
Ramon M. Jackson

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd

Part of the African American Studies Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation


This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.
LEADERS IN THE MAKING: HIGHER EDUCATION, STUDENT ACTIVISM, AND THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN SOUTH CAROLINA, 1925-1975

by

Ramon M. Jackson

Bachelor of Arts
The College of Charleston, 2004

Master of Arts
University of Charleston, 2007

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
History
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Carolina
2019

Accepted by:

Bobby J. Donaldson, Major Professor
Valinda Littlefield, Committee Member
Jon Hale, Committee Member
Christian Anderson, Committee Member
Todd Shaw, Committee Member
Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
DEDICATION

To Leiana, Darious, and Jael

Philippians 4:13
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To say that the completion of this project has been a long time coming would be a gross understatement. There have been numerous moments where I have questioned the wisdom of my continued pursuit of this degree and participation in my chosen profession. This process has truly been a test of strength and faith. I have learned a great deal about myself but, more importantly, about the power of God’s love and how he acts through others to lift his believers in their darkest hour. I am forever grateful for the unyielding patience, good advice, close friendship, and unconditional love that I have received from all who have helped me to reach this point. I’ll spend the remainder of my life working to make sure that your efforts were not in vain.

The successful completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without my committee chair, Professor Bobby Donaldson, an excellent scholar, mentor and friend who constantly challenged me to become the best version of myself. Working alongside him on the Columbia S.C. 63 Civil Rights Project was the highlight of my graduate school experience and instilled, for better or worse, an adventurous spirit in my research and scholarship. A myriad of precious memories come to mind when I think about those years. Thank you for the good fellowship at Preston Dining Hall, the wisdom shared in our late-night bull sessions, your trust in me to help you unearth civil rights
films and images tucked away in dusty morgues and rusty cannisters, and those countless moments that I had the best seat in the house to watch a star shine. I am forever indebted to you for your support, sound advice, and unwavering belief in my abilities when I was consumed by fear and doubt. We truly have come this far by faith. I look forward to fighting more battles by your side.

Professor Valinda Littlefield deserves special mention for her wise counsel, constant encouragement, and constructive criticism throughout my graduate school experience. Please accept my sincere appreciation for opening the doors of the African American Studies Program and making it a place that I could call home. Thank you for providing me with invaluable teaching experiences and research assistantships to hone my craft and sustain me during lean times. Any future success that I have is a direct result of your tireless advocacy and generous spirit.

I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Jonathan Hale and Dr. Christian Anderson for joining my dissertation committee and offering fair critiques and suggestions that improved this project. I have long admired your scholarship and appreciate your willingness to grant me an audience. Thank you for your worthwhile contributions to this project. Additionally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Department of History at the University of South Carolina for providing me with the opportunity to not only pursue an advanced degree but take part in such a life changing experience. Special thanks to Dr. Dorothy Pratt for the many private conversations in her office that bolstered my confidence and strengthened my resolve. I also wish to thank Dr. Wanda Hendricks for allowing me to assist with the final drafts of her excellent biography of Fannie Barrier
Williams. It was an unforgettable experience and you deserve every bit of the success you have earned.

I would also like to acknowledge and express gratitude to the former movement activists who invited me into their homes and agreed to share their stories. To Oliver Francis, Cecil Raysor, J.B. Bryant, Samuel Mintz, and the family of the late Alphonso Beach: The “Black Fire” still burns brightly. We simply need to stoke the flames. Cecil Williams, Dorris “Dee Dee” Wright, Leola Robinson-Simpson, Augustus Holt, the Cannon Street YMCA All-Stars, and the families of the late Joshua Shubrick and Robert McClary also deserve special recognition. While some of these interviews did not make it into this document, the testimonies shared by these activists inspired me as a scholar and citizen and will no doubt appear in future studies. I am also grateful for the assistance of the staff at the South Caroliniana Library, the Government Information and Maps Division at Thomas Cooper Library, the South Carolina Political Collections, Avery Research Center, the Richland County Public Library and the South Carolina Department of Archives and History for helping me to locate sources and working diligently to expand their digital collections to make South Carolina’s civil rights history more accessible to the public.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement, patience, kindness and love throughout this difficult process. Many thanks to my mom, sister, and her two wonderful children for keeping me grounded and helping me to understand that being present is often a better use of one’s time than dwelling on the past. I also wish to express appreciation to my dad, Leonard Bailey, for standing tall when others did not and for replacing my Nintendo with an illustrated history of the United
States when I was in third grade. The punishment still does not fit the crime. Special thanks to my beloved Aunt Paulette and the Colorado Springs branch of the Jacksons for always upholding the true meaning of the word “family.” Much love to the Carters, the Deans, and the crew at the bar formerly known as the Upper Deck Tavern for the lodging, refreshments, entertainment and good company that bolstered my spirits and filled my heart with hope.

To Joy, my everything, words cannot express my love for you and how grateful I am for your loyalty, friendship, and Job-like patience. I know that this has not been easy for you. Thank you for standing by my side as deadlines lengthened and all seemed lost. I’m excited about what the future holds and cannot wait to watch our daughter, Leiana, grow and thrive. If I die a better husband and father than a scholar, I will consider my life a success.
ABSTRACT

*Leaders in the Making* examines the shifting political and social consciousness of African American college students in South Carolina and their reaction to and impact on the Black freedom struggle in the state between 1925 and 1975. Placing young people at the center of the story, this dissertation explains the process by which race leaders were cultivated, an effort that largely occurred in segregated public and private high schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Black South Carolinians ingeniously transformed these symbols of racial inferiority into incubators of the post-World War Two generation of youth activists that dismantled Jim Crow in the Palmetto State. Both within the classroom and as participants in extracurricular student-centered organizations such as youth and college chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Black college students were taught lessons of respectability, competitiveness, racial equality, and were instilled with a commitment to uphold the responsibilities of first-class citizenship. From the Depression era onward, young Black South Carolinians sought to make their ideals compatible with reality as participants in grassroots campaigns for educational equality, voting rights, and economic advancement. During the period of legal and extralegal white resistance that followed the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, a new generation of militant student rebels sustained and strengthened the freedom movement. Black youth and college students in South Carolina developed new tactics and recycled old ones, forged statewide and regional alliances, and applied tremendous pressure on segregationist politicians and
their allies forcing them to negotiate for racial peace. Lastly, this dissertation challenges existing interpretations of South Carolina’s desegregation process as “integration with dignity” by examining how the rise of “Black Power” on black college campuses altered the terrain of interracial and intra-racial debates over the ideological and tactical direction of the Black freedom struggle during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The resulting upheavals inspired a wave of government sanctioned violence and repression that hindered progress and ultimately left an enduring legacy of racial discrimination and economic inequality in the state.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ....................................................................................................................... iv

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ viii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .................................................................................................................. xi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................................1

CHAPTER 2: FREEDOM’S APOSTLES: DEPRESSION-ERA STRUGGLES FOR STUDENT RIGHTS, RACIAL SELF-DETERMINATION AND EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY AT PRIVATE BLACK INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN COLUMBIA, S.C. ............................................................. 34

CHAPTER 3: MARCHING UP FREEDOM ROAD: BLACK YOUTH AND COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA’S CIVIL RIGHTS VANGUARD .......................................................... 89

CHAPTER 4: “A LITTLE LEARNING IS A DANGEROUS THING”: BLACK STUDENTS AT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HBCUS IN SOUTH CAROLINA COMBAT MASSIVE RESISTANCE ......................................................... 123

CHAPTER 5: WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED: BLACK STUDENT ACTIVISTS FORGE RACIAL PEACE IN SOUTH CAROLINA ........................................................................................................ 168

CHAPTER 6: BLACK FIRE AT VOORHEES COLLEGE: STUDENT POWER, SELF-DETERMINATION AND STATE REPRESSION ....................................................................................................... 216

EPILOGUE .......................................................................................................................................... 286

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................................. 293
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AME.................................................................African Methodist Episcopal Church
AAUP...........................................................American Association of University Professors
ABHMS ..........................................................American Baptist Home Mission Society
ACLU..............................................................American Civil Liberties Union
AMA..............................................................American Missionary Association
AFRO...............................................................Association of Afro-American Students
BACC..............................................................Black Awareness Coordinating Committee
CIO.................................................................Congress of Industrial Organizations
CORE...............................................................Congress for Racial Equality
CP...........................................................................................................Communist Party
HBCU .............................................................Historically Black Colleges and Universities
HUAC ..............................................................House Un-American Activities Committee
KKK.............................................................................................................Ku Klux Klan
LCRM .................................................................................................Long Civil Rights Movement
LBSM.................................................................Long Black Student Movement
NAACP.............. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NNC .................................................................National Negro Congress
NNCM..............................................................New Negro Campus Movement
PWI...........................................................................................................Predominantly White Institutions
PDP .................................................................Progressive Democratic Party
SLED........................................................ SOUTHERN LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION
SCSU........................................................ SOUTHERN CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCSMA.................................................... SOUTHERN CAROLINA STUDENT MOVEMENT ASSOCIATION
SACS................................................... SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
SCLC...................................................... SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
SCHW .................................................... SOUTHERN CONFERENCE FOR HUMAN WELFARE
SNYC ..................................................... SOUTHERN NEGRO YOUTH CONGRESS
SNCC .................................................... STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE
SOBU .................................................... STUDENT ORGANIZATION FOR BLACK UNITY
SGA........................................................ STUDENT GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION
UCP ........................................................ UNITED CITIZENS PARTY
UMWA ................................................... UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA
USC ........................................................ UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
WCC ........................................................ WHITE CITIZENS COUNCILS
YMCA................................................... YOUNG MEN’S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives.” -- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983)

South Carolina occupies a peculiarly tangential place within the historiography of the modern Civil Rights Movement. The dominant classical narrative, now canonical among most Americans, casts whites in Deep South states such as Alabama and Mississippi as the main antagonists in America’s grand morality tale due to key events such as the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, the grisly murder of Emmett Till, violent protests against James Meredith’s admission to the University of Mississippi, the assassination of Medgar Evers, militant white resistance to the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, and the infamous 1965 March on Selma. Birmingham Public Safety Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor, Alabama governor George Wallace and virtually every white person in Mississippi exemplify the worst of humanity as they ferociously defended Jim Crow and white supremacy only to be thwarted by the heroic Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his disciples. As the story goes, South Carolinians sat quietly offstage while this drama unfolded. “Without such events and figures,” writes John Monk, a reporter for *The State*, “a myth had been created in some quarters that South Carolina had been a kinder, gentler state, a place where all the white folks somehow, one day, had an epiphany and, without much prompting, decided to give black
folks equal rights.”¹ Indeed, for most scholars, comparing South Carolina to their Deep
South neighbors is akin to likening a tiger to a field mouse. Upon reflection, however,
the mouse is no less dangerous. Even the most pious church mice, under the right
conditions, can spread plagues powerful enough to erase generations.

The omission of South Carolina from the larger narrative of the “King Years” and
its relative absence from the national consciousness as a site of agitation, struggle and
confrontation are no accident. As Jacqueline Dowd Hall notes, “remembrance is always
a form of forgetting, and the dominant narrative of the civil rights movement—distilled
from history and memory, twisted by ideology and political contestation and embedded
in its heritage tours, museums, public rituals, textbooks, and various artifacts of mass
culture—distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals.”² South Carolinians have
developed a willful forgetfulness about the modern Civil Rights Movement, a historical

¹ John Monk, “Foreword,” in Orville Burton and Winfred B. Moore, Jr., 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, 2008), xviii; M. Ron Cox, Jr., “Integration with [Relative] Dignity: The
Desegregation of Clemson College and George McMillan’s Article at Forty,” in Burton and Moore eds., Toward the Meeting of the Waters, 274-275; Wim Roefs, “The Impact of 1940s Civil Rights Activism
on the State’s 1960s Civil Rights Scene,” in Burton and Moore, Toward the Meeting of the Waters, 157. Numerous South Carolina historians have made these claims in the past. “Remarkably, [civil rights in]
South Carolina was relatively peaceful,” Walter Edgar writes, “Given this relatively peaceful racial climate,
the state’s white power structure was able to work with the state’s black leadership in dismantling
segregation.” See Walter Edgar, South Carolina in the Modern Age (Columbia: University of South Carolina
Maizlish, eds., New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America (Lexington: University of Kentucky
Press, 1986), 164-184. Historian William Hine was among the first to notice this historical trend but, for
some reason, echoes their findings. He writes: “South Carolina never has been closely associated with the
civil-rights movement. Indeed, it is not uncommon for histories of the United States to exclude any
mention of South Carolina in the twentieth century…South Carolina’s tranquil transition from segregation
to integration helps explain its absence from recent history. Credit for this profound yet little emphasized
change belongs to the caution and conservatism of the state’s black and white leaders who avoided, with
the tragic exception of the Orangeburg Massacre, the brutality and violence so well documented and so
closely identified with race relations in Alabama and Mississippi.” See William Hine, “Civil Rights and
Campus Wrongs: South Carolina State College Students Protest, 1955-1968,” South Carolina Historical

² Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” The
amnesia that is the legacy of the state-sanctioned assault on academic freedom, freedom of assembly, and journalistic integrity that defined the post-Brown era. The heavy cloak of silence surrounding the events of the 1960s survived the downfall of Jim Crow and the supposed thawing of race relations due, in part, to the failure of journalists and historians to speak forcefully and truthfully about the state’s racial past. Many authors of the earliest studies of civil rights in South Carolina, a group comprised predominantly of white native-born sons and daughters, devote more attention to scapegoating their Deep South neighbors in search of absolution for the sins of their fathers than investigating the statewide movement. Like their fellow storytellers on the “New Right” that reworked the dominant classical narrative of America’s civil rights experience for political gain, some of these historians offer Whiggish interpretations of South Carolina’s civil rights experience as the inevitable outcome of industrialization or the natural progression of the aristocratic virtues of its conservative white and African American leadership. Jealously guarding the state’s image as a place associated with “Smiling Faces, Beautiful Places” rather than a racial battleground, they have produced a triumphal, colorblind narrative devoid of complexity and dynamism that is generally skeptical that Black South Carolinians and their white allies mustered the energy and willpower to wage an intense,

---

3 Monk, “Foreword,” xvii-xix. Monk credits Governor George Bell Timmerman, the architect of a state-sanctioned assault on academic and journalistic freedom during the 1950s, for the fear and self-censorship that persists at South Carolina’s flagship universities. “No one in their wildest imagination fifty years earlier would have ever imagined a South Carolina where scholars would gather to talk publicly about civil rights, or where a newspaper would give those scholars such prominence,” he reflected when discussing the 2003 civil rights symposium held at The Citadel. See also Burton and Moore, eds., “Preface,” xxi-xxii. The authors note that recent “stormy exchanges” over the flying of the Confederate flag, the funding of rural school districts, and the observance of the King holiday were “deeply rooted in the state’s troubled racial history—a history that many South Carolinians do not know, and many others prefer to forget.”
militant struggle for educational equality, racial self-determination and radical democracy. The consensus narrative credits the successes of desegregation to the moderation and pragmatic conservatism of white political leaders and older African American civil rights veterans who made interracial cooperation and consensus building the norm as they guided the Palmetto State through a peaceful, dignified transition toward a pluralistic society—*Dum spiro spero nos*.

This self-congratulatory model of civil rights history contributes to the state’s anomalous reputation relative to its Deep South neighbors regarding how it handled racial tensions and the overall outcomes of its Second Reconstruction. Over the past two decades there has been a tremendous effort to recall South Carolina’s civil rights past, recognize and commemorate its heroes and heroines, and reconsider its place in the broader narrative on the Black freedom struggle. Adopting the now dominant Long Civil Rights Movement (LCRM) framework, civil rights historians have produced exemplary scholarship that chronicles widespread Black activism during the three decades prior to the 1960s movement and challenges longstanding assumptions about its origins, tenor, impact and decline. Historians of South Carolina’s civil rights movement such as

---


5 Tony Badger, “From Defiance to Moderation: South Carolina Governors and Racial Change,” in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 5, 17-18.
Barbara Woods, Cherise Jones-Branch, Peter Lau, John Egerton, Patricia Sullivan, R. Scott Baker, and Wim Roefs have contributed greatly to this effort, stretching the temporal boundaries of the movement to place its origins within Depression-era grassroots movements and the “forceful, sustained, and militant” court-based litigation and political pressure campaigns brought to bear on South Carolina’s white political establishment by the civil rights vanguard of the 1940s. These revisionist studies have jogged our memories about important precedents to the 1960s movement such as the successful Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) campaign to abolish the all-white Democratic Party primary and the grassroots organizing and litigation campaigns waged by African Americans in Clarendon County that resulted in *Briggs v. Elliott*, the Palmetto State’s contribution to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. They also thoroughly examine the militant, segregationist counterrevolution that mobilized to combat these challenges to white supremacy and shed new light on the role of white politicians in South Carolina who provided the rhetorical fuel that fanned the flames of hate and division that produced a statewide campaign of intimidation, economic terror, forced exile, racial violence, and the passage of anti-Communist and segregationist legislation that crippled the NAACP movement and delayed the emergence of an organized assault on Jim Crow until the early 1960s. Only two of these studies, however, connects these early struggles for self-determination, civil rights, and educational equality to the 1960s movement to provide readers with greater understanding of the successes and failures of these generational struggles.  

---

A handful of scholars have built upon this foundation with serious, thoughtful, and well-researched analyses of the controversial Orangeburg Massacre, the brutal and violent assault on Black students at South Carolina State College by white South Carolina highway patrolmen in February 1968, challenging earlier claims that it was caused by a “momentary, unexpected breakdown of control” rather than the boiling over of long simmering racial tensions caused by generational poverty, mis-education, and continued white resistance to desegregation and federal intervention to expand civil rights reforms.

and alleviate generational poverty caused by racial capitalism. These autobiographies, memoirs, and scholarly studies offer powerful glimpses into the troubling and complex legacies of student activism and civil rights in this majority-Black rural South Carolina town and the violent white backlash that claimed the lives of Henry Smith, Delano Middleton, and Samuel Hammond, Jr., and left countless others scarred for life. Equally important, they also trace connective threads linking the Massacre to earlier period of student activism at State College in opposition to the autocratic rule of longtime president Dr. Benner C. Turner. By linking the tragedy to a longer tradition of student activism, this new scholarship on this watershed moment in South Carolina’s civil rights and Black Power eras has enhanced our awareness of Black colleges as important movement centers and revealed the presence of a parallel and intersecting freedom movement led by Black college students that predates the 1960s movement. None of these studies, however, attempted to re-examine the early 1960s nonviolent movement or reconsider its outcomes. Failure to do so has left intact the cracked façade of the consensus narrative and limited our understanding of the “pattern of agitation, struggle, and confrontation that marked the often hostile and angry shift from the cruel indignities of Jim Crow in the

---

1950s to the quasi-tolerant and inclusive society” of the present day.⁸

Scholars of both the 1940s and 1960s civil rights movement in South Carolina have preserved certain aspects of the consensus narrative because they draw upon the same source for inspiration, I.A. Newby’s 1973 classic *Black Carolinians*, a detailed yet deeply flawed study of Black life and racial politics in the state during the post-World War Two era. Although Newby has been largely dethroned as the dominant voice in the historiography of the 1940s movement, the worst aspects of his analysis of the modern civil rights struggle remain gospel. Initial examinations of the 1960s movement in South Carolina suffer from similar problems of interpretation, omission, and definition that historian Wim Roefs claims once afflicted 1940s movement scholarship. Consensus scholars, echoing Newby, cast white political moderation and pragmatic Black conservatism as the twin forces that shaped the 1960s movement and determined its outcomes.⁹ These analyses pay a disproportionate amount of attention to race relations and civil rights activism in Columbia, a place that Newby largely ignored due to his penchant for seeking out “active” or “turbulent and disruptive” protest campaigns elsewhere in the state. Historian Paul Lofton, whose thesis of pragmatic conservatism was complicated by the presence of a vibrant student movement in South Carolina’s capital city, minimizes their actions as late, timid, short-lived, and not nearly as impactful as those in other cities such as Rock Hill, where Black citizens “had more experience with protests and discrimination than most other areas of the state.”¹⁰ Such findings are

¹⁰ Paul S. Lofton, Jr., “Calm and Exemplary: Desegregation in Columbia, South Carolina,” in *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, ed. Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Coburn (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 75-76.
difficult to square with those of Woods, Newby and, later, 1940s revisionist scholars who note that African American leaders in Columbia—many of whom became mentors to young collegiate activists in the city—drew upon roughly three decades of civil rights and political organizing experience in their response the emergence of the student sit-in movement and negotiations with white business and political leaders. Despite these issues, other historians toed the consensus line giving the lion’s share of the credit for desegregation to white politicians, many of whom were committed to preserving segregation and white supremacy in earlier decades. The relatively peaceful 1963 desegregation of Clemson College and the University of South Carolina, moments of relative dignity and political moderation made possible through interracial cooperation and savvy media publicity, have mistakenly become emblematic of the entire state’s civil rights experience.\footnote{Cox, “Integration with [Relative] Dignity,” 274-277, 283. Cox offers a cogent explanation for why South Carolina historians and the general public have accepted the notion that the Palmetto State is unusually moderate compared to its neighbors. He traces this idea back to a single event and publication, the desegregation of Clemson College and George McMillan’s article, “Integration with Dignity—The Inside Story of How South Carolina Kept the Peace,” published in the \textit{Saturday Evening Post} on March 16, 1963, roughly two months later. In many respects, McMillan’s article served as the rough draft of the consensus narrative, crediting Governor Hollings, Clemson president Robert C. Edwards, Greenville News editor Wayne Freeman, and three other powerful politicians for spearheading a two-year clandestine campaign to prepare the college and state for the “inevitability of racial change.” Beginning in 1961, McMillan claims, these men quietly assessed public attitudes in South Carolina and settled on the idea that “law and order” should be maintained if desegregation occurred. They reportedly persuaded potential opponents to acquiesce paving the way for Gantt’s eventual entry. Cox notes that McMillan’s article is not contradicted by available sources, but challenges claims that such actions demonstrated South Carolina’s racial moderation and set the stage for passive accommodation to racial change throughout the remainder of the 1960s. He questions the appropriateness of the term “dignity,” due to white South Carolinians embrace of law and order out of political expediency rather than moral turpitude. One wonders if the term “integration” is even applicable considering the glacial increase of African Americans at Clemson and other predominantly white South Carolina colleges and universities during this period.}

The few scholars who have examined the desegregation of South Carolina’s flagship public universities through the lens of Newby’s analysis of the 1940s, still conclude that African Americans—gradualists and reformists all—were not as potentially
revolutionary as those in other Deep South states. The true heroes, they argue, were white politicians and business leaders who moderated their public rhetoric, emphasized law and order, and permitted token desegregation in order to avoid mass protests and violence, a sure recipe for federal intervention. Save for the existence of a small group of militant Black and moderate white college students in Columbia, there were no real threats to disrupt their conspiracy for peace. In each of these studies, the movement ends with a whimper in 1963—there was no Black Power, no declension, and nothing else to see here.  

Supporters of the consensus narrative have produced a 1960s civil rights narrative that is disconnected from the 1940s movement, largely silent about racial conflict in rural and Upstate sections of the state, and fails to fully reckon with the impact of the decades-long militant segregationist counterrevolution whose impact could still be felt just outside the doors of the boardrooms where white politicians, businessmen, and select African American civil rights leaders negotiated for racial peace. The heroic freedom struggle waged by Black South Carolinians has been stripped of its drama, gravitas, and regenerative potential leaving behind a sanitized narrative where progress

---

12 Cox, “The Year of Decision”; Synnott, “Federalism Vindicated”; Marcia Synnott, “Moderate White Activists and the Struggle for Racial Equality on South Carolina Campuses,” in Robert Cohen and David Snyder, eds., Rebellion in Black and White: Southern Student Activism in the 1960s (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 106-128. Notable exceptions include studies of the Orangeburg Massacre and several biographies of white politicians who lived through the turbulent 1960s decade. Examples include David Robertson, Sty and Able: A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1980); Joseph Crescino, Strom Thurmond’s America (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); and Philip Grose, South Carolina at the Brink. Grose’s account of Governor McNair examines the Orangeburg Massacre and two important moments—the Charleston Hospital Strike and a student uprising at Voorhees College. He wrongly claims that public attention faded in the aftermath of the shootings due to the assassinations of Dr. King and Senator Robert Kennedy a few months later.
was achieved because magnanimous and aristocratic white South Carolinians willingly granted freedom and equality to blacks who had enough self-respect and humility to ask nicely and not cause a ruckus like those bad Negroes elsewhere.

One reason for the assumed lack of militancy in South Carolina’s movement is that historians have until recently ignored or marginalized those who are among the most important actors in the broader civil rights literature—Black youth and college students. South Carolina’s civil rights historiography suffers from neglect of pre-\textit{Brown} student activism and marginalizes campus movements at HBCUs and PWIs during the pivotal decades that followed the desegregation mandate. A rich body of scholarship examines the importance and impact of segregated public schools to Black communities across the state, but few scholars have chosen to join the robust conversation on the role southern institutions of higher education played as essential sites of leadership training, intellectual development, and organized resistance to Jim Crow on and off campus during the decades prior to the emergence of the 1940s civil rights movement.\textsuperscript{13} Depression-era campus revolts are either ignored or marginalized within a more cosmopolitan Long Black Student Movement (LBSM) where students left their campuses and embarked upon a three-decade long campaign against segregation, white supremacy, and global

\textsuperscript{13} Most existing studies follow the lead of Edwin Hoffman, whose study of the origins of the movement for civil rights and racial equality marginalizes Black college students as leaders and activists. See Hoffman, “The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Equal Rights in South Carolina, 1930-1939.” Two studies that thoroughly examine the importance of segregated public and private schools to Black communities in the Lowcountry are Edmund Drago, \textit{Charleston’s Avery Center: From Education and Civil Rights to Preserving the African American Experience} (Charleston: History Press, 2006); R. Scott Baker, \textit{Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926-1972} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006).
economic inequality. Historians’ marginalization of the NNCM within the supposedly moribund 1920s decade or the more radical 1930s renders Depression-era black campus activism into a caricature of the more serious adult-led campaigns for racial equality waged by Communists, New Deal liberals, populist politicians, labor unions and the NAACP. Scholars of the Long Civil Rights Movement (LCRM), in their zeal to “reinforce the moral authority” of well-meaning white liberals and labor organizers, have placed black campus rebels at the kids’ table of the Popular Front and largely denied them recognition as seminal figures in the burgeoning freedom struggle.

Merging the histories of the NNCM and its more radical counterpart in the 1930s reveals that black students were catalysts for a vibrant, two-decade-long movement for student freedom, educational advancement, and racial equality that changed the face of the ebony tower and fueled the resurgence of grassroots organizing, litigation, and direct-action protest that laid the groundwork for the modern Civil Rights Movement. Utilizing this long movement framework but stressing the importance of change at the local level

14 Kendi (Rogers), The Black Campus Movement, 29, 36. Kendi sheds light on the origins and overlapping chronology of the New Negro Campus and Long Black Student Movements. However, he overexaggerates their differences. Kendi explains that the former “propagated slowly and steadily in 1919 and the early 1920s…” but “encapsulated 1923-1927.” He later declares that the “activism against tyrannical rules did not stop until it joined the early Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1930s.” The Long Black Student Movement, on the other hand, “focused increasingly (though not totally) on accruing off-campus civil rights from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s, and then ventured to black power reaching its pinnacle in the late 1960s and early 1970s during the Black Campus Movement.” Despite highlighting their overlapping chronologies, Kendi’s overview of the Black Campus Movement isolates the New Negro Campus Movement from the Long Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

15 Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement,” 1235: The marginalization of New Negro and radical campus activism in South Carolina is evident in early studies of the Long Civil Rights Movement including Patricia Sullivan, Days of Hope; Lau, Democracy Rising. Lau’s omission of early student activism in South Carolina is particularly notable considering his focus on racial self-determination and African American efforts to build strong educational institutions. Rather than examine the development of South Carolina HBCUs during the 1930s, for example, he focuses his attention on generational debates between Black activist intellectual W.E.B. DuBois and several members of the “Young Turks.” Important studies of student radicalism during the 1930s also minimize the role of Black campus activists. Notable example include Eileen Eagan, Class, Culture, and the Classroom (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981) and Robert Cohen, When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America’s First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
allows us to correct oversimplified depictions of black collegiate activists as merely rank and file members of Communist-affiliated student organizations or adolescent Black Bourgeoisie more interested in smoking cigarettes than blazing a trail toward freedom. Instead, black college students were on the movement’s cutting-edge, often warning older leaders—sometimes forcefully—of the dangers of racial capitalism, Jim Crow segregation, economic divestment, labor exploitation, and patriarchal dominance that threatened to choke all prospects for a brighter future. Few understood the corrosive effect of white supremacy and racial capitalism better than African American college students whose initiation into the broader world of the Jim Crow South took place in segregated high schools and HBCUs.

Plagued by white hostility, state indifference, inadequate facilities, and contentious internal politics, South Carolina’s private HBCUs were doubly burdened with the responsibility to develop modern, ambitious college programs while also supplementing the separate and unequal system of public education that shaped the prospects and imaginations of young Black South Carolinians during the post-Reconstruction era. A 1917 survey of Negro institutions of higher learning reported that only two private Black colleges in South Carolina, Benedict and Claflin, were equipped to do college work. Only 71 students were enrolled at the two schools. Private, denominational HBCUs in South Carolina—essentially colleges in name only—largely provided elementary and secondary education to counteract the lack of state support for public high school training for African Americans. Graduates of these institutions were also certified to teach in South Carolina’s segregated public-school system. The number of teachers produced by these institutions could not meet demand but contributed greatly
to the growth of a small, Black professional class in Charleston, Columbia, and other cities. 

As noted by Newby and other scholars, the mission and purpose of private HBCUs in South Carolina was to provide students with an education that would grant them entry into the middle class, thereby creating a small group of upwardly mobile African Americans. Such mobility came at a price; Conformity to existing racial custom was expected from Black businessmen and other professionals. Black institutions of higher learning were governed by conservative social and educational philosophies that stifled originality, creativity, initiative, and independence in favor of an ethos that centered the Protestant work ethic, wealth accumulation, and the pursuit of respectability as prerequisites for first-class citizenship. Educated African Americans were expected to mimic white intellectual thought, patterns of academic inquiry, and assumed tastes and behavioral traits while barely acknowledging Black history, culture, and contemporary problems as subjects worthy of study. This educational philosophy manifested itself in a variety of ways. Students at private, Baptist operated Benedict College in Columbia, a liberal arts institution governed by the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) and operated by a predominantly white trustee board and faculty, were expected to cultivate “habits of virtue, morality and godliness, and the highest type of Christian manhood and womanhood” through adherence to regimented daily schedules, rigorous Bible study, classical training, and moral education. 

Autobiographies and other biographical studies of the lives of African American scholars, educators and civil rights organizers who spent their young adult years during

---

the long Depression era as students at southern private and public HBCUs reveal the importance of these institutions as social laboratories where black youth were molded into intelligent, race-conscious, and determined race leaders with the moral clarity and courage to challenge Jim Crow and white supremacy through their own individual achievement and, more importantly, by participating in organized, collective, and nonviolent resistance movements. Barbara J. Ransby, Andrew J. Rosa, Valerie Boyd and other scholars have produced exemplary personal accounts of the formative years of activist scholars and civil rights organizers who attended southern HBCUs where prevailing ideas of race, racial uplift, class, and education were challenged and these future leaders developed intimate relationships with members of the African American avant-garde who modeled the best of past traditions while nudging their pupils to push beyond the boundaries of what was socially, politically, and culturally acceptable to mainstream American society. A handful of such studies exist that document such activities at South Carolina’s black colleges, but they remain largely tangential to the current literature on the origins of the civil rights movement.  

Consensus historians’ neglect and indifference toward the origins of Black Power and how the ideology influenced activism in South Carolina is another notable deficiency in the existing scholarly literature. Despite renewed attention to the origins and impact of student activism on the 1960s movement, the historiography on Black student activism in South Carolina sits on an island apart from cutting-edge debates among scholars within blossoming subfields such as Black Power Studies and, more recently, new literature on

the Black Campus Movement, the nationwide struggle among Black student nationalists at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and HBCUs to reconstitute higher education.\textsuperscript{18} Black campus activists in South Carolina and the rest of the nation demanded and protested for a relevant learning experience during the late 1960s, a trend that was an implicit indictment of the failures of public-school desegregation. What passed for relevance varied along the political spectrum but generally included the study of progressive African American and Third World literature with the goal of providing students with the intellectual tools to fix a broken society. Following the lead of avant-garde scholars and activists at San Francisco State, thousands of Black Campus activists organized Black Student Unions or co-opted existing student organizations to wage strikes, boycotts, and mass demonstrations to challenge oppressive rules and regulations, and correct the marginalization of Blacks from nearly all facets of higher education through the hiring of additional Black faculty and the creation of Black Studies, new courses, programs, and departments intended to upend Eurocentric models of academic inquiry and revolutionize higher education.

Leaders in the Making: Higher Education, Student Activism, and the Black Freedom Struggle in South Carolina, 1925-1975 examines the role of Black college students at South Carolina’s HBCUs in the Long Black Student Movement (LBSM), the multi-generational struggle for educational equality, racial self-determination, civil rights, and economic equality that paralleled and intersected with the elongated civil rights and Black Power movements throughout the twentieth century. Placing young people at the center of the Black freedom struggle in the state, this study clarifies how each successive generation of young African Americans unlearned racial tradition and transformed the dominant culture of accommodation that was rooted in an ethos of elitist individualism and uplift into a culture of activism that relied upon educational advancement, institution building, and collective action to combat white supremacy and Jim Crow on campus and in their surrounding communities. Much of this process of socialization and leadership training took place mostly within segregated public schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU).19 Beginning in the New Negro era of the early 1920s, Black campus activists at South Carolina HBCUs instigated a protracted assault

on the racial constitution of higher education and chipped away at the system of racial patronage that undergirded Jim Crow. Activist faculty and students gradually but ingeniously transformed these impoverished and segregated institutions of higher learning into bastions of Black historical and cultural inquiry, citizenship education, grassroots political organizing, and, ultimately, incubators of the post-World War Two generation of activists that dismantled Jim Crow in the Palmetto State. Within the confines of the ebony tower, students learned what historian Jelani Favors refers to as a “Second Curriculum,” a pedagogy and philosophy that instilled self-confidence, race pride, and an ethos of service to the race. Professors, college presidents, faculty and other community mentors taught Black students lessons of respectability, competitiveness, and the need for collective action as necessary ingredients for leadership and solving the problems of the race. They also instilled within young people an appreciation for and willingness to perform the duties and responsibilities associated with first-class citizenship.

Neither indifferent or cowardly, Black college students in South Carolina participated in grassroots campaigns for educational equality, protested the menace of lynching, and fought alongside older Black leaders for the reclamation of the franchise.

---

prior to the *Brown* decision of 1954. During the wave of legal and extralegal white resistance that followed, Black college students sustained and strengthened the freedom movement. They developed new tactics and recycled old ones, forged statewide and regional alliances, and applied tremendous public pressure on segregationist politicians to begrudgingly permit integration. By the late 1960s, increasingly militant students grew frustrated with the slow pace of change. HBCUs in South Carolina became the locus for a campus and community movement for social justice rooted in black cultural nationalism that altered the terrain of interracial and intra-racial debates over both the purpose of black higher education and the long-term goals of the Black Freedom Struggle. These ideological and tactical shifts fractured the black community and inspired a wave of government sanctioned violence and political obstruction that destroyed a burgeoning, modern “Popular Front,” ultimately circumscribing the goals of the freedom movement and all but guaranteeing continued miseducation and generational inequality in the state.

The purpose of this dissertation is to refine our understanding of the multi-generational Black student movement and the collegiate environment from which it emerged. By examining this Long Black Student Movement (LBSM) within the context of the larger Black Freedom Struggle, Black youth and college students assume their

---

21 Black students were often criticized for their supposed apathy and indifference to the freedom struggle. Famed author and poet Langston Hughes accused Black colleges of “doing their best to produce spineless Uncle Toms, uninformed, and full of mental evasions.” He lamented the climate of censorship and social control that permeated these institutions arguing that the restrictions imposed upon students created a submissive attitude towards whites. See Langston Hughes, “Cowards from the Colleges,” *The Crisis* (August 1934), 213-221. Roughly two decades later, famed sociologist E. Franklin Frazier offered an equally pessimistic assessment of the potential for Black college students to become agents of change. He argued that younger Blacks showed no interest in liberation but rather sought to become “Super-Americans,” or raceless members of the American middle class with little connection to their African heritage or traditions. See E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: The Free Press, 1957, 1962).
rightful place as central figures rather than marginal actors. Between roughly 1925 and 1975, successive generations of young Black South Carolinians who courageously fought to win basic student freedoms, improve educational facilities, secure free speech and academic freedom, and eventually raze to the ground the Jim Crow system that circumscribed their ambitions. *Leaders in the Making* puts the struggle back into the story of South Carolina’s civil rights movement by historicizing Black colleges as sites where students made sense of their lives, struggled for social and political change, and doggedly pursued the elusive goal of a larger freedom and a greater heritage. Federal crackdowns on Communism and varying forms of white resistance caused periods of inactivity and retreat. Intra-racial debates over the meaning of freedom, the purpose of Black education, and tactical approaches for uplifting the race also slowed progress. Although public schools and accommodations were largely desegregated in many cities across the Palmetto State by the mid-1960s, Black students continued to rage against widespread racial discrimination and economic inequality during the decade that followed. Government repression left a select few to benefit from desegregation while most Black and poor white citizens were left behind. By focusing our narrative on the movement’s young foot soldiers and race leaders, *Leaders in the Making* answers Jacqueline Dowd Hall’s call to “make civil rights harder. Harder to celebrate as a satisfying morality tale…harder to simplify, appropriate, and contain.”

Including this introduction, this dissertation is divided into six chapters. The second chapter entitled, “Freedom’s Apostles: The Fight for Student Rights, Racial Self-Determination and Educational Equality at Private Black Institutions of Higher Learning

---

in Columbia, South Carolina, 1925-1940,” offers a new bookend for the study of the
Black freedom struggle in South Carolina by examining a long-forgotten series of New
Negro campus revolts which took place in its capital city, Columbia, during the long
Depression era. It examines the origins, evolution and impact of student activist
traditions at Allen University and Benedict College, two private denominational
institutions of higher learning, and reveals how these powerful campus movements for
student power, racial self-determination, institutional control, and educational equity
paralleled and intersected with early civil rights activities in South Carolina during the
1930s. Stripped of their citizenship rights and cast out of mainstream society, African
Americans in Columbia focused their energies on building strong educational institutions
that prepared future generations to become race leaders and laid the foundation for the
steady advancement of the race. Perhaps the most important of these institutions were
Allen University and Benedict College, two private denominational institutions of higher
learning that provided secondary education to students of varying ages and supplemented
the state’s grossly deficient public education system that was designed to suppress Black
ambitions and doom the race to second-class citizenship.

Adopting a missionary philosophy of black education based on models employed
at northern white colleges, these institutions actively recruited students from rural
sections of South Carolina in hopes of molding them into good “Christian” citizens that
would comprise the bulk of the state’s black teaching and ministerial force. By the late
1920s, as a national debate raged among educators over whether industrial or classical
training was best for black students, Allen and Benedict administrators publicly
acquiesced to white desires for the former while clandestinely providing students with a
hidden curriculum that nurtured their self-esteem and broadened their intellectual horizons. Despite the open support for classical training among faculty and students, Allen and Benedict administrators refused to shed their belief in the need for religious and moral education as integral for the training of respectable, Christian citizens and race leaders.

Students at the two private HBCUs, like their counterparts at predominantly white institutions and black colleges nationwide, chafed under the regimented schedules and restrictive codes of conduct that threatened their individual freedom and right to academic inquiry. Throughout the 1920s decade, Allen and Benedict students joined the collection of local struggles for basic student freedoms known as the New Negro Campus Movement (NNCM), organizing sporadic protest campaigns to express their displeasure with conditions on these moralizing plantations. During the spring of 1929, Benedict College students—building upon a movement started by recent graduate and future Black Studies pioneer Nick Aaron Ford—questioned the exclusion of Blacks from leadership positions, lobbied for greater emphasis on liberal ideas and “Negro History,” and demanded the right to create student societies and athletic clubs to add variety to the mundane campus atmosphere.

During the Depression, students began to consider the links between their campus environment and the larger struggle for black freedom. Inspired by socially conscious professors and other community mentors, Allen and Benedict students organized college chapters of the NAACP and devoted their energies to the fight against lynching and educational inequality. By the late 1930s, while still protesting on campus, students at both institutions provided desperately needed manpower, energy, and support for the
floundering NAACP movement in Columbia. Their aggressive, militant approach to fighting injustice, revealed most poignantly during a student strike at Allen University in 1939, alarmed the city’s more conservative Black leadership who silenced their voices out of fear of white reprisals. Despite their brief censure, black youth and college students in South Carolina claimed their rightful place toward the political left of adult leaders where they remained throughout the mid-twentieth century.

The third chapter entitled “Marching Up Freedom Road: Black Youth and College Students in South Carolina’s Civil Rights Vanguard, 1940-1950,” examines the role of activist faculty and students at South Carolina’s segregated high schools and HBCUs within the aggressive, militant 1940s civil rights movement that directly challenged Jim Crow through mass voter registration drives, political organizing, civil rights litigation, and occasional direct-action protest. Historians have correctly emphasized the importance of the cadre of influential, charismatic adult leaders within the state’s civil rights vanguard—Progressive Democratic Party chairman and Lighthouse and Informer editor John Henry McCray, Army veteran and 1944 senatorial candidate Osceola McKaine, the indomitable Modjeska Montieth Simkins, and State NAACP president James Hinton—who successfully led black South Carolinians to important victories in battles to equalize teacher salaries, end the “whites only” Democratic Party primary, and challenge the constitutionality of segregated public education in Briggs v. Elliott (1951), achievements that placed South Carolina on the cutting edge of the early civil rights movement and served as a model for movements across the Deep South. Often marginalized within this scholarship are the contributions of their allies and
followers, many of whom were scholars, artists, public intellectuals, and students at segregated high schools and colleges across the state.

One reason for the absence of young people in this scholarship is that they were largely absent from the NAACP movement during the early part of the 1940s due to the military draft and adult leaders’ lingering suspicion regarding the potential dangers of their involvement. Seeking to fill the void, three members of South Carolina’s civil rights vanguard—Modjeska Montieth Simkins, Osceola McKaine, and Annie Belle Weston—along with a host of other progressive educators and activists developed grassroots student organizations and connected with national youth leaders who were concerned with the problems facing black youth to attract the necessary support, financial resources, and new ideas to inspire greater youth participation in South Carolina’s civil rights struggle. Between 1942 and 1947, Simkins and McKaine joined the adult advisory board of the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), a youth-centric Popular Front organization, and established strong friendships with key leaders such as James and Esther Jackson. The Jacksons and their colleagues were well aware of South Carolina’s reputation as a bastion of black resistance, especially among its youth, and hoped to make the state a staging ground for SNYC’s expansion. SNYC organizers and local volunteers such as Weston established chapters at segregated high schools and HBCUs and began to shift the gaze of young Black South Carolinians beyond the state’s borders connecting them with an increasingly powerful, cosmopolitan, and militant youth movement against fascism, imperialism, racism, and unfettered capitalist exploitation of the poor and
Their efforts culminated in the 1946 All-Southern Youth Legislature, an interracial gathering of nearly 1,000 youth delegates that was sponsored by SNYC but largely coordinated by Simkins, McKaine, and faculty and student activists from South Carolina’s segregated high schools and HBCUs. Delegates at the mock legislature, with the aid of civil rights veterans and other dignitaries, grappled with the major issues of the day—global war, black disfranchisement, lynching, America’s unequal justice system, educational inequality, and unemployment—and produced resolutions to be presented to Congress. More importantly, the Youth Legislature provided participants and spectators with a vision of the integrated world to come as the rules of Jim Crow were momentarily waived to accommodate visiting dignitaries, delegates, and international student ambassadors. SNYC’s successful youth legislature, its radical tactical and rhetorical departures from civil rights orthodoxy, and its subsequent recruitment campaigns in South Carolina and other Deep South states exacerbated tensions with the NAACP. The onset of the Cold War and rising anticommunism, however, fueled a sustained campaign of intimidation, surveillance, economic terror, and violence slowed the pace of desegregation and weakened the statewide civil rights movement. SNYC’s most important legacy, however, was that it inspired adult leaders of the South Carolina NAACP State Conference and other civil rights organizations to place renewed emphasis on youth organizing and leadership development. Fearful that SNYC and other outside organizations would make inroads into rural areas of the state, NAACP youth organizers intensified membership recruitment efforts and reorganized dormant youth councils and college chapters. By 1950, the Association boasted over 25 youth councils and had
active college chapters at nearly every HBCU in South Carolina. These organizations provided leadership training and opportunities for young people to participate in direct-action protests against educational inequality, disfranchisement, and, most notably, struggles against the denial of bus transportation for black children in Moncks Corner, Anderson, and other rural cities that laid the groundwork for the battle for equal education in Clarendon County that led to *Briggs v. Elliott* (1951), a precedent setting case for the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that outlawed segregation in America’s public schools.

“‘A Little Learning is a Dangerous Thing’: Black College Students Respond to Massive Resistance in South Carolina, 1948-1960,” assesses the response of Black youth and college students to the statewide campaign of political obstruction, economic terror, forced exile, intimidation, and extralegal violence that accompanied the rise of “Massive Resistance,” the militant segregationist counterrevolution that intensified after the *Brown* decision and the Supreme Court desegregation mandate issued the following year. Empowered by the court’s rulings, African Americans in Orangeburg, South Carolina petitioned local school boards to provide their children with the same educational opportunities afforded white youth. As fears of race mixture and social equality spread, white politicians sounded the alarm and encouraged local citizens to resist. Klan terror resumed, and thousands of supposedly more civilized South Carolinians formed White Citizens Councils (WCC) that utilized various forms of economic terror and racial violence against Black civil rights activists, intimidated liberal whites into silence, and targeted the state NAACP with anticommunist propaganda and a deluge of segregationist legislation that both threatened the livelihood of its membership and weakened public
support for the organization. South Carolina governor George Bell Timmerman and his legislative allies also stoked fear and paranoia about Black colleges and universities characterizing them as safe havens for subversive activity that threatened segregation and the American way of life.

Faculty and students at South Carolina’s public and private HBCUs provided critically needed reinforcements for the NAACP as shock troops in a two-front war against the forces of massive resistance. At the behest of the Orangeburg NAACP, State College and Claflin students, led by junior Fred Henderson Moore, conducted food strikes, rallies, and waged a four-day boycott of classes in opposition to the vicious economic terror campaign waged by the WCC and sympathetic white merchants against African Americans in their surrounding community. State College faculty passed a resolution urging local whites and state authorities to comply with the Supreme Court desegregation mandate and demanding the protection of academic freedom. Alarmed at the rising militancy at South Carolina’s only public HBCU, Governor George Bell Timmerman signed legislation ordering law enforcement to investigate the activities of the NAACP and subversive groups at the college. Outraged at the thought of white police power on their campus, Moore and his peers turned their ire toward State College president Dr. Benner C. Turner and the college’s all-white Board of Trustees, whose leadership styles resembled plantation overseers rather than administrators at a modern college. State College students conducted a four-day boycott of classes and demanded a greater voice in the daily operations of the college, academic freedom, rejection of the intrusive presence of white police, and an end to the paternalistic system of patronage.
that limited their personal ambitions, circumscribed students’ rights to free speech and assembly, and stymied institutional progress.

Although the movement largely failed, the courageous example set by Moore and his classmates inspired similar rebellions against later state-sponsored incursions against Allen University and Benedict College, two Columbia-area private HBCUs targeted by Governor Timmerman for employing several faculty members with supposed Communist ties. Timmerman’s attacks on the First Amendment, academic freedom, and racial self-determination convinced black students that “separate but equal” education was farcical thus igniting a spirited letter writing, litigation, and direct-action campaign to desegregate South Carolina’s flagship “whites only” colleges and universities that set the stage for the modern civil rights movement of the 1960s decade.

The penultimate chapter of this study entitled, “We Shall Not Be Moved: Black Student Activists Forge Racial Peace in South Carolina, 1960-1965,” assesses the resurgent student protest tradition at segregated high schools and HBCUs in South Carolina during the first half of the turbulent 1960s decade. Far from indifferent or apathetic to the plight of the race, black high school and college students in South Carolina joined their peers across the South and fought vigorously for desegregation and racial advancement while facing often stiff resistance from white politicians, racial terrorists, black and white conservatives, and even their friends, neighbors, and parents. Inspired by the “Greensboro Four,” Black youth and college students across the state, both independently and as members of traditional civil rights organizations such as the NAACP Youth Councils and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), conducted a variety of nonviolent direct-action protest campaigns, registered black voters and served
as plaintiffs in lawsuits that directly challenged *de jure* segregation. Under the leadership of its field secretary Rev. I. DeQuincey Newman, who gradually coalesced support in black communities across the state, the NAACP reclaimed its status as the dominant civil rights organization and built a statewide movement of young activists who organized boycotts, marches and other nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns to pressure white political and business leaders to sue for racial peace. Student activists also served as plaintiffs in several Supreme Court cases that opened public accommodations, desegregated state colleges and universities, and strengthened First Amendment rights for all Americans. Despite their successes, full integration remained out of reach. Newman and other veteran civil rights leaders sacrificed the idealistic aims of their young followers to pursue token desegregation and other piecemeal victories won through strategic endorsement of direct action and negotiation with white leaders. Public displays of compliance with federal desegregation orders, namely the relatively peaceful admission of black students to the previously all-white Clemson College and the University of South Carolina in early 1963, were widely promoted as evidence of South Carolina’s aberrant status among other Deep South states in how it dealt with racial strife. Claims of dignified integration and praise for white moderation were the bedrock of a negative racial peace—Some blacks enjoyed a modicum of racial progress while large swaths of the state’s black population remained mired in educational inequality, political powerlessness, and generational poverty. Internal strife, movement politics, rising white indifference to the plight of African Americans, and the inability of older NAACP leadership to transfer the energy of the protest struggle into a passion for the mundane work of political organizing beyond voter registration further slowed the pace of change.
Frustrated by justice delayed and adult leaders’ willingness to settle for incremental progress, many Black college students drifted away from the NAACP and began to organize domestic grassroots campus and community networks using a more militant political ideology and activist philosophy rooted in Black cultural nationalism, global anti-imperialism, racial self-determination, and armed self-defense.

The final chapter entitled “Black Fire at Voorhees College: Student Power, Self-Determination, and State Repression, 1965-1975,” focuses on the development of an increasingly race conscious and militant student protest tradition at Voorhees College, a historically Black junior college turned liberal arts institution in the rural town of Denmark, South Carolina. Like other college students across the country in the early 1960s, Voorhees College students participated in public demonstrations to desegregate local restaurants, drug stores, transportation facilities, and other public accommodations. Despite their best efforts, change was glacial at best. By the mid-1960s, student activists—particularly those who had experienced the negative effects of public-school desegregation—grew frustrated and disillusioned. Adhering to an emerging trend at PWIs and HBCUs nationwide, initiated by Black campus activists at San Francisco State College, Voorhees students organized group study sessions to expand their intellectual and cultural horizons through close reading and analysis of progressive African American and Third World history and literature. From these bull sessions sprang the idea to establish the Black Awareness Coordinating Committee (BACC), a chartered student organization whose goal was to transform the bland campus culture at Voorhees and spread awareness of the problems facing the student body and poor African Americans living in South Carolina’s Black Belt. From its inception, BACC members became
embroiled in the larger cultural and political wars that shaped racial politics in South Carolina during the late 1960s. The Orangeburg Massacre intensified their efforts to transform Voorhees into a center of political education and grassroots activism against the miseducation, economic exploitation, and generational poverty which they believed was the product of generational inequality created by Jim Crow, white resistance to full integration, and the weakness of older leaders who settled for piecemeal reforms rather than transformational change. Unlike existing interpretations of Black Power organizations as rhetorically bombastic, sexist, and devoid of a connection to the surrounding community, the protest movement built by BACC articulated blackness as a tool to develop a campus and community movement that reconstituted higher education at Voorhees and provided much needed assistance to working class Blacks in Denmark.

Despite their noble intentions, BACC met fierce opposition from numerous factions on campus including conservative students, concerned faculty, and older administrators who embraced respectability, interracial cooperation, token integration and education for the “work world” as paths for racial advancement. These ideological and generational tensions boiled over during a BACC-led takeover of the Voorhees College Library-Administration building on April 28-29, 1969. Thirty-five students, mostly comprised of BACC members and sympathizers, cleared occupants from the building at gunpoint and issued a list of demands to the administration to remedy problems caused by systemic racism, white supremacy, respectability politics, and the normalization of whiteness in Black higher education. The dissidents christened the building as “The Liberated Malcolm X University,” symbolizing the transformation of Voorhees into a truly Black university devoted to racial self-determination, revolutionary political
education, and cultural nationalism. They also demanded greater academic freedom, protection of their right to free speech and assembly, increased hiring of Black faculty, the creation of a Black Studies department, and administrative support for cultural programming intended to raise the racial consciousness of their classmates. Declaring that there was “not going to be another Orangeburg,” the campus rebels affirmed their right to armed self-defense by carrying light firearms and other weapons into the library as a precautionary measure against the use of force by state authorities. In addition to their calls for the reconstitution of Black higher education at Voorhees, BACC leaders demanded higher wages for low-wage workers at the college and urged administrators to develop GED courses and public programs to improve the lives of working-class Blacks in Denmark. Their protest campaign met with mixed results. The movement inspired by the Voorhees BACC inspired disgruntled faculty and staff to express grievances about their lack of academic freedom, representation on college committees, low wages, and the lack of opportunities for professionalization and advancement. Long after the arrests of those involved in the takeover, Voorhees administrators acquiesced to their request for a Black Studies program. These changes came at a high cost. Shortly after a second campus rebellion the following year, Voorhees began to struggle due to its damaged reputation, increased competition from white colleges for the best and brightest Black students, and poor leadership.

Answering the call to identify the “names, faces, voices, goals, ideas, strategies, demonstrations, successes, and failures,” of those involved in the Black Campus Movement who changed the character of American higher education, this chapter acknowledges the importance of students at South Carolina HBCUs to this nationwide
movement and, equally relevant, addresses their role in the rise of Black Power, a historical trend that has yet to be properly examined by scholars of civil rights in the Palmetto State. As revealed in this chapter, the combined expressions of anger and frustration at South Carolina State College, Voorhees, the University of South Carolina, and even among Black high school students in Charleston inspired an intense white backlash that denigrated Black nationalists, student activists, and labor protesters as “destroyers without hope,” giving South Carolina governor Robert E. McNair carte blanche to crush nascent protest movements using surveillance, intimidation, and ostentatious displays of police and military force. The Voorhees protests were even cited alongside those at Cornell and North Carolina A&T Universities during the 1969 Senate Permanent Subcommittee hearings on “Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders” as exemplars of the radical, violent nature of Black Power on college campuses. These widely publicized hearing contributed to the longstanding failure of the American public to understand Black Power as more than a fleeting, angry moment in American history but, rather, the shrill cries of the miner’s canary choking from the rising toxic fumes created by the failures of desegregation, “Law and Order” politics, and continued economic inequality caused by racial capitalism.
We have tomorrow
Bright before us
Like a flame

Yesterday
A Night-gone thing
A Sun-down name

And dawn—today
Broad arch above
The road we came
We march!
Americans together.
We march!

