



Dr. Dorian Newton, O&E Committee Chair

May 19, 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 marks the first installment of our new 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 inaugural work connects historical narratives to contemporary civic life, encouraging reflection and engagement across our community.



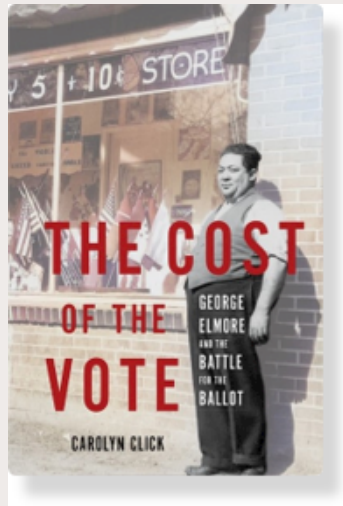
“The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have.”

– John Lewis

Spotlight:

The Cost of the Vote by Carolyn Click Introduction & Chapter 1 – “The House on Tree Street”

As Carolyn Click's *The Cost of the Vote* was recently honored with the 2026 South Carolina African American Heritage Commission Book Prize, its message holds special significance for Aiken and beyond. With South Carolina's Democratic primary scheduled for June 9, 2026, this timely book reminds us of the cost of securing the fundamental right to vote and challenges us to engage deeply in the democratic process.



What is the true cost of claiming our right to vote—and how does the everyday life of an ordinary family illuminate the extraordinary courage required to secure it for an entire community?

In the Introduction, we meet George Elmore on August 13, 1946, a determined Black citizen of Columbia, South Carolina, who arrived at his polling place in Richland County expecting to cast a ballot in the Democratic primary—the only election that truly mattered in the one-party South. Turned away because of his race, Elmore's bold stand—along with other qualified Black voters—sparked the NAACP's landmark class-action lawsuit, *Elmore v. Rice* (1947). In a historic ruling on July 12, 1947, U.S. District Judge J. Waties Waring declared South Carolina's all-white primary unconstitutional.

Building directly on the U.S. Supreme Court precedent of *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), Waring held that the Democratic Party was acting as an arm of the state and could not exclude voters based on race. He famously declared, “It is time for South Carolina to rejoin the Union.” The decision was later upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the case, effectively ending the white-primary system in our state.

Chapter 1, “The House on Tree Street,” then invites us inside 907 Tree Street in Columbia's Waverly neighborhood, where George Elmore lived with his wife Laura and their children from 1943 to 1954. Far from the dramatic courtroom, we meet a hardworking family man: manager of the Waverly Five & Dime store, skilled photographer who built a darkroom in his bathroom, and taxi driver juggling multiple jobs to provide for his loved ones.

This intimate portrayal of middle-class Black life during segregation reminds us that the fight for voting rights was never abstract—it was a deeply personal battle rooted in homes, families, and neighborhoods just like our own here in Aiken and across South Carolina. These opening sections underscore why historical awareness and community education matter. By remembering the human faces behind landmark struggles, we empower ourselves and our neighbors to value and protect the franchise so many sacrificed to win—especially as we prepare for the Democratic Party primary on June 9, 2026.

The Safety of Silence vs. The Courage of One Voice

The Safety of Silence:

- Turning away from the polls because “it’s not worth the risk” or “nothing will change.”
- Allowing daily routines—work, family, community—to become excuses for civic disengagement.
- Forgetting that silence in the face of exclusion quietly endorses the very barriers our ancestors fought to tear down

The Courage of One Voice:

- Recognizing that ordinary homes like the one on Tree Street can become launchpads for extraordinary change.
- Embracing the personal cost—time, comfort, even safety—so future generations inherit fuller rights.
- Building community resilience through shared stories, education, and collective action.

Reflection Questions

For this chapter, reflect on how this story touches your own life and community:

1. In what ways does your own “house on Tree Street”—your routines and relationships—prepare you to advocate for civic participation today?
2. What personal “costs” would you pay to ensure access to voting rights and historical truth for everyone in our community?
3. How can you preserve and share local stories, like the Elmore’s, to inspire younger generations to see themselves as heirs to the civil rights legacy?
4. When has personal comfort clashed with a call to public action in your own life? What did it teach you?
5. How might you channel “uncommon boldness,” as Elmore did, into voter registration, education, and proactive engagement ahead of the June primary?

