



Dr. Dorian Newton, O&E Committee Chair

August 10, 2026

Welcome to our Outreach & Education Biweekly Series

The Center for African American History, Art, & Culture (CAAHAC), located at 120 York St. NE, Aiken, SC 29801, and housed in the historic Immanuel Institute, preserves and celebrates the creativity, resilience, and significant contributions of Aiken's African American community. Through exhibits, lectures, art shows, concerts, and educational programs, we aim to inspire, celebrate diversity, and highlight African Americans' vital role locally, statewide, and nationally.

This biweekly message continues our Community Outreach & Education series—a chapter-by-chapter exploration of books like Carolyn Click's *The Cost of the Vote: George Elmore and the Battle for the Ballot*. This work connects historical narratives to contemporary civic life, encouraging reflection and engagement across our community.

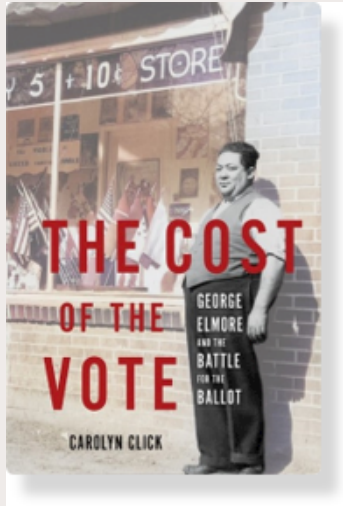


“Freedom is never given; it is won.”
– A. Philip Randolph

Spotlight:

The Cost of the Vote by Carolyn Click Chapter 7 – “Power and Peril of Collaboration”

As we reflect on the ongoing struggle for voting rights chronicled in Carolyn Click’s *The Cost of the Vote*, Chapter 7, “Power and Peril of Collaboration”, examines the bold decision by Black South Carolinians to organize their own political party in the face of exclusion and the complex risks and opportunities that strategy entailed.



In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court’s April 1944 decision in *Smith v. Allwright* and South Carolina’s swift legislative attempt to privatize the Democratic Party, John H. McCray, editor of the influential Black newspaper the *Lighthouse and Informer*, and Osceola E. McKaine took decisive action. McCray had already called in his columns for a new political organization. Early efforts under the name South Carolina Negro (or Colored) Democratic Party quickly gained support. At the suggestion of Margaret Howe, a white Columbia widow who became an early supporter, the name was changed to the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) to emphasize the goal of interracial membership and progressive principles.

On May 24, 1944, the Progressive Democratic Party held its first state convention at the Negro Masonic Temple in Columbia. McCray, serving as acting state secretary, presided over approximately 172 delegates representing thirty-nine of the state’s forty-six counties. Osceola McKaine delivered the keynote address. The convention adopted a platform supporting the war effort, federal aid to education, an anti-lynching law, elimination of the poll tax, and the reelection of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Delegates also selected a slate of eighteen representatives to challenge the seating of the regular (all-white) South Carolina delegation at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago that summer.

The chapter explores both the power and the peril of this collaborative strategy. By forming an independent party while seeking recognition within the national Democratic framework, McCray, McKaine, and their allies demonstrated agency and organizational strength. They publicly contested exclusion and forced national attention on the denial of Black voting rights in South Carolina. Yet the effort also carried significant risks: political isolation, limited resources, and the possibility that white Democratic leaders and national party officials would simply refuse recognition. The PDP’s challenge at the national convention was ultimately unsuccessful, and when McKaine later ran for the U.S. Senate against Governor Olin D. Johnston, he was officially credited with only 3,214 votes (though observers believed the true total was higher). Still, the party’s existence marked a historic assertion of Black political independence and laid important groundwork for later advances in voter registration and civil rights activism.

Reflection Questions

- How did the decision by John McCray and Osceola McKaine to form the Progressive Democratic Party represent both a powerful act of self-determination and a calculated risk in the political climate of 1944?
- What does the involvement of white allies such as Margaret Howe, and the party's deliberate choice of an interracial name, reveal about the possibilities and limits of collaboration across racial lines during this period?
- In what ways did the May 24, 1944, convention and the subsequent challenge at the Democratic National Convention demonstrate the organizational capacity of Black South Carolinians even under conditions of severe exclusion?

Practical Actions for the Next Two Weeks

- 1 Read or revisit Chapter 7 of *The Cost of the Vote* and reflect on the strategic choices involved in forming the Progressive Democratic Party. Share one insight at our next book club session.
- 2 Research the roles of John H. McCray and Osceola E. McKaine and discuss with your networks how independent Black political organization contributed to the broader struggle for voting rights.
- 3 Share the story of the May 24, 1944, Progressive Democratic Party convention and its challenge to the national Democratic Party with at least one person outside the committee—helping to keep this history of political courage alive.

Closing Thoughts

Chapter 7 reminds us that the path to political power has always required both courage and careful calculation. The formation of the Progressive Democratic Party by John McCray, Osceola McKaine, and their allies was an act of bold collaboration that carried real peril yet also demonstrated the capacity of Black South Carolinians to organize, assert their rights, and force the larger political system to respond. Their example calls us to continue building strategic partnerships, speaking with clarity, and working together for a more inclusive democracy. Let us honor their legacy by remaining steadfast in our pursuit of justice and equal rights for all.

Historical Spotlight

On May 24, 1944, the Progressive Democratic Party of South Carolina held its first state convention at the Negro Masonic Temple in Columbia. Under the leadership of John H. McCray and with Osceola E. McKaine as keynote speaker, approximately 172 delegates from thirty-nine counties adopted a progressive platform and selected a slate of eighteen delegates to challenge the seating of the regular South Carolina delegation at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. This gathering marked a historic assertion of Black political agency in the state.

CAAHAC Bookstore & Gift Shop Update

To support our mission and the local literary community, we encourage you to purchase or borrow *The Cost of the Vote* from independent bookstores such as The Book Tavern in Augusta or All Good Books in Columbia, or to check availability through the Aiken County Public Library system. The CAAHAC gift shop may also have copies available for community members. Every book acquired helps sustain our educational programs, outreach initiatives, and the preservation of these essential stories.

Things to Look Forward To:

- Continuing our summer community programs, including book club discussions and historical education efforts focused on South Carolina's civil rights legacy.
- **August 21, 2026 – Next Biweekly Message** Our next installment will continue exploring *The Cost of the Vote* Chapter 8 and the long road toward voting rights and full citizenship.

Let us carry the spirit of advocacy, persistence, and strategic collaboration from this chapter into every conversation, every classroom, and every gathering as we work together to honor the past and build a stronger, more connected future for all.

Warm Regards,
Dr. Dorian Newton
CAAHAC Outreach & Education Committee