-- Langston Hughes, “Youth,” August 1924

On February 26, 1926, renowned scholar and native South Carolinian Dr. Benjamin E. Mays delivered a stirring opening address for a three-day “Negro Older Boys’ Conference” at Benedict College, a Baptist supported institution of higher learning in Columbia, South Carolina. Sponsored by the state Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the annual forum was intended to teach black youth how to approach the larger problems they faced. For Ralph Bullock, boys’ work secretary of the YMCA and organizer of the event, Mays’ appearance was quite a coup. At age 28, his career was in full flight; Mays held degrees from two of the nation’s finest liberal arts colleges, Bates
College in Lewiston, Maine, and the University of Chicago, and once served as Dean of the College Department at Morehouse College, one of the preeminent Black universities in America. His impeccable credentials, however, was not the sole reason for Bullock’s invitation. Weeks earlier in an Atlanta train station, the YMCA official, having just purchased a return ticket to South Carolina aboard a segregated coach, witnessed Mays request a berth in a Pullman sleeping car, a risky act of racial defiance in a city not yet busy enough to love its darker citizens. The agent politely but firmly refused his request. Impressed by Mays’ courage, Bullock introduced himself and the two men became fast friends. They discussed many topics on the smoky, cramped train ride home, most notably the ideals and goals of the “New Negro”—a label that neither could define but both understood was represented by black intellectuals and professionals who rejected Jim Crow and defended the self-respect of Black people, even and especially if only to be beaten down. Tasked with the mission of finding a speaker to address his young proteges, Bullock chose Mays as an example of composed, intelligent, productive and fearless manhood to emulate.¹

Reflecting upon his experiences as a “frustrated lad in Greenwood County” and a determined student at the Colored Normal, Industrial, Agricultural and Mechanical College in Orangeburg, Mays sought to inspire and motivate these several hundred high school and college-aged youth whose visions of the future, he later wrote, were

¹ John H. Roper, Sr., The Magnificent Mays: A Biography of Benjamin E. Mays (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 107-108, 111-130. This was not the first time that Mays attempted to circumvent Jim Crow law on southern railroads. A few years earlier, he tricked a ticket agent in Atlanta to give him a seat in a Pullman berth to St. Louis, site of a fraternity convention. A short time later, a Pullman porter warned him that his life was in danger. After a brief stop in Columbia, Tennessee, Mays was accosted by three armed white men and forced into the Jim Crow car.
restricted to “the ceiling and not the sky.” The tall, gentlemanly scholar deeply understood how white supremacy and Jim Crow, along with blacks damaged or bowed by such oppression, often stifled ambition or killed their dreams altogether. Mays’ effort to transcend the carefully ascribed place set aside for him by white South Carolinians proved to be a Herculean task. To earn his high school diploma, he overcame stifling poverty and racial violence, resisted the strong objections of his father and the family’s white landlord, and endured pointed insults and physical attacks from less ambitious classmates. Seeking knowledge and freedom beyond the borders of the Palmetto State, Mays successfully immersed himself within the rigorous academic cultures at predominantly white colleges becoming further disabused of the myth of black inferiority and increasingly unwilling to “accept the system in his own mind as being inescapable or right.” Returning to his native state, where segregation and inequality were “taken for granted—unprotested, unquestioned,” Mays’ mindset was unique. He was an ebony *rara avis*—a “New Negro” in search of a flock.2

Mays’ address, entitled “The Goal,” was a forceful critique of the debilitating

---

2 Ibid., 122-128. Mays returned to South Carolina after accepting a position as a professor of English at his alma mater. Among those who inspired him to adopt the term “New Negro” to describe himself was State College professor and future wife Sadie Gray and Asa Gordon, a tough-minded young historian employed at the college since 1919. Gordon guided Mays’ thoughts on the subject insisting that a New Negro was first and foremost a “Race Man,” or a person that rejected Jim Crow and held himself to high academic standards. Mays’ reflections on his address can be found in *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), 103-112. This speech was later reprinted, along with an expanded introduction, in Asa Gordon, *Sketches of Negro Life in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), 203-212. Originally published in 1929, Gordon intended this study to recognize the contributions of African Americans to the growth and development of South Carolina while also chronicling the emergence of the “New Negro” in the state. He encouraged Mays to add an introduction to his Benedict speech that reveals an evolution in his thoughts on the definition of the term. He explains that the “New Negro” is a *rara avis*, stressing that there were few Black South Carolinians who fit the description despite the pronouncements of leading Black publications. One reason for this is that his definition of the term had expanded to include a commitment to manly, militant but nonviolent resistance to Jim Crow.
effects of enslavement, political disfranchisement, racial discrimination and economic exploitation on black life in South Carolina. Seeking to define the goal of life for his young audience, Mays explained that the task was too difficult due to existing “handicaps and restrictions” imposed by American racism. “But were I white…my task would not be so difficult,” he lamented, “We would be clothed in that skin that gives perpetual protection. We would then represent that group that holds the destiny of this Nation in its hand, and to whom the doors of opportunity are never closed. Were this true…I would recommend that you aspire to be Governor of your native state. I would point the way to the President’s chair.”

Unable to suggest a concrete goal, Mays challenged the young men to pursue an ideal that would “forever beckon but forever elude.” In this timely and prophetic address, he encouraged them to work towards perfection—to go “upward to truth, onward to virtue, thru perils to right, and thru bitter experiences to the plain of justice.” Employing a more democratic and inclusive definition of racial uplift, the priestly scholar urged his disciples towards full, mature adulthood and a commitment to fight for social change in order to make blacks “freer intellectually, freer politically, and freer economically…in order that those who come after us may enjoy a larger freedom and a greater heritage.” The goal, Mays claimed, was to make it possible for future generations of Black South Carolinians to be citizens of the world.

Mays charged faculty and administrators at the state’s Black colleges and universities with the responsibility of training young people to meet this challenge. Citing “mental slavery” as the most serious obstacle to racial progress, he urged

---

3 “Older Boys’ Conference in Columbia,” The Palmetto Leader, February 27, 1926, 1; Mays, Born to Rebel, 103-105.

4 Ibid., 4.
educators to elevate the race by cultivating the minds and guiding the ambitions of their pupils. Linking education to the fight for social justice, he stressed that the role of the Black college was not simply to train “Negro Agriculturalists” or “Negro Doctors” but to provide a pathway for future generations of African Americans to assert their humanity and claim first-class citizenship. Merging the philosophies of Washington and DuBois, Mays challenged leaders of these institutions to “prove our equality by producing great scientists, great artists, great businessmen—in fact, whatever man has done—to take our place in this world of competition.” Voicing his long simmering frustration with the lax enforcement of high educational standards by Black college presidents, he implored them to “produce the largest number of Negroes who can lose themselves in their work and think the thoughts of the world, undisturbed.”

Mays urged campus authorities to prepare students to lead in the integrated world to come by granting them intellectual freedom to think beyond the confines of race, pursue cooperative alliances with well-meaning whites, and work “until the mind and character become the standard of man, not race, not color.” In short, the scholar-activist offered a vision of Black colleges as safe havens where young people were to be molded into confident, broadly trained race leaders whose

---

5 Roper, *The Magnificent Mays*, 90-99, 103-105. Upon his arrival at Morehouse College in 1921, Mays was immediately struck by the paradoxes of Black higher education at southern private HBCUs. Black students at “the House” were to be molded into tomorrow’s Christian leaders and urban professionals but were often hindered by humiliations suffered as a result of Jim Crow and the excesses of the Jazz Age. Mays taught the first calculus course offered at a southern HBCU in addition to psychology and debate. He was distressed to witness “spotty” teaching in both mathematics and theology at the college and developed a reputation as an opponent of football and other collegiate sports which he deemed cocurricular distractions that kept academically weaker students from excelling. At the end of the first semester, Mays clashed with Morehouse president John Hope after announcing a second exam to psychology students, a fourth of whom had likely cheated on the first attempt. Like most Black faculty, Mays did not win the battle but, luckily, won his respect. He was named dean shortly thereafter.
mission was to “win the right to participate fully in American life.”

Despite having been away from the Palmetto State for nearly a decade, Mays’ assumptions about Black South Carolinians’ passivity in the face of racial oppression were largely true. In his absence, however, a small but vibrant indigenous movement had emerged. The onset of the First World War, described by adopted son of South Carolina Woodrow Wilson as a fight “for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments,” inspired a marked shift in consciousness and renewed vigor in the fight for racial equality and self-determination among blacks in the Palmetto State. In 1917, African Americans in Charleston and Columbia established local branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a largely white, northern bureaucratic civil rights organization. By the end of the year, the NAACP took on a darker hue as thousands of black southerners in over a dozen cities established branches to form a “Dixie District” that represented what scholar-activist W.E.B. DuBois called a “real first line of defense facing the enemy at proper range.”

Black professionals in both cities began aggressive protest campaigns against disfranchisement, employment discrimination, and residential segregation utilizing extensive networks formed in pre-existing racial uplift institutions and relationships forged through their roles as racial ambassadors to the white community. Many of these efforts failed due to white political obstruction and internal

\[6\] Ibid.

divisions along gender and class lines.\textsuperscript{8}

African Americans within the Charleston and Columbia branches of the NAACP achieved their most tangible gains through collective action to improve conditions and provide their constituents with a greater voice in the daily operation of black public schools, foreshadowing the state’s importance as a battleground in the fight for educational equity. South Carolina’s racially separate and unequal system of public schools, a gross perversion of the Radical Republican vision of universal education developed a generation earlier, was cemented into law at the 1895 Constitutional Convention as United States senator Benjamin Ryan Tillman, agrarian reformer and virulent racist, and his legislative allies crafted a series of labyrinthine measures that placed the future of black children in the hands of white trustees and handpicked government officials. Convention delegates also rewrote the state constitution to include strict residency requirements, a poll tax, and literacy tests to further disfranchise African Americans. These measures, coupled with the establishment of the “whites only” state Democratic Party primary, effectively eliminated black participation in South Carolina politics. Denied the right to vote, blacks were powerless to prevent white trustees and local school boards from providing a disproportionate share of public funds to white

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 26-40; “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” 18. In late March 1917, white residents of Columbia, S.C. pushed for the passage of a residential segregation ordinance. The ordinance passed its first reading before the City Council despite vocal opposition from white progressives such as Trinity Church rector R.G. Finlay, three white professors on the faculty at the University of South Carolina, and white members of the colored auxiliary to the Associated Charities of Columbia.
educational institutions. By the 1923 school year, the state legislature spent eleven times more on white schools than those for African Americans; only $196.25 was spent on transportation for the state’s entire black school-aged population. Recognizing the links between citizenship and education, the Capital Civic League, a precursor to the NAACP, organized Columbia’s most prominent and well-respected black men to register to vote. Their successful campaign put the city’s white leaders on the defensive. To strengthen traditions of black patronage, they provided funds for the construction of the state’s first black public high school, Booker T. Washington, in 1916. Locked out of electoral politics, Black Columbians utilized this cycle of accommodation and protest to achieve incremental change. The following year, African Americans in Charleston took matters a step further. After a three-year grassroots campaign, the NAACP local branch successfully forced the city’s board of commissioners to prohibit white teachers from working in its black public schools. These victories provided the state’s urban black professional class with additional resources for its racial uplift efforts and inspired visions of an independent, statewide black political organization.

Economic depression and a sustained pattern of violent backlash tested the moral and political stamina of Black South Carolinians to continue the fight to change the

---


meaning and practice of American democracy. In the aftermath of the war, white reactionaries sought to stem the tide of racial progress and reinforce blacks’ servile conformity to Jim Crow. On May 10, 1919, Charleston descended into chaos as several thousand whites rioted following an altercation at a pool hall between local blacks and white sailors based in the city’s Naval Shipyard. At least forty blacks were murdered. When asked whether the war had worsened race relations, Tillman protégé and four-term Congressman James Byrnes declared America would forever be a “white man’s country.”

As the twenties roared onward, Black citizens’ once vivid dreams of first-class citizenship became a reddish-tinged nightmare. White South Carolinians, some of whom were members of a nationally resurgent Ku Klux Klan (KKK), lynched 14 blacks between 1919 and 1927. Many of these brutal murders took place in rural South Carolina where African Americans lacked the financial resources and political maneuverability of their urban counterparts. In nearly every instance, racist law enforcement officers, judges, and citizens conspired against victims and their families as they searched in vain for justice. This injustice system was buttressed by elected officials who repeatedly made “brave professions” about the need for civility, thus hiding these crimes beneath a veneer

11 Ibid., 56.
of southern gentility. This repressive climate weakened African American movements for meaningful, progressive change in the Palmetto State.

Analyzed within this context, “The Goal” was a bold yet dangerous call to arms against white supremacy in South Carolina. Older blacks in the audience, eager to please white benefactors and unwilling to test the patience of their reactionary brethren, criticized Mays’ address as an affront to good race relations and distanced themselves from him. “The young man has much to learn,” one observer remarked, “he is quite radical.” Others privately feared for his life. White retaliation was not their only concern. At the conclusion of his speech, the young men in the audience leapt to their feet and thunderously applauded. His words had struck like lightning. Many of those gathered had never witnessed a black man openly reject white supremacy and publicly encourage his people toward fearless, independent manhood. Moreover, they were thrilled by his impassioned call for Black South Carolinians to build modern, financially

---

12 “Editorials,” *The Crisis* (May 1917), 9; Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 58-59. According to Lau, the most notable example of extralegal violence and legal obstruction in South Carolina involved the Lowman family of Aiken, South Carolina. In early April 1925, the town sheriff and several deputies visited the home of Sam Lowman, a tenant farmer who lived and worked on the property of William Hartley. They had received reports that Lowman had been involved in the sale of illegal whiskey. Sam Lowman was not home at the time. Shortly after their arrival, Lowman’s son, Demon, and his nephew, Clarence, ran to the house to assist Sam’s wife and his daughter, Bertha. In the moments that followed, gunshots were exchanged. The sheriff and Lowman’s wife were killed. Demon, Clarence, and Bertha (along with two other family members) were arrested, tried, and convicted of murder. Sam Lowman was sentenced to two years on the chain gang. After reading about the proceedings, Columbia lawyer Nathaniel J. Frederick, an African American, appealed to the Supreme Court on behalf of the Lowman family and won a retrial. In October 1926, Frederick argued the case and won a “not guilty” verdict for Demon. Immediately after the verdict, however, he was arrested on new charges and returned to the Aiken jail alongside his sister and cousin. On October 8th, a mob descended upon the jail and removed the prisoners likely with the assistance of the jailor. They were driven to an old tourist camp on the outskirts of Aiken and shot to death in front of the crowd. A grand jury investigated and ruled that there was no evidence to indict members of the mob. Despite national outrage, none were charged for murder. See also “Along the Color Line,” *The Crisis* (August 1930), 277.

13 Mays, *Born to Rebel*, 104-105. Luckily, Mays was not harmed. Within months, however, he was forced to leave State College after its president, R.S. Wilkinson, refused to bend the rule forbidding married couples form working together on the faculty. Mays and his new wife moved to Tampa where he became a popular leader within the city’s branch of the NAACP.
stable, and socially conscious institutions of higher learning with well trained, committed faculty whose sole mission was to help each student achieve their fullest potential. Like thousands of their peers nationwide, Black college students in South Carolina challenged the stifling and repressive conditions on their respective campuses. Mays had stoked the embers of a flickering movement for student self-determination, academic freedom, and racial equality that would change not only Black colleges in South Carolina but, eventually, American society.

This chapter examines the rise of powerful, organized and aggressive protest movements for student rights, racial self-determination, academic freedom, and educational equality at private historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) in South Carolina’s capital city, Columbia, during the long Depression era. Beginning in the New Negro era of the early 1920s, Black students at Allen University and Benedict College, two private, denominational HBCUs, forged strong and enduring student activist traditions that challenged the racial constitution of higher education at these institutions and, by the mid-1930s, radicalized and confronted Jim Crow both on campus and in the surrounding community. This examination of Black campus activism during the long Depression era offers a new bookend to existing scholarship on the origins of civil rights activism in South Carolina and, equally important, recognizes its HBCUs as sites of militant thought and social action during the decades before World War Two.

Student insurgencies at Allen and Benedict during the interwar years were important local episodes in what historians have dubbed the New Negro Campus Movement (NNCM), a loosely organized collection of campus incursions at HBCUs and predominantly white educational institutions nationwide. Between 1914 and the eve of
World War Two over twenty-five Black colleges and universities, stretching from Pennsylvania to Florida and as far westward as Oklahoma, experienced mass strikes and other disruptions as students voiced their dissatisfaction with the state of higher education and the accommodation of Jim Crow and white supremacy both on campus and outside the ebony tower. Inspired by global struggles against colonialism, rising African American militancy, shifting currents of Black scholarship and cultural expression, and the proud, dignified examples set by Black faculty and community leaders, African American college students challenged educational philosophies that were deeply rooted in American racial ideology, specifically with respect to the education of Blacks in a caste society. Black college students opposed entrenched, predominantly white university administrations that advanced institutional education over classical training, spoke out against segregationist policies and campus traditions, and criticized any sign of missionary paternalism in instruction and philanthropy. Moreover, they demanded basic social and academic freedom, greater student power, the right to racial self-determination and an end to the normalization of whiteness in leadership roles and scholarly inquiry. The NNCM in South Carolina and elsewhere produced a new generation of race leaders who not only attacked white power and privilege but also rejected bourgeois conventions of respectability and late-Victorian morality that both shaped older generations’ tenuous claim on middle-class status and hindered the development of broad-based collective action for civil rights and racial equality. Black college students replaced these outmoded principles with a new ethos rooted in freedom of consumption, self-expression, personality development, and race consciousness—prerequisites for participation in the
civil rights struggle to come.\textsuperscript{14}

Most studies of this loosely organized movement for student rights, racial self-determination, academic freedom and educational equality focus on its origins during the Roaring Twenties at prominent Black educational institutions such as Fisk, Howard, Hampton, and Tuskegee.\textsuperscript{15} Campus rebels at these and other institutions targeted what historian Ibram X. Kendi refers to as the moralized contraption, or the draconian rules and regimented daily routines instituted by predominantly white campus authorities that were intended to “Christianize and civilize, and ultimately induce submission to the white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal American order.” Black college students, particularly those at southern HBCUs, spent much of the decade fighting for moral freedom and basic student rights taken for granted by their white counterparts including the right to eat delicious food and dress fashionably, dictate their own schedules, socialize with the opposite sex, publish school yearbooks and newspapers, establish Greek-lettered fraternities and sororities, organize student governments, receive due process when accused of breaking rules and appeal unfair rulings made by administrators. They also protested the exclusion of African Americans from positions of power and criticized the rejection of Black thought, history, and culture from the American mainstream. Indeed,


these battles for control of black bodies, minds, and institutions were foundational to the consequential war for the soul of America that lay just beyond the horizon. Without gaining these basic freedoms within the ebony tower, this generation of Black students would have been unable to pick up the torch of freedom and carry it forward to the 1960s civil rights generation.\textsuperscript{16}

Historians of black life in South Carolina during the first two decades after America’s entry into World War I describe the era, despite the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan and increased incidents of lynching and racial violence, as one of rising expectations, greater social mobility and “psychological emancipation” for African Americans. While these changes did not bring about an end to racial discrimination or produce a concerted assault on white supremacy, they did result in an increased willingness to publicly voice dissatisfaction with the myriad problems that circumscribed their aspirations.\textsuperscript{17} Freedom dreaming, intimation, aspiration, complaint, and public expressions of dissent were important steps on the road to building strong campus and community movements. The interwar years, while marked with tremendous racial violence and other cruelties, was an important, transitional period rife with individual and collective African American expressions of freedom. Nowhere were such public displays witnessed more often than on the campuses of private Black high schools and HBCUs due to their presence as relatively safe havens and centrality as discursive spaces where

\textsuperscript{16} Kendi, \textit{The Black Campus Movement}, 4, 47.
Black students and intellectuals could research, develop new ideas, engage in vigorous debate, freely express themselves, and be exposed regularly to New Negro race leaders who inspired them to build campus organizations or join community movements to uplift the masses and ultimately advance the race. The victories achieved by the Charleston and Columbia NAACP during the New Negro era would not have been possible without Black educational leaders use of these institutions as the race’s bully pulpit, particularly on the issue of Black educational innovation, control and advancement.

The bulk of this chapter examines the rise of student activism at Benedict College and Allen University, two private, denominational HBCUs located in Columbia, South Carolina. Beginning shortly after the First World War, progressive faculty and students at these institutions began a protracted struggle to improve and expand educational offerings, end the moralized contraption, and oust autocratic white and black administrators. Benedict and Allen students frequently expressed frustration that their schools were horribly mismanaged, beholden to the whims of paternalistic and sometimes overtly racist white benefactors and led by conservative presidents more willing to please white politicians and donors than the communities they served. Similar to their counterparts across the country, these New Negro campus activists grew weary of the rigid and repressive regimes rooted in fundamentalist Christian theology and missionary paternalism. Working alongside like-minded faculty mentors, students developed a powerful racial pride that modified existing philosophies of racial uplift and self-help to recognize African American institutional control, educational innovation, professional training, and the pursuit of social justice as prerequisites for first-class citizenship. In short, the sensibilities often associated with the New Negro were not the province of the
young but, rather, a state of mind accessible to any black person willing to think and act differently. By the end of the 1920s, budding young professionals and race leaders at Benedict College utilized innovative protest strategies commonly associated with later freedom struggles, such as boycotts and skillful public relations, to win basic student freedoms, modernize curricular offerings, and force the resignation of longtime Benedict president C.B. Antisdel and his replacement with the college’s first African American executive.

Historian I.A. Newby and others have noted that black South Carolinians made “significant but limited progress” in public education despite the worsening economic depression and white resistance to any sign of racial progress during this period. Illiteracy rates declined, school terms increased, and expenditures for building construction rose leading to rising numbers of black children being educated statewide. These educational reforms slowed with the intensification of the Great Depression except for one area: the development of a system of secondary education that expanded educational opportunity for black youth. In 1930, only three Black high schools had been accredited by the State Department of Education. Seven years later, the number had increased tenfold. Rising numbers of black youth in South Carolina were better prepared for higher educational opportunities that barely existed. The discrepancy between the ambitions of young Black South Carolinians and the realities of black higher education in the state created new openings for protest and civil rights organizing to foster educational equality. Progressive faculty at segregated high schools and HBCUs in Columbia and other sections of the state were happy to oblige. Black professionals, particularly Benedict College and Allen University faculty, reorganized the local NAACP branch and
supported the national office’s campaigns for educational equality and their fight against the horrors of lynching. Far from indifferent or cowardly, black high school and college students in Columbia urged branch leaders to establish NAACP youth councils and college chapters and permit them to join the fray. Following the example set by progressive, race-conscious faculty, black high school and college students in Columbia, Charleston, and other cities petitioned local school boards, volunteered to serve as plaintiffs in NAACP lawsuits intended to provide blacks with access to professional and graduate training, and organized letter writing and direct-action campaigns against lynching.

This newfound student militancy also found an outlet on the very campuses they called home. In the spring of 1939, Allen University students, many of whom were members of the campus NAACP, turned their rage against the corruption, theft, mismanagement, outmoded curriculum, racial accommodation, and vestiges of the moralized contraption that they believed prevented their alma mater from becoming a parallel but modern liberal arts college capable of meeting the needs of South Carolina’s black citizens. Although Allen and Benedict students were unable to completely overthrow Jim Crow and white supremacy on their campuses and in the surrounding community, they stretched the boundaries of the moralized contraption and forced university administrators to modernize curricular offerings and alter student policies in ways that allowed future students to assemble, think, speak, love, pray, refuse to pray, and protest freely. Without the basic student freedoms won by Depression-era campus rebels, the civil rights protest campaigns waged by the 1960s generation of student activists at Allen, Benedict and other HBCUs in South Carolina would not have been
possible.

In Search of a Newer World: Nick Aaron Ford and New Negro Campus Rebellions at Benedict College

South Carolina colleges and universities—black and white—experienced sporadic, intense episodes of student unrest that were consistent with those witnessed nationwide during the Jazz Age. Cadets at Clemson College frequently expressed discontent with the poor food, unsanitary conditions, and regimented, militaristic educational philosophy offered by the whites-only land grant college located in upstate South Carolina. On March 11, 1920, virtually the entire freshman and sophomore cadet corps at all-white Clemson College left the institution in protest of the suspension of two popular students, Charles W. Crossland and R.F. Holohan, incidents that were deemed endemic of the longstanding abuse of power by faculty and administrators. Student leaders issued a series of demands to Clemson president Walter Merritt Riggs and the Board of Trustees including reinstatement and amnesty for those suspended and all strike participants, greater student representation on the faculty disciplinary committee, open hearings and access to faculty counsel for all cadets accused of violating school policies, better food and improved sanitation in the campus mess hall. Striking students boarded trains for Greenville where they hoped that upperclassmen would join the boycott of classes. President Riggs, to break the strike, granted senior and junior cadets leave of absence pending investigation. Free from punishment for desertion, they instead formed a committee to negotiate on behalf of their younger classmates. By the end of the week, Clemson trustees demanded that all students return to classes or be counted as deserters. “We agreed that we would close the school before we would see the authority of the
college administration trampled underfoot,” declared one board member. This public show of strength hid the fact that, fearing such closure and wary of losing the support of parents and alumni, Clemson administrators had tentatively agreed to many of the reforms demanded by the students including open hearings, faculty counsel for the accused, the appointment of a three-man committee to study whether or not to add a student representative to the disciplinary committee, and a new trial for the two suspended students. The board also allocated funds for President Riggs to improve food service and sanitation in the mess hall. Memory of the strike lingered; Outraged by the administration’s failure to fully implement these changes, Clemson cadets went on strike again in 1924.

Black college students at Allen University, a private denominational HBCU in Columbia, were equally frustrated with the inadequate facilities, antiquated curriculum, and rigid set of rules and regulations that defined campus life. Established in 1880 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), Allen experienced fleeting moments of progress prior to a lengthy period of financial, physical and academic decline caused by

---

18 “Clemson [sic] Students on Strike Today,” The Columbia Record, March 11, 1920, 1, 7; “450 Cadets Quit Clemson Campus,” County Record, March 11, 1920, 1; “Students’ Strike at Clemson Complete as Upper Classmen Quit,” The Columbia Record, March 12, 1920, 19; “Clemson Class Work Stands Still,” March 15, 1920, 7; “Clemson Boys of Richland at Home,” The Columbia Record, March 16, 1920, 10; “Clemson Trustees Return From Meet,” The Columbia Record, March 16, 1920, 12. Not all of the Clemson trustees were comfortable with such a hardline stance against the striking students. Four trustees from Oconee County—Major W.J. Stribbling, J.M. Moss, J.M. Barron and V.H. Ellison—blamed college authorities for the situation arguing that the college had no right to make the students perform menial labor without payment. Opposing trustees reportedly explained that the question of student labor was not a factor in the ongoing strike. Objections to such unpaid labor reveal, however, longstanding grievance on the part of former students about their past treatment.

19 “Clemson Trustees Uphold Faculty in Recent Row,” Abbeville Press and Banner, March 17, 1920, 1; “The President and Faculty Upheld,” The Columbia Record, March 18, 1920, 1; “Alumni of Clemson Summoned to Meet,” The Herald and News, March 19, 1920, 5; “Clemson Students Asked to Return,” The Columbia Record, March 20, 1920, 5; “Clemson Students All Back at Work,” The Columbia Record, March 22, 1920, 1; “Clemson Cadets Return,” County Record, March 25, 1920, 1. In addition to the changes mentioned above, President Riggs also established a new Department of Student Affairs later this year. For more on the later Clemson College strike see, “Clemson Men Are Expelled,” The Clinton Chronicle, October 30, 1924, 1.
the dismantling of the state’s Reconstruction regime in 1895. Despite its predominantly Black administration and faculty, Allen functioned much like northern missionary educational institutions as it sought to cultivate “Christian manhood” within its students using a combination of intensive religious and moral education, rigorous classical training, and daily hard labor. When not in class, Allen students performed manual labor to earn tuition credits and, equally important, to fulfill the university’s mission to produce docile, respectable and disciplined workers. Women students, due to greater financial need and campus authorities’ concerns about the mischief caused by idle hands, were expected to stoically shoulder a heavier workload. Dorothy Evans, a 1924 graduate, remembered that male students often shirked their responsibilities and were shielded from punishment for minor violations. A brief, unsolicited conversation with a boy during study hall resulted in Evans having to scrub the floors in her dormitory prior to a full shift waiting tables in the campus dining hall. She and other boarding students were also expected to attend mandatory chapel exercises two to three times per week and attend Sunday church services. “And we had to march to church,” she recalled, “The boys didn’t have to go. I don’t know why they didn’t have control over the boys. But we had to march to church, you know, from Allen all the way [to Bishop Memorial].” Image conscious and obsessed with decorum, campus authorities enforced a strict dress code for Allen women. Evans and her peers were expected to wear navy or white dresses or “middy blouses” with skirts with plain shoes and stockings.20 The Parisian attire associated with the Jazz Age was considered risqué. Students of both sexes were given

---

20 Dorothy Evans, interview by Dr. Tom Crosby, part 1, 29 May 2010, transcript, Tom Crosby Oral History Collection. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.
little privacy or margin for error.

On November 23, 1923, Allen faculty ordered several male students to clean the new Chappelle administration building in preparation for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. They vehemently refused, even threatening violence against any faculty member who tried to force them to do so. The frightened instructors soon ordered Evans and a few of her female classmates to perform the task. “[The boys] told us not to do it,” laughed Evans, “And so we didn’t do it and they sent us home.” Upon learning of the incident, Allen University president Dr. R.W. Mance suspended 48 students, only three boys, for insubordination. The roughly 50 male students who collectively refused to clean the building were individually called before Mance and voluntarily renounced their earlier objections. Allen women, including Evans, were punished for their roles in the rebellion. “A girl was cleaning the president’s office and she found this copy of a letter that they were sending to our parents to tell them to meet us, what train they was going to put us on. They sent us home. And, honey, we cried. We were scared to go home,” she remembered.21 45 Black women and three men, all boarding students, were officially expelled on November 25. “All our students are required to give three hours a week to work outside of their regular classroom duties,” Mance explained to reporters, “We cannot have disorder; we have an enrollment of more than 1,000 students this year and we must maintain discipline at all hazards.” AME officials were less than pleased with the negative publicity and the expulsion of nearly half of Allen’s normal student body. Within a week, Bishop W.D. Chappelle forced Mance to reverse his decision, at once dealing a humiliating blow to a former rival for his office and demonstrating the limited

21 Dorothy Evans, interview by Dr. Tom Crosby, part 2, 20 August 2010, transcript, Tom Crosby Oral History Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC.
power held by the president of the college. This asymmetrical power arrangement persisted throughout the next decade until church laymen, Allen faculty, and student activists demanded a greater voice in the daily affairs of the college.

Benedict College students experienced similar levels of frustration and discontent with the state of higher education and the rigid, regimented and repressive code of conduct required as part of their moral education and character-building program. In his autobiography entitled *Seeking a Newer World*, Benedict alumnus, African American literary theorist, and Black Studies pioneer Nick Aaron Ford described his alma mater as a place where he lived, grew, suffered, and learned during his time as a high school and college student at the historically black college between 1918 and 1926. The pastor’s son from Ridgeway, South Carolina recalled his years at Benedict as a transition into a broader Jim Crow world where his ambitions, dreams, and well-being were determined more by the “whims and fancies of the white world” than his own actions. This pivotal, foundational lesson for black youth living in a Jim Crow world was reinforced upon his arrival on campus. After packing his meager yet well-maintained belongings, sharing a tearful goodbye with his parents, and joining his mentor Rev. J.A. McConnell on a train bound for Columbia, Ford arrived at Benedict and strolled toward the entrance of Convention Hall, the largest of several magnificent brick buildings that dotted the campus grounds. Turning to observe the teeming crowd of students, parents, and curious onlookers gathered on the finely manicured lawn, the incoming freshmen’s excitement quickly faded. “I saw groups of students standing still as if frozen in their tracks and a

---

frightened black man shabbily dressed running in a zigzag manner with a hat in hand,” Ford wrote, “Behind him also running were two white policemen in uniform with shiny pistols in their hands.” Resisting the urge to hide, Ford breathlessly watched as the policemen aimed their weapons at the suspect, with seemingly little regard for the innocent bystanders nearby, just before he plunged into the dense shrubbery adjacent to the administration building and disappeared. Disgusted at the loss of their quarry, the exhausted, red-faced officers holstered their weapons and departed.

The frightening episode left an indelible mark on the impressionable youth. Ford’s sheltered upbringing in Fairfield County failed to prepare him for the invasive presence of white police on such hallowed ground as Benedict. He later recalled experiencing recurring nightmares about the “unfortunate creature” whose only crime was “suspicion aroused by his blackness, aggravated by hunger or perhaps desperation and general hopelessness.” As a product of an upper-working class African American family in rural South Carolina, Ford understood how easily the floods of proscription, prejudice, and persecution could overwhelm those caught unprepared. Having been saved by lessons of respectable behavior carefully taught to him by parents and other elders, Ford likely felt tremendous guilt having watched a fellow member of the race drown. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the racial manhunt and the idyllic campus setting was a frightening signal of his own vulnerability to the insane logic of Jim Crow and the mercurial impulses of white authorities. These sobering realizations shattered Ford’s image of Benedict College as a bastion of personal safety, academic inquiry, and
racial self-determination.\textsuperscript{23}

The next eight years did little to restore his faith. Ford’s high school and college experience was shaped by a racial constitution in black higher education that demanded unceasing labor, absolute deference, and unyielding moral and emotional restraint. The goal of a Benedict College education was to “cultivate habits of virtue, morality, and godliness, and the highest type of Christian manhood and womanhood” for the practical purpose of training teachers and ministers to serve black communities throughout South Carolina. To ensure these aims would be achieved, the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS) assigned a white president and predominantly white trustee board, faculty, and staff to oversee daily operations and control the college’s rather unimaginative curriculum. Rather than seek to expand students’ social horizons or promote the creation of race conscious, classically trained scholars, Benedict administrators aimed to develop within each pupil an “aptitude and pleasure in skillful physical labor” and cultivate pristine moral character to transform them into trustworthy laborers and second-class citizens. Controlling student’s bodies and curtailing freedoms was paramount. Benedict students were forced to conform to a conservative social philosophy instilled through a highly regimented work schedule and restrictive code of moral conduct that stifled originality, initiative, creativity, and independence. Male and female students were prohibited from leaving campus without permission, could not associate with opposite sex without permission or supervision, and were prohibited from

various unsavory activities such as playing cards, drinking, smoking, or even dancing.\textsuperscript{24} The true goal of a Benedict College education, it seemed, was to fit New Negroes into a decaying social order.

Throughout their high school and collegiate years, Ford and his classmates were forced to work without ceasing or complaint. All the necessary menial tasks for the university’s daily operation—cleaning, construction, landscaping, food cultivation and storage, deliveries, and even animal husbandry—were completed by students as part of their “duty work” in exchange for compensation to cover their room and board. Ford’s daily regiment, personally negotiated with the president during an especially precarious moment in his educational journey, consisted of milking and caring for a herd of six cows that provided milk and butter for white faculty and administrators, cleaning the stalls after each milking, and promptly delivering the pails of fresh milk to the president’s home prior to the start of classes. Ford’s parents were initially outraged that such intensive menial labor was required to earn the privilege of an education. Another close relative accused Benedict’s president Dr. C.A. Antisdel, a former missionary to Africa, of being “deranged” by the experience on the continent where he had, no doubt, acted as a “slave master and a king.” Ford, however, initially viewed the arrangement as the actions of a generous friend who had rescued him from a life devoid of higher learning, a “fate almost as bad as death.” Like his classmates, Ford was credited with twelve dollars per month for room and board provided he completed his duties in a timely fashion and without

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 44-45.
complaint. Benedict students were under constant surveillance to ensure these standards were upheld. 25

Benedict’s majority-white faculty were responsible to ensure that students were inculcated with an appreciation of northern cultural values and norms. Ford recalled that they insisted that students display a healthy respect for the proper use of language and an appreciation for hard work. The Benedict freshman assigned to perform household duties for Dr. and Mrs. T.G. Brownson, two white faculty members. He cleaned their two-room apartment located on the second floor of College Hall, the men’s dormitory, dusting the furniture and bookshelves, scrubbing the bathroom twice a week, and cleaning the couple’s two Persian rugs once a month. Ford also participated in “personal enlightenment sessions” with the Brownsons, where they discussed current events, cultural topics, and reviewed the finer points of articles they recommended. While Ford developed a camaraderie with another professor to whom he was assigned during his junior year, it is unlikely that these visits exposed him to new ideas percolating in New Negro enclaves such as Harlem or Chicago. Instead, he was subject to the whims of his professors and, yet again, reminded that his future place in society would be subordinate and his days filled with constant labor.26

During a mass meeting convened on April 8, 1929, nearly all the Baptist institution’s male undergraduates agreed to boycott classes to demonstrate their frustration with conditions at the college. Student leaders, both when interviewed by

25 Ibid., 51-54. Ford agreed to this arrangement because his parents were forced to sell two of their larger farms to pay off huge debt accrued as a result of poor crops and falling cotton prices during the early Depression. Their last remaining farm was struck by the boll weevil. Despite their best efforts, the weevil destroyed the Ford family’s cotton crop and left them unable to liquidate their debt. Ford visited Antisdel to plead his case and solicit financial support.
26 Ibid., 46-47.
local reporters and in letters written to ABHMS executive secretary Charles L. White, explained that they went on strike in protest of the Antisdel administration’s dismissal of popular liberal-minded professors, the president’s opposition to a liberal college program, the suppression of free speech, and the treatment of Benedict students like “small children and serfs” rather than mature adults. Within a few days, the ABHMS board sent its secretary, Dr. George Rice Hovey, to investigate the situation. After a lengthy and productive conversation, the students agreed to call off the strike. Benedict trustees, however, were not so forgiving. During an emergency meeting called later that week, they expelled the striking students with the condition that only those who personally apologized to President Antisdel would be readmitted. Some chose to leave rather than submit to such humiliation. Others remained defiant holding out hope that Antisdel’s deadline would pass and amnesty would be given. No such reprieve was forthcoming. Parents and community residents, to the dismay of the campus rebels, backed President Antisdel and urged students to surrender. The strike ended with a whimper roughly two weeks after it began.

**Depression-Era Struggles for Student Rights, Racial Self-Determination, and Educational Equality at Allen University**

The rising demand for higher education among Black South Carolinians not only spurred grassroots organizing and civil rights litigation campaigns to desegregate professional and graduate programs at colleges and universities nationwide but also

---

sparked crucially important battles to improve southern HBCUs. The fight to reconstitute black higher education was a two-front battle. Students in South Carolina who could not earn scholarships to white universities outside the state fought to make black colleges live up to their ideals and become modern institutions capable of producing the next generation of race leaders. Although Allen had survived the worst of the Depression and received its accreditation, the resignation of former president Abram L. Simpson diminished the morale of its supporters and reignited longstanding rumors of its impending demise. “I have heard the proverbial prophecies concerning Allen University at Columbia times and again during my 20-year affiliation with the Trustee Board of said institution,” Reverend Phillip Ellis countered in *The Palmetto Leader*, “Such is usually the verdict when there seems to be a sentiment to change heads.” The transition from one executive to the next was not the only cause for concern. Intense political rivalries between laymen and ministers vying for control and influence within the A.M.E. Church threatened to tear the Allen community apart. In his invitation to the August meeting of the Allen Christian Endeavor League, educator and minister W.R. Bowman encouraged members to “bury all politics” and requested that ministers take a backseat to laymen during the proceedings. “Let us [minister] prepare our lessons, be a student, and do a question box,” he urged. Concerning conditions at Allen, Rev. Bowman noted that “hundreds of members are saying that Allen is no good to them and they could send their children to State, Claflin, or Benedict just as reasonable as they can Allen and some say under certain conditions, they can get better financial terms.” Indeed, several notable members of the Board of Trustees sent their children elsewhere rather than subject them
to what they believed was an inferior program.\textsuperscript{29} Those who sent their children to Allen received substantial gifts and other benefits that placed the university on shaky financial ground. Indeed, Allenites found themselves at an important crossroads on the arduous path towards becoming a modern liberal arts college. The impending Allen presidential election reopened longstanding rifts between secular, progressive educators and church laymen hoping to appoint a native born, classically trained South Carolinian with enough administrative experience to help modernize Allen and develop an educational program that would uplift the masses and conservative A.M.E. church leaders who, adhering to tradition, awaited the bishop’s word before committing to a candidate. Within any other context, A.M.E. officials would have carried the day with little resistance. After all, Allen University had only once elected a native South Carolinian and Allen alumnus and had never chosen a former college president to hold the office. The shifting mood among blacks in South Carolina by 1937, particularly regarding questions of racial self-determination and the intersection of education and civil rights activism, transformed the Allen presidential election into a referendum on the state and effectiveness of the A.M.E. Church, the purpose of black higher education, and the need to democratize local institutions to permit greater participation by the masses and develop race leaders for the burgeoning civil rights struggle.

Reverend Ellis argued that A.M.E. bishops were acknowledged heads of denominational colleges and urged prospective candidates to curry favor with Bishop Flipper and develop policies that preserved church and university traditions. “Nothing wrong in endeavoring to secure a record vote from presiding elders, ministers, and lay-

members at a trustee board meeting. But when they will be holding quarterly conferences, official board meetings, ploughing corn, and transporting passengers, you will need the bishop,” he warned. Allen’s survival, he and other senior church officials argued, was secured by the wisdom of earlier bishops who limited the power of past presidents. “Unlike Benedict, Allen has never selected a man who was a college president before,” Ellis boasted, “It has made good presidents out of those elected, and in the course of making them, she has not yet gone to the dogs.”

The list of candidates endorsed by various factions within the Board of Trustees revealed far more discontent than Ellis publicly acknowledged. Hoping to sway moderates who valued local control but respected tradition, the A.M.E. establishment threw its support behind Reverend Eldridge Fisher Gregory Dent. A native of Lexington County, South Carolina, Dent was the son of Isaac and Elvina Dent, tenant farmers who labored on several plantations on the outskirts of Columbia. Having survived a hardscrabble upbringing alongside his eight siblings, Dent graduated from the Allen University high school and eventually earned a bachelor’s degree. He then journeyed north and enrolled at the Boston School of Theology where he earned his S.T.B. in 1923. By the eve of the Depression, Dent had returned to South Carolina, married, and was employed as a professor of Theology at his alma mater. Little is known about his reputation among Allen students; In 1937, Dent served as the faculty advisor to the Dickerson Literary Society, a literary and debate club whose aim was to “develop the ideals and aspirations of the ministers of the campus and to promote a closer relationship between them.” Perhaps coincidentally, one of Dent’s fiercest critics during a later controversy was a member of the student organization.

What appears true is that Dent spent much of his time currying favor with senior A.M.E. ministers in preparation for the upcoming election. By late July, Ellis and several older members of the trustee board were counted among his supporters.  

Opposing factions of laymen and secular educators promoted several other candidates including Reverend Jesse E. Beard, a veteran A.M.E. minister, former Allen professor, and member of the Allen executive committee. Described as a “strong, courageous, dignified Christian gentleman,” Beard was proclaimed to be a friend to laymen who would raise standards at Allen and avoid even the slightest appearance of impropriety. Samuel Richard Higgins, a lay minister and principal of Charleston’s Burke High School, emerged as a frontrunner due to his native roots and prowess as an educator and administrator. He was also close with many church leaders as evidenced by his receipt of an honorary doctorate from Allen a year earlier. Wilberforce University professor Howard Gregg, despite his immense popularity with students, proved to be a longshot candidate due to his reputation for defying autocratic administrators. These disparate factions soon coalesced around the candidacy of Reverend Eugene Howard McGill, a respected minister and professor of Theology at Kittrell College, an A.M.E. affiliated institution in rural North Carolina. Born in Helena, South Carolina, on May 19, 1888, McGill was the son of Daniel McGill, an A.M.E. minister and his wife, Carrie. Eager to provide their son with a quality education, McGill’s parents moved the family to Columbia where he attended Howard Graded School. A brilliant student, McGill earned

32 “Dr. McGill Endorsed for Pres. Of Allen,” The Palmetto Leader, July 24, 1937, 1, 8; “Dr. Beard Endorsed for Pres. Of Allen,” The Palmetto Leader, July 24, 1937, 1. For more information, see Rogers (Kendi), The Black Campus Movement, 45-46.
a bachelor’s degree from South Carolina State College in 1904, at the age of 16. He was also the captain of the college debate team. Deeply devoted to the Christian faith, McGill followed in his father’s footsteps and joined the ministry later that year. While serving as one of the youngest preachers in his A.M.E. conference, McGill attended Allen University’s Dickinson Theological Seminary and earned a bachelor’s degree in Divinity four years later. Prior to accepting a position as the Chair of Homiletics and Systematic Theology at Kittrell College, McGill married Carrie L. DeLaine, an Allen classmate and school teacher, and relative of Rev. J.A. DeLaine, future leader of the grassroots movement to equalize public schools in Clarendon County.

By the end of the Great War, McGill and his wife had returned to South Carolina where he simultaneously served as an Allen University trustee and Secretary of the Columbia Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church. McGill devoted the next fifteen years of his life to strengthening the church and furthering the cause of higher education for African Americans in the Carolinas. He served as pastor of several churches, including Mother Emmanuel in Charleston, and was named a presiding elder of the Rocky Mount district during a brief sojourn in North Carolina. By 1937, there were whispers that McGill was on the short list for bishop. Ambitious for higher office and eager to help improve conditions at his alma mater, the Kittrell College professor entered the presidential race and quickly made inroads with frustrated and divided trustees. While serving as an instructor at the State College summer school, McGill contacted numerous trustees, alumni, and church leaders to plead his case. W.R. Bowman, a Columbia-area minister and educator who initially supported Beard, switched allegiances
after one such meeting. Realizing that the election was an opportunity to pass the torch to a new generation of race leaders, Bowman encouraged Beard’s supporters to vote for McGill, whom he described as a younger version of their man. Rather than emphasize his lengthy list of educational and ministerial accomplishments, Bowman pleaded for his fellow insurgents to support McGill as a means of restoring integrity, honesty, and a sense of purpose to the Allen presidency. He applauded McGill’s plan to improve the curriculum and strengthen the Allen faculty by recruiting highly trained professors and replacing the “present efficient dean” with a man “who has much learning and stands high in the literary world.” Most importantly, Bowman argued that McGill was more virtuous and manlier than previous scandal-ridden executives. “Not a person,” he wrote, “not even his enemy or enemies (if he has any) can truthfully point to one malicious act he did them behind closed doors, causing his family to suffer or put him or them in a very embarrassing condition by demoting them or making the presiding bishop see him or them in a bad light.” In short, McGill’s educational background, Christian morality, impeccable character and manly comportment made him the “logical man for the presidency.”

McGill was especially attractive to Bowman and other trustees due to his willingness to publicly attack corruption within the A.M.E. Church. He had built a strong reputation for being tenacious but fair-minded in his dealings with other church leaders. “This correspondent has disagreed with his policy more than he has agreed with it,” Bowman admitted, “but we are frank to admit at no time and under no condition did he

stoop to do us harm and always fought in the open.” And fight he did. In private
collaborations and public addresses given at churches statewide, McGill blasted corrupt
A.M.E. officials and university administrators for allowing Allen to fall into a state of
disrepair. Church laymen soon mustered the courage to follow his lead causing a great
deal of angst among senior A.M.E. leaders and their supporters. Dent supporter Samuel
Nance blasted critics who complained about “dilapidated church buildings,” “poor
salaries,” and the “want of a program for the young people” as negligent and dangerous
do-nothings seeking to disrupt God’s plan for the church. Without mentioning McGill
and his supporters by name, he warned congregants against falling for “cheap oratory” of
the “sounding brass and tinkling symbol” type. Failure to do so, he argued, would place
the church under the power of a “mass mind” incapable of comprehending the larger
vision of God and his chosen leaders. “Indeed, sometime the devil is the best educated
person in the audience or the best dressed man or the most fluent speaker or the
wealthiest person among us,” he warned.

Representatives of both sides convened at Bethel A.M.E. Church in Columbia,
South Carolina, on July 27, 1937 for the final vote. In his opening address, Bishop
Flipper encouraged attendees to elect a true South Carolinian as the head of the university
and endorsed Dent. Bishop Monroe H. Davis, a lifetime trustee, countered by endorsing
McGill, his former classmate and close friend. Contrary to later reports that the election
was peaceful, both candidates’ supporters hurled insults and interrupted speakers with
jeers and even threats of physical violence. When the dust settled, McGill won the
election by three votes. Senior A.M.E. officials, including the bishop and three of four

presiding elders, had been rebuffed.\textsuperscript{36} Seeking to put a brave face on the outcome, Ellis praised Bishop Flipper as a “high toned Christian gentleman” and “one of the best parliamentarians the race has ever produced.” Moreover, he urged A.M.E. congregants to faithfully support his vision for the church. That vision, regardless of his vote, now included the new Allen president. “Rev. E.H. McGill is an educator, a wonderful Gospel preacher and one of the best orators this country affords,” he wrote, “And regardless of his supporters of last Tuesday he is our president and all of us must make him succeed.” Whether such cooperation was possible after such a vicious election was an open question.

Upon taking office, McGill worked to mend fences with A.M.E. leadership and strengthen Allen’s profile among black communities across the state. During several speaking engagements at black churches in Charleston and other cities, McGill encouraged parents to consider sending their children to Columbia for college. He also collaborated with students, faculty, and alumni to build campus unity and re-brand the university as a modern, progressive institution. One of his most important initiatives was the creation of “Homecoming Day,” a series of events intended to boost school spirit, enhance the university’s ties to the surrounding community, and encourage donations from increasingly wealthy and influential alumni. In previous years, the annual “Big Game” between the Allen “Yellow Jackets” and cross-street rival Benedict College “Tigers” was a quaint local affair that often failed to entice alumni to return to campus or pry open their wallets. A believer in the power of cooperative action and entrepreneurship, McGill sought to make the event a financial boon for the university and

a symbol of its renaissance. Several committees were formed to plan a “mammoth” pregame parade and post-game alumni banquet. Embracing the opportunity to host an event like those held at neighboring University of South Carolina and other modern universities, McGill broke with tradition and permitted students to establish a governing council. Council members planned and directed student activities, mailed invitations, and drafted advertisements and press releases in *The Palmetto Leader* to promote the event.

Escaping the shadow of past administrations proved to be difficult. Unbeknownst to McGill, former president Sampson had promised leaders of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) a $10,000 contribution to the Benedict College library fund and pledged to develop a student exchange program in return for membership in the association and a “B” rating for Allen. With neither promise kept, Allen was promptly stripped of its accreditation during McGill’s first month in office. Distraught over this “great blow” to the school, the new president took stock of the damage wrought by decades of indifference, mismanagement and neglect. It was worse than he imagined. In his first annual report to the Bishop and the Allen Board of Trustees, McGill bemoaned the loss of accreditation, paltry condition of the buildings and grounds, lax organization and business practices, and inadequate training and compensation of faculty and staff. He also stressed the need for a library worthy of a modern college. “Without adequate library service and facilities, we will be dropped as a rated institution,” he warned. Drawing upon the growing spirit of black collective action brewing among black leaders in Columbia, McGill negotiated with Benedict president J.J. Starks to permit Allen students to use its library for a nominal fee. Far from satisfied with this arrangement,
which conflicted with his self-help philosophy, McGill strongly encouraged church leaders to form a committee and begin plans to raise funds for a new library.\textsuperscript{37}

The despondent president bluntly criticized the crumbling buildings and cluttered landscape that greeted students each day. “No real educational program can be carried on in an environment of filth, dirt, and squalor. On assuming office here at Allen, I found conditions very unsanitary and positively menacing to the health and well-being of the students, aside from giving the school a very poor advertisement,” he complained. To remedy the situation, McGill imposed strict standards for cleanliness in all campus facilities and ordered matrons to closely monitor students to ensure they completed their daily chores.\textsuperscript{38} In yet another example of cooperative action, McGill persuaded State College president Miller F. Whitaker to provide the services of a landscape architect free of charge. McGill heeded his recommendation to move the entrance to the university from National Highway No. 1 (Taylor Street) to Pine Street in order to protect students from the dangers posed by oncoming traffic. Ever the optimist, McGill hoped to ornament and beautify the entrance so that “when one enters he will know indeed that he is entering upon a sacred precinct—a place dedicated to Christian education.”\textsuperscript{39}

Cosmetic improvements failed to mask the dilapidated buildings that pockmarked the campus grounds, shoddy structures that belied a people stuck in purgatory rather than Christian soldiers training for a glorious crusade. Nearly every classroom and dormitory were in a state of disrepair after decades of overcrowding and negligence. Potential

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. McGill expressed special appreciation for the matron of Arnett Hall for keeping it in “excellent condition.”
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
accidents and health hazards abound. Coppin Hall’s front portico was reportedly on the verge of collapse. Male students at Arnett Hall, the boys’ dormitory, often “tapped” exposed wiring to operate radios and other appliances increasing both the cost of electricity and odds of a dangerous inferno. Allen often received charitable donations from A.M.E. brass but these funds were used to keep the school financially solvent. McGill stretched his resources to their limit by paying student laborers to perform routine maintenance and even purchasing several small appliances on his own dime.

McGill blamed these problems on the university’s confusing bureaucratic structure that limited the president’s authority to make important financial and personnel decisions. Allen’s chief executive and treasurer shared control over the purse strings. Neither could make even the smallest transaction without the knowledge and consent of their counterpart. The Board of Trustees further undermined the duo by enlisting certified public accountants to check monthly bank statements and conduct bi-monthly audits. The muddled administrative scheme greatly limited McGill’s ability to fix problems or help departments operate more efficiently. The new president urged trustees to grant him greater autonomy and control over daily operations to remedy the lax business practices that threatened Allen’s financial future. The Boarding Department, for example, was an unprofitable “dead weight” because students often received overly generous scholarships to cover tuition, room, and board. Others simply refused to pay. “Seemingly our patrons are under the impression that students need not pay board at

---

40 Ibid. Bishop Flipper eventually paid $345 out of his own pocket to rewire the building.
41 Ibid. According to the report, McGill purchased the first electric refrigerator used in Allen’s kitchen. The kitchen stove, however, could not be replaced despite projections that it would last just one more season before completely breaking down.
Allen,” McGill groused, “We have students who come month after month paying a small part, say four or five dollars every now and then, and many others who pay nothing at all. Many of these are the children of ministers and when we write they say that ‘I am supporting the school, and have supported Allen for years, and therefore my child must stay and I’ll send money if, and when I get it.’”\(^{42}\) Black South Carolinians’ penchant for charitable giving, passion for education, and collective consciousness proved to be a double-edged sword. This sort of arrangement allowed many African American youth to attend Allen that otherwise could not afford such an opportunity. On the other hand, such charity contributed to the overcrowded classrooms, worn-out facilities, underpaid faculty, and frequent budget deficits that required short-term loans from banks and individual church officials to keep the university afloat.\(^{43}\)

Allen was redeemed by its small cadre of dedicated and selfless instructors. McGill lauded their ability to maintain high standards for classroom instruction despite the myriad problems at the university. Like black professors nationwide, those at Allen often held thankless and precarious positions. Criminally underpaid, overworked, and faced with limited prospects for advanced training or promotion, Allen professors languished as forgotten men and women whose status more closely resembled senior students than authority figures. Professors at Allen ranked second-lowest in teacher pay among the 37 SACS member institutions. Room and board were provided to supplement their irregularly paid and meager salaries.\(^{44}\) Senior faculty at times lived alongside their students in dormitories which all but eliminated any expectation of privacy and

\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
jeopardized student-teacher relationships. McGill pleaded with the board to remove teachers from the dormitories by converting the rarely used but finely maintained Episcopal residence into faculty housing. His limited power and church politics made this impossible. Trustees instead opted to reserve the space as a temporary residence for the bishop when he visited Columbia.  

Undaunted, McGill continued to pursue the elusive goal of transforming Allen University into one of the South’s premiere African American liberal arts colleges. Seeking to surround students with an environment conducive to the creation of “men and women of initiative and self-reliance” that appreciated culture and boasted high character, he tenaciously negotiated with the Board of Trustees to hire new personnel, add new courses, and improve departmental efficiency. McGill hired four new faculty members, each of whom held advanced degrees from prominent Negro colleges or northern predominantly white universities, before the start of his second year. Allen’s reputation improved considerably; Over 300 freshmen, including a sizable contingent of out-of-state students, enrolled prior to the 1938-1939 school year.

