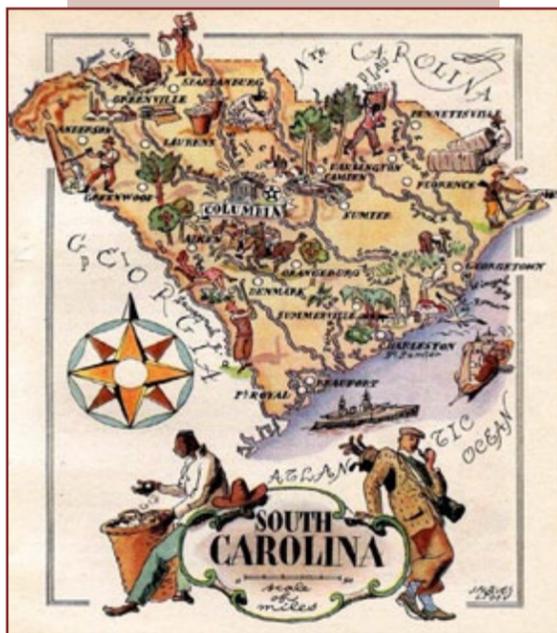


HISTORY DENIED

Recovering South Carolina's Stolen Past

Becci Robbins



Census of 1860.

No.	States.	Free Population.	Slave Population.	Total.	Percentage of Slaves.
1	South Carolina	301,271	402,541	703,812	57.2
2	Mississippi	351,700	436,696	791,396	55.1
3	Louisiana	376,280	333,010	709,290	47.0
4	Alabama	529,161	435,132	964,293	45.1
5	Florida	78,686	61,753	140,439	43.9
6	Georgia	595,097	462,232	1,057,329	43.7
7	North Carolina	661,586	331,081	992,667	33.4
8	Virginia	1,105,192	490,887	1,596,079	30.7
9	Texas	421,750	180,682	602,432	30.0
10	Arkansas	324,323	111,104	435,427	25.5
11	Tennessee	834,063	275,784	1,109,847	24.8
12	Kentucky	930,223	225,490	1,155,713	19.5
13	Maryland	590,846	87,188	687,034	12.7
14	Missouri	1,067,352	114,965	1,182,317	9.7
15	Delaware	110,420	1,798	112,218	1.6
		8,289,953	3,950,543	12,240,496	32.2

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Pact of Southern Youth: Drafted in Columbia by SNYC Delegates in 194647

This is a cautionary tale. It centers on the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC), a militant, interracial youth movement that thrived against all odds between 1937 and 1949 in the Jim Crow South. Its rise and fall—and the collective amnesia that followed—offers a timely warning about how history is made and unmade, and how that shapes our shared narrative.

While SNYC was based in Birmingham, AL, South Carolina activists played a key role in SNYC’s unlikely success. Early on, Columbia activist Modjeska Monteith Simkins served on its board, and was instrumental in bringing SNYC’s 7th annual conference to Columbia in October 1946.

The three-day event promised a glittering line-up of distinguished speakers—including keynote W.E.B. DuBois and internationally acclaimed Paul Robeson—as well as invited guests from around the world. The ambitious schedule included daytime workshops to hone the organizing skills of the young delegates.

It was an unprecedented gathering, yet one that has largely been forgotten. Only recently has scholarship on the radical human rights movement in the 1930s and ’40s emerged, enriching our understanding of the people who drove it and the critical ground they laid for those who came later.

SNYC is far from the only chapter of history to be white-washed, distorted, or erased altogether. This booklet offers a few South Carolina examples: the first Memorial Day, celebrated in war-ruined Charleston after Confederates evacuated the city in 1865; the radically democratic experiment that was Reconstruction; the widespread practice of lynchings after Reconstruction’s end; and the conspiracy of silence that

followed the 1934 killings of seven striking textile workers in Honea Path.

It is no accident that we don’t know our labor history or the darkest truths about the white supremacy built into South Carolina’s very constitution, and that denial carries lasting consequences. Ignorance comes with a heavy price.

This booklet is an attempt to broaden our view of the past, even if it hurts. These stories are painful, but they are also heroic. For every act of oppression, there have been acts of resistance by people willing to risk their very lives to stand for human decency and the promise upon which this

country was built. Their struggles and triumphs deserve to be shared, their bravery celebrated, their work continued.

This volume is not a comprehensive telling of South Carolina’s forgotten resisters. The voices and contributions of women, workers, Native tribes, LGBTQ+ Americans, immigrants, and other marginalized communities also are missing or minimized in our textbooks and in the mainstream media. This is simply a reminder that what we’ve been

taught has largely been dominated by money, war, and the experiences of white men of privilege. That cheats a whole lot of citizens from knowing that their ancestors played important roles in the making of this state and nation.

SNYC’s story lays bare the very best and worst of America. We’d be wise to know both.



The Rise, Fall, and Disappearance of the Southern Negro Youth Congress

“We have come here to Columbia—in the heart of South Carolina, in the heart of the deep South—to re-arm ourselves with a deeper realization of our condition and our needs. We have come to give voice and strength and organizational power to the burning and unsilenceable demand of our generation for the right to live and prosper.

“Today, the movement of the new South, for people’s livelihood, decency of human relations, and democracy was foreshadowed in the glorious achievements of the Reconstruction period, when white men and black men shared political power in true representative state governments, and administered wisely and progressively in the interest of the whole people.”

With those words, Esther V. Cooper welcomed delegates to the Southern Negro Youth Congress’ annual conference on Oct. 18, 1946.

Cooper pointed to portraits of southern black Reconstruction Congressmen lining the walls of the Township Auditorium, and challenged the assembled to continue those pioneers’ struggle for full equality. “Let us carry their work before us always,” she said, “for a historic conference, for the full voting

rights of Southern people, for a peaceful, secure world, and for the unity of the youth of the world.”

The conference attracted more than 3,000 people, some 800 of them youth delegates, mostly from Southern black colleges. Participants included workers and writers, war veterans and labor organizers, students and teachers. They also were black and white, boldly breaking social norms and laws that prohibited race mixing.



Willis Johnson (right) of Johnson Funeral Home greets Paul Robeson at the train station in Columbia upon Robeson's arrival for the annual conference of the Southern Negro Youth Congress in 1946.



An integrated crowd fills the Township Auditorium for the Southern Negro Youth Congress’ 7th annual conference, held in Columbia Oct. 18–20, 1946. The event attracted more than 800 delegates from across the South and overseas.

Columbia had never seen anything like it. This was, after all, the Jim Crow South in the Forties. Named for a 1930s minstrel character, “Jim Crow” was shorthand for a code of conduct that adhered to a strictly enforced color line. For three-quarters of a century in the American South, a caste system racially segregated schools, churches, parks, trains, buses, and restaurants. Public facilities were marked with signs reading “white” and “colored.”

Racial tensions were running high the fall that SNYC held its 7th conference in Columbia, openly defying the state’s segregation laws. The mood was electric inside the packed Township Auditorium on opening night as black delegates representing the Confederate states marched into the hall and assembled on stage under a giant American flag.

“We are meeting at a most crucial hour in the history of the world,” Ed Strong told the crowd. One of SNYC’s founders and its first executive secretary, Strong spoke with the urgency of a man just returned from war. “Those of us who had the opportunity and responsibility of serving in the armed forces were able to travel the world,” he said. “Everywhere we went, we discovered that there is a common bond that binds all mankind. That is the common aspiration for human freedom.”

“In the most titanic battle that the world has ever seen,” Strong said, “we had one view in mind—and that was to realize democracy for us all. When we think of the contrast between what we fought for and the reality of our everyday life in this country, then surely we must begin to realize that something is wrong.”

That theme—of black Americans fighting for democracy overseas only to be denied it upon their return home—was recurring throughout the weekend.

By the 1946 conference in Columbia, SNYC had matured into a disciplined and politically savvy organization. Members were focused, driven by a clear vision of an America that lived up to its promise and a South free of its institutional bigotry.

SNYC organizers had planned an ambitious program for delegates and the broader public, promising a distinguished line-up of speakers—most notably the internationally acclaimed Paul Robeson, senior statesman Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, historian Dr. Herbert Aptheker, and Dr. Clark Foreman. Congressman Adam Clayton Powell cancelled at the last minute, claiming

to have fallen ill. (That may be true, but correspondence shows the high-profile lawmaker asking for more in speaking fees than the cash-strapped organization was able to pay. In his absence, Columbia activist Modjeska Monteith Simkins read Powell's speech.)

Foreman, the white president of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, spoke on opening night. Looking out at the diverse crowd, he asked the delegates to work across racial and class barriers to create a united front. "In this fight for democracy no one can sit idly by," he said. "Wherever you are, seek out those people of both races who are willing to stand up for their rights, and join with them in the fight."

"The rising tide of fascism in the South must be turned back before it has the chance to engulf the whole nation. Unfortunately, slavery has not disappeared from the South. Not only the Negroes, but the whites as well are enslaved." (Read more of Foreman's speech on page 14.)

During the day, delegates met for "committee hearings" on voting, edu-

cation, civil liberties, veteran affairs, and organized labor. Delegates were invited to convene "in the tradition of our forefathers who assembled in great peoples conventions after the Civil War to draft model legislation for their full emancipation from slavery, and to memorialize, petition and demand its enactment into law by state and federal governments."

Among the documents they drafted in Columbia was the Pact of Southern Youth. (See inside back cover.)

"For those three days, the delegates felt like the fate of the world was in their hands," wrote Eric Gellman in his 2012 book *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and Rise of Militant Civil Rights*.

"The mock legislature convened in Columbia to show the world that the next generation of blacks and whites could bring democracy to the southern United States," Gellman wrote. "For a weekend, at least, this roster of speakers coming southward reversed the flow of the years of the Second World War when civil rights opportunities drew southerners to the North. Now the SNYC would bring New York to

Columbia to signal that the postwar battlefield for civil rights would be a southern one."

"The future of the American Negro is in the South"

On Saturday night, Robeson took the stage to speak to a rapt audience. He talked about his son, then the same age as many of the students in the audience, and connected the dots between oppressed people around the globe. "There is a great responsibility upon all of us here," he said in his booming voice. "It is our great destiny to be the vanguard in this struggle, the forward place for courage, for fighting." (See more of his speech on page 9.)

Robeson had just been in the nation's capital a few weeks earlier as part of the American Crusade to End Lynching, a 100-day campaign to mobilize support for federal anti-lynching legislation. While there, he met with President Harry Truman to solicit his leadership on the matter, and performed at a mass rally in the pouring rain.

Robeson and his delegation left disappointed. There was no appetite for a national conversation about lynching, much less for federal mandates to stop the racially fuelled violence.

"There have been to date few arrests, fewer indictments, and no convictions," Robeson told the audience in Columbia. "Resolutions and appeals unnumbered have been sent to Washington, but with no results—no strong word of condemnation...from the President. We want to see an intensified effort in these 100 days commemorating



The Lighthouse & Informer Editor John McCray speaks during the opening session of the Columbia conference. At left are Dr. Clark Foreman and Rose Mae Catchings.

Lincoln's signing the document of our emancipation. The facts are very clear: colored veterans, men and women being shot to death. In the face of these physical assaults against the Negro people, there has been an almost callous disregard of the deeds themselves as well of the destructive forces responsible for them."

Robeson treated the audience to a half-dozen songs, including "Old Man River," "Go Down Moses," and a song mourning the murder of union activist Joe Hill. He told the audience to remember his name, as he was

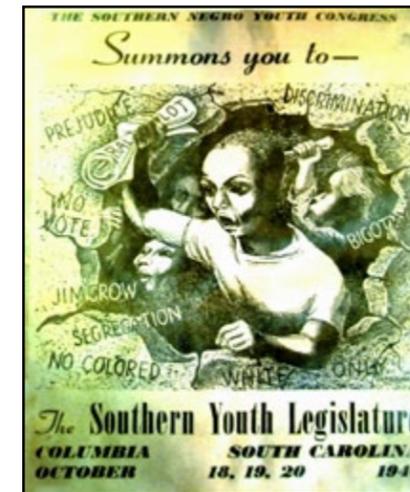
a martyr for a shared cause. "One must understand the unity of the struggle," Robeson said. "We are laboring people. We come from toiling masses and have always been allies with the toiling groups throughout the world."

It was a rare show, as Robeson, who refused to play to segregated audiences, was performing for just the second time in the South.

Sharing the stage that evening was Howard Fast, the white author of the novel *Freedom Road*, set in post-Civil War South Carolina. The book's lead protagonist is formerly enslaved Gideon Jackson, who returns from fighting in the Union Army to a homeland radically changed. Jackson goes on to serve in Congress during Reconstruction. In the end, he is killed by the Ku Klux Klan.

The best-selling novel challenged the popular narrative that Reconstruction failed because of corruption and mismanagement, suggesting instead that it was not allowed to succeed because of a relentless domestic terrorism carried

out by white supremacists desperate to maintain power. In his afterword, Fast writes of the Reconstruction era, "Not only were the material things wiped out and people slain, but the very memory was expunged."



In 1944, the *Negro Digest* ran an excerpt of the novel because it "gives an entirely new picture of the Southern society of freed Negro slaves and poor whites." The editors called it "one of the finest books ever written about the Negro" and "a strong rebuttal to the *Gone with the Wind* and *The Clansmen* school of writing."

In 1979, the book was adapted into a movie starring Muhammad Ali and Kris Kristofferson, receiving tepid reviews. It had been optioned in Hollywood studios in the 1940s and 1950s, with Robeson intended for the lead, but the political climate made it impossible to produce a movie featuring a blacklisted white writer and a blacklisted black actor. "I was told they would never let it play in the South," Fast told a reporter.

The book was beloved among SNYC's members. Its newsletter, *Cavalcade*, awarded prizes to college students for art and poetic interpretations of *Freedom Road*. Having Fast at the Columbia conference was a real draw. Upon the author's acceptance to speak, SNYC organizer Louis Burnham wrote an enthusiastic letter of thanks and an outline of program details. Fast was to speak about his novel and "the people's culture as a weapon in the fight against fascist reaction, American style."

Fast's book would be for sale at the conference, with proceeds being di-

We are the sons and daughters of people of courage. Ours is a history of struggle for democracy. Each generation has had its historic task: to become the first full-fledged voting generation of Negro Americans is ours. We can no longer wait.

We are not alone. Our cause is the fight of all Americans who hold democracy and freedom dear. The great organizing drive of labor unions and the spreading influence of progressive thought among the white youth of the South strengthens our fight.

- For the abolition of the poll tax and all barriers to the vote
- For...a law guaranteeing the right to work at all jobs.
- For federal anti-lynching legislation and genuine civil liberties.
- For adequate and equal housing, health and educational facilities.
- For an end to "white supremacy" customs and practices which violate our human dignity and rights.

From invitation to delegates of SNYC's Columbia conference

“I went to a convention in Columbia, SC, and this was the first time blacks had used the city auditorium of that city even though it was majority black. The convention had around the walls pictures of all the blacks who had been elected during Reconstruction. I had never seen that in my life. I had 12 years of high school and three years of college, and I did not know there had been black congressmen and mayors of cities during Reconstruction in the South.

So it was a great educational experience with the Southern Negro Youth Congress.”

Jack O’Dell, activist who would go on to serve as top aide to Martin Luther King

“We black people didn’t have no mass organization in the South before [SNYC]. Police shoot down a Negro, it’s just a Negro shot down. Some may have grumbled among themselves, but nobody said nothin’.”

Hosea Hudson, union organizer

vided between organizations. Burnham asked him to send 500 copies in care of Modjeska Simkins in Columbia.

The program featured speakers who had traveled from several continents to take part in the conference. SNYC had invited representatives from the All India Student Congress, the Soviet Anti-Fascist Youth Committee, and youth movements in Europe, China, and Latin America.

Haitian delegate Theodor Baker shared news of the revolution in his country and his hopes for collaboration with young Americans seeking political and social change. He called it an honor to raise his voice “in this assembly, so vibrant with the hope of establishing a new order of things in which men of any color may take their respective places with dignity.”

A. Romeo Horton brought greetings from Liberia. “You have come a long way up from slavery to where you are,” he told the crowd. “You have made much and wonderful progress. We congratulate you upon your effort, upon your courage and determination, upon your success so far. Let us work

together. Let us share what we have with each other. We are brothers.”

DuBois brought the convention to a memorable conclusion on Sunday evening in Benedict College’s Antidel Chapel. A reverent crowd filled the pews and aisles of the church, and more people spilled outside, where they listened over loudspeakers.

“The future of the American Negro is in the South,” he began. “Here, 327 years ago, they began to enter what is now the United States...Here they have suffered the damnation of slavery, the frustration of Reconstruction and the lynching of emancipation. I trust then that an organization like yours is going to regard the South as the battleground of a great crusade.”

DuBois took on South Carolina’s most famous politician since John C. Calhoun, former US senator, Supreme Court justice and future governor James F. Byrnes, “that favorite son of this commonwealth, today occupying an indefensible and impossible position. And if he survives in the memory of men, he must begin to help establish

Continued on page 17



Student prepares mailing for 1946 conference in Columbia.

Howard University

“It is our great destiny to be the vanguard”

The venerable actor, singer, and activist Paul Robeson headlined the Columbia conference in 1946. These are his remarks, edited for space.

I am proud and happy to be here. I come as one who feels very close and proud and very thankful to you as I look out at you tonight, because I have a boy, reared a good deal abroad, who is back in his land to fight for his people. He knows that it is for you here in the South that the struggle really goes on. Here you must bear it day by day. I shall be proud to tell him I have seen your faces tonight and that there are a lot of youngsters his age who are fighting for him every day.