Suggested Activities for the Next Two Weeks

To move from reflection to action and support our shared goals of civic education and historical preservation, consider these steps:

1 Get Your Copy of the Book:

- Purchase at local independent bookstores (The Book Tavern in Augusta, All Good Books in Columbia).
- Order through USC Press or borrow from the Aiken County Public Library.
- Visit the CAAHAC gift shop—limited copies may be available.

2 Engage with the Book Club:

- Participate in discussions of the book's opening sections.
- Prepare one reflection question to contribute—your perspective enriches us all.

3 Prepare for the Election Season:

- Confirm your own voter registration and encourage family, friends, and neighbors to do the same.
- Share deadlines and requirements with your networks to ensure broad participation.

4 Preserve Local History:

- Visit or research sites tied to Columbia's Waverly neighborhood or Aiken's own civil-rights landmarks.
- Document or share family voting stories to strengthen our community's shared legacy.

5 Strengthen CAAHAC's Work:

- Join the Friends of CAAHAC to support outreach and educational initiatives across the region by visiting <https://caahac.org/membership/>.
- Every contribution helps expand outreach, education, and preservation across our region.

Closing Thoughts

As we walk with George Elmore through the rooms of his house on Tree Street, and as the 2026 South Carolina African American Heritage Commission Book Prize celebrates this powerful story, we are reminded that the vote is never merely a ballot—it is a sacred inheritance purchased by the courage of ordinary families who refused to accept exclusion as their children's destiny. *The Cost of the Vote* calls every one of us to honor that legacy not with distant admiration, but with active participation in the work of civic education, historical preservation, and community empowerment that defines the CAAHAC mission. Together, we transform personal reflection into collective power, ensuring that every voice in our community is heard, every story preserved, and every right defended. The road ahead may still demand sacrifice, yet the promise of a more perfect union has never been brighter because we choose, like Elmore, to pay the cost and claim the prize.

Historical Spotlight

On **April 19, 1948**, two years after his historic stand, George Elmore learned that the U.S. Supreme Court had declined to review *Elmore v. Rice*, making the end of South Carolina's all-white primary permanent and irreversible. In Chapter 1, author Carolyn Click deliberately uses that ordinary spring morning on Tree Street to illustrate the quiet dignity of Black families who, despite threats and economic reprisals, kept building lives worthy of full citizenship. (Source: *The Cost of the Vote*, Chapter 1)

Things to Look Forward To:

- **May 29, 2026 – Next Biweekly Message** In Chapter 2, “Amid Rural Landscape, Spasms of Violence,” we move from the city streets of Columbia into South Carolina's rural countryside during the Reconstruction era (1865–1877) and the Nadir (1877–1901), a term coined by historian Rayford W. Logan to describe the lowest point in African American civil rights. After the progressive 1868 Constitution dramatically expanded Black men's voting rights, ordinary citizens faced sudden, brutal outbursts of racial terror and the systematic disenfranchisement that followed—led by figures like Martin Witherspoon Gary and “Pitchfork Ben” Tillman, both from Edgefield, and culminating in the restrictive 1895 South Carolina Constitution—revealing that the cost of the ballot was often paid in blood.
- **June 12, 2026 – Third Biweekly Message** In Chapter 3, “Hard Work, Racial Uplift, and Card Parties,” we enter the early 1900s, where Black communities across South Carolina combined daily labor, self-improvement initiatives, and social gatherings like card parties to quietly build economic strength and political awareness—demonstrating how everyday resilience and collective uplift became powerful foundations for the voting-rights battles still ahead.
- **Summer Community Voter-Education Series**— The Aiken Center for African American History, Arts, and Culture (CAAHAC) will collaborate with the NAACP and/or the Women's League of Voters to support initiatives focused on voter education and community engagement.
- **June 20, 2026 – Juneteenth Celebration!** Mark your calendars for a FREE community event hosted by the Center for African American History, Art & Culture at 120 York St NE, Aiken, SC 29801, 11AM–2PM. Celebrate our shared history, art, and culture together—see the attached official Juneteenth 2026 flyer for all the details.

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION



CENTER FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN
HISTORY, ART & CULTURE



**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**



SCAN FOR VOLUNTEER SIGN UP

**FREE
ADMISSION**

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11AM-2PM

803-502-4858



NAACP

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Let us carry the spirit of Tree Street—and the honor of this recent book prize—into every conversation, every classroom, and every polling place. Together, we turn the ship—steadily, courageously—toward a future where every citizen's voice is both cherished and heard.

Warm Regards,

Dr. Dorian Newton

CAAHAC Outreach & Education Committee