McGill’s health began to deteriorate by the end of the year. In early March 1939, while on a fundraising tour of the mid-Atlantic states, he collapsed and was transported to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. Upon receiving word of his illness several of his closest companions on the faculty traveled to Atlanta to discuss plans for a temporary replacement with Bishop Flipper. McGill’s colleagues, sensitive to the increasingly toxic

---

46 Ibid; “Three Hundred Students Registered at Allen University in First Registration,” The Palmetto Leader, October 8, 1938, 1; “Students from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, Florida Coming to Allen,” The Palmetto Leader, September 17, 1938, 1; “New Library Building for Allen University,” The Palmetto Leader, October 15, 1938, 1.
political environment brewing on campus, urged the bishop to permit a faculty member to serve as president while he recovered. Flipper reserved judgement until his planned visit to Columbia to participate in “Allen Day” festivities. On March 8, 1939, while McGill clung to life, the bishop convened an emergency meeting of the A.M.E. Council of Presiding Elders and requested that they appoint an interim executive. With the bishop’s blessing, the elders unanimously chose Dent to serve as acting president. The concerns of faculty and students were ignored.

Back in Maryland, McGill survived a four-hour surgery but soon faded. He passed away on March 13, 1939, at the age of 51.47 The calamitous death of Allen’s visionary leader shocked and saddened his large network of supporters. The Palmetto Leader editor expressed profound regret that McGill was “denied the opportunity of fully developing a program which he had so well begun.” Another supporter declared that the “race as well as the A.M.E. Church has lost a great leader and a man that was so interested in his people that he gave his all…Dr. McGill’s devotion to Allen University shall never be forgotten.” Four days later, an overflow crowd packed the Allen University chapel to celebrate his life. The list of speakers included a litany of South Carolina’s most prominent African American religious and educational leaders. Allen University dean Thurman O’Daniel was chosen to speak on behalf of the faculty and student body. State College president Miller F. Whittaker and Benedict College president J.J. Starks made earnest pleas for donations to support McGill’s grieving widow.

Representatives of each A.M.E. conference in South Carolina also delivered remarks.

Bishop Flipper’s eulogy, derived from Samuel 3:38 and spoken over the haunting melodies of the rare Wurlitzer organ played by Allen music professor F.P. Abraham, was later described by the Leader as one of the greatest devotionals ever uttered. Some Allenites were skeptical of the belated shows of support for the now deceased president. One observer, unmoved by the pomp and pageantry of the event, blasted the “pathetic eulogies,” “big sermons,” and “tears of sorrow” as a crudely woven veil intended to “veneer the hypocrisy within.” Many Allen students agreed. Outraged student leaders, many of whom were also members of the campus NAACP, had already mailed a letter to Bishop Flipper requesting that Dent be removed. Allen NAACP secretary Mary Holloway gave voice to her classmates’ grief and love for their fallen mentor in a commemorative poem printed in the funeral program. She lauded McGill as their “guiding star” and praised his tireless campaign to improve Allen against unnamed enemies and long odds. “We have his zest, though, undiminished,” she warned. Bishop Flipper’s eulogy proved prophetic. The newly installed president would soon find himself in struggle against McGill loyalists. The ensuing controversy removed the gilded sheen and laid bare the crumbling foundations of the Allen community for all to see.

Tensions escalated between university administrators and frustrated, grief-stricken students after the funeral. Students refused to attend compulsory religious services after receiving no response from the bishop. The next day, March 20th, nearly all of Allen’s


49 Funeral program for Eugene Howard McGill, March 17, 1939, 4. South Caroliniana Library Digital Collections, University of South Carolina.
302 students gathered outside the Chappelle Administration building. At the center of the teeming crowd was John Albert Middleton, a broad-faced, stylishly dressed Allen senior. Born around 1914 in Foreston, South Carolina, a tiny rural enclave in Clarendon County, Middleton entered the college program at Allen University in 1935. He served as the staff critic in the Dickerson Literary Society, supervised by Rev. Dent, and was elected Vice President of the Allen University Student Council for the 1938-1939 school year. An older student than many of his peers, Middleton ingratiated himself with more serious minded and driven classmates; Two of his best friends, upperclassmen Lewis Dowdy and L.I. Mishoe, were quite popular and influential due to their excellent grades and athletic prowess. They likely encouraged Middleton to take part in the inaugural pledge class of Alpha Phi Alpha, the first Greek-lettered organization established at Allen in 1938 after years of pleading and protest by interested students.

Upon hearing the commotion, President Dent emerged from the building and demanded that the students return to class. Middleton retorted, “There will be no more meetings of classes until our petition is granted!” The petition sent along with the letter to Bishop Flipper demanded that the board “remove from office the acting president” and “allow the faculty and assistants to carry on the term of administration of our late president.” After the rally, Middleton and several other students nailed a notice to the door of the administration building urging students to refrain from attending classes and chapel exercises until the situation was resolved. Despite their heightened passions, the
campus rebels permitted faculty and administrators to freely enter and exit the building. At times, however, they roughly policed one another to maintain solidarity.\textsuperscript{50}

The strike intensified over the next few days as student leaders displayed remarkable savvy in swaying public opinion to support their cause. White reporters flocked to the tiny campus causing news of the strike to spread. Despite vocal protests from trustees against outside interference in Allen’s private fight, disgruntled students and faculty seized the opportunity to air their grievances. At a morning faculty meeting, Middleton asserted that the students were fighting to preserve McGill’s legacy by combating the backroom politicking, outmoded curriculum, and lack of local control that hindered Allen’s progress. “Dr. McGill has lived in vain if he has not so impressed the students of Allen that they cannot stand up for the principles for which he was fighting,” the charismatic student leader charged.\textsuperscript{51} Desperate to restore order, Dent moved to divide and conquer the student rebellion by withholding mail delivery to force students to individually meet with him. The obvious intimidation tactic failed. During a second meeting held later in the evening, this time with Dent in attendance, Middleton boldly reiterated the students’ dissatisfaction with the elders’ decision and pledged that the strike would continue until it was reversed. In both instances, the faculty demonstrated their tacit support for the students by refusing to censure the fiery young activist and allowing

\textsuperscript{50} “Allen Students Out on Strike,” \textit{Columbia Record}, March 20, 1939, 1; “Allen Students and Trustee Claim Dent Illegally Named,” \textit{The State}, March 21, 1939, 11; “Students Stay from Classes,” \textit{Columbia Record}, March 21, 1939, 8. According to the latter article, a “small skirmish” ensued when a lone male student attempted to enter the Chappelle Administration building through its south entrance. He was “quickly repulsed” by nearby students.

\textsuperscript{51} “Allen Students Out on Strike,” \textit{Columbia Record}, March 20, 1939, 2; “Named Successor Too Quick, Students Strike,” \textit{Pittsburgh Courier}, April 1, 1939, 4.
local white reporters to cover the proceedings.

Relations between the Board of Trustees and A.M.E. Church officials fractured under the intense pressure from disgruntled students and sympathetic faculty. A progressive faction of board members comprised of secular educators and other laymen within the A.M.E. church expressed support for the students’ pleas for a modern college controlled by and devoted to fulfilling the needs of all African Americans in South Carolina. The student rebellion created an opening to challenge A.M.E. leaders’ autocratic rule over the university. Dr. R.M. Mance, the leader of this faction, charged that Dent was not the legally elected acting president because the presiding elders overstepped their bounds. During an interview with local white reporters, he explained that the original Allen University constitution granted trustees the power to hire and fire faculty, design curriculum, and confer degrees. “There is nothing said in any section of the original charter regarding the vesting of the power of electing a president, acting or permanent, to any other body or individual,” Mance argued. He added that an amendment drafted four years earlier gave trustees the power to elect a seven-member executive board with the authority to act upon “unfinished business,” not including elections for higher office. Perhaps most galling to Mance and his supporters was that the elders violated a spirit of compromise that had recently developed between church and university officials. Months before McGill’s indisposition, trustees and church officials voted to expand the executive board to twelve members comprised of one minister and one layman from each of the six annual conferences. Church officials even supported a rule that required the chairman of the board to be a resident of South Carolina. Mance asserted that this rendered Bishop Flipper, who lived in Atlanta, unable
to preside over any meeting without the presence of the full executive board.\textsuperscript{52} Reverend Thomas “T.J.” Miles, who held conflicting positions of Allen executive board chairman and Vice President of the A.M.E. corporation, rejected Mance’s argument and expressed support for Flipper’s decision to intervene. Another trustee, W.R. Bowman, agreed explaining that the bishop was unanimously appointed Allen University chancellor by the Board of Trustees granting him the authority to fill vacancies. In the same breath, however, Bowman relented on the issue of Dent’s appointment. “Bishop Flipper just exceeded his authority,” he reasoned.\textsuperscript{53}

Days later, Dent met with faculty and eight student representatives in the administration building to discuss the ongoing strike. Meanwhile, two white men strolled toward its entrance but were stopped by a group of armed students. One of the men, Columbia Police Chief W.H. Rawlinson, promptly ordered the students to drop their weapons but promised not to interfere with the strike if there was no violence or destruction of property. His companion, Coleman Livingston Blease, was far less diplomatic. Purporting to be a “friend of the Negro race,” the former racist governor turned racial intermediary warned that a prolonged fight would injure Allen’s reputation among local whites and damage their ability to raise funds. “I advise you to get together and arbitrate this whole affair,” he warned, “You are wasting precious days in this fighting.” Repeatedly referring to the students as “dogs,” Blease angrily prophesied that “Northerners who send you money will quit sending it, and the Southerners who respect

\textsuperscript{52}“Students Stay from Classes,” \textit{Columbia Record}, March 21, 1939, 8; “Allen Students and Trustee Claim Dent Illegally Named,” \textit{The State}, March 21, 1939, 11.

\textsuperscript{53}“Allen Strike of Students is Unbroken,” \textit{The State}, March 22, 1939, 9.
you will lose their respect.” Believing that the tide had turned in his favor, Dent ordered student representatives to inform their peers that classes would resume at 11 a.m. Middleton and his outraged classmates stormed from the meeting. “We are not going to classes,” he thundered to the delight of those gathered outside, “We have damaged nothing. We are going to damage nothing, but we will stay out here until summer if Dent is still president!” Dent’s plan had backfired.

In a letter to Bishop Flipper, the embattled interim president blamed the “influence of the ring leaders” for his inability to halt the strengthening rebellion. The students were also winning the battle of public opinion. True to his word, Chief Rawlinson refused to intervene and applauded the students for their orderly behavior. Rather than continue to negotiate, however, Dent and his supporters dug in their heels. On March 23, 1939, Middleton and five other strike leaders were presented with arrest warrants by Richland County sheriff Alex T. Hefse and several deputies. In a later interview, Sheriff Hefse explained that Allen Executive Board chairman Miles had signed each of the warrants and requested that he give the students an ultimatum: end the strike or face arrest. “When I informed them of that condition, they told me that they would rather go now,” the sheriff recalled. “Hail, hail, we’ll go to jail,” the dissidents mocked as they were hustled across campus in handcuffs. The six students—Middleton, Clyde Richards, Anderson Davis, Robert Ford, Albert Kennedy, and Jerome Pettis—were charged with inciting a riot. Kennedy and Pettis, both natives of South Carolina and

54 “Blease and Police Chief Attend Conference Called to Stop Students’ Strike,” Columbia Record, March 22, 1939, 2.
members of the Allen NAACP chapter, were also charged with disturbing, preventing, and interrupting religious worship for disrupting services at the Allen University chapel. After several hours in the Richland County jail, they were released and warned to avoid trouble. Sheriff Hefse also instructed them to leave the campus and find other housing arrangements if they were expelled. Upon returning to Allen, each of the boys received written notice that the lawman’s prophecy was fulfilled. Eighteen other students were also suspended for openly supporting the rebellion.

Dent’s use of white police power and repressive intimidation tactics merely strengthened the rebels’ resolve. Most of the Allen student body gathered on the front lawn of the administration building to protest his abuse of power. Students loudly voiced their displeasure and nailed a sign on the door of the administration building proclaiming Dent the “Police President of Allen.” “Everyone will have to go to jail before we end this strike,” warned senior Edgar Thompson, “If they send any boy home, all of us are going home!” As the raucous horde cheered, another student mocked, “How can you expel people when there is no school?!” After the impromptu rally, students reportedly lounged, played games, and knitted on the campus lawn for the remainder of the day. The classrooms and chapel sat empty. Uplift proved to be impossible without willing participants.

The embattled president’s decision to call the authorities alerted members of the Allen University Alumni Council that the situation had deteriorated beyond his control. Many alumni were upset by the widespread negative publicity created by the strike and the arrests of its ringleaders. Seeking to restore decorum and campus unity, several alumni served as mediators between students and administrators. Signs of a détente soon
appeared. Dr. Mance, once a passionate supporter of the students, modified earlier criticisms of Dent and A.M.E. officials.56 During a hastily convened meeting at Coppin Hall, Alumni Council leaders straddled the line between allegiance to tradition and empathy with the students’ plight. They publicly denounced the arrests of Middleton and his five lieutenants and urged Bishop Flipper to call a meeting of the trustee board to discuss plans to end the strike. Council president J.T.W. Mims, however, remained silent about whether Mance’s earlier claims of internal corruption within the administration were valid. Strike leaders left the meeting ambivalent about whether compromise was possible. Middleton continued to hammer away at the administration’s “untimely and disrespectful” appointment of Dent reiterating that the students would avoid “abusive or destructive” behavior while upholding the fine traditions of their forefathers. “We are protesting on the grounds of a principle and our stand will be firm until this matter is properly settled,” he declared.57 Faced with a united and indomitable opposition, Allen administrators and A.M.E. church officials made plans for a conditional surrender.

Two days later, student representatives met with the Allen University executive committee in Coppin Hall to negotiate terms. Student leaders again presented their petition outlining their grievances and emphatically called for Dent to resign. Committee members announced that a final decision would be made the following day. As a show of good faith, Middleton and his colleagues encouraged their peers to attend chapel services held that evening in Chappelle Auditorium which marked the first time in nearly three weeks that a single student had entered the building. As the prayer service ended,

56 “Allen Alumni Council Meets This Morning,” The State, March 25, 1939.
Dean O’Daniel approached the pulpit. O’Daniel, a graduate of three prominent northern universities and one of McGill’s closest friends, was a highly respected member of the faculty and especially popular with students due to his tireless advocacy on their behalf as an advisor to several campus organizations. The fair skinned, impeccably dressed professor announced that Dent had resigned and would resume his previous role as a presiding elder of the Columbia district. Amidst deafening cheers, he informed those gathered that he had been chosen to serve as acting president until the end of the school year. Lastly, students who had been suspended or expelled for their roles in the student strike were granted amnesty and permitted to return to campus.

The Allen University community struggled to return to normalcy during the weeks and months following Dent’s resignation. Hard feelings remained as a result of the strike. Revelations about the theft and mismanagement of funds dampened the resolve of prominent donors to continue supporting the university. Reverend Lewis M. Hemingway, a minister and philanthropist living in Washington, D.C., was singled out by McGill’s widow as one of several benefactors that refused to donate to the struggling institution out of frustration with its current state and disdain for the way that Bishop Flipper handled McGill’s death and the process of selecting a replacement. Charging that she misrepresented the truth, Hemmingway praised the bishop as his closest friend and a living example of Christian manhood. The missionary philanthropist explained that he had made several large donations at Flipper’s request prior to the start of the student strike. “I did not want to bother with the affairs any longer but the Bishop said I must stand up and help Dr. McGill run Allen,” he explained, “There is three thousand dollars
in a bank in South Carolina for Allen right now when they need it.” He made no mention of whether he planned to donate additional funds in the future.58

Church officials and trustees loyal to Bishop Flipper attempted to repair their reputations and regain control of the narrative. Rev. J.E. Thomas, an Allen graduate and member of the executive board, credited Bishop Flipper for uniting a divided district, restoring local control to the university, and supporting McGill despite his endorsement of Dent during the contentious 1937 election. He added that Flipper was also responsible for preserving the traditional chain of command at Allen following McGill’s death.

“After a most colourful and successful short administration our very popular President became seriously ill, and it was noised abroad that those closest to him went to Atlanta beseeching the Bishop to allow a member of the faculty to carry on until the President returns,” Thomas recalled, “Bishop Flipper came to the Presiding Elders with a mind made up to ask his cabinet to name someone to act temporarily, a kind of bobtail or figurehead until the real president returns.” Rather than allow these individuals to buck tradition and usurp power, the elders thrust the virtuous Dent into an untenable situation.

“He failed to receive 100 percent cooperation—the student strike going from bad to worse,” Thomas lamented, “…he was called everything but a child of the King.” The students spurred on by a clandestine group of disgruntled faculty, cruelly rejected the Board’s initial compromise which would have allowed Dent to serve as Business Manager in exchange for his resignation. Such vindictive and malevolent persons were the real threat to the peace and stability of the university.59

Allen alumnus H.B. Rikard

58 “Rev. Hemmingway Wants the Record Straight,” The Palmetto Leader, April 1, 1939, 1.
59 “Facing the Facts and Keeping the Record Straight,” The Palmetto Leader, April 1, 1939, 1.
concurred. “I feel that had our Bishop thought in the least that the action of the Presiding Elders Council as to an acting president would have stirred up so much unrest in the school and over the state as it did, he never would have allowed it to be at the time, and in the way it was done,” he concluded. Recognizing the divide between those who believed that the church was corrupt and others who believed that the students had been stirred up for political gain, Rikard called for both sides to have “quitting sense” and resolve their differences to avoid further damaging the A.M.E. institution. Reverend R.S. Lawrence, the pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church in Georgetown, dismissed such calls for hollow reconciliation and challenged Allenites to face the problems plaguing the university first by electing a moral, physically strong, and intellectually gifted president. He urged church officials to recognize that the recent strike was not simply a minor spat amongst family members but a titanic struggle between generations old and new. Gone were the days when A.M.E. laymen, Allen faculty and students would blindly follow those chosen to lead. “Men are thinking and acting their convictions,” he observed, “We are getting so pugnacious that no bishop will want to come to South Carolina.”

Higgins’ status at the frontrunner did not prevent progressive-minded Allen faculty, students, alumni and other interested persons from flirting with other potential candidates. Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, now a dean at Howard University, drew great interest from those left unimpressed by the slate of candidates. “If I were called a college student of 1939,” Mays advised Allenites during a visit just a month after the conclusion of the strike, “I would strive to reach the 9th degree; I would stand for something so that no one

---

60 “The Allen Strike Was a Regrettable Happening: But Leaders Should Have Quitting Sense,” The Palmetto Leader, April 8, 1939, 1.
could pass me aside with the wave of his hand or the shrug of his shoulders. It is a great tragedy to live in this world and not count for something.” Captivated faculty and students swooned. “We need that type of man as president of our school,” remarked a group of starstruck Allen seniors. *The Palmetto Leader* editor agreed. In a later editorial, he urged Allen administrators and trustees to consider removing religious membership as a qualification for selecting its president. “Students are thinking. Students crave for inspiration that should come from the head of the school,” the editor mused, “He should be a man of academic rating and administrative power…It does not matter a ‘tinker’s damn’ what his denomination is.” Mays, he argued, was a mighty fine example of what an ideal college president should be.62 Despite their obvious desire for Mays to take the helm, Allen trustees selected Higgins as president a few weeks later.

With a new executive in place, Allen administrators and alumni moved to achieve McGill’s dream of building a new library. The specter of the Allen strike loomed over the fundraising campaign. “At no other time in the history of Allen University has she needed more openminded, progressive, unbiased, and enthusiastic logical thinking than now,” wrote Mims, “Therefore, in the midst of the mad rush for popularity, political power, economic gin, and selfish prestige at the expense of Allen University, let us strive to make a better Allen perpetuate the traditions, and serve the present well-wishers, supporters, and constituency in the best possible way with every act and conversation.” The university, he wrote, should “function for the best good of the PEOPLE.” The remaining funds were raised within a month. During Alumni Day festivities on May 31,

---

1939, Allen officials broke ground.\(^{63}\) Old habits die hard. The new library was named for Bishop Flipper rather than McGill, the man whose vision made such an event possible.

The fierce, determined struggles of Depression-era campus activists, however, were not in vain. In his twilight years, *Lighthouse and Informer* editor John McCray reflected upon the impact that their exploits had both on his career and the overall trajectory of the civil rights struggle in Columbia and the entire state. McCray’s fiery invectives against church officials and subsequent recommendation of Samuel Higgins to assume the presidency made the *Lighthouse* a household name among black citizens statewide and foreshadowed its role as the unofficial organ of South Carolina’s civil rights movement over the next two decades. He joyfully remembered the public’s popular approval of the paper’s treatment of “snakes” regardless of color, class, or proximity to God.\(^{64}\)

As memory of the 1939 strike faded, dogmatic church officials and conservative university administrators regained control of the A.M.E. supported institution over the next decade. In his 1952 comprehensive survey of South Carolina HBCUs, State College professor Lewis K. McMillan lamented that Allen had again fallen into disrepair and lacked purpose. He criticized church officials and Allen administrators for developing an educational mission intended to “tickle and please” white-controlled accrediting agencies rather than achieve the “holy task of elevating a despised people.” The schism between

---


faculty, students and administrators worsened due to their mismanagement, neglect, and corruption. “The bishop, president, and the few other people who count for anything at all live off the campus,” McMillan observed during a 1950 visit, “and one simply does not build up and maintain beautiful grounds for mere students and a few straggling hands who go in the name of teachers, not on South Carolina Negro campuses.”

McMillan could not fathom that Allen was on the verge of yet another renaissance. By the mid-1950s, the A.M.E. institution became home to an activist cohort of progressive faculty and students who laid the groundwork for the modern civil rights movement in Columbia and other sections of the state. Allen students learned the art of resistance within its ancient classrooms, on its dusty athletic fields, and as participants in a variety of extracurricular activities that trained them to write, debate, and perform freedom in ways that their ancestors could only dream. Depression-era campus militants, many of whom had become civil rights veterans by the 1960s, deserve the bulk of the credit for tilling the field where freedom and justice blossomed. Without the battles they waged for basic student freedoms and racial self-determination, the tremendous gains made by the 1960s student movement that sprang from South Carolina’s HBCUs would have been impossible to achieve.

---

CHAPTER 3

MARCHING UP FREEDOM ROAD: BLACK YOUTH AND COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA’S CIVIL RIGHTS VANGUARD

“We, the youth, demand an end to racism!
An end to Jim Crow, to economic discrimination, to the poll-tax!
Death to the lynchers! No longer will the Negro and poor white be second-class citizens!
This is a good and beautiful and fruitful land—we ask for its fruits!
They are ours by the holy right of heritage and labor!
We ask for peace and we ask for bread, but we ask not meekly, no longer meekly,
but with a voice strong enough to be heard in every corner of every land!”

--Howard Fast, “They’re Marching Up Freedom Road” (1946)

The past three decades have been marked by the renaissance of historical inquiry into the black freedom struggle in South Carolina during the mid-twentieth century.
Exemplary scholarship chronicles important antecedents to the modern 1960s movement that challenge longstanding assumptions about the origins, tenor, and impact of collective black activism during earlier decades. Following the precedent set by historian Barbara Woods, numerous scholars have produced important studies of the 1940s civil rights vanguard and its “militant, outspoken and charismatic” leaders who inspired, cajoled, and even shamed black citizens into action and organized effective civil rights litigation and grassroots political campaigns to win equal pay for black and white teachers, register thousands of new African American voters, end the “whites only” Democratic Party primary, and eventually challenge the constitutionality of segregated public education in
Briggs v. Elliott (1951). This aggressive 1940s South Carolina civil rights leadership—Modjeska Montieth Simkins, John Henry McCray, Osceola McKaine, and James Hinton—were central figures among a politically astute, well-organized, and successful generation of activists whose uncommon militancy and effectiveness at combating Jim Crow segregation, economic terror, political disfranchisement, mis-education, and white reactionary violence shaped future civil rights battles and likely inspired white segregationists’ seemingly tepid response to the modern 1960s movement. Recent studies have attempted to paint a more complete portrait of the litany of schoolteachers, college professors, club women, ministers, and ordinary people who searched for

1 Barbara Woods Aba-Mecha, “Black Woman Activist in Twentieth Century South Carolina: Modjeska Montieth Simkins” (PhD dissertation: Emory University, 1978); Miles Richards, “Osceola McKaine and the Struggle for Black Civil Rights, 1917-1946” (PhD dissertation: University of South Carolina, 1994); John Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); Patricia Sullivan, Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Wim Roefs, “Leading the Civil Rights Vanguard in South Carolina: John McCray and the Lighthouse and Informer, 1939-1954,” in Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950, ed. Charles Payne and Adam Green (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Peter Lau, Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006); Cherisse Jones-Branch, “‘To Speak When and Where I Can’: African American Women’s Political Activism in South Carolina in the 1940s and 1950s,” South Carolina Historical Magazine 107:1 (July 2006): 204-224; Wim Roefs, “The Impact of 1940s Civil Rights Activism on the State’s 1960s Civil Rights Scene: A Hypothesis and Historiographical Discussion,” in Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century, eds. Orville Vernon Burton and Winfred B. Moore, Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008); Sid Bedingfield, “John McCray, Accommodationism, and the Framing of the Civil Rights Struggle in South Carolina, 1940-1948,” Journalism History 37:3 (Summer 2011): 91-101. A notable omission in the above list is Idus A. Newby’s 1973 classic text Black Carolinians which examines the “New Reconstruction” in South Carolina beginning in the 1940s. Unlike later studies, Newby credits much of the meaningful reforms to the vanguard leadership but inaccurately describes them as moderate or even conservative activists who used “realistic and effective” tactics and developed “cautious, limited programs in pursuit of moderate, pragmatic objectives.” In his 2008 historiographic essay on the topic, Wim Roefs correctly asserts that the term “moderation” does not define black activism in the 1940s well. The strength of the 1940s movement, especially that of the state NAACP, not only pushed the boundaries of Jim Crow in the postwar years but dramatically shaped both white leaders’ uncharacteristically moderate response to the 1960s movement but also limited the number of organizations that participated and their potential to topple white supremacy and racial privilege for good.
freedom amid the harsh, brutal winter of black life in South Carolina.² Vanguard leaders, however, remain somewhat lonely figures in the 1940s South Carolina civil rights landscape.

It seems a bit strange that historians have singled out four middle-aged members of the Black professional class as the most militant participants in South Carolina’s 1940s movement. While age is certainly not the sole factor in determining one’s willingness to fight oppression and membership in an upper-class stratum does not always preclude one from becoming disenchanted with the status quo, the relative absence of the usual suspects in the search for militancy—black youth and college students—is striking. This trend is inconsistent with the broader pattern within early adult-led civil rights movements nationwide that, as noted recently by historian Ibram X. Kendi, grappled with an aggressive, militant, and internationalist cadre of black student activists whose labor and civil rights politics were situated to the left of their older colleagues.³ Such a consensus within the historical literature on South Carolina’s civil rights struggle is stranger, even when accounting for the intensity of white resistance, because its younger population displayed a bubbling radicalism during the long Depression era and eventually provided the inspiration, energy, and manpower necessary to sustain powerful and

---

² Jones-Branch, “‘To Speak When and Where I Can’: African-American Women’s Political Activism in South Carolina in the 1940s and 1950s.” This study is perhaps the lone example of recent historical scholarship that analyzes allies of vanguard leaders. Jones-Branch adds to the historical literature on South Carolina’s civil rights vanguard by examining the collective and individual roles played by African American women in the 1940s and 1950s movement for greater political power in the state.

effective black freedom movements throughout the mid-twentieth century. One reason for the relative absence of black youth and college students within the historical literature on South Carolina’s early civil rights movement is its understandably narrow focus on the role of the South Carolina NAACP State Conference, the dominant civil rights organization in the Palmetto State. Historians Patricia Sullivan, John Egerton, and Peter Lau, among others, have written excellent institutional histories of the statewide civil rights organization that paid long overdue attention to adult vanguard leaders and their interactions with NAACP executives and local grassroots activists. However, each of these studies marginalizes the role of young people in the NAACP movement and fails to consider the importance of the problems they faced, with the lone exception of the fight for equitable public education, as motivating factors in the growth and intensity of the State NAACP movement. Scholars within a growing subfield on the Long Black Student Movement, a trans-historical phenomenon stretching from 1920 to the Black Power era, shed light on the rise of powerful student activist traditions at HBCUs, PWIs, and within the NAACP itself but their broad scope left little room for intensive, localized

---

4 For more on Black youth and college student activism during the Depression, see Edwin Hoffman, “The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Equal Rights in South Carolina,” *Journal of Negro History* 44:4 (October 1959), 363-364. See also chapter 2 of this dissertation. For more on the role of Black youth and college students in civil rights activism during the 1950s and 1960s, see chapters 4-6 of this study.

5 Sullivan, *Days of Hope*; Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*; Peter Lau, *Democracy Rising*; 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). Lau marginalizes youth to a lesser extent; he provides an excellent account of the plight of William Anderson but fails to connect it to the evolution of the NAACP Youth program instead briefly tying Anderson’s situation to the formation of the State Conference itself. Baker’s exemplary local study offers several examples of student participation in the early civil rights movement as petitioners for improved educational facilities in Charleston and prospective plaintiffs in planned lawsuits for the desegregation of graduate and professional programs in the state.
analysis of student activism in South Carolina and other sections of the Deep South.\textsuperscript{6} Thomas Bynum’s excellent institutional history of the NAACP Youth Councils and college chapters, for example, reveals important ideological and tactical shifts toward internationalism and an increased preference for voter registration and direct action protest during the 1940s but leaves readers with the impression that black students in the Deep South were largely dormant except for a few intrepid souls who dared to sit-in at Howard University or register voters in Georgia and South Carolina.\textsuperscript{7} There remains much to be learned about the origins, evolution, and impact of black youth and college student activism during the lost decades between the Depression and the iconic 1960s decade.

Presently no manuscript exists that chronicles the role of black youth and college

\textsuperscript{6} The burgeoning subfield on the Long Black Student Movement is an offshoot of “Black Power Studies,” a field conceptualized and popularized by Peniel Joseph, author of several important studies of Black Power in the 1960s including \textit{Waiting Til’ the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America} (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007) and \textit{Stokely: A Life} (New York: Basic Civitas, 2014). Perhaps the most important recent study on the LBSM is Ibram Rogers (Ibram X. Kendi), \textit{The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Rogers coins the term “Black Campus Movement” to describe the ideologically, tactically, and spatially unique brand of activism among college students at HBCUs and PWIs during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He explains that earlier periods such as the New Negro Campus Movement (NNCM) and student activism during the modern civil rights movement were distinct social movements in their own right but were “separate, but interlocking tussles” within a Long Black Student Movement that stretched from 1919 to 1972. Interestingly, Rogers provides no label for student activism between 1941 and 1953. This important transitional period between New Negro protest and the modern movement remains an underappreciated but vital part of the development of the Black freedom struggle. See also Ibram H. Rogers (Ibram X. Kendi), “The Marginalization of the Black Campus Movement,” \textit{The Journal of Social History} 42 (Fall 2008) and “The Black Campus Movement: The Case for a New Historiography,” \textit{The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics, and Culture} 4 (December 2011). There are few studies of black student activism in the Deep South within a specific, localized context. A notable study of this type is Jelani Favors, “Shelter in a Time of Storm: Black Colleges and the Rise of Student Activism in Jackson, Mississippi” (PhD dissertation: Ohio State University, 2006). For more on NAACP Youth activism, see Thomas Bynum, \textit{NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014).

\textsuperscript{7} Bynum, \textit{NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom}, 41-42.
students in the militant 1960s civil rights movement in South Carolina. Evidence of such activity is scarce, largely buried between the headlines of African American newspapers that have only recently been digitized for use by the larger public and hidden within the attics and memories of elderly black citizens who are gradually fading from the scene. What is known has been gleaned from the papers of the NAACP and the few manuscript collections and interviews left behind by adult members of the vanguard generation which, in part, explains the dearth of youth and college-aged activism within the current historical literature. During the years before the Second World War, the NAACP youth program in South Carolina languished due to a lack of vision, membership attrition caused by the military draft, internal division at the local level, and a lack of funds stemming from the insatiable financial demands of the legal defense program. As the growing literature on the Long Black Student Movement (LBSM) and the previous chapter of this study reveal, however, black youth and college students did not necessarily need to join the NAACP to fight Jim Crow and white supremacy. Student strikes at Allen University, Benedict College, and other HBCUs during the long Depression era, for example, foreshadowed the continued rise of southern black student radicalism as campus rebels raised their voices against remnants of the moralized contraption and raged against spoiled food, unsanitary and dilapidated facilities, mis-education, and the tyrannical rule of powerful, corrupt aristocrats—all symptoms of a

---

8 According to the NAACP papers, there were six total youth chapters in cities and rural areas of South Carolina—Aiken, Dorchester County, Lee County, Columbia, Charleston, and Cheraw—by 1945. Four HBCUs—Benedict, Allen, South Carolina State, and Claflin—boasted active NAACP college chapters, meaning that these chapters had an official charter, had dues paying members, and filed reports with the national office.
racist, segregated, and unequal system of higher education. Southern HBCUs, including Benedict and Morris Colleges, witnessed successive waves of student protest for improved educational quality, greater individual freedom, equal representation, academic freedom, and the right to freely assemble throughout the 1940s decade.9

Unlike their New Negro ancestors, the 1940s generation of southern black student activists radicalized and shifted their gaze beyond the dusty, ivy laced walls of the ebony tower to combat global war, racial capitalism, rising Facism in Europe, imperialism, and the exploitation of the poor and oppressed at home and abroad. By the eve of America’s entry into the Second World War, an interracial and intergenerational movement infrastructure consisting of liberal, progressive, and leftist organizations—the National Negro Congress (NNC), NAACP, the Communist Party (CP), and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to name a few—stood ready to provide southern black youth and college students with the means and platform to fight back.

This chapter explores the impact of faculty and student activism both on the campuses of South Carolina’s segregated high schools and HBCUs and within the aggressive, militant 1940s civil rights movement that directly challenged Jim Crow and white supremacy through voter registration, political organizing, civil rights litigation, and direct-action protest. Black youth and college students in the state played a significant role in the fight to equalize public and private higher education and, with the aid of movement bridge builders, joined the increasingly powerful, cosmopolitan international youth movement being organized by radical youth-centered organizations

9 Rogers, The Black Campus Movement, 57-59. For more on the origins of the NAACP youth program and the emergence of youth and college chapters in South Carolina, see chapter two of this dissertation.
within the Popular Front such as SNYC. The SNYC movement in South Carolina was, in fact, as much a product of vanguard leaders’ recognition of the need to train and mold a new generation of race conscious, militant citizen-activists as it was rooted in SNYC leaders’ desire to build an international radical youth movement. Modjeska Simkins, Osceola McKaine, and other adult leaders connected with SNYC organizers and other progressive educators and activists who were concerned with the problems facing black youth to attract resources, support, and new ideas to inspire greater youth participation in South Carolina’s civil rights struggle. Simkins and McKaine gravitated toward SNYC’s interracial, communal, and internationalist message and persuaded its leaders to select South Carolina as the place where the firing line between racial despotism and true democracy would be drawn. Their efforts culminated in the 1946 All-Southern Youth Legislature, an interracial gathering of nearly 1,000 youth delegates sponsored by SNYC but largely coordinated by Simkins, McKaine, and a host of faculty and student activists from segregated high schools and HBCUs across the Palmetto State.

Perhaps the most important legacy of the SNYC movement in South Carolina was that it forced leaders within the South Carolina NAACP State Conference to focus their energy and resources on developing young leaders to carry on the fight against Jim Crow. The onset of the Cold War and rising anticommunism—characterized by a sustained campaign of intimidation, surveillance, and economic terror—led to SNYC’s untimely demise by the end of the 1940s. Seeking to capitalize on its downfall, the national NAACP adopted an almost identical agenda in hopes of rebuilding its struggling youth division. In South Carolina, fears that SNYC would make inroads into the state intensified efforts to recruit young blacks and reorganize dormant youth councils and
college chapters. These youth organizations provided effective leadership training and avenues for direct action against educational inequality, disfranchisement, and, most notably, the denial of bus transportation to black students. The SNYC movement not only exposed South Carolina civil rights leaders to an internationalist approach to fighting for human rights but also gave them a blueprint for building a powerful, militant, and committed youth movement that would help to bring Jim Crow to its knees over the next two decades.

Throughout the spring of 1946, Esther and James Jackson embarked upon a whirlwind tour of southern Black colleges to promote the upcoming youth legislature. Fresh from her recent tour of war-torn England and Russia, Esther Jackson expressed reservations about SNYC’s wartime support of the United States and raised doubts about the Truman administration’s commitment to peace. “The one thing the youth of the world wants to assure is that there will be no more wars,” she told one audience, “Yet we can see the forces of imperialism fanning the flames of distrust against the Soviet Union, preparing for a third world war.” During the question and answer session that followed, Jackson was asked to respond to claims made by Olivia Stokes, a leading official with the Baptist Educational Center, who publicly stated that blacks in the South had more physical comfort and freedom than Russian workers. “I call that indecent,” Jackson retorted, “When we were there, every citizen in the Soviet Union was preparing to vote in the elections. In the South only a handful of poll taxers vote.” In what amounted to a dress rehearsal for their impending visit to the Palmetto State, the SNYC executive secretary blasted Stokes for her close relationship with native South Carolinian and Secretary of State James F. Byrnes whom she described as the leading political figure in a
“poll-tax and Jim Crow state” whose residents were hurting from mass unemployment due to the collapse of the wartime economy. Such persistent and widespread poverty trapped generations on the bottom rungs of society and, as evidenced by India and other colonized lands, sparked revolutions.

SNYC organizers’ ambitions far exceeded their available resources. The Jacksons struggled to raise funds during their college tour despite their immense popularity. Preparations for the Leadership Training School and the upcoming youth legislature were made haphazardly, and their outcomes were largely dependent upon donations from anonymous white benefactors and black communities across the state. Burnham cut costs by hiring two Howard University students, Lucille Lewis and Hazel Tucker, as summer interns. Simkins arranged for them to use a tiny, one room annex located in the rear of the Willis C. Johnson funeral home on Washington Street as an office. The pressures of constant surveillance, territoriality, limited resources, and a fast-approaching deadline increased tensions between local activists and SNYC organizers. During a meeting at Simkins’ home, an outraged Annie Belle Weston accused SNYC representatives of conspiring to grant themselves prime speaking slots on the program. “She accused us of mapping out the program behind her back,” Burnham recounted to Esther Jackson, “and then—at midnight in a driving rain—she stormed out of the house with the words: ‘I don’t give a good goddamn about any of you and you can all go straight to hell!’” Other negotiations went more smoothly. SNYC organizers acquiesced to Simkins and McKaine’s suggestion to charge attendees to attend both evening programs but grant free admission to delegates. Simkins also helped Burnham navigate the racial politics of reserving the Township Auditorium. Inexperienced with traditions
of accommodation, however, Burnham hesitated when the venue manager agreed to permit Simkins to reserve the space without a contract. “He balked at giving her a contract because she has used it many times before and they’ve never used contracts. She said she’s sure it’ll be OK, but at my insistence we drove over to see him to sign a contract,” Burnham later wrote. After securing a site for the conference, the pair spread word of the event to black teachers across the state. “There are 700 teachers from all over the state in summer school here for another week at Benedict and I want to cover them,” Burnham informed SNYC leaders in Birmingham, “And there’s another summer school at Friendship College which I’ll try to cover.”

SNYC organizers have received a disproportionate amount of credit for the success of the 7th All-Southern Youth Legislature. While brilliantly planned, the event would not have been successful without the enthusiasm, support, and resources provided by vanguard leadership, countless grassroots organizers, and increasingly militant scholar-activists at South Carolina’s segregated high schools and HBCUs. State College president Miller F. Whittaker, hardly a radical, permitted SNYC organizers to promote the upcoming youth legislature and even personally sold tickets to the meeting. During the keynote session of the youth legislature, Whittaker was among the dignitaries seated behind famed scholar activist W.E.B. DuBois as he urged South Carolina’s white leadership to promote democracy at home with as much zeal as they did in Europe. After the meeting, Whittaker permitted the staff of the campus newspaper, The Collegian, to encourage State College students to join the nascent organization. Black youth and

---

college students eagerly helped overwhelmed and underfunded SNYC staff recruit new members and prospective delegates, solicited and registered young people to participate in SNYC leadership training institutes, and performed a wide array of mundane administrative tasks to execute their vision to spur growth of the organization long after the excitement of the 1946 meeting faded.

The Jacksons helped Burnham make up for lost time by soliciting funds and requesting support from their extensive network of friends and sympathizers at southern black colleges and universities. In letters to close associates, James Jackson stressed that the purpose of the school was to equip young people with organizational knowledge and techniques and provide them with a fuller understanding of the relevant issues of the day and their relationship to black liberation. “We realize that little time is left to work on promotion, nonetheless we feel that a number of young people would be happy to take advantage of the opportunity to VACATION WITH A PURPOSE at so small a cost to them,” Jackson excitedly claimed to Winston-Salem State University professor Samuel Hall. Their efforts met with mixed results. Burnham, Simkins, and other local volunteers spread the word to public school teachers attending summer school sessions at South Carolina HBCUs and urged them to convince students to participate. Roughly 25 black students from South Carolina and other southern states registered for the Third

SNYC Leadership Training School at Harbison Institute, a tiny vocational high school located just outside the small town of Irmo.\(^\text{12}\)

Set upon three thousand acres of picturesque countryside dotted by teeming forests, Harbison provided an ideal setting for the summer institute. Originally established in 1886 as Ferguson Academy in Abbeville, South Carolina, the school flourished during its first two decades until local whites forced principal Thomas Amos to resign due to his affiliation with the Republican Party. After a series of racially motivated arsons, one of which resulted in the deaths of three students, the Presbyterian Board of Missions moved the school to Irmo in 1911. Over the course of the next thirty years, the Harbison Agricultural and Industrial College operated as a vocational high school for country boys and girls. “The genius of old Harbison was to take crude Negro youths from where they were and help them along in the direction of where they ought to go,” one observer remarked in 1951. Students, however, refused to go to Harbison. By the start of the leadership institute in August 1946, only 11 students were enrolled.

Principal Thomas Banes Jones, a graduate of Biddle (Johnson C. Smith) and Northwestern, rescued the school from closure after yet another devastating fire in 1941 but had been largely unsuccessful in raising its profile among prospective students in South Carolina. Despite swirling rumors about Communists within SNYC’s ranks, Jones agreed to host the summer institute at Harbison out of both necessity and empathy with

\(^{12}\) Letter from Esther Cooper to Mary Cooper, August 8, 1946, Papers of James and Esther Cooper Jackson, Southern Negro Youth Congress: Documents, Publications, Clippings, 1946, New York University, New York City, NY, Frame 022-023. Writing from Birmingham on this date, Esther Cooper Jackson reports that the 25 students from SNYC councils attended the Leadership Training School. The group included two students from Texas, three from Alabama, two from Georgia, two from Florida, and the rest from South Carolina. McMillan, *Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina*, 50-52. Harbison Institute was renamed Harbison Junior College in 1947.
organizers’ passion for improving the lives of black youth. Jones hoped to entice more students to consider Harbison and copied elements of the SNYC program as part of a planned “Real Life School” curriculum that he and the Board of Missions were developing to provide both classroom training and carefully supervised work and service experience to future students. The Harbison community represented itself well. SNYC organizers and students marveled at the beautiful scenery and spacious, clean facilities. They raved about the picnic lunches and hearty meals which included fresh vegetables harvested from gardens planted by Harbison students. Institute participants spent their free time on leisurely walks along dusty clay roads as trees swayed gently in the summer breeze. They also sang songs, played tennis, held foot races, and danced beneath the stars.13

The SNYC Leadership Training School was no vacation. Simkins and her fellow organizers designed lecture and discussion courses intended to train young men and women for future leadership in SNYC clubs and other community organizations. Students were exposed to the major problems facing black youth, most notably disfranchisement, rampant unemployment, global war, and the scourge of racism, Jim Crow, and white supremacy at home and abroad. Instructors encouraged debate and urged students to develop solutions to these problems while also providing their pupils with organizational techniques and intimate details about the plight of the working poor gleaned from their deep reservoir of experience as grassroots political organizers and

labor activists in the Deep South. Lectures and discussion courses focused on a variety of topics such as “Winning the Ballot,” “Defending our Civil Rights,” “World Affairs and the Fight for Peace,” “Education for Democracy,” and the “History of the Negro in Politics,” a course taught by Simkins herself. Students received training in debate, public speaking, public relations and parliamentary procedure, all essential skills for political organizing and race leadership.\footnote{Application, “Southern Negro Youth Congress, Third Leadership Training School,” Papers of James and Esther Jackson.}

Delegates and other participants traveled by train or braved the dusty, pockmarked dirt roads that veined the Carolina countryside. Howard Fast, a popular left-wing novelist and Communist organizer, marveled at the mild and gentle weather, crystal blue skies, and rust-colored hills that greeted him. Stopping to chat with a Black sharecropper and his daughter who lived “some thirty miles” outside of Columbia, Fast learned that word of the conference had spread to even the most remote sections of the state. “There was a mighty lot of talk in New York,” the poor farmer said through a sheepish grin. “A lot of talk in Columbia, too,” he added. When asked for his thoughts about the upcoming youth legislature, the sharecropper plainly observed, “Folks talk and they get to moving, don’t they?”\footnote{Howard Fast, “They’re Marching Up Freedom Road,” \textit{New Masses}, November 5, 1946.} Gwendolyn Midlo, a charter member of the New Orleans Youth Council, remembered that travel to the conference was fraught with danger. She and her comrades, flanked by a carload of armed Black longshoremen and truck drivers, drove through some of the most dangerous places in the South often in
near-total darkness. Fortunately, she and the other delegates arrived in Columbia unharmed. The city was eerily quiet. Black residents, however, were abuzz with excitement. “The first Negro man we saw on the street directed us to the Negro community and even told us where to register as soon as we mentioned that we were delegates to the youth meeting,” Junius Scales remembered. Conference organizers enthusiastically cultivated support from black communities across the state as evidenced by the litany of hearty greetings offered in the souvenir program provided to each visitor. Black and white business owners and civic organizations offered praise for a successful meeting. A closer inspection of advertisements featured in the souvenir journal reveals a slight misunderstanding along racial lines about the goals of SNYC and the youth legislature. The Capital Life and Health Insurance Company, whose president was future Columbia mayor Lester Bates, saluted SNYC for its “good work in eliminating delinquency among the youth of the nation.” C.C. Williams, proprietor of the Blue Palace Tea Shoppe located in the city’s segregated district, more accurately praised the organization for developing better citizens. Considering the presence of segregated department stores among the advertisements, it is likely that local student activists and adult organizers may have occasionally hid the truth about SNYC to raise funds. The arrival of carloads of strange visitors aroused suspicion among some whites in Columbia. Scales recalled feeling the “ever-watchful eyes of the police” and the tense, stoic expressions of white cab drivers who were instructed to provide service to visitors, including foreign born blacks, as a result of successful behind-the-scenes negotiations.

between Simkins and local white politicians. She and SNYC organizers hoped that the conference would provide Columbia and the nation with a glimpse of the integrated world to come. African, Indian, and Chinese delegates were permitted to stay at white-owned hotels. Several white students from North Carolina lived and were entertained at the home of an Allen University official providing many in the group with a rare opportunity for interracial mingling and cultural exchange. Scales recalled that this official and his wife displayed “such social grace and affection that we felt as though we had entered a time machine and a future we had only dreamed of.” Such intimate encounters helped these students overcome racial guilt and speak openly with their hosts. By the end of the weekend, Scales recalled that one of his fellow white students hugged and kissed their hostess and offered expressions of love and gratitude for their hospitality.¹⁷

Early in the morning on Friday, October 18, 1946, over nine hundred delegates from every southern state and several hundred spectators assembled at the Township Auditorium for the opening session of the 1946 All-Southern Youth Legislature. Delegates marched into the auditorium where the walls were adorned with an over-sized American flag that partially obscured a massive mural depicting the “Freedom Road,” inspired by Howard Fast’s immensely popular novel. The walls of the auditorium were decorated with large portraits of the twenty-two Black legislators who served in the U.S. Congress during Reconstruction and banners demanding “Land for the Landless Farm Workers,” the abolition of segregated public transportation, an end to the KKK, support

for Progressive Party presidential candidate Henry Wallace, “Big 3 Unity,” and justice for Isaac Woodard and other black victims of the American injustice system. An impressive collection of pioneering race leaders, movement bridge builders, educators, artists, and grassroots activists representing the transnational Popular Front also attended the conference. Among the committee panelists, performers, and speakers were vanguard leaders such as Simkins, McCray, and McKaine. The presidents of Allen University and Benedict College, seemingly oblivious or indifferent to rumors of Communists within SNYC’s ranks, issued welcoming addresses and greeted dignitaries. Visiting luminaries included W.E.B. DuBois, Paul Robeson, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Clark Foreman of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), Henry O. Mayfield of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), famed preacher, poet, and educator Don West, historian Herbert Aptheker, and Fast himself. International student delegates from Haiti, India, and China were also present while other kindred spirits expressed solidarity from afar.\footnote{Conference Program, “1946 All-Southern Youth Legislature,” October 18-20, 1946, Papers of James and Esther Jackson; Telegram from Flavio Bravo to SNYC leaders, October 19, 1946, Papers of James and Esther Jackson; “Negro Youth Group to Meet Here Tomorrow,” \textit{Columbia Record}, October 17, 1946, 4B; “Negro Youth Congress to Open Today,” \textit{The State}, October 18, 1946, 3A; ‘Negro Group Meets; Signs Reveal Aims,” \textit{Columbia Record}, October 18, 1946, 3A; Lau, \textit{Democracy Rising}, 164-165.}

The youth legislature was intended to serve as an “exercise in citizenship” with the goal of producing a “unity movement” or a cross-class, interracial, multi-generational coalition devoted to fighting for social, political, and economic justice in America and around the globe. SNYC organizers transformed Columbia into a global public square where delegates wrangled with issues of local, national, and international significance and drafted resolutions that were presented to the youth legislature for approval and
eventual submission to Congress.\textsuperscript{19} The event provided students with the basic civics training and lessons in parliamentary procedure within a bicameral legislature and served as a proving ground for future activists and civil rights leaders.\textsuperscript{20} Student delegates, including numerous young Black South Carolinians, were exposed to alternative viewpoints, shared stories, and compared notes about the best tactics for achieving social change. They attended lectures and symposiums that provided a greater awareness of their place within the broad tradition of black resistance and forged important spiritual and personal connections with others in the growing international youth movement. On a more practical level, SNYC organizers hoped that the legislature would teach young people, black and white, to study, debate, and develop solutions to problems facing black southerners and oppressed peoples at home and abroad. Adhering to SNYC’s tradition of interracial cooperation, organizers made sure to avoid hosting segregated events. The goal was to develop an interracial body of intelligent, courageous, tolerant, and militant activists committed to the fight for true democracy and equal justice for all.

Because of its mass appeal and centrality to the success of radical reform campaigns, Burnham and other organizers emphasized the importance of voting rights and urged delegates to recognize the power of the vote as a tool to foster true democracy. SNYC executive secretary Esther Cooper Jackson echoed these sentiments. “We have come here…to give voice and strength and organizational power to the burning and

\textsuperscript{19} “Negro Youth Congress to Open Today,” \textit{The State}, October 18, 1946, 3A; “Thousands Register for Negro Youth Conference in Columbia,” \textit{The State}, October 19, 1946, 4; Lau, \textit{Democracy Rising}, 165.

\textsuperscript{20} Preliminary registration application, “The SNYC Summons you to the Southern Youth Legislature,” 1946, Papers of James and Esther Jackson. The 1946 All-Southern Youth Legislature was divided into a House of Representatives composed of representatives of youth organizations, youth serving agencies, and other groups interested in serving young people but unaffiliated with SNYC. The Senate was limited to delegates from SNYC neighborhood clubs and councils. Visitors were allowed to attend the legislature but not allowed to vote.
unsilenceable demand of our generation to live and prosper,” she declared in her opening address. Cowardly Justice Department officials, she charged, buried their heads in the sand like ostriches while Klansmen maimed and murdered black veterans, women, and young people. Pointing to the portraits of Radical Republican politicians, Cooper urged delegates to emulate “those brave men who before us charged a democratic Southland. Let us carry their work before us always—for a historic conference, for the full voting rights of the Southern people, for a peaceful, secure world, for the unity of the youth of the world.” Invoking the historical memory of Reconstruction as an egalitarian and progressive era, Cooper stressed that the right to vote and interracial cooperation were vital to the construction of a more just and democratic world.21

Replacing Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, who pulled out at the last minute due to illness, John McCray gave a short, stirring address championing the PDP as an example for black people across the nation. Shedding his ambivalence about the connection between the Black freedom struggle in South Carolina and elsewhere, McCray urged listeners to organize political parties to challenge lily-white delegations and racially exclusive primaries in their own backyards. Perhaps inspired by the rebellious atmosphere, McCray peppered his address with sharp jabs at South Carolina’s white political elite, past and present. He chastised white supremacist forefathers John C. Calhoun and “Pitchfork” Ben Tillman for their vehement opposition to racial progress and black freedom. McCray urged listeners to pressure national Democratic Party leaders to grant equal representation to African Americans. The fiery editor charged that “nobody in the South has made any effort to put the National Democratic Party on the

spot and hold it up before the world as a real rascal. We raised that question in 1944. That is why we went to Chicago. That is why we are going in 1948.” Calling for immediate action in every corner of the South, McCray divulged that “being abject and respectable is not going to get us anywhere…the only way we can control that is to be able to vote for or against a man in office.”

In lieu of Powell’s absence, SCHW president Dr. Clark Foreman gave the keynote address. He used the occasion to express the need for unity and renewed purpose in the face of a “rising tide of fascism” that threatened to engulf the South. Using the history of the war as a foil, Foreman cast blame on the German people for embracing fascism in response to the global Depression. Urging delegates to be vigilant against its spread in America, Foreman warned that there “are people in the South who would welcome the way of Fascism. But organizations like this [the Negro Youth Conference] …are proof that many of the people of the South are aware of the menace, and that they are determined to fight it regardless of danger or intimidation.” Turning his attention to white reactionaries, reluctant liberals, and black accommodationists, Foreman declared “the day of Uncle Tom is over.” “To those who say ‘the Negro must keep his place,’” he added, “the only possible meaning that phrase can convey is that the Negro must take his place as an equal alongside fellow white citizens under the Constitution of the United States.”

Foreman pledged that the SCHW would lead a cooperative effort to draft federal civil rights legislation that would “give meaning to the Constitution in many Southern states” and guarantee federal protection from the lynch mob, punish those

---

22 Lau, Democracy Rising, 166-167; “Foreman Sees ‘Rising Tide of Fascism,’” The State, October 19, 1946, 4.
23 “Foreman Sees ‘Rising Tide of Fascism,’” The State, October 19, 1946, 4.
involved with such crimes, and ensure free elections and fair justice for all. He urged attendees to stand together to ensure that the bill would not be “filibustered to death by reactionary congressmen.”

Foreman and SNYC organizers believed that by raising the awareness of social, economic, and political problems among young people and building a progressive coalition representing labor, veterans, students, African Americans, and the oppressed working-class, the birth of a new world free from white supremacy and racial capitalism was possible. Delegates and organizers began the hard work towards achieving such goals with an intensive series of seminars and lectures held the following day. Several committee hearings were convened that covered a variety of topics including “Peace,” “Voting Rights,” “Veterans,” “Civil Liberties,” “Education,” and the relationship between southern youth and the labor movement. These sessions provided an important opportunity for marginalized black and white southern youth to express their frustration with the poor quality of life in their native region. Delegates questioned and debated the impact of racism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and economic exploitation on their daily lives and pondered how these trends buttressed the American postwar social order. Speakers and seminar chairpersons, many of whom were leading researchers and influential politicians and activists, challenged attendees to connect the plight of southern youth to seemingly disparate global freedom struggles.24 From its inception, SNYC sought to provide marginalized persons, especially black women, with leadership opportunities and safe havens to discuss problems that affected their lives. Women comprised half of the leadership in the national office and numerous young, college-

24 Lau, Democracy Rising, 168.
educated women led SNYC chapters. The 1946 meeting was no different. Esther Cooper Jackson, Modjeska Simkins, noted educator Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and Grace Towns Hamilton of the Atlanta Urban League played key organizing and decision-making roles. Miami SNYC secretary Florence Valentine was the star of the “Youth and Labor” committee. In her address concerning “Jobs and Job Training for Negro Women,” Valentine blasted racial discrimination and exploitation of women through limited employment opportunities, long hours, low wages, and harmful working conditions. Black women were treated doubly harsh; Valentine reminded listeners that Black women engineered the arsenal for democracy and argued that ensuring their security was “the best weapons against defeat at home and abroad. Negro women need jobs…with no bars created because of color, creed, or sex.”

