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**THE PALMETTO LEADER'S MISSION  
TO END LYNCHING IN SOUTH CAROLINA:  
BLACK AGENCY AND THE BLACK PRESS  
IN COLUMBIA, 1925–1940**

Kerstyn M. Haram\*

One of these days lynching will be a thing of the past in this country, for it is barbarism, and one cannot entertain the thought that the white people will forever go on degrading themselves through such a practice.

*Palmetto Leader*, May 11, 1935

The *Leader* is uncompromising in its efforts to give the Negro that faith in himself that is so essential to any race that would take its rightful place in civilization's onward march.

*Palmetto Leader*, July 5, 1930

**IN 1925 THE PALMETTO LEADER, AN AFRICAN AMERICAN** newspaper based in Columbia, South Carolina, reached the printing press for the first time. Beginning in its initial year of publication, this conservative weekly made bold statements about personal motivation and self-improvement, which it sought to encourage within the readership. In a May 1925 article on the recent decrease of lynchings nationwide, the author noted that "some observers declare there has been a gain in the self-respect and self-discipline of the Negroes themselves that may account for part of the improvement."<sup>1</sup> The *Palmetto Leader*—with its distinguished editor, Nathaniel Jerome Frederick, and its strong, opinionated publisher, George H. Hampton—adopted the fight against lynching as one of its primary social causes. With hopes and expectations of black agency and self-respect, the paper attacked lynching through distinct strategies involving reports and editorials on lynching, analyses of black and white crime, and calls to Christian morality. The *Palmetto Leader* helped give voice to the anti-lynching crusade in South Carolina, and as an important early advocate for African American civil rights in the state, its efforts to initiate lynching reform from within the black community merit recognition.

The lynching era is one of the most disgraceful, regrettable chapters in American history. Between 1880 and 1930, an estimated 3,220 blacks and

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<sup>1</sup> *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, South Carolina), May 23, 1925, p. 4. Politically, the *Palmetto Leader* was an organ for the moribund Republican Party in South Carolina.

of my wicked Heart began to rise—which made me think of the Expression of a good man speaking of Dangers of the Christian not a Duty performed but a Temptation follows—Lord forgive the Sins of my Duties!

[December] 29<sup>th</sup> Preached this Evening from Revelation 2:4-5<sup>154</sup>—but alas! In but a poor Frame—tis poor Preaching when my good master is not with me.

*(To Be Continued)*

<sup>154</sup> Revelation 2:4-5: "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Hutson preached on the same verse on November 10 (see diary, November 13, 1757).

723 whites died at the hands of mobs in the South.<sup>2</sup> Lynching was so much a part of society in the United States during these years that W. Fitzhugh Brundage, a leading historian on the subject, noted that many people came to view it as a "measure of American distinctiveness."<sup>3</sup> Mark Twain even dubbed America the "United States of Lyncherdom."<sup>4</sup> Despite the prevalence of these extralegal activities, the U.S. Congress never passed anti-lynching legislation. African Americans, therefore, had no federal protection against these crimes. Decades later, the U.S. Senate apologized for its passive role in the lynching epidemic. This gesture provided little solace for the victims of lynching and failed to expunge memories of this dark period from America's past. Unfortunately, atonement for the victims of lynching and the crime's lasting impact on the African American community has come far too late.<sup>5</sup>

One of the first steps in reconciliation is to examine honestly these past crimes against African Americans, and one understudied aspect of lynching history in the United States can be found in the African American community's response to such acts through its newspapers. With the failure of Congressional intervention, black agency manifested in the press was an important vehicle used to speak out against lynching during the early twentieth century. In South Carolina, which had one of the highest incidence of lynching in the country (although still considerably lower than that of its neighbor Georgia), evidence of black willpower to end mob violence was abundant.<sup>6</sup> Much of this resolve was demonstrated in black-owned newspapers, such as the *Palmetto Leader*, a product of the state capital's black population from 1925 to 1959. However, then as now, the black press often went unnoticed by black and white communities alike. In Gunnar Myrdal's classic 1944 study *An American Dilemma*, he stated that

<sup>2</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>3</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under the Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 1; quoted in Mark Twain's *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays, 1891-1910* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 485.