One must understand the unity of the struggle. We are laboring people. We come from toiling masses, and have always been allies with the toiling groups throughout the world. There was one guy who fought for you, whether you know it or not, way back some time ago. He came from Salt Lake City, and they shot him down in Colorado. His name was Joe Hill. Remember that.

What we see in the South is not an isolated thing. It is a part of the whole fabric of America. Let’s go back just a few years to the New Deal, when Roosevelt said that one-third of the American people is underprivileged. He meant that they were living a life that had nothing to do with the level of living that could be and should be theirs in a country as rich as ours.

Not only the Negro people, who make up one-tenth of the United States, but one-third of the workers of many nationalities, white workers in the South, Spanish American workers in the Southwest, Americans of Asiatic descent on the West Coast, all denied the privileges that should belong to us as American citizens. These same people who would crush democracy

[abroad] would break organized labor in the United States.

They would break the Negro people who have aspirations for real freedom and who have an innate power to attain that freedom. They would break the back of other minorities like the Jewish people, the Spanish-American people. Yes, they must break all minorities. There is no connection made between Nuremburg crimes and lynchings in Georgia and in other parts of the South. One of the weaknesses of Mr. Byrnes’ position in Paris has been exactly that.

The United States has no moral position whatsoever in the council of nations to talk about the extension of democracy until they can see that it has some relation to the dignity of millions and millions of Americans who up until now have had little part in this so-called free land. It is still a battle of fascism against anti-fascism. We must understand that in other parts of the world today our government has, up to this point, decided to throw its weight on the side of the remnants of fascism against the emerging democracies of the world.

They do it in many ways. One way is to make everybody a little nervous. Our reactionaries say, “We have to go to war against the Soviet Union.” Anything that is red, anything that is Communist, we have just got to destroy. Now what is the history of this? Communism didn’t begin in Russia. It comes from the struggle of people to get a decent life. This happened in 1917 in Russia just as it happened in

1775 here or 1789 in France; just as it happened in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia during this war.

It gets a little absurd today to worry about the “Communist menace.” Communists have been elected to power in many countries because they were the first to die in the struggle against fascism. Behind this red bogey that



Paul Robeson addresses crowd in September 1946 at a rally in Washington, DC, calling for anti-lynching legislation.

Hitler used, there is the hope of scaring away every liberal from fighting for the rights of oppressed peoples. But the American liberal must understand that it is too late to go now. I saw this happen in France. First they attacked minorities like the Negro people and the Jewish people. Next, they called everybody a Communist, and before you knew it the jails were filled. This is the essence of fascism.

So there is a great responsibility upon all of us here. It is our great destiny to be the vanguard in this struggle, the forward place for courage, for fighting. Suffering belongs to us, the Negro people together with many others, with labor, and with other minorities. We have been challenged.

With our allies here and in other parts of the world, we will gain our freedom. There are no more dignified and prouder people than our forebears in Africa who were brought as slaves to America. Human dignity is important to us. We want to walk the earth with our shoulders back, knowing that we are free, free like any other people on the face of the earth. Thanks to you and to many others, we will be. 🌟

Behold the Land

W.E.B. DuBois delivered this address at the closing session of the SNYC conference in Columbia. It was later printed as a booklet and distributed widely. The piece also was reprinted in *Freedomways*, the black journal Esther Cooper helped launch in 1961 and edited until 1985.

The future of American Negroes is in the South. Here 327 years ago, they began to enter what is now the United States of America; here they have made their greatest contribution to American culture; and here they have suffered the damnation of slavery, the frustration of reconstruction and the lynching of emancipation.

I trust then that an organization like yours is going to regard the South as the battle-ground of a great crusade. Here is the magnificent climate; here is the fruitful earth under the beauty of the southern sun; and here, if anywhere on earth, is the need of the thinker, the worker and the dreamer.

This is the firing line not simply for the emancipation of the American Negro but for the emancipation of the African Negro and the Negroes of the West Indies; for the emancipation of the colored races; and for the emancipation of the white slaves of modern capitalist monopoly.

Remember here, too, that you do not stand alone. It may seem like a failing fight when the newspapers ignore you; when every effort is made by white people in the South to count you out of citizenship and to act as though you did not exist as human beings while all the time they are profiting by your

labor, gleaning wealth from your sacrifices and trying to build a nation and a civilization upon your degradation. You must remember that despite all this, you have allies and allies even in the white South.



Esther Cooper presents W.E.B. DuBois a gift on behalf of SNYC at the Columbia conference in 1946.

First and greatest of these possible allies are the white working classes about you, the poor whites whom you have been taught to despise and who in turn have learned to fear and hate you.

This must not deter you from efforts to make them understand, because in the past in their ignorance and suffering

they have been led foolishly to look upon you as the cause of most of their distress. You must remember that this attitude is hereditary from slavery and that it has been deliberately cultivated ever since emancipation.

Slowly but surely the working people of the South, white and Black, must come to remember that their emancipation depends upon their mutual cooperation; upon their acquaintance-ship with each other; upon their friendship; upon their social intermingling. Unless this happens each is going to be made the football to break the heads and hearts of the other.

White Youth is Frustrated

White youth in the South is 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.

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. Some of them, in larger and larger numbers, are bound to turn toward the truth and to recognize you as brothers and sisters, as fellow travelers toward the dawn. There has always been in the South that intellectual elite who saw

the Negro problem clearly. They have always lacked and some still lack the courage to stand up for what they know is right. Nevertheless they can be depended on in the long run to follow their own clear thinking and their own decent choice.

Finally even the politicians must eventually recognize the trend in the world, in this country, and in the South. James Byrnes, that favorite son of this commonwealth, and Secretary of State of the United States, is today occupying an indefensible and impossible position; and if he survives in the memory of men, he must begin to help establish in his own South Carolina something of that democracy which he has been recently so loudly preaching to Russia.

He is the end of a long series of men whose eternal damnation is the fact that they looked truth in the face and did not see it; John C. Calhoun, Wade Hampton, Ben Tillman are men whose names must ever be besmirched by the fact that they fought against freedom and democracy in a land which was founded upon democracy and freedom.

Eventually this class of men must yield to the writing in the stars. That great hypocrite, Jan Smuts, who today is talking of humanity and standing beside Byrnes for a United Nations, is at the same time oppressing the Black people of Africa to an extent which makes their two countries, South Africa and the American South, the most reactionary peoples on earth, peoples whose exploitation of the poor and helpless reaches the last degree of shame. They must in the long run yield to the forward march of civilization or die.

What Does the Fight Mean?

If now you young people, instead of running away from the battle here in Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi, instead of seeking freedom and opportunity in Chicago

and New York—which do spell opportunity—nevertheless grit your teeth and make up your minds to fight it out right here if it takes every day of your lives and the lives of your children's children. If you do this, you must in meetings like this ask yourselves what does the fight mean? How can it be carried on? What are the best tools, arms, and methods? And where does it lead?

I should be the last to insist that the uplift of mankind never calls for force and death. There are times, as both you and I know, when

Tho' love repine and reason chafe,
There came a voice without reply,
'Tis man's perdition to be safe
When for truth he ought to die.

At the same time and even more clearly in a day like this, after the millions of mass murders that have been done in the world since 1914, we ought to be the last to believe that force is ever the final word. We cannot escape the clear fact that what is going to win in this world is reason if this ever becomes a reasonable world.

The careful reasoning of the human mind backed by the facts of science is the one salvation of man. The world, if it resumes its march toward civilization, cannot ignore reason. This has been the tragedy of the South in the past; it is still its awful and unforgivable sin that it has set its face against reason and against the fact. It tried to build slavery upon freedom; it tried to build tyranny upon democracy; it tried to build mob violence on law and law on lynching, and in all that despicable endeavor, the state of South Carolina has led the South for a century. 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.

Nevertheless reason can and will prevail; but of course it can only prevail with publicity—pitiless, blatant pub-

licity. You have got to make the people of the United States and of the world know what is going on in the South. You have got to use every field of publicity to force the truth into their ears, and before their eyes. You have got to make it impossible for any human being to live in the South and not realize the barbarities that prevail here. You may be condemned for flamboyant methods; for calling a congress like this; for waving your grievances under the noses and in the faces of men.

That makes no difference; it is your duty to do it. It is your duty to do more of this sort of thing than you have done in the past. As a result of this you are going to be called upon for sacrifice. It is no easy thing for a young Black man or a young Black woman to live in the South today and to plan to continue to live here; to marry and raise children; to establish a home.

They are in the midst of legal caste and customary insults; they are in continuous danger of mob violence; they are mistreated by the officers of the law and they have no hearing before the courts and the churches and public opinion commensurate with the attention which they ought to receive. But that sacrifice is only the beginning of battle; you must re-build this South.

There are enormous opportunities here for a new nation, a new economy, a new culture in a South—really new and not a mere renewal of an old South of slavery, monopoly and race hate. There is a chance for a new cooperative agriculture on renewed land owned by the state with capital furnished by the state, mechanized and coordinated with city life.

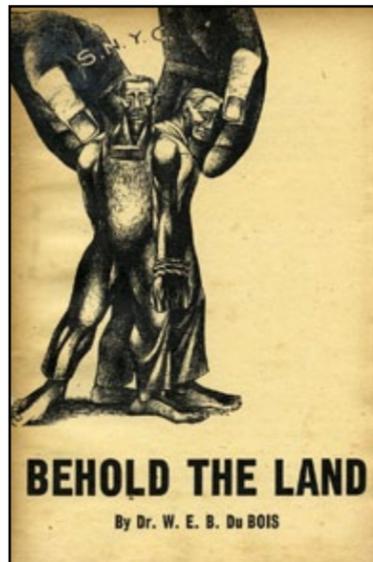
There is a chance for strong, virile trade unions without race discrimination, with high wage, closed shop and decent conditions of work, to beat back and hold in check the swarm of landlords, monopolists and profiteers who are today sucking the blood out of this land. There is chance for cooperative industry, built on the cheap

TVA and its future extensions. There is opportunity to organize and mechanize domestic service with decent hours, and high wage and dignified training.

Behold the Land

There is a vast field for consumers' cooperation, building business on public service and not on private profit as the main-spring of industry. There is chance for a broad, sunny, healthy home life, shorn of the fear of mobs and liquor, and rescued from lying, stealing politicians, who build their deviltry on race prejudice.

Here in this South is the gateway to the colored millions of the West Indies, Central and South America. Here is the straight path to Africa, the Indies, China and the South Seas. Here is the path to the greater, freer, truer world. It would be shame and cowardice 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 its soul and steal its resources.



The oil and sulfur; the coal and iron; the cotton and corn; the lumber and cattle belong to you the workers, Black and white, and not to the thieves who hold them and use them to enslave you. They can be rescued and restored to the people if you have the guts to strive for the real right to vote, the right to real education, the right of happiness and health and the total abolition of the father of these scourges of mankind, poverty.

“Behold the beautiful land which the Lord thy God hath given thee.” Behold

the land, the rich and resourceful land, from which for a hundred years its best elements have been running away, its youth and hope, Black and white, scurrying North because they are afraid of each other, and dare not face a future of equal, independent, upstanding human beings, in a real and not a sham democracy.

To rescue this land, in this way, calls for the Great Sacrifice; this is the thing that you are called upon to do because it is the right thing to do. Because you are embarked upon a great and holy crusade, the emancipation of mankind, Black and white; the upbuilding of democracy; the breaking down, particularly here in the South, of forces of evil represented by race

prejudice in South Carolina; by lynching in Georgia; by disfranchisement in Mississippi; by ignorance in Louisiana and by all these and monopoly of wealth in the whole South.

There could be no more splendid vocation beckoning to the youth of the twentieth century, after the flat failures of white civilization, after the flamboyant establishment

of an industrial system which creates poverty and the children of poverty which are ignorance and disease and crime; after the crazy boasting of a white culture that finally ended in wars which ruined civilization in the whole world; in the midst of allied peoples who have yelled about democracy and never practiced it either in the British Empire or in the American Commonwealth or in South Carolina.

Here is the chance for young women and young men of devotion to lift again the banner of humanity and to

walk toward a civilization which will be free and intelligent; which will be healthy and unafraid; and build in the world a culture led by Black folk and joined by peoples of all colors and all races—without poverty, ignorance and disease.

Once, a great German poet cried: “Happy man whom death shall find in Victory’s splendor.” But I know a happier one: he who fights in despair and in defeat still fights. Singing with Arna Bontemps the quiet, determined philosophy of undefeatable men:

*“I thought I saw an angel flying low,
I thought I saw the flicker of a wing
Above the mulberry trees;
but not again,
Bethesda sleeps. This ancient pool that
healed.
A host of bearded Jews does not
awake.
This pool that once the angels troubled
does not move.*

*No angel stirs it now, no Saviour
comes
With healing in His hands to raise the
sick
and bid the lame man leap upon the
ground.
The golden days are gone.
Why do we wait*

*So long upon the marble steps, blood
Falling from our open wounds? and
why
Do our black faces search the empty
sky?
Is there something we have forgotten?
Some precious thing
We have lost, wandering in strange
lands?*

*There was a day, I remember now,
I beat my breast and cried, “Wash me
God,”
Wash me with a wave of wind upon
The barley; O quiet one, draw near,
draw near!*

*Walk upon the hills with lovely feet
And in the waterfall
stand and speak! ❁*

Culture as a Weapon

The arts were central to SNYC’s organizing strategy, a critical tool for engaging, inspiring, and mobilizing members and allies. SNYC sponsored poetry contests, held art shows, wrote and performed skits, and created the Association of Young Writers and Artists to support black talent and “conscious art.”

In 1941, SNYC launched a monthly newsletter, *Cavalcade: The March of Southern Youth*. The publication was by and for black youth in the South, filling a void for that demographic. Its editor, Augusta Jackson, featured seasoned as well as new writers and poets, critical essays, and political commentary.

In its first year, in 1947, SNYC opened a People’s Theater in Richmond, VA, and another in New Orleans, LA, where they staged plays and show-cased musicians. In places where they didn’t have a community theater, they performed skits in churches and recreation centers to teach black history, promote civic engagement, and advance their campaigns against lynching, the poll tax, and sharecropping.

In 1940, their political troupe Caravan Puppeteers hit the road in rural Alabama to reach neglected communities and register them to vote. They used a donated Chevy as a stage for Snottypus and Pig to teach health and farming practices, and to organize SNYC councils and labor unions. The performers played to the crowd, adjusting their scripts depending on whether white people were watching.

Poet Waring Cuney, a friend of writer and social activist Langston Hughes, was one of the original Puppeteers, along with Ramona Lowe and Peter Price. The trio performed original skits, distributed leaflets on voting, and invited the rural workers to join SNYC.

Many of Cuney’s pieces were anti-war. In “Uncle Sam Says,” he laments:

*Uncle Sam says,
Your place is on the ground.
When I fly my aeroplanes
Don’t want no Negroes around.
Got my government letter
It was time to go,
When I went to camp
I found the same Jim Crow.
Uncle Sam says, Two camps for
black and white.
But when trouble starts
We’ll all be in the same big fight.*

The Puppeteers had the support of folk singer Pete Seeger, who understood the value of their work, and the legendary Marian Anderson, perhaps best known for her 1939 performance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, before a crowd of 75,000.

While the troupe was entertaining and educating marginalized communities, they also were gathering important data from the field. They reported, for instance, that most of the farmers lived at least 20 miles from any school, too far to reach on foot. That led to a collaboration with black colleges to bring books to people who lacked access to them.

The Puppeteers’ were instrumental in freeing Nora Wilson, a black teen jailed in Alabama for cursing a white woman—charges the accuser later wanted dropped. Wilson’s mother contacted the Puppeteers to ask for help in securing her daughter’s release from the eight-month sentence.

Nora Wilson’s crime was coming to the defense of her 11-year-old sister, accused of stealing six ears of corn

while working in the home of a white family. When Wilson confronted the employer, she was slapped and threatened with a gun. Wilson fled, but was soon arrested and given a \$1,000 bond, which she was unable to pay. Without counsel, she waived her right to a jury trial and was convicted.

SNYC unleashed an aggressive public campaign to free her. They secured an attorney, lobbied the governor and state solicitor, and kept readers updated on her case through their newspaper and letters to members and allies.

The public attention cast an unwelcome spotlight on Alabama. A prison supervisor was quoted saying, “This is a nigger case, and we don’t like publicity on these things.” Because of

SNYC’s efforts, Nora Wilson was released from prison and charges were dropped.

The skills SNYC activists honed in their years of service would serve the movement long after the organization disbanded. Some would go on to work in the anti-apartheid movement in

South Africa. Others put their talents to work at home.

Esther Cooper would help launch *Freedomways*, a journal she edited from 1961 until it folded in 1985. A leading repository for black artists and intellectuals, *Freedomways* ran pieces by notable black writers and thinkers, including Nobel laureates Martin Luther King Jr., Pablo Neruda, and Derek Walcott. It featured a young Nikki Giovanni, was first to publish the work of Alice Walker, and was the first black publication to oppose US involvement in Vietnam. ❁



Waring Cuney was one of SNYC’s Caravan Puppeteers, a troupe that performed in rural communities.

“Slavery has not disappeared from the South”

Speech by Dr. Clark Foreman, President of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, at SNYC's 1946 conference in Columbia. Modjeska Simkins attended the founding conference of SCHW in 1938, when First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt famously refused to take segregated seating. Like SNYC, the group dissolved in 1948 due to red baiting. Simkins spoke at the 51st anniversary of the group's founding in 1990 in Birmingham.