SNYC organizers attempted to convince white workers that their interests lay in supporting the burgeoning Black freedom struggle against white supremacy and racial capitalism. Several panelists expressed the belief that evil capitalists and corrupt politicians used race to create divisions between poor whites and African Americans to exploit both groups and cement their place atop the social and political hierarchy. The committee on civil liberties asserted that racism persisted “because the ruler and owners of the bread and butter of the nation’s wealth would deny the masses of Americans, both Negro and White, a decent way of life in order to satisfy their greed, seeking to rule by dividing our people.”

---


26 Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 168.
“landlord-big business-KKK political combination” for the poverty, chronic illiteracy, and political impotence of poor southerners, black and white. He asserted that the increased political activity among African Americans and working-class whites during the postwar period “has been a challenge to their long rule on the backs of poor people…They are seeking to destroy this new political awakening.” Jackson called for white support of anti-poll tax laws, the enforcement of the Supreme Court decision in Smith v. Allwright and the abolition of restrictions on voter registration to foster black political empowerment and lay the groundwork for an interracial movement of the American proletariat against an encroaching Fascist government-business-law enforcement alliance.27

SNYC organizers and panelists repeatedly emphasized the need to teach young people how these larger trends impacted their lives and hindered interracial cooperation and future advancement in race relations. One panel resolved that white and black youth were separated due to their divergent life experiences under Jim Crow. Inequality and the violence used to preserve it “weakened the whole fabric of our democratic way of life” and prevented freedom from flourishing.28 SNYC leaders believed that social interaction between black and white youth on equal footing within a congenial, inviting atmosphere was the first step towards the creation of an interracial movement for democracy. They worked diligently to bring southern white students into the fold. Molly Leiber, a white student representing the American Youth for Democracy caught the fever. During the committee hearing on the antiwar movement, Leiber expressed solidarity with black students in their fight against Jim Crow and white supremacy. She attacked the

27 “Russia is Praised at Negro Meeting,” Columbia Record, October 19, 1946, 8A.
28 Lau, Democracy Rising, 168.
federal government for its shift in policy towards militarism and support for imperialists and proclaimed that the Soviets were “far ahead of the United States in many things, most notably in the principle of opportunity for the whole people.” Taking perhaps the most extreme stance against racism, Leiber lauded Russia’s policy of employing the death penalty for those found guilty of various forms of discrimination.

The closing session of the youth legislature was headlined by Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, the seventy-eight-year-old scholar and senior statesman of the Black liberation struggle. An ebullient Esther Cooper Jackson introduced him to the audience of 850 delegates and several hundred observers crammed into Benedict College’s tiny Antisdel Chapel to hear the noble and peerless educator and activist deliver a message that became a foundational text of the postwar leftist movement. In his sobering yet inspirational address entitled “Behold the Land,” DuBois urged southern blacks, especially young people, to remain in the South and fight to reclaim first-class citizenship. Echoing earlier sentiments shared by SNYC leaders, DuBois, torn asunder by two warring ideologies—Pan Africanism and revolutionary socialism—espoused the view that the American South was the “firing line” for the new, global struggle for the emancipation of the African diaspora and “white slaves of modern capitalistic monopoly” from racial capitalism and imperialist oppression. Deeply moved by his presence before the massive interracial audience united in common cause in the Deep South, the octogenarian scholar-activist urged listeners to dream beyond the pursuit of narrow liberal reforms and instead forge a “new nation, new economy, and new culture in the South” to replace its decayed and immoral regime.
founded upon slavery, monopoly, and racism. DuBois, perhaps jaded by his decades-long struggle against white supremacy, harbored no illusions about southern whites’ capacity for substantive change. Tempering the idealism of the moment, he described working-class whites merely as “possible allies” in the burgeoning freedom struggle. Racism had long served as a wedge driving apart the races despite their shared experience of poverty, oppression, and powerlessness in America. Undeterred, DuBois urged black youth to seek cooperation with young people of all races and creeds to weaken the foundations of Jim Crow. The emancipation of working-class southerners, black and white, would be built through the “social intermingling” and rich experiences that resulted in the types of close friendships that sustained movements through hard times. Without such interpersonal contact, especially the types of public displays and private moments shared during the two-day conference, race would be used as a bludgeon to batter both sides politically and maintain white supremacy indefinitely.

DuBois’ intended audience for this address was southern white fellow travelers toward the dawn who braved angry glares, clenched fists, and social ostracism from their communities to join African Americans in their fight for equal justice. White southern youth were themselves victims of white supremacist ideology. “White youth in the South is peculiarly frustrated. There is not a single great ideal which they can express or aspire to, that does not bring them into flat contradiction with the Negro problem,” DuBois explained, “The more they try to escape it, the more they land into hypocrisy, lying and double-dealing; the more they become, what they least wish to become, the oppressors

---

and despisers of human beings.” The Negro problem, DuBois hinted, was less about the Negro himself and more about southern whites’ refusal to truthfully and honestly grapple with the contradictions inherent within America’s original sin. Even worse, southern white politicians actively resisted the expansive vision of abolition and freedom inherent within Radical Reconstruction and opposed even the most milquetoast reforms within the Jim Crow system during subsequent decades. The legacies of James Brynes, like Calhoun, Hampton, Tillman, Blease, and countless other white South Carolina politicians were forever tarnished by their multi-generational fight against freedom and democracy and the damage their hypocritical crusade wrought to white youth and the economic terror, political oppression, and savagery it engendered at home and abroad, as evidenced by South African apartheid.

With no safe harbors at home or abroad, DuBois urged black youth to grit their teeth and prepare for a long and costly war for freedom, justice, and equality in the South. Victory was unlikely to be achieved without violence and bloodshed, but lasting peace would only be possible by using reason to build a better world. The deadliest sin committed by southern whites was the bearing of false witness and worship of false idols to preserve a white civilization doomed to collapse. South Carolinians were perhaps the worst of the lot, DuBois declared, because its leaders “tried to build slavery upon freedom…tyranny upon democracy…mob violence on law and law on lynching.” “It began not the Civil War—not the War between the States—but the War to Preserve Slavery; it began mob violence and lynching and today it stands in the front rank of those defying the Supreme Court on disfranchisement,” he concluded. The aging scholar betrayed ambivalence about whether voting rights in a “sham democracy” was enough to
stop such generational criminality. Laying out a vision of a new South rooted in his evolving socialist ideological bent, DuBois called for the creation of a shared economy, stronger labor unions and better work conditions to ease the transition toward a greater, freer, truer world. “It would be a shame and cowardice,” he argued, “to surrender this glorious land and its opportunities for civilization and humanity to the thugs and lynchers, the mobs and profiteers, the monopolists and gamblers who today choke and steal its resources.” Revolutionary change would only occur if young Black South Carolinians and their generational peers utilized direct action protest, armed self-defense, and “pitiless blatant publicity” about the grievances of oppressed peoples to build a true democracy and forge a path toward a new nation, economy, and culture free from slavery, monopoly and racial strife. Passing the torch to a new generation, the noble and peerless patriarch called for young black southerners to follow his example and flamboyantly publicize the barbarities practiced by southern whites until their sins were known worldwide. Radical and intense local and national activism needed to be paired with attempts to connect the plight of African Americans to the struggle for freedom and emancipation among the working class and oppressed worldwide. Such tireless dedication required the ultimate sacrifice of denying their own lofty freedom dreams to bravely live, marry, and build strong families and communities in their bountiful yet dangerous homeland. Only by remaining in the South and fighting this existential conflict could young Black men and women uplift humanity and build a culture and
civilization free from poverty, ignorance and disease.\textsuperscript{30}

The euphoria surrounding the 1946 youth legislature was short lived. Within weeks, the SNYC began to show signs of organizational fatigue and an inability to realize the freedom dreams shared at the conference. Florence Castile stayed behind to raise funds and recruit new members for the organization. Despite her misgivings about changes in SNYC leadership, Castile threw herself into her work and started a campaign to recruit students at segregated high schools and HBCUs to establish new councils in the Carolinas. She quickly realized that it would be an uphill battle. During a visit to Mather Academy in Camden, South Carolina, a private Methodist boarding school established by northern white missionaries, Castile met with an enthusiastic group of students who expressed interest in organizing a SNYC chapter and agreed to arrange meetings with local white youths to improve race relations. However, the principal, a “Miss Bryan,” refused to attend the assembly and openly mocked Castile. When later asked whether she believed that Black youth could organize and achieve social change, the administrator responded that “incendiary organizations” such as the NAACP Youth Councils and SNYC were little more than “debating societies” that provided her “little colored friends” with the means to blow off steam. While Bryan did not directly oppose the creation of a SNYC chapter, she made it clear that the Mather administration would not provide any support. Castile experienced similar disappointments at Benedict College and Allen University, the two HBCUs most closely linked with the 1946 youth legislature. “Now I went to the Benedict meeting Monday night. [The chapter] had gone to hell. The

\textsuperscript{30} Angela Davis, “James and Esther Jackson: Connecting the Past to the Present,” \textit{American Communist History} 7:2 (2008), 276.
attendance had dwindled to about 5. Mrs. Simkins was present,” she reported to Burnham. Castile learned that the disorganization and structural problems plaguing SNYC made it impossible to recruit new members. SNYC organizers had devoted nearly all their time, energy, financial resources and manpower to planning and executing a successful conference leaving little room for building stable local councils. Such a task was doubly difficult at southern black colleges where community organizers had to navigate local politics and earn the trust of conservative administrators to win an audience with potential recruits. Castile, like countless youth organizers before her, found herself at the mercy of Benedict president J.J. Starks and the National Missionary Board in New York. When the students raised this concern, the SNYC field worker and Simkins countered with brave pronouncements about the need for greater academic freedom and racial self-determination. Both women, however, understood that they were fighting a war of attrition. The Benedict College SNYC chapter died in its infancy. The situation at Allen University was not much better. Its chapter had deteriorated into a cult of personality led by Roosevelt Franklin, an ambitious but inexperienced student leader. “I made an appointment with Franklin yesterday about the veterans and he didn’t show up. He’s Mr. Franklin you know. I went to chapel at Allen yesterday and he’s trying to run about 5 different organizations,” she lamented. “I asked him why he didn’t show up the other night and he said that his first frat meeting lasted until very late. He says he can’t get the veterans together until the first of the year.” To make matters worse, old suspicions about the organization among local activists died hard. The disorganization and inconsistency within SNYC and its Communist ties led some to believe that it was simply a “racketeer organization” more interested in lifting money from the pockets of
hardworking citizens and gullible students than uplifting the oppressed.\textsuperscript{31} Despite her best efforts, Castile was largely unsuccessful in her attempt to expand SNYC’s base in Columbia prior to her departure in early January 1947.

Hounded by the FBI, bereft of financial resources, exhausted, and cast out of the African American political mainstream, what remained of SNYC retreated to Birmingham by 1948. A mere 200 activists attempted to gather for the organization’s ninth and final annual meeting but were stymied by Birmingham police led by Eugene “Bull” Connor with the assistance of the Ku Klux Klan. Connor and his allies pressured local churches to distance themselves from SNYC activities and to refuse to permit them to use their facilities to host the event. Federal agents refused to protect SNYC members from physical violence due to their reputations as fellow travelers. The organization’s fate was sealed when Henry Wallace’s quixotic 1948 presidential campaign went down in flames. Louis Burnham closed the Birmingham headquarters in 1949 prior to leaving the South to join other former SNYC leaders in New York.\textsuperscript{32}

The success of the 1946 All-Southern Youth Legislature inspired NAACP leaders to set about the task of rebuilding its youth program in order to develop the next generation of community organizers and civil rights leaders. National NAACP Youth director Ruby Hurley, both due to this event and ongoing problems within councils nationwide, recognized the need for the Association to change with the times and adopt a more militant agenda that embraced the use of direct-action protest to spur social change.

\textsuperscript{31} Letter from Florence Castile to Louis Burnham, undated, The Papers of James and Esther Jackson, SNYC Correspondence, 1946-1949, Frames 009-012.
SNYC’s demise left the NAACP without competition for the hearts and minds of young blacks in South Carolina and other southern states. Organizers within the South Carolina State Conference intensified efforts to recruit black youth and college students for the battles to come. By 1950, there were over 25 NAACP youth councils in rural towns and cities across the state including a chapter at Mather Academy. Evidently, young people needed to blow off more steam. The State Conference of NAACP Youth Councils was formed later that year. Contrary to the idealistic and radical liberalism preached just a handful of years earlier by SNYC organizers, the NAACP program was slightly more moderate and intended to avoid controversy. The Cheraw youth council, for example, conducted “Back to School” campaigns to persuade former veterans to return to college and placed signs near elementary schools to warn children of oncoming traffic. SNYC’s fingerprints were still visible in other ways. SNYC Leadership School graduates Charlotte Davis and Alexander T. Bryd, the son of the legendary NAACP stalwart, kept alive the defunct organization’s dream of full democracy by encouraging their peers within the Cheraw youth council to register nearly 400 new black voters. Youth councils in other rural sections of the state found the sledding much tougher despite attempts to moderate their aims. Members of the Shelton, South Carolina youth council, for example, listed post office box addresses for return mail in order to hide their activities from suspicious whites.\(^{33}\)

SNYC’s legacy is a paradox; Its leaders left behind tangible legacies of youth organizing and tactical reinvention that made the successes of the 1960s black freedom

\(^{33}\) Papers of the NAACP, Part 19, Reel 11, Youth File: Series C, 1940-1955, Cheraw Youth Council, November 1945, 0261-0266; Shelton SC Youth Council, January 1949, 0269-0272.
struggle possible. However, as scholar-activist Angela Davis notes, not all legacies are progressive. SNYC’s presence as a radical, internationalist, and anti-colonialist freedom organization could not withstand the prevailing winds of change wrought by the Cold War that decimated both radical movements and our collective memories of the possibilities for substantive change they presented. After the red storm subsided, there was no room for SNYC within what remained of the 1940s civil rights movement or the minds of everyday Americans who prefer dead martyrs over living, breathing, struggling others. The bold, visionary internationalist approach embraced by its leaders was not the only casualty of anticommunism among federal officials and their weak-kneed liberal allies. The death of the Popular Front cost the movement a piece of its soul, as the southern movement became domesticated and more interested in narrow legalistic victories rather than the expansive, collective freedom dreams offered by the Jacksons and other radical activists hounded into exile by Hoover’s agents. Southern historians were not immune from these trends. SNYC disappeared from the public memory not because of movement fatigue or amnesia but because the legacy of its leaders, and to a lesser extent the local grassroots activists in South Carolina who supported their cause, could not be assimilated into a historical consensus reliant upon simplistic claims of white dignity as the impetus for desegregation or the dominant national civil rights mythology that creates black messiahs to mask the generational inequalities faced by the

poor, downtrodden, and oppressed for whom they fought. Recognition of SNYC’s rich legacy would require continued struggle for true democracy, freedom, and the creation of a benevolent community incompatible with the apathy, neglect and militant resistance practiced by segregationist whites and their supposedly enlightened descendants. Young Black South Carolinians who embraced their vision carried the torch of freedom forward. Their actions kept the fire going and eventually forced South Carolina and other southern states to prepare more seats at the table of brotherhood.

---

35 The SNYC movement is nearly absent from the early historiography on South Carolina civil rights. Studies authored by white conservative and liberal historians alike ignore the 1946 All-Southern Youth Legislature and the movement from which it sprang. These scholars have developed a consensus narrative on civil rights that is reliant upon claims that black South Carolinians were largely pragmatic and moderate compared to African Americans in other southern states. They minimize and marginalize the role of black youth and college students in the long civil rights movement in the 1960s and earlier decades, at times even granting white politicians and citizens an inordinate amount of credit for the changes that occurred. Examples include Paul S. Lofton, Jr., “Calm and Exemplary: Desegregation in Columbia, South Carolina,” in Elizabeth Jacoway, ed., Southern Businessmen and Desegregation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 70-81; John G. Sproat, “Firm Flexibility: Perspectives on Desegregation in South Carolina,” in Abzug, Robert, eds., New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth M. Stampp (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1986), 164-184; Marcia Synnott, “Federalism Vindicated: University Desegregation in South Carolina and Alabama, 1962-1963,” Journal of Policy History 1:3 (1989), 292-313; and Walter Edgar, South Carolina: A History (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 512-552.
CHAPTER 4

“A LITTLE LEARNING IS A DANGEROUS THING”: BLACK STUDENTS AT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HBCUs IN SOUTH CAROLINA COMBAT MASSIVE RESISTANCE

On June 30, 1946, just months before DuBois’ urgent call for young Black southerners to grit their teeth and fight for their birthright, John Wrighten was already on the battlefield. The former veteran turned South Carolina State College student, and soon-to-be SNYC Vice-President, applied for admission to the law school at the University of South Carolina (USC). With the support of the South Carolina NAACP State Conference, Wrighten sued after university officials rejected his application due to his race. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund dispatched Thurgood Marshall and Robert Carter to Columbia, where they were assisted by local attorneys Harold Boulware, Esau Parker, and W.F. Robinson. Wrighten v. Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina was argued before the District Court of the United States for the Eastern District of South Carolina on June 5-6, 1947, with U.S. District Court Judge J. Waties Waring presiding. NAACP attorneys argued that USC’s refusal to admit Wrighten violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, adding that the lack of a state-supported law school inconvenienced present and future Black students interested in legal education, a line of reasoning intended to signal to the court that equalization, not
desegregation was the goal.\textsuperscript{1} In many respects, the Wrighten lawsuit represented an escalation of the NAACP’s legal campaign to equalize public education. Despite the Supreme Court’s 1938 ruling in \textit{Gaines v. Missouri}, which provided the legal precedent for the plaintiff’s argument, and the State NAACP’s successful equalization of teacher salaries, South Carolina’s HBCUs remained largely unchanged by the end of the Second World War. Wrighten, one of thousands of returning veterans educated at overcrowded, underfunded State College, likely sought to become a lawyer to join the fight to improve these institutions.\textsuperscript{2}

The young veteran’s courageous stand drew an immediate response from state officials. White politicians were convinced that if State College could be transformed into an institution on par with white colleges and universities in South Carolina, racial segregation in higher education could be justified. The South Carolina General Assembly quickly appropriated $60,000 to establish a graduate program and law school at S.C. State for the 1947-1948 school year. State attorneys argued that these facilities could provide legal training to Wrighten and future Black law students on par with the

---


\textsuperscript{2} Hine, \textit{South Carolina State University}, 196-197. Wrighten would have been quite familiar with the numerous problems that plagued State College during this period. State College was overcrowded as enrollment doubled between 1941 and 1947. There was a waiting list for undergraduate students and returning veterans who, like Wrighten, sought to take advantage of the G.I. Bill by enrolling in regular and short courses at the college. Lack of available housing was another issue at State College throughout the late 1940s. Lowman, Bradham, Manning, and Miller were filled. Roughly 40 percent of the students lived off campus in and around Orangeburg. Sadly, some were even homeless. Returning veterans seeking housing were initially placed on cots in Dukes Gym before the arrival of military surplus Quonset huts in early 1947. The huts were set up near campus in a muddy section that became known as “Vetville.”
all-white law school in Columbia. Among the witnesses called was South Carolina State College president Miller F. Whittaker. As the handpicked president of the state’s only public HBCU, Whittaker was obligated to support the state’s outlandish claim that a legitimate law school could be established at State College within a few weeks. Privately, he complained about being caught in the middle between Wrighten and other African American college students desirous of a legal education and powerful state officials who could make his life difficult if he did not toe the line. When questioned by Marshall, Whittaker stated that no legal education was readily available nor had funds for a law school at State College been allocated over the past two years. He added that the college had hired no law professors and lacked a law library. Pressed further, Whittaker ultimately conceded that he did not believe that the State College law school would be the “full and complete equal” of the USC Law School.

Judge Waring announced his decision on June 6, 1947, the same day that he ruled in *Elmore v. Rice*, the lawsuit that ended the “whites-only” Democratic Party primary. Due to both sides’ reliance on the *Gaines* precedent to argue their case, Waring essentially sided with the state. He ruled that South Carolina officials should be granted “faith and deference” that they would build, operate, equip, and staff the State College law school on par with USC Law School. Judge Waring warned that if this standard was not met, then Wrighten would be admitted to the all-white law school or legal education.

---

3 Hine, *South Carolina State University*, 191; Burke, *African American Lawyers in South Carolina*, 173-174. State attorneys chose USC law school dean Samuel Prince as a key witness to support the position that an equal law school could be quickly established at State College. Future NAACP attorney and District Court Judge Matthew Perry recalled Marshall’s evisceration of Prince on the witness stand. He produced a series of articles on legal education and hammered Prince with precise questions about his profession and modern trends in the training of future lawyers. Prince crumbled eventually admitting that he had never attended law school himself.

for all residents would be abolished. The South Carolina State College Law School opened two months later but largely failed to meet Waring’s standards. NAACP lawyers decided against an appeal due to discord between Marshall and Wrighten, whose financial struggles and dreams of becoming a lawyer led him to enroll at the makeshift law school. Black South Carolinians were also sharply divided over whether the establishment of the State College Law School represented a capitulation to segregation or an opportunity to practice racial self-determination in legal education and provide a space for Black law professors and students to enter the profession.⁵ Despite the mixed outcome, Wrighten’s courageous lawsuit had the unintended consequence of creating a law school that eventually produced numerous skilled and influential civil rights attorneys. Moreover, it also proved to be an important inflection point in white leaders’ use of State College and other HBCUs as political footballs in their efforts to preserve segregation in higher education and society writ large.

This chapter examines the response of Black students at public and private HBCUs in South Carolina to the transformations that occurred as a result of white political leaders’ attempt to equalize higher education and, later, the rise of massive resistance, the militant segregationist counterrevolution that used a variety of tactics—passage of segregationist legislation, privatization, economic terrorism, forced exile of liberal and Black activists, and extralegal violence—to stall and delay enforcement of the Brown desegregation mandate to preserve the southern way of life. As noted by several

⁵ Hine, *South Carolina State University*, 193-194. At inception, the South Carolina State Law School was a collection of bookshelves and desks set up in a single classroom in Wilkinson Hall, which already housed the college library, campus bookstore, and the offices of President Whittaker and the business manager. The law school dean and two faculty members were given office space in Manning Hall, one of the girl’s dormitories. Hundreds of law books, many out-of-date, were also acquired.
scholars, southern officials endorsed these actions to obstruct federal intervention and intimidate grassroots activists into quietude. As fears of race mixture and social equality spread, segregationist leaders in South Carolina sounded the alarm and encouraged their constituents to resist. Klan terror escalated and thousands of supposedly more civilized South Carolinians joined local chapters of the White Citizens Councils (WCC), a network of fundamentalist, white supremacist organizations whose members retaliated against proponents of desegregation by conducting economic terror campaigns, spreading anti-Communist propaganda, and fostering a violent, reactionary climate where attacks against African Americans and their white liberal allies were justified as necessary to preserve Jim Crow. White politicians supported their actions in word and deed, effectively fomenting a climate of state-sponsored repression that stymied nearly all attempts to usher in a new era of equality, democracy, or even racial reform.⁶

Their efforts, coupled with a deluge of segregationist legislation, both endangered the lives of NAACP members and weakened public support for the organization. Recognizing the centrality of Black institutions of higher learning as bastions of civil rights activism and Black political organizing, South Carolina governor George Bell Timmerman and his legislative allies specifically targeted HBCUs, describing them as safe havens for Communist indoctrination and other subversive activities. To entrench this confederacy of the mind, segregationist politicians attacked the notion of academic freedom as a mortal threat to southern racial tradition. Battling for the hearts and minds

of young Black South Carolinians, state leaders—aided by conflicted Black college
presidents—targeted faculty and student activists. Those who railed against educational
inequality, held membership in the NAACP and other integrationist organizations,
encouraged compliance with the Brown mandate, or encourage students to fight for first-
class citizenship were often fired without recourse.

Radicalized within this context, Black students at South Carolina HBCUs
expressed solidarity with the plight of Black parents who bravely signed petitions to force
local school boards to comply with the Supreme Court’s desegregation order. In
response to a vicious campaign of economic terror, violence, and intimidation enacted by
the WCC and its supporters, students at South Carolina State College organized a campus
NAACP chapter in the spring of 1956 and initiated a two-front war against Jim Crow.
Led by senior Fred Henderson Moore, State College students expressed solidarity with
local efforts to desegregate public schools in Orangeburg and Clarendon counties by
boycotting goods provided by white merchants affiliated with the WCC and those who
sympathized with their cause. Disgusted with the abusive and autocratic leadership of
State College president Benner C. Turner and white trustees, who ran the college more
like a plantation than a modern university, Black campus activists at State College issued
a series of demands to win greater student power, racial self-determination and
institutional control for African Americans at the state’s only HBCU. Roughly two years
later, students at Allen University and Benedict College responded to state-sponsored
attacks on academic freedom and institutional autonomy by applying for admission to the
all-white University of South Carolina.

**Lewis McMillan and Battles for Tenure and Academic Freedom at State College**

Born in 1897 and raised in a backwoods section of southwestern Barnwell County near the Savannah River, Lewis Kennedy McMillan was the youngest son of Thomas Jackson McMillan, an unschooled tenant farmer, and Anna Twiggs McMillan, his wife of seven years who appears to have died while giving birth to their last child. Growing up in this hardscrabble community comprised mostly of cotton farmers and railroad workers, McMillan knew few blacks who could read fluently or even write their own names. His father and grandmother, a former slave named Arsula, encouraged the McMillan children to excel in school while others in the community, most notably a young preacher named William Stoney, inspired young Lewis with fantastic stories about Black colleges and the intellectual giants they produced. Similar to his generational peers Nick Aaron Ford and Benjamin E. Mays, McMillan soon discovered that these fantasies failed to match the realities of student life at South Carolina HBCUs. His secondary and high school experience at Voorhees College and Benedict College, respectively, filled him with an intense disdain for the Hampton-Tuskegee model of Black education and a profound dissatisfaction with the missionary approach preferred by private black liberal arts

---


colleges. “Immediate contact with them showed me that they were playthings,” he wrote decades later, “Even in the fourth and fifth and sixth grades I came to discover that Voorhees was living far too short of its marvelous possibilities and responsibilities. In the eighth and ninth and tenth grades I was shocked into a realization of the fact that Benedict was falling tragically short of her holy calling.” Disillusioned and frustrated with the restrictive rules and stale curriculum, McMillan convinced his father to send him to the high school at Howard University on the condition that he would return home each summer to assist with the harvest. His college options were greatly limited by his father’s financial difficulties. McMillan begrudgingly enrolled in the college program at Howard where he graduated in 1923. A brilliant and dedicated student, he earned a bachelor’s degree in Divinity from Yale University three years later before returning to the South to join a revamped faculty at Shaw University, a private black college supported by the ABHMS located in Raleigh, North Carolina. The young professor was dismayed to learn that little had changed at southern black colleges. Within months, McMillan was fired by Shaw’s autocratic president Joseph L. Peacock for inflammatory statements made in a letter he sent to trustees and Home Mission board criticizing the outmoded curriculum and repressive rules as well as the administration’s refusal to end

---

9 “Shaw University Doing Only College Work,” The New York Amsterdam News, October 6, 1926, 6. McMillan was employed as a professor of the Old Testament and church history at Shaw University as part of its transition from a high school academy and normal institute to a four-year liberal arts college. He likely replaced or supplemented a professor who became the target of a group of student activists, including famed political and civil rights organizer Ella Baker, due to his insistence that they memorize their readings and lectures and his refusal to allow them to use notebooks during exams. Baker and her peers submitted a formal letter of protest to the faculty council indicating their refusal to sit for the exam and politely voicing their disagreement with the way the course had been taught. The burgeoning rebellion was quashed; Baker and her peers took the exam. However, it appears likely that the professor was not rehired due to the uproar he caused. See Barbara Ransby, “A Polite Dissident and Reluctant Rebel,” in Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 59-63.
its tradition of segregating white and black professors in the campus dining hall.\textsuperscript{10}

Following his dismissal, McMillan relocated to Baltimore and eventually found work both as a YMCA field representative supervising Association activity in black high schools and colleges in the Deep South and also moonlighted as a reporter for the \textit{Baltimore Afro-American}.\textsuperscript{11} His incisive commentary soon caught the attention of \textit{Chicago Defender} editor Lucius Harper, a fellow expatriate of the Deep South, who offered him a position as a foreign correspondent. He left for Germany in July 1929 and remained there for nearly a decade. Throughout his sojourn to Europe, McMillan regaled his largely black audience back home with fantastic stories about the friendliness of the German and French people towards African Americans and the freedoms that he and other blacks enjoyed as visitors to the Old World. “The Negro is a welcomed guest in Berlin. The people are evidently glad to see him,” McMillan observed. Denizens of the German Republic, not yet fallen under the spell of Nazism, rejected American racism; Segregation was nowhere to be found save for public spaces owned by white Americans. Nearly every public space in Berlin was open to blacks from the best hotels to the wildest nightclubs where people of all races drank, danced, mingled, and aroused one another’s passion. “That our men should socialize with German women is taken as a matter of course. The element of prejudice does not enter whatever on that point. With them it is still another couple—man and woman—spending some time together,” McMillan explained. He was not, however, blinded by idealism. The \textit{Defender} correspondent regularly noted the Germans’ aversion to foreign citizenship and economic achievement.

\textsuperscript{10} “Shaw U. Instructor Gets His Discharge,” \textit{Chicago Defender}, April 16, 1927, 4.
\textsuperscript{11} McMillan, “Negro Higher Education as I Have Known It,” 10.
at the expense of native-born citizens. Although he and other black visitors could not make Germany their permanent home, McMillan recognized that there existed a “ready spirit of friendliness” between “youths of the darker races” studying in the University of Berlin or backpacking across the European continent. On numerous occasions, these young ambassadors met one another, shared stories about their lives, and forged strong friendships that outlasted time and distance. Such camaraderie gave McMillan and other African Americans in Europe hope that one day alliances could be forged with progressive-minded citizens abroad as a means of winning justice and opportunity for black people in America.¹²

McMillan was so enthralled by the vibrant community of global student ambassadors he encountered in Berlin that he soon joined them. He enrolled in the doctoral program in History at the University of Bonn, a public research institution founded in 1818 by Prussian monarch Frederick Wilhelm III. Once a jewel in the Prussian crown, the university fell on hard times during the interwar years; The German parliament cut its funding on numerous occasions which contributed to mass student uprisings, the adoption of a new constitution and the establishment of a student council with full participatory powers. Perhaps recognizing the similarities between the radical German student movement and that which was raging in America, student activists in Dresden invited McMillan to deliver an address on the New Negro in America. Speaking before a sizable crowd composed of activists, politicians, consulates, educational and

business leaders, McMillan shared insights about African American cultural contributions and sharply criticized Jim Crow and white supremacy back home. During the discussion that followed, an impassioned German student expressed his disgust at white Americans’ treatment of blacks and questioned how a nation that claimed to be civilized could allow such abhorrent behavior among such a large portion of its citizens. A quick glance around the room would have taught the inquisitive student a great deal. The United States consul in Dresden, a southerner, angrily left the room during McMillan’s address. “A friend of mine in Dresden tells me of the old Southern songs which he likes,” McMillan told readers back home, “He was present at the meeting, but he did not come to shake hands. Some said that he did not like the speech. The same person remarked that he could not have been nearly so moderate in making such a presentation.”

American racism was indeed an implacable and inescapable foe. Several months later, while on a research trip to Montpellier University just outside Paris, McMillan was again targeted by white Americans whose prejudice knew no bounds. Segregationist whites barred McMillan from taking residence in a newly erected dormitory in the city. Refusing to abide such insult, McMillan and several white students left the American house in protest. French residents were reportedly “unusually vehement in their denunciation” of the color line being drawn in their homeland and soon found lodging for McMillan in a nearby hostel.

The young scholar circumvented these and other obstacles throughout his stay in Europe and eventually earned his doctoral degree in 1933. The most important lessons he learned, however, had little to do with his chosen discipline but rather the need for

---

13 “German People Show Keen Interest in Race Problem,” Chicago Defender, April 5, 1930, 4.
African Americans to revise their childrearing and educational traditions to prepare black youth to become mature, thoughtful, and fearless adults capable of handling such adversity. During his stay in Berlin, McMillan wrote a series of exposes highlighting the differences between how Germans and African Americans viewed childhood and developed educational philosophies to foster such growth. Despite living in a poor, war-ravaged country, McMillan observed that German children were a “fine lot of free, happy, hearty, alert little creatures” due to their centrality in the lives of their parents and society. German parents valued play with their children, eagerly passed on knowledge, and elected leaders devoted to providing young people with immensely beautiful parks and public recreational spaces. “There is no wonder that their family ties are so strong, that there is so much individual pride, that the finer and more human things, are often first in the mind and ambition of the German youth,” McMillan wrote. The young scholar lauded the Germans for pouring their lives into their children and, more importantly, being willing to diminish themselves in order to pass the torch of leadership to the next generation. Reflecting on his own childhood and his tumultuous years as a student and instructor at southern HBCUs, McMillan groused at what he believed was older blacks’ assessment of their children as a “necessary evil.” Fiercely loved but subject to their elders’ domineering power and zealous discipline and without the necessary resources and institutions for proper education and healthy recreation, black children existed on the fringe of American life and were often victimized by their elders’ dogmatic belief in outmoded educational philosophies and reliance upon untrustworthy white philanthropists and segregationist politicians for financial support to maintain their
schools and colleges. Their lack of racial pride and ambition was no accident. Rather, it was the product of an educational system that reinforced notions of white supremacy and black inferiority and the failure of the larger black community to recognize that the long hard road toward democracy and equality began with the intellectual development, mentoring, and nurturing of each child. African Americans could start along this path by liberalizing their educational system to provide a true college education to all students regardless of their upbringing. By shedding the cruelty and selfishness of past regimes and embracing a collective vision for education rooted in race pride and classical training, McMillan argued, African Americans could take their rightful place in the modern world.15

Upon returning to the United States, McMillan taught at Virginia State, Bishop College, and Wilberforce University before taking a full-time position at South Carolina State College in 1950 as a member of a new cohort of highly educated professors whose recruitment was supported by equalization funds. Returning to his native state, McMillan, now fifty years old, was by far the most distinguished scholar on the relatively young and inexperienced State College faculty. By 1951-52 only six of the 94 members of the State College faculty had a doctorate. The number doubled by the end of the

In addition to his regular duties as an instructor, McMillan continued to serve as a correspondent for several Black newspapers and conducted research for a book on the history and contemporary state of Black higher education in South Carolina, a project he hoped would raise public awareness and inspire genuine reforms. McMillan visited and recorded his observations on the conditions at each of the state’s public and private Black colleges. His self-published 1952 study *Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina* proved to be less a historical analysis than a passionate denunciation of racial segregation and a scathing indictment of white political leaders—and by extension the state’s white citizens—for their outright hostility to Black education and support for a system of higher education that he believed was corrupt and paternalistic at best and farcical at worst. McMillan criticized accommodationist Black administrators and faculty

---

16 Hine, *South Carolina State University*, 220-221; “Wilberforce Begins Eighty-Second Year on September 27th,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 11, 1937; “Wilberforce Starts 87th Year Sept. 27,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 11, 1937, 5; “Wilberforce Prof. Youth Day Speaker,” *The Chicago Defender*, January 7, 1939, 11; “Shakeup at Wilberforce: 4 Dismissed Teachers Are Reinstated,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 30, 1939, 1; “Social Science Teachers Meet,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 6, 1944, 14; “Claflin College Speakers,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 20, 1947, 9; “S.C. State College Opens 52nd Season,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 27, 1947, 9. State College president Miller F. Whittaker invited McMillan to teach summer school in 1946. He eventually accepted a part-time, joint position as an instructor at Claflin and member of the graduate faculty at S.C. State the following year. The veteran scholar delivered the matriculation address during the official opening day at Claflin College during the fall of 1947 and subsequently moved to Orangeburg in 1948. He eventually became a full-time faculty member at State College in 1950. McMillan conducted research for his book, *Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina*, throughout this period. Other State College faculty that held doctorates and remained at the college for their entire academic careers were Algernon S. Belcher, George Hunter, Nettie Parler, Laler DeCosta, Annabelle S. Sherman, Ashriel I. Mose, and George Brooks. Hine explains that because they had advanced degrees, these professors quickly rose to administrative positions. “It was the degree and not their teaching experience, record of research and publications, or potential for leadership that led to these posts,” he explains.

17 McMillan taught graduate and undergraduate history courses and occasionally taught German at State College. He continued to be fond of the German people and their culture, even returning to Germany in 1949 where he reunited with the family that hosted him as a graduate student in the early 1930s. Lastly, McMillan was a well-informed correspondent on the Jewish-Palestinian conflict often wrote articles that attempted to connect the plight of African Americans to ongoing campaigns for self-determination abroad. See Lewis K. McMillan, “The Negro Forty-Ninth State in the Light of the Jewish National Home,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 9:2 (April 1940): 144-153; “Brown Skinned War Babies,” *The Chicago Defender*, November 5, 1949, 18; “What the German People Think of the Negro G.I.,” *The Chicago Defender*, October 29, 1949, 17.
for failing to educate or lift the self-esteem of their already disadvantaged students and embracing a system of education rooted in notions of Black inferiority and political impotence.18

The veteran State College instructor offered a blistering critique of Black institutions of higher learning in South Carolina. He described the four private Black liberal arts colleges in the state—Allen, Benedict, Claflin, and Morris—as failed institutions that contributed little to the fight to emancipate the masses from ignorance, poverty, and second-class citizenship. Drowning in the “stale, slimy, sickly waters of Negro racism,” these colleges were plagued with ancient, dilapidated facilities and disconnected from the American political and cultural mainstream. Increasingly unable to secure financial support from northern missionary associations and industrial philanthropists, several of these institutions relied heavily upon donations from overburdened congregations, impoverished students, and disinterested alumni networks to survive. Roughly a decade after publishing his initial criticisms of leadership at these institutions, McMillan asserted that their condition had metastasized. Having survived the student uprising of 1939, Allen was again ruled by a “despotic ecclesiastical regime” that wrung support from cash-strapped members of the South Carolina AME church. Benedict and Morris, two Baptist supported institutions, were locked in a vicious battle for survival. McMillan asserted that Black private colleges and universities in South Carolina were led by a “perfectly hapless lot of Negro college heads” who spent much of their time policing student behavior and academic curiosity to protect the racial status

None had the education or gravitas required to implement a dynamic higher education program. Such ineptitude was born of corruption and sustained by factionalism within these institutions. As a result, faculty and student morale at these colleges had reached a nadir. “Graduating classes depart from these colleges in a bad mood,” McMillan observed, “Instead of pledging their loyalty to the alma maters’ growth and development, they swear vengeance!” Without a renewed spirit of cooperation and the development of a distinctive mission, these colleges were in danger of being replaced by white-run institutions in the event of desegregation.19

McMillan saved his sharpest barbs for his employer, South Carolina State College. A “mere stepchild” in educational circles, the institution had badly failed its ill-prepared and disadvantaged students. The lack of a stimulating intellectual or political culture on campus pushed State College students toward more superficial pursuits—membership in fraternities and sororities, athletic success, climbing the social ladder, being fashionable, or making high grades in meaningless courses. Moreover, the campus itself left much to be desired. The landscape and buildings were largely unattractive, worn and decayed from decades of overuse and neglect. Vestiges of State College’s failed industrial and agricultural programs, such as farming machinery and several cow pastures, were strewn about large sections of the campus. State College students often repaired or retrofitted existing structures to account for shortfalls in the college treasury, the inevitable result of the miserly appropriations provided by the General Assembly. By 1952, their resourcefulness had reached its limit. The few hastily erected but modern

buildings such as the State College Law School were surrounded by a patchwork of ancient, dilapidated structures, a visual representation of the disillusionment and stagnation that marked much of the college’s existence.\(^{20}\) Largely isolated from the surrounding community, State College faculty and students had few public spaces for leisure, recreation, quiet study, or reflection.

The postwar influx of returning veterans and steady increase in enrollment of homegrown Black high school graduates left State College responsible for educating nearly 40 percent of South Carolina’s Black college-aged population. Administrators turned away thousands of prospective students due to a lack of housing while those who were admitted lived in dormitories that bordered on slum conditions. The four dormitories at State College, one for men and three for women, were cramped, unsanitary, and dangerous relics from bygone eras. Bradham and Manning Halls, both built in 1916, had cracked ceilings and floors, exposed wiring, and were poorly retrofitted to meet the needs of over two hundred co-eds. Six students were packed into each room in Lowman Hall, the only men’s dormitory. Roughly one hundred State College males, mostly veterans, were jammed into six crudely constructed, poorly furnished, filthy G.I. barracks leftover from the war.\(^{21}\) Faculty fared little better. A lucky few lived in two newly constructed apartment buildings or a collection of small faculty houses built during the Depression. Less fortunate professors occupied single rooms in the student

---


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 172-174. During the 1950-1951 school year, Bradham Hall housed 164 girls. Only one bathroom was provided for each of its three floors. McMillan reported that each room lacked storage space and a single small reception room was provided for recreation. Manning Hall was retrofitted for use as both a dormitory and faculty office space. Like Bradham Hall, there was only one bathroom on each floor for girls to care for themselves.
dormitories or, due to Orangeburg’s racially discriminatory housing policies, were even homeless.\(^{22}\)

Speaking on behalf of his younger colleagues, who could ill afford a direct confrontation with Turner, McMillan criticized the low pay, lack of quality housing, and limited opportunities for advancement offered to State College faculty. Faculty had little power to create change. The college was governed by a six-person, all-white board of trustees, drawn from Orangeburg’s business and professional class. Routine decisions were left to Turner, who ruled State College with an iron hand. There was no faculty manual or tenure policy due to their belief that arbitrary governance and contingent employment was necessary to maintain order. A new tenure policy was adopted in 1955, after some unrest among the faculty, but Turner retained the absolute authority to remove individuals whose conduct threatened the interests of the college.\(^{23}\) McMillan also criticized the myriad obstacles that prevented the development of a stimulating learning environment. Overcrowding at Hodge Hall and the Mechanical Arts building was commonplace due to their roles as classroom buildings and office space for State and County “Negro Work” boards. The cacophony produced by the combination of choir practices, the buzzing of machines, banging of hammers, and the constant murmuring of young men and women made classroom instruction or quiet study difficult. The campus library provided little respite for studious pupils and devoted faculty. “There is absolutely no space for serious private study. There are no conference rooms, no browsing rooms, no exhibition rooms. The librarians are all crowded together in one

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 175.
\(^{23}\) Hine, *South Carolina State University*, 229-230. Faculty members could be suspended for misconduct, failure to perform required duties, staff reductions, curtailment or discontinuation of a department or school, and conduct detrimental to the best interest of the college.
room that is always overflowing with uncatalogued new books, and every other obstructions thing that can be packed into a library,” McMillan observed. This also included other teachers who, due to the lack of available office space, often prepared lectures and consulted with students in the horribly cramped facility.

McMillan blamed South Carolina’s white political leaders and southern accreditation agents for the seemingly interminable state of decay at State College and, ultimately, the failure to offer quality higher education to Black students in the Palmetto State. State officials, with the lone exception of the increase in appropriations and building program that followed the Wrighten decision, loathed to conduct an honest audit of conditions at State College because of the prohibitive costs of transforming the state’s only public HBCU into a first-rate institution and, equally important, the potential danger that such introspection posed to the entire system of segregated higher education. Accreditation inspectors were blinded by their own prejudices or mistakenly viewed state leaders as mature, self-correcting stewards of the public trust rather than power brokers in a racial caste system. When faced with undeniable evidence of the fruits of their inaction—such as the stifling, miserable, and antiquated State College laundry—inspectors were slow to pressure government officials for redress. Exasperated State College presidents and altruistic health care professionals waited decades for legislators to provide funds to modernize such dangerously antiquated facilities. Generational neglect of Black institutions of higher learning had created a massive gap in educational opportunities between the races that had not even begun to close. “As one looks to the future, the outlook for public higher education for Negroes in the state of South Carolina is very dark. Practically everything remains to be done; even the beginning has yet to be
made,” McMillan lamented.  

McMillan’s candid, amply researched study largely failed to arouse public support for reforms in higher education. Instead, his book incensed members of both races and eventually led to his dismissal from State College. Black alumni were particularly upset at McMillan for insulting their schools and airing dirty laundry without offering real solutions to the problems they faced. 

Lighthouse and Informer editor John McCray, however, commended McMillan’s diagnosis of the “crystal-clear ailments” afflicting South Carolina HBCUs even if his observations were laced with the “taint of vindictiveness of vengeance.” McCray and other members of the Black press defended McMillan’s right to free speech and commended him for dramatizing the plight of Black colleges in the state. 

The fiery editor and civil rights activist questioned whether Black

24 Hine, South Carolina State University, 227; McMillan, Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina, 174, 180-182, 221. McMillan recognizes State Board of Health epidemiologist Dr. A.H. Hayden as an unbiased critic of the government’s sustained neglect and indifference toward conditions at State College. Dr. Hayden spent nearly two decades fighting alongside President Wilkinson in his fight for appropriations to build new dormitories and improve existing classroom spaces. The State College laundry had long been a source of controversy among frustrated administrators and students. President Miller F. Whittaker, upon the urging of numerous students, urged state officials to provide funds or solicit a loan from the Public Works Administration for the construction of a new facility. His pleas went unanswered. In 1945, a special legislative committee toured State College and raved about the conditions of the buildings and grounds—except for the dormitories and laundry. The committee suggested the provision of funds for “a new and adequate laundry building and equipment” but nothing was done. McMillan visited the “weird, dilapidated, old, two-story frame building” several years later and found that conditions had considerably worsened. State College co-eds braved puddles of water and stood on warped boards to keep their feet dry and relied upon ancient wash boards to clean their clothes. They also attempted to dry their clothes using “crude wires” extended over tall, wet grass.

25 “Negro Historian Fired for Attack on South Carolina System,” 2. White liberals in South Carolina responded to McMillan’s book with a mixture of pride and shame. “This book should be read by every South Carolinian regardless of race. It should be required reading in schools. It should be publicized from one end of the State to the other…..,” wrote The Columbia Record, “The facts which McMillan describes should be a deep source of shame to every resident of the Palmetto State, not so much because the conditions as he describes them exist, but because we are, for the most part, totally ignorant of them…..” Such ignorance seems farfetched considering that several studies of Black higher education in South Carolina had been conducted prior to the publication of McMillan’s book. White South Carolinians knew these conditions existed but were uncomfortable with them being publicized, least of all by an African American scholar.

colleges should be measured with the same yardstick as those of white institutions. “No one has presumed, or should now presume, that graduates of South Carolina’s Negro colleges are prepared as well as those who are turned out by white colleges in the state,” he wrote. McCray noted that most of the better trained Black professionals were trained elsewhere as a result of the availability of scholarships for African American students to attend graduate and professional schools beyond the state’s borders. Black college presidents, however, were not solely responsible for the paltry condition of these institutions. These men spent much of their time “running around begging funds in order to stay in business” rather than attending to educational matters due to the apathy and selfishness of rank and file supporters.

On February 3, 1953, a day after McMillan announced the impending publication of his book, Turner summoned him to his office and reminded him that policy forbade any member of the faculty to “vilify” State College or any sister institution in the state. He bitterly complained that he had not been permitted to read the manuscript and warned that any violation of this rule would be subject to review by the Board of Trustees.

“Remember, now, Doctor McMillan, that you have a good job here at the College,” he cautioned. Three months later, McMillan—now a published author—greeted a State College janitor with a friendly, “Hi, neighbor,” as was his usual custom. The janitor told McMillan that a rumor was circulating that he had been dismissed. The following day, May 6, he received a one-sentence letter from the president informing him that he would

---

not be offered a contract for the 1953-54 school year. Turner did not thank him for his service.

Because State College lacked a tenure policy, McMillan had few options to appeal. After all, the existence of tenure would have set up the possibility of a Black person questioning white authority. The Board of Trustees would not let him appear before it to plead his case, but he was permitted to file a formal letter of complaint. McMillan begged trustees to rescind the president’s decision. The veteran scholar described his firing as a “death sentence” imposed by Turner, an autocrat who served as judge, jury, witness, and executioner. Reiterating that Turner had not read a single line of the manuscript nor had he received a copy of the book, McMillan described his firing as an egregious violation of his personal and academic freedom. The board ignored his pleas. Stunned but defiant, McMillan asked SACS, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) for assistance. SACS officials informed him that they lacked the necessary resources to investigate. Turner later informed their executive secretary, J.M. Godard, that McMillan was not afforded a hearing because he was not dismissed while under contract. His contract was simply not renewed. He added that McMillan had demonstrated a level of hostility and antipathy toward the university that nullified any requirement to recognize his right to academic freedom. McMillan’s inquiry to the AAUP languished for nearly four years and was eventually stymied by Turner, who informed investigators that there was no record of the case. Heartbroken and disillusioned, McMillan and his wife, Karen, left

---


McMillan’s dismissal laid bare many internal problems within the institution that could not be solved with a few modern buildings and the hiring of token faculty with doctoral degrees. To become a truly cutting-edge university, State College needed quality, well compensated faculty who could teach and write on controversial subjects without fear of reprisals. The college lacked a tenure policy, instead relying upon the predominantly white Board of Trustees to protect the employment rights and academic freedom of faculty members. Their contingent status suited Turner and his fellow administrators just fine because they could remove troublemakers quickly and without cause. Even decorated senior faculty like McMillan were vulnerable to dismissal if they failed to toe the line. After his dismissal, Turner devised and implemented a new tenure policy that made explicit the second-class status of State College faculty. Faculty members could be dismissed for misconduct, laid off without warning and “conduct detrimental to the best interest of the college.” The president determined what constituted detrimental conduct but, as evidence of his evolving magnanimity, terminated faculty were given thirty days’ notice. Throughout the coming decade, State College faculty remained junior partners in the daily operations of the college, forced to walk on eggshells rather than risk their livelihood in pursuit of larger intellectual or activist aims. It was not until the dawn of the civil rights movement in Orangeburg that faculty found
their voice and made common cause with student activists in their fight against Jim Crow on and off campus.  

Fred Moore and the Rise of a Vibrant Student Movement at South Carolina State College

The Orangeburg freedom movement began in earnest during the summer of 1955 when fifty-seven Black parents signed and submitted a petition requesting that the local school board take steps to eliminate segregation in county public schools in compliance with the Brown mandate. The petition was produced by the Orangeburg NAACP, led by Reverend Matthew McCollom, a Methodist minister, and James Sulton, a World War II veteran and co-owner of a local Esso station. Attorney Newton Pough, a graduate of the recently established State College Law School, assisted in drafting the petition. The campaign involved working and middle-class African Americans, many of whom were skilled laborers and business owners in the city’s segregated business district. Whites in Orangeburg, like those in communities across the South, were outraged by this attempt to desegregate public schools “with all deliberate speed.” Led by local insurance agent W.T. C. Bates, with the support of influential local and state politicians and businessmen, they organized a White Citizens’ Council and exacted a campaign of economic terror against the petitioners to force them to withdraw their support for school desegregation. Orangeburg mayor Robert H. Jennings, who operated the Palmetto Bakery, Orangeburg Fuel and Ice, Paradise Ice Cream and the local Coca-Cola distributor, refused to deliver his goods to Black grocers. The council also forced local merchants to withdraw credit from an estimated 2,000 suspected members of the NAACP, whose names were publicly

30 Hine, South Carolina State University, 230.
distributed. Sulton’s Esso station was denied gasoline and his drink machines sat empty. Sharecroppers, skilled tradesmen, and even a municipal employee who signed the petition lost their homes and livelihood. Roughly half of the original signers removed their names.  

White rage against the federalist machine exploded in other sections of the state as well. Segregationists set ablaze Lake City’s historic St. James AME Church, where Clarendon County NAACP organizer J.A. DeLaine was exiled due to his courageous leadership in the grassroots movement to equalize public schools that led to the Briggs lawsuit. It was the first Black church in the South burned in response to the Supreme Court verdict. Built in 1918, on the scorched earth where Frazier Baker and his family were lynched 37 years earlier, St. James narrowly avoided becoming the site of another brutal massacre. In the year leading up to the arson, the pastor’s home was struck with bricks, broken bottles and other missiles and riddled with gunfire. Alerted by neighbors, DeLaine narrowly escaped South Carolina with his life and never returned. In Clarendon County, whose population was roughly 85 percent African American, white grocers refused to sell to Black customers forcing those who were able to travel as far away as Columbia to purchase bare necessities. Sharecroppers found to be supportive of the NAACP petition drive were forced to immediately pay to use farm machinery and tools or were simply evicted. Nearly 500 Black farmers and field hands could not afford

to buy milk, clothing, pay medical expenses, or prepare for the next planting season because white banks denied them loans. “The NAACP made a horrible mistake. We overextended the white man’s integrity. I don’t know how low these white people will eventually get. If the NAACP loses this battle, it will be 100 years before Negroes can stand up as men,” Rev. McCollum feared. White South Carolinians’ campaign of economic terror bred a slow, gnawing hunger across the state’s Black Belt but, equally important, inspired Black communities to unite and fight back.

Black South Carolinians rallied to the defense of beleaguered farmers in Clarendon County and others harmed by the Citizens’ Council domestic terror campaign. The Orangeburg NAACP responded in kind, urging local Blacks to patronize select white businesses while avoiding those owned by prominent Council members. Supporters refused to purchase Sunbeam bread, Standard Oil products, Paradise Ice Cream, Coca-Cola, and bypassed certain downtown stores and dealerships. White merchants on the “don’t buy list” panicked as loyal Black customers spent their money elsewhere. Clarendon County sharecroppers also dug in their heels. “I ain’t taking my name off the list until Thurgood Marshall comes down here and tells me,” quipped Ladson Stukes, a 65-year-old sharecropper and father of 25 children. NAACP officials statewide coordinated efforts to find temporary work for local farmers and distributed donations from concerned citizens nationwide. Longtime NAACP activist Modjeska Simkins spearheaded a humanitarian aid campaign from Motel Simbeth, a segregated hotel that she co-owned in Columbia. At the behest of Jet reporter Simeon Booker, who stayed at the motel after barely escaping Lake City with his life, she collected money, canned

33 “South Carolina’s Plot to Starve Negroes,” 9-11; Hine, South Carolina State University, 232.
goods, and clothing for those in need.34

Fueled by outrage over the murder of Emmett Till, meanness toward Black children closer to home and, later, encouraged by the success of the Montgomery bus boycott, Black South Carolinians stood firm. The racial stalemate dragged on into the following spring, when State College students joined the fray.35 In March 1956, Sulton

---

34 Modjeska Montieth Simkins, interview by Jacqueline Dowd Hall, Interview G-0056-2, 28 July 1976, Southern Oral History Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC; Katherine Allen, “Searching for Motel Simbeth,” https://www.historiccolumbia.org/blog/searching-motel-simbeth (Accessed November 9, 2019); “South Carolina’s Plot to Starve Negroes,” 13. Simkins told Hall that Booker, South Carolina NAACP executive secretary Rev. A.C. Redd, and Elloree NAACP president L.A. Blackman visited her at Motel Simbeth shortly after DeLaine’s church was burned. The motel was not much safer. It had already been attacked at least two times in 1956. Booker, who came to South Carolina after covering the trial for the murderers of Emmett Till, snuck into Lake City in disguise and took photos of the charred remains of the church. They escaped in the nick of time. During a conversation, Booker suggested that Jet place a small text box in the middle of the page soliciting donations for those in need. Simkins agreed to house the goods in a vacant store and another building owned by her brother. She was later invited by Adam Clayton Powell to speak at Abyssinian Church in New York. Donations poured in from as far away as Quito, Ecuador. Motel Simbeth was demolished in 1965. An office park sits at its former location. See also “Summary of Letters of Support,” Pages 1-10, Modjeska Simkins Papers, 1909-1992, Series: Topical Files, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Feb.-Sept. 1955, South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C. For more on Simkins’ visit to New York see “Press Release from the Young Women’s Civic League of Abyssinian Baptist Church,” in the same collection and folder. For more on the first two attacks on Motel Simbeth see “Negro Motel is Fired Upon a Second Time,” The State, March 17, 1956, 3B; Judge J. Waties Waring aided the effort by sending three automobiles full of food and clothing to suffering Black farmers and other citizens in Orangeburg and Clarendon County. See “Waring Helps Collect ‘Relief’ for SC Negroes,” The State, March 18, 1956, 1A, 2A.