<sup>5</sup> "A Sorry History: Why an Apology from the Senate Can't Make Amends," *Washington Post*, June 19, 2005, sec. B.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; John Hammond Moore, *Carnival of Blood: Dueling, Lynching, and Murder in South Carolina, 1880-1920* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 54-58. Moore cites Frank Shay's *Judge Lynch: His First Hundred Years* (which, in turn, used data from the *Chicago Tribune* and the NAACP) for the number of southern lynchings that occurred from 1882 to 1937. South Carolina recorded 180, while Georgia's total was 531. Hammond discusses explanations for why the number of lynchings in South Carolina seems low when compared to states like Mississippi and Texas, but also ponders why many more lynchings occurred in South Carolina than in North Carolina and Virginia, both of which recorded about 100 lynchings

most whites were "entirely unaware" of the black press, while well-off African Americans shunned it as unprofessional and unpolished.<sup>7</sup> Yet, it was through the black press that black protest was given an expression. Ultimately, these writings provide a window into how an oppressed people demonstrated unyielding determination to overcome inhumane, unlawful treatment.

The lynching-era black press did not just advocate against lynching, but endeavored to promote a variety of causes associated with its readers' basic human rights. John H. Murphy, editor of the Baltimore *Afro-American*, offered a statement of goals in 1920 that included fostering a newspaper that believed in itself, God, and the present generation; preserving liberties of the people; fighting to eradicate slums and provide jobs; and exposing corruption in politics. Campaigns against Jim Crow laws and discrimination against blacks in baseball were among the *Pittsburgh Courier's* causes. The *Chicago Defender* adopted a more general platform: "The obliteration of American race prejudice."<sup>8</sup>

#### COLUMBIA AND THE EARLY BLACK PRESS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Black newspapers first arrived on the South Carolina scene during Reconstruction, with the publication of the *South Carolina Leader* in 1865. The *South Carolina Leader* was short-lived, as were other black newspapers published in the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>9</sup> South Carolina possessed a large African American population, but it was extremely poor, very rural, and highly illiterate. As late as 1930, the illiteracy rate of blacks in South Carolina hovered at roughly 30 percent. The urban areas of Charleston (which was considered a "graveyard" for black newspapers), Greenville, and Spartanburg did not foster successful papers despite substantial black populations and coinciding opportunities to build extensive readerships.<sup>10</sup>

each. He attributes many of the lynchings to a destitute, rural way of life with poorly organized, transient communities and to the creation of new counties in the western part of South Carolina, in which inexperienced sheriffs and deputies reigned and the proportion of blacks increased during the period.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Lewis Suggs, ed., *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), ix.

<sup>8</sup> Roland E. Wolseley, *The Black Press, U.S.A.* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1971), 172-173.

<sup>9</sup> Suggs, *The Black Press in the South*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Theodore Hemmingway, "South Carolina," in Suggs, *The Black Press in the South*, 289-293. Little has been published concerning the South Carolina press during Reconstruction. Hemmingway asserts that there were major black papers in Beaufort, Georgetown, and Charleston during the Reconstruction period. For an overview of the black press in South Carolina after 1877, see Charles F. Behling,

The capital of South Carolina, Columbia, became home to some of the state's most flourishing black papers. Historian Theodore Hemmingway has described the Columbia papers, the *Palmetto Leader* and the *Lighthouse and Informer* (established in 1938), as "the principal voices of black protest in the state." Some historians have attributed the success of black newspapers in Columbia to the city's increasing affluence, which was reflected in the emergence of the black middle class. These papers catered to community news and the social life of moderately well-to-do African Americans, with features on their churches, schools, and associations, while simultaneously exposing a wider readership to the politics of lynching. With this combination of popular community updates and strong editorial opinions, the *Palmetto Leader* developed into a prominent South Carolinian paper. While some black weeklies only reached circulations of a couple of hundred, the *Palmetto Leader* peaked at 12,500 during World War II.<sup>11</sup>

The prosperity of the papers had much to do with the city of Columbia itself. By 1925 the *Manufacturer's Record* noted that Columbia had come to view itself as the "City—Unlimited." Emerging from the Civil War and "turning its attention to things much more progressive than historical memories of misunderstanding and desolation," the capital city expanded its industrial and business sectors.<sup>12</sup> Columbia became a regional transportation hub with eleven separate rail lines and 144 trains passing through daily. The railroad network improved communication greatly. The *State*, a white, Columbia-based daily, was distributed by train and reached most towns in South Carolina well before noon.<sup>13</sup> The Civic Improvement League had a landscape architect draw up a master plan for Columbia, which led to the completion of four new parks in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Facilities for education also improved greatly, as Columbia built six schools, two of which were high schools, in a decade.<sup>15</sup> By the birth of the *Palmetto Leader*, Columbia was thriving.