Nearly 300 years ago, Pierre Robert, my grandfather 10 generations back, settled in what is now the state of South Carolina to escape the persecution of Protestants which was then prevailing in France. As the first Huguenot minister in America, Pierre Robert came to build a free country, where all people, of whatever faith or origin, could live in harmony, free from the persecutions of the old world.

Thousands of other early settlers in the South set out to make this country free and democratic. Freedom and liberty are just as important in the heritage of the South as the puritan tradition in New England. The best Southerners have always been true to that tradition of freedom.

The freedom and liberty-loving Southerners were overwhelmed several generations ago by the growing power of the small minority of plantation-owners. We were pushed into slavery and secession by these big-businessmen of the old South because then, as now, the majority of the people of the South were not allowed to vote.

The period of slavery, secession and bloody civil war would not be in our history books today if all the Southerners had had the vote in the 1700s and 1800s. So long as a handful of people are allowed to speak for an entire state, we shall not have democracy

in the 1900s. The sooner the people of the South elect their own officials and have a real voice in the running of their government, the better off the South and the whole nation will be. The recent post-war wave of lynching and terror has focused the eyes of the nation on the corruption of much of our democratic machinery in the South. Almost without exception the victims of lynching have been guilty only of standing up for their rights.

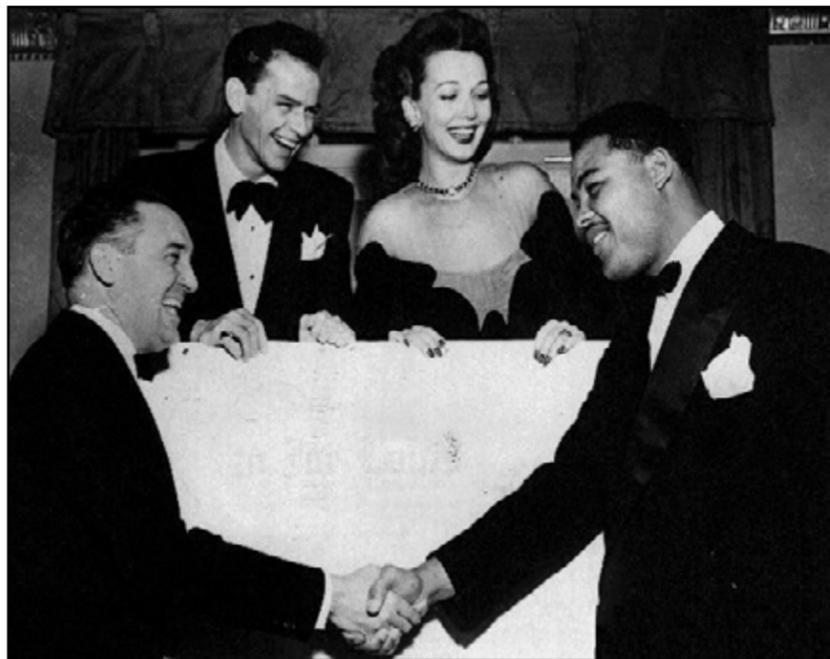
Just as the plantation owners profited from slavery in the South that many Americans like to think is a thing of the past, their present-day successors still hope for greater profits through labor at little better than slave prices.

Unfortunately, slavery has not disappeared from the South. One look into the Southern part of the United States will tell any observer that now not only the Negroes, but the whites as well, are enslaved. Enslaved to a system of taxation without representation, enslaved to a system which knows

little economic security, enslaved to a combination of Northern industrial overseers and modern plantation owners whose Simon Legrees are the Bilbos, and Talmadges, and their tools among the police who shoot up Negro communities as in Columbia, Tennessee, or wink at lynching as in Monroe, Georgia, or who gouge out the eyes of a Negro veteran as in Batesburg, South Carolina.

The rulers of this feudal minority can call upon money from the North and the South to maintain their control. They can buy a large corrupt segment of the press. Wherever the masses of the people are unable to vote, their rulers can buy into office their state, county and municipal officials and even legislators in Washington.

They can also confuse many people by spreading false information and inflaming prejudice. These feudalists endanger the whole country, because their minority-elected stooges in the Senate and the House of Representa-



Clark Foreman (left), with Frank Sinatra and Carole Landis, shakes hands with Joe Louis at the Waldorf Astoria in New York in 1946.

tives can be depended upon to block every piece of progressive legislation introduced in Congress.

The racist propaganda put out by these would-be Hitlers deceives many people into crimes they never would commit if they had economic security. The Southern white worker is very often the victim of poverty and prejudice. Under the goading of the demagogue, the white worker is driven by that age-old enemy of logic: fear. The white worker, constantly in a state of insecurity, is afraid that he will lose his job to a Negro, and rationalizes the sinister lies and distortions of the demagogue.

Lynching is no racial matter. All of us are endangered when the mob strikes at any one of us. The organization of prejudice is the prelude to fascism. It is a tool used by Northern and Southern owners of industries in the South who, like the German industrialists, realize that economic fear can be profitable to them.

I have seen in my native Atlanta shops of a corporation which employed both Negroes and white workers on a 50-50 basis but kept them segregated and allowed very little communication. Whenever either group asked for some remedy or better working conditions, the standard answer was that if they didn't like what the company was doing, the company would be glad to employ more of the other group. This answer was given with equal facility to a grievance from a white person as to a grievance from a Negro.

The separation of the two groups made it difficult, if not impossible, to present a united demand. Segregation, prejudice and discrimination are all part and parcel of the economic issue in the South. So long as the workers of the South are kept divided by economic fear they cannot have security; they cannot have the basic protections of our Constitution. The Northern and Southern mill owners who think of their profits and not of the security and

prosperity of the people of the South are doing everything in their power to keep the South divided into two groups which are constantly fighting each other. They will use any means at their disposal to keep workers of the South unorganized and working for low salaries.

The day of Uncle Tom is over. More and more the people of the South are realizing that complacency and subservience are not the answers to segregation and discrimination. To those who say, "the Negro must keep his place," there can be but one reply: the only possible meaning that phrase can convey is that the Negro must take his place as an equal alongside his fellow white citizens under the Constitution of the United States. Now Mr. James Byrnes of South Carolina is insisting that European nations guarantee to their nationals the civil rights that this same Mr. Byrnes has insisted should be denied in this home state.

The South has strayed far from the precepts of Pierre Robert and the early founders. The lack of democracy in the South is not a problem for the South alone. Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "the South represents the nation's number one economic problem—the nation's not merely the South's." Economically and politically the low standards in the South affect the entire country. Roosevelt's words are just as true today as they were eight years ago. The rising tide of fascism in the South must be turned back before it has the chance to engulf the whole nation. In this fight for democracy no one can sit idly by. Wherever you are, seek out those people of both races who are willing to stand up for their rights, and join with them in the fight.

The forces of reaction are solidly organized and well-financed. Only through organization of all the people who cherish liberty and freedom and are willing to work for it can American fascism be prevented from doing what Hitler and Tojo failed to accomplish in the United States. ☸

"Now Mr. James Byrnes of South Carolina is insisting that European nations guarantee to their nationals the civil rights that this same Mr. Byrnes has insisted should be denied in this home state.

"The South has strayed far from the precepts of the early founders. The lack of democracy in the South is not a problem for the South alone. Economically and politically the low standards in the South affect the entire country.

"The rising tide of fascism in the South must be turned back before it has the chance to engulf the whole nation.

"In this fight for democracy no one can sit idly by. Wherever you are, seek out those people of both races who are willing to stand up for their rights, and join with them in the fight."

Dr. Clark Foreman,
Southern Conference
on Human Welfare



Launched in 1941, *The Lighthouse and Informer* was a vital source of news for South Carolina's black community until it folded in 1954. It was managed by John McCray and Modjeska Monteith Simkins in an office she donated in Columbia. They, along with Osceola

McKaine and Annie Belle Weston, were the state's leading players in the Southern Negro Youth Congress. The four also were instrumental in the Progressive Democratic Party, founded in 1944 to challenge the state Democratic Party's whites-only primaries.

Continued from page 8

in his own South Carolina something of that democracy which he has been recently so loudly preaching in Russia. Eventually this class of men must yield to the writing in the stars."

The speech held the crowd spellbound. Regarded as one of DuBois' finest, "Behold the Land" was printed and distributed widely. (See full speech on page 10.)

Media Matters

Coverage of the Columbia conference in *The State* quoted Gov. Ransome Wilson, who said, "It was regrettable that Communist elements came so boldly and brazenly into South Carolina in an effort to undermine Sec. of State Byrnes." It included an editor's note: "Ousting Byrnes is now the No. 1 item on the Communist program."

The paper ran two pieces side by side; one clearly taken from a press release, as it reported that Congressman Powell spoke and his wife played two numbers on the piano.

Under the headline "Foreman Sees 'Rising Tide Of Fascism,'" the paper quoted the keynote address at length, describing how he "blazed away" at a litany of social ills. It reported that speaker John McCray, editor of the black newspaper *The Lighthouse and Informer*, "lashed out" at South Carolina titans Wade Hampton, John C. Calhoun, Ben Tillman, Olin D. Johnston, and "Cotton Ed" Smith.

The *Columbia Record* ran a story under the headline "Russia Is Praised at Negro Meeting." An editorial in the *Beaufort Gazette* chided SNYC for vilifying "the names of such great South Carolinians" Calhoun, Tillman, Smith, and Byrnes. Even the *New York Times* disapproved of SNYC's antipathy toward Byrnes, claiming it "revealed the degree to which the Communist Party has been able to guide the actions of the conference."

The mainstream press was a willing accomplice to the segregation espoused by Byrnes and most politicians in the South. It was easier to decry the social activists as communist dupes of an outside agitating force than to address the problems of black Americans' lack of access to decent jobs, education, and health care.

SNYC pushed back, issuing a press release defending their resolution condemning Byrnes. Foreign and domestic policies are inseparable, SNYC argued, and "our relations with other powers cannot be entrusted to those who represent the most backward and undemocratic policies in internal affairs."

The Columbia conference was a high-water mark for SNYC. Attendance was double that of the previous convention, reflecting a movement gaining strength. After the conference, students channelled their enthusiasm into establishing councils, or clubs, across South Carolina.

At least 15 members were required to charter a SNYC group. Students organized in Aiken, Irmo, Anderson, Monks Corner, Columbia, Orangeburg, Pelzer, Huger, Hardeeville, Winnsboro, Seneca, and Andrews, as well as on the campuses of Allen University and Harbison Agricultural Institute. New members received a letter saying "You have just joined a crusade of youth working for a better future. Enclosed is a membership card."

In Monks Corner, high school student Leroy Aiken organized three clubs,

a library, and a two-day institute in February 1947. In a letter reporting on the groups' progress, he wrote that their activities included "discussing

Negro history, and their achievements. Sometimes we have a picture show. One Sunday out of every month we have a rally or educational programs."

On Oct. 23, 1946, 17-year-old Frank Pinckney wrote the Columbia office to thank them for an article they sent pointing out the injustice of veterans being denied the very freedoms they were fighting for overseas. "I wrote Mr. Truman the other day about the same thing. We fought together like one, why can't we be like one.

How ever he hasn't answered me back yet but I hope I will hear from him soon. I do not think I am to young to help fight to keep up our

Negro race. I will like very much to be in you all mits. [sic]"

Growing a Southern Youth Movement

The activists driving SNYC had come a long way in less than a decade, fuelled by a youthful idealism and a shared belief in their power to effect change.

SNYC was an outgrowth of the National Negro Congress (NNC), founded in 1936 in Chicago as an umbrella organization seeking to unite various civil rights groups and personalities. That gathering drew more than 800



The *Hambone* comic strip was a regular feature in *The State* newspaper from 1919 to 1962. This one ran on Oct. 19, 1946, right next to coverage of SNYC's conference.

delegates from civic, civil rights, labor, and religious groups from across the country. A few young people at that conference saw the need for a student-led Southern strategy that would build new coalitions to educate and mobilize in bold and creative new ways.

It became clear, historian Waldo Martin argued in a 2013 article in *Dissent*, that “a southern-based youth movement was imperative to push a dual yet interrelated agenda: the concerns of black youth specifically and blacks generally. In the heady context of the wide-ranging social activism spawned by the Depression and the gathering clouds of European war, youth activism mushrooms, especially among college youth. SNYC’s founders and activists were part of this yeasty moment.”

SNYC’s founding resolution brimmed with hope. “We...realizing the vast possibilities in the millions of young people, unawakened and uninformed; the disinherited sharecropper, the tenant farmer, the workers of the field, young people whose future outlook is one of monotonous toil without any hope of security or happiness, resolved that we cast our lot with Southern brethren knowing that ultimate success will not be achieved until the South is free.”

SNYC held its first conference in Richmond, VA, Feb. 13–14, 1937, to coincide with Frederick Douglass’ birthday. The keynote address was delivered by the distinguished theologian Dr. Mordecai Johnson, the first black president of Howard University in Washington, DC.

Johnson told the audience of some 1,200, “Do not deceive yourself. It is not sufficient to intellectually recognize evils, talk about them, fuss about them and cuss people out who are responsible for them. You must go deeper than that. Unless you are able to see that the wrong you see around you is wrong because it hurts the universe itself and every human being within the confines of the South, it will be impossible for you to get the strength to do the things you need to do.”

Representing 250,000 young Americans, 534 delegates were joined by a reported 2,000 observers at Fifth Street Baptist Church. Their average age was 22. Half were women, and most of them were from the South. Delegates established a four-point program for



SNYC archives, Howard University

Modjeska Monteith Simkins (3rd row, 2nd from left) poses with students enrolled in SNYC’s Leadership Institute in 1947 at Allen University. The trainings were part of SNYC’s ongoing commitment to educating a cadre of activists to grow and drive their movement.

jobs, health care, education, and full citizenship for black and poor southerners.

Young people of the South saw in SNYC a vehicle to chart a new way by creating partnerships across traditional barriers of race, class, gender, and educational pedigree. World-wise and ahead of their time, these young activists looked beyond the caste system of the American South to embrace a human rights agenda.

NNC and SNYC were created in a time of rising fascism overseas and a realization that New Deal programs for families devastated by the Depression were failing to reach black Americans. Black communities lacked access to education, housing, and health care, and were locked out of a political system constructed to exclude them through literacy tests and poll taxes.

Founding member Ed Strong thought blacks had been duped by the New Deal. “We were promised cars in every garage and a chicken in every pot,” he said in an early speech, “but we not only do not have two cars in every garage but we have lost both the garage and the pot.”

Blacks in the South also faced the threat of lynching, the ultimate tool of white power, a practice more widespread than we have been taught. (See more on lynchings in South Carolina on page 30.)

Conditions were so harsh that by 1930 some 1.6 million black people had moved North and West to escape poverty and violence in the South. For the first time in 120 years, South Carolina’s population became majority white in 1930. By 1900, about 2,000 black South Carolinians had moved to New York. By 1940, some 41,000 had settled there.

Philadelphia also drew blacks from South Carolina, nearly half of those fleeing between 1917 and 1923. By 1930, one in 10 Philadelphians was

born in the Palmetto State. That mass migration had lasting implications for those who fled and those left behind.

As historian Johnetta Richards noted in her 1987 dissertation on SNYC, “whites controlled the ballot, the benches in the local park, and even southern history. The SNYC urged local blacks to resist this state of physical and mental dominance through a global politics that linked them to other working-class peoples around the world.”

They were living in perilous times, but the young people in SNYC felt connected to a movement larger than themselves. They took to heart the adage: Don’t mourn; organize!

Organize they did. Steep odds didn’t dampen their enthusiasm or stop their forward motion. In their first year, they established more than 20 clubs across the South.

SNYC’s first campaign was to help organize tobacco workers in Virginia. Strikes there in the spring of 1937 led to a doubling of workers’ wages and an eight-hour work day. The triumph was long overdue, as black workers for 200 years had been relegated the worst work of stemming tobacco, a tedious job often done in unventilated rooms.

SNYC sent CIO representatives James Jackson and C. Columbus Alston to Richmond, where they organized more than 5,000 tobacco workers into the union. The move boosted the income of blacks in Richmond by \$250,000 annually.

The early victory affirmed SNYC’s strategy of building coalitions between white labor and black activists. They understood the strength of those alliances, and the power of presenting a united front.

While fighting for fair pay for tobacco workers, the SNYC staff in Richmond got by that first year on a combined

salary of \$817. What they didn’t have in money they made up for in creative energy and youthful optimism.

That first year, SNYC opened the Negro Community Theater in Richmond that staged works written and performed by black artists. (See more about SNYC using the arts as an organizing tool on page 13.) It also held the first of its youth leadership training seminars in Richmond to teach civics, history, and organizing skills to young activists.

In 1939, SNYC moved its headquarters to Birmingham, AL. A benefactor gave them a six-story building from which to operate, with space to hold meetings, literacy classes, and cultural programs. That same year, SNYC’s council in New Orleans established a labor school with courses created for workers. Its success led to two more such schools opening in Tennessee and West Virginia.

“The reputation of the Youth Congress flourished as it became the unofficial barometer for youthful black thought in the Roosevelt Administration via its relations with Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune,” Richards wrote. The South Carolina native and nationally renowned educator was the only woman in FDR’s “Black Cabinet,” advising the president on matters of race. Bethune joined SNYC’s advisory board early on, lending the organization gravitas and elevating its national profile.