35 Ramon M. Jackson, “Sacrifices and Errors: The Story of the 1955 Cannon Street YMCA All-Stars” (M.A. Thesis: The University of Charleston, 2007); “Baseball Dreams Deferred: The Story of the 1955 Cannon Street Y.M.C.A. All-Stars,” Part 1, July 10, 2014, Sport in American History blog, https://ussporthistory.com/2014/07/10/baseball-dreams-deferred-the-story-of-the-cannon-street-ymca-all-stars-part-i/; “Baseball Dreams Deferred: The Story of the 1955 Cannon Street Y.M.C.A. All-Stars,” Part Two, September 1, 2014, Sport in American History blog, https://ussporthistory.com/2014/09/01/baseball-dreams-deferred-the-story-of-the-cannon-street-y-m-c-a-all-stars-part-two/. White South Carolinians victimized Black children on numerous occasions to preserve the southern way of life. Even something as seemingly trivial as Little League Baseball became a political football during the summer of 1955. In 1953, Cannon Street YMCA president Robert F. Morrison established the Cannon Street Little League, which became the only all-Black league sanctioned by Little League Baseball, Inc., two years later. After the first half of the 1955 season, Morrison and the league’s four coaches selected an “All-Star” team to represent the league in Charleston’s traditionally segregated Little League tournament. City officials canceled the event and, eventually, all 60 of the white teams in South Carolina boycotted the state tournament rather than play the team. After being denied entry into the regional tournament on a technicality, the Cannon Street All-Stars were invited to Williamsport as guests. During a warmup session before the title game, they were hailed with chants of “Let Them Play!” by the awestruck crowd. The following year, white Little League teams across the South formed Dixie Youth Baseball, founded to uphold segregated play in the region.
met with Fred Henderson Moore, the State College student body president, and Reverend Francis Donlan, a local Catholic priest, and asked for their support. Moore, a graduate of Charleston’s Burke High School, attended State College on scholarship, one of hundreds awarded by white leaders in the city to maintain the color line at The College of Charleston. The State College senior, eager to support the NAACP campaign but aware that such activism could prove costly, sought out President Turner for advice.

The autocrat—a loner with no real ties to the Black community—warned Moore against such action arguing that the college was “separate and distinct from the Orangeburg community, and should not be involved in civic matters.” Moore dissembled but secretly galvanized support among students for the NAACP campaign. State College students focused their attack on the Floyd Dining Hall, which continued to serve products sold by Mayor Jennings. On March 25, 1956, student activists desecrated their food and left the dining hall without eating. In later protests, they assembled singing, “We Shall Overcome” and promptly threw their food into the garbage. Some students supported the boycott by purchasing meals from nearby Orangeburg restaurants. To their dismay, Turner and the Board of Trustees refused to cancel the contracts.36

Meanwhile, in Columbia, Governor Timmerman signed a series of bills designed to preserve segregation and, more importantly, cripple the ability of the NAACP to recruit soldiers for its growing army of freedom fighters. Proposed and drafted during what became known as the “Segregation Session” of January 1956, these proposals

created an atmosphere of fear, apprehension, and paranoia that forced Black civil rights activists into the shadows and divided them from their liberal and progressive allies. Legislators passed measures supporting the closure of public institutions—including State College—in the event of court-ordered integration, prohibited NAACP membership among public school teachers and government employees, and conspired to create a legislative committee to investigate subversive activities in Orangeburg. Playing upon public fear and apprehension of outsiders and foreigners rooted in the Cold War, Timmerman and his legislative allies deftly linked rising militancy within the state’s Black population to a vast communist conspiracy that threatened to disrupt America’s racial hierarchy. News of the impending state investigation infuriated State College students and faculty. “This is not a mental institution nor a penal institution but an institution of higher learning, attended by free people in a free land,” declared Moore. On March 27, students proceeded to hang Turner, local state legislator Jerry Hughes, and Governor Timmerman in effigy on campus. Perhaps alluding to more sordid abuses committed by the State College president, someone scrawled the word “brain” on the crotch of the Turner effigy. Not to be outdone, students from neighboring Claflin College picketed several white-owned businesses in downtown Orangeburg a few days later. One student carried a sign urging onlookers to “Join the NAACP.” President Turner could no longer conceal the roiling discontent among students at State College. He, the Board of Trustees, and white authorities were saved by the proverbial bell when,

---

37 Williams, Freedom and Justice, 123-125.
38 Hine, South Carolina State University, 234-235; Williams, Freedom and Justice, 98, 102-104; Williams, Out-of-the-Box-in-Dixie, 130-131; “State College Head Denies Legislator ‘Hung’ in Effigy,” The State, March 27, 1956, 6B.
on April 3, students from both schools went on Spring Break.

Beating back the fear caused by Turner’s self-serving, draconian tenure policies, State College faculty angrily rebuked Governor Timmerman and his legislative allies for their ham-fisted attempt to interfere in the daily operations of the college by restricting the First Amendment rights and academic freedoms of the campus community. After circulating an anonymous resolution two days before the student demonstrations began, the State College faculty presented Turner and the Board of Trustees with a new version that was signed by all but one of 177 instructors and administrators. Faculty members, they wrote, could not teach effectively “if pressures and attempts at intimidation are leveled at us—no matter from whence they come.” The faculty made no specific demands but reminded readers that federal officials did not consider the NAACP a subversive organization. Affirming their support for “law and order” and respect for the Supreme Court, the teachers urged South Carolina lawmakers and white citizens to respect their constitutional rights and freedoms. State officials, however, believed that an explosion was imminent. In response to the heated protests in late March, Governor Timmerman announced plans to dispatch SLED agents to Orangeburg to investigate and root out the “subversive elements” that had infiltrated the campus community.39 His endorsement of the use of surveillance and white police power, the first in a series of state-sponsored incursions at State College over the next two decades, infuriated students and faculty. South Carolina held its collective breath as Black students returned to

39 “State College Head Denies Legislator ‘Hung’ in Effigy,” The State, March 27, 1956, 6B; Hine, South Carolina State University, 233-235; Williams, Freedom and Justice, 106-108; Williams, Out-of-the-Box-in-Dixie, 130-131. Historian William Hine implies that Turner was the source of these rumors. Shortly after meeting with State College students following their initial protests, he reportedly told trustees that the students were being “exploited by outside forces.”
When the campus reopened on Monday, April 9, 1956, nearly all the 1,500 members of the State College student body refused to attend class. Moore and other strike leaders played coy about their reasons for the campus revolt but informed the public that the boycott would continue until Governor Timmerman withdrew his decision to send SLED agents to Orangeburg. President Turner warned students that failure to return to class would result in expulsion, but they remained united. Over the next few days, acting Orangeburg police chief C.H. Hall informed the public that the campus appeared “very quiet” and no disturbances had been reported. State College students conducted themselves as normal—but remained committed to the boycott of classes. White reporters breathlessly challenged the seriousness of the strike by describing State College students as immoral delinquents more interested in reading comic books and playing cards than taking advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to them. Moore blasted such criticism as “ridiculous” and urged reporters to avoid presenting a few “scattered cases” as representative of the entire student body.40

State College students and faculty finally expressed their deep-rooted discontent with life under white supremacy in Orangeburg and, equally important, with Turner’s autocratic regime. Encouraged by several faculty members, student leaders drafted a resolution condemning the State College president’s haughty and capricious leadership style and outlining a litany of grievances. Moore and his allies expressed concern that the planned state investigation into NAACP activities at State College was an opening salvo in a protracted campaign to transform the school into something akin to a reformatory

40 “Students Hit Surveillance,” The State, April 11, 1956, 15A.
rather than a modern college. Deftly connecting their own educational experience to the enrichment of Orangeburg’s segregationist white political and business elite, student activists reiterated their earlier call for the Turner administration to discontinue the sale of products distributed by franchises owned by WCC members and sympathizers. Student leaders called for an end to the use of local police in handling disciplinary matters and a halt to ongoing surveillance campaigns. Campus rebels directed the bulk of their ire towards Turner, who behaved more like a plantation overseer than a college president. They complained that the State College president ruled with an iron fist and operated a patronage system that rewarded students and faculty who catered to his “petty, personal, and private likes and dislikes” and used threats, investigations, and disciplinary “inquisitions” to intimidate and oust dissenters. Such behavior was inconsistent with life at a democratic institution where the First Amendment and academic freedom were supposed to be sacrosanct. State College students urged Turner and his loyalists to foster an “atmosphere of congeniality and friendly relations” by granting them a greater voice in the daily operations of the college, including the right to elect representatives to serve on the Disciplinary Committee, a revised policy for campus publications, and the right to negotiate with faculty to revise existing rules and regulations. A positive first step, of course, would be to extend amnesty to all students involved in the uprising. After distributing copies of the resolution, students conducted a vote of confidence on Turner’s leadership at a mass meeting. Of the 716 who voted, only two expressed satisfaction with his leadership.41

Behind-the-scenes negotiations between Turner and student leaders resulted in an

---

41 Williams, *Freedom and Justice*, 105.
end to the strike on April 13. President Turner cautioned trustees against disciplinary action because order had been restored but promised to discipline any individual guilty of violating the law or college regulations. State College students remained unified and kept their silence, which made it difficult to keep such a pledge. Fred Moore, the charismatic leader of the protest movement, could not hide. On April 25, Turner recommended his immediate expulsion and trustees eagerly concurred. Weeks before he was supposed to graduate, Moore retrieved his belongings from his dormitory and was escorted from the campus. Upon learning that he was to be expelled, hundreds of exuberant State College students gathered near Wilkinson Hall to bid him farewell.42 Weeks later, Turner ordered fourteen additional students—identified by the Dean of Women as leaders, agitators, and sympathizers with the strike—suspended for the 1956-1957 academic year. Turner informed their families that the students had been unwilling to “conform sincerely and loyally” to the regulations of the College. In subsequent letters to suspended students, the State College president expressed hope that they would be able to transfer to other educational institutions and continue their college careers. True to form, Turner worked behind-the-scenes to ensure that this would not happen. Moore and a handful of his more well-connected peers were able to enroll at other institutions and earn degrees while

42 Hine, *South Carolina State University*, 236; Williams, *Freedom and Justice*, 2, 12-13, 37, 98, 105, 109-112, 118-122; Williams, *Out-of-the-Box-in-Dixie*, 133-137. Other students suffered as a result of the purge of dissidents initiated by Turner and the Board of Trustees. Turner rescinded a scholarship offer made to Wilkinson High School graduate and amateur photographer Cecil Williams after a series of iconic photographs of Moore’s departure appeared in the magazine. Shortly thereafter, Jet Associate editor Francis H. Mitchell offered him a position as a freelance correspondent and Claflin president Dr. H.V. Manning offered Williams a full scholarship. Williams opened his first photography studio in downtown Orangeburg near the campuses of South Carolina State and Claflin colleges where he had easy access to photograph sit-ins and other demonstrations in the early 1960s. Williams was also a correspondent for the Baltimore Afro-American and a contributor to *The Crisis*, the official publication of the NAACP. His close relationship with SC NAACP executive secretary I. DeQuincey Newman gave him priceless photographic opportunities to document the history of South Carolina’s civil rights struggle.
some, due to Turner’s interference, never returned to S.C. State or enrolled at any other college. The dictatorial president also moved to sever ties between State College and Claflin students by erecting a chain-link fence between the two campuses, a barrier that stood until his departure in 1968. Despite his best efforts, Turner could not censor collective memory of the strike. Younger student leaders had already distributed a revised list of businesses to be boycotted in the fall. Students coughed and scraped their feet at the mention of the State College president’s name during assemblies in later years.\(^4^3\)

White media in South Carolina were concerned about the potential closure of State College as a result of future unrest because such an occurrence was an existential threat to segregation in higher education. “A closing would leave Negroes without a state-supported college of their own, a situation that might result in their seeking admittance to the state’s white colleges,” The State warned. Segregationists interpreted the State College student uprising as more than a dustup between a hated autocrat and his subjects but, rather, blamed the recent unrest on a larger conspiracy led by the NAACP, Communist Party, and northern agitators seeking to force South Carolina to adhere to the Supreme Court desegregation mandate. The students were simply pawns in a grand

---

\(^4^3\) Hine, *South Carolina State University*, 237-239; Williams, *Freedom and Justice*, 113, 117; Williams, *Out-of-the-Box-in-Dixie*, 138-147; “Say ‘Purge’ Won’t Stop S.C. College Boycott,” *Jet*, July 12, 1956. The fourteen suspended students were Vivian Lennon, Barbara Harrell, Annie Bomar, Vera Rhue, Barbara Brown, Alice Pyatt, Ruthie Mae Sarvis, Rochelle Moore, Geneva White, Claudia Brown, Eugenia Thomas, Alvin Anderson, Earl Bradford, and Roosevelt Brown. Moore and Leroy Nesbitt, one of his main lieutenants, were barred from readmission. After a brief stint at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Fred Moore returned to South Carolina and graduated from Allen University in June 1957. He later earned a law degree at Howard University. Alice Pyatt also graduated from Allen. Scarred and embittered, Pyatt remains outraged at the failure of local NAACP leaders to intervene on behalf of the students despite their willingness to join their cause. Rudolph Pyatt, her brother, was permitted to graduate because he was scheduled to receive a commission in the U.S. Army and such punishment would have complicated matters. Barbara Brown and several others did not receive any offers for further educational training thanks, in part, to Turner’s interference.
scheme that endangered the very fabric of American life. State College trustee W.C. Bethea, for example, discounted the notion that the strike was a spontaneous demonstration led by collegiate activists concluding that “there is definitely leadership somewhere, outside of the college.”

Events that took place during the summer following the strike gave a veneer of truth to such assertions. In late June 1956, Moore and other State College student activists were invited to participate in a press conference at New York’s Abyssinian Church, hosted by the venerable Black representative Adam Clayton Powell. Powell introduced Vivian Lennon, a 21-year-old New York City native and lifelong member of the church, who was one of the sixteen students expelled for coordinating the student strike. Lennon read aloud the letter sent to her and her comrades by the Turner administration explaining their reasons for expelling the group. Afterwards, Powell blasted the board asserting that they were all members of the Citizens Council. He charged that Turner, a “captive’ figurehead, had expelled the “cream of the student body” on their orders as retaliation for the counterboycott. The firebrand preacher pledged to bring the issue before Congress during its upcoming debate over legislation to provide federal aid to public schools. “There shouldn’t be any federal funds sent to any state that is conducting a reign of terror in defiance of the elementals of federal law,” he thundered. Powell proposed a series of amendments that barred federal funds to states with segregated schools on appropriations bills to raise funds for State College and other southern land grant colleges and universities, but they were easily defeated by southern legislators. Powerful whites in South Carolina viewed such activities as evidence that

greater vigilance was required to preserve the southern way of life. “The board is not going to put up with any such insurrections,” Bethea warned, “The NAACP is just trying to goad us into closing the school, so they’ll have an excuse to seek entrance at our white colleges.”

After temporarily silencing the State College student movement, Governor Timmerman and his legislative allies turned their attention to Allen University and Benedict College, two private, denominational HBCUs located mere blocks from the State House in Columbia. Allen administrators’ decision to admit Moore upon his return from exile raised suspicions among segregationist politicians that the A.M.E. supported institution of higher learning was again becoming the chief center for Black militancy in South Carolina and a haven for integrationists, Communists, and other subversives who threatened the southern way of life. Few would have described the university in such a way just a few years earlier. During the decade following the 1946 Southern Youth Legislature, Allen’s reputation as a strong, financially independent educational institution had sharply declined and no longer did it boast a cadre of vocal, progressive scholar-activists who made the school a haven for grassroots political organizing. Cold War racial politics, increased fear of white reprisals, and an increasingly desperate financial situation fostered a heightened conservatism among university leadership. Further complicating matters was the fact that the university functioned less like an educational institution than the headquarters of the presiding Bishop of the Seventh District of the AME Church, now Rev. Frank Madison Reid. Lacking substantive financial support from the national body and unable to accept state appropriations, the university relied

---

45 “15 SC State Students Expelled,” *The State*, June 26, 1956, 1A, 10A.
heavily upon student fees and the largesse of ministers and alumni to fund its daily operations. With balance sheets dripping with red ink, Allen faculty sacrificed portions of their salaries to keep the school afloat. Desperate for financial support, Bishop Reid privileged the desires of conservative benefactors—including a few anonymous whites—over the need for academic freedom or the concerns of the larger community. Communist organizers, leftist political activists, and avant-garde intellectuals were barred from speaking on campus.46

Bishop Reid and longtime Allen president Samuel Higgins encouraged students to avoid controversy and publicly endorsed programs and activities that upheld traditions of self-help, respectability, and political accommodation as the only acceptable solutions to the race problem. Allen regularly hosted denominational conferences where guest speakers—most of whom were church leaders or low-level government officials—advised young people to read the Bible daily and visit the sick but refrained from broaching controversial topics such as desegregation.47 Upon learning of the Brown decision, Bishop Reid publicly questioned whether Black South Carolinians were truly ready for the integrated world to come. “When integration comes in its full force, I am afraid many of us will be inadequate for the task,” the minister warned. “Integration can be workable,” he surmised, “when our parents will see to it that their children who may attend mixed schools are dressed with modern style and able to compete with any child.” Rather than urge blacks to move quickly to desegregate public schools, Reid advocated a far more gradual approach predicated upon the ability of blacks to prove their readiness

46 McMillan, Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina, 97-101.
for integration by perfecting themselves and building strong institutions despite Jim
Crow. Successful boycotts and litigation campaigns in Alabama and closer to home in
Orangeburg failed to convince Reid and other conservative black officials at Allen and
Benedict to reconsider their views on civil rights protest. While NAACP officials urged
blacks to boycott white businesses to challenge Jim Crow in the Palmetto State, ministers
and administrators at Allen urged caution. “Things cannot be changed overnight,”
warned Rev. J. Arthur Holmes, an Allen administrator and president of the
Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, during a meeting held shortly after the
Supreme Court struck down an appeal to maintain bus segregation in April 1956.
Despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary, Holmes believed that the “city fathers”
would cooperate in order to prevent “a Montgomery affair in our proud state.” Lacking
intellectual stimulation and mentored by accommodationist officials, Allen students were
largely absent from campaigns for racial and educational equality during the early
1950s.48

Alarmed by the resurgent militancy among Allen faculty and students, the
governor attempted to utilize state authority to prevent any further dissolution of the color
line in higher education and halt the development of a much larger campaign to end
segregation beyond the campus walls. Shortly after the publication of the controversial
bulletin, Governor Timmerman warned Allen president Frank Veal that he would have to

48 “Bishop Reid Tells Negroes to Live Up to Their Aims,” The State, July 28, 1954, 6A; “Things Can’t Be
Changed Overnight,” Negroes to Be Told from Pulpit,” The State, April 26, 1956, 8D. On February 26,
1956, the NAACP and Allen University hosted separate events that highlighted this difference of opinion.
In an address given to the Southeastern regional conference of the NAACP in Charleston, Michigan
Representative Charles C. Diggs urged delegates to conduct boycotts to force white businesses to hire and
serve blacks. On the same day, Bishop W.R. Wilkes, resident bishop of the 12th A.M.E. District, urged
Allen graduates to embrace self-help and racial unity but made little mention of ongoing civil rights
campaigns. See “Negro Urges Boycotts to Force Mixing,” and “2,000 Attend Convocation at Allen,” in
The State, February 27, 1956, 10B.
dismiss three professors from the faculty—Dr. John G. Rideout, Dr. Edwin Hoffman, and Dr. Forrest O. Wiggins—whom he considered to be corrupting influences on impressionable Allen students. Veal refused. His resolve inspired Allen University students to take matters into their own hands. On January 15, 1958, eleven students, mostly education majors, left the A.M.E. institution and walked toward the campus of the University of South Carolina. Four members of the group were A.M.E. ministers who returned to Allen for advanced training. Upon witnessing their arrival, a white student leaned out of a nearby window and shouted, “Here come the niggers!” Undaunted, the students filed into the Osborne Administration building and visited the office of Dr. W.C. McCall, the director of the examination and counseling bureau, to request applications for enrollment. “According to the orders under which we operate, I cannot examine you. Therefore, there is no purpose in giving you application blanks,” McCall responded. After politely thanking him, the students returned to Allen. During an interview with local reporters, the students, who chose to remain anonymous, justified their actions. A few of the students, prioritizing institutional autonomy and self-determination over integration, blamed the State Board of Education’s withdrawal of teacher certification for their protest, only later adding that “segregation per se is unconstitutional.” Another student, reflective of the divide within the black community claimed that integration was the primary objective. “We went down there, not as a unit but as individuals,” he explained, “We all feel that Negroes have been ostracized by being kept out of the university and our cups are just about to run over…We will strive to gain our objective through legal means but we will see this through!” Whites at the University of South
Carolina were equally adamant about maintaining racial tradition. Several hours after the Allen student protesters left campus, a small group of white students hung a man in effigy. Etched across its chest was a warning: “They Tried but Don’t You.” While the dummy swayed in the breeze, the racist youths burned a large cross in the heart of campus. Allen officials reportedly received bomb threats later in the evening. The battle lines had been clearly drawn.

Five of the students returned to McCall’s office the following afternoon armed with completed application forms acquired from an unnamed source. “The response is that I cannot accept your application,” McCall replied. After being rebuffed multiple times, the students again politely thanked him but promised they would mail their applications. An unidentified Allen University student held true to his word. Roughly a week after the protest, he was mailed a rejection letter and the money order used to pay the application fee. “As I advised you orally,” McCall wrote, “I am not in a position to give you the entrance examination which you requested.” Not to be outdone, four Benedict College students tried their luck a few days later. When they arrived, they found McCall in a foul mood. Upon their request for application blanks, McCall mocked, “What’s the matter, are you having any trouble at Benedict?” “No, but I think

---


51 “Negro Says USC Sent Him Written ‘No’,” Baltimore Afro-American, January 25, 1958; Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, Reel 37, Box 44, Folder 2, Frame: 0035. Two months later, State NAACP officials met in the Benedict College library to discuss ways to raise funds for a potential lawsuit on behalf of this student to desegregate the University of South Carolina. South Carolina CORE field organizer James T. McCain was also in attendance. The lawsuit was never filed.
they have better facilities here than at any private college. I am a taxpayer and a lifelong resident, and I want to enroll,” one student retorted. Their pleas fell on deaf ears.  

Allen officials disavowed any responsibility for the student protests. According to a source within the administration, President Veal and Bishop Bonner were attending an A.M.E. conference in Chicago while the incidents occurred. When reached for comment, Veal expressed neither surprise nor concern about the students’ actions. “We should not be upset or disturbed by what these young people are doing,” he contended, “They have a serious problem, and nobody should expect them to take what’s been done to them lying down.” In a candid interview with John McCray of the Baltimore Afro-American, two of the students echoed his sentiments. “I enrolled in Allen in good faith,” explained one student protester, “We mortgaged our house so I could go to college and prepare to teach. I studied and worked hard and now, just about the time I can graduate, for no reason of my own, I cannot. What do they think we are going to do?” A male colleague argued that “If Allen isn’t good enough for us anymore then we think the thing to do is to enroll for this last semester at the state-operated University of South Carolina. We thought we had the best, but maybe USC is the best for us.” An all-out attack on segregated higher education seemed to be on the horizon.  

The student-led movement to desegregate South Carolina’s all-white flagship university gained little momentum. In an address to the General Assembly, given on the same day that Allen University students made their initial attempt to desegregate the University of South Carolina, the governor urged the legislature to pass a bill barring state-supported colleges and universities from accepting federal grants that required

52 “4 Benedict Students Try to Enter USC,” The State, January 23, 1958 8A.
53 “‘This is Our Fight,’ Co-Ed Tells AFRO,” Baltimore Afro-American, January 25, 1958.
acceptance of an anti-discrimination clause. Hardening his stance against integration, Timmerman blasted federal intervention in Little Rock as a blow against “the foundation of our freedom” and urged whites to abandon schools integrated through military force. Unaware of the turmoil taking place just blocks from the State House, the governor predicated that integration would only bring about race hatred and applauded “responsible colored people” for their “good sense in refusing to follow the false advice of communist agitators and their dupes.” Throughout his remarks, Timmerman utilized anti-communist rhetoric to slander and marginalize the burgeoning student-driven grassroots movement emerging in his own backyard. Turning his attention to the Allen University controversy, the governor blamed the State Board of Education’s decision to withdraw certification on the three professors’ refusal to resign their posts.

Still reeling from his defeat at Allen, Governor Timmerman faced stiff resistance to his effort to oust the three subversive faculty members at neighboring Benedict College. One of his primary targets, Humanities chairman Dr. Lewis Smith, pledged that he and his colleagues refused to submit to Timmerman’s “strong arm methods” and urged administrators not to lay prostrate before the “same forces that would keep the Negro people from achieving full equality.” Initially, they agreed. In a lengthy letter to the governor, Bacoats denied ever having been a member of the Communist Party and proclaimed himself a believer in God. The Benedict president also shared a telegram from the Justice Department that indicated that the hosts of the 1941 dinner-forum were not listed as subversives by HUAC. Sensing that Timmerman held the Benedict

---

administration responsible for the students’ recent attempts to desegregate USC, Bacoats informed him that he had no knowledge of such activity until it was reported in the media and reminded the governor that “a college has no authority to direct or to be responsible for where the students make applications for admission.” Turning the tables on the governor, Bacoats expressed hope that “it is not the general policy of the Governor of South Carolina to label as communists and to attempt to smear the character and to discredit the leadership of citizens of the State who do not accept and agree with the governor’s points of view in regard to race and human relations.” Additionally, he warned Timmerman and other segregationists that it was “improbable” that they would be able “to stall or to forever delay the democratic and Christian social changes” taking place in the nation and around the globe. That said, he promised to continue to ask applicants to disavow affiliation with the Communist Party in oral and written form in accordance to state law. Paul Wheeler, the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Benedict College Board of Trustees, gave Bacoats his vote of confidence and promised that the three accused faculty members and other subversives would be granted due process and, if found guilty of Communist loyalties, would be removed “with equity and justice.”

To Timmerman’s dismay, Wheeler exonerated the three professors a few weeks later.

Governor Timmerman had achieved a pyrrhic victory. Despite the reluctance of state and national NAACP leaders to sue for the admission of black students to the University of South Carolina and Clemson College, the battles over academic freedom

55 “Benedict to Remove Any Communists Found,” The State, February 5, 1958, 8B; “Bacoats Says He Has Never Been Communist,” The State, February 8, 1958, 1B, 8B.
and institutional autonomy during the late 1950s exacted a great toll on the segregationist cause. Activist faculty and students at South Carolina’s public and private HBCUs, on the other hand, had begun to fully realize the promise of citizenship education, grassroots organizing, and nonviolent direct action as effective tactics in their escalating struggle against Jim Crow. Ensconced within the ebony tower, faculty and students at South Carolina State College, Allen University, and Benedict College waged guerrilla warfare against the old order by joining the fight to desegregate public schools and simultaneously organizing powerful campus movements which aimed to improve facilities and curriculum, preserve academic freedom, and protect the basic rights and freedoms won by students in previous decades. Despite the Supreme Court’s desegregation mandate, predominantly white trustees and administrators at these institutions, either out of altruism or a desire to maintain segregation, responded by building modern facilities, hiring well-trained and dynamic faculty, and developing curricula that challenged young minds and expanded their horizons. These changes spawned activist communities on these campuses that applied tremendous pressure on segregationist politicians to cease their assault on these educational institutions.

Segregationist politicians ceded the moral high ground during these intense debates over the purpose of higher education creating an opening for moderates to reassert themselves in the public sphere despite intense campaigns of intimidation and violence by their more reactionary neighbors. In May 1958, Allen graduates, parents, and other visitors gathered to celebrate these victories and look forward to the future. Bishop Joseph Gomez, the keynote speaker, challenged young people to treasure their hard-won “right to inquiry”
and to resist the “tyranny of type” by holding on to the best traditions of the past while embracing new visions and ideas.56

---

CHAPTER 5

WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED: BLACK STUDENT ACTIVISTS FORGE RACIAL PEACE IN SOUTH CAROLINA

As revealed in previous chapters, African Americans in South Carolina made considerable progress in their quest for racial equality and self-determination during the first two decades after the onset of the Great Depression. The Palmetto State was home to a politically astute, aggressive, militant, and organized freedom movement that used grassroots political organizing, court-centered litigation, and occasional direct-action protest to equalize teacher salaries, end the all-white Democratic Party primary, and establish key legal precedents that were eventually used to abolish Jim Crow in public education and other facets of southern life. Black college students at South Carolina’s HBCUs provided inspiration, energy, manpower, and leadership throughout this campaign while waging an interlocking, yet separate fight for greater student power, racial self-determination, and the equalization of Black higher education. White South Carolinians militantly defended their way of life using political and legal obstruction, intimidation, forced exile, and racial violence to dramatically slow the pace of social change. This white backlash, coupled with the dissolution of the civil rights vanguard and internal disagreement within the Black community over the appropriate response to
the *Brown* decision caused stagnation in the push for desegregation but created openings for the rise of new leadership and the adoption of new and reinvented protest strategies.

Faced with a similar campaign to stall and obstruct desegregation in public schools and accommodations, African Americans in neighboring North Carolina fought back. On February 1, 1960, four students at North Carolina A&T University—Ezell Blair, Jr., David Richmond, Joseph McNeil, and Franklin McCain—walked into a local Woolworth’s in downtown Greensboro, purchased toothpaste and other sundries, and requested service at a nearby lunch counter. “We do not serve Negroes,” the manager responded. After waiting for a few minutes, they left. They returned the next day with several hundred of their classmates and female students from nearby Bennett College, a liberal arts institution for Black women. This simple yet powerful stand for racial equality ignited a generation and intensified the struggle for social justice in the American South. Within two months, the “sit-in movement,” as it was dubbed by the national press, had spread to fifty-four cities in nine states. By 1961, the fierce, organized student protest movement had forced white leaders in nearly one hundred southern cities to desegregate at least a portion of their public accommodations.1 Inspired by the “Greensboro Four,” young Black South Carolinians bucked tradition and engaged in a determined campaign of grassroots political organizing and nonviolent civil disobedience to protest segregation. White leaders initially shrugged off their actions as a youthful fad. Simon Bouie, an Allen University student activist, saw things differently.

---

He credits the student sit-in movement for accelerating the pace of change in Columbia and other sections of the state. “It sharpened the movement,” he explained, “…We kept the fire going.” Impassioned Black students at South Carolina’s segregated high schools and HBCUs rekindled the statewide freedom movement and reduced the old racial order to ashes.

This chapter examines the role and impact of Black youth and college students on the civil rights movement in South Carolina during the early 1960s. Contrary to the consensus narrative of the struggle for civil rights and racial equality in the Palmetto State, which characterizes the transition to integration as a tranquil process whose success was largely due to the magnanimity and political moderation of white politicians and business leaders, this chapter reveals that young Black South Carolinians were the catalysts for the rise of a mass movement that directly challenged the twin evils of Jim Crow segregation and white supremacy that had long trapped African Americans in a vicious cycle of educational inequality, political disfranchisement, and generational poverty. Far from indifferent or apathetic to the plight of the race, Black youth and college students at segregated high schools and HBCUs across South Carolina joined their peers across the South and fought vigorously for racial advancement despite stiff resistance from white political leaders, racial terrorists, conservative activists of both races, and even their own parents and neighbors. These young freedom fighters, both independently and within civil rights organizations such as the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and the NAACP, conducted nonviolent direct-action protest campaigns, registered thousands of Black voters, and served as plaintiffs in hundreds of lawsuits that
overwhelmed the state’s injustice system and eradicated de jure segregation.\(^2\) Black college students in South Carolina ultimately helped to desegregate public accommodations, state-supported educational institutions, and strengthened the First Amendment rights of all Americans. While no single group can take full credit for the eventual desegregation of schools and public accommodations in South Carolina, it is safe to say that Black students were always on the cutting edge of social change. These young activists not only claimed seats at lunch counters but also rented space in the heads of older Black and white leaders as they negotiated a peaceful end to segregation. Fearful white politicians and business leaders, greatly alarmed by the “hurricane force” of Black student activism in cities across the state in 1960, came to understand the futility of continued massive resistance and began to negotiate behind-the-scenes to end segregation. Recognizing that this new generation of Black South Carolinians was fiercely determined to resist and controlled the moral high ground, white politicians moderated their public rhetoric and strategically complied with local demands and federal desegregation mandates in moments where the costs of tokenism was outweighed by the benefit of preserving white superiority, if not supremacy, in state political and educational institutions.

Under the leadership of field secretary Rev. I. DeQuincey Newman, the NAACP gradually reclaimed its status as the dominant civil rights organization in South Carolina during the first half of the 1960s decade. The State NAACP Conference built a powerful

---

\(^2\) “900 Suits in Civil Rights Set to Flood S.C. Courts,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 5, 1961, A3. By this date, NAACP and CORE attorneys were managing over 900 civil rights cases stemming from sit-ins and other protest demonstrations in South Carolina. In addition to these cases, civil rights lawyers in South Carolina also filed suit to desegregate public schools, colleges, and universities in the state and to gain access for Blacks to state parks and other leisure sites. Several former student activists turned civil rights attorneys handled these cases including John Wrighten and Fred Henderson Moore.
movement of youth and college students who conducted sit-in demonstrations, boycotts, marches, and other nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns to pressure white political and business leaders to sue for racial peace. Despite their successes, full integration remained out of reach. To the dismay of their more idealistic young charges, Newman and other veteran civil rights leaders pragmatically pursued token desegregation and other piecemeal victories won through strategic endorsement of direct-action protest and negotiation with white leaders. Public displays of compliance with federal desegregation orders, namely the relatively peaceful admission of Black students to previously all-white Clemson College and the University of South Carolina in early 1963, symbolized the state as an aberration among other southern states in how it dealt with racial strife. Such claims of dignified integration, however, obscure the fact that white moderation fostered a negative peace—While some Black South Carolinians enjoyed a modicum of racial progress, the pace of social pace was glacial. Black gains in urban areas were offset by continued white defiance embodied by violence, labor crackdowns, school privatization, and political gamesmanship. Rural areas were largely unaffected by student demonstrations or the passage of federal civil rights legislation. Perhaps the most significant gains were made on Black college campuses, where students won greater freedom, revised stale curriculum, and ousted conservative presidents. Frustrated by delayed justice and adult leaders’ willingness to settle for crumbs, many Black college students embraced a more revolutionary cultural and political ideology that addressed their concerns.

During the latter half of the 1950s, there were few signs that South Carolina would become an important battleground in the nonviolent struggle for civil rights in the
American South. The South Carolina NAACP State Conference, the dominant civil rights organization for nearly two decades, was greatly weakened by a series of political machinations and economic reprisals orchestrated by proponents of massive resistance to the enforcement of the Brown desegregation mandate. Between 1956 and 1958, fifty South Carolina branches folded and membership in the famed “Dixie District” was cut in half by the end of the decade. South Carolina’s aging vanguard leadership dissolved due to a combination of fatigue, political division, personal animus, and the increased danger that accompanied such activism. Declining in both prestige and manpower, the NAACP became less aggressive, devoting much of its attention to voter registration and fighting segregation in the courts.³ Meanwhile in New York, CORE co-founder and executive secretary James R. Robinson sought to expand the organization’s reach in the South. Founded in 1942 as an extension of the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, CORE maintained a predominantly white, middle class membership and was largely confined to the North throughout its first two decades of existence. Practitioners of Ghandian nonviolence, CORE sent emissaries to train demonstrators during the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott and, afterwards, began to hire staff to organize new chapters to lead mass voter registration drives and nonviolent direct-action campaigns to challenge segregation. Robinson handpicked James T. McCain to spearhead efforts to expand its reach into other states in the Deep South. A graduate of Morris College and Temple University, McCain served as president of the Sumter NAACP, where he led the fight to equalize teacher

salaries. During the 1950s, he was employed as principal of Palmetto and Scott’s Branch high schools before being fired due to his activism. He was hired as Associate Director of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations (SCCHR), an affiliate of the Southern Regional Council, where he organized educational programs to strengthen efforts toward interracial cooperation. The interracial and liberal SCCHR documented incidents of racial conflict and regularly provided financial and legal assistance to victims of economic reprisals and racial violence. McCain’s deep personal and activist roots in South Carolina, particularly his access to a broad network of Black teachers and educational professionals, made him the perfect choice.

Beginning in November 1957, McCain toured Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina and met with grassroots activists and civil rights leaders to discuss ways to build local CORE affiliates whose interracial membership would coordinate mass voter registration and nonviolent direct-action campaigns. McCain impressed audiences with his fiery, unapologetic calls for Black citizens to register to vote and directly challenge racial custom. Drawing upon relationships cultivated in his earlier experiences as a civil rights activist and educator, McCain established a foothold for CORE in South Carolina. By 1960, there were active chapters in Sumter, Columbia, Charleston, Clarendon County, Greenville, Florence, Marion County, Rock Hill, Spartanburg, and

---

4 Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, Subject Files: James T. McCain, Correspondence, Reel 37, Box 44, Folder 1, Frames: 00001-00010; Lofton, “Calm and Exemplary,” 72. The SCCHR would play a key role in overseeing negotiations between Black civil rights leaders and white officials in Columbia during the 1960s. Lofton minimizes its transformation during the 1950s from an organization committed to reforming Jim Crow culture through appeals to courtesy and decency into a group devoted to motivating Blacks to become aware of and more involved in civil rights activities. McCain’s brief but effective stint as Associate Director played a huge role in redefining its goals. While not a pressure group, the SCCHR violated Jim Crow custom by educating the public on the humiliations and violence suffered by Blacks in South Carolina and, equally important, roused white liberals to their defense. For more on their role during the student movement in Columbia, see Sauls, “Desegregation in Columbia, South Carolina, 1960-1963” (M.A. Thesis: University of South Carolina, 1994), 32-33.
Marion County. Under McCain’s guidance, members of these CORE affiliates registered new Black voters, organized institutes for citizenship education, and provided escorts to accompany fearful potential voters to the polls.⁵ Despite its non-partisan stance, CORE national leadership understood the importance of Black political organizing to its mission to desegregate the South. In 1958, the Clarendon County CORE reorganized the dormant Republican party and appointed themselves as delegates to its state convention. In Sumter, the local CORE affiliate registered enough Black voters to name all but one delegate sent to the state Democratic convention. News of these victories was shared nationwide in the CORE-lator, the official newsletter of the civil rights organization. Readers were greeted by the beaming face of Sarah Pugh, a Sumter native and receptionist, proudly pasting a bumper sticker which read, “I Have Registered. Have You?” Pleased with his progress, Robinson encouraged McCain to find other “enthusiastic men and women” to serve as organizers.⁶

The Sit-In Movement Arrives in South Carolina

South Carolina’s capital city, Columbia, was among the earliest cities in the region that witnessed such activism among Black college students. On February 14-15, 1960, students at Allen University and Benedict College held separate rallies to protest continued school and community segregation. Recognizing the need for larger action, student leaders called a mass meeting of both student bodies and formed a select committee of roughly twenty students to study the events in Greensboro, Raleigh, and

---


⁶ Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, Subject Files: James T. McCain, Correspondence, Reel 37, Box 44, Folder 1, Frames: 00018-00019.
Rock Hill and determine next steps. News of sporadic protests in Orangeburg, organized by State College and Claflin students, increased their sense of urgency and roused their competitive spirit. On March 2, one month after the Greensboro protests, roughly 50 students from Allen University and Benedict College braved sleet and bitter cold to conduct the first sit-in demonstrations at the lunch counter at Woolworth’s on Main Street in downtown Columbia. The protest, which took three days to plan, lasted only eight minutes. When the neatly attired students arrived and sat at the lunch counter, employees roped off the area and posted signs which read, “This Section Closed,” throughout the restaurant. White patrons nonchalantly sipped coffee and ate pie while seated beside them. The students were not served. Undaunted, they soon left and trudged, books in hand, through several nearby department stores to keep warm before making a second failed attempt to receive service at Woolworth’s. Soon afterwards, they journeyed to nearby S.H. Kress department store where white patrons blocked them from claiming seats at the lunch counter. Aware of what had occurred elsewhere, the manager posted signs closing the dining area “in the interest of public safety.” “If we can spend our money at the counters, we should be able to eat there too,” a frustrated student complained to a local reporter, one of several who had been notified about the protests beforehand. After their modestly successful opening salvo against segregation in the city, the students returned to their campuses and spread the word that they planned to

return the following day.

After an early morning rally near the Chappelle Administration building on the Allen campus, roughly 200 students marched in pairs toward Main Street. Plain clothes Columbia police officers, Richland County sheriffs, and SLED agents awaited, under orders to monitor the situation and intervene when necessary to prevent violence. This time, however, local whites were prepared. When Allen and Benedict students arrived at Kress, they discovered that the stools had been removed and signs placed on the counter which read, “Carryout Service Only.” A group of 10 or 15 white youths mocked, insulted, and jostled with the group as they left. Management at Woolworth’s shut down service at its lunch counter and nearby sections, even refusing to serve several whites who were already seated. Tapp’s limited its food service to employees only. Nearly every other business on Main Street closed for the day. Management at McCrory’s, however, momentarily refused to surrender. According to reports, a fair-skinned Black student approached the lunch counter and ordered a hamburger and a cup of tea. “I’m in a big hurry,” he prodded when she hesitated. After receiving the hamburger, he passed it to a darker-skinned classmate who then sat down at the counter. Fearful that others would see the student had been served, the manager rushed to shut off the lights and immediately closed the store. Small groups of students were served at the Belk’s lunch counter, which usually served Black customers if they stood. Rather than allow them to sit, the store manager offered to sell them prepared sandwiches in paper bags if they agreed to leave. As Black students surged into the store, the manager admonished them for “abusing the situation” and closed the restaurant. As the students marched along
Main Street, now largely deserted, white youths formed lines of their own traveling in the opposite direction and yelled obscenities at the demonstrators. Columbia City Manager Irving McNayr, sensing an explosive situation, told student leaders that they had demonstrated “quite long enough.”

Allen and Benedict students returned to campus having served notice that a new day had dawned.

Stunned older Black and white leaders struggled to make sense of what had occurred. “I hadn’t expected it to happen in Columbia,” Allen University president Dr. Frank Veal told reporters. Asked if he had warned against such action, Veal answered in the negative because he never anticipated such an action taking place. Benedict College president J.A. Bacoats, still under fire from Communist obsessed state leaders, cautiously applauded the student protests. Describing student protest as an “ancient and universal practice,” Bacoats expressed reluctance to intervene out of concern that his administration would be deemed a defender of the racial status quo and obstacle to social and political change. He cautioned state law enforcement against violent reprisals warning that such acts would make “heroes and martyrs out of the persecuted” and inspire others to join their cause. Allen and Benedict faculty had quietly done so. Some showed their support by secretly monitoring the protests and even raised bail money for students who were arrested in later demonstrations.

Still reeling from the recent unrest, Columbia City Manager Irving McNayr warned that future demonstrations would

---

9 “Short Sit-Downs Are Staged Here,” 9A; “Negroes Again March Here,” The Columbia Record, March 3, 1960, 1A; “Negroes Again March Here,” The Columbia Record, March 3, 1960, 1A; “Showdown Due Today on Negro Sit-Downs,” The State, March 4, 1960, 1A, 9A; “Sumter Jails Two Negro Students,” The Columbia Record, March 4, 1960, 1A, 2A; Sauls, “Desegregation in Columbia,” 16-17. Allen and Benedict students also visited Silver’s, the luncheonette at the Greyhound bus terminal, the H.L. Green department store, Eckerd’s Drug Store, and Walgreen’s Drug Store. Not all whites maintained their composure. There were unconfirmed reports that at least two women fainted during the demonstrations.

not be tolerated. In a prepared statement, he ordered all law enforcement agencies to prevent any mass march or procession into any section of the city. Further demonstrations of any type, he argued, would endanger lives, property, and “good order.” The beleaguered official urged all college students to make Columbia a safe place to live, work and shop by observing all existing ordinances but pledged that the “rights and privileges of all citizens will be fully protected, without regard to race, creed, or color.”

White reactionaries infuriated by the actions of Black students in Columbia and elsewhere in the state fiercely resisted this new threat to southern racial tradition. In Rock Hill, protesters were kicked, cursed, and doused with harmful chemicals. Blacks and whites in Greenville and Charleston brawled in the streets. Protesters in Orangeburg were gassed and sprayed with high powered hoses in freezing weather before being herded into the stockade outside the city jail. While devoid of the widespread violence found in neighboring cities and other southern states, Black students in Columbia were verbally threatened, intimidated, taunted with racial epithets, spat upon and even stabbed. White reaction to sit-in demonstrations increased the potential for greater racial violence in South Carolina’s capital city. Sometime around midnight, several white youths burned a cross on the campus of Allen University. A brick fight ensued


12 Cecil Williams, Freedom and Justice: Four Decades of the Civil Rights Struggle as Seen by a Black Photographer of the Deep South (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995), 193; Williams, Out of the Box in Dixie: Cecil Williams’ Photography of the South Carolina Events that Changed America (Orangeburg: Self-Published, 2007), 154-155; Newby, Black Carolinians, 324; Sauls, “Desegregation in Columbia,” 19; “White Youth Fined Here for Cursing Picket,” The Columbia Record, March 3, 1961, 11A. In an interview with historian Brad Sauls, Rev. Roscoe Wilson, a former student activist and pastor at St. John’s Baptist Church in Columbia, shared that a local policeman tried to scare students away by threatening violence. “I remember this tall policeman, I could feel his gun rubbing against my back, every time he would pass, I would feel it. He did it deliberately close enough so I could feel that gun on my back,” he remembered.
between the invaders and several Allen students who rushed to the scene after witnessing the blaze. Neither side reported injuries, but several windows were shattered before the white hoodlums sped away into the darkness. The infuriated students plotted their revenge. At dawn on March 5, roughly fifty armed Allen and Benedict students stormed Mac’s Drive-In, a whites-only restaurant located roughly a block from the Allen campus, and requested service. News accounts claim that the shouting, club wielding Black students announced their intent to “take over the place” before breaking the windows of several parked cars and chasing others off the property, injuring a bystander in the process. After a lengthy investigation, fifteen students were arrested and charged with vandalism and disturbing the peace.13

City and state officials immediately began to crackdown on public protest. Rather than call for further investigation into the cross burnings and vandalism at Allen or confront their racial demons, Columbia Mayor Lester Bates and City Manager Irving McNayr demanded that all protesters cease their activities or face arrest. The Columbia

13 “Brief Racial Disturbance Erupts Here,” The State, March 6, 1960, 1A, 2A; “Negroes Invade White Drive-In,” The Columbia Record, March 5, 1960, 1, 10; “Negroes Batter Cars at Drive-In,” The New York Times, March 6, 1960, 43; “50 Negroes Batter Cars at White Restaurant in South Carolina,” The Washington Post, March 6, 1960, A16; Sauls, “Desegregation in Columbia,” 18; “Fifteen Students are Fined,” New York Times, March 19, 1960, 8. See also “Negro Fined in Connection with Incident,” The Columbia Record, March 7, 1960, 1A. Arnold Smith, a 23-year-old Allen University student athlete, was the first Black student arrested for participating in a mass demonstration in Columbia. On March 6, he and roughly 30 of his classmates attempted a second protest at Mac’s Drive-In. Smith, armed with a piece of lumber, was arrested by Columbia police and charged with loafing and loitering. He was convicted in City Recorder’s Court by Judge John I. Rice the following day. An unnamed Allen University appeared alongside him in court. The arresting officer, Sgt. R.S. Younginer, claimed that he arrested the group while they were off-campus, marching alongside the Taylor Street side of campus heading toward Two Notch Road. They were reportedly shouting and jeering passerby. “This is a serious thing,” exclaimed Judge Rice before convicting Smith, “I am going to put a stop right here and now to anyone walking the streets of Columbia armed in such a fashion. I don’t care whether they are white or colored.” Smith or officials at Allen likely paid a $10.50 fine shortly thereafter. He remained a member of the basketball team and eventually graduated.
Police Department, Richland County Sheriff’s Office and South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) were ordered to block any mass demonstration within the city limits. Concerned state representatives, joining their southern colleagues in continuing their proud tradition of legislative massive resistance, drafted a barrage of bills intended to curtail the burgeoning sit-in movement. Florence Representative George Sam Harrell proposed measures that would have eliminated retail store lunch counters targeted by any demonstrations deemed to cause “public disorder or provoke civil strife.” Another failed piece of legislation would have made the operation of such facilities expensive enough to warrant closing them for good. Evidently, a good hamburger and ice-cold Coca-Cola was too high a price to pay to preserve segregation. Due to their inability to strip licenses from franchisees of northern-based companies, lawmakers could only strengthen existing laws to prosecute Black protesters for trespassing if they refused to leave a restaurant at the request of management.14

The increasingly dangerous situation and potential for mass arrests—or worse—caused student leaders at Allen and Benedict to postpone future demonstrations. In a joint press release, they thanked city officials for their “fair and impartial” treatment and expressed hope that white South Carolinians would demonstrate such fairness in someday granting African Americans the rights and privileges that accompanied first-class citizenship. The students explained that they began the sit-ins to protest the unfair and inequitable treatment of Blacks in public accommodations. They hoped to be arrested in order to build legal precedents in future lawsuits against de jure segregation and to belie

the widespread myth that African Americans “willingly and voluntarily” accepted the practice. Allen and Benedict students expressed disappointment that they were not arrested like their peers in other southern cities. “We as students fully understand that freedom has a price tag on it and that those who wish to be free must be willing to suffer and pay the penalty,” they concluded. Whites in Columbia moved to reclaim control of the narrative. The Record editor commended city officials for warning sit-in protesters that their actions would result in arrest and applauded them for not doing so. “It was recognized all along that this act was to lay the groundwork for legal action,” he claimed, “But one Negro student could have established the basis for court action. The use of groups endangered public order.” Believing himself and other whites on the right side of history, the outraged newsman informed the students that the record would forever show that they had defied the law and imperiled peace and order in Columbia.  

While stunned whites in Columbia and elsewhere grappled with the sea change in race relations, Black college students from several institutions—Claflin, South Carolina State, Allen, Benedict, and smaller HBCUs established the South Carolina Student Movement Association (SCSMA), an intercollegiate student organization established to build a statewide coalition of Black student activists to plan mass demonstrations with the goal of full and complete integration. Over the coming weeks, the SCSMA played a vital role in organizing young people across the Palmetto State to fight for social change. Within days, the emboldened Black students resumed their nonviolent struggle for social change. Students from Columbia’s two Black colleges executed a series of

15 “Columbia Sit-Ins Are Halted,” The State, March 5, 1960, 1A, 3A; Sauls, “Desegregation in South Carolina,” 17-18; “Keeping the Peace,” The Columbia Record, March 5, 1960, 4A.
planned demonstrations on Main Street, two of which resulted in the arrests of protesters for the first time. On March 14, Allen University student Simon Bouie and Talmadge Neal, a 20-year-old Benedict student, took seats in a booth at the restaurant inside Eckerd’s drug store on Main Street. After they were seated one of the waitresses put up a chain link sign which read: “No Trespassing.” The manager then called the police and requested to have the students removed. Columbia Assistant Chief of Police Shep Griffith and several officers arrived and twice asked the duo to leave. “For What?” Bouie demanded. “Because it’s a breach of the peace,” Griffith retorted. The cops brusquely grabbed the students by their collars. “Take your hands off me,” shouted Bouie as he was hauled awkwardly through the swinging glass door at the entrance and jammed into a waiting police car. Bouie and Neal were later charged with breach of the peace. The former was given an additional charge of resisting arrest for jerking his arm away from Griffith as they exited the building. A local funeral director posted bond for both students.17 The next day, five Allen and Benedict students—Charles Barr, Milton Greene, Richard Counts, Johnny Clark, and David Carter entered the Taylor Street pharmacy and sat down at the lunch counter after purchasing a few items. Store policy dictated that customers of all races could buy goods from every department, but the lunch counter was reserved for whites only. Black customers could only purchase food if they ate elsewhere. Unbeknownst to the students, the manager had previously arranged for the police to arrest any sit-in demonstrators. Three police officers were waiting in the store when the students arrived. Shortly after Barr and his friends sat down, the manager

17 “Two Negroes Arrested Here in Incident at Drug Store,” The Columbia Record, March 14, 1960, 1A; “Columbia Police Jail Two Negroes After ‘Sit-Down,’” The State, March 15, 1960, 1A.
announced that he would not serve their party and ordered them to leave. They remained seated. At the request of one of the officers, the manager approached each student and asked them to leave. The four were arrested and charged with breach of the peace and criminal trespass. Movement leader David Carter, fresh from jail, posted bond.  

The legal implications of these arrests belie the historical consensus that the student sit-in movement in Columbia was short lived and ineffectual to the broader civil rights struggle. Barr, Bouie, and their fellow demonstrators eventually served as plaintiffs in a series of NAACP lawsuits that all but settled the question of segregated eating facilities and other public accommodations in the South. Both groups of demonstrators were tried separately and convicted in Columbia Recorder’s Court. The trial of Bouie and Neal proved to be a dress rehearsal for future legal battles over the legality of racially discriminatory trespass laws. City of Columbia attorney John Scholenberger argued that the defendants were rightfully charged because they visited Eckerd’s not as customers but as troublemakers whose sole intention was to be arrested. Moreover, their mere presence as demonstrators was disturbing to white customers, especially those who might become violent if they learned about the students’ purpose for

18 “Five Sit-Downers Are Jailed in Columbia,” *The State*, March 16, 1960, 5A. Later in the day, three other students briefly sat down at the Kress lunch counter but left soon after the manager closed. Five other students were arrested, questioned, and released without charges after an attempted sit-in demonstration at the lunch counter at the Union Bus Depot on Blanding Street. After purchasing tickets at a nearby window, the students sat down and began reading their Bibles. “I’m sorry. We don’t serve Negroes,” the manager explained. They were soon arrested after refusing to leave.