Race, nonetheless, was a significant barrier in Columbia. While the population of African Americans in the city grew from 8,790 in 1890 to

"South Carolina Negro Newspapers: Their History, Content, and Reception" (M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Hemmingway, "South Carolina," 291-293, 301. For more information regarding the growing affluence of black Columbians, see Arlecia D. Simmons, "Advertisements in *The Palmetto Leader*, 1925-1959, as Cultural Reflectors of an Emerging Black Middle Class" (M.A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Jack Wooten, "Columbia: The 'City-Unlimited,' State Capital of South Carolina." Reprinted from the *State*, June 4, 1925, *Manufacturer's Record* section, pp. 1-3.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 454-455.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 464.

22,195 in 1940, white residents remained in the majority, recording a population growth rate that was nearly twice the rate for blacks during those fifty years.<sup>16</sup> Racial tension, the threat of lynching, and severe economic hardship, especially among farmers, led countless African Americans to take flight to the North after the 1890s. Black businesses dropped from 10 to 5 percent of all such Columbia establishments between 1900 and 1930. Although there was no official residential segregation code in Columbia, the African Americans who remained in or moved to the city were largely confined to three sections: Waverly to the northeast, which boasted two colleges and two hospitals; Seaboard Park in the northwest, which stretched to the municipal waterworks; and the shanties along Lincoln, Senate, Pulaski, and Gates Streets to the south, between the University of South Carolina and the Congaree River. Furthermore, among white businesses downtown, Jim Crow was the rule.<sup>17</sup>

But the city made small strides in race relations in a number of areas during the intra-war years. About 1934 white-only movie theaters along Main Street allowed blacks into shows for the first time, albeit only after 11 P.M. on Saturdays. When the black operatic tenor Roland Hayes sang at the white Columbia Theater in February 1931, half of the seats were reserved for blacks. Perhaps it was more noteworthy that the white newspapers in Columbia, the *State* and the *Columbia Record*, began to take firm stances against lynching. In 1938 editor of the *State* William E. Gonzales, the influential son of a Cuban expatriate, even claimed that his daily was the first southern newspaper to oppose lynching outright.<sup>18</sup> The *Palmetto Leader* called the *State* "one of the fairest papers of the South."<sup>19</sup> In an August 1932 *Palmetto Leader* editorial entitled "Encouraging Signs," N. J. Frederick praised both the *State* and the *Columbia Record* for their articles on the achievements of two black, former Columbia residents, surgeon Dr. Luther O. Baumgardner and Hall Johnson, a musician who directed the internationally famous Hall Johnson Choir. Frederick stated, "We commend THE STATE and THE RECORD for their having given to their readers informa-

<sup>16</sup> John Hammond Moore, *Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 369-370.

<sup>17</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 485-486; Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 383-385.

<sup>18</sup> Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 384-385; Louis B. Wright, *South Carolina: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1976), 204. The *State* was not alone among white South Carolinian newspapers in its opposition to lynching. In a December 1935 article, the *Palmetto Leader* featured a bold statement from the *Greenwood Index-Journal*: "Get this straight: Lynching is without excuse. The South knows lynching is without excuse." *Palmetto Leader*, December 14, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, June 12, 1926, p. 4.



tion that teaches them that mere color of skin is no real barrier to altruistic accomplishment."<sup>20</sup>

The local white press also supported "black-initiated uplift efforts" like Rev. Richard Carroll's South Carolina Industrial Home for Negroes in Columbia.<sup>21</sup> Residents of the state capital came to fashion Carroll, who was of mixed racial heritage, as Columbia's own Booker T. Washington, and he presided over the majority of African American gatherings in the city.<sup>22</sup> Blacks in Columbia took on many efforts of community betterment, including the establishment of the Fairworld Institute, a facility for orphaned and abused girls. African American doctor Matilda Evans founded Taylor Lane Hospital and helped organize the Negro Health Association.<sup>23</sup> By 1930 many whites and blacks believed that black Columbians, through their ingenuity and hard work, had earned their place in mainstream society. In 1929, when W. E. B. DuBois visited Allen University, one of Columbia's two black colleges, he noted that his audience was "unusually intelligent and attentive."<sup>24</sup>