Simkins assumed various roles and responsibilities, working “tirelessly to promote the SNYC in Columbia,” Richards wrote. “Simultaneously involved in local campaigns for recreation and for hospital facilities for blacks, Simkins employed ‘personal button-holings’ to get people to join.”

In July of 1945, Simkins reported to SNYC headquarters about progress on the ground in South Carolina, “Picture me getting out not less than 10,000 cards and letters in this heat.”

“This is the firing line not simply for the emancipation of the American Negro but for the emancipation of the African Negro and the Negroes of the West Indies; for the emancipation of the colored races; and for the emancipation of the white slaves of modern capitalist monopoly.

Remember here, too, that you do not stand alone. It may seem like a failing fight when the newspapers ignore you; when every effort is made by white people in the South to count you out of citizenship and to act as though you did not exist as human beings while all the time they are profiting by your labor, gleaning wealth from your sacrifices and trying to build a nation and a civilization upon your degradation.

You must remember that despite all this, you have allies and allies even in the white South.”

W.E.B. DuBois

Simkins was on the planning committee that convinced the board to hold SNYC’s 7th conference in Columbia. Converging forces made the Palmetto State the perfect backdrop for a serious conversation about race, democracy, and hypocrisy.

Eyes on South Carolina

In 1945, native son and staunch segregationist James Byrnes had assumed the international stage as secretary of state, appointed to the position upon FDR’s death. By then, he’d already served in the US House and Senate, and on the US Supreme Court. He would later be elected governor of South Carolina.

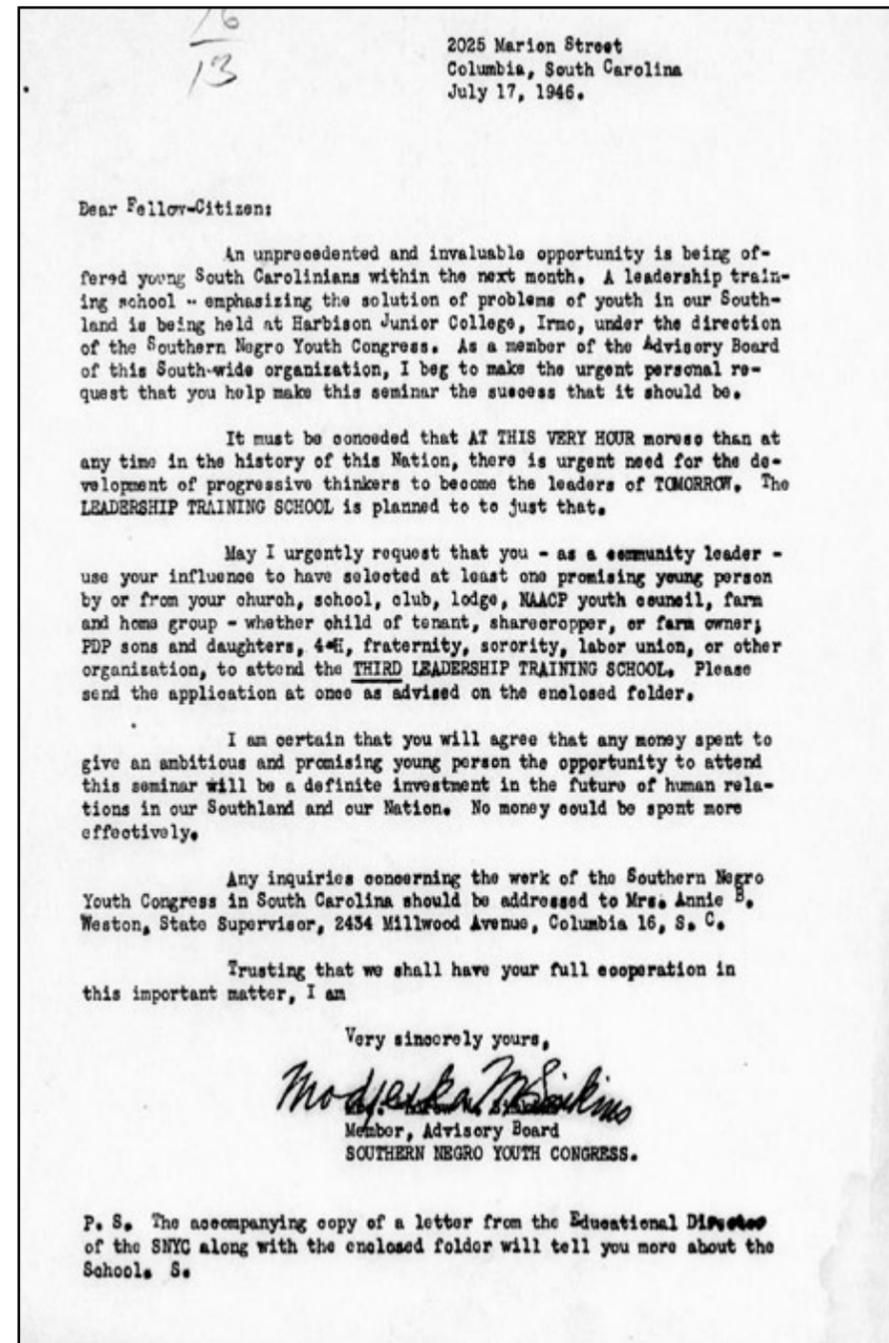
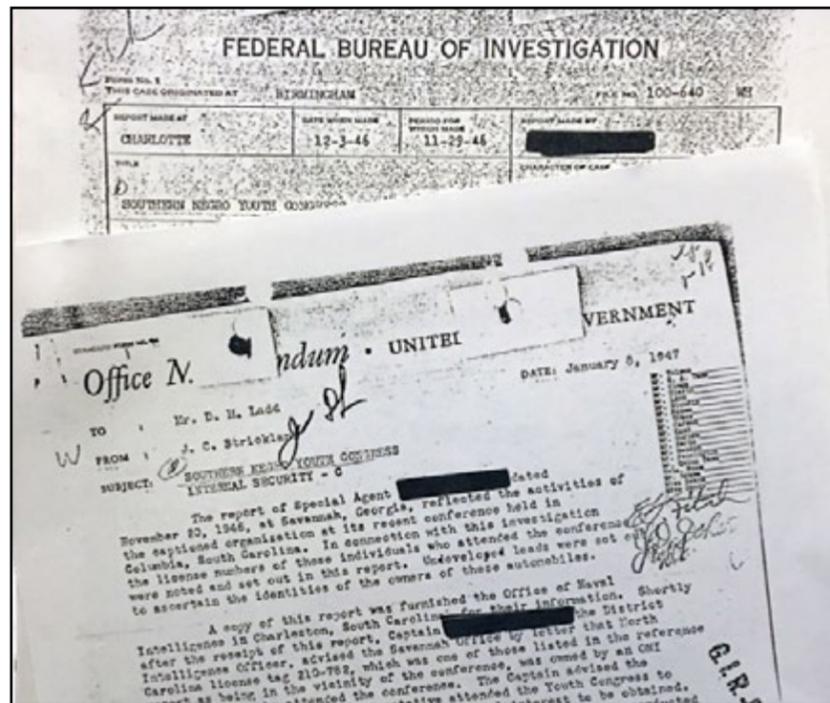
Byrnes, a protégé of “Pitchfork” Ben Tillman, had opposed fair labor and anti-lynching laws while in Congress, voting in lockstep with other Southern lawmakers under the guise of states rights. SNYC called Sec. Byrnes out, asking why someone with his record would be charged with selling democracy abroad.

South Carolina was making news for defying a 1944 US Supreme Court

order declaring the white-only Texas Democratic primary unconstitutional. Instead of following the law, the Palmetto State’s political elite elected to turn parties into private clubs, a move that allowed the state’s Democratic political machine to remain effectively all-white.

Outraged but not defeated, a group that included Simkins and led by McCray formed the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP). At the party’s convention, they elected 18 delegates to attend the 1944 national Democratic convention in Chicago, adopted a 10-point platform, and nominated Osceola McKaine for the US Senate. The PDP was refused any seats, the all-white delegation represented South Carolina, and McKaine’s name never made the ballot.

This happened 20 years before the better-known Fannie Lou Hamer led the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964 to challenge the all-white Mississippi delegation to the National Democratic Party Convention in Chicago. While the PDP did not win any electoral victories, it moved the state closer to full enfranchisement.



As SNYC matured, it posed a growing threat to the status quo. In turn, the backlash against it intensified. The FBI and other agents were deployed to infiltrate and cripple SNYC by branding it as a communist front. In fact, circling in the crowd in Columbia were “colored confidential informants” and undercover agents planting microphones, taking notes, and copying license tag numbers in the parking lot.

The FBI files are heavily redacted, but reveal that the agency employed numerous agents from 11 field divisions to monitor SNYC activists and events. One file noted that Bethune gave the keynote address at SNYC’s 1944 convention in Atlanta. Another file on the 1946 conference in Columbia reported, “Ms. Andrew W. Simpkins [sic]... took the platform and apologized for the absence of Congressman Adam Clayton

Powell, Jr. She stated he had taken ill suddenly, and she read to the group the press release he had sent in his absence.”

These FBI reports became the justification in 1947 for classifying SNYC as subversive. The designation cost the organization its tax-exempt status, a crippling blow.

Just days before Christmas in 1948, after the heat surrounding SNYC grew radioactive, Bethune penned a polite letter to headquarters assuring them that they “can do without me, I am sure.”

Within a week, SNYC suspended operations.

“Bull” Connor and the Singing Cowboy

SNYC’s 8th conference, held in Birmingham April 23-25, 1948, would be its last. It was a memorable weekend, drawing international coverage—for all the wrong reasons.

When Public Safety Director Eugene “Bull” Connor heard that SNYC would be holding an integrated conference in Birmingham, he set about issuing grave warnings. This is the same Connor who would rise to national prominence during the 1960s, becoming the poster boy for white power. It was at his directive that fire hoses and attack dogs were trained on civil rights marchers. In five days in May 1963, he arrested 3,000 protesters, 600 of them minors, some as young as 8 years old.

Connor had started his professional life as a baseball announcer on the radio, which gave him a leg up with the public when he decided to run for a seat in the Alabama House in 1934. He won, and went on to serve four terms as Birmingham’s head of public safety, beginning in 1937. He was not about

to let SNYC come into Birmingham unchallenged by a heavy police presence. Days before the conference, he riled the members at a meeting of the Mobile Lions Club, assuring them that segregation laws would be enforced and there would be no race mixing in their fair city.

The Birmingham *Post* ran a front-page story headlined: Commies Sponsor Negro Youth Meet. It noted, “This organization was on the Attorney General’s list of Communists and Communist Front organizations last December. One of its officers is Louis Burnham, Negro, who has been active in organizing the Alabama Progressive Party.”

Three days before the conference, Connor called Burnham in to his office and grilled him for two hours, throwing his weight around in an effort to silence SNYC. Connor threatened,

“There’s no Klan here, but there will be if you persist with this meeting.” He added, “You’re the Executive Secretary of the organization. That ain’t no job. I ought to lock you up for vagrancy.”

Connor used similar tactics to intimidate the pastor at the church where the event was to be held, warning that if the meeting took place God would “strike the church down.” He promised that cops would be stationed at the church doors to ensure no whites entered, as it didn’t have separate bathrooms for blacks and whites.

He interrogated two campaign workers, one white and one black, for eight hours. Defending his actions, Connor said, “This is still the South, and when we find a white woman in the same office with two Negroes behind closed doors, we’re going to find out what’s going on.”

Rattled by Connor’s threats, the pastor withdrew his offer to serve as event host. A second church stepped up, but also was intimidated into rescinding the invitation. The pattern repeated with yet a third church. SNYC finally found refuge at Rev. C. Herbert Oliver’s small church, the Alliance Gospel Tabernacle.

Tension was thick on the opening night of the conference. The first speaker was Philadelphia Judge Joseph Rainey, whose grandfather was a South Carolina native and the first black Reconstruction Congressman. He likened the current racial hostility to a noose, and called the rise in red baiting as “the cheapest answer to embarrassing questions.”

Among the assembled was Columbia’s Modjeska Simkins, then serving as Secretary of the NAACP’s State Conference of Branches and a senior advisor to SNYC. She was there when police arrived. They took photographs of the scene and then arrested three white attendees on charges of violating segregation laws. Rev. Oliver also was arrested. They were released on \$300 bail.

Meanwhile, the SNYC office got a call from the Ku Klux Klan threatening violence. A crowd of 30 whites and 100 blacks had gathered at the church to hear the evening’s scheduled speaker, Idaho Sen. Glen Taylor, Henry Wallace’s vice-presidential running mate on the Progressive Party’s ticket.

Wallace, President Roosevelt’s vice-president and founder of the Progressive Party, was pitted against Strom Thurmond, who was running for president as a Dixiecrat.

Hearing of the arrangement to accommodate the city by segregating the audience, Taylor called SNYC organizers to say he would not speak if that were the case. It was Simkins who helped convince the senator to come on Sunday and use his speech to challenge the system.

Taylor was a colorful character. A former ranch hand and actor, he had earned the nickname Singing Cowboy for his flare and love of his banjo. After being elected to the Senate, he had a hard time finding housing in Washington, DC. To highlight the city’s post-war housing shortage, he sat with his family on the steps of the Capitol, strumming a banjo and singing, to the tune of Home on the Range, “O give us a home, near the Capitol dome, with a yard for two children to play...”

When Taylor arrived at the church to deliver his remarks, a police officer directed him to use a side door, marked with a hastily drawn sign as the white entrance. Taylor instead chose to enter the one marked “colored.”

Accounts vary as to exactly what happened during the fracas. Either Taylor fell or took a swing at the officer, who sent Taylor sprawling to the ground and then shoved him against a fence with enough force to leave scratches. Taylor was charged with disorderly conduct and fined \$100.

The conference carried on in spite of the arrests, deviating from the schedule only to allow delegates to attend the funeral of a 19-year-old black boy killed by Birmingham police, the fifth such case in a month.

Taylor’s arrest made national news. Wallace defended his running mate, calling his challenge of segregation laws justified. “Glen was not violating any law,” he said. “He was upholding the basic law of the land, the Constitution of the United States.”

Three days later, Taylor appeared in court, where he was quickly convicted, fined \$50, and given a suspended sentence of 180 days in jail. Taylor was



Idaho Sen. Glen Taylor sings on the Capitol steps in January 1945 to protest the housing shortage in DC. Taylor, Henry Wallace’s running mate in 1948, was to speak at SNYC’s conference but was arrested by Birmingham’s Eugene “Bull” Connor for entering a door marked “colored.”

put on probation for six months, purposely lasting through the end of his campaign. The judge called the case a matter of “outside influences attempting to create disturbances between the white and Negro races in the South.”

In Columbia, the Sunday May 5 edition of *The State* carried a front-page story reporting that the judge had given Taylor “a profound tongue lashing, introducing the racial issue into the case” and that the judge called it a “publicity stunt.”

Editors at the *Columbia Record* called the senator’s arrest a vote-getting scheme that “by his melodramatics set back the very cause he purports to champion. For any outsider’s attempt to break down segregation in the South for political purposes stiffens the Southern lines.”

The editors argued that Birmingham officials should not have arrested Taylor because that played into the hands

“Liberals...failed to appreciate the value of SNYC’s international political ideology or its accomplishments. While the SNYC and the Wallace campaign suffered defeat at the hands of red-baiters and race-baiters in local towns in the South, as well as suppression by the State Department and the attorney general, they had also helped force a blueprint for civil rights onto the federal agenda.

The militant pressure that the South Carolina movement...placed on the Democratic Party, led President Truman to create a civil rights commission. One year later, Truman...de-segregated America’s armed forces.

Suppression of the SNYC would cause its demise in 1949 and push South Carolina far from the center of the next generation’s freedom struggles.”

Erik Gellman
Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights

Before Rosa Parks, Sarah Mae Flemming challenged bus system in Columbia—and won!



Sarah Mae Flemming (in black dress) and her attorneys Lincoln Jenkins and Mathew Perry. On June 22, 1954—17 months before Rosa Parks drew national attention for refusing to give up her seat in Montgomery, Flemming was thrown off a bus at the corner of Main and Washington in Columbia for the same act. The domestic worker was ordered out of her “white” seat by a city bus driver, who punched her in the stomach as she tried to exit. Modjeska Simkins enlisted the help of attorney Philip Wittenburg to use the case as a tool to challenge segregation laws in court. The case was dismissed by Judge George Bell Timmerman, who had upheld segregation in Briggs v. Elliott, part of the landmark Brown v Board. Perry and Jenkins won on appeal in the Fourth Circuit Court.

Southern courts were deeply embedded in the exploitation of black workers in the South long after the formal abolition of slavery. States exploited the Thirteenth Amendment's exemption for prisoners by passing "Black Codes" and convict leasing laws that branded black people as criminals to facilitate their reenslavement for state profit.

Further, although the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and Supreme Court rulings banned racial discrimination in jury selection, local officials barred African Americans from serving on juries. African Americans virtually disappeared from the Southern jury box by 1900, even in counties where they constituted an overwhelming majority of the local population, which reinforced the impunity under which lynching flourished.

The fairness of the judicial system was wholly compromised for African Americans, and the courts operated as tools of their subjugation.

Equal Justice Initiative

of SNYC. Instead, the city should have chosen the path taken in Columbia, where law enforcement declined to intervene. The editorial concluded, "If Senator Taylor can arrogate to himself the right to decide which of Birmingham's laws may be openly violated, then lynchers in logic have the same right to do the same thing."