19 Lofton, “Calm and Exemplary,” 74-76. Lofton describes the Columbia movement as “late, timid, and short-lived,” explaining that earlier demonstrations and “more turbulent and disruptive” activities in Rock Hill, Sumter, and Orangeburg disqualify Columbia’s student movement as worthy of mention. As demonstrated above, this is clearly not the case. Additionally, historians have used his description of Columbia’s movement in this essay as descriptive of the statewide movement. As Lofton notes, South Carolina was set aflame by the Greensboro protests but, as he and others are reluctant to admit, Black students in Columbia and other cities were the catalyst.

being in the store. “Wasn’t it your intention to be arrested when you went there?”
bellowed Scholenberger at Neal during cross-examination. “Yes,” he reluctantly
answered. The attorney then presented an inventory of items found on Neal’s possession
at the time of his arrest which included a typewritten list of instructions for conducting
sit-in demonstrations. No money was found on his person. When asked the same
question, Bouie responded that he went there for food and “to get arrested, if it took that.”
Pressed further, Bouie was asked about Griffith’s claims that he had resisted arrest. “No,
I didn’t resist him. I wouldn’t resist him. A small person and a tender one like me
wouldn’t resist the sheriff there,” Bouie mocked to the delight of a handful of Black
supporters in the courtroom. Attorneys for the students spent much of the three-hour trial
in legal combat with Scholenberger and Judge John I. Rice, who admonished their clients
to “avoid side issues” and stick to the law. Assuming the role of night school legal
professor, Rice read sections of the Castle doctrine and an earlier Fourth Circuit case,
\textit{Williams v. Howard Johnson,} that was remanded because the court ruled that the customs
of the people of a state did not constitute state action under the Fourteenth Amendment.
He convicted both students of breach of the peace and sentenced them to 30 days in jail
or $100 fine after denying several motions for a new trial.\footnote{\textit{Student Admits Sit-Down Was to Get Self-Arrested,} 9B; \textit{Charles E. Williams v. Howard Johnson’s Restaurant,} 268 F. 2d 845 (4th Cir. 1959).}

NAACP lawyers appealed these decisions to the State Supreme Court where,
unsurprisingly, their convictions were upheld. The resulting Supreme Court cases, \textit{Barr}
v. \textit{City of Columbia} (1964) and \textit{Bouie v. City of Columbia} (1964), heard on June 22,
1964—a week after the Senate passed the Civil Rights Act—struck the penultimate blow
against the old racial order. Like the 1951 \textit{Briggs} case, both South Carolina sit-in were
paired with several other lawsuits that challenged the enforcement of breach of the peace and criminal trespass statutes. State attorneys argued that federal judges could not review these statutes because they had been upheld by the State Supreme Court, which ruled that NAACP lawyers’ objections were “too general to be considered.” Petitioners argued that the existing breach of peace and criminal trespass statutes, hastily drafted in the aftermath of their initial sit-in demonstrations, were “unconstitutionally vague” adding that there was a “complete and utter lack of evidence” to support claims that the students had committed a crime. Their only crime was being Black in a facility that refused them privileges that accompanied first-class citizenship. Supreme Court justices agreed; In a 7-2 decision, they reaffirmed the right of judicial review and, more importantly, validated the tactics and strategies adopted by the students. The court rejected the argument that students could be charged with breach of the peace simply because their mere presence may have inspired violence. The students—who were always well dressed, polite, and peaceful—at no point in either episode represented a threat to public order. Signaling the emergence of a policy of federal intervention on questions of civil rights, the justices concluded by reasserting the right to judicial review of all southern statutes. The Barr and Bouie decisions, often overshadowed by the omnibus civil rights legislation signed shortly thereafter, laid the legal groundwork for federal oversight of southern law enforcement in all aspects of public life.\textsuperscript{22} None of this would have been possible without the courageous protests conducted by Black student activists in Columbia four years earlier.

Shortly before the demonstrations that produced these momentous court rulings, SCSMA leaders announced a planned march and prayer rally at the South Carolina State House to protest continued segregation. Governor Ernest “Fritz” Hollings interrupted television broadcasts statewide and sternly warned students to cancel their pilgrimage. Skirting the line between enforcing the law and violating the students’ First Amendment rights, the governor declared a state of emergency and ordered police to break up any mass demonstration, regardless of its intent, on the grounds that such protests could potentially inspire violence. “The threat is the same whether it be by demonstrators or unruly spectators,” he argued, “Law enforcement officers have been directed to apprehend either or both when they threaten violence.” Citing public disturbances and racial violence in Montgomery, Nashville, and other southern cities, Hollings concluded that all forms of assembly by Black citizens—parades, pilgrimages, sit-downs, silent marches—were explosive in nature and a danger to the public good. Revealing a rage for order that would later supersede his own desire for segregation, the governor breathlessly commended law enforcement in Rock Hill, Orangeburg, Sumter and rural towns throughout South Carolina for “keeping cool heads” and, if one discounted their widespread campaign of intimidation and extralegal violence during the 1950s and the skirmishes in Columbia, handling public protest without incident. He tacitly acknowledged that the sit-ins were the inevitable result of simmering frustration and impatience but, in the same breath, blamed “outside, selfish, antagonist groups” for inciting local Blacks to rebel. The governor later informed the presidents of Allen and Benedict that their students were prohibited from hosting any meetings on the State
House grounds and that future demonstrations anywhere else in the city would not be tolerated. “We will not allow such explosive situations in South Carolina,” he decreed.23

The unlikeliest opposition to the actions of Black college students in Columbia, came from members of the 1940s vanguard generation who viewed nonviolent civil disobedience as an undignified tactic that was devoid of respectability and an affront to their tried and true strategy of racial accommodation, litigation, grassroots political organizing, and occasional direct action. Fearful of state sanction, the presidents of Allen and Benedict publicly denounced the planned demonstration at the State House and distanced their institutions from the burgeoning student movement.24 John Henry McCray, former editor of the Lighthouse and Informer and chairman of the Progressive Democratic Party, issued a full-throated endorsement of negotiation and accommodation as the most effective solution to racial problems in Columbia and the rest of the state. The veteran civil rights activist and political organizer nostalgically recounted his nearly twenty-year career as a voice for the marginalized and applauded city leaders for their token efforts to hire or appoint Blacks to city agencies and boards, apply equalization funding to improve segregated public schools, and desegregate public transportation without “fanfare or untoward incident.” Sounding more like a senior member of the Columbia Chamber of Commerce than a decorated veteran of the state’s civil rights vanguard, McCray commended Columbia’s white leaders for handling racial discord with greater zeal, honesty, and sincerity than neighboring southern cities, a fact he believed

resulted in its celebrated status as an “All-American” city. Recalling the protracted yet unfinished fight for racial equality from his own generational perspective, McCray counted the token employment of Black firemen and policemen and the equalization of segregated recreational facilities in Columbia as major victories, not evidence of the failures of gradualism. McCray criticized sit-ins as a poor tactical substitute for the tried and true strategy of interracial cooperation, grassroots political organizing, voter registration, litigation, and institution building used throughout the 1940s decade. The venerable civil rights activist commended the students for their good behavior during the first day of demonstrations but questioned the wisdom of conducting “mass invasions” in such a polarized and dangerous climate. McCray feared that such actions would fail to engender public support and, worse, placed participants “a breath away from an ugly explosion.” Leaning heavily upon the language of respectability, the former Lighthouse editor encouraged students to adopt a mature approach and avoid trampling the rights of others while pursuing their own.25

Older black leaders such as McCray eventually convinced Carter and other student leaders to call off their planned State House march. In a prepared statement, the Benedict College graduate student quipped that the governor was the “victim of an acute tension attack” inspired by the students’ fearlessness and his own paranoia concerning the presence of outside agitators. “I would love to know the outside influence or the sort of information the governor has,” Carter mocked in a later interview, “If he has any information along that line, he has got more than I have.” Describing Hollings as more tin-pot dictator than governor, the Benedict student activist and Korean War veteran

reminded him that student demonstrators were “law abiding citizens and not hoodlums or gangsters who will have to be met with brass and guns.” Carter added that he and his peers were not outside agitators and nor were they connected to the NAACP. “No one is calling our bluff,” he responded when pressed about whether the group acquiesced due to fear of mass arrest, “We are not afraid of crowding the jails. As a matter of fact, this may be the one time that we will have integrated jails in Columbia. This would be a little progress.” He concluded by alerting the presidents of Allen and Benedict that their refusal to support the students’ cause had not gone unnoticed. “No college can exist without the students, and this is a student movement,” he warned.26 Despite the temporary setback, Carter and his peers had resurrected the flagging civil rights movement through sheer will and courageous action, putting accommodationist Black leaders and white segregationists on the defensive.

Black students at HBCUs in other sections of the state continued to make life miserable for defenders of segregation. In late February, roughly forty students from South Carolina State and Claflin marched to the downtown Kress department store, only to find the lunch counter closed and stools removed. *Times and Democrat* editors issued students a word of caution stating that most of the residents of Orangeburg County opposed desegregation, even though whites were in the minority. Orangeburg whites,

---

like those in Columbia, had convinced themselves that African Americans accepted and supported segregation. Growing support for the burgeoning student movement proved otherwise. On March 1, more than 400 students gathered at Trinity United Methodist Church and underwent a brief training session on nonviolent protest. The well-dressed State College and Claflin students quietly marched downtown with signs that read: “Segregation Must Die.” 27 Unlike the sit-in protests in Columbia, which were planned by independent student leadership, the Orangeburg student movement was initially organized by CORE organizer James T. McCain and South Carolina field secretary Thomas Gaither, who was also Claflin’s student council president. Gaither hosted meetings on the Claflin campus, attended by members of the “Orangeburg Seven”—Clarence “Duke” Missouri, Bobby Doctor, Lloyd Williams, Charles “Chuck” McDew, James Gilliard, and James Clyburn. On March 15, more than one thousand well-dressed State College and Claflin students, split into several smaller groups, braved frigid temperatures while marching in pairs toward downtown Orangeburg. Student leaders were careful to instruct participants not to block traffic or obstruct pedestrians along the way. Flanked by city firemen, the Orangeburg police chief warned the students that they were violating city ordinances and demanded they turn back. Defying his orders, the students pressed forward and were soon doused with high powered hoses and tear gassed. “There we were, dressed in our Sunday best, being driven into the ground, up against trees and walls, the hoses soaking and drenching many of us in the freezing weather,”

---

Clyburn later remembered.28 Claflin student and freelance Jet photographer Cecil Williams was roughly apprehended while snapping photos nearby. “They grabbed my arms, lifted me off the ground and placed me in the front seat of their grey colored patrol car. They took my Rolleiflex camera and film and tossed it into the trunk of their car,” he remembered. The press blackout not only permitted Orangeburg police to brutalize protesters but hid the violent tendencies of the rural town’s all-white police force from the public.29

Nearly 400 students were arrested and herded into a hastily erected stockade outside the Orangeburg Jail, derisively known as the “Pink Palace” due to its sickly mauve façade. Some sang “God Bless America” and “The Star-Spangled Banner” while others helped the injured. Tightly packed within the makeshift cage, the drenched students passed cigarette lighters to one another to warm their hands. Once the pens were filled, police began to order newly processed students to return to their campuses. Their campaign of terror did not, however, instill fear but rather galvanized the Black community in the sleepy college town. “Many of the students who were sent back to the dormitories cleared their beds of linen and blankets and returned to the stockade and threw those blankets over the fence so that those cold, wet students could have some

28 Ibid, 66-67; Hine, South Carolina State University, 259; Williams, Out of the Box in Dixie, 153; Lofton, “Calm and Exemplary,” 76. Lofton references student protests in Orangeburg to slight those in Columbia as unimportant and ineffective. Another way to view these simultaneous occurrences is that they were evidence of a much larger and, perhaps, more cohesive student movement than he realized at the time. More research is needed to determine how closely students at South Carolina’s HBCUs worked together during this period.
29 Williams, Out of the Box in Dixie, 153; Clyburn, Blessed Experiences, 67-68. Williams recalled seeing a female student being struck by a policeman during the confrontation. According to Clyburn, he, Doctor, and Missouri soldiered onward to conduct a sit-in at the Rexall drugstore as planned. Armed police were waiting when they arrived. The trio was grabbed, forcibly from the store, and slammed against the police cruiser. Doctor, outraged by the threats and epithets used by the policemen, fought back. The State College student swore off Ghandian nonviolence from that point forward.
modicum of warmth,” Clyburn remembered. Concerned dining hall employees made sandwiches delivered by a group of students who could not risk their scholarships by participating in the protests. The student demonstrations temporarily united the Black community in Orangeburg across generational lines. Adults who initially opposed direct action were so appalled by the inhumane treatment of the students that they made tremendous sacrifices—even using their homes and property as collateral—to support the cause.  

A United Front: The Edwards march and the Fall of Jim Crow in South Carolina

Zion Baptist Church, founded 1865, was one of the oldest and largest African American churches in Columbia. During the 1940s movement, Zion’s pastor Rev. J.P. Reeder opened the doors of the church to various Black civic clubs and civil rights organizations including the YMCA, NAACP, Negro Citizens Committee, and several Black women’s clubs. Located on 801 Washington Street, in the heart of Columbia’s segregated Black business district, Zion Baptist Church again served as the headquarters of the 1960s struggle for African American civil rights. For participants in the sit-in movement, “Big Zion” was a haven, a place to pray, be inspired, and prepare oneself for the slings and arrows that awaited with each protest. Students also came here to rest and recuperate afterwards. “You felt safe when you came here. When you got out of jail, you came to Zion,” recalled Isaac Washington, a student activist and church member.

30 Clyburn, Blessed Experiences, 68-69. After Clyburn and his friends were released from the dank, inhumane cell, they reunited with their friends at the Orangeburg County courthouse. The hungry activist loudly announced his hunger to anyone who would listen and was soon approached by a “cute, ninety-two-pound coed who responded by thrusting toward me one of the sandwiches she and some of the other students had brought to the courthouse. I reached for it, and with an impish grin, she drew it away, broke it in half and we shared the hamburger.” Clyburn and the young lady, Emily England, were married fifteen months later.
On March 2, 1961, NAACP officials and student protesters gathered at the church for a mass rally prior to their planned march on the State House. The purpose of the march, conducted while the General Assembly was in session, was to demand the removal of Jim Crow laws that “prohibited Negro privileges” in all facets of public life. With reporters present, roughly 200 Black students from nearly every HBCU in the state—and a handful of white students—marched around the sanctuary singing “We Shall Not Be Moved” and other freedom songs. After receiving their final instructions to follow the plan and be polite, student leaders walked in separate groups of roughly 15 protesters and lined up outside the church to begin the fifteen-minute trek to the capitol. Some held placards which read “Jim Crow Must Go” and “You May Jail Our Bodies, but Not Our Souls.”

The first regiment to arrive, led by State College student leader Chuck McDew, was met by Hollings legal aide and SLED lieutenant Harry Walker and roughly 30 officers near the “horseshoe” parking lot facing Main Street. He informed the marchers that it was illegal to conduct such demonstrations onsite and added that any attempt to march around the perimeter of the State House would be considered a breach of the peace. An awkward silence followed. “May I pass?!,” shouted McDew as he and his peers barged past the shocked officer. Over the next twenty minutes, several phalanxes stormed the State House from various directions. Outnumbered and overwhelmed, Walker nervously

31 “State House March Lands 189 in Jail,” The State, March 3, 1961, 1A. The State reported that David Carter divided the group in this manner per advice of Columbia City manager Irving McNayr, who told him that the city would not permit mass demonstrating and that he should restrict the groups to 15 or 16 to remain compliant with the law. This is likely untrue considering that the students were subject to such parade laws regardless of the size of their group. It is probable that the decision to divide the group in such fashion was Carter’s alone; it was a brilliant strategy intended to confuse and overwhelm law enforcement and prevent them from being able to respond quickly and halt demonstrations before they had the desired effect. See also Edwards v. South Carolina, 372 U.S. 229 (1963).
stopped another group and granted them permission to circle the grounds “just as every other citizen,” but only once. Singing freedom songs, however, would constitute a demonstration and was therefore prohibited.32

Meanwhile, McDew’s group reached the Sumter Street side of the property, walking west along Gervais Street, before they were again stopped by SLED agent Mabury Shorter. “We want to show that us students of the South are against segregation,” McDew responded when asked why they came to the State House. “May we go through?” the State College firebrand demanded. “No,” Shorter responded. Skirting past the officer, the marchers circled back to the parking lot in front of the State House. Recovering his composure, Walker warned them that further attempts to circle the State House would result in arrest. McDew and his charges stepped onto the grounds and were promptly arrested while curious onlookers gathered nearby. Carter and Lennie Glover, a 19-year-old Benedict College divinity student, soon arrived with reinforcements. McNayr pulled the student leaders aside and warned them that further attempts to circle the State House constituted an unlawful attempt to incite a riot. He gave the duo fifteen minutes to convince their peers to disperse or everyone present would be arrested. “We are protesting the indignity and inhumanity of segregation,” Carter shot back before turning toward his friends. “Do you want to be free?!” he thundered, “Do you want to go to jail for your rights?” “Yes!” his peers shouted in unison as they began to rhythmically clap and stamp their feet. Moments later Carter, Glover,

32 “State House March Lands 189 in Jail,” The State, March 3, 1961, 1A.
and their determined, energized, and boisterous army surged past the stunned and
defeated officers loudly singing, “We Are Not Afraid.” 33

Over 189 demonstrators—the second largest total in the entire South to that
date—were arrested and charged with breach of the peace.34 SLED agents and local
police took marchers to correctional facilities around Richland County. Ill prepared to
handle so many arrests, they ran out of vehicles. The remaining demonstrators were
marched in pairs roughly six blocks to overcrowded holding cells at the Columbia City
Jail. When they were brought to the local courthouse, students and older activists
searched about for friends and loved ones. Rev. Newman, who was one of two arrested
NAACP officials, read scripture to frightened students and led them in the Lord’s
Prayer.35 A lone white teenager sat conspicuously amongst a group of Allen and
Benedict students. Frederick Hart, a 17-year-old native of Washington D.C. and student
at the University of South Carolina, sat alone on a park bench on the State House grounds
when demonstrators passed. Moved by their fierce determination and soul stirring
chorus, Hart approached the students and offered praise. “I felt I had to shake hands with
the arrested demonstrators because I was in sympathy with them,” he told reporters. He
was immediately arrested. Wearing a borrowed NAACP button, Hart expressed support
for the student demonstrations. “I had not planned to take any part in the demonstration,
but if I had been notified, I would have joined,” he proclaimed, “If I wasn’t a member of
the NAACP before, I am now.” Despite his willingness to remain in jail, Hart was

33 “State House March Lands 189 in Jail,” 1A; “Police Arrest 189 at S.C. State House,” The Greenville
News, March 3, 1961, 1A.
34 Lofton, “Calm and Exemplary,” 76. The arrest of 425 protesters in Orangeburg, mentioned earlier in this
chapter, constituted the largest number arrested in the region as of 1961.
35 “State House March Lands 189 in Jail, 1A. Charleston NAACP president Rev. B.J. Glover, who later
served as Allen University president, was the other.
released on bond. While some students contemplated their legal fate or worried about impending corporal punishment from their parents, others remained defiant. “Why am I being arrested?” they shouted. McNayr asked Carter to calm his classmates. “If they so desire to holler, they are on their own,” he quipped. Within earshot of the students, the City Manager reminded Carter of the governor’s earlier ultimatum and ordered the student leader to halt any plans for future demonstrations.36

The mainstream media downplayed the significance of the protest as a watershed moment in the civil rights struggle and instead depicted it as a minor disturbance caused by outside agitators. “The entire move had an out-of-state flavor to it,” claimed State reporters, pointing to rumors that New York City area newspapers were aware of the demonstration hours before it took place. A cursory glance at the list of those arrested debunks this well-worn canard. Most of the students arrested represented three South Carolina HBCUs—Benedict, Claflin, and State College. The remaining student activists either refused to identify themselves to avoid punishment and protect their schools from accusations of Communist ties or could not be publicly named because they were

36 “State House March Lands 189 in Jail,” The State, March 3, 1961, 1A; “Police Arrest 189 at S.C. State House,” Greenville News, March 3, 1961, 1A; “Students Fought for Nation’s Promise,” Greenville News, March 2, 2013, 1A; “USC Student Tells How He Joined March,” Greenville News, March 3, 1961; “Segregation ‘Protesters’ Out on Bond,” The State, March 4, 1961, 3A. A few white students, likely members of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations (SCCHR), participated in the pre-march rally and walked with black protesters towards the State House. Many of these students dropped out before reaching their destination to avoid arrest. An officer reported that a second white student was arrested but escaped. For more on subsequent sit-in demonstrations in Columbia, see “24 Negroes Guilty in Sit-Ins,” New York Times, March 9, 1961, 18. “Segregation ‘Protesters’ Out on Bond,” The State, March 4, 1961, 3A. The students were released on a combined $2,850 bond raised by Black businessmen and educators in Columbia. Those who posted property bonds were F.G. Jenkins, a Columbia dentist, Benedict president J.A. Bacoats and E.E. Riley, the college’s dean of students; AME church elder W.R. Bowman; Insurance salesman C.D. Ingram; and W.C. Johnson, a funeral home director and longtime supporter of civil rights activities.
minors. \textsuperscript{37} Greenville News editors commended local police for halting the illegal demonstrations thus preventing the disorder and violence that would have resulted from the expression of such unpopular views. They chastised white liberals for valorizing Black civil rights activists who, in their opinion, had proven themselves incapable of assuming the responsibilities and duties of first-class citizenship. NAACP officials pushed back, arguing that the demonstration proved that Black South Carolinians not only rejected segregation but were also locked in struggle against the South’s most regressive regime. Unlike student demonstrators in other cities nationwide, South Carolina arrested 200 peaceful Black student protesters to protect the “antiquated and unjust pattern of segregation” codified within state law. White lawmakers’ use of police power to maintain white supremacy constituted “tyranny of the worst kind.” NAACP officials and other civil rights activists believed that dissent was the highest form of patriotism. “If we were so base or so unpatriotic as to accept this situation without protest, we should be sorry citizens indeed,” they concluded. \textsuperscript{38}

Fresh from their monumental demonstration on the State House grounds, emboldened Black students in Columbia redoubled their efforts to desegregate public accommodations, but learned that their earlier assault on the seat of white power in South Carolina made such protest far more dangerous. Four days after the State House march, Carter and Glover returned to Main Street to lead sit-in demonstrations at Woolworth’s and other department stores. A short time later, Carter stepped away to make a phone call and check-in with their fellow protesters. An unidentified white man approached...

\textsuperscript{37} Sauls, “Desegregation in South Carolina,” 23; “Police Arrest 189 at S.C. State House,” 1A.
Glover and asked, “Are you having any fun?” When he declined to answer, the man drew a knife and stabbed him before escaping into a crowd of shoppers. The wounded Benedict College student reported the incident to police who arrested Carter and charged him with contributing to the delinquency of a minor, a new legal tactic employed by law enforcement to disrupt the student movement. Glover’s assailant was never brought to justice. Police reported that Glover’s wound was not serious but later reports showed otherwise. The courageous student activist was driven to the nearby Good Samaritan-Waverly Hospital, a segregated facility, where Dr. C.O. Spann—the only Black surgeon in Columbia—performed an emergency operation to remove his spleen. While the brave Benedict College student recovered, news of his assault spread across the South. In response, NAACP chapters across the southeast organized a “No Easter Buying” campaign, a mass boycott of department stores and other shopping centers deemed “off limits to seekers of freedom.” After a lengthy recovery, Glover bravely returned to the same storefront and rejoined his fellow student protesters carrying a sign which read,

39 John Hammond Moore, Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 423; Newby, Black Carolinians, 324; “Negro Demonstrator Here Stabbed at Lunch Counter, The Columbia Record, March 6, 1961, 2A; “Negro Student’s Condition Still Listed as Critical,” The Columbia Record, March 9, 1961, 3A; “Negro Improves After Stabbing,” The Columbia Record, March 8, 1961, 11A. James Edwards, Jr., a 21-year-old Benedict College student, and nineteen adult participants in the March 2, 1961 protest at the South Carolina State House were charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor along with breach of the peace. They were given penalties of thirty days in jail or $100 fines while minors were fined $10 per person or given the alternative of serving a five-day jail sentence. Edwards, the namesake of a later Supreme Court case that overturned the convictions of State House demonstrators, pleaded with Judge Frank Powell to revoke the charge. Powell refused but ordered SLED Chief Dan Beckman to investigate the role of adults who participated in the march. It is unknown whether such an investigation occurred. For more information, see “8 Convicted for March at Capitol,” The Greenville News, March 7, 1961 and “136 Negros Convicted,” The New York Times, March 28, 1961, 27.

40 “‘No Easter Buying’ Drive,” Pittsburgh Courier, April 1, 1961, A8.
“This store bears the blood of Lennie Glover. BEWARE of Woolworth’s!”

Defenders of de jure segregation found themselves on the defensive in the courts as well. By August 1961, NAACP and CORE attorneys in South Carolina were managing over 900 suits stemming from grassroots nonviolent direct-action campaigns and local efforts to desegregate public schools, colleges and universities. This legal siege warfare campaign, largely the product of the courageous activism of Black students at segregated high schools and HBCUs, relentlessly battered the state’s Jim Crow regime into submission. Ironically, two of its field generals—NAACP attorneys John Wrighten and Fred Henderson Moore—had laid the groundwork for the 1960s student movement during their collegiate years. A lawsuit filed shortly after the State House march—Edwards v. South Carolina—struck a crushing blow against segregation in the South and strengthened the right of future generations of Americans to speak out against all forms of injustice. Demonstrators arrested for their participation in the march were tried in groups, at four separate trials. Each was convicted of breach of the peace and received sentences ranging from a $10-100 fine or 5-30 days in jail. During the subsequent State Supreme Court trial, McNayr and the Columbia police chief testified that the student demonstrators were well-dressed and orderly but added that they recognized several “potential troublemakers” among the group. “We took no official action because there was none to be taken,” McNayr explained when asked why no arrest was made, “They were not creating a disturbance, those particular people were not at that time doing

---

anything to make trouble, but they could have been.” Despite testifying that the students
did not obstruct the sidewalk and made no threats upon police or bystanders, the City
Manager claimed that he moved to disperse the protesters because “a dangerous situation
was really building up” due to the swelling crowd of curious onlookers. Each witness for
the state concurred that the students did not raise their voices until threatened with arrest.
South Carolina justices upheld their convictions arguing that breach of the peace “is not
susceptible to exact definition” nor did it require threatening behavior or violence to be
prosecuted. The justices ruled that the students—through their mere presence—had
violated the “tranquility enjoyed by citizens of a municipality or community where good
order reigns among its members, which is the natural right of all persons in political
society.” Black students, marginalized due to age and race and disfranchised by law, had
no rights to which white citizens were bound to respect.44 This decision, coupled with
failed appeals by CORE led sit-in demonstrators in Florida, bolstered the hopes of South
Carolina officials who believed the federal courts would grant law enforcement wide
latitude in enforcing breach of the peace laws, whose vague prose allowed for abuse of
power to uphold segregation.45

*Edwards v. South Carolina* was heard before the Supreme Court on December 13,
1962. NAACP Legal Defense Fund director Jack Greenberg argued the case for the
petitioners alongside Constance Baker Motley, James Nabritt III, and South Carolina
NAACP attorneys Matthew J. Perry, Lincoln C. Jenkins, and Donald J. Sampson. South
Carolina Attorney General Daniel McLeod argued on behalf of the state. Greenberg
argued that the state lacked evidence to charge the State House demonstrators with

---

44 *Edwards v. South Carolina*, 372 U.S. 229 (1963); “Students Fought for Nation’s Promise,” 1A.
breach of the peace but decided to make a broader claim that their First and Fourteenth Amendment rights had been violated. The nattily attired students assembled peacefully, did not use “fighting words” or commit violence, did not obstruct the flow of traffic into and out of the parking lot, and followed the orders of law enforcement until threatened with arrest without cause. Only then did Carter deliver the harangue that caused his peers to erupt into a noisy, boisterous frenzy on the State House lawn. The students’ only crime, Greenberg asserted, was the peaceful expression of opinions that were so sufficiently opposed to a majority of the community that a crowd appeared, and police protection was required.

On February 25, 1963, in an 8-1 decision, the Supreme Court struck down their convictions. “The Fourteenth Amendment does not permit a state to make criminal the peaceful expression of unpopular views,” wrote Justice Stewart, “A function of free speech under our system of government is to invite dispute. It may indeed best serve its high purpose when it induces a condition of unrest, creates dissatisfaction with conditions as they are, or even stirs people to anger.” Reinforcing the power of free speech as a weapon against prejudices and preconceptions, supporters of the majority opinion charged that breach of peace laws—when used to suppress the free exchange of ideas—were a form of censorship could result in the “standardization of ideas” by legislatures, courts, or dominant political or community groups. Taken to the extreme, the arbitrary or discriminatory application of police power to censor dissent was an abuse of state authority that violated the rights of the minority and threatened them with permanent second-class citizenship. Moreover, the court placed the burden upon the state to prove how free expression could lead to disorder. This decision provided legal protection for
continued civil rights demonstrations nationwide and laid the groundwork for other marginalized groups to build movements and voice grievances in the public square. It was a stunning rebuke that all but confirmed Hollings’ fears that South Carolina had run out of courts and, more importantly, splashed cold water directly into the faces of obstinate segregationists who believed the old racial order could be preserved.  

A week later, roughly half of the nearly 200 State House demonstrators reunited at Zion Baptist Church to celebrate the two-year anniversary of their release from jail and their resounding legal victory. NAACP leaders honored the marchers, attorneys, and bondsmen with certificates of merit and thanked members of Zion Baptist Church for opening their doors and hearts to support the cause. Rev. Newman recounted the experience of being “arrested, herded like cattle” and jailed solely because their skin color made them non-citizens in the eyes of law enforcement. “[We intend] to march again, and again, and again,” he declared, “until the officials of South Carolina from the governor down and from the lowliest magistrate up recognizes the equality of all men under the law regardless of race, creed, color or previous condition of servitude.”

46 Edwards v. South Carolina 372 US 229 (1963); “Top Court Reverses Conviction of 187,” The State, February 25, 1963; “Supreme Court Tosses Out 187 Marchers’ Convictions,” The Columbia Record, February 25, 1963; “The Changed Court,” The State, February 27, 1963, 10A; “Students Fought for Nation’s Promise,” 1A. In his dissenting opinion, Justice Clark argued that his fellow justices had misinterpreted existing free speech law and ignored important details in the case. “To say that the police may not intervene until the riot has occurred is like keeping out the doctors until the patient dies,” he wrote. Clark’s opinion largely rested McNayr’s testimony that the situation had become dangerous and that he enlisted a local cop to direct traffic in and out of the horseshoe thus proving that the students obstructed traffic during their protest. However, none of the state’s witnesses supported this claim nor did arresting officers charge any of the demonstrators with violating a statute on the books that dealt specifically with this issue. See also “Magistrate Powell Explains Conviction,” The State, February 25, 1963, 2A; Upon learning of the decision, Columbia magistrate Frank Powell admitted that the arrests were made “to quell what police thought was a situation which might result in a riot” and claimed that race was not a factor. He pledged to abide by the high court’s ruling. Others, however, were not as compliant. The State editor blasted the decision as unnecessary federal intervention by distant judges who used a “reverse crystal ball” to judge the actions of individuals two years earlier. “Once again,” he wailed, “the Supreme Court gives unmistakable evidence that it has become, in this age of brotherhood by brute force, not so much a dispenser of justice as an instrument of integration.”
NAACP Conference president J. Arthur Brown pledged that Black South Carolinians would “press forward” in the fight to make justice and equality a reality in the state. A new crop of young freedom fighters was needed, however, because those unable to attend had graduated or moved elsewhere.  

By 1963, South Carolina had witnessed nearly three decades of relentless struggle between African American civil rights activists and white citizens committed to preserving Jim Crow, white supremacy and racial capitalism. The post-

Brown struggle for racial equality—marked by a roiling cauldron of political chicanery, economic terror, and reactionary intimidation and violence—calls into question the notion that white citizens in the Palmetto State desegregated out of the kindness of its citizens’ hearts. The walls of Jim Crow were felled by courageous Black student activists who risked everything to ensure that future generations would have a larger freedom and greater heritage. Without their sacrifice, the vaunted NAACP litigation campaign would have lacked the ammunition to storm the federal courts with lawsuits that established the legal foundations of a more tolerant, open society. Sit-ins, picketing, boycotts, and other forms of nonviolent direct-action protest shifted public opinion and forced white politicians and business leaders to reconsider their stance on desegregation and, in Columbia and other cities, quietly grant Blacks access to department stores, bus stations, libraries, airports, and other public accommodations. Rural sections of the state, however, remained virtually unchanged as Black citizens continued to suffer from educational and economic inequality. The state’s dual system of public schools would not be abolished until 1970, roughly two decades after the initial Brown mandate. Despite the numerous victories

---

47 “State House Marchers Gather to Celebrate Court Decision, The State, March 11, 1963, 11A.
achieved over the first three years of the 1960s-decade, Black citizens knew the road remained treacherous. “All the American Negro wants is the chance to be a man,” remarked Bishop David Sims at an Emancipation Day celebration held at Allen University in 1963. 48 Most African Americans simply wanted equal opportunity and better employment as compensation for decades of heartache and struggle. Others recognized that token integration could not possibly make up for nearly a century of broken promises, exploitation, and racial violence. Indeed, as Black South Carolinians celebrated the impending demise of Jim Crow, fresh fault lines emerged.

Civil rights gains were met with fierce resistance across the American South. On September 30, 1962, white students at Ole Miss rioted upon the entry of James Meredith as the university's first African American student. Among those who witnessed the riot was the director of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), Pete Strom, who was sent to Oxford to study its integration process. White officials in South Carolina realized that integration was inevitable and moved to ensure that it occurred without violence. On January 9, 1963, in his final speech as governor, Ernest "Fritz" Hollings declared an end to segregation and called for the process to be handled "with dignity." A week later, newly inaugurated Governor Donald Russell hosted an integrated post-parade barbecue at the Governor's Mansion. Over 100 black citizens were invited to dine with the Governor and other whites at the "Old South" themed event. While some were offended by the presence of whites dressed in Confederate regalia, others viewed

the event as a small step forward in race relations.

By the time Governor Hollings departed office in January 1963, the deluge of court actions and fierce militancy displayed by Black South Carolinians, especially black youth and college students, signaled a changing social and political dynamic in the state. In his final address before the General Assembly, the battered and momentarily defeated governor declared that the fall of segregation was inevitable and urged his colleagues to “move on for the good of South Carolina and our United States.” Calling for integration “with dignity” and the preservation of law and order, Hollings admitted that such an act would bring little progress to either race but warned that “irreparable damage” would result from continued strife. Days later, Hollings ceded power to his successor, Donald Russell, ushering in what appeared to be a new era in race relations. In a dramatic gesture, the new governor opened his inaugural events to black and white citizens and invited over 100 black citizens including a delegation of students and faculty from Allen University and Benedict College to attend a barbecue held at the Governor’s Mansion. There was a limit to how much change local whites could stomach with their meal. In a scene reminiscent of the idyllic Old South, white attendees ate while standing rather than be photographed violating racial custom by being seated next to black guests. A few even donned Confederate style garb.

By the Spring of 1963, race relations in Columbia gradually improved as cracks appeared in the legal foundations of racial segregation. The Supreme Court ruling in *Edwards v. South Carolina* protected civil rights activists’ right to the peaceful expression of unpopular views and paved the way for continued public pressure on local and state governments across the South to end Jim Crow. Seeking to manage the
integration process and prevent racial violence, Columbia Mayor Lester Bates secretly convened racially separate groups of community leaders to discuss plans for gradual desegregation. In July 1963, Mayor Bates convened a meeting of 87 prominent white business leaders and informed them that continued adherence to segregation invited public ridicule and potential violence. Several department store executives traveled to Atlanta and Augusta to gauge how limited desegregation fared in those communities. This informal committee evolved into the "Committee of 50," a biracial committee of 25 whites and blacks designed to promote interracial understanding and make a smooth transition toward desegregation. A fragile peace was negotiated to halt further student protests until the process was finalized. Simkins and other militant activists lambasted the committee's segregated status and Bates' exclusion of blacks who might question its motives and plans. The committee, however, successfully encouraged the Columbia city council to adopt a non-discriminatory hiring policy and convinced local merchants to remove “whites only” signs from water fountains, restrooms, and lunch counters. Black customers were also permitted to try on clothes in department stores. On August 21, 1962, eight downtown chain stores, including Eckerd's and Woolworth's, served black customers for the first time. White counter protesters picketed the newly built Richland Mall and Main Street stores in opposition to "race mixing" at lunch counters.

Tensions boiled beneath the surface. As in other parts of the country, a growing number of Black South Carolinians were frustrated with the slow pace of change and began to question tokenism and gradual integration as adequate cures for racism and generational poverty. One organization that spoke to such concerns was the Nation of
Islam (NOI), a religious sect who embraced racial separatism and economic empowerment as the true paths to freedom. The impassioned, fiery rhetoric of their national spokesman, Malcolm X, inspired converts and struck fear in the hearts of conservative and liberal race leaders alike. Born in 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska as Malcolm Little, Malcolm X emerged by the early 1950s as the chief lieutenant of the Nation of Islam’s leader Elijah Muhammad. In April 1963, Thomas Shabazz, a Columbia businessman and member of local mosque #38, invited Malcolm to speak at the Township Auditorium. White officials and black integrationists found themselves caught between a desire to protect his right to free speech and concerns that his address would reignite the smoldering student movement. Upon learning of their impending visit, white politicians, media, and black integrationists clandestinely planned to limit the Black Muslims ability to attract a mass audience and recruit converts. The Edwards ruling complicated matters; no longer could city and state officers physically bar individuals and organizations from voicing unpopular opinions in the public square. Ironically, the Supreme Court ruling fostered greater coordination between previously warring sides to protect the limited progress made and to prevent new voices from changing the narrative on integration. Sam McCuen, a staff writer for The State, launched the opening salvo in the campaign to discredit the Nation of Islam and stifle their recruitment drive in a scathing article describing them as the most “bitter, powerful, and extreme anti-white Negro organization” in the country. Basing his assumptions on earlier hyperbolic articles written by Newsweek and other mainstream publications, McCuen offered readers a lengthy profile of the Nation of Islam founder and a snapshot of its overall political, racial, and moral philosophy. The “Black Muslims,” McCuen wrote,
“claim they are not Negroes, that there is no such thing as a Negro race and that the so-called Negro race is the original race of Asiatic origin, which is being kept in slavery by the ‘white devils.’” He emphasized the Nation’s goal of developing a separate “black nation” consisting of seven western states to be turned over to them by the Federal Government as recompense for “300 years of slave labor.” To give shocked white readers something familiar with which to relate, the reporter added that one of the two Universities of Islam operated by the organization was operated by a Communist sympathizer.49

Upon Malcolm X’s arrival in Columbia, he defended the NOI and expressed his frustration with the delegation's decision. "We'll hold the meeting in the street if we have to," he declared. "We have never had any violence at any of our meetings. It's a shame and disgrace for the officials of Columbia Township Auditorium to accept our money, give us a contract, wait within two days of the meeting and then tell us the meeting is canceled. This makes South Carolina a worse state than Mississippi." Undaunted, Malcolm and Shabazz scoured the city in hopes of finding a new site. They made inquiries with funeral directors and the Negro Masonic Temple in West Columbia. All turned them away due to personal fear or behind-the-scenes pressure from black civic leaders.

Clandestine machinations of white and black political leaders and negative publicity provided by mainstream white newspapers combined to severely dampen the enthusiasm and turnout for the three-hour-long Nation of Islam event. With no alternative venue for Malcolm X's address, the NOI agreed to host the service at their

49 “Bitter, Powerful, Extreme,” The State, April 13, 1963, 10A.
small place of worship, located here at 2217 Waverly Street. Speaking before an interracial gathering of roughly 70 people huddled together within the tiny Muslim Temple located in the heart of Columbia’s Waverly neighborhood, Malcolm X sharply rebuked American racism and criticized "naive and narrow minded" black leaders as duped by the "trick" of integration. The firebrand orator urged black South Carolinians to doggedly pursue racial self-determination and abandon the American political duopoly which he described as an unholy and paternalistic alliance between racist, fundamentalist white politicians and conservative Black ministers and civil rights leaders. “There is no such thing in this country as a Republican and Democratic Party. The whites are not split that way. The political battle is between the conservatives and the northern liberals. The liberals have perfected the use of the Negroes against the conservatives and therefore the whites remain in control,” he suggested. The American two-party system was an illusion designed to preserve white control and subdue potential black liberation.

Malcolm then addressed local issues namely his treatment at the hands of the fair-minded citizens of South Carolina. Malcolm applauded student protesters for revolting against “Uncle Tom” black leaders and white politicians. He also blasted the NAACP push to admit Harvey Gantt to Clemson College as yet another example of the failure of tokenism as a solution for the problems of the race. “Sticking Gantt into that college didn’t solve any problems. That only benefits the handpicked Negro. Tokenism never helped the masses,” he argued. Malcolm charged liberals with hypocrisy for avoiding intelligent conversation on the race question out of fear of hurt feelings, or worse, widespread disorder. He pointed to their reluctance to consider separation as a solution to the problems facing African Americans as one example of their intellectual dishonesty.
Malcolm explained that separation was a “voluntary action between two equals” rather than an unequal power relationship such as segregation or integration. “What we do want is separation,” he claimed, “Let the white man have his own, control his own and use his own for the benefit of his own. We only want what we can develop and earn for ourselves without help from the white man; something we will never receive anyway.” Integration, therefore, was nothing more than a trick foisted on the Black masses by “naive and narrow-minded” preachers, civil rights activists and “foxy liberal Northern whites.”

The audience enthusiastically applauded. The minister chafed at attempts to prevent the NOI from recruiting fellow travelers. He affirmed that Muslims were taught to enter cities peacefully but to be prepared to defend themselves from any insult or attack. “We advocate self-defense, not violence,” Malcolm explained, “No law in the world will convict you for self-defense.” Where lawsuits and combat training failed, Allah would provide. The NOI minister prayed that God’s wrath would strike all who sabotaged his visit. It is highly likely that white leaders heard him loud and clear. Ten police cars circled the mosque as he spoke.

Despite Hollings' earlier pronouncement, segregation continued to shape life in Columbia well into 1963. During the summer, a wave of televised violence and turmoil in Birmingham and other southern cities portended disaster for the city if it remained opposed to integration. NAACP leaders and student activists were also frustrated with the slow pace of change in Columbia. On June 5, 1963, South Carolina NAACP executive secretary I. DeQuincey Newman demanded that city officials integrate public

---

50 “Integration Called Trick,” Columbia Record, April 18, 1963, 8A; “Muslim Leader: ‘We Don’t Go Where We Aren’t Wanted,” The State, April 1963, page unknown [Find source]
accommodations or face renewed protests. A month later, Mayor Lester Bates convened a meeting of 87 prominent business leaders and informed them that continued adherence to segregation invited disaster. More than 50 NAACP leaders and delegates from all parts of South Carolina met at the Carver Theater on Harden Street in Columbia to discuss next steps in the fight for integration. Among their desired goals were the complete desegregation of all government, educational, health, penal and recreational facilities, equal employment opportunities in the public and private sector for blacks, and the desegregation of all state eating establishments and public facilities. These demands were delivered to the governor, the General Assembly and mayors of eight major cities in the state. At the conclusion of the meeting, Newman announced that the NAACP would escalate its campaign of selective buying, picketing, and legal redress of grievances “within a fortnight” unless white politicians and business leaders made a “good faith showing” of their intent to desegregate all areas of public life.\footnote{“NAACP Gives S.C. Cities 2 Weeks to Desegregate,” \textit{Columbia Record}, June 6, 1963, 3D.} When asked what qualified such action, Newman explained that his standard was an offer to negotiate the end of racial discrimination “at the conference table rather than through demonstrations.” On the question of the first target for such protests, Newman demurred but hinted that they would occur in a “city where the merchants haven’t cooperated as well as the merchants in Greenville and Spartanburg have.” He added that Charleston might be excluded from the list of potential targets because of ongoing negotiations. White leaders responded in mixed fashion. The \textit{Record} editor, who called for bi-racial commissions just days earlier, agreed with Newman’s call for such committees to ensure “greater racial recognition and participation in private and public affairs” for African Americans” and
reestablish lines of communication between the races. These conversations were to exclude the NAACP due to their sustained attack on “the South’s bi-racial customs in the courts” and their pledge to resume mass demonstrations if their demands were not met. Montgomery added that each committee should “seek amicable and fair solutions” rather than obliterate all forms of segregation. “Total integration,” he wrote, “would destroy many desirable Negro as well as white institutions. Deliberate destruction of the bi-racial society would be catastrophic.” Full integration, in his view, could only be achieved through totalitarianism or the subjugation of an interracial majority at the hands of a vocal, militant minority. Senator L. Marion Gressette, the architect of the state’s legislative defense, defiantly warned Newman and other “noisy and provocative” Black leaders that the state had enough laws and police power to “maintain good order” and if they decided to follow through on their ultimatum. Falling back upon the well-worn canard that much racial progress had been made, Gressette accused NAACP leaders of resorting to outlandish acts to remain relevant. “If these demands are not met,” he angrily charged, “these NAACP leaders say they will take what they call non-violent action. This we can presume to mean demonstrations by hundreds and perhaps even thousands of Negroes who have been worked up to just the right emotional and unreasoning pitch by men calling themselves clergymen and dedicated crusaders.” In perhaps the most egregious example of the pot naming the kettle, Gressette blamed the “irresponsible and savagely childlike behavior” of Newman and other race leaders for

---

52 “The NAACP’s Nine Points,” *Columbia Record*, June 7, 1963, 10D.
creating an “impossible” climate for achieving racial progress.

The fierce and determined student protest campaign in South Carolina overcame stiff, occasionally violent opposition, to shape public opinion and force white leaders to desegregate lunch counters and other public accommodations in Columbia and other cities by 1963. Their courageous resistance also made future civil rights campaigns—and more aggressive, militant protests led by grassroots Black nationalists and campus revolutionaries—possible. The Supreme Court ruling in *Edwards v. South Carolina* remains an important precedent for the legal defense of free speech that protects the right of activists of all stripes to voice grievances and express unpopular opinions without fear of arrest or imprisonment. Realizing that blacks in South Carolina were fiercely determined to resist and controlled the moral high ground, white political and business leaders moderated their public rhetoric and pragmatically complied with local demands for inclusion and federal desegregation mandates in moments where the cost of tokenism was outweighed by the benefits of preserving white superiority, if not supremacy.

African Americans in in South Carolina won a measure of equal protection under the law, token desegregation and other piecemeal victories but genuine integration and economic justice remained out of reach. White political leaders and local media widely promoted public displays of compliance with federal desegregation orders, namely the relatively peaceful admission of black students to the state’s two flagship universities in early 1963, as examples of how South Carolina was unique compared to other southern states in how it dealt with racial strife. Such claims of dignified integration obscure the fact that white moderation ushered in a negative racial peace—While some blacks enjoyed a modicum of racial progress, the pace of social change proved glacial. Black gains in urban areas
were offset by continued white defiance, labor crackdowns, school privatization and political gamesmanship. Rural areas were largely unaffected by student demonstrations or the passage of federal civil rights legislation. Perhaps the most significant gains were made on Black college campuses, where students won greater freedoms, forced administrators to revise stale curriculum and ousted conservative presidents. Frustrated by delayed justice and adult leaders’ willingness to settle for crumbs, many Black college students embraced a more revolutionary cultural and political ideology that spoke to their concerns.
CHAPTER 6

BLACK FIRE AT VOORHEES COLLEGE: STUDENT POWER, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND STATE REPRESSION

“They came with machine guns and tanks with one thought in mind—to kill some niggers,” Black Fire editor Alphonso Beach dramatically recalled in its September 1969 issue, “It is a miracle that there was not another Orangeburg massacre at Voorhees.” Outraged and fatigued, the self-proclaimed “student-in-exile” and charter member of the Black Awareness Coordinating Committee (BACC) at Voorhees College recounted the events of April 28-29, 1969, when 36 of his fellow comrades and sympathizers were imprisoned for their participation in the armed seizure of the college’s Library-Administration building in pursuit of student power, racial self-determination, the reconstitution of black higher education, and improved living and working conditions for poor black residents of the tiny, rural town of Denmark, South Carolina. South Carolina governor Robert E. McNair, a prospective Democratic party vice-presidential candidate and practitioner of law and order politics, deployed National Guard troops to quell the uprising, the second such use of militarized law enforcement at a South Carolina HBCU in fifteen months. National media all but ignored the incident. Mainstream Americans had seemingly lost their appetite for introspection about the causes of racial and social unrest. The hopeful and dramatic civil rights confrontations of the early 1960s were but a faint echo obscured beneath the din of impassioned cries for “Black Power” and urban conflagrations in Watts, Cleveland, Newark, and Detroit. In 1969, the United States was
a nation divided. The Vietnam quagmire and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther
King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy eroded the public’s faith in its elected officials and all but
shattered dreams of a more egalitarian and progressive union. America’s youth were
perhaps the best barometer of its stormy mood, as college campuses were rocked by
antiwar protests waged by angry, disillusioned Baby Boomers, devotees of a burgeoning
counterculture that prescribed various political and herbal remedies for the nation’s ills.
The arrest of nearly forty Afro-wearing campus revolutionaries at a small historically
Black liberal arts college in a dusty South Carolina hamlet barely penetrated the nation’s
consciousness—the impact of the Voorhees BACC on black higher education at the
institution and racial politics in the Palmetto State and the nation writ large is absent from
the historical record.¹

Morris, Box 2, Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: Miscellaneous, Manuscripts Room, South
Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Martha Biondi, The Black Revolution on Campus
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 32-33. Biondi asserts that the Voorhees uprisings, like the
Orangeburg Massacre, was obscured in the national media by “rapid string of assassinations, street clashes,
global upheavals, and military battles” that led many Americans to believe that these events had little
impact. State and local newspapers such as the Bamberg Herald, The State (Columbia, S.C.), and The
News and Courier (Charleston, S.C.) covered the uprisings from varying perspectives. The students’ side
of the debate was mostly covered by African American newspapers such as Muhammad Speaks and
mimeographs produced by the Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU) and bulletins published in
African World. In 1983, two scholars published studies of the student rebellion that reflected continued
animosity between supporters of the students and administration and both sides’ desire to control the
narrative and shape collective memory of the uprising. Robert Blanton, son of former Voorhees principal
Joshua Blanton, was hired by the Voorhees College Alumni Association to write a new history of the
college. His study, entitled The Story of Voorhees College: From 1897 to 1982, heavily criticized student
activists for “very rudely” interrupting Voorhees’ “splendid march of progress” and blamed “inside and
outside influences” for leading gullible students astray. Like most of the administration’s supporters,
Blanton blames the takeover for the decline in enrollment and loss of revenue suffered by Voorhees
College over the next two decades. Coincidentally, or perhaps not, former Voorhees College professor Dr.
Albert Jabs penned two studies that examined the causes and outcomes of the 1969 Voorhees College strike
and subsequent protests, placing these moments within the context of the rise of Black Power, the
emergence of student movements at PWIs and HBCUs, shifting attitudes toward civil rights organizing and
nonviolent civil disobedience, and fierce debates over the purpose of higher education. Jabs initially
accuses the students of overreacting to “slogans, internal concerns, and external stress” but gradually
evolves over time to give a fairer assessment of the crisis. In his doctoral thesis, Jabs connects BACC to an
earlier tradition of student activism at Voorhees College and depicts its members and their sympathizers as
mature, intelligent and astute social activists who responded to a litany of problems at the institution
Despite Black South Carolinians’ tradition of “forceful, sustained, and militant civil rights agitation” after World War Two and the presence of six public and private HBCUs, historians have rarely associated South Carolina with the Black Power movement or described the state as fertile ground for Black campus radicalism during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Studies of the state’s civil rights movement either ignore this period or narrowly focus on the Orangeburg Massacre as the sole instance when the state failed to control the anger and ambitions of its Black populace. On February 8, 1968, South Carolina highway patrolmen opened fire on a crowd of unarmed black students during a tense, yet peaceful demonstration on the campus of South Carolina State College. Three students were killed—Samuel Hammond, Jr., Delano Middleton, and Henry E. Smith—and twenty-seven others were wounded. All but two of those hit by the double-ought buckshot were struck in the side or back. Initial reports described the massacre as the climax of almost four years of student protests against the lax enforcement of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in Orangeburg symbolized by the continued segregation of All-Star Lanes and the paltry living conditions and limited curriculum offered at State College. Such balanced analyses of the causes of the tragedy were

including poor food service and living conditions; the lack of student representation on the Board of Trustees and other administrative bodies; and the lack of books and courses that focused on the Black experience in the Western Hemisphere. While it is unknown if Jabs and Blanton knew of one another’s studies, their findings are reflective of conflicting interpretations of the Voorhees student movement that will be examined in this study. See Albert Jabs, “Voorhees College Disturbances of 1969 and 1970,” unpublished paper, 1980, Voorhees College Student Movement Collection, Elizabeth Evelyn Wright-John Foster Potts Library and “The Mission of Voorhees College: Its Roots and Future” (PhD dissertation: University of South Carolina, 1983).

Wim Roefs offers this description of South Carolina’s civil rights movement in his essay “The Impact of 1940s Civil Rights Activism on the State’s 1960s Civil Rights Scene: A Hypothesis and Historiographical Discussion,” in Winfred B. Moore and Orville Burton, 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, 2008), 159-160. Examples of earlier, balanced media coverage of the Orangeburg Massacre include “Orangeburg Massacre: All Because of an All-Star, All-White Bowling Alley,” The New Republic 158, 13-14; Jack Bass and Paul Clancy, “The Militant Mood in Negro Colleges,” The Reporter,
eventually obscured by the state’s whitewashed version of events, an explanation readily accepted by a racially polarized, apathetic American public that no longer viewed civil rights as an urgent and universal concern.

Cleveland Sellers, a 24-year-old native South Carolinian and former field organizer with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), was blamed for the grisly murders. Once an integrationist civil rights organization devoted to Ghandian nonviolence, SNCC underwent a radical ideological shift towards a platform that stressed the need for armed self-defense, racial pride, cultural nationalism, global anti-imperialism, and domestic Black grassroots political organizing—dubbed “Black Power” by activists and the national media—by the late 1960s. The adoption of Black Power within SNCC, coupled with the expulsion of its white members, shocked and alienated its donor base and struck fear in the hearts of mainstream Americans. Amidst a raging storm of negative publicity and relentless harassment by law enforcement officials, SNCC’s inner circle was torn asunder by ideological division, hostility, and personal tragedy. Tired of “settling arguments and swinging the organizational hatchet,” Sellers, like many former SNCC organizers, returned to the South to organize black college students to build a social justice movement that would bring much needed attention and relief to poor blacks suffering from the generational poverty, miseducation, and economic exploitation.
that shaped their lives. By the fall semester of 1967, Sellers had moved to Orangeburg and recruited students at both State College and Voorhees, his alma mater, to establish student organizations, both named BACC, with the goal of building racial unity through cultural and political education. Despite being largely comprised of politically moderate students with a budding interest in Black Power, the increasingly militant rhetoric espoused by State College BACC members alarmed more conservative students and raised suspicions among administrators and white citizens in Orangeburg still reeling from earlier student protests that ended nearly two decades of authoritarian rule by former president Benner C. Turner. Physically imposing and sporting a voluminous Afro and goatee, Sellers embodied white South Carolinians’ worst fears of an

---

3 Cleveland Sellers and Robert Terrell, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 170-206; William C. Hine, *South Carolina State University: A Black Land-Grant College in Jim Crow America* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 308-313; Ibram Rogers (Ibram X. Kendi), *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 93-94. The author notes that former SNCC organizers returned to the South to organize black students at public and private HBCUs such as Texas Southern University, Fisk University, Lincoln University (MO), and Howard University to name a few. Frustrated students followed their lead and waged protests and other more aggressive campaigns demonstrating their displeasure with their “Negro” universities, student powerlessness, police brutality, poor food and housing, racist professors, and authoritarian administrators.