In the early twentieth century, African American leaders came to embody and encourage the values of the up-and-coming black middle class in Columbia. One of the most respected of these leaders was Nathaniel Jerome Frederick, editor of the *Palmetto Leader*. Born on November 18, 1877, in Orangeburg County, South Carolina, N. J. Frederick earned multiple bachelor's and master's degrees from his hometown Claflin University and Benedict College in Columbia, as well as a bachelor's degree at the University of Wisconsin.<sup>25</sup> He began his career of service to Columbia around 1901 as the principal of the Howard School, the city's only public high school for blacks at the time. The school provided two-and-a-half years of secondary education with "good industrial training" and in 1901 had a total attendance of 138 students.<sup>26</sup> While principal, Frederick read law and in 1913 established his own practice on Washington Street. The only African American lawyer in Columbia until the 1930s, Frederick occupied a prominent position in the city, serving as an attorney for numerous black organizations including the Knights of Pythias and Vic-

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, August 27, 1932, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 468-469.

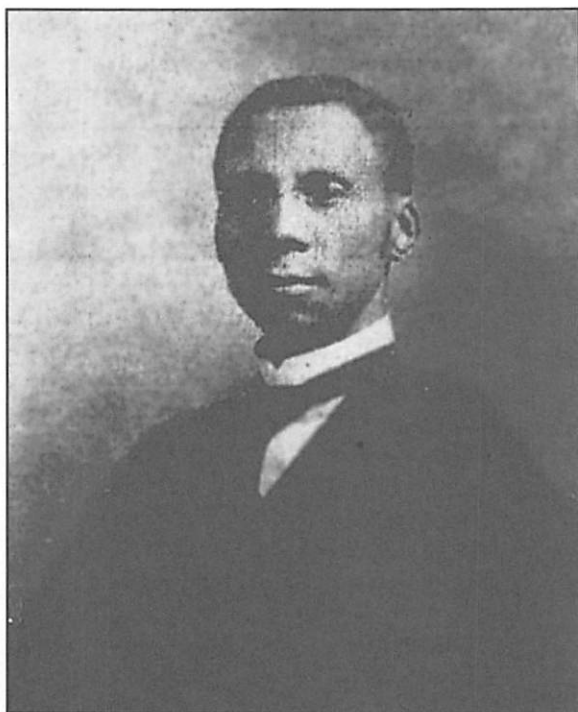
<sup>22</sup> Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 373-376.

<sup>23</sup> Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 468-469.

<sup>24</sup> Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 385.

<sup>25</sup> *Who's Who in Colored America, 1933-37*, 195, from the Vertical Files of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia; "Atty. N. J. Frederick, A Lawyer and Newspaper Editor Passes," unidentified newspaper clipping, *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> "The Nathaniel Jerome Frederick House," *ibid.*; "Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States, Vol. 1," *Department of the Interior Bureau of Education Bulletin*, no. 38, 1916, p. 505.



Attorney N. J. Frederick, editor of the *Palmetto Leader* from its founding in 1925 until his death in 1938. From *History of the American Negro, Volume 3: South Carolina Edition* (1919).

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tory Savings Bank, which he helped found. In 1932 he was appointed to the National Legal Committee of the NAACP, and he also acted as the county chairman of the Republican Party, serving as a delegate to the National Republican Conventions of 1920, 1924, and 1932.<sup>27</sup> As the founding editor of the *Palmetto Leader* in 1925, which he edited until his death in 1938, he earned the utmost respect from his readership. The author of his obituary stated, "He was regarded as one of the outstanding editorial writers of the South and to say the least he was a thinker whose thoughts lingered long with the reader."<sup>28</sup> George H. Hampton wrote that Frederick "was fearless as a writer, conservative as a leader . . . had the courage of his convictions," and desired to "further the cause of his race."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> "The Nathaniel Jerome Frederick House."