Lessons and Legacy

SNYC's growing success was met with increasingly fierce resistance. Just two years after the Columbia conference, SNYC was dead, its reputation smeared, its key leaders driven North, underground, and overseas.

The organization was more than dismantled; it was erased. The same cultural and political forces that silenced SNYC also rubbed it from public memory, obliterating the record of an army of young people who risked their lives and livelihoods to challenge the balance of power in the segregated South.

So it is that a generation of activists, black and white, have not been properly credited for the work they were able to do under segregation laws that made everything a challenge—meeting, travelling, eating. They did so while facing the constant threat of violence.

Alain Locke, the first black Rhodes scholar in 1907 and the "dean" of the Harlem Renaissance, called SNYC the most historic development for Southern blacks since Reconstruction.

Historian Waldo Martin said radical black histories, especially those with communist connections, have been left out of conventional teachings, distorting our understanding. "Only in the last few decades have we begun to come out from under the related Cold War-Anti-Communist hysteria that shaped American popular and scholarly understanding and practice," he wrote. "An especially telling aspect of this troubling legacy has been not simply the scholarly effort to disas-

sociate and separate the histories of SNYC and SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], but also to minimize the historical significance and impact of SNYC. The shameful red baiting and disremembering of SNYC has shaped the received yet flawed wisdom of the fundamental discontinuity between SNYC and SNCC."

Historian Lindsay Swindall in *The Path to the Greater, Freer, Truer World* wrote, "While the second SNCC has oft been examined, the legacy of the first SNYC deserves greater attention. America's political landscape was vastly different in the 1960s, with new antisegregation laws and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. It was the consistent efforts of SNYC organizers who had maintained the call for African and African American freedom through those crucial Depression and war years that had prepared the way for the generation that followed."

SNYC organizer Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, who was inspired to a life of activism after attending the Columbia conference, wrote, "Few of us know what we should know about the continuity of the movements for full racial equality in the Deep South. Amnesia about black history cuts us off from the past and undermines our self image and our confidence that we can bring about important, constructive change in the world."

SNYC has not been given its due in the long march for equal rights in America—nor has South Carolina claimed its unique and central part in that rich history.

The young people who built and sustained SNYC, who drove the militant human rights era of the 1930s and '40s, paved the way for the domesticated civil rights movement of the 1960s. One of the brightest chapters of that history took place in Columbia. South Carolinians—black and white—deserve to know that. 🌟

The Blinding of Sgt. Isaac Woodard

In February 1946, South Carolina made international news after the brutal beating of black WWII veteran Isaac Woodard in Batesburg. The 27-year-old, who had trained at Fort Jackson and was deployed 15 months in the South Pacific, was travelling to Winnsboro by bus to reunite with his wife when he was violently attacked and blinded by police during a bus stop, then thrown in jail without medical treatment.

Woodard wrote in his affidavit, "When they discharged me from Camp Gordon, I'd given four years of my life to my country. I had survived the war and come home to 'the land of the free.' I became a casualty five hours later."

Woodard's ordeal began in Aiken, where the bus had stopped. When he asked to be let off so he could use the rest room, the driver refused, falsely accusing him of being drunk. He was finally allowed to exit the bus but at the next stop was hauled off by police.

When Woodard objected, the cops bludgeoned him with a blackjack, gouging out his eyes, and locked him up until morning. In court, he pleaded guilty to being drunk and disorderly. He was fined \$50, but was \$6 short. The court demanded he cash his Army discharge payment to cover the cost, but gave up when they realized he couldn't see to sign the check.

Woodard was sent to the Veteran's Hospital in Columbia, where he spent three months being treated for his injuries. Upon his release, he moved to New York to stay with his sisters, leaving behind his wife and marriage.

John McCray was the first to write about the case in *The Lighthouse Informer*. It soon caught the attention of Orson Welles, who devoted five of



Joe Louis (left) championed the case of war veteran Isaac Woodard, beaten and blinded by a police mob in Batesburg. The case put South Carolina in the international spotlight for most of 1946.

his national radio broadcasts to the injustice. "The blind soldier fought for me in this war," Welles said. "The least I can do is fight for him. I have eyes. He hasn't. I have a voice on the radio. He hasn't. I was born a white man, and until a colored man is a full citizen, like me, I haven't the leisure to enjoy the freedom that a colored man risked his life to maintain for me. Until somebody beats me and blinds me, I am in his debt."

In June, SNYC organizer Louis Burnham penned a letter to Simkins asking her thoughts about sending a letter to South Carolina Gov. Williams calling upon him to "intervene for the punishment of the sadists" who brutalized Sgt. Woodard. "It seems to me that all decent Americans must react to this case vigorously, and especially the SNYC in South Carolina." SNYC had a particular interest in the case, he

said, given the upcoming conference in Columbia.

In August, a dazzling line-up of stars—including Cab Calloway, Milton Berle, and Billie Holiday—drew a crowd of 31,000 to a fundraiser for Woodard in New York City. To close the show, Woody Guthrie sang "The Blinding of Isaac Woodard."

Boxing legend Joe Louis made a rare public appearance at the fundraiser. "Nobody in America should have to go through second class citizenship," he told the crowd. "Me and a whole lot of black guys went out fighting for the American cause. Now we're going to have to get America to give us our civil rights, too. We earned them."

President Harry Truman was angered by the state's failure to bring charges against Woodard's assailants, and ordered federal authorities to intervene.

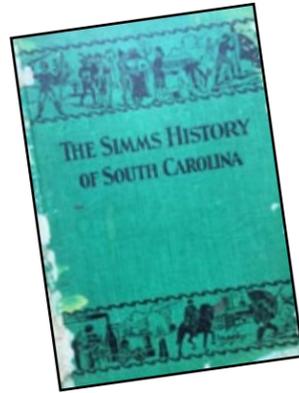
In October, Batesburg Police Chief Lynwood Shull was indicted in US District Court in Columbia. Shull was found not guilty by an all-white jury.

The presiding judge in the Shull trial, J. Waties Waring, derided the federal prosecutor for failing to make his case, later writing, "I was shocked by the hypocrisy of my government."

The case angered and galvanized Waring, who would rule a year later that the state's Democratic Party could no longer exclude black citizens from voting in the primary. In 1951, he called school segregation unconstitutional in his dissent in the *Briggs v. Elliott* case, which would join four other cases to go before the US Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

It was Waring's assertion that "segregation is *per se* inequality" which formed the legal basis for the court's unanimous decision. 🌟

Teach Your Children Well



The history textbooks that schooled generations of South Carolina children were sanitized and whitewashed. Some argue they still are.

Of the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery, students learned, “Very strict regulations... were provided for the freed slaves. Most of the Negroes were ignorant and some of them were almost savages. All were unaccustomed to taking care of themselves. The sudden freeing of the slaves meant a tremendous problem for the whites.”

“The horrors of war were nothing compared to this period when Congress was ‘reconstructing’ the State. It was the darkest and bitterest time we have ever known. The Carpet Baggers, Scalawags and the Negroes were called Radicals. Backed by US troops, they took complete charge of affairs.”

The Simms History of South Carolina, written by Mary Simms Oliphant, was a revision of a book by her grandfather, William Gilmore Simms, a slave owner at Woodlands Plantation near Bamberg. He was a well-known novelist who published the original textbook in 1840.

Oliphant revised the book in 1917, and eight more times until the final edition was published in 1970. While the content changed over the years, the tone remained the same, as did the practice of sanitizing the state’s more unpleasant chapters.

Reconstruction à la Oliphant

In the Simms textbook, Reconstruction is painted as a catastrophic event, rife with scoundrels and outsiders meddling in state affairs, and freed slaves run amok. Here is an example of what children were reading in South Carolina’s classrooms:

“The Congress of the US kept troops in South Carolina to keep these thieves in power. Negro militia companies were organized and white companies were ordered to disband.



Thomas Nast’s 1872 illustration “The Man with the Carpet Bags” was reprinted in several editions of *The Simms History of South Carolina*. The epithet referred to a stranger coming—with all his belongings in a carpetbag—with intent to exploit.

“With the arming of the Negroes, crime increased greatly. Houses were burned, women were insulted on the streets, white men were arrested on slender excuses, murders and burglaries were frequent.

“Faced with these terrible conditions, South Carolinians banded together and formed the Kuklux Klan. Whenever the

Negroes gave trouble, the Kuklux dressed in long white robes and caps and, mounted on fast horses, galloped through the darkness, frightening the superstitious blacks into submission. The sudden freeing of the Negroes would have brought serious problems even without the evil influence of the

Carpet Baggers. There were more Negroes than whites in the State. The Negroes were uneducated. They had no knowledge of government. They did not know how to make a living without the supervision of the white man.”

About the constitution, the Simms book said: “Strange to relate, South Carolinians lived for some 27 years under the Constitution formed by the Carpet Baggers and Negroes. In 1895, urged by Governor Tillman, a Convention was called to form a new Constitution. This Constitution is the one under which we live today.”

That same constitution still governs South Carolina, and accounts for the state having the nation’s weakest governor and least accountable legislature. Indeed, Tillman’s legacy is alive and well in the Palmetto State.

SC Earns “F” in History

SNYC understood the power of the school textbook, and routinely ran history workshops on campuses, at their conferences, and in their leadership institutes. An undated college program included these bullet points:

- Fight against intellectual complacency;
- Correct and combat distortions of

Negro History (Negro participation in Civil War and Reconstruction); Examine text books.

The Simms book so offended Modjeska Monteith Simkins that she refused to use it in 1928 when she was teaching at Booker T. Washington High School in Columbia, choosing instead to teach algebra rather than a history she knew to be false.

The Journal of Thought, a peer-reviewed publication by and for educators, published USC graduate student Alan Weider’s 1995 study on the state’s history textbooks. It concluded with this bleak summation: “So what do we know? One thing that we know through reviewing the South Carolina school history textbooks is that they are racist. We know that they claim that slaves were lucky to be captive in the United States. We know that they claim that slaves were adoring and loyal and yet dangerous.

“We know that they claim that the abolitionists and any other ‘outsiders’ attempting to end slavery were malevolent. We know that they claim that Radical Reconstruction was evil. We know that they claim that the Ku Klux Klan was necessary for the survival of white South Carolinians. We know that the earlier texts claimed that



Felicia Furman Oliphant

Mary Simms Oliphant wrote *The Simms History of South Carolina*, a textbook used for more than 60 years. She was the first woman to be awarded the Order of the Palmetto, the state’s highest civilian honor, in 1980.

“[Negroes] were so accustomed to being taken care of that they had no idea how to behave under freedom. They stole cattle chickens, and hogs, and burned barns and stables. They were not willing to work. They were like children playing hooky the moment the teacher’s back was turned.

“There were so many more Negroes than whites that they would have been in control if they had been allowed to vote. They had nearly ruined the State during the years they voted.

“The whites were determined that this should not happen again. Regulations were made which prevented the Negroes from voting, and to this day South Carolina has a white man’s government.

“The welfare of two races living in one small state is a problem you will have to face when you become citizens.”

Mary Simms Oliphant
The New Simms History of South Carolina, 1940

the Constitution of 1895 and its Black Codes were important for the survival of white South Carolina. We know that the later texts ignored twentieth century black history in South Carolina. And finally, we know that none of the texts infused the history of South Carolina's African-Americans into their histories of the state."

More recently, Donald Yacovone studied Harvard University's collection of some 3,000 history texts from 1800 through the 1980s. He found, "The assumptions of white priority, white domination, and white importance underlie every chapter and every theme of the thousands of textbooks that blanketed the country. This is the vast tectonic plate that underlies American culture."

In the April 8, 2018, issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Yacovone said, "While the worst features of our textbook legacy may have ended, the themes, facts, and attitudes of supremacist ideologies are deeply embedded in what we teach and how we teach it. History took place in European exploration, colonization, revolution, Constitution-forming, party politics, and presidential administrations—and nowhere else."

Historian I. A. Newby underscored the damage that textbooks have inflicted on generations of students in *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968*. "It inculcated in white Carolinians a set of historical 'truths' that were always an obstacle to racial reform, while it poisoned, or sought to poison, the minds of blacks with assertions of their own inferiority and worthlessness."

Newby noted that most of the textbooks do not mention a single black by name. "When blacks are discussed it is only in a disparaging context. Carolinians are white people. The student, white or black, who absorbed and accepted the information in these books had no understanding of his state or its people. He had instead a set

of biases which interfered with a clear comprehension of past and present."

Testing, testing...

South Carolina has a chance to offer a more honest and inclusive curriculum. The state's education standards for teaching history, social studies, and civics are under review, and changes set to go into effect in 2020. The state standards were last revised in 2011.

A draft of those guidelines released in 2017 made national news when historians pointed out that there was no mention of Nazism or the Holocaust. Also missing were mention of Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Smalls, who freed himself by commandeering a Confederate ship in 1862 and went on to be elected a state lawmaker and congressman. Ironically, Smalls also helped establish the South Carolina's public school system—the very entity that proposed to ignore him.

Reflecting the politics involved, the proposed standards offer a course on The Old and New Testament, thanks to state lawmakers who passed a law in 2007 mandating such instruction be offered as an elective. No other religious study is offered.

Jeffrey Eargle at USC reviewed the standards and published his findings in *The Journal of Social Studies Research* in 2015. Focusing on the treat-

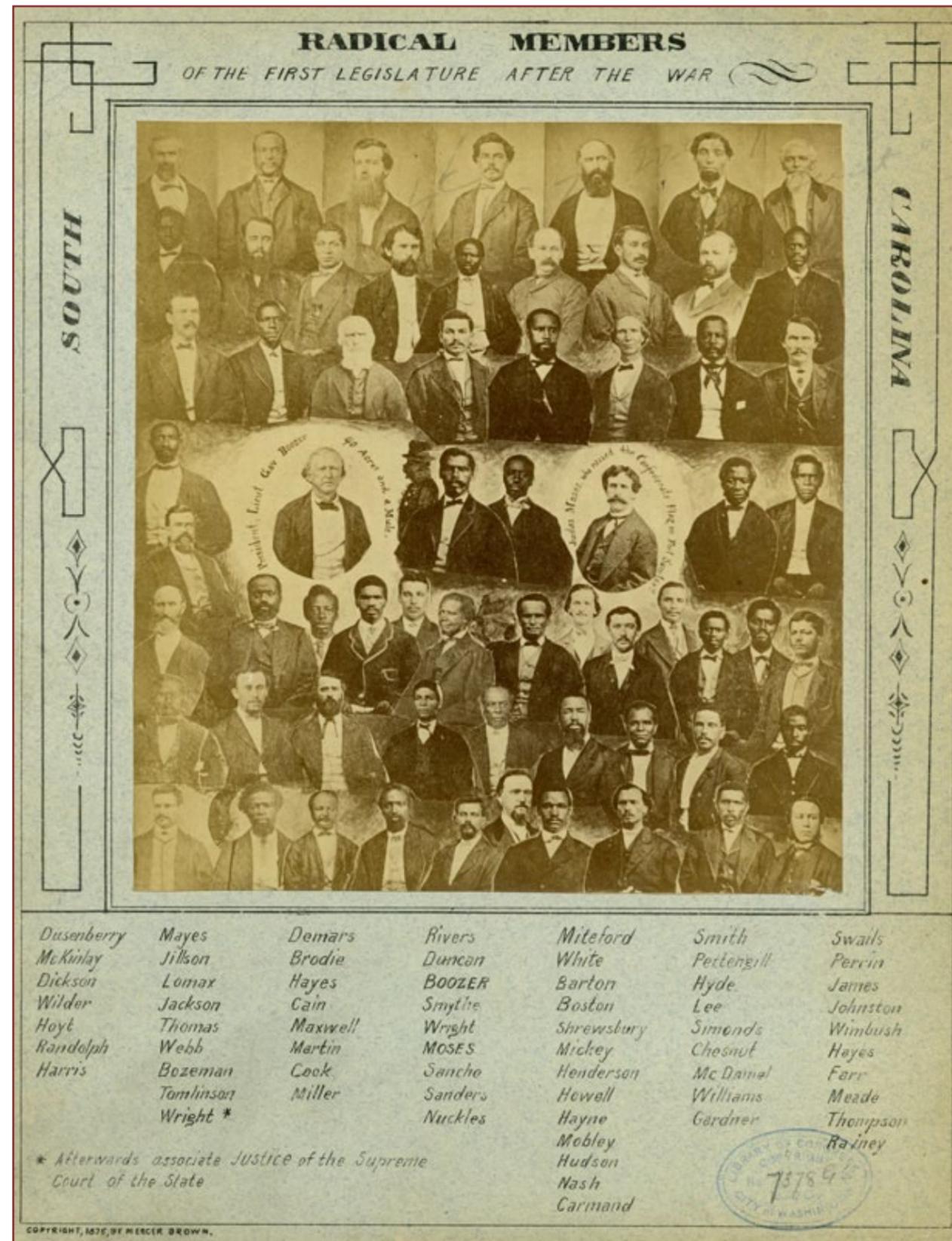
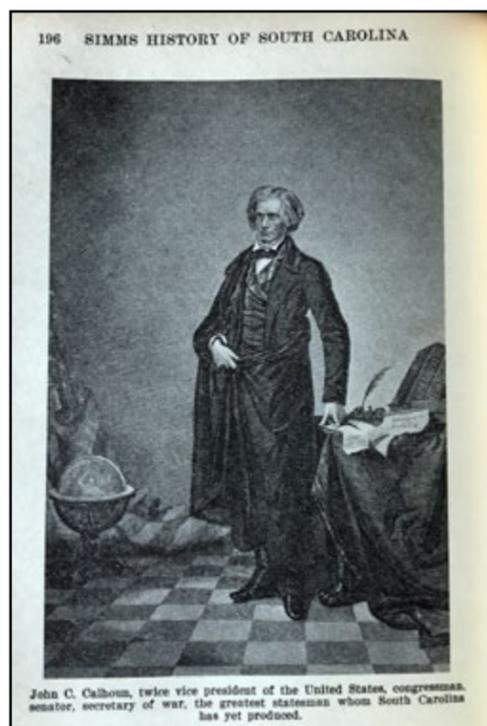
ment of teaching slavery, he discovered that history requirements did "not offer a complete narrative of slavery and African Americans, perpetuates a negative image of African Americans, excludes themes of African American heroism, and maintains myths related to slavery."

