



Dr. Dorian Newton, O&E Committee Chair

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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.

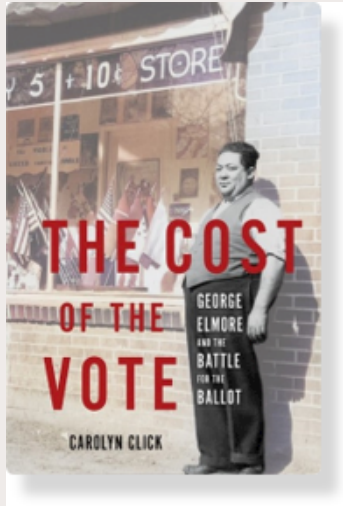


***"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."
– Frederick Douglass***

Spotlight:

The Cost of the Vote by Carolyn Click Chapter 6 – “We’ll Fight the Negroes at the Polls”

As we reflect on the ongoing struggle for voting rights chronicled in Carolyn Click’s *The Cost of the Vote*, Chapter 6, “We’ll Fight the Negroes at the Polls”, examines the immediate and defiant response of South Carolina’s political leadership to a landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that threatened the white primary system.



The chapter opens with a powerful quote from South Carolina Governor Olin D. Johnston on April 14, 1944: “History has taught us that we must keep our white Democratic primaries pure and unadulterated so that we might protect the welfare and homes of all the people of our State.”

Just days earlier, on April 3, 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Allwright* that the Texas Democratic Party’s all-white primary was unconstitutional under the Fifteenth Amendment. This decision was built upon and overruled earlier cases, including *Nixon v. Herndon* (1927), *Nixon v. Condon* (1932), and *Grovey v. Townsend* (1935), which had gradually challenged the legal foundations of the white primary system.

In swift response, the South Carolina General Assembly convened a special session in April 1944 and repealed 147 state laws regulating the primary elections. The clear intent was to recast the Democratic Party as a private club, free from constitutional oversight, so that it could continue excluding African American voters. This legislative strategy, combined with Governor Johnston’s unyielding rhetoric, demonstrated the depth of resistance among white political leaders to expanding the franchise.

While the white political establishment moved quickly to preserve exclusion, South Carolina’s Black leadership responded with strategic urgency and resolve. On April 14, 1944, ten days after the *Smith v. Allwright* ruling—John McCray and Osceola McKaine publicly announced their intention to launch a new political party to challenge the all-white Democratic primary system. At the same time, James Hinton, the second South Carolina NAACP statewide president, immediately used the Supreme Court decision as a springboard, making clear that Black citizens across the state were poised to file a similar complaint in the federal courts.

These developments unfolded as Black veterans returned from fighting for democracy abroad during World War II, only to confront entrenched systems of exclusion at home. The chapter underscores how local and state actions in South Carolina formed part of a broader Southern effort to maintain white supremacy in the face of federal court rulings and growing demands for equality.

By tracing this sequence—from the Supreme Court’s historic ruling and the preceding legal battles, to South Carolina’s legislative countermeasures and political defiance, alongside the rapid organizing of Black leaders—the chapter illustrates the intense opposition to Black voting rights and foreshadows the legal challenges, including those involving George Elmore, that would soon test the limits of this resistance.

Reflection Questions

- What does Governor Johnston’s April 1944 quote and the legislature’s repeal of primary laws reveal about the political climate in South Carolina following the *Smith v. Allwright* decision?
- How did the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Smith v. Allwright*, building on cases like *Nixon v. Herndon*, *Nixon v. Condon*, and overturning *Grovey v. Townsend*, represent a turning point in the fight against the white primary system?
- In what ways did the return of Black veterans from World War II, having fought for democracy abroad, intersect with the domestic political battles over voting rights described in this chapter?
- How do the immediate responses of James Hinton, John McCray, and Osceola McKaine demonstrate the power of organized leadership in turning a Supreme Court victory into tangible momentum for change?

Practical Actions for the Next Two Weeks

- 1 Read or revisit this section of *The Cost of the Vote* and reflect on the courage required to confront institutional injustice. Share one insight at our next book club session.
- 2 Research the history of the white primary and the key Supreme Court cases that challenged it and discuss with your networks how these legal battles shaped the path to voting rights.
- 3 Share the story of Governor Johnston’s response to *Smith v. Allwright* and the South Carolina legislature’s attempt to circumvent the ruling with at least one person outside the study group—helping to keep the legacy of advocacy alive.

Closing Thoughts

The events of 1944 remind us that progress is rarely linear and often meets fierce resistance. The defeat of reform efforts through legislative maneuvering and defiant rhetoric was a setback, but it also strengthened the resolve of Black citizens and their allies. Their example calls us to continue building bridges, speaking out, 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

Governor Olin D. Johnston's April 14, 1944, statement and the South Carolina General Assembly's special session repealing 147 primary laws exemplified the swift and defiant resistance to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Smith v. Allwright*. These actions highlighted the determination of white political power in the state to preserve the all-white Democratic primary despite federal intervention, setting the stage for continued legal and political battles over the ballot. At the same time, the swift organizing by James Hinton, John McCray, and Osceola McKaine showed that Black South Carolinians would not wait passively for change—they were already building the legal and political infrastructure to claim it.

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 7, 2026 – Next Biweekly Message** Our next installment will continue exploring *The Cost of the Vote* Chapter 7 "Power and Peril of Collaboration" and the long road toward voting rights and full citizenship.

Let us carry the spirit of advocacy, persistence, and community 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