<sup>28</sup> "Atty. N. J. Frederick, A Lawyer and Newspaper Editor Passes."

<sup>29</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, September 10, 1938, p. 4.

As the *Palmetto Leader's* publisher and a successful printing-press owner, Hampton also occupied a leading position in Columbia's black community. A native of Laurens County, South Carolina, Hampton was born in 1890, received his college degree from Allen University in 1918, and by 1920 had founded the Hampton Printing Company. In 1925 he yielded to his "cherished desires" to publish a newspaper, which became the *Palmetto Leader*.<sup>30</sup> In his years with the weekly, Hampton addressed a wide variety of topics, including protests against the white primary, an end to job discrimination, a call for black graduate schools, and the eradication of lynching. Hemmingway stated that Hampton's "attacks on racial inequality raised the consciousness of black Carolinians to new heights and underscored a movement for equal rights in the state."<sup>31</sup> The *Palmetto Leader's* staff, though modest in numbers, provided not only a widely available vehicle to promote social justice, but also a model of positive leadership through the example of their own lives.

#### ANTI-LYNCHING SENTIMENT IN THE *PALMETTO LEADER*

In August 1940, the *Palmetto Leader* published an editorial entitled "The Making of a Newspaper," which defined the importance of the black press in the United States. The article began with overarching acclaim for African American newspapers in general: "In fact, the [black] newspaper is an asset and serves the social needs of the race as no other institution does in that it is the only mouthpiece that speaks for the defense of the race and advocates the cause of our people."<sup>32</sup> Ten years earlier, the *Leader* had stated that the "Negro Press endeavors to encourage the colored brother" and named a series of publications working toward this goal, including the *Chicago Defender*, *Kansas City Call*, and *Pittsburgh Courier*.<sup>33</sup> In 1940 the *Palmetto Leader* eloquently identified its objective to promote racial progress, a statement that justifiably placed it among the great black papers of the time: the *Leader's* aims had "been to render services to the public in general and the race in particular. Its columns carry news articles which tell of the progress of our people."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Who's Who in Colored America, 1933-37*, 229; *PEA Journal*, January 1957, 13, from the Vertical Files of the South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>31</sup> Hemmingway, "South Carolina," 293, 300; Papers of the NAACP, Part 7, Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1916-1950, Series A, Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953, NAACP Administrative File, Subject File: Lynching, South Carolina, 1914-1936 (microfilm).

<sup>32</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, August 31, 1940, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, October 4, 1930, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, August 31, 1940, p. 2.

Like African American papers across the United States, the *Palmetto Leader* confronted a variety of issues that gripped the black populace. From the black vote to the improvement of education to simple church bulletins, the weekly addressed an array of topics that promoted black well-being. To assert this agenda of black encouragement, however, the staff of the *Leader* needed a focus that had the power to resonate in the hearts and minds of all of its readers. At a minimum, the black community desired a freedom from the overwhelming fear that held their society captive, freedom from the fear of arbitrary abuse, injury, and even death at the hands of a mob.

In the mid 1920s, anti-lynching sentiment consistently occupied some of the most apparent front-page headlines of the *Palmetto Leader*. While black periodicals across the country decried lynching in a variety of fashions, the *Leader* came to use distinct tactics in order to promote its anti-lynching agenda. Though an array of positions emerged from the articles and editorials on lynchings and anti-lynching legislation, four primary strategies prevailed in the weekly. First, the *Leader* featured outright and eye-catching front-page denunciations of lynchings, in addition to disparaging commentary on these extralegal acts throughout the body of the paper. Second, it emphasized white crime, both in sheer statistical numbers and in the portrayal of the high degree of brutality with which whites committed offenses. Third, the *Leader* minimized black crime, which it frequently portrayed as petty and waning. Finally, the paper appealed to a higher sense of morality in the black community through editorials, as well as weekly poetry and commentary sections.