4 Sellers and Terrell, eds., *The River of No Return*, 206-208; Philip Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink: Robert McNair and the Politics of Civil Rights* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 187-190, 200; Hine, *South Carolina State University*, 293-333 and “Civil Rights and Campus Wrongs: South Carolina State College Students Protest, 1955-1968,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 97:4 (October 1996), 310-331. Sellers may have confused memories of recruiting State College students with those he may have encountered at Voorhees College. In his biography, Sellers recalls that students expressed interest in joining his nascent student organization but were “afraid of administrative sanctions.” He then states that BACC was already active when he first contacted them in mid-October 1967. Several authors including Philip Grose misread this section and concluded that Sellers started BACC at State College and later Voorhees when he may have simply provided informal advice to leaders of both groups. In his recent study of student activism at State College during the late 1960s, Hine writes that black students won expanded rights and freedoms, including the right to establish campus organizations and host visiting and controversial speakers, prior to the start of the fall 1967 semester. The new State College president M. Naceo Mance, Jr. allowed interested students to establish BACC but tried to dissociate himself from their ideology without condemning the organization publicly to avoid swaying student opinion. What Sellers described as a group of “politically moderate” students who were “very interested in Black Power” may actually have been future members of the Voorhees College BACC, who faced stiffer opposition from the Dean of Students and other administrators.
approaching racial cataclysm making him the perfect scapegoat for state-sponsored terror against black students in February 1968—despite himself being unarmed and among those wounded. Conservative media in South Carolina and elsewhere cast the former SNCC organizer as the firebrand leader of a band of violent “Black Power advocates,” outside agitators who convinced gullible and impressionable students to engage in a shootout with police thus justifying their use of deadly force. McNair publicly endorsed this version of events and stonewalled attempts to fully investigate what occurred. His evasive attitude coupled with a tangled web of police corruption, bureaucratic malpractice, media indifference, the rise of “law and order” politics, and the increasingly polarized racial climate in South Carolina stacked the deck against those who sought justice for the murders.5

Over the next two decades, a veil of secrecy and silence fell over the incident that slowed its entry into the national civil rights narrative. Early historians of South Carolina’s civil rights struggle, like most white South Carolinians, treated Orangeburg as an aberration, a tragic moment of incivility caused by intransigent black militants who

5 Jack Bass and Jack Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 143-198. According to the authors, several factors prevented a full and accurate investigation of the events of February 8, 1968. Turnover within the Justice Department led to the appointment of a less experienced and biased District Attorney who eventually refused to argue the government’s case. Additionally, a widespread pattern of collusion between FBI agents and state law enforcement officials and Governor McNair’s refusal to convene an open commission to investigate the Massacre slowed efforts to bring justice to the victims’ families. In March 1969, nine South Carolina highway patrolmen were tried for the murders of the three students. The jury, influenced by false testimony and the increasingly polarized racial climate surrounding the case, found the officers not guilty. See also Frank Beacham, *Whitewash: A Southern Journey through Music, Mayhem and Murder* (New York: Beacham Story Studio, Inc., 2007), 54-111 and Hine, *South Carolina State University*, 320. The phrase “veil of secrecy and silence” is borrowed from Sellers’ reflections on the Orangeburg Massacre in Moore and Burton, eds., *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 361-366. Other studies that analyze and debate the collective memory and meaning of the Orangeburg Massacre include William C. Hine, “We’re Not There Yet: Orangeburg, 1968-2003,” in Moore and Burton, eds., *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, 373-382 and Jack Shuler, *Blood and Bone: Truth and Reconciliation in a Southern Town* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012).
threatened to forever blemish the state’s hard-won reputation for moderation, stability and racial peace. These scholars contend that South Carolina, this momentary loss of composure aside, managed to avoid the brutality and violence so closely identified with other Deep South states due to careful negotiation between cautious and conservative leaders of both races. This consensus interpretation distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals. Like a powerful, aristocratic family seeking to hide its dark secrets and fatal flaws, those who share this view prefer to “speak softly the victims’ names and move on,” an act of racial privilege and ageism that marginalizes the stories of tenacious, militant black student activists at South Carolina HBCUs who fought doggedly to transform these institutions into politically radical, culturally oriented, and socially responsible Black universities that would produce the next generation of race leaders and

---

6 Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 541. Edgar writes that Black South Carolinians were “less strident in their demands than activists elsewhere” because they “did not wish to destroy their towns over principle” due to their being part of their communities and not outsiders. He claims that the state’s small size “allowed people to know one another across the racial divide and fostered a ‘tradition of civility’ that undid segregation—with dignity.”; John G. Sproat, “Firm Flexibility: Perspectives on Desegregation in South Carolina” in Robert H. Abzug and Stephen E. Maizlish, eds., *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth M. Stampp* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 180. Sproat argues that “economic expedience, political realism, traditions of deference and paternalism; the basic conservatism of both blacks and whites in the state—all these factors came together in the 1960s to direct South Carolina away from massive resistance to peaceful accommodation.” He describes the incident in Orangeburg as “a momentary, unexpected breakdown of ‘control,’ rather than evidence of a larger pattern of racial animus or resistance to a vibrant movement for progressive change; Marcia Synott echoes this sentiment in her essay entitled “Desegregation in South Carolina: Sometime Between ‘Now and Never’,” in Winfred Moore, Jr. and Joseph Tripp, eds., *Looking South: Chapters in the Story of an American Region* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 51-64; Jack Bass and Scott Poole, eds., *The Palmetto State: The Making of Modern South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 111-116, 196. Oddly, Jack Bass’ documentation of the Orangeburg Massacre did not convince him that South Carolina transitioned into a multicultural society with anything but “relative ease.” He credits “progressive governors” in the 1950s and 1960s for affecting “profound change…with a minimum of turmoil.”; Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink*, 206. Grose acknowledges that civil rights protests occurred in South Carolina but claims that many of the most important moments, such as the desegregation of Clemson and the University of South Carolina, were orchestrated and highly organized affairs forged through communication between veteran activists, law enforcement officials, and white politicians. Orangeburg, in his view, was caused by the lack of communication between these parties and, most importantly, the interjection of Black youth and college students into ongoing political debates.
organize within grassroots community activist networks to improve the lives of poor black folk struggling to eke out an existence in Denmark and surrounding counties in South Carolina’s “Black Belt.” The failure of historians to acknowledge the presence and impact of the militant Black campus movement at State College, Voorhees, and even predominantly white institutions such as the University of South Carolina, has rendered the story of the Orangeburg Massacre and its turbulent aftermath akin to an infected appendix, surgically removed in order to preserve a larger progress narrative.

Scholars within the growing subfield of Black Power studies have taken the lead in examining the impact of the rise of Black Power ideology on the campuses of the nation’s colleges and universities. Between 1965 and 1972, a new generation of Black campus activists supported by a multiracial coalition of allies and sympathizers demanded a more relevant learning experience and dramatic reforms to the racial reconstitution of higher education at HBCUs and predominantly white colleges and universities (PWI). Black campus activists at southern HBCUs criticized the presence of majority-white faculty and trustee boards, repressive rules and regulations leftover from bygone eras, and the outdated curricula that prepared students to be docile cogs within the capitalist machine rather than provide them with the intellectual tools to fix a broken society. Joining their generational peers across the South and the nation, Black student leaders at South Carolina State and Voorhees formed study groups, founded Black Student Unions and co-opted existing campus organizations, and organized class boycotts and other aggressive protests with the goal of transforming their provincial colleges into
politically radical, culturally aware, and socially responsible Black universities.\textsuperscript{7}

Explicit within each of these studies of the Black Campus Movement is an understanding that the Orangeburg Massacre was neither an aberration nor irrelevant to Black students nationwide. The malice displayed by South Carolina law enforcement officials on that chilly February 1968 evening in Orangeburg fit the pattern of national backlash against efforts by black students to transform their campuses and communities. Black campus activists nationwide were rebuked, ridiculed, suspended, expelled, beaten, jailed, injured, traumatized, and killed—over a dozen students at southern HBCUs were murdered by overzealous law enforcement—for their efforts to change the racial constitution of higher education.\textsuperscript{8} Viewed within this context, Governor McNair’s use of police power to squash campus rebellions at South Carolina State and Voorhees was part of a devastating campaign of surveillance, political repression, and militarized state intervention ordered by white politicians nationwide in response to the awakening of Black college students to their second-class status as students and American citizens.\textsuperscript{9} Historians note that the Orangeburg Massacre was one of two major turning points—the other being the assassination of Dr. King—that fueled more strident activism for greater student power, increased Black representation on faculty and leadership positions, the creation of Black Studies programs, and an end to racism in the nation’s colleges and universities. The Orangeburg Massacre struck Black college students in the Carolinas, Virginia, and Washington D.C. like a bolt of lightning. Black campus activists at North


\textsuperscript{8} Rogers (Kendi), \textit{The Black Campus Movement}, 127-144.

\textsuperscript{9} Biondi, \textit{The Black Revolution on Campus}, 32-33.
Carolina A&T, North Carolina Central College, Johnson C. Smith, Shaw, and Virginia State University planned and executed marches and mock funeral processions to honor the three slain students. Outraged student activists at Howard University voiced their frustration by seizing the administration building for nearly a week to force campus authorities to accede to the “Orangeburg Ultimatum,” a list of demands intended to radically transform “the Mecca” into a true Black university.\(^\text{10}\)

The scholarly literature on the Black Campus Movement recognizes the importance of the Orangeburg Massacre as the inspiration for increased campus radicalism nationwide but, due to the need to outline the broad contours of this new subfield, devotes minimal attention to the reaction of Black college students in South Carolina to the murders. The historical amnesia surrounding the presence of Black Power in the Palmetto State is due, in part, to the conspicuous absence of Black campus activists in the literature on South Carolina’s civil rights movement. This chapter seeks to correct this problem by acknowledging the rise and impact of Black Power ideology at South Carolina HBCUs during the late 1960s and early 1970s, specifically on the campus of Voorhees College—the unlikely home to one of America’s most well-organized, militant yet forgotten Black campus movements. Inspired by the brutality and injustice in Orangeburg and frustrated with the glacial pace of social change in Denmark, the

\(^{10}\) Rogers (Ibram X. Kendi), *The Black Campus Movement*, 94; Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, 33, 36-37, 158; Bass and Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre*, 92; “Violence Erupts During Durham, N.C., Protest,” *The New York Times*, February 16, 1968, 16. Students at North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro and North Carolina College in Durham conducted separate mock funeral processions and burned Governor McNair in effigy. In Durham, firemen used high powered hoses to douse the flames and disperse nearly 200 angry Black students who retaliated by smashing department store windows. During the skirmishes that followed, UNC-Chapel Hill instructor Howard Fuller was arrested and charged with assault for striking policeman R.E. Lee in the mouth with his elbow while trying to escape the scene. Among the largest demonstrations took place at Virginia State University where 1,500 students staged a peaceful march. Voorhees College students held a small campus demonstration on this date as well.
Voorhees BACC escalated their ongoing cultural awareness, political education, and direct-action protest campaigns to force college administrators to improve living conditions, strengthen and racialize its outdated curriculum, hire additional black faculty, and develop programs to improve the lives of poor blacks in its surrounding community. Similar to their peers at State College, the Voorhees BACC faced stiff opposition from conservative students, dogmatic faculty, and authoritarian campus administrators such as Board of Trustees chairman Rev. J. Kenneth Morris—a missionary paternalist with a rage for order—and Arthur J. Clement, Jr., a veteran civil rights activist and proponent of respectability politics, interracial cooperation, and education for the “work world” as necessary tools for racial advancement.

These ideological and generational tensions boiled over during the BACC-led siege of the Library-Administration building. BACC leaders negotiated and eventually won numerous concessions including the establishment of a Black Studies program devoted to the close study of the African and African-American historical and cultural past. Their success came at a high cost. The escalation of the Black Campus Movement at home and abroad combined with increasingly aggressive labor and civil rights activism in Charleston inspired an intense white backlash against Black student protesters, civil rights activists, and labor organizers. Governor McNair was given carte blanche to crush nascent protest movements using surveillance, political repression, and militarized state intervention. Analysis of the Voorhees BACC’s campaign to rewrite the racial constitution of higher education at the college and the subsequent crackdown on dissent statewide reveals that Black Power was not only present in South Carolina but it changed the mindset of Black citizens, especially youth and college students, in ways that forced
white politicians to shed their veneer of moderation and behave in ways that belie myths of dignified integration. Examined within this context, South Carolina historians’ claims that state leaders practiced gentility or moderation in dealing with black resistance fall apart; White South Carolinians were equally if not more repressive than their southern neighbors.

Black students, faculty and administrators at South Carolina HBCUs and predominantly white colleges and universities were angry, bitter, outraged, and exasperated at the gross miscarriage of justice that had occurred at State College. “Was it necessary that three people be killed because 100 of them threw bricks? I have difficulty conceiving in my imagination of the highway patrolmen firing point-blank at students of the University of South Carolina or Clemson doing the same thing,” State College alumnus and Benedict College president Benjamin F. Payton asked white members of a prominent civic club in Columbia. Black campus activists within the Association for Afro-American Students (AFRO), a student organization established at the University of South Carolina in 1967, bitterly denounced the “needless and wanton slaughter” as the latest manifestation of the evil inherent in the existing order and vowed to eliminate racial injustice in all aspects of university life. Rather than provide state authorities with a reason to test Payton’s theory by resorting to violence, AFRO leaders Luther Battiste and Harry Wright sent a manifesto to USC president Thomas F. Jones demanding a series of reforms including an increase in the number of books written by black authors on the freshmen required reading list, the admission of black students proportional to the state’s population, increased recruitment of qualified blacks for faculty and leadership positions, and higher pay for janitorial staff. AFRO leadership persuaded Jones to establish an
interdisciplinary Black Studies program in 1971 to end the “misrepresentation and gross ignorance” of Black history and culture among white students by developing a series of courses studying the proper role of African Americans in the United States and around the globe. Battiste, Wright, and other AFRO members also worked alongside liberal and leftist white students to speak out against the Vietnam War, ban the flying of the Confederate flag and singing of “Dixie” during campus activities, and elect the first African American student body president in school history. These changes did not come easily; Reactionary white students counter protested against these changes using peaceful and violent means. Administrators and faculty frequently demonstrated indifference, prejudice, or overt racism toward black students. Black students at South Carolina’s flagship university oscillated between feelings of alienation and inclusion throughout the 1970s decade.

State College students grimly returned to campus in late February 1968 to honor the dead and mend their shattered campus community. On the three-week anniversary of the massacre, several hundred students and faculty members gathered in front of White Hall roughly a few hundred feet from the site of the massacre. Cold brisk wind and driving rain battered the “weary assemblage” as they made their way to the embankment on the front lawn of the campus, where they placed three garnet and blue wreathes in

---

11 Bass and Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre*, 94; “Working Copy: A Report by the Negro Students of the University of South Carolina,” Records of the Office of the President, Thomas F. Jones, 1967-1968, Box 10, Folder: Student Affairs/Student Activities: Organizations-Association of Afro-American Students, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. In addition to these demands, students also requested the inclusion of black athletes on major university athletic teams, an increase in the number of lectures and speeches on campus by black authors and other professionals, the “immediate cessation of harassment of militant black students enrolled at USC,” and a public statement by President Jones condemning racism on campus.

honor of the fallen. Although the Justice Department finally forced the owner of the All-Star Lanes, Harry Floyd, to admit black patrons, grieving students at State College felt that it was too little, too late. In an editorial in the Collegian, State College student Woodrow S. Nathan, Jr. spoke for his outraged peers. “Three Black men died. And we ask our governor, ‘Did it have to happen? Did the state have to ‘murder’ three of our students?’ He continued, “Must blood flow? Must tears be shed? Must students so elect disorder, boycott classes, etc., as a means toward settling their grievances? Is this the only way to get the ear of the white power structure?” 13 Barely able to contain their rage, State College SGA president Robert V. Scott and seven other student leaders met with Governor McNair on March 6 to win his support for an $8.8 million appropriation for State College, amnesty for Cleveland Sellers and others facing criminal charges stemming from confrontations with law enforcement, desegregation of the South Carolina National Guard, and the naming of the new physical education facility at State College in honor of their fallen classmates. Their attempt at diplomacy failed. While armed highway patrolmen secretly huddled in a nearby room, McNair flatly rejected most of their requests and shrewdly deferred other decisions to State College administrators and federal authorities. Scott and his colleagues returned to Orangeburg having derived few meaningful concessions from the governor. 14

State College BACC leaders, who were largely indifferent to the earlier fight to desegregate All-Star Lanes, made it clear that they would not accept platitudes as recompense for the lives of their fallen classmates. The next day, March 7, they

13 Hine, South Carolina State University, 321.
14 Ibid., 322-323.
organized roughly 250 students—including Sellers’ wife, Sandi, and black campus activists from Voorhees, Claflin, Allen, Benedict, USC, and schools in Mississippi and North Carolina—for a mass protest at the State House. Some of the students were carrying signs: “McNair is a Son of a Birch,” “Orangeburg Massacre—A Police Riot,” and “Needed: Quality Education at South Carolina State,” but were ordered by SLED agent Leon Gasque to leave them at the front door of the building. After dropping their placards, they swarmed into the galleries of the General Assembly and the governor’s outer office.15 Approximately 90 students led by State College BACC co-founder Steve Moore entered the Senate chamber to draw attention to their prepared list of grievances. The State College senior loudly called to Lieutenant Governor John C. West, the senate president, who rapped his gavel and explained that spectators had never been allowed to address the Senate but the group could submit their petition to be read during a future session. Undaunted, Moore began to read. “We’ve got some grievances here,” the BACC leader shouted as he was hauled out of the door by SLED agents. Five student protesters, including 20-year-old Priscilla Ann Phillips—known within the Voorhees BACC as “Yolande X”—were also arrested for continuing to read the grievances over the vociferous objections of West and his fellow senators. They were charged with disorderly conduct, but those charges were later dropped.16 Several senators met with the

15 Ibid., 324; “Mrs. Sellers—Respectable Way Fails,” The State, March 8, 1968, 5A; “Students Protest Orangeburg Action,” The State, March 8, 1968, 1A, 12A. According to The State, members of both houses of the General Assembly were advised that the group was coming and decided to continue their scheduled sessions. One group of students visited the House chambers but reportedly left after quietly sitting in the gallery for ten minutes.

16 Ibid; “Students Protest Orangeburg Action,” 1A, 12A. The other students arrested were State College students Al Benjamin Hazel, Sandra Fordham, William Toney, and Eddie Sharperson; “Disturbance Rocks Quiet S.C. Senate,” The State, March 8, 1968, 1B, 10B.
remaining protesters in the lobby of the State House after the proceedings adjourned. While his comrades lobbied for support, State College BACC president Wayne Curtis read aloud the petition which protested the “vicious use of Gestapo tactics of the S.C. state troopers, SLED, the Orangeburg National Guard, and the Orangeburg City Police” and called for a series of reforms including reparations for the families of those killed during the Orangeburg Massacre.17

Upon arriving at the governor’s outer office, the remaining student protesters were informed that McNair would return shortly and that he preferred to meet with five or six representatives. The students left his office, regrouped, and marched once around the State House. Dressed in a shaggy white coat and sporting an Afro, Sandi Sellers stood nearby snapping photos and chatting with reporters. “Rather than tearing up the town, we decided that if we would act in the so-called white, respectable way, we would be respected, but obviously tearing up the town would have achieved the same results,” she lamented. A short time later, Curtis told the marchers that the police had agreed to release the six arrested students if they agreed to the governor’s request. “That’s a sellout,” replied one of the students as they again marched on McNair’s office. Curtis promised Wayne Seal, McNair’s press secretary, that he and his peers would behave if McNair met with select student representatives in the presence of the larger group.18 The governor refused out of fear of public embarrassment or violence. While the students

18 “Students Protest Orangeburg Action,” 12A; “Mrs. Sellers,” 5A; “Head Scarf Surprises Students,” The State, March 8, 1968, 7A. Students marching around the State House were reportedly distracted by the sight of Hattie Miller, a middle-aged Black woman, wearing a head scarf emblazoned with a Confederate flag while seated at a nearby bus stop. When BACC member Edward Pough questioned her about her fashion choice, Miller responded that she bought the scarf because it fit her budget. Several students attempted to buy the scarf from her but she refused. A short time later, she left without boarding the bus.
huddled outside the governor’s office, two Urban League officials spoke with them and later informed the governor that they were calm and reasonable. McNair, however, felt that agreeing to meet with the students would be viewed by the public as rewarding insolence. As the angry and frustrated students left the State House, Curtis declared, “This is war. We want to vote Governor McNair and men like him out of office.” When questioned about the potential for violence, the BACC president explained that his organization was a “thinking group” and stressed that violence was a last resort.19

State College students returned to Orangeburg defeated but unbowed. They drew strength from the memory of the fallen and were stirred by the unyielding support provided by kindred spirits from colleges and universities across South Carolina and neighboring states. Outraged students from Voorhees and other South Carolina HBCUs rallied to the defense of their peers not only because they feared the potential for state sponsored terror on their own campuses but also due to a shared sense of frustration with the paltry state of Black higher education. Several historians have examined the emergence of student activism at State College in early 1967 to protest President Benner C. Turner’s authoritarian regime and continued segregation in Orangeburg but none have acknowledged that their actions inspired similar movements elsewhere in the state.20

Allen University students who joined the protest at the State House, for example, saw that moment as an extension of their own struggle for quality education at the AME Church supported institution. Campus activists marched, picketed, and conducted a week-long boycott of classes in May 1967, roughly two months after the emergence of

“the Cause” at State College. On May 4, about 400 Allen students marched on the home of Board of Trustees chairman Bishop Carey Gibbs following the resignation of a popular white dean, who left the university because trustees vetoed then president Benjamin J. Glover’s recommendation to fire several professors for abusive and unprofessional behavior. When trustees threatened student activists with the loss of teacher certification upon graduation, student leader Kenneth Barnes reminded them that “without students, there is no Allen University.” Dissatisfied with Gibbs’ response to their pleas for fair hearings where evidence against accused faculty could be made public, Allen campus activists successfully organized nearly 85 percent of the student body to support a boycott of classes that virtually closed the university. “The program for tomorrow,” said another student leader, “is to sleep as much as you want to.”

On the first day of the boycott, May 5, students marched to Glover’s home to express their support for his fight to assert his autonomy. Glover thanked the students for their support during “these days of crisis” and pleaded for all parties to reestablish tranquility and normalcy on campus. He urged the students to return to classes, but they refused. During a mass meeting held later that day, Bishop Gibbs demanded that students end the boycott and refused to answer their prepared questions about the situation. When Glover asked them to stand as trustees departed, many refused. “I’m still not satisfied,” shouted Barnes. Many other students loudly concurred. “Are you willing to go back to class?” he asked them. “NO!” they shouted. Several Allen faculty members supported

their cause. Allen professor George Bowdler applauded their principled stand for honest governance and equated their fight against theocratic dominance with earlier struggles for civil rights and equal treatment under the law. The students returned to Gibbs’ home where they loudly clapped and sang freedom songs. Shortly before Sunday services, the board reaffirmed its decision and blamed Glover for a series of administrative errors that forced them to intervene. Student leaders rejected these claims. “We will try to close down the whole university. Captains and picketing crews have already been assigned to various buildings. We’ll even try to keep the president from entering,” Barnes warned.

Two days later, disgruntled Allen students lined entrance gates with signs: “We Want Quality Education,” and blocked other entrances with cinderblock and screen barricades. Students sang and chanted near the entrances to classroom and administration buildings, sat atop gate posts or relaxed on campus lawns. Rather than risk arrest, they eventually removed the barricades and organized a continuous picket line around the small downtown campus. Student leaders and supportive faculty, echoing criticisms raised in earlier decades, blamed the corrupt and incestuous Allen theocracy for the university’s failure to secure its accreditation and provide quality education to black South Carolinians. “Accreditation will mean too many members of the board of trustees and or relatives would either lose their jobs, be stripped of their power to dictate to the president, or be exposed to the public,” they charged. Campus activists warned that failure to upgrade Black higher education at Allen would doom its students to receive a
“second hand education” ill-suited to prepare them for the future. The Allen student movement eventually dissolved after Barnes and his lieutenants agreed to end the boycott in a failed attempt to prevent the firing of Glover, whose fate was sealed by his refusal to publicly defend trustees during the crisis. Allen trustees also fired his wife and other members of the faculty and staff who supported the boycott. Many of the Allen students who joined the State House protest a year later, still stinging from this defeat, sympathized with State College student demands for legislators to finally provide the necessary funding to transform their alma mater into a modern liberal arts institution.

Campus activists at Voorhees College, as evidenced by the arrest of Yolande X, were also embroiled in a fierce debate over the purpose and future of Black higher education. Founded in 1897 by Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, a Tuskegee graduate, Voorhees was initially known as the Denmark Industrial School, a one-room private school for African American children modeled on the industrial educational philosophy of Booker T. Washington. Shedding her initial reluctance to accept aid from white philanthropists and denominational boards, Wright approached Ralph Voorhees, a Clinton, New Jersey, philanthropist for assistance in purchasing 280 acres of land on the outskirts of town to expand the school. Voorhees donated $4,500 for the purchase of the land and later contributed funds to build two dormitories, a hospital, a Boys’ Trade building, and to cover future expenses. The new school, named Voorhees Industrial School for its

---

22 Ibid.; “Allen Trustees to Talk with Students, Faculty,” *The State*, May 9, 1967, 1B. The Allen student strike of 1967 is part of a long tradition of student and faculty protest against theocratic control at the AME institution. See Chapter Two for more information on Depression era struggles for student power, racial self-determination, and the reconstitution of higher education at Allen.

benefactor, opened in 1902 as a coeducational school for elementary and high school
students. Wright overcame opposition from hostile whites by relying on her Tuskegee
connections and forging strong bonds between Voorhees and the surrounding
community. Voorhees students received training in skilled and unskilled trades with an
emphasis on Christian morality and character building and, by the 1920s, were granted
eligibility to teach in Black public schools in South Carolina. 24

Wright’s death in 1906 left a void in leadership that dramatically impacted the
level of support given to Voorhees by northern philanthropists and the African American
community in Denmark. Infighting, mismanagement, and rising white hostility to Black
advancement nearly forced the college to close its doors. 25 Disinterested trustees, many
of whom lived abroad and had never seen the school, reached an agreement with
Episcopal Church leaders to take over its daily operations in 1924. The church agreed to
provide $6000 each year and gave Voorhees leaders permission to solicit funds from
philanthropists and churches within its connection. Under new leadership, Voorhees high
school was accredited and became a feeder school for the newly established Voorhees

24 Larry Watson, “Martha Fell Schofield and Elizabeth Evelyn Wright: Women Founders of South Carolina
African American Schools,” in Marjorie Spruill, Valinda Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson, eds., South
Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times, Volume Two (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 44-45;
Jesse Thomas, My Story in Black and White: The Autobiography of Jesse O. Thomas (New York:
Exposition Press, 1967), 84-90; Lewis McMillan, Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina

25 McMillan, Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina, vii-viii; J. Kenneth Morris, Elizabeth
Evelyn Wright, 1872-1906: Founder of Voorhees College (Sewanee, TN: University of the South, 1983),
240-241. In the introduction of his comprehensive study of Black higher education in South Carolina,
McMillan recalls his experience as a disillusioned elementary student at Voorhees College prior to the First
World War. He left Voorhees after three disappointing years at the college because, as he later explained,
the college was “living far too short of its marvelous possibilities and responsibilities.” Nearly a decade
later, Voorhees students raised similar complaints during a student strike in 1922. Similar to other New
Negro students at HBCUs nationwide, black students protested the strenuous work schedule, rigid rules and
regulations, poor food, and dilapidated facilities at the largely white controlled, nonsectarian college. Their
strike contributed to the resignation of Voorhees president Rev. E.R. Roberts in 1922.
Junior College by the end of the Depression. Success proved to be a double-edged sword; Local school officials in Denmark negotiated terms with Episcopal Church leaders to pay an annual appropriation to Voorhees in order to avoid desegregation. By the 1950s, one observer remarked, the college resembled an “oasis” for an educated class of African Americans increasingly disconnected from their relatives and neighbors in the backwoods of the Lowcountry. The schism worsened by mid-decade as the State Department of Education raised the minimum standards for teacher certification thereby jeopardizing the career prospects of Voorhees graduates. Voorhees was confronted with two choices: either close its doors or somehow transform itself into a four-year liberal arts college which would effectively force the closure of its model elementary and high schools.

Following the resignation of President C.D. Halliburton in 1953, the Voorhees Board of Trustees appointed a presidential search committee that was chaired by Rev. J. Kenneth Morris, a white Episcopal minister and Columbia area family counselor elected to the board two years earlier. After an exhaustive search, Morris and the trustees selected Dr. John Foster Potts as the college’s new president in 1954. Potts was born in Hot Springs, Arkansas, on April 18, 1908, to John Moultrie Potts and Leila Snead, who moved the family to their ancestral home in Flat Rock, North Carolina nearly a decade

---

26 Thomas, My Story in Black and White, 85; McMillan, Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina, 69-71.
27 Blanton, The Story of Voorhees College, 10-11; McMillan, Negro Higher Education in the State of South Carolina, 75. Voorhees received an “A” rating from SACS in 1947 which enabled it to continue its two-year junior college program and certify its graduates to teach in South Carolina public schools. The college began its transition towards becoming a liberal arts college the following year as it donated 25 acres of land for the creation of the South Carolina Area Trade School, an industrial training school. Male enrollment at Voorhees dropped as a result of the presence of SCATS and the college’s abandonment of its trade program in 1949. In 1952, Voorhees was forced to discontinue its elementary teaching specialization due to the passage of a new state law requiring a four-year degree for teacher certification.
The future educator attended Lincoln Academy in nearby King’s Mountain before receiving his high school and college training at Benedict College in Columbia, where he graduated *summa cum laude* in 1930. Over the next five years, Potts taught at various Columbia schools and served as assistant principal at Waverly Elementary and Booker T. Washington High School. In 1936, Potts moved to Gary, Indiana, where he taught social science at segregated Roosevelt High School and conducted research for his master’s thesis which he earned from Cornell University one year later. Potts returned to Columbia in 1939, where he served as principal of Waverly and directed the normal program at Allen University. Shortly after the United States entered World War Two, he and his new wife, Muriel, moved to Charleston where he took a position as a Recruiting Specialist for the United States Navy. The American Missionary Association (AMA) appointed him principal of Avery High School in 1945, where he served until it closed shortly after the *Brown* decision.  

The new Voorhees president had built a reputation as an effective teacher and community activist whose charisma, administrative skill, and willingness to compromise endeared him to white Charlestonians and AMA representatives. Working alongside Morris, who assumed dual roles as board chairman and Director of Development by the mid-1960s, Potts oversaw the miraculous transformation of Voorhees from an obscure, nearly defunct junior college to a four-year liberal arts college with a strong faculty, growing donor base, and sterling public image from which its leaders drew upon to solicit

---


29 Drago, *Charleston’s Avery Center*, 237-238.
funds from white industrialists, philanthropists, and federal officials to support its continued development. Potts helped the college regain its accreditation as a two-year institution in 1957 and successfully raised $120,000 for the construction of the Wilkinson Library-Administration building and the renovation of existing structures by the end of the decade. Two years later, Dr. Sherman Webster became the first member of the Voorhees faculty to hold a doctorate. At the beginning of the 1962-1963 semester, the Potts administration developed an ambitious five-year plan to upgrade the faculty, academic programs, physical plant, and student services at the newly renamed Voorhees College. Desegregation made the need for modernization imperative as predominantly white colleges and universities in South Carolina and nationwide began to compete with Voorhees and other southern HBCUs for the best and brightest African American students.

By the fall of 1967, the Potts administration had made “unprecedented and unparalleled progress” in modernizing the college to meet the minimum standards required for accreditation. The Voorhees high school program had been eliminated and $2 million was raised to improve the college’s physical plant; new sewer lines and drainage pipes were laid, several older buildings were renovated, and plans were made for the construction of two new dormitories, a dining hall, and state-of-the-art Science building. Spurred by rising enrollment, Potts initiated a $1 million fundraising campaign for the erection of a new library and, as a stopgap measure, organized local Episcopal

---

churchwomen and Voorhees faculty to select and purchase thousands of new volumes for the existing site. The college also received thousands of dollars in grants for faculty training and curriculum development from industrial philanthropists interested in Black educational advancement. The Ford Foundation, for example, provided funding for three Black faculty members—Rodney Albert, James Martin, and Theodore Hemmingway—to pursue advanced degrees as part of a cooperative arrangement with the University of South Carolina. Such contributions, Potts wrote, helped Voorhees assemble the “best qualified” faculty in school history; Roughly one-fourth of its members held doctoral degrees and several professors were Woodrow Wilson and National Teaching fellows.

Chairman Morris, working pro bono as Director of Development, persuaded U.S. Department of Education officials to provide $300,000 for the creation of the “Thirteen College Project,” a joint consulting initiative between Voorhees and twelve other colleges, and additional funds for new laboratory equipment, work study stipends, student loans, and Economic Opportunity grants. The beneficiaries of these changes were Voorhees students, many of whom were now reportedly being selected from the upper-third of high school graduates nationwide.

---

32 Potts, “The Challenge of Change,” 2-4. Rodney Albert and James Martin studied chemistry and biology, respectively. Theodore Hemmingway became the first African American to graduate with a doctorate in History from the university.; Potts, “1967-1968 Annual Report,” 7-9. Potts and Morris persuaded several professors from Ivy League institutions to delay their retirements to join the Voorhees faculty including two Princeton graduates, Drs. Ralph Bebee and George Harper, and Harvard graduate and internationally known Shakespearean scholar Dr. Arthur Colby Sprague. Other doctorate holding faculty included the college’s academic dean Dr. H.I. Fontellio-Nanton, exiled Benedict College professor and Potts’ former student Dr. Marianna Davis, and Dr. Milton Shuler, who was hired as part of a cooperative arrangement with Claflin College.
Speaking before the Faculty Institute in September 1967, Potts celebrated the successful implementation of the Five-Year Plan but cautioned against complacency. “There are many people and organizations interested in Voorhees who have not been concerned before and their expectations are very high. We cannot afford to lose the confidence of those who are expecting so much from us. We must continue to accelerate our pace and increase our momentum without fumbling the ball,” he pleaded.33 Fully aware of the tense situation at nearby State College, the Potts administration viewed rising student discontent as an imminent threat to their plans to modernize the college. Frustrated Voorhees students, inspired by the success of “The Cause,” had already begun to push for a greater voice in the daily operations of the college. Seeking to prevent the emergence of a campus wide student movement, Potts convened an ad hoc committee comprised of nine students and two adult advisers to revise the outdated student handbook. Utilizing numerous handbooks from modern public and private educational institutions, as well as the AAUP statement on academic freedom, the committee drafted a new set of academic and social regulations that expanded student rights to free speech and assembly, permitted student organizations to invite controversial speakers to campus, and granted due process to students facing disciplinary action.34 Voorhees students were also permitted to establish new campus organizations such as BACC, a move that Potts believed would both promote the hallmarks of a liberal arts education—advanced literacy training, critical thought, strong character, knowledge of contemporary affairs, historical and cultural appreciation—and create an intellectually stimulating environment that

33 John Foster Potts, “Bridging the Educational Gap at Voorhees, An Address Delivered to the Faculty of Voorhees College During the Faculty Institute,” September 11, 1967, 1, John F. Potts, Sr., Papers, 1885-2005, Box 5, Folder 4, Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, Charleston, S.C.
would prepare graduates to pass professional exams and acquire gainful employment.\textsuperscript{35}

Black campus activists at Voorhees shared Potts’ appreciation for liberal arts education but challenged the idea that such training could only help them achieve individual material gain. The ensuing debate, further enflamed by the furor over the Orangeburg Massacre, raised important questions about the impact of generational inequality in black higher education in South Carolina and forever changed Voorhees College.

Potts’ main opposition arose within the Voorhees BACC, a militant black campus organization chartered in the fall of 1967 for the purpose of raising the racial consciousness of the student body through cultural and political education to inspire a “radical desire for social change” on campus and in the surrounding community. Simmering discontent with the administration’s myopic pursuit of accreditation, student powerlessness, and the dull, vanilla campus atmosphere found an outlet within the growing BACC movement, which expanded to Voorhees due to Sellers’ close friendships with a tightly knit group of Voorhees students and their families. Several founders of BACC were natives of Denmark whose racial outlook was shaped by their lived experience under segregation and, most notably, the frustration and anger caused by the closure of Voorhees High School and, later, their second-class status as students at Voorhees College. “People loved and cared about you,” remembered Cecil Raysor, a 1965 graduate of Voorhees High and founder of BACC. Adult leaders at Voorhees High did their best to shelter their pupils from the indignities endured by most blacks in Denmark and surrounding counties in South Carolina’s Black Belt. Raysor fondly

recalled countless tutoring sessions with dedicated teachers and the joy of being asked to run errands that permitted him to visit the idyllic college campus.36

While Voorhees officials sold the new construction and improvements to the physical plant as signs of progress, Raysor and his classmates bristled as they watched their school limp toward its eventual closure. “They were pimping us,” said Raysor when asked about his high school experience, “They made us sacrifice. The college had a football team but we had to raise money for them.” Reflecting the approach of black students who eventually became campus activists, Raysor was dismayed by the conservatism of his peers and Voorhees adult leaders concerning questions of civil rights and desegregation. Raysor’s interactions with Lucius Wright, a local mortician and community leader, taught him the limits of gradualism and accommodation as a weapon against Jim Crow and white supremacy. When the budding activist asked Wright about the possibility of desegregating schools in Denmark, the veteran community leader explained that the time was not ripe. “We looked at him as a sort of ‘long coat, top hat’ spokesman for the townspeople. He said wait. But I was ready then. I felt that it was time to do something for Black people. I took him at his word because I didn’t know he was a handkerchief head,” Raysor chuckled, “I just figured he was looking out for the rights of our people.” As time passed, he thought otherwise. “The sad thing is that when you’re in a town like Denmark, the educated people would sell you out,” he lamented, “Now, if you go to Bamberg, which was seven miles away, they were making progress with integrating the schools and parks. But we had spokesmen. They were educated.

36 Interview with Cecil Raysor, June 3, 2014.
They were holding us back.” Worse, many of these spokesmen were chosen by whites to speak for individuals with whom they rarely contacted.37

Raysor entered Voorhees College in the fall of 1966 and, like many of his generation, struggled to contain his rage while adapting to a campus culture that was constantly shifting and increasingly enmeshed in America’s ever deepening racial quagmire. He and many of his classmates experienced culture shock as they struggled to cope with antiquated rules and regulations, student powerlessness, irrelevant and outdated curriculum, and other problems with campus life. Although earlier generations of Voorhees students had convinced campus authorities to lift prohibitions against dancing and card playing, Raysor and his classmates were governed by a strict set of rules that regulated student freedom and agency intended to mold them into civilized Christians and compliant workers within the capitalist, patriarchal American order. Sunday chapel, convocation, and class attendance were still mandatory. Freshmen and sophomores, especially women, were burdened with additional strictures. Co-eds were required to attend daily religious services and, out of concern for their security and chastity, prohibited from owning vehicles.38 Student dress, appearance, and behavior was heavily policed. One of Raysor’s teachers, Mrs. Annie Hicks, delivered an ultimatum about his Afro hairstyle. “Young man, if you’re going to come into my class, you’re going to have to get rid of that Afro. It’s either Mrs. Hicks or that Afro,” he recalled with laughter, “I said, ‘My Afro,’ and left the class.”39

37 Interview with Cecil Raysor, June 3, 2014. Raysor noted that his little brother and sister fulfilled his dream and were among the first African Americans to desegregate public schools in Denmark.
39 Interview with Cecil Raysor, June 3, 2014.
Roughly one week after their initial march on the State House, approximately one thousand students gathered to seek redress for the Orangeburg Massacre and the long tradition of neglect, corruption and patronage that afflicted Black educational institutions. Campus activists from State College were joined by allies from Allen, Benedict, the University of South Carolina, and a large contingent from Voorhees College. A phalanx of highway patrolmen dressed in full riot gear greeted them. This time, McNair agreed to meet with five students and two adult advisors, State College professor Roland Haynes and Robert Moore, the state AAUP president and Columbia College history professor. The contentious meeting did little to ease tensions. When asked how the state would respond in a future confrontation with Black students, McNair did not mince words: “I have made myself crystal clear before and I will make it clear again. We will never initiate any confrontation, but whenever the first brick is thrown, whenever the first rock is thrown, whenever the first firebomb is thrown, whenever the first house is set on fire, then it’s our move.” When pressed for specifics, the governor claimed that he could not provide any without knowing the circumstances surrounding the conflict. “But you’re the governor,” Moore declared, “you have to know what the move would be.” The group left McNair’s office believing that the official response would be all or nothing.

Meanwhile, a delegation of 15 students and BACC faculty adviser Dr. Rubin Weston were permitted to enter the capitol through a side entrance and present their grievances to Lieutenant Governor John West. Later, they discussed the grievances in an hour-long session with McNair. Outside, the horde of student demonstrators split into two groups. Those from State College held a mock funeral procession. They carried a casket with a sign: “Look, it could happen to any of us.” Beside the casket marched a
student with another sign, “McNair, you’ve got blood on your hands.” A smaller group of taunting, cursing militants charged up the capitol steps several times to within a few feet of the highway patrolmen. But there was no violence.

During its March 1969 meeting, the BACC discussed ideas for large-scale protests that would awaken the administration to the seriousness of their demands. The disgruntled students heatedly debated a wide variety of possible actions including campus-wide pickets, a collective boycott of classes and even an armed takeover of the Library-Administration building. The latter idea steadily gained popularity but was opposed by Raysor and others who feared arrest, expulsion, or blacklisting from future employment. Another student, harkening back to the Orangeburg tragedy, warned that the authorities would not hesitate to use force to quell an armed uprising. Casting aside such worries, a proponent of the takeover argued that the governor would not bring the National Guard onto the campus of a private college. “Don’t underestimate the administration,” one of his peers replied, “Remember, they put Abdullah in jail.” After further deliberation, a vote was taken and the option to seize the building passed by a slim majority.\(^\text{40}\) The BACC and its supporters carefully planned their attack throughout the month of April. “We talked about where the weapons would come from and all of the people who lived in the area checked on what guns and rifles were available from their families,” Francis remembered. A number of students volunteered to case the library at various times each day to determine the best time to strike. The scouts reported back that few people frequented the library between noon and 12:30pm. After collecting intelligence, the insurgents enacted a series of “dry runs” to gauge travel time from the

\(^{40}\) Memoirs of Oliver Francis,” June 2012, Personal Papers of Oliver Francis, 3.
“Power House” on Maple Street, where the guns were stored, to the library. Satisfied with their plan, the siege was scheduled for April 28th, the two-year anniversary of famed boxer Muhammad Ali’s refusal to be inducted into the U.S. Army. The campus rebels, like their brash and bombastic hero, fully understood the gravity of the situation but were willing to sacrifice their elders’ faith and trust, their place within the Voorhees family, and their future earning potential at the altar of freedom. After losing the vote, Raysor gave lukewarm support to the plan and continued to work within the SGA to bring about change. The student government’s conservative philosophy and the administration’s delayed response to BACC demands soon pushed him over the edge. “The SGA is an agent set up by the administration to keep the students cool,” he complained, “Any student who is a member of the SGA will have to fight the administration to meet basic needs of the students.” Realizing that a united front was necessary to foster change, Raysor revolved to support the imminent student revolt and urged his peers to join the fight.

Upon returning to Voorhees College, the student insurgents prepared to execute their plan. On Sunday, April 27th, BACC leaders visited dormitories to encourage students to support the cause. Later that evening, the campus rebels joined the rest of the student body at chapel. “When classes ended at 11am on that Monday, some of the leaders went into the library early,” Francis recalled. Over the next thirty minutes, sympathetic students and other curious onlookers gradually arrived. While BACC representatives attempted to persuade others to join the takeover, the “Power Car”

41 “Memoirs of Oliver Francis,” 3-4.
42 Cecil Raysor to “Brothers and Sisters,” April 22, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 2, Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: Student Statements.
whipped through campus and screeched to a halt in front of the library. The driver, Beach, sped away to retrieve the weapons after receiving the “okay” signal from those inside the building. His fellow conspirators issued an ultimatum to their fellow students to stay and participate or leave. Some left but many stayed. At roughly the same time, BACC sympathizers delivered memos to news media in Denmark and Columbia informing them that students armed for “self-defense purposes” had taken over the Library-Administration building to “obtain a more meaningful education in the interest of black people” and would occupy the building until their demands were met.\textsuperscript{43}

Back on campus, several students distributed flyers which included a revised list of grievances. In addition to demanding amnesty from punishment by the college or law enforcement, the dissidents called for the total restructuring of black higher education at Voorhees College starting with the abolition of its \textit{in loco parentis} philosophy of education, particularly the longstanding tradition of compulsory class attendance. Campus rebels also demanded an end to the normalization of whiteness in campus leadership and academic inquiry. They called for the creation of a Black Studies program, controlled by students and faculty with full authority to hire and fire teachers and grant degrees, and requested that a section of the library be “devoted to the history of the black man, from Africa to Afro-Americans.” \textsuperscript{44} Student insurgents also called for


\textsuperscript{44} “Black Students Demands,” April 28, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 2, Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: Student Statements. The students’ desire for greater input on new hires was not simply due to the lack of black instructors at Voorhees. They were also outraged at the recent discovery that a white professor in the English Department, Victor Ulrich, was found to have falsely claimed to hold a doctoral degree from Oxford University. According to Oliver Francis, by the time his lie was uncovered, Ulrich had already failed close to 60 students, many of whom were placed on academic probation. The dissident
Voorhees College to improve living conditions and to devote greater energy and
resources to the redress of social problems rooted in the generational poverty and racism
that had long plagued poor blacks in Denmark. They urged the college to employ a
permanent doctor, provide non-academic workers with a raise to meet federal minimum
wage standards, repair dilapidated facilities, buy new furniture, and build new
dormitories to alleviate overcrowding. Lastly, the dissidents demanded the creation of
relevant programs to aid poor blacks in the surrounding community such as courses to
help high school dropouts earn their diplomas, adult literacy programs, prenatal care for
young mothers, and the creation of a job training corps. The few remaining library
patrons, among whom were several students and the administrative assistants to Potts and
Voorhees College Business Manger Orlando White, were forcibly removed from the
building at gunpoint. Francis and other student protesters barricaded the exits with
heavy-duty chains while their comrades plastered the windows with large banners
reading “Black Power,” “Power to the People,” and one that christened the building as
“The Liberated Malcolm X University.” Shortly after being forced from the library, the
terrified secretary fled to a nearby residence hall and phoned President Potts, who had
already been made aware of the situation by both his daughter and Voorhees College
Business Manager Orlando White. After reading the list of demands given to him by
Voorhees Dean of Students Wilsie Jenkins, Potts asked Dr. M.S. Guram, the Academic

---

students, some of whom had taken his course, demanded that “all students who received a grade below a C,
be given Cs.” See also “Armed Voorhees Students Seize Buildings on Campus,” Bamberg Herald, April
29, 1969, 1; “Testimony of Orlando White and Rev. J. Kenneth Morris,” in Hearings before the Permanent
Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, United States Senate, 91st
45 Ibid.
Dean, and Thurston DeLaine, the Director of Financial Aid, to attempt to schedule a meeting with the leaders of the rebellion to discuss their grievances. They approached Raysor but were rebuffed.\textsuperscript{46} Potts and his administrative staff relocated to White’s off-campus home to maintain secrecy and avoid being taken hostage themselves.\textsuperscript{47}

After making the necessary arrangements, the beleaguered president called Chairman Morris, who was involved in a counseling session, to alert him about the turmoil on campus. The president nervously explained that the need was urgent but agreed to Morris’ request to discuss the matter later in the day. Shortly after 1:30pm, Morris asked his secretary to call Potts. “Malcolm X University. Power to the People,” an unidentified male student answered. When asked for his name, the student abruptly replied that President Potts was unavailable and hung up. Alarmed by the strange response, the secretary dialed again. This time, the young man reported that the Library-Administration building had been seized and would be held until certain demands were met. The panicked chairman called Potts’ home and spoke to his daughter who confirmed the news and told him of her father’s whereabouts.\textsuperscript{48} The two men finally made contact roughly an hour later. From the beginning of the crisis, Potts and Morris

\textsuperscript{47} “Testimony of Orlando White and Rev. J. Kenneth Morris,” July 1969, 4799; “Memorandum to the Board of Trustees and the Board of Visitors,” May 1, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 2, Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: Correspondence; “Armed Students Occupy Building at Voorhees,” \textit{The State}, April 29, 1969, 1A.  
disagreed about how to respond. Sensitive to the still-fresh memory of the Orangeburg Massacre, the Voorhees president sought to handle the matter internally to “avoid any real confrontation” between the student radicals and law enforcement officials. He contacted Bamberg County Sheriff A.L. Strickland and SLED officials to inform them of the situation and request additional time to negotiate with the campus rebels. Despite being initially snubbed, Potts drafted a bulletin to be distributed to the student body pledging to keep the lines of communication open while setting a 6pm deadline for BACC leaders to organize a committee of legally enrolled Voorhees students to meet with administrators. The Voorhees president warned that failure to vacate the Library-Administration building or send the committee to meet with college administrators would result in “appropriate action” to end the siege.\(^\text{49}\) Morris, on the other hand, believed that the situation was “very serious and dangerous” and suggested that they contact Governor McNair and request that the National Guard be sent to remove the dissidents. Squeamish about the potential for violence, Potts shot down the idea.\(^\text{50}\) Unbeknownst to the Voorhees president, Morris later phoned several members of the Board of Trustees to rally support for his plan. A majority agreed that a show of force was necessary and encouraged him to take “stern measures” to restore order. “Move in hard,” advised Winthrop University president and Voorhees trustee Dr. Charles Davis, “The Board will


\(^{50}\) “Armed Students Occupy Building at Voorhees,” The State, April 29, 1969, 1. According to this article, a spokesman for Governor McNair told reporters that as of late Monday (April 28, 1969), the state “was not officially involved.” The governor was said to be “assessing the situation” and was reevaluating whether to become more closely involved as the situation developed.
say we will not take the students back. Any students who don’t like it can leave.  
Emboldened by the support of the board, Morris contacted Governor McNair without
Potts’ knowledge or consent. Aware of the need to proceed with caution due to the
volatile racial climate, the governor urged Morris to convince Potts to sign a written
request for state intervention.  
Satisfied with McNair’s response, the chairman visited
Hayne Crum, a local attorney, to seek further counsel and draft the letter.

Upon returning to campus, Potts met with several Voorhees officials at his home
to make plans for their tentative meeting with BACC representatives. He instructed
DeLaine to distribute copies of his written ultimatum to students gathered at the Library-
Administration building. He was likely shocked by what he witnessed. Like a spirit
conjured from beyond the grave, the powerful, rhythmic cadence of Malcolm X’s voice
boomed from nearby loudspeakers. Standing on the lawn of the Library-Administration
surrounded by a swelling crowd of his peers, Raysor fielded questions and encouraged
them to join the uprising. Gerald Albert, the son of Bamberg County NAACP president
Ronnie “Chief” Albert, Francis, and several other BACC members peeked between the
curtains or brazenly stood guard while armed with shotguns and other light weapons.
Several picketers carrying handmade signs jeered a small gathering of white reporters and
photographers. DeLaine passed out copies of Potts’ memo but was prohibited from
entering the building. Undaunted, he passed fifty copies to one of the armed sentries
leaning out of a window. Moments after disappearing inside, the student bolted back to

---

52 Ibid., 4; “Armed Students Occupy Building at Voorhees,” 1A. A spokesperson for Governor McNair
informed reporters that state assistance had to be requested by either the college president or chairman of
the board of trustees “in writing.” No such request had been received by the publication of this article on
Monday night (April 28, 1969).
his post and gleefully pointed a shotgun at the reporters. Chuckling at their obvious surprise, he opened the weapon casing to reveal that it was not loaded. Recovering from the shock, the reporters questioned Raysor about the need for his comrades to carry such weapons. The BACC leader reiterated that the weapons were for defensive purposes only. “We will not make any aggressive moves with them,” he promised, before heading towards the Science Building to meet with Potts and his administrative team.\footnote{“Armed Students Occupy Building at Voorhees,” \textit{The State}, April 29, 1969, 1-2A; “Students Ask Black Studies,” \textit{The State}, April 29, 1969, 1A.}

As the rally dispersed, reporters questioned several protesters about their experiences as students and the goals they sought to achieve through seizing the Library-Administration building. Speaking under condition of anonymity, the insurgents blasted Voorhees College as a racist and mismanaged institution and reiterated their support for BACC demands. Frustrated students expressed their long simmering discontent with compulsory attendance policies, the hiring of unqualified faculty, poor living conditions, and the lack of books and other resources “devoted to the history of the Black man.” When pressed further, they also revealed a deep concern about the racial constitution of the Voorhees curriculum and the problematic mindset they believed it fostered. Ladder altruism, normalization of whiteness, and indifference toward the plight of poor blacks in the surrounding community were among its most sinister outcomes. The dissidents pleaded for the establishment of a Black Studies program and the need to hire qualified Black faculty and administrators but, equally important, urged Voorhees officials to build a truly Black university devoted to molding a new generation of Black leaders and activists and committed to developing educational and anti-poverty programs to improve
the lives of poor blacks in Denmark victimized by segregation, unequal education, and economic exploitation characteristic within racial capitalism.\textsuperscript{54} Local media reports revealed that BACC leaders had built a powerful, organized student movement that had evolved rather quickly over its brief existence. BACC members and sympathizers displayed remarkable solidarity, consistency in their demands, and offered a passionate defense of the rights of voiceless students and marginalized people that belied later claims that their actions indicated a lack of foresight, immaturity, or acquiescence to the will of outside agitators or foreign subversives.

Differing accounts of what happened next provide further insight into the motivations and commitment of BACC members and sympathizers as well as the extent that fear and paranoia gripped older black administrators who were desperate to restore order. \textit{The State} reported that students staged an unofficial “free feed-in” at the Voorhees College dining hall. Cafeteria workers reportedly testified that “many students trooped in, helped themselves from the serving line and left without paying.” Francis recalled that the students “showed solidarity with BACC by overturning plates of food on the tables and causing a diversion so that they could take food to those who were in the library.”\textsuperscript{55} Orlando White offered a much different account to President Potts that was later repeated in the \textit{News and Courier}. White reported that George Wolever, the director of food services, claimed that several armed individuals, none of whom could be identified as Voorhees students, entered the dining hall and ordered him to leave. “Look, Mr. Wolever, we don’t want to hurt you,” one of the intruders reportedly stated, “We

\textsuperscript{54} “Students Ask Black Studies,” \textit{The State}, April 29, 1969, 1-2A.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 2A; “Memoir of Oliver Francis,” 5.
think that it’s best that you leave.” After forcing Wolever, his staff and other students from the dining hall, the thieves allegedly stole $5,000 worth of food and utensils.\textsuperscript{56}

The initial explanation for the missing food is likely closer to the truth for several reasons. First, Wolever’s testimony during an earlier Student Welfare Committee meeting regarding the college’s inability to afford enough meat to feed the student body contradicts descriptions of the bountiful harvest reportedly stolen by the unidentified robbers.\textsuperscript{57} Secondly, no food was recovered from the Library-Administration building or campus dormitories after the siege. Raysor remembers, however, that students brought food to those gathered inside the building. “They ain’t brought no raw hamburger meat,” he chuckled. Raysor explained that it was impossible to cook food in either building seized by BACC and students did not have refrigerators in their dormitories. A more likely explanation for Wolever’s tale is that it was the product of one man’s imagination, a savvy attempt to keep his job after being overwhelmed by a mob of hungry, frustrated, and politicized students likely aided by disgruntled cafeteria workers.\textsuperscript{58} BACC’s armed takeover of the Library-Administration building inspired a full-scale worker and student revolt. In his final letter to the Voorhees community, Raysor praised the “95% of the student body that in one way or another showed that they were in support of the demands.” Astonished and humbled to be a part of such a powerful cooperative

\textsuperscript{56} “Memorandum to the Board of Trustees and the Board of Visitors,” May 1, 1969, 4; “Students Seize Voorhees Building,” \textit{Charleston News and Courier}, April 19, 1969, 1-2A.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 1A. Reporters claimed that “100 pounds of uncooked roast beef, 600 frozen hamburgers, 20 dozen honey buns, 600 hot dogs; 125 pounds of bacon and sausage; along with assorted steaks, fish and frozen shrimp” were taken from the dining hall.

\textsuperscript{58} Martha Biondi, \textit{The Black Revolution on Campus}, 158. The notion of a student-worker alliance is not farfetched. Roughly a month earlier, 2,500 students at North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro, North Carolina, marched in support of a strike being waged by cafeteria workers.
movement for change, the BACC leader remarked that it was the first time that he felt pride in being a student at Voorhees College. Collective memory of the Orangeburg incident, the disorderly campus environment and the lack of information emanating from campus inspired heightened levels of fear and paranoia giving rumors of the presence of violent, Black Power revolutionaries and other “outside agitators” an aura of truth.