Eargle concluded that South Carolina's standards "offers teachers and students a narrow image of African Americans, does not debunk myths such as paternalistic slave-owners, excludes racism and slavery as a cause of the Civil War, and overlooks the importance of slave culture and resistance."

Beginning in the mid-1980s, an "accountability movement" took root in the American school system. Within a decade, it had manifested in the form of pro-

scribed curricula and test-based teaching and tracking of scores. In 2002, the federal No Child Left Behind Act mandated a systematic assessment of public school students' mastery of the standards.

Eargle's research revealed "powerful conservative groups sought standardization policies and curriculum to reduce education to meeting conservative ideological and economic goals, the removal of discourse and diversity from pedagogy, and the ending of teachers as engaged academics in a democracy." 🌟



Composite portrait of the "radical" members of the South Carolina legislature, created ca. 1868-72.

“The Ku Klux... would take the negroes’ own guns, and tie the guns around their necks in the following manner: The barrel of one gun was tied with wire around the negro’s neck, and the stock of the other gun was fastened with wire around the negro’s neck.”

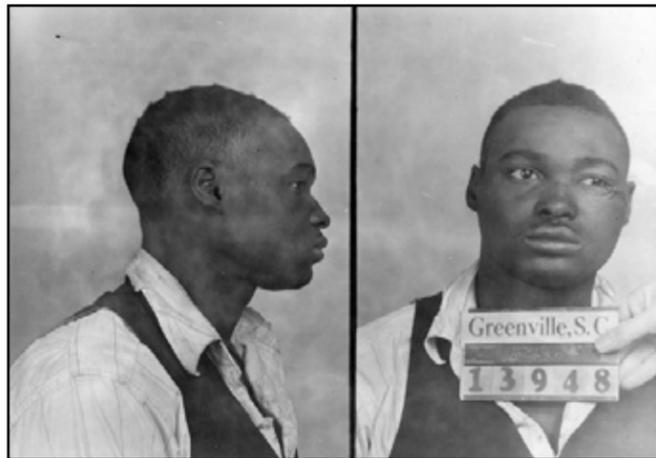
“When the captain would say, ‘AMEN,’ over the side of the boat the negro went, with his guns and bullets taking him to a watery grave in the bottom of Broad River.”

“The wooden parts of the guns would rot, and sometimes the bodies would wash down on the rocks at... Jeter’s Old Mill. Old gun stocks have been taken from there as mementoes.”

Charlie Jeff Harvey,
Union, SC

“The Ku Klux wore white clothes and white caps. They made out like they was ghosts from the cemetery, and they would get a man and carry him off, and we never would see him again.”

Nellie Lloyd,
Newberry, SC



The 1947 murder of 24-year-old Willie Earle at the hands of a white mob in Pickens County is the last recorded lynching in South Carolina.

to order a federal investigation. At a protest rally in Chicago she mocked southern lynchers “whose proud boast is their chivalry toward womanhood.”

The president relented to public pressure, leading to the federal prosecution of 11 white men. The case ended in a mistrial when the all-white jury deadlocked.

Three months later, on May 2, a mass meeting was held at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston to respond to the family’s needs. They passed a resolution condemning the attack, and took up money for the Baker family.

In 1916, Anthony Crawford was lynched in Abbeville by a crowd of more than 200, according to his great-granddaughter Doria Johnson. “His crime you might ask?” she wrote in an account of the assault. “Cursing a white man for offering him a low price for the cotton seed he was trying to sell and being too rich for a Negro.”

“His ordeal lasted all day. His body was beaten and dragged through town to show other Negroes what would happen to them if they got ‘insolent.’ Finally, he was taken to the county fair grounds and strung up to a tree and riddled with bullets. Although we have heard his body was thrown on some-

one’s lawn, we have yet to locate his grave.”

In a rare ceremony commemorating lynching victims, a century later, on Oct. 24, 2014, hundreds turned out in Abbeville to take part in the unveiling of a marker honoring Crawford.

South Carolina’s last recorded lynching was in 1947 in Pickens County, after a white cab driver was found dead beside his car. Identified as the cab’s last fare, Willie Earle was fingered for robbery and assault. While he was being held in the Pickens County Jail, a mob forced the jailer to hand him over.

They threw him in a car and drove to Greenville, where he was lynched and left to die. Although 31 men and women went to trial for the murder, each was acquitted by an all-white jury.

The case inflamed the public, and prompted 28-year-old state Rep. Earnest “Fritz” Hollings to draft an anti-lynching bill in 1951.

“Second Slavery”

The museum in Montgomery goes further than memorializing lynching victims; it places them into a context and connects the dots between America’s old slave trade and its current prison system, the world’s largest.

EJI’s report reminds us that convict leasing, Jim Crow laws, and a federal government disinterested in enforcing racial equality gave rise to new ways of maintaining white supremacy. “Southern legislatures institutionalized

the racial inequality enshrined in their state constitutions. The South created a system of state and local laws and practices that constituted a pervasive and deep-rooted racial caste system. the era of ‘second slavery’ had officially begun.”

“Southern prisons made incarcerated people pick cotton until the 80s and early 1990s,” Stevenson said. “That’s where that language in the 13th amendment that prohibits slavery except for people convicted of crimes becomes so relevant. This isn’t an accident.”

EJI makes the case that slavery is not altogether dead, having morphed into a penal system that repeats the disproportionate mass incarceration of black Americans. While the landmark Civil Rights Act passed in 1964 addressed racial discrimination in voting, education, and employment, it did not include provisions for stemming abuses in criminal justice.

Mirroring an old pattern, the criminal justice system is packed with young men and boys of color. According to the SC Progressive Network’s Racial Justice Project, black South Carolinians are much more likely than whites to be targeted for arrest, more likely to be found guilty, and consistently receive longer sentences. While black and white people commit crimes at an equal rate, two of every three South Carolina prisoners are black.

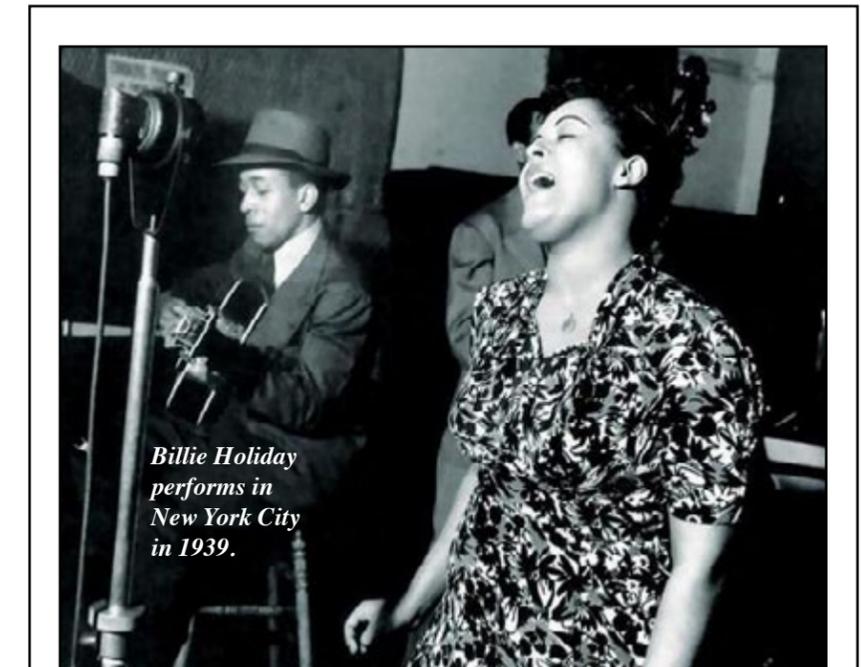
Lindsey Vann, executive director of Justice 360, which advocates for prisoners condemned to death, wrote in an editorial that a victim’s race plays a large role in determining who is executed in South Carolina. Since 1977, 81 percent of death sentences were given to those accused of killing a white person. On Death Row, more than 56 percent are black. African Americans comprise just 30 percent of the state’s population.

“It is all too easy to say that lynching is a thing of the past, a product of an

earlier era of our state’s history best forgotten,” Vann wrote. “That would be both wrong and short-sighted. Lynching was replaced with a legal system of capital punishment that continues to mete out the death penalty

disproportionately to black defendants accused of crimes involving white victims.

“It became, for all practical purposes, lynching’s stepchild.”



Billie Holiday performs in New York City in 1939.

“Strange Fruit,” Billie Holiday’s haunting song about lynching, was recorded in 1939. Jazz writer Leonard Feather called it “the first significant protest in words and music, the first significant cry against racism.”

Holiday said she always thought of her father when she sang it. He died at 39 after being turned away at a white-only hospital in Texas. She wrote in her autobiography, “It reminds me of how Pop died. But I have to keep singing it, not only because people ask for it, but because 20 years after Pop died, the things that killed him are still happening in the South.”

Strange Fruit

*Southern trees bear strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees*

*Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh*

*Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop*

The hanging of Darlington's Amy Spain



Newly freed Amy Spain was lynched March 10, 1865.

This account ran in Harper's Weekly Sept. 30, 1865.

One of the martyrs of the cause which gave freedom to her race was that of a colored woman named Amy Spain, who was a resident of the town of Darlington, situated in a rich cotton-growing district of South Carolina.

At the time a portion of the Union army occupied the town of Darlington she expressed her satisfaction by clasping her hands and exclaiming, "Bless the Lord the Yankees have come!" She could not restrain her emotions. The long night of darkness which had bound her in slavery was about to break away.

It was impossible to repress the exuberance of her feelings; and although powerless to aid the advancing deliverers of her caste, or to injure her oppressors, the simple expression of satisfaction at the event sealed her doom.

Amy Spain died in the cause of freedom. A section of Sherman's cavalry occupied the town, and without doing any damage passed through. Not an

insult nor an unkind word was said to any of the women of that town. The men had, with guilty consciences, fled; but on their return, with their traditional chivalry, they seized upon poor Amy, and ignominiously hung her to a sycamore-tree standing in front of the court-house, underneath which stood the block from which was monthly exhibited the slave chattels that were struck down by the auctioneer's hammer to

the highest bidder.

Amy Spain heroically heard her sentence, and from her prison bars declared she was prepared to die. She defied her persecutors; and as she ascended the scaffold declared she was going to a place where she would receive a crown of glory.

She was rudely interrupted by an oath from one of her executioners. To the eternal disgrace of Darlington her execution was acquiesced in and witnessed by most of the citizens of the town.

Amy was launched into eternity, and the "chivalric Southern gentlemen" of Darlington had fully established their bravery by making war upon a defenseless African woman.

She sleeps quietly, with others of her race, near the beautiful village. No memorial marks her grave, but after-ages will remember this martyr of liberty. Her persecutors will pass away and be forgotten, but Amy Spain's name is now hallowed among the Africans, who, emancipated and free, dare, with the starry folds of the flag of the free floating over them, speak her name with holy reverence. 🌟

Columbia activist Modjeska Monteith Simkins played leading role in SNYC

Excerpts from a 1974 interview with NC historian Jacquelyn Hall.

Modjeska Monteith Simkins: I can remember the first meeting of the Southern Negro Youth Congress. I went to Knoxville where there were miners, people in brogan shoes, people in overalls.

The average person didn't think of wearing them then unless they were going to the field or the mines. And those fellows came out there with... overalls, and sun hats, and all of them were working and planning together.

I don't think the South would be the same without what they did, because they opened the eyes of a number of people. The thing that the political power structure had against organizations of that kind was the fear that they would bring the black and white mass together.

Well, the first thing they did when they got a chance was to red-smear and disrupt the movement. Now, I think if the Southern Negro Youth Congress, for instance, could have gone on, there would have been a very great change in the South because the younger people would have worked together better.

But the power structure doesn't want that. They don't want poor whites and Negroes getting along together. There's always been the effort, either obvious or subtle, on the part of the reigning element to keep the forces of blacks and whites apart.

They didn't care any more about a poor white than they did about a Negro. And they still don't. They just give them a little more deference because he's white like they are, but they don't give a damn about a poor white. They'll exploit him just like they will

a Negro. I've seen it. I know what I'm talking about.

There were some very highly intelligent young men who organized the Southern Negro Youth Congress, some of the most brilliant [people] I've ever known. Louis Burnham, James Jackson, Esther [Cooper] Jackson, a brilliant young woman.

James went into hiding for a number of years. They intended to persecute him like they did some other people who they said had communist leanings. Paul Robeson was closely con-



Photo of Modjeska Monteith Simkins that ran in the program for the Columbia conference. Her bio read: "In terms of length and quality of service, one of the senior members of the Advisory Board, Mrs. Andrew W. Simkins is one of South Carolina's leading civic figures and a prominent businesswoman. A great part of the publicity and contacting in our host state in preparation for the Legislature is due to her volunteer activity. Students at this past summer's Leadership Training School at Irmo, S.C. will remember her as the stimulating teacher of the Negro history course."

nected with the Southern Negro Youth Congress. W.E.B. DuBois was an adherer. I have some programs from the meetings.

Jacquelyn Hall: Were there white students in the organization?

MMS: Yes, there were some. There were a number of them in 1946, and there were some of them at Birmingham. Some of them were arrested and persecuted by Bull Connor and his crowd. I was down in Birmingham at the time [The 8th annual SNYC conference was held in Alabama April 23–25, 1948].

JH: The Congress was accused of being a Communist front organization, of course.

MMS: Yes.

JH: What would you say that the role of the Communist Party in the Southern movement was?

MMS: I always heard a lot about communists trying to influence Negroes and organizing them into certain movements and all like that, but I never saw any effect of it. I never saw this thing they were talking about, that communists were always trying to influence and build a whole phalanx of activists among blacks. I never saw it, and I've got about as sharp an eye as anybody. Now, I belonged to all kind of things that were called communist fronts, so that I've been red-smearing up and down South Carolina.

JH: Were you ever called before HUAC [House UnAmerican Activities Committee]?

MMS: Never. I wanted to be, but they never called me. I thought once, during the Henry Wallace campaign, that I might be, but I wasn't. 🌟

"The question of whether lynching is justifiable is figuring in the US Senatorial campaign in South Carolina. Sen. Coleman L. Blease, up for re-election, discussed the subject in a campaign address. 'Whenever the Constitution comes between me and the virtue of white women in South Carolina, I say to hell with the Constitution,' Blease is quoted as having said recently at the scene of a recent lynching where he was seeking the local vote.

"When he was Governor, he did not call out the militia to protect Negroes against mobs, and asked that when a suspect was caught he not be notified until the next morning.

"It would be difficult to equal such a statement for sheer barbarity and demagogism. It is a deliberate invitation to the people of South Carolina...to supersede normal legal processes with lynch law and mob violence. And there has been plenty of that in the South in recent weeks."

July 12, 1930,
New York Telegram

Seeing “Red Under Every Bed”

Brett Bursey

“I’m no Communist, and never have been. If Communists do all the good things you all say they do, it looks like to me that it would be good to be one.”

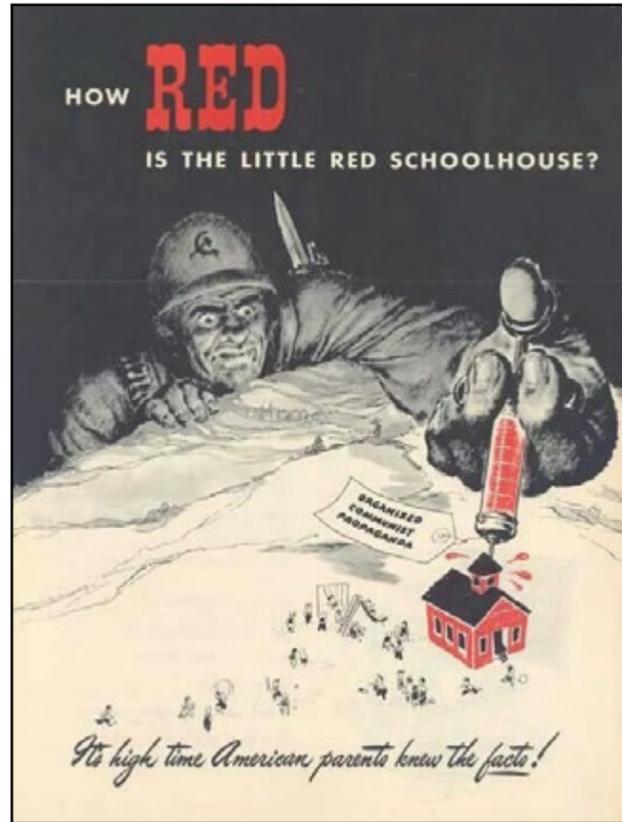
Modjeska Monteith Simkins

Simkins was a teenager when WWI broke out, and 17 when the Russian revolution inspired workers of the world to rise up. She was familiar with the phenomenon of people who do good things being blamed for bad things by people who profit from them. Simkins herself was, as she put it, “red-smear[ed] up and down South Carolina” for doing good things.