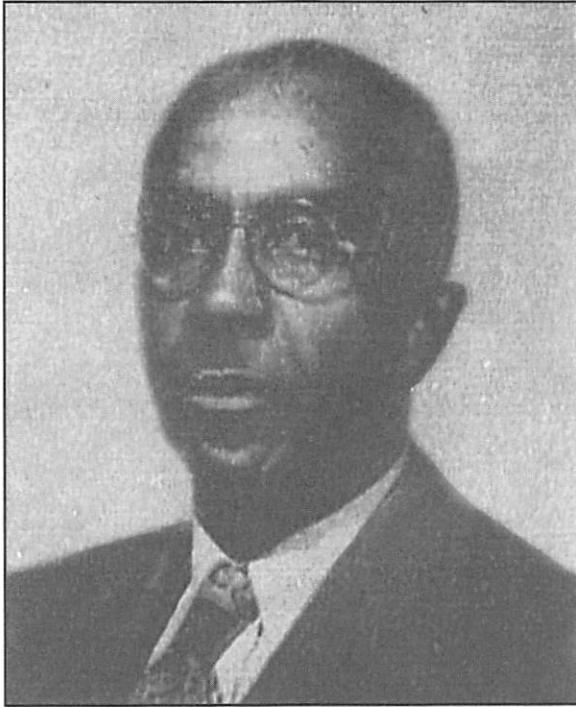
The *Palmetto Leader* condemned lynchings and the ways in which police and officials dealt with these atrocities in conspicuous gradations of intensity. The most noticeable, though infrequently used, presentation of anti-lynching sentiment in the *Leader* came by the means of a sensational headline. Sometimes the paper appealed directly for an end to lynching, as it did with the May 1925 headline "Segregation, Like Lynching, Must Go!"<sup>35</sup> It also made caustic remarks regarding the way in which state and local authorities handled lynchings: "Investigation, investigation! That's about all one hears after every lynching and there have been about 4,000 within the last thirty years. It does not take a Sherlock Holmes to find lynchings. But after they are found, what ever is done?"<sup>36</sup>

More often than not, however, denunciation was not quite as explicit. For example, in February 1926, the weekly asked its readers to "Urge the Anti-Lynching Law," encouraging a legalistic way to bring about an end to lynching.<sup>37</sup> The *Leader*, despite its strong opposition to lynching, eventually

<sup>35</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, May 23, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, October 16, 1926, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, February 27, 1926, p. 1.



**George H. Hampton, president of the Hampton Printing Company and publisher of the *Palmetto Leader*. From *Who's Who in Colored America, Supplement to the Seventh Edition* (1950).**

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began to frown upon lynching headlines, which it came to consider "hackneyed." In September 1930, the *Leader* questioned a front-page headline from a Darien, Georgia, Associated Press dispatch that it ran. An editorial the following week commented upon this "GEORGIA MOB LYNCHES NEGRO" news piece: "It would seem that the mere lynching of a Negro by a Georgia mob should cease to have great news value, so common has that practice become." The *Leader* then suggested that an article, "Farm Hand Held in Negro's Death," that had appeared in the same issue of the paper, but on the third page, should have received greater attention. A title like "WHITE MAN SHOOTS NEGRO ABOUT NEGRO'S WIFE" would have emphasized another aspect of white injustice and "would not be a hackneyed headline," as those of lynching pieces had become.<sup>38</sup> The *Leader*

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., September 13, 1930, p. 4.

moved away from the headline approach in denouncing lynching soon after its founding, perhaps in order to focus more on black uplift and the active pursuit of ending these crimes.

More direct and defined attacks on lynching appeared in the less conspicuous editorial section of the *Palmetto Leader*. In 1926 one such editorial noted, "After every brutal lynching there is now much condemnation. While that is encouraging yet that is not enough."<sup>39</sup> The staff of the *Leader* used the editorial section as a forum to make specific pleas to end lynching. In an August 1935 article, "Oh, Hum! Another Lynching," the editor directly appealed to the U.S. Congress to "recognize the fact that the American Government's first duty is to protect all of its citizens."<sup>40</sup>

Pleas by the *Palmetto Leader* perhaps had a greater chance of spurring readers to action when they pointed to particular states, white groups, or extralegal incidents with which readers were familiar. The especially bold March 1935 article "Georgia Believes in Lynching" referenced the unwillingness of South Carolina's southern neighbor to support an anti-lynching bill on the grounds of states' rights. The *Leader* derided Georgia for endorsing "the right of a state to murder helpless men, women and youths."<sup>41</sup> In a May 1930 editorial, "Defend Allen Green's Name," the weekly championed an Oconee County, South Carolina, man who had been lynched for a crime that he did not commit. The paper called for the death penalty for the lynchers and asked that "Green's name . . . be cleansed of the stigma that his lynching has attached to it."<sup>42</sup> The *Leader* in general highlighted events with which the readership could directly identify, such as church functions in Columbia. Thus, its discussion of lynching most likely possessed greater relevancy to readers when it concerned familiar people or places.