Claims made by Mrs. Muriel Potts, the president’s wife, provide another vivid example. She reportedly claimed one of the dissidents barricaded in the Library-Administration building was Cleveland Sellers, who allegedly had been in Denmark for over a week. This would have been a difficult feat to achieve considering that Sellers was in Ithaca, New York serving as an advisor to the recently established Black Studies program at Cornell University. In short, supporters of the embattled Voorhees administration sought to buttress its crumbling power by filling the information gap with half-truths and wild speculation. These rumors served as a proverbial dog whistle inviting state intervention into an already volatile situation. A spokesman for the Governor’s office informed reporters that direct intervention could only occur if requested in writing by either President Potts or Rev. Morris. The News and Courier reported that such intervention had not been requested but National Guard troops in nearby Barnwell

---

59 “Message from the President,” May 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 2, Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: Student Statements.
60 “Armed Students Occupy Building at Voorhees,” The State, April 29, 1969, 2A; “3 Voorhees Rebels are Sought,” Charleston News and Courier, April 30, 1969. Sheriff Strickland debunked rumors of Sellers’ involvement during one of his first press conferences following the siege. He reported that FBI agents had “definitely located Sellers in Washington, D.C.”
County stood ready if trouble arose.  

The students’ impassioned rhetoric and refusal to back down further increased tensions. Shortly before the “feed-in,” Potts received confirmation that the campus rebels had elected Raysor to serve as their spokesperson during the meeting in the Science Building. The tete-a-tete proved fruitless. Raysor declared that the students’ demands were non-negotiable and informed Potts that the Library-Administration building would remain occupied until an agreement was reached. “I told him that I would refuse to sign because I have maintained a policy against signing under duress, and that some of the demands were unreasonable, and were not acceptable to me,” Potts later recalled. During an interview with reporters later that evening, the president cited the demand for a Black Studies program as the most unreasonable request due to a lack of available faculty to teach courses, not his estimation of its value as an academic discipline. “We can’t get teachers to establish a program like that all at once,” he declared, “There is no possible way to do it. Even larger white schools are having trouble finding Negro teachers trained in that field.” Unable to reach a compromise, both sides parted ways. Potts and his colleagues left the Science building resigned to the fact that they had lost control of the college in the short term. “It was obvious nobody got anywhere,” he tersely informed

---

61 “Armed Students Occupy Building at Voorhees,” The State, April 29, 1969, 1A; “Voorhees Students Arrested as Officers Move in On Barricade, Demands Made,” Bamberg Herald, May 1, 1969, 1A. Bamberg County National Guardsmen were already actively intervening in nearby Charleston, South Carolina, to enforce a citywide curfew mandated by Governor McNair in response to protests related to an ongoing strike conducted by local black nurses in the city for better pay and working conditions.

62 “Memorandum to the Board of Trustees and the Board of Visitors,” 3; “Students Seize Voorhees Building,” Charleston News and Courier, April 29, 1969, 2A.
While administrators weighed their options, BACC members and sympathizers wooed recruits and prepared for a long siege. By nightfall, nearly 200 well-fed protesters, supporters, and curious onlookers, roughly one-third of the entire Voorhees college student body, reconvened on the lawn of the Library-Administration building now littered with hundreds of leaflets tossed from the building by its occupants. Amid loud cheers and chants of “Black Power,” Raysor and his fellow firebrands whipped their classmates into a frenzy with a series of powerful speeches and an impassioned reading of their demands. “We will be forced to fight if the police commit any acts of aggression,” one BACC representative warned, “We aren’t going to allow another Orangeburg.” Within an hour, the exhausted students gradually dispersed. The library’s occupants studied, strategized and kept watch for potential threats. Potts spent much of the evening in self-imposed exile in Crum’s office along with White, Chairman Morris, Sheriff Strickland, and SLED Lieutenant J. Leon Gasque, Jr., who was sent by the governor to monitor the situation. After hearing White’s tale of the dining hall robbery, the men decided that the crisis had escalated beyond their control and necessitated state intervention. Chairman Morris and President Potts drafted the letter requesting the presence of the National Guard. The initial version betrayed fears that violence was imminent. The men expressed concern that “personal injury and property damage may

---

63 “Testimony of Orlando White and Rev. J. Kenneth Morris,” July 1969, 4801; “Armed Students Occupy Building at Voorhees,” 1A. Among those who accompanied Potts to the meeting with Raysor in the Science Building were Voorhees chaplain Father Jackson, Dr. M.L. Guram, the Academic Dean, Dean of Students Mrs. W.G. Jenkins, Business Manager Orlando H. White, and Thurston DeLaine, the Student Financial Aid Director.
64 “Memorandum to the Board of Trustees and the Board of Visitors,” 3; “Armed Students Occupy Building at Voorhees,” The State, April 29, 1969, 2A; “Memoir of Oliver Francis,” 6.
result” from such action but promised that “any damage to College property will be assumed by the College.65” Close to midnight, Governor McNair phoned into the strategy session. Seeking to ensure that the public would view intervention as just and necessary, McNair advised Potts to secure arrest warrants. “We are not only planning to make charges but hope they will be prosecuted,” the president reportedly stated. Potts and Morris also decided to order all students to vacate the campus by noon and close the college indefinitely. The president spoke briefly with the Dean of Students who advised him to avoid exacerbating the rebellious students by notifying them of the decision in the morning. 66 Governor McNair insisted on using National Guardsmen due to the unpopularity of state highway patrolmen because of their role in the State College tragedy. McNair planned to order a small number of troops to use tear gas to clear the library rather than rely on a heavily armed battalion. Chairman Morris objected and urged a greater show of force. “Hard to know what is best,” the governor retorted, “let our people plan.”67” After working out the final details, McNair asked the two administrators to sign the letter and mail it to his offices in Columbia.

After returning home, Potts grew uneasy about his decision to sign the agreement and resolved to renew negotiations with the students to bring about a peaceful solution to the crisis. Shortly after daybreak, he received a call from Dean Jenkins who told him that a group of upperclassmen visited her home at around 3:30am and requested a meeting

65 “Memorandum to the Board of Trustees and Board of Visitors,” May 1, 1969, 3-4; Letter from J. Kenneth Morris to the Honorable Robert E. McNair, April 28, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 1, Folder: Voorhees College-General-Feb to 30 April 1969; “Statement of Reverend J. Kenneth Morris,” July 1969, 3.
67 Transcript of Recorded Conversation, April 28, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 1, Folder: Voorhees College-General-Feb to 30 April 1969.
with him. Potts directed her to organize a meeting with Voorhees faculty and the student body in the auditorium at 8:30am. “On my way to the auditorium,” Potts recalled, “I accidentally ran into Mr. Raysor and he indicated that the militant students would modify those demands which I would not accept.” To avoid being late for the assembly, he informed Raysor that they would discuss the matter later. There are several possible reasons for the dissidents’ change of heart. Some might have been pressured by their parents, who reportedly received calls from Dean Jenkins informing them that “there was a riot on campus and that they should come and get their kids.” Considering the effectiveness of BACC’s information blackout, another explanation is more likely. Potts later testified that the campus became “somewhat noisy because the news leaked out that the school would be closed the next day, and the students holding the building tried to urge the other students not to leave.” Situated within his house, Potts could not have known the source of the commotion, but evidence shows that he was partially correct.

Robert Wright, one of the student protesters, later explained that inclement weather forced those camped on the front lawn of the Library-Administration building to seek shelter within the nearby Science Building before dawn. It is possible that some within the library may have interpreted this as surrender and pleaded for them to stay.68 Whether or not news leaked is unknown. If so, the likely source was Dean Jenkins, who may have shared the news with students at their pre-dawn meeting. Either due to a growing awareness that state intervention was imminent or decreased confidence in their

---

army of supporters, BACC leaders realized their chances of achieving their goals through a long siege were slim.

During the meeting in the auditorium, Potts informed faculty and students that the situation had become “very grave” and that the “life of the College was at stake.” He repeated his earlier rationale for refusing to sign BACC’s demands but expressed his willingness to continue negotiations. Potts urged students to “help their alma mater in its time of crisis” by convincing the campus rebels to vacate the library. “I wanted to be absolutely sure that we had exhausted every means for securing a peaceful settlement before using force because I was concerned about bloodshed,” he later explained, “I did not want to create a situation similar to the one in Orangeburg.69” Moments after the meeting ended, Potts’ prayers were answered. Two students, Willie Williams and Noel McFadden, volunteered to serve as intermediaries to facilitate renewed negotiations between Potts and BACC leaders. Shortly after 10am, the Voorhees president met with Raysor, Mintz, and Evans and explained that he would have to discuss their academic demands and the issue of amnesty with the faculty and formally request that the Board of Trustees consider the wage hike for non-academic employees. The students conceded but requested an opportunity to present their grievances to the faculty. Sensing a breakthrough, Potts asked Dean Guram to schedule a faculty meeting for 12:15pm. He then phoned Chairman Morris, Sheriff Strickland, and SLED officials to request that they “hold off any forceful action” until he could complete the negotiations. Authorities gave Potts until 2pm to reach an accord with the dissidents.70

69 Ibid., 5; “Testimony of Orlando White and Rev. J. Kenneth Morris,” 4803.
70 Ibid, 6.
The chairman’s decision to grant Potts additional time was a curious one. Morris spent the entire morning trying to convince trustees that a massive show of force was necessary to regain control of the campus. Board members were divided almost completely along racial lines. “Make a stand,” encouraged one white trustee, “If we meet their demands, they will run the school. Close school temporarily. No amnesty. Make formal request to Governor McNair to remove students.” Greenville civil rights attorney Donald Sampson agreed that the school should be closed but urged patience. “Let the men stay in the building for a day or two,” he advised, “Amnesty will get them out. Anything to prevent confrontation…” Sampson suggested that Morris enlist respected Voorhees alumni such as Prezell Robinson to negotiate an agreement with BACC dissidents. Some whites cautioned against state intervention. Bishop Temple, a white Episcopalian minister warned, “They want trouble. They want publicity. If we bring in force and try to take the building, we may have another Orangeburg. Let them stay a week or 10 days. Don’t give in.” Morris eventually convinced Temple to support his plan. “If decision is that we use force I’ll go along,” he acquiesced, “But I would hope we can work it out.” Satisfied that he had built a consensus, the chairman asked his secretary to deliver the signed request to the governor. He then set out for Denmark.71

Potts, BACC leaders, and Voorhees faculty met to discuss terms. After Evans presented the students’ demands, President Potts suggested revisions and requested

71 “Handwritten Notes,” April 28, 1969, 7-9; “Statement of Reverend J. Kenneth Morris,” July 1969, 4. After sending the signed request to Governor McNair, Morris continued to call trustees who he had been unable to reach earlier including E.E. Dargan, Harry McDowell, Dr. Wilbur Sojourner; and Bishops Temple and Pinckney. Three of these men reportedly encouraged Morris to call in the National Guard and the others felt that the students should be allowed to remain in the building indefinitely. All, however, were said to have agreed to support whatever action Morris believed was necessary. The chairman was unable to contact several board members including Dr. H.W. Crawford, Allen Horres; Rev. Thomas Hudson; James Coker; and Mrs. Catherine Moore.
additional time to institute the desired changes to the curriculum. Both sides agreed to a September 1st deadline. The faculty deliberated for another hour and ultimately approved the revised demands including the students’ plea for amnesty. Satisfied with the outcome of the proceedings, Raysor, Mintz, and Evans agreed to meet Potts at his home to sign the agreement following a brief meeting with their supporters. The president, aware of the fact that Morris’ deadline had passed, rushed home to call the chairman to request an extension. He was informed that Morris planned to meet with Attorney Crum at his office.  

Undaunted, Potts dispatched his two student emissaries to search for Raysor and his lieutenants. They returned with news that they were still meeting with their comrades in the library. Time was running out.

Back in Columbia, Governor McNair issued an executive order declaring a state of emergency at Voorhees College. Although no shots were fired, the governor decreed that “acts of violence and threats of violence” had been committed and a “common disregard for law” had manifested itself among students. McNair authorized state law enforcement officers, under the direction of SLED Chief J.P. Strom, to “maintain peace and good order” by any means necessary. 

Unaware of the governor’s proclamation, President Potts anxiously awaited the arrival of BACC leaders. “Mr. White came to my house to tell me that Mr. Morris and the law enforcement officials had sent for me. I went with Mr. White to Mr. Crum’s office and requested more time to complete

---

72 “Memorandum to the Board of Trustees and Board of Visitors,” May 1, 1969, 6-7. On page 7, Potts claims that he “inquired about the whereabouts of the three representatives who were to have met me at 1:30…” It is likely that he made plans to meet the students during their earlier meeting at 1:30pm but missed that scheduled appointment because they all attended the faculty meeting.; “Testimony of Orlando White and Rev. J. Kenneth Morris,” 4804.

negotiations,” Potts remembered. Shortly after they arrived, E.N. Brandon, a representative from the Attorney General’s office, joined the trio and informed them that a sworn affidavit was needed in order to arrest the students. Morris, eager to end the revolt and restore order, added that Governor McNair warned that the troops needed to evacuate the building before nightfall or else they would be withdrawn. He then pressured Potts to sign a blank arrest warrant. Aware that such an act would endanger ongoing and future negotiations with the students, the president refused. Orlando White eventually signed the document.74 Before Potts left the office to return to campus, Morris informed him that he had set a 3:15pm deadline for students to evacuate or risk arrest. Local media outlets had already reported the impending closure and urged parents to collect their children. Unable to dissuade the chairman and eager to prevent bloodshed, Potts rushed back to campus to make a final, desperate attempt to persuade the student rebels to vacate the building before the National Guard arrived.75

Potts was met at his home by Chairman Morris, Williams and McFadden. Sensing that something was awry, the president asked the students to find Raysor, Evans, and Mintz. When the BACC central committee arrived, they informed Potts that the modified list of demands had been accepted. Eager to bring the crisis to an end, the Voorhees president quickly reviewed the document and suggested two last-minute revisions: the continuation of compulsory attendance for freshmen and the removal of language asserting that “instructors of other ethnic groups cannot relate to black

75 “Memorandum to the Board of Trustees and Board of Visitors,” May 1, 1969, 7; “Memorandum to All Voorhees Students,” April 29, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 2, Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: 20 May 1969-17 July 1969; “Memoirs of Oliver Francis,” 6-7.
students.” 76 The three student leaders agreed to the changes. Seeking unanimity, Potts shared the document with Morris who expressed reservations about his willingness to grant amnesty and ease attendance rules for upperclassmen. “If I were you, I would not sign it, but you are the President and you do as you see fit,” the chairman conceded. Potts expressed sympathy with his concerns but reiterated that the circumstances dictated that the agreement was the best course of action to prevent bloodshed. Distant screams interrupted the debate. An unidentified student running toward the library shouted, “The National Guard is here and they’re looking for trouble!” BACC member J.B. Bryant ran toward the president’s house to alert his peers. Yanking him into another room, Morris again urged Potts not to sign stressing that the Board was opposed to amnesty. Potts retorted, “Those are black students in that building and I do not want another Orangeburg Massacre here at Voorhees College!” Hurriedly signing the document, Potts explained to BACC leaders that he could only grant amnesty for violations of college rules not criminal charges. He handed the accord to Bryant who dashed toward the library. 77

Several Voorhees students and faculty, including professors Charles Ramsey and Bernie Dingle, were gathered near the building when Bryant raced past them shouting, “The demands have been signed!” The repetitive clomping of boots and thunderous rumble of tanks grew closer. Bryant relayed a copy of the signed agreement to the two professors who raced into the library to share the news with its occupiers. “Don’t panic.

76 “Black Students Demands,” April 29, 1969. Potts and the students agreed to refer the issue of a wage hike for non-academic workers to the Board of Trustees.
77 “Memorandum to the Board of Trustees and Board of Visitors,” 8; “25 Arrested: Militants Give Up at Voorhees,” The State, April 30, 1969, 1A; “Memoirs of Oliver Francis,” June 2012, 1; “Statement of Reverend J. Kenneth Morris,” July 1969, 10; “Testimony of Orlando White and Rev. J. Kenneth Morris,” 4804. President Potts also informed BACC leaders that the matter relative to noncompulsory class attendance would have to be taken up by Voorhees faculty.
Come on out. Put down your guns and calm yourselves,” Potts pleaded as the troops noisily filed onto campus. The dissidents eventually abandoned their posts and walked toward his home. Within minutes, the National Guard had sealed off the campus and surrounded the Library-Administration building. Strolling briskly alongside the students, Professor Dingle spied the guardsmen and screamed, “Get those racist troopers off this campus!” BACC leaders—Raysor, Evans, and Mintz—slipped away during the commotion. “Ali, Otu, and X were coming out. They gestured to me and I heard them say to get out of line, but I didn’t and went into the house with the others,” Francis recalled.78

The three student revolutionaries jogged toward a nearby faculty parking lot and were met by Professor Charles Arisman, a white professor, and his wife. They were on their way to Orangeburg; the students asked for a ride and they agreed. “There wasn’t any sense in trying to run home to our parents because I stayed in Denmark and X lived off campus,” Raysor explained. Arisman’s whiteness proved to be their saving grace. He and his wife aroused little suspicion as they drove the three fugitives in plain sight through security checkpoints and journeyed to Orangeburg. They dropped the students off at a café on Highway 301 where they watched news reports about their exploits. “We watched the six o’clock news and they had me on there with that ‘Soul Brother’ t-shirt on,” Raysor laughed, “I knew that I had to go underground.” The trio soon returned to Denmark to retrieve the “Power Car” and drove to Charleston, a city under curfew due to an ongoing strike waged by local hospital workers for better wages and working conditions. Flashing blue lights greeted them. “We were trying to get to James Island

78 Interview with Oliver Francis, October 25, 2012.
because we knew somebody there,” Raysor recalled, “When we got to the Highway 17 bridge, the police pulled us over. They accused us of pulling a fire alarm. By the time they got us downtown, they recognized that we were wanted. They put us in the cell right next to Abernathy. It was wild!” Their parents raised bail within two weeks and the three fugitives returned to Bamberg County where they were arraigned and released on bond. 79

Roughly twenty minutes after the three students escaped, several police vehicles two South Carolina Department of Corrections buses slowed to a halt in front of Potts’ home. Chief Strom stepped from one of the cars and ordered the students huddled inside to surrender. Stepping onto the porch, Potts asked whether the students would be arrested if they peacefully complied. “They have violated the laws of this State and I have to uphold the laws,” Strom tersely responded. At Potts’ urging, the students—19 men and 6 women—filed quietly from the house and were Mirandized, searched and loaded onto the buses by SLED agents. 80 Bamberg County sheriffs later searched the administration building and found six rifles, three 12-gauge shotguns, two pistols; three knives; and ammunition. “Let the students go! They haven’t done anything!” shouted Dingle as he pushed through a crowd of onlookers. The students were initially taken to Bamberg County Jail but were later separated by gender and sent to two prisons in Columbia to be reprocessed, bathed, and given prison uniforms. Despite the minimal damage to life and

80 Roughly half of those arrested for participating in or sympathizing with the BACC takeover were freshmen. Several students were arrested in the days that followed as investigators questioned their peers about others who supported their efforts. While some estimates claimed that the number of participants was as great as 75, it appears that only 36 students were arrested. See “List of Students Arrested,” Voorhees College Black Student Movement Collection, Elizabeth Wright-John Foster Potts Library, Voorhees College, Denmark, South Carolina.
property, the campus rebels were charged with “engaging in riot” and, ironically, were
deemed a threat to the “peace and dignity” of South Carolina, a state with a demonstrable
tradition of indifference toward actual violence committed by white reactionaries. Bond
was set at $1,500 for the women, $2,500 for men. Alphonso Beach, later apprehended
while attempting to return to campus and recover the weapons, was also charged with
“possessing a pistol” and his bond was set at $3,500. The entire group was slated to be
tried before a Grand Jury in July. Shortly after 6pm, Governor McNair rescinded his
emergency order and the National Guard and SLED withdrew. The campus stood
deserted except for a handful of faculty members and key administrators. Despite
managing to avoid a repeat of the Orangeburg tragedy, the crisis at Voorhees College was
not over. As the last tanks rumbled into the distance, they left behind a campus and
community in shambles. Voorhees administrators, faculty, and students spent the next
two years locked in fierce debate over the state of black higher education at the college
while struggling to bind frayed relationships. Local, state and national leaders of both
races were also forced to examine the causes of the student rebellion and reevaluate white
leaders’ policy of using surveillance, military posturing, political repression, and violence
when faced with aggressive, yet nonviolent protest.

The following day, a despondent Potts answered questions from reporters about
the resolution of the crisis. The embattled president admitted that he signed the request

81 “Voorhees Students Arrested as Officers Move In On Barricade, Demands Made,” Bamberg Herald, May 1, 1969, 1; “Armed Students Surrender As Guard Moves In,” Charleston News and Courier, May 1, 1969, 1A; “25 Arrested: Militants Give Up at Voorhees,” The State, 1A; “Voorhees Reopening Undecided,” Orangeburg Times and Democrat, May 1, 1969; “Memoirs of Oliver Francis,” June 20, 12, 2. According to the Times and Democrat, Voorhees students began leaving campus shortly after Voorhees Dean of Students Wilsie Jenkins announced plans to close the college “to insure [sic] the security of members of the Voorhees family…” She added that students needed to leave due to a lack of food as a result of the raid of the dining hall.
for state intervention but stressed that he did not want the National Guard on campus and had no knowledge of their impending arrival. “I signed it, but I didn’t want to,” he asserted. When asked whether he had been pressured into signing the request, Potts replied, “I wouldn’t use the word ‘pressured,’ but I didn’t want them here.” Rather than exacerbate the growing schism between himself and Morris by airing their dirty laundry, the president stressed that he and BACC representatives had reached “total agreement” before the National Guard arrived. “I think we were on our way to solving our problems without civil assistance,” Potts lamented, “We had made so much progress.” Hoping to repair relations with the student body, he sorrowfully explained that BACC activists and their supporters were not immune from civil prosecution but promised that the college would not press charges. Potts went into seclusion after the press conference. Later, reporters asked his wife whether he planned to reopen the college. “If ever,” she sharply replied.\(^2\)

Her skepticism was due, in part, to the fierce debate raging between Black South Carolinians, who connected Voorhees uprisings with national struggles for civil, labor, and student rights, and white politicians and their supporters fighting to preserve an autocracy rooted in paternalism and racial prejudice.

Appearing before the largest contingent of news reporters ever gathered during his tenure as governor, McNair emphatically answered Potts’ charges. “The state is not in a position of negotiating with armed militants,” he affirmed. The pugnacious executive pledged that he would use whatever force was deemed necessary to remove “militant insurrectionists” who seized property and threatened the public. “Society cannot

survive if we allow a band of armed insurrectionists to act like this,” he warned. McNair added that Voorhees College officials requested his aid but twice asked him to delay action which forced him to act on his own accord to prevent the state from being put into a vulnerable position. On the question of amnesty, the governor split the difference and argued that Potts could absolve the dissidents of any infractions of college rules, but he lacked the authority to prevent criminal prosecution. “The lives of the people should be protected regardless of where they are,” he suggested when asked about the use of state troopers at a private institution. Believing himself to be a champion of law and order, McNair took a hardline stance and pledged that state intervention including the use of military force would continue throughout the remainder of his tenure as governor.83

Concerned Voorhees faculty, aided by prominent leaders and activists within South Carolina’s civil rights establishment and Black nationalist grassroots networks, pushed back against Governor McNair’s description of black student protesters as lawless subversives and issued a powerful call for unity, racial self-determination, institutional autonomy, and greater control over the academic affairs of the college. Led by Professor Bernie Dingle, a second-year Chemistry professor and staunch critic of the Voorhees administration, activist faculty rallied to protect the First Amendment rights of the campus community and urged that BACC members and sympathizers be granted amnesty on the grounds that no actual crime had been committed. “Since there was no rioting or serious destruction of property at Voorhees College, we agree that all charges should be withdrawn,” they argued. Exasperated and outraged by the administration’s failure to warn them of the impending arrival of National Guard troops, Dingle and his colleagues

83 “McNair Stands Firm on the Use of Troops,” Charleston News and Courier, May 1, 1969, 1A.
demanded a complete restructuring of the college. Sympathetic to BACC leaders’
criticisms of the college’s stale intellectual atmosphere and indifference to the plight of
poor blacks in the surrounding Denmark community, they expressed support for the
creation of “responsible” campus and community programs and suggested the creation of
a Community Relations Committee whose program would be planned by faculty and
student leaders.84 Faculty leaders demanded final authority on all academic matters and
moved quickly to stake their claim by forming fully independent committees with the
newfound power to update the college’s outmoded curriculum. Shedding any guise of
neutrality, they gave an overwhelming vote of confidence to President Potts for refusing
to request militarized state intervention and publicly rebuked the Board of Trustees,
particularly Chairman Morris, for his ham-fisted attempts to usurp authority over the
college. Initially reluctant to disrupt the chain of command for the sake of unity,
Voorhees faculty pivoted due, in part, to a vicious campaign of intimidation and
economic reprisals waged by supporters of the administration. By mid-May, the
Voorhees College chapter of the Association of American University Professors (AAUP)
demanded the immediate resignation of Chairman Morris and the restructuring of the
Board of Trustees to “reflect the black constituency and to provide for faculty and student
representation.”85

Voorhees faculty were able to take advantage of the openings created by the crisis
due to the support they received from concerned citizens across the state. Assembled at
the request of Bamberg County NAACP president Rodney “Chief” Albert, whose son

84 Voorhees College faculty, “Position Paper No. 1,” May 1, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 2,
Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: Faculty.
85 “Resolutions of the Voorhees College chapter of the Association of American University Professors,”
May 14, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 2, Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: Faculty.
Gerald was arrested for his participation in the takeover, a multigenerational coalition of civil rights veterans, Black grassroots political organizers, and white liberal allies joined Voorhees faculty to express their disgust at how the situation unfolded. They boldly asserted that the decision to send troops to the private Black college was a violation of the campus community’s First Amendment and property rights. Coalition spokespersons blasted Chairman Morris for hatching a “pre-determined plan” to lay the legal groundwork for state intervention and ripped the governor for disrupting fruitful negotiations between Potts and BACC leaders with an ill-advised and untimely “onslaught of armed state forces,” a despicable attempt to curry favor with national Democratic party elites in search of a conservative, “Law and Order” candidate for Vice president to serve as a foil to President Nixon in the upcoming election. Were it not for the “twelfth-hour courage” of President Potts and Professor Dingle, they claimed, the situation would have likely devolved into a violent confrontation between armed students and National Guardsmen. Recognizing that drastic measures were necessary to rebuild unity within the Voorhees community, Albert and his colleagues recommended amnesty, demanded Morris’ resignation, and urged trustees to comply with the “just, reasonable, and long overdue” accord reached by Potts and BACC representatives. Black leaders brushed aside criticism that their attempts to peacefully resolve the conflict amounted to

86 “Joint Statement on Voorhees,” May 1, 1969, J. Kenneth Morris Papers, Box 2, Voorhees College Student Unrest, Folder: Faculty. Voorhees professors Bernie Dingle, Charles Ramsey, and two substitute professors, Frank James and Theodore Hemmingway, represented the college during this press conference. Other members of the civil rights establishment and Black nationalist grassroots community present at the event included Allard Alston III, Assistant Director of the South Carolina Human Relations Council, NAACP Field Secretary Rev. I. DeQuincey Newman; Statewide Black Student Union Coordinator Redfern II; Modjeska Simkins of the Richland County Citizens Committee; and Southern Afro-Chronicle editor Nathaniel Abraham. See also “Rights Leaders Condemn Actions by Governor,” Charleston News and Courier, May 1, 1969, 1A; “Statement Blasts McNair: ‘No Riot’ At Voorhees Until…,” May 17, 1969, newspaper clipping, Voorhees Black Student Movement Collection.
cowardly appeasement adding that McNair and his supporters too often disregarded the legitimacy of student grievances and ignored the concerns of poor, marginalized South Carolinians.

Deftly linking McNair’s use of militarized state intervention in response to protests in Orangeburg, Denmark, and Charleston, the unified body of Black and progressive activists described “Law and Order” politics as an irrational, racist set of beliefs and practices that conformed to the darkest fears and desires of white South Carolinians. Majority-white law enforcement officials and state politicians, they argued, often made assumptions about the motivations and propensities of black students that were rooted in “racism and ignorance of the grossest kind” proving that those in power had not learned from earlier mistakes that resulted in the Orangeburg tragedy. “It seems so much easier to blame our failures on a group of frustrated students, a Cleveland Sellers, a ‘creeping socialism,’ or any other scapegoats,” they argued, “The public wants protection from these mythical ‘devils’ and unfortunately, there is little condemnation for the kind of ‘protection’ which white South Carolina received in Orangeburg and Denmark.” Black leaders argued that Voorhees students were justified in their adoption of armed self-defense due to McNair’s repeated use of militarized white police power to quell nonviolent protests on Black college campuses. Even more alarming was the conviction shared by those in power that such a show of force was necessary and their inability to recognize the damage done to the state’s racial image by sending a nearly all-white police force to storm a predominantly black college campus. “Is the protection of
the citizenry of South Carolina truly colorless?” they wondered.87

McNair’s actions betrayed his true feelings on the matter. On the heels of a tumultuous week of protests and demonstrations by local Black youth, labor organizers, and civil rights activists in support of a month-long strike waged by unskilled laborers and Black nurses in pursuit of higher wages, racial equality, and recognition of their Local 1199B chapter, the governor declared a state of emergency and dispatched a battalion of National Guardsmen to enforce a citywide curfew. “It appears to my satisfaction that there exists…widespread acts of violence and threats of violence, common disregard for the law and disorders of a general nature which constitute a danger to persons and property,” he argued.88 Speaking later before a massive contingent of local and national reporters, McNair warned that the state stood at a “very important crossroad” and pledged to doggedly defend South Carolina against forces that threatened its integrity. “The state is not in a position of negotiating with armed militants,” he warned. The governor pledged to use “whatever force is necessary” to remove “militant insurrectionists” from seized buildings in the interest of public safety and to preserve civilized society. He warned Black youth in Charleston that any attempt to mimic the actions of the Voorhees dissidents would result in mass arrests.89

McNair reaffirmed his belief that state policy trumped ongoing efforts to negotiate at the local level and, equally important, asserted his right to order militarized police intervention on college campuses. The combative governor conceded that Charleston Mayor Gaillard could appoint a citizens committee to meet with striking

87 Ibid. The word “white” is underlined in the original document.
88 “Curfew Imposed to ‘Cool Down’ Tense Charleston,” Charleston News and Courier, May 2, 1969, 1A.
hospital workers but firmly stated that they could not change the state’s “right to work” policies or amend salaries fixed by the General Assembly. To do so, he asserted, would take away from the legislature’s right to set state employee wage scales and benefits. The governor bluntly swore that he would fight against such efforts with every ounce of his influence and prestige. In short, the protection of South Carolina’s citizenry was not colorless but instead inflected with specific biases. The denial of justice in Orangeburg and the use of surveillance and military force against black citizens in Denmark and Charleston revealed that the lives of poor and working-class blacks were expendable relative to the need to protect the assumed rights of wealthy white businessmen and industrialists. State officials repeatedly shunned negotiations with frustrated African Americans struggling to cope with the legacies of racism, economic inequality, and generational poverty in favor of a tactical approach that would frighten activists into submission and scare up votes. McNair, a career politician whose career began during the emergence of the 1940s Popular Front, deeply understood the danger that a re-emergent labor and civil rights coalition posed to racial capitalism during the 1960s. He staked his political future on his ability to cut this movement off at its knees by any means necessary.

McNair authorized surveillance and militarized state intervention to restrict the First Amendment rights of Black South Carolinians fighting for student power, racial self-determination, and a better quality of life because he was convinced that the American public had become jaded about the necessity of nonviolent civil disobedience and perceived the recent wave of campus unrest, particularly the armed seizure of

---

90 “Citizens Unit to Tackle Hospital Row,” Charleston News and Courier, May 1, 1969, 1A; “McNair Squares Off Against SCLC, Insurrectionists,” 1A.
buildings by Black student militants, as a threat to American higher education and, by extension, a danger to the republic. President Nixon defined the zeitgeist of the 1960s conservative counterrevolution on the question of student activism during an address given before the U.S. Chamber of Commerce just a day after BACC seized the Library-Administration building. “There can be no compromise with lawlessness and no surrender to force if free education is to survive in America,” he breathlessly warned. Peaceful dissent was welcomed but when dissenters resorted to the use of violence campus authorities “should have the backbone to stand up.” Other members of the Nixon administration doubled down. Attorney General John Mitchell and his assistant, future Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist, called for an end to “minority tyranny” on American college campuses and demanded that college officials and law enforcement crackdown on “the new barbarians” terrorizing American colleges. Mitchell rejected the premise that faculty should negotiate with students to resolve crises and, instead, stressed the need to “use reasonable physical force to eliminate physical force” to diminish the power of the small core of professional militants who tragically convinced disgruntled students to use violence to redress their grievances.91

91 “Occupation Ends at Belmont Abbey,” Charleston News and Courier, April 30, 1969, 1A. Nixon responded not only to ongoing unrest at Voorhees College but a series of sit-ins, demonstrations, marches, and takeovers at both predominantly white and historically Black colleges and universities on this date and throughout the previous few years as a result of rising discontent with the Vietnam War and the emergence of the Black Campus Movement. On April 29, 1969, there were anti-ROTC sit-ins at Dartmouth College and Tulane University. Students at Rochester, NY, boycotted classes and picketed administration buildings demanding an end to the private college’s contract to manage a Navy research institute in Virginia. Sit-ins continued at Queens College, City College, and nearby community colleges in Manhattan as African American and Puerto Rican students fought for a separate college and proportional admission of New York high school students based on race. Coupled with the seizures of buildings at Voorhees and Belmont Abbey College, American citizens likely wondered whether the chaos unfolding on college campuses was a harbinger of things to come in society writ large. John Mitchell and William Rehnquist’s commentary on student protest can be found in “Halt to Turmoil in Colleges Urged,” Charleston News and Courier, May 2, 1969, 1A.
An unlikely coalition supported McNair and like-minded governors who were willing to take a hardline stance against student dissenters and other subversives. Among the usual suspects was South Carolina senator Strom Thurmond who introduced a bill proposing that it become a federal crime to interfere with the operation of a government supported college by committing acts of violence, barring entry or exit from buildings or campus grounds, or refusing to leave a building with the intent of disrupting daily operations. Thurmond argued that the federal government was responsible for maintaining order in the nation’s colleges and universities but urged caution to avoid penalizing faculty and students who refused to participate. The editors of Charleston’s two most widely read, politically conservative newspapers applauded the governor for sending troops to Voorhees and dispelling the myth that colleges and universities were “intellectual Edens” that existed outside the common law and had little connection to the problems and frustrations of ordinary people. President Potts, one editor wrote, foolishly believed that he could negotiate with anarchist “hoodlums” at Voorhees until McNair wisely intervened. News and Courier editor and avowed segregationist Thomas Waring, fashioning himself as the voice of a silent majority fatigued with the ceaseless bellyaching and churlish protests that only seemed to have worsened, criticized Voorhees faculty for defending arrested student dissidents who had behaved in ways that were injurious to the public good and the rule of law. “Civil disobedience is simply another name for law breaking. A citizen who refuses to obey a court injunction against
picketing is no better than a citizen who shouts defiance in a courtroom,” he concluded.92

The conservative coalition formed in opposition to student dissent stretched across racial lines. Veteran civil rights leaders such as Bayard Rustin, the lead organizer of the 1963 March on Washington and executive director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, expressed disgust at the recent string of armed campus insurrections due to their symbolic violence and the negative behaviors reinforced by administrative weakness. He accused colleges of taking the cheap way out by agreeing to Black students’ demands for black studies program in lieu of developing extensive remedial programs to improve their aptitude and prepare them for future success. Equally troubling was the humiliating sight of college faculty and administrators submitting to Black students at gunpoint. “They wouldn’t submit to Ku Klux Klansmen coming on campus with guns,” he argued, “They say well, its only Negroes behaving this way. They wouldn’t tolerate this from white students.” Their tepid response to black student unrest reinforced the prevailing opinion of the race as childlike, inferior and unworthy of integration. Such racial thought, Rustin believed, allowed white administrators to avoid pursuing substantive reforms in favor of “educational separatism,” or the creation of Black Studies programs that amounted to little more than a series of courses that left black youth unprepared to compete in American society.93

The common denominator amongst these conservative diatribes against black student unrest was a gnawing fear that the crisis in America’s colleges and universities was an existential threat to the republic. Voorhees Director of Admissions and Placement

---

93 “Rights Leader Deplores Black Studies Programs,” Charleston News and Courier, May 2, 1969, 1A.
Arthur J. Clement, Jr., perhaps the most outspoken member of the administration, urged all Americans to redouble their efforts to build national unity by helping their fellow citizens to benefit from the freedoms provided by the Constitution. Failure to do so would make young people, especially black youth, easy targets for radicalization by Communists and homegrown Black nationalist agitators. “If the youth of America can be divided, can be propagandized into becoming disillusioned about the American Dream; if this youth can consciously or unconsciously be developed into a subversive force by embroiling them cursorily in the negative aspects of American history and what America is—then the inner forces are at play to abort and to destroy the American Dream,” he warned.94 Clement interpreted what had become standard operating procedure among campus revolutionaries at Voorhees and other American colleges and universities as evidence of such a grand conspiracy. “They are all mouthing the same phrases. Using nebulous ideas and un-thought out arguments. They are all quoting the same revolutionaries,” Clement cautioned. The bewildered administrator argued that the recent uprisings were not the product of rising knowledge, race consciousness, and political maturity among Voorhees students but, rather, were instigated by a collection of unnamed outside agitators with the requisite funding, transportation, lodging, support, and seductions to recruit gullible young people for their quixotic crusade.95 He urged all reasonable members of the Voorhees family to do everything in their power to wrest control of the college from campus militants who threatened to forever damage its image and ruin educational and economic opportunities for future generations.

---

95 Ibid.
Tensions again boiled over during the Spring 1970 semester as Chairman Morris and newly appointed Voorhees president Harry Graham attempted to reestablish order. In February 1970, the college abruptly announced that the contracts of Professor Dingle and five other faculty members would not be renewed the following year. Dingle, who was one of the more outspoken defenders of the student militants, had long been suspected of having caused the April protests. He and four of his colleagues immediately requested a statement outlining specific reasons for their dismissal and a fair hearing.\(^{96}\) Outraged students, led by BACC, quickly mobilized a series of mass meetings in protest. They distributed leaflets asserting that the firings were orchestrated by Morris, Graham and Voorhees trustees to “get rid of all black men and women who stand up for what they believe is right.” On February 17, 1970, BACC hosted “Fired Black Faculty Speaks,” a meeting of the student body where Dingle and Eugene Mathis, who also received a notice of termination, spoke about the situation. After they concluded their remarks, BACC leaders asked administrators, faculty, and staff to leave the room. The students voted to organize a boycott of classes and issue a series of demands which included the reinstatement of Dingle and his colleagues and a call for the immediate resignation of Chairman Morris. Billy Threatt, a normally reserved student from Bennettsville, South Carolina summed their feelings up best: “The way I feel tonight, \textit{I am ready to die} for what these students are doing for the betterment of Voorhees College. I’ll see ya’ll tomorrow.”\(^{97}\) BACC leaders returned to the Power House to strategize and prepare for

\(^{96}\) The Executive Committee of Voorhees College informed Dingle and the other fired faculty that their hearing would be held on February 25, 1970.\(^{97}\) Biondi, \textit{The Black Campus Movement}, 154-155; Student Organization for Black Unity, “Fact Sheet,” February 17, 1970, 1; “Memoirs of Oliver Francis,” 7.
what was to come.

BACC leaders returned at daybreak and met at Ebenezer Rock, a sacred spot in the heart of campus. They raised a black flag at half-mast in honor of the black liberation struggle and posted a sign designating the site as a classroom. The boycott of classes began shortly thereafter; BACC leaders and their sympathizers declared that the flag would not be raised to full mast until their demands were met. Over the next two days, only 11 of the roughly 700-person Voorhees student body crossed the picket line. Boycott leaders organized campus rallies and study sessions on the front lawn of Massachusetts Hall and Ebenezer Rock. Seeking to restore order, President Graham and his administrative staff ordered those gathered to leave or risk arrest. Some of the students left while others continued to hold impromptu study sessions on race consciousness, political education, and educational reform. Boycotting students faced such harassment throughout the day, as campus security and Bamberg County sheriffs were called to investigate claims that the students had blocked entrances to classroom buildings and dormitories. Concerned Voorhees parents and Denmark residents met with striking students later that evening. Many expressed reservations about the boycott but agreed that the college should better serve the needs of black students. A small number pledged their whole-hearted support and agreed to provide financial assistance for the boycott.

The next day, February 20, President Graham issued a memorandum to all

---

99 Ibid.
Voorhees students and faculty announcing that the college would be closed indefinitely at 2pm due to the “disruption of its normal functions.” He gave students one hour to vacate the dormitories or risk being arrested for trespassing. College officials also filed a court injunction closing the campus to all unauthorized persons.

During the month following the closure of Voorhees College, the Graham administration convened a new disciplinary board to cull potential threats to good order at the college. BACC leaders and their supporters were permanently expelled for leading the campus boycott. Francis, for example, was expelled on charges of “interfering and bringing to a complete halt the orderly administrative and educational functions of the college,” willful disobedience of the court order to vacate the campus and intimidating fellow students to prevent them from attending classes. The long arm of the Voorhees legal apparatus reached far beyond the campus walls. Sophomore Paul Mickens, a BACC sympathizer, called his mother to pick him up from campus out of fear that participating in the boycott would lead to his suspension or expulsion. He was mailed a letter notifying him of his expulsion while sitting at home.100 On February 25, 1970, President Graham notified each of the five faculty members appealing their termination before the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees that they would be fired, paid severance, and removed from campus if they lost their cases. There was little doubt that this would happen. Professor Dingle and three other professors were dismissed within a week.

After nearly a decade of intense protests and two incursions by militarized state

---

100 Letter from W.G. Jenkins, Dean of Students, to Oliver Francis, March 15, 1970, Voorhees Black Student Movement Collection; “Memoirs of Oliver Francis,” 8.
law enforcement, the Voorhees student movement faded into memory, but its impact was noticeable in later years. Voorhees administrators slowly acquiesced to many of the demands made during the April 1969 takeover, most notably appropriating funds to establish an African American Studies program. Despite efforts to smother dissent, black campus activists at Voorhees remained vigilant against administrative overreach, institutional neglect, and disregard for the concerns of the student body. In 1972, for example, the Voorhees SGA rallied the student body to protest the planned renaming of several campus buildings in honor of conservative white and Black accommodationist educators. Working through the proper channels, Nash provided Dean Jenkins with an alternative list honoring those who had instilled self-respect, dignity, and “pride in heritage” within students. Among those selected was former president Potts, for whom the Library-Administration building was named in 1973. The SGA president, in keeping with recent tradition, could not resist the chance to thumb his nose at Acting President Graham and the majority white trustee board. “In closing,” he chided, “please do me one personal favor—advise President Graham that this is the one matter to which he will listen, since he profoundly stated earlier this year he was not listening to any ‘demands.’”

These and other “bitter and abusive remarks” toward guests at Graham’s inauguration resulted in Nash’s swift and unceremonious exile from the college. Free speech had its limits.

The story of the rise of the Black Campus Movement at Voorhees College and other public and private institutions of higher learning in South Carolina warrants further

investigation by historians and other social scientists. What is clear, however, is that Black campus activists at State College, Voorhees, Allen, Benedict, and the University of South Carolina comprised a powerful vanguard of Black higher educational reformers who, inspired by the state-sanctioned murders of their peers in Orangeburg, built a fierce, organized, and effective movement that transformed Black higher education and produced a new generation of leaders that shaped racial politics in South Carolina. Black students at South Carolina’s HBCUs responded to the state-sanctioned murders in Orangeburg with collective outrage and honored the memory of the fallen with a fierce, organized, and determined protest movement to rewrite the racial constitution of higher education and establish truly “Black” universities that would provide relevant coursework, leadership training, and a renewed emphasis on grassroots altruism in order to defeat generational poverty, educational inequality, political disfranchisement and the last vestiges of *de jure* segregation once and for all. The absence of the Voorhees student movement and, by extension, the Black Campus Movement in South Carolina, from the national civil rights narrative is a product of the fear and trauma caused by Governor McNair’s use of surveillance, propaganda, censorship, and militarized law enforcement to stifle nonviolent direct action, unionization, civil rights organizing, and dissent in general. An equally important reason for the absence of these stories from the larger civil rights narrative is the collective refusal of South Carolina HBCUs—with the lone exception of State College—to acknowledge these difficult chapters in their pasts and treat Black campus activists not as pariahs but, rather, as devoted members of their communities with a different vision of the purpose and mission of Black higher education. Prior to his first retirement, President Potts advised trustees that the best way
to heal from the crisis was to avoid discussing it at all. “Time has a way of healing all wounds if we stop reminding people of the unfavorable incidents which inflicted them,” he suggested. The Voorhees community largely followed his advice; There was no mention of the Black Campus Movement in subsequent editions of *The Tiger* nor have there been any efforts to commemorate these stories until recently. Historians must take the lead in acknowledging the presence of Black Power and Black campus radicalism in South Carolina to correct faulty assumptions that the Palmetto State was behind, not on the cutting edge of the post-Civil Rights white backlash that sped the retrenchment of radical democracy at a time when it could be least afforded.
EPILOGUE

On a sweltering, mid-July afternoon in 2015, one generational war ended while new ones were just beginning. After more than 50 years as a symbol of South Carolina’s pride in its status as America’s stormy petrel, the Confederate flag was removed from its lofty perch near the exact spot where David Carter, Lennie Glover, Chuck McDew, James Edwards, James Clyburn, Dorris Wright, Leola Clement, and hundreds of Black high school and college-aged activists courageously struck a fatal blow against Jim Crow in 1961. A swelling, tense crowd gathered on Gervais Street while smarter, or luckier, observers huddled on balconies or pressed their faces against shimmering glass windows of high-rise buildings adjacent to Columbia’s revitalized downtown shopping district. The gathering filled the air with a mixture of boisterous cheers and outraged jeers as the flag was lowered into the waiting hands of seven members of the South Carolina Highway Patrol—five white, two Black—who furled the banner and marched it into history. As we breathe, we hope.¹

The relatively peaceful and largely symbolic surrender of the legislative wing of Massive Resistance was cathartic for many South Carolinians, still reeling from the horrific June murders of nine Black parishioners at Charleston’s Mother Emmanuel AME

Church at the hands of Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old white supremacist and Columbia native. His victims were members of a small prayer group—a dynamic preacher and statesman, a devoted speech therapist, a dedicated librarian, a barber; beloved church elders and community members—men and women whose belief in the inherent goodness of their fellow man blinded them to the evil they had invited into their midst. As they closed their eyes in prayer, Roof opened fire, turning their sacred refuge into a slaughterhouse.

Later profiles note that the killer’s hatred was fueled by a toxic combination of social isolation, generational poverty, and weaponized revisionist history. During practice runs to Mother Emmanuel, Roof crisscrossed the state making stops at Confederate museums and extant plantations converted into romanticized Old South cultural tourism sites such as Boone Hall. He downloaded poorly-researched books about slavery and the Klan and even visited Sullivan’s Island, long considered the Ellis Island for African Americans, and desecrated its sandy beaches with Nazi crosses and Klan runes. “Roof is what happens when we prefer vast historical erasures to real education about race,” an observer noted in the aftermath of the murders.\(^2\) Educated in a state ranked near the bottom in every relevant category and taught a version of history as fragmented as its race relations, it comes as no surprise that Roof filled his intellectual voids with more darkness. Although white South Carolinians would like to believe that he is an outlier, the state’s overwhelming support for President Donald Trump and the increasingly nativist, isolationist, and racially homogenous Republican party proves

otherwise. Indeed, American racism did not wither and die of old age but is instead
forever young. The violence it produces is as South Carolinian as boiled peanuts.

A new conspiracy for peace was set in motion. Having learned their lessons well,
embattled South Carolina leaders—Black and white—moved swiftly to control the
narrative. “It’s a great day in South Carolina,” exclaimed Republican governor Nikki
Haley as he signed legislation to remove the flag and place it in the Confederate Relic
Room. “We’ll bring it down with dignity,” she added. Critics of the flag expressed hope
that this, too, would pass and calm would be quickly restored. “What we don’t want is a
lot of controversy around it,” said one Black legislator, himself a victim of racial violence
as a child growing up in the state. Grace and forgiveness became the watchword as the
nation’s first Black president offered a stirring yet benign eulogy for Reverend Clementa
Pinckney, the moral leader of the State Senate, who sponsored a bill to ensure that all
South Carolina police officers wear body cameras in the aftermath of the videotaped
murder of Walter Scott, an unarmed Black man, by a white Charleston cop. Such pleas
were even echoed by his Republican colleagues, many of whom defended the flag with
every obstructionist tactic imaginable before abandoning their lost cause. Few would
remember the vitriol expressed by relatives of the victims at Roof’s trial or mass protests
in the streets of Charleston demanding justice for not only the Emmanuel Nine, but for all
cought in the grips of racial capitalism, the disease whose symptoms—miseducation,
generational poverty, political powerlessness, alienation, apathy—afflicts whites and
Blacks alike.

Perhaps most remarkable is that Black students at State College, Voorhees, and
other South Carolina HBCUs were not radicalized by the incident like their forebears
were fifty years earlier. These historic institutions and incubators for student activism have been forced to reckon with the unintended consequences of desegregation, which resulted in several dramatic changes to their educational missions and the curriculum, extracurricular offerings, community institutions, and neighborhoods that once nurtured and sustained multiple generations of Black campus activists. First, they were sapped by a “brain drain,” as fewer talented Black students and faculty chose to attend these institutions. Between 2008 and 2018, enrollment at the seven total HBCUs in South Carolina fell 33 percent, almost four times the national average. With the bulk of brilliant, race-conscious faculty slowly being impressed to predominantly white institutions, the historic and nurturing relationship between these scholars and the masses of Black students that was previously formed within the ebony tower has been diminished.3

Attitudes toward classical education have also changed. The economic recession in 2008 shifted popular notions of college into a tool for job preparation rather than a place to develop the whole self. At some public universities, where state funding has been dramatically cut, humanities programs have been targeted for retrenchment or closure. Republican-controlled legislatures in South Carolina and neighboring Deep South states have kept pace with this trend, hiding their anti-intellectualism and aversion

---

to academic freedom behind claims that these programs fail to provide graduates with employment opportunities and saddle them with substantial debt.⁴

The promise of increased corporate funding and employment opportunities for graduates in STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—has caused a generation of Black and white students to steer clear of the humanities. Despite being instrumental in their formation, few Black colleges in the state maintain thriving Black studies departments and none have developed strong Public History or museums programs, which could serve as potential avenues for reestablishing this bond between campus and community. The recently installed administration at Benedict College helped expedite this trend by cutting seven majors including history, religion, philosophy, sociology, and political science as part of an expanded “onboarding process” and career advising program funded by the United Negro College Fund intended to steer students towards lucrative employment opportunities in cybersecurity, biology, and engineering. “Eliminating the major does not eliminate the discipline. We will continue to have religion and philosophy classes. We have a full-time chaplain on campus. There are lots of ways to enrich and stimulate the spiritual development of our students that doesn’t require them to major in it,” explains Benedict president Dr. Roslyn Artis. The Baptist-supported college even ceded the training of ministers to longtime rival Morris College, ending a proud tradition of progressive religious education that produced some of the state’s most important civil rights leaders. These changes have borne fruit, resulting in

increased grant funding and lower tuition but also led to the dismissal of nearly forty staff.\textsuperscript{5} Whether the rewards of such changes are worth the risk of losing these vital disciplines and spaces that cultivated and molded generations of Black youth remain to be seen.

Nearly all of South Carolina’s HBCUs are working to reverse the perception in some minds that they are subpar colleges. Benedict’s academic reputation, for example, was badly damaged by its well-meaning but doomed “success equals effort” policy where freshmen could receive passing grades just by attending class. State College was threatened with closure on at least two occasions due to mismanagement by past presidents and state officials, who were accused of “perpetuating a segregated system in violation of federal law” in a 2015 lawsuit. The availability of educational options and these internal struggles has prevented the best and brightest Black students and faculty from considering these schools as places to study and work. Still, a higher percentage of African American students attends an HBCU in South Carolina than the national average. Not all the news is negative. Claflin College in Orangeburg has flourished in recent decades, building a strong public image and reputation through innovation in recruiting, retention and course offerings. The Methodist college has a $27.6 million endowment, which is more than any other private HBCU in South Carolina and received $2.5 million

in gifts and donations, more than every other HBCU except for Allen University.⁶

Undoubtedly African Americans in South Carolina have experienced great progress since the end of the watershed 1960s decade. Black colleges and universities deserve much of the credit for this success due to their importance as vital movement centers where young Black students were trained to reject the racist ideas and expectations that accompanied white supremacy, to see themselves as agents of social and political change, and to use their agency and privilege to achieve a larger and greater heritage of freedom for all marginalized people. As the twenty-first century continues, one hopes that these institutions will welcome a new generation of young people and continue to embrace the type of work that will train an increasingly diverse mass of students to develop solutions to the problems faced by poor and marginalized people in the state. Any attempt to initiate the process of confession, penance, and racial reconciliation so desperately needed in South Carolina must include the voices of scholars produced by these vital educational enclaves.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

NEWSPAPERS

Abbeville Press and Banner
Atlanta Daily World
Baltimore Afro-American
Bamberg Herald
The Boston Globe
Charleston Evening Post
Chicago Defender
The Columbia Record (Columbia, S.C.)
The Crisis
The Greenville News (Greenville, S.C.)
Harvard Crimson
Muhammad Speaks
The News and Courier (Charleston, S.C.)
The New York Amsterdam News
The New York Times
Norfolk Journal and Guide
Orangeburg Times and Democrat
Pittsburgh Courier
The County Record
The Herald and News
The Palmetto Leader
The State (Columbia, S.C.)
The Washington Afro-American
The Washington Post

MAGAZINES

African World
The Boston Globe Magazine
Ebony
The Reporter
The Atlantic

CONGRESSIONAL PUBLICATIONS

U.S. Congress. Senate Document 5. 65th Congress, 1st session, 1917.

**MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS**

African American Vertical Files, Manuscripts Room, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

Arthur John Howard Clement, Jr., Papers, Manuscripts Room, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

James T. McCain Papers, 1957-1972, Manuscripts Room, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

John Henry McCray Papers, Manuscripts Room, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

Records of the Office of the President, Thomas F. Jones, Manuscripts Room, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

The Papers of Rev. J. Kenneth Morris, Manuscripts Room, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

Modjeska Montieth Simkins Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, Ernest F. Hollings Library, University of South Carolina.

Allen University Archives, Joseph S. Flipper Library, Allen University, Columbia, S.C.


Voorhees College Black Student Movement Collection, Elizabeth Evelyn Wright-John Foster Potts Library, Voorhees College, Denmark, S.C.

The Papers of James and Esther Jackson, Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University, New York, N.Y.

The Papers of the Congress for Racial Equality

The Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

The Personal Papers of Oliver Francis
SECONDARY SOURCES


Burton, Orville Vernon and Winfred B. Moore, Jr., 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, 2008.


Jones-Branch, Cherisse. “‘To Speak When and Where I Can’: African American Women’s Political Activism in South Carolina in the 1940s and 1950s.” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 107, n.1 (July 2006): 204-224.


Martin, Waldo. “A Dream Deferred: The Southern Negro Youth Congress, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Politics of Historical Memory”…


“S.C. Whites Burn Church to Chase Minister,” *Jet*, October 20, 1955: 3-5.


**THESSES AND DISSERTATIONS**


**LEGAL BRIEFS**

*Williams v. Howard Johnson* 268 F.2d 845 (4th Cir. 1959)
*Barr v. City of Columbia* 378 US 146 (1964)
*Bouie v. City of Columbia* 378 US 147 (1964)

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS**


Alphonso Beach. In discussion with the author. August 7, 2019.