The first Red Scare came during the patriotic fervor of war and was fuelled by anti-immigrant hysteria, an increasingly militant labor movement, and fear that anarchists, socialists, and communists were conspiring to start a workers’ revolution in the United States.

The Espionage and Sedition Acts of 1917 prohibited interference with US war efforts, and prohibited speaking, writing, or publishing anything deemed as disrespectful to the US government. Labor activists were arrested and deported, including prominent leftist Congressman Victor Berger and Industrial Workers of the World founder Eugene Debs. On Sept. 5, 1917, IWW offices in more than 20 cities were raided. Their common crimes were opposition to the war and to capitalism.

Workers struggling under brutal conditions were unionizing, striking, and placing blame for their poor conditions



on factory owners. Opposition to the war was led by many of the same socialists and Christian activists advocating for workers’ rights, many of whom were European immigrants deemed un-American agitators.

The Palmer Raids of 1919 and 1920, orchestrated by US Attorney General Mitchell Palmer, targeted labor activists, leftists, and immigrants. President Woodrow Wilson called “hyphenated Americans” who “poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life...and must be crushed. Any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic.”

Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels criticized Palmer “for seeing red behind every bush and every demand for an increase in wages.” More than 10,000 labor activists were

arrested in federal raids in 23 states. Some 3,500 were jailed, and more than 500 were deported. None of the arrests were in the South, but surely participants at the Sunday meetings of the Richland County Socialist Party (advertised in *The State* newspaper) felt the heat of the red fever.

Commies in Dixie

Anti-communism came to South Carolina when union organizers started gaining traction in textile mills in the early 1930s. In 1934, seven striking textile workers were shot and killed in Honea Path. (See more on page 38.) The killings broke the strike as well as workers’ appetite for unions. To this day, organized labor is widely denounced in South Carolina, accused of being

orchestrated by ill-intentioned outsiders.

After WWII, resistance to white supremacy paralleled the rapid rise of anti-communism. US relations with the Soviet Union were deteriorating while communism was blamed for labor and racial unrest—especially in the South.

At the 1946 Southern Negro Youth Conference in Columbia, Paul Robeson warned, “Behind this red bogey [of communism] that Hitler used, there is the hope of scaring away every liberal from fighting for the rights of oppressed peoples.”

James Byrnes had represented South Carolina in the US House and Senate before being appointed to the US Supreme Court by President Franklin Roosevelt. After a year on the court,

Byrnes became the only justice to ever resign in order to accept a presidential appointment to serve on a board. As Director of War Mobilization, and later Secretary of State, Byrnes secretly championed the funding and use of atomic bombs as a hedge against the Soviet Union. He is considered “the first Cold Warrior.”

Byrnes was also deemed “Assistant President” to FDR, but was denied the nomination as Roosevelt’s vice president in 1944 because he was out of step with the Democratic Party on race and labor matters.

In 1935 and in 1937, Sen. Byrnes led successful opposition to federal anti-lynching laws. He argued that lynching was necessary “in order to hold in check the Negro in the south,” claiming that “rape is responsible... for most of the lynching in America.” Byrnes also opposed the 1938 Fair Labor Act that established minimum wages, child labor laws, and the 40-hour work week.

In *Sly and Able, a Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*, David Robertson lays out Byrnes’ pivotal role in the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan. In the waning months of the war, after Germany’s surrender, Russia was poised to invade Japan, and Byrnes argued that the bomb should be dropped before Russia gained more control in Asia. To many historians, Byrnes’ political strategy to contain the Soviet Union through the military use of the bomb on Japan was the deciding factor.

Byrnes single-handedly blocked the prevailing consensus that the research and blueprints for atomic bombs be turned over to an international consortium of allies for safe-keeping, believing that sharing custody of the secrets was the only way to avoid a nuclear arms race. Byrnes won

the argument, the US tried to keep nuclear weapons plans secret, and the world entered a race for mutually assured destruction.

By 1947, a second Red Scare was in full swing. President Harry Truman signed an executive order requiring federal employees to take an oath that they were not communist. Congressional conservatives overrode Truman’s veto of the Taft-Hartley Act which, among other things, required union officers to swear that they were not communists.

The Act allowed states to pass “right to work laws” that decimated union organizing in the South by banning the practice of a majority of workers voting to require union membership as a condition of employment. Right to work laws allow workers to take advantage of union wages and protections on jobs without having to pay union dues.

In 1950, the Subversive Activities Control Act passed. It established the Subversive Activities Control Board and required communist organizations to register. Once on the list, citizens could be prevented from entering or leaving the country. It also allowed “emergency detention” of those who “probably engage in, or conspire with others, in acts of espionage or sabotage.” The act made picketing a federal courthouse a felony.

In 1950, US Sen. Joseph McCarthy seized national headlines after claim-



President Harry Truman, Secretary of State James Byrnes, and Fleet Admiral William Leahy in Berlin, July 16, 1945.

ing he had a list of members of a Communist Party spy ring inside the State Department. McCarthy alleged there were Soviet spies and sympathizers infiltrating the government, universities, and the film industry.

In 1951, the Subversive Activities Registration Act passed in South Carolina requiring “every member of a subversive organization, or an organization subject to foreign control, every foreign agent and every person who advocates, teaches, advises or practices the duty, necessity or propriety of controlling, conducting, seizing or overthrowing the government of the United States, (or) of this State...shall register with the Secretary of State.” Subversives failing to register faced a \$25,000 fine and 10 years in prison.

In 1953, McCarthy called a string of high-profile actors and entertainers before a congressional committee, accusing them of being communists. Similarly, in the “Lavender Scare” McCarthy focused on exposing suspected homosexuals as security risks because of potential blackmail.

By late 1954, McCarthy had become the target of ridicule for his persistent grandstanding, and was censured by the Senate. The term “McCarthyism” has taken on a broader meaning, now used more generally to describe reckless, unsubstantiated accusations, as well as attacks on the character or patriotism of political adversaries.

In 1954, the Communist Control Act outlawed the Communist Party USA. Membership or support for the Party was punishable by a \$25,000 fine and 10 years in prison.

Brett Bursey is director of the SC Progressive Network. After being queried by the Secretary of State’s office in 1994, he became the state’s first and only registered subversive before the law was debated and removed in 2010. ☸



Bloody Thursday

Textile workers in South Carolina were in the eye of a national storm in the fall of 1934. They were among hundreds of thousands of mill workers who walked off the job on Labor Day, launching one of the largest strikes in American history.

The General Textile Strike, initiated and led by southern workers and extending from Alabama to Maine, was a long time coming. Since the late 1920s, workers were suffering reduced wages and heavier workloads. The average mill worker in South Carolina in 1932 made less than \$10 a week.

The United Textile Workers union went on strike at their Southern headquarters in Greenville on Sept. 1. Within days, strikers from Spartanburg mobilized to shut down the area's mills. They were among more than 50 strike squadrons activated in the Carolinas, operating in detachments of 200 to 650, moving south on a 110-mile front between Gastonia, NC, and Greenville, SC.

Gov. Ibra Charles Blackwood responded by sending in the National Guard, posting soldiers with fixed bayonets on rooftops and at the factory gates.

Tensions were high on the morning of Sept. 5 at Greenville's Dunean Mill when a deputy sheriff shot a worker in the back after he reportedly brandished a knife, wounding but not killing him.

The next day, 35 miles south in Honea Path, seven workers were killed and some 20 wounded at Chiquola Mill. *The Anderson Independent* newspaper reported that non-union workers and deputized citizens shot first.

The *New York Times* reported, "Without warning came the first shots, followed by many others, and for a few minutes there was bedlam. Striker after striker fell to the ground, with the cries of wounded men sounding over the field and men and women running shrieking from the scene."

A horrified community turned out in the thousands to bury the dead. While the strike collapsed soon after, it was not a futile campaign. Within

a year, Congress passed the National Labor Relations Standards Act. Three years later, the Fair Labor Standards Act banned child labor, set maximum hours, and established a minimum wage.

Instead of claiming its role in a painful but critical historical event, the community soon suffered a widespread case of amnesia. "Not only have Honea Path's founding fathers done little to preserve the town's rich legacy, but it seems that some genuinely want to forget," wrote Frank Beacham, whose grandfather—the town's mayor and mill superintendent—organized the men who fired at striking workers on what would become known as Bloody Thursday.

In his book *Whitewash: A Southern Journey through Music, Mayhem and Murder*, Beacham recounts, "When I was growing up in Honea Path during the 1960s, the subject of the mill

violence was taboo. There were hints of what happened, of course, but the topic was never discussed in the open. I learned the truth about Honea Path's history in 1994 from a documentary film called 'The Uprising of '34.'

"Since that film essentially ended Honea Path's six-decade long secret, I've learned about the history of the town and its people through many conversations and stories. I was shocked to find one of the most compelling stories I've ever heard connected to my own family and hometown. Even more shocking, I found, was how an event of such magnitude and importance to the lives of generations of Honea Path families could have been hidden and buried for so long.

"There was a campaign of fear and intimidation after the shootings that effectively erased public discussion of what had happened. Fearful workers who wanted to keep their jobs put a self-imposed lid on their own past. Somehow, as the years went by, the violence at Chiquola evolved into a source of shame. Many myths have built up over the years about the workers who died in Honea Path 75 years ago. They were called an isolated

group of troublemakers and rabble-rousers. Some, mainly the mill's former management, claimed they deserved what happened to them.

"I see it another way. I think these mill workers risked everything—their jobs, their freedom and ultimately their lives—for a cause they believed in. They made a decision to exert some control over their changing place in an increasingly industrialized world. Their method was to attempt to organize their fellow workers into a labor union."

In 1995, SC ETV declined to air "The Uprising of '34," which was broadcast nationally. The documentary also was banned at Spartanburg Tech for fear of "sending the wrong message."

The film documents not just the strike and its violent end, but also the subsequent effort to cleanse it from the public record. That irony wasn't lost on South Carolina viewers still talking about SC ETV's decision nearly three years later.

"For years, public television stations across the country have been expanding our grasp of the past by



Private "deputies" protect Chiquola Mill during the strike.

"Fifteen-year-old Mack Duncan smelled trouble the minute he turned up for the 6am shift at the Chiquola Mill. The strike had deeply divided the mill community, and one shift had already stopped rung.

"As he approached the mill, he saw a huge crowd massed at the gate, mainly strike supporters, and he was able to get inside, only with the aid of a policeman.

"He did not see what happened, but 'all of a sudden you heard shooting. For about five minutes it was just ding, bang—and it was bad.'

"When the shooting stopped, six strikers lay dead, another critically wounded (he died later), and upward of a score had been hit. The killings at Honea Path was the strike's bloodiest single incident."

John Salmond,
The General Textile Strike of 1934: From Maine to Alabama

“My father’s brother Ira Davis was killed in the [Chiquola Mill] strike, and his family said he was trying to go to work. My father said someone in the community came to the family and told them what had happened.

“Daddy said they stayed up and dug Ira’s grave that night. Ira left three children, and his wife lost her father in the strike as well. I remember my parents talking about being blackballed if you were not careful with what you said.

“Unfortunately, Daddy died when I was in my 20s, and I did not ask him more about the strike, but I could tell Daddy was hurt by the massacre. He did say the management of the mill were given guns and stood on top of the mill.

“It is a dark mark on society that these people were allowed to walk away free and were not punished for killing these people.”

E. Bell
Honea Path resident

airing countless documentaries that trace our rich and complex history,” Reginald Stuart wrote in the journal *Southern Changes*. “In South Carolina, operators of the state’s public television system have unintentionally succeeded in developing a new way to stir public interest in our history—don’t air a documentary. Case in point: ‘Uprising of ‘34,’ a well-crafted oral history about the campaign to organize Southern textile workers, a movement spurred by the promises of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal.

“Release of the documentary in 1995 marked the first time since the 1930s that much of the history of the strike was explored in detail for the general public. Most history books in the region say little if anything about the strike and the people who participated in it say even less.”

It wasn’t the first time SC ETV played it safe by passing on programs that might ruffle the feathers of state lawmakers, who oversee the agency’s budget and appoint its board of directors. South Carolina is the only state where all its educational broadcast licenses (63) are owned by the state and controlled by the legislature.

In 1980, the station declined to air a program recounting the execution of a young woman in a Saudi royal family who was found guilty of adultery. John West was then serving as US ambassador in Saudi Arabia, and SC ETV



Mamie, a spinner at Lancaster Cotton Mills, SC, in 1908. Photographer Lewis Hine called the mill “one of the worst places I have found for child labor.”



Chiquola Mill worker Lois McClain after she was shot. The bullet in her hand was never removed, and was buried with her when she died at age 91.

worried that airing the program might embarrass the former South Carolina governor.

In 1991, SC ETV chose to blur out the last scene in “The Grapes of Wrath,” in which a white woman takes a starving black man to her breast. Programs with gay content routinely have been censored.

In 1992, Masterpiece Theater’s “Portrait of a Marriage” was shown without the lesbian love scene. “Lost Language of Cranes,” about a gay father and son making peace with each other, was not aired at all. And while viewers in Georgia and North Carolina got to watch American Playhouse’s “Tales of the City,” a series about San Francisco in the late 1960s, its content was deemed unfit for South Carolina viewers. ☹

Toward a Brighter Dawn

Cramped and crushed by prejudice and discrimination, fingers worn to the bone by ceaseless labor at coolie wages, the Negro women are the most exploited group in America. But they have banded together for the fight for freedom, and will win.

Louise Thompson Patterson, in CP USA journal Woman Today, April 1936. Edited for space.

Early dawn on the plantations of the South. Dim figures bend down in the fields to plant, to chop, to pick the cotton from which the great wealth of the South has come. Sharecroppers, working year in, year out for the big landlord, never to get out of debt. The sharecropper’s wife—field worker by day, mother and housewife by night. Scrubbing the pine floors of the cabin until they shine white. Boiling clothes in the big black iron kettle in the yard. Cooking the fat-back and corn pone for hungry little mouths. She has never to worry about leisure-time problems.

Over the whole land, Negro women meet this triple exploitation—as workers, as women, and as Negroes. About 85 percent of all Negro women workers are domestics, two-thirds of the two million domestic workers in the United States.

Other employment open to them is confined mainly to laundries and the tobacco factories of Virginia and the Carolinas, where working conditions are deplorable. The small fraction of Negro women in the professions is hampered by discriminatory practices and unequal wages.

It was against such a background that there assembled in Chicago on Feb. 14, 15 and 16, 1936, Negro women from all sections of the country for the National Negro Congress. They made up about one-third of the 800 delegates, men and women, who came



together from churches, trade unions, fraternal, political, women’s, youth, civic, farm, professional, and educational organizations. Women club leaders from California greeted women trade unionists from New York. Women school teachers made friends with women domestic workers. Women from the relief agencies talked over relief problems with

women relief clients.

Women from mothers’ clubs and housewives’ leagues exchanged experiences in fighting against the high cost of living. Negro women welcomed the white women delegates who came to the Congress as an evidence of the growing sense of unity between them.

Organization and unity were the keynote of the resolution on women passed by the Congress. All three to be joined together to work for adequate social legislation, for better relief, and against war and fascism.

The delegates have returned to their homes, but not as they came. These women now have a program around which they will rally their sisters at work and in the home.

They have a year in which to carry through the declarations of their resolution, so that by May, 1937, when the National Negro Congress again convenes...they will come together once more in greater numbers and with a different story to tell, of accomplishment, of a struggle nearer the goal of the liberation of Negro women from bitter exploitation and oppression. ☹

“Women work today. Yes. But are they paid accordingly? No. Women today are getting wise. Those who can are joining various trade unions.

Negro women played an important part in winning the war... were behind the noise—the hammer, the thunder, the drive. Negro women have pooled their strength with other Americans to achieve a common goal: victory.

They carried their full share of the nation’s wartime load. In the steel mills, in the foundries, the aircraft plants and in the shipyards, Negro women helped to make the weapons of war.

Negro women’s wartime performances proved that by giving them the training, they can succeed in work that any other women can do. Since the war, many of these women were laid off.”

Florence Valentine,
Columbia, 1946

Nobody's Token

Women assumed visible leadership roles in SNYC.

It was a deliberate strategy, one not widely used before—or since.

SNYC was ahead of its time in its commitment to encouraging women to assume leadership roles. Women in the organization were not serving coffee, taking minutes, and answering the telephone; they were travelling, convening meetings, and calling the shots.

Women were treated as equal partners, and shared power in the organization. They served as delegates to national and international conferences, lobbied in Washington, DC, and crafted statements for the organization.

Esther Cooper was one of the most instrumental of those women. A graduate of Oberlin College, the Virginia native dedicated her master's thesis to a study of black domestic workers. In 1945, she received a fellowship to study young Americans' attitudes toward the war and their navigation of the postwar world. That same year she represented SNYC at the World Youth Conference in London, and was elected to the governing council of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, organizations funded by our WWII ally the Soviet Union.

Cooper credits SNYC founder Ed Strong for pushing her out of her comfort zone to take on a central and visible position. "I wanted to work behind the scenes and didn't want to speak," Cooper said in a 1988 interview. Strong told her, "We don't want you just in the office working the mimeograph machine." Cooper said they truly

believed in building an egalitarian society. "Ed Strong, Jim Jackson and Louis Burnham weren't free of male chauvinism; [those men] don't exist. But they were remarkable men. They struggled against it. The people I knew best fought for my leadership as a woman and pushed me forward."