One such issue to which the *Leader's* readership could relate was the need for a Congressional anti-lynching bill, which had become the subject of a national debate. In the first years of the paper, just after World War I, there appeared an agreeable climate for passage of a federal anti-lynching law. The collective memory of the trauma of the war and the United States government's rhetoric of democracy provided an impetus for change on the domestic front. Furthermore, Republicans composed the majority of both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives during the 1920s, and President Warren G. Harding apparently supported anti-lynching legislation, stating that "Congress ought to wipe the stain of barbaric lynching from the banners of a free and orderly, representative democracy."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, October 23, 1926, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, August 3, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, March 16, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, May 3, 1930, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), 258-261. Republican Congressman George H.

The *Palmetto Leader's* editorials and short articles embraced the need for an anti-lynching bill. In the editorial section, the staff offered a wide range of beliefs and calls to action to promote such a bill. A January 1935 article, "Federal Anti-Lynching Law Needed," noted that juries of "friends and neighbors" could rarely be expected to convict perpetrators of lynching, even if they confessed. The editorial pointed to a specific case from South Carolina in which four lynchers were arrested, tried, and acquitted as an impetus for federal action, which was, in the *Leader's* opinion, the only way to ensure fair convictions.<sup>44</sup>

Congressman Leonidas Dyer of Missouri, a white Republican representing a heavily black area in south St. Louis, introduced an anti-lynching bill to the House of Representatives on April 11, 1921. The Dyer Bill defined lynching as murder of an American citizen by a mob of three or more, and it gave the federal government the ability to prosecute lynchers when a state neglected to do so. Participation by a state officer in a lynching, or a state officer's failure to hinder a lynching, was punishable by a minimum five-year prison sentence in the Dyer Bill, and counties in which lynchings occurred were required to pay \$10,000 to the victim's family.<sup>45</sup> The NAACP, headed by James Weldon Johnson, led a considerable effort to gain support for the bill. The 1919 "Red Summer" race riots in major cities like Chicago and St. Louis resonated in the minds of many northerners, who feared that lawlessness and lynchings would soon follow the black migration.<sup>46</sup> Many felt that such legislation would punish lynchers and participating sheriffs when state laws, including a similar law passed in South Carolina in 1896, failed to do so.<sup>47</sup>

Anti-lynching bills, nonetheless, met much resistance in Congress, with disagreements occurring over the constitutional relationship between the federal and state governments. Both those who supported and those who opposed the Dyer Bill had difficulty reconciling the Fourteenth Amendment's role in prosecuting individuals, whether lynchers or negligent state authorities. While some were content to let the courts settle such issues after passage of the bill, many others were not. The Democrats decided to filibuster the Dyer Bill in both the House and the Senate. Eventually the proceedings veered gravely off course, with Representative

White of North Carolina introduced the first anti-lynching legislation into the House of Representatives in 1900. It received almost no support.

<sup>44</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, January 12, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 258-262; George C. Rable, "The South and the Politics of Anti-Lynching Legislation, 1920-1940," *Journal of Southern History* 51 (May 1985): 201-209.

<sup>46</sup> Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 254, 258-259. A lynching in Duluth, Minnesota, in June 1920, confirmed this fear.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

Thomas Sisson of Mississippi declaring that white women needed lynching as a means of protection. Historian Claudine L. Ferrell also notes that the Republican Party was "apathetic and listless" in response to the filibuster. Few were emotionally invested in the bill, and the South, many Congressmen believed, did not need the help of the federal government in dealing with lynchings.<sup>48</sup>