Cooper married James Jackson in 1941 but kept her maiden name. "I was an early advocate of women retaining their names," she said. "I only started using Jackson during the McCarthy hearings when I had to go out and speak in his defence."

Jackson, charged with advocating the overthrow of the US government, went into hiding in 1951 after being indicted under the Smith Act. He was a fugitive until 1955, a time Cooper calls "the underground period."

Jackson was active in the Communist Party USA, but Cooper had no appetite for party politics. "I have never



Mary McLeod Bethune (left) was the most prominent woman in SNYC. Her relationship with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (center) and access to the administration made her an important link with Washington, DC. Photo dated 1943.

been an activist in the CP," she said. "I always had a broader sphere. You have to be very strong to be politically active and politically honest."

Cooper went to Birmingham in the summer of 1940, expecting to work at SNYC for just a few months. She stayed seven years. She was the face of the organization during the war years. She and other women didn't just keep the organization running while men were fighting overseas, their involvement was intentional from the beginning. That strategy of inclusion served the organization well, ensuring that no talent was wasted and that SNYC would remain strong while its men were away.

"Women were vital to the group from its founding and especially during the tumultuous war years," Lindsey Swindall notes in *The Path to the Greater, Freer, Truer World: Southern Civil Rights and Anticolonialism, 1937-1955*. "The prominent role of women in SNYC made it unique among civil rights organizations, which like the NAACP...were traditionally directed by men with a hierarchical leadership approach."

Women's strength within SNYC ensured that it didn't just survive the war, she argues, but "came through the crisis robust enough to sponsor arguably its most significant national event in the autumn of 1946."

Among the women holding leadership positions in SNYC were Rose Mae Catchings, who served as president, and Dorothy Burnham (married to Louis Burnham) who did dual duty as a member of the executive board

and as educational director.

Mayesville, SC, native Mary McLeod Bethune was an early supporter. The education advocate and founder of Bethune-Cookman University in Florida enjoyed a close relationship with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. She led the president's Black Cabinet, advising him on racial matters.

SNYC was grateful for the national clout Bethune brought to the table. In 1945, they held a dinner to honor her years of dedication to the organization.

Modjeska Monteith Simkins was a SNYC organizer early on, working alongside Annie Belle Weston in Columbia. Simkins handled the press, organized speaking tours, and opened her home to travelling guests—a hospitality she often dispensed because blacks were barred from most motels.

Simkins also planned and invited students from around the state to SNYC's Leadership Training Schools. The 10-day residential programs recruited young activists to study history, civics, and learn practical skills to strengthen their organizing work.

Weston travelled South Carolina's back roads that summer, drumming up interest in the coming fall conference, especially from the "so-called backward communities." Arming these neglected neighborhoods with educational programs, she believed, was critical to the movement. "We are living in an era of thought revolution and positive action," she wrote. "The world—even our Glorious Southland—is changing before our eyes."

The Columbia conference featured a workshop dedicated to women in



Esther Cooper and Paul Robeson at SNYC conference in Alabama.

the workforce. Florence Valentine called attention to "the double harshness" facing female workers. "Women in general have been discriminated against and exploited through limitation of their opportunities for employment, through long hours, low wages, and harmful working conditions."

Citing 1930 Census numbers, Valentine said "one in every six women workers is a Negro," and that upon them "have fallen the more menial jobs, the lower paid, the more hazardous—in general, the least agreeable and the least desirable."

This awareness informed SNYC strategy, which expanded union organizing to include black women workers, who suffered disproportionately on their jobs.

Female involvement in SNYC was unlike the male-dominated civil rights organizing that followed. First to raise the matter in a public way, in 1965 social activists Mary King and Casey Hayden wrote "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo" to challenge the structure at the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

"There seem to be many parallels that can be drawn between treatment of Negroes and treatment of women in

our society as a whole," they wrote. "But in particular, women we've talked to who work in the movement seem to be caught up in a common-law caste system that operates, sometimes subtly, forcing them to work around or outside hierarchical structures of power which may exclude them. Women seem to be placed in the same position of assumed subordi-

nation in personal situations too. It is a caste system which, at its worst, uses and exploits women."

They were reflecting a growing feminist consciousness when they wrote, "Having learned from the movement to think radically about the personal worth and abilities of people whose role in society had gone unchallenged before, a lot of women in the movement have begun trying to apply those lessons to their own relations with men."

Swindall asserts that although SNCC had received important guidance from seasoned activists such as Ella Baker, women were largely absent from the leadership core of the national group.

"Without a doubt," Swindall writes, "women were vital to the work of SNCC at the national local levels. However, the public voice and national agenda of SNCC was primarily expressed through men."

"In contrast, SNYC's public face, as seen in spaces like conference proceedings, delegations to Washington, letters to the federal government, and articles in *Cavalcade* [SNYC's newsletter] was fashioned through the joint efforts of women and men activists." ❁

Forgetting Why We Remember

This piece by David W. Blight ran in *The New York Times* in 2011.

Most Americans know that Memorial Day is about honoring the nation's war dead. It is also a holiday devoted to department store sales, half-marathons, picnics, baseball and auto racing. But where did it begin, who created it, and why?

At the end of the Civil War, Americans faced a formidable challenge: how to memorialize 625,000 dead soldiers, Northern and Southern. As Walt Whitman mused, it was "the dead, the dead, the dead—our dead—or South or North, ours all" that preoccupied the country. After all, if the same number of Americans per capita had died in Vietnam as died in the Civil War, four million names would be on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, instead of 58,000.

Officially, in the North, Memorial Day emerged in 1868 when the Grand Army of the Republic, the Union veterans' organization, called on communities to conduct grave-decorating ceremonies. On May 30, funereal events attracted thousands of people at hundreds of cemeteries in countless towns, cities and mere crossroads. By the 1870s, one could not live in an American town, North or South, and be unaware of the spring ritual.

But the practice of decorating graves—which gave rise to an alternative name, Decoration Day—didn't start with the 1868 events, nor was it an exclusively Northern practice. In 1866 the Ladies' Memorial Association of Columbus, Ga., chose April 26, the anniversary of Gen. Joseph Johnston's final surrender to Gen. William T. Sherman, to commemorate fallen Confederate soldiers. Later, both May 10, the anniversary of Gen. Stonewall Jackson's death, and June 3,

the birthday of Jefferson Davis, were designated Confederate Memorial Day in different states.

Memorial Days were initially occasions of sacred bereavement, and from the war's end to the early 20th century they helped forge national reconciliation around soldierly sacrifice, regardless of cause. In North and South, orators and participants frequently called Memorial Day an "American All Saints Day," likening it to the European Catholic tradition of whole towns marching to churchyards to honor dead loved ones.

But the ritual quickly became the tool of partisan memory as well, at least through the violent Reconstruction years. In the South, Memorial Day was a means of confronting the Confederacy's defeat but without repudiating its cause. Some Southern orators stressed Christian notions of noble sacrifice. Others, however, used the ritual for Confederate vindication and renewed assertions of white supremacy. Blacks had a place in this Confederate narrative, but only as time-warped loyal slaves who were supposed to remain frozen in the past.

The Lost Cause tradition thrived in Confederate Memorial Day rhetoric; the Southern dead were honored as the true "patriots," defenders of their homeland, sovereign rights, a natural racial order and a "cause" that had been overwhelmed by "numbers and resources" but never defeated on battlefields.

Yankee Memorial Day orations often righteously claimed the high ground of blood sacrifice to save the Union and destroy slavery. It was not uncommon for a speaker to honor the fallen of both sides, but still lay the war guilt on the "rebel dead." Many a lonely widow or mother at these observances painfully endured expressions of

joyous death on the altars of national survival.

Some events even stressed the Union dead as the source of a new egalitarian America, and a civic rather than a racial or ethnic definition of citizenship. In Wilmington, Del., in 1869, Memorial Day included a procession of Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians and Catholics; white Grand Army of the Republic posts in parade with a black post; and the "Mount Vernon Cornet Band (colored)" keeping step with the "Irish Nationalists with the harp and the sunburst flag of Erin."

But for the earliest and most remarkable Memorial Day, we must return to where the war began. By the spring of 1865, after a long siege and prolonged bombardment, the beautiful port city of Charleston, S.C., lay in ruin and occupied by Union troops. Among the first soldiers to enter and march up Meeting Street singing liberation songs was the 21st United States Colored Infantry; their commander accepted the city's official surrender.

Whites had largely abandoned the city, but thousands of blacks, mostly former slaves, had remained, and they conducted a series of commemorations to declare their sense of the meaning of the war.

The largest of these events, forgotten until I had some extraordinary luck in an archive at Harvard, took place on May 1, 1865. During the final year of the war, the Confederates had converted the city's Washington Race Course and Jockey Club into an outdoor prison. Union captives were kept in horrible conditions in the interior of the track; at least 257 died of disease and were hastily buried in a mass grave behind the grandstand.

After the Confederate evacuation of Charleston, black workmen went to

the site, reburied the Union dead properly, and built a high fence around the cemetery. They whitewashed the fence and built an archway over an entrance on which they inscribed the words, "Martyrs of the Race Course."

The symbolic power of this Low Country planter aristocracy's bastion was not lost on the freed people, who then, in cooperation with white missionaries and teachers, staged a parade of 10,000 on the track. A New York Tribune correspondent witnessed the event, describing "a procession of friends and mourners as South Carolina and the United States never saw before."

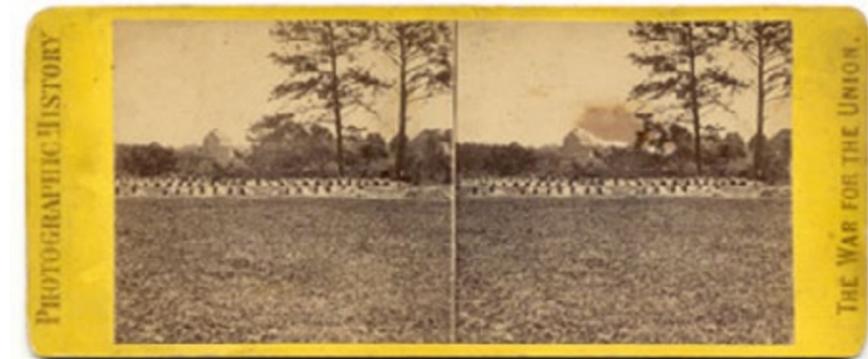
The procession was led by 3,000 black schoolchildren carrying armloads of roses and singing the Union marching song "John Brown's Body." Several hundred black women followed with baskets of flowers, wreaths and crosses. Then came black men marching in cadence, followed by contingents of Union infantrymen. Within the cemetery enclosure a black children's choir sang "We'll Rally Around the Flag," the "Star-Spangled Banner" and spirituals before a series of black ministers read from the Bible.

After the dedication, the crowd dispersed into the infield and did what many of us do on Memorial Day: enjoyed picnics, listened to speeches and watched soldiers drill. Among the full brigade of Union infantrymen participating were the famous 54th Massachusetts and the 34th and 104th United States Colored Troops, who performed a special double-columned march around the gravesite.

The war was over, and Memorial Day had been founded by African-

Americans in a ritual of remembrance and consecration. The war, they had boldly announced, had been about the triumph of their emancipation over a slaveholders' republic. They were themselves the true patriots.

Despite the size and some newspaper coverage of the event, its memory was suppressed by white Charlestonians in favor of their own version of the day. From 1876 on, after white Democrats



The graves of Union soldiers at the Charleston Race Course, 1865.

took back control of South Carolina politics and the Lost Cause defined public memory and race relations, the day's racecourse origin vanished.

Indeed, 51 years later, the president of the Ladies' Memorial Association of Charleston received an inquiry from a United Daughters of the Confederacy official in New Orleans asking if it was true that blacks had engaged in such a burial rite in 1865; the story had apparently migrated westward in community memory. Mrs. S. C. Beckwith, leader of the association, responded tersely, "I regret that I was unable to gather any official information in answer to this."

Beckwith may or may not have known about the 1865 event; her own "official" story had become quite different and had no place for the former slaves' march on their masters' racecourse. In the struggle over memory and meaning in any society, some stories just get lost while others attain mainstream recognition.

As we mark the Civil War's sesquicentennial, we might reflect on Frederick Douglass's words in an 1878 Memorial Day speech in New York City, in which he unwittingly gave voice to the forgotten Charleston marchers.

He said the war was not a struggle of mere "sectional character," but a "war of ideas, a battle of principles." It was "a war between the old and the new, slavery and freedom, barbarism and civilization ... and in dead earnest for something beyond the battlefield." With or against Douglass, we still debate the "something" that the Civil War dead represent.

The old racetrack is gone, but an oval roadway survives on the site in Hampton Park, named for Wade Hampton, former Confederate general and the governor of South Carolina after the end of Reconstruction. The old gravesite of the Martyrs of the Race Course is gone too; they were reinterred in the 1880s at a national cemetery in Beaufort, SC.

But the event is no longer forgotten. Last year I had the great honor of helping a coalition of Charlestonians, including the mayor, Joseph P. Riley, dedicate a marker to this first Memorial Day by a reflecting pool in Hampton Park. By their labor, their words, their songs and their solemn parade on their former owners' racecourse, black Charlestonians created for themselves, and for us, the Independence Day of a Second American Revolution.

David W. Blight teaches American History at Yale University where he is the director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition. ☪



Joe Neal 1950–2017

Rev. Joe Neal leads a class of the Modjeska Simkins School in August 2015, the leadership institute's first session. The school is a project of the SC Progressive Network, which Neal helped found in 1995.

He was a friend, pastor, teacher, mentor, legislator, and tireless champion of his constituents in Lower Richland.

This booklet is dedicated to his memory.

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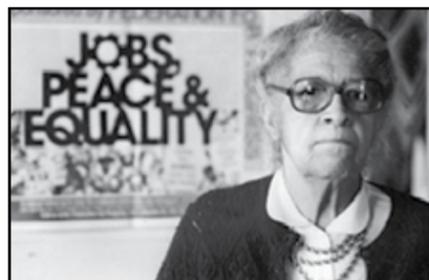
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More resources are available at the Modjeska Simkins School for Human Rights web site: scpronet.com/modjeskaschool. Download free booklets, and find links to articles, blogs, and videos. Join us on Facebook.

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Pact of Southern Youth

Drafted by delegates to the 1946 conference of the Southern Negro Youth Congress.

We, Negro and white young people, one thousand strong, assembled in the Southern Youth Legislature at Columbia, South Carolina, do hereby declare our common purpose, to build a new and democratic South.

We are Southerners. We are united in a mutual love of the Southland, a belief in the democratic way of life and the Christian ideals of human brotherhood. We are united by pride in the traditions of the great Southern statesmen George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Frederick Douglass and Hiram Revels; and those nameless thousands who have always fought in the South against slavery and the oppression of man by man.

The sacrifice of millions of white and Negro youth who fought on the battlefields of Europe and Asia unite us. We are joined by our love and veneration for Franklin D. Roosevelt and the determination to realize the heritage he left us, his challenge to us, the generation which has a “rendezvous with destiny.”

We are united in righteous indignation and protest against the UnAmerican and UnChristian wave of mob violence, lynching and brutality in our Southland.

We are also bound by our common needs:

- secure and well-paid jobs
- the unrestricted right to vote
- to own the land we till
- adequate medical and hospital care
- homes for our families
- better education for all
- protection from mob violence and police brutality
- guarantee of a peaceful world, through the continuation of Roosevelt’s policy of collaboration with our wartime allies.

We have come to realize that only through acting together can we reach these goals. We are resolved no longer to be the victims of the old Nazi game of divide and rule. We have come to understand that discrimination against Negro youth—in all its forms—is but a device used by economic royalists and plantation landlords to cheat the young white people and our entire generation of Southern youth of the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in a democratic South.

We know that only when Negro youth achieve the full citizenship promised them in the Constitution and earned by them in their patriotic devotion to the cause of democracy, only then can millions of young white people go forward and our Southland prosper. Our generation knows that these aspirations cannot be easily won, that only our common efforts and intelligent action, through organization of students, veterans, young workers and young women, will guarantee their achievement.

We know we must join together with all democratic minded groups in the South to go forward. Our generation today is faced with two alternatives: either a life of continued poverty, ignorance and division—or the opportunity, through unity, to build a free, prosperous and happy South, as part of a democratic America and a peaceful world. It is for this solemn reason that we who have a rendezvous with destiny pledge to join hands to realize the rich promise of the South.

We, who have liberated ourselves from the crippling bonds of race prejudice, call upon Southern youth in all walks of life to affix their signatures to this declaration of our purpose, and to join with us in common action to make our dream for a better South and a better America come true.

DONE THIS DAY, October 20, 1946, at Columbia, South Carolina



Renty was born in Congo and enslaved at B.F. Taylor plantation in Columbia, SC. Renty and his daughter Delia were part of a 1850 study by Columbia daguerreotypist J.T. Zealy at the behest of Harvard scientist Louis Agassiz. The study was intended to support the theory that blacks are a different—and inferior—species from whites.

This image was among 15 found at Harvard University in 1976. They are the earliest known photographs of identified enslaved Americans.

Agassiz was celebrated in his native Switzerland which, among other honors, named a mountain for him. In 2008, a public campaign culminated in the installation of a marker renaming the peak Rentyhorn “in honor of the slave Renty and of the men and women who have suffered similar fates.” The marker reminded readers that Agassiz was not just a great geologist and zoologist, “but also an influential racist and a pioneering thinker of apartheid.”