While the Dyer Bill ultimately failed to pass in the Senate, with arguments for states' rights prevailing, it nonetheless provoked a notable response from the black press in support of federal legislation to combat lynching. The NAACP, in conjunction with a national coalition of black women called the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, raised money to run ads in both black and white papers throughout the United States. One such ad was entitled "The Shame of America." It stated, "Do you know that the United States is the Only Land on Earth where human beings are BURNED AT THE STAKE?" After the Dyer Bill failed, proposed legislation containing similar provisions, such as the January 1934 Costigan-Wagner Bill, received the same enthusiastic backing from the black press, along with the rallying support of the NAACP, but to no avail.<sup>49</sup>

The *Palmetto Leader* expressed adamant support for specific anti-lynching measures, notably the Costigan-Wagner Anti-lynching Bill. A May 1936 editorial, which referenced W. A. Dickerson, a police chief in Georgia who ignored a lynching, stated, "The authors of the Costigan-Wagner Anti-lynching bill knew what they were doing when they put in a provision dealing with such officers."<sup>50</sup> The editorial decried a wide spectrum of groups and individuals for their failure to endorse anti-lynching bills. In May 1935, the *Leader* cited the Florida legislature's stand against the Costigan-Wagner Bill as "outrageous," given the recent and highly publicized lynching of Floridian Claude Neal.<sup>51</sup> The weekly also indicted mem-

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 263-266, 272, 336. Claudine L. Ferrell, *Nightmare and Dream: Antilynching in Congress, 1917-1922* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), 278-279.

<sup>49</sup> Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 270-271, 341-343, 357-358; Robert L. Zangrando, "The NAACP and a Federal Antilynching Bill, 1934-1940," *Journal of Negro History* 50 (April 1965): 106-108. The Costigan-Wagner Bill, proposed by Senator Edward Costigan of Colorado and Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York, defined lynching as murder by three or more persons, imposed imprisonment for law officers who acted negligently during the crime, and suggested prison sentences of five-to-twenty-five years for lynchers. It also included financial penalties for counties in which lynchings occurred. The Costigan-Wagner Bill failed to pass because, like the Dyer Bill, it met a filibuster in Congress. After 1937 Dray states that deaths from lynching steadily decreased and were generally condemned by the public. Thus, the need for such a bill was not as pressing.

<sup>50</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, May 2, 1936, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., May 25, 1935, p. 4. On Claude Neal, see James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of a Lynching: The Killing of Claude Neal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).



bers of the black community for their lack of support for the bill. The editor noted in the January 1935 article "Why the Failure?" that sixty-four of sixty-five presidents of black colleges with whom he had communicated did not make public statements in favor of the bill. The editorial criticized these leaders:

If their silence is the result of fear on their part, then what hope can there be for the developing of manhood in those who go to them for improvement? If it is indifference, then they are the wrong men in the wrong place. If they lack courage, they are not abreast of the growing and decent sentiment of the South. College presidents like other men in positions of leadership should take bold stands in those things which will result in the ultimate good.<sup>52</sup>

In spite of opposition or apathy in the larger black community, the *Leader* believed that anti-lynching legislation had the power to produce change for African Americans and that lending support to these efforts was a major means of black agency. In noting the decline in lynchings from 1920 to 1924, the *Leader* quoted the *San Francisco Bulletin*: "Part of the effect has been produced by the campaign carried on by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People . . . Anti-lynching bills in Congress have made people stop and consider what was going on."<sup>53</sup>

In its editorials, the *Palmetto Leader* also recapitulated the words of anti-lynching leaders that appeared in other newspapers as a means of supporting its own goals of direct denunciation. One such leader was Senator Matthew M. Neely, a white Democrat from West Virginia, who was the subject of a May 1935 editorial. The paper printed a statement from Neely about the Costigan-Wagner Bill: "If there is a single phrase, or sentence, or syllable in the Constitution to the effect that the United States cannot protect its humblest citizen, of whatever color or creed, against blood, against blood-curdling barbarities, such as were inflicted for more than 10 hours upon the agonized body of Claude Neal, such phrase, or sentence, or syllable is a disgrace."<sup>54</sup> Through the words of a potentially influential white Congressman, the *Leader* conveyed its anti-lynching objectives to its readers, while placing them in the larger framework of national sentiment. Occasionally, the paper expressed its gratitude to anti-lynching leaders it believed were particularly helpful to the cause. It singled out

<sup>52</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, January 26, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, May 23, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, May 18, 1935, p. 4.

Walter White, national secretary of the NAACP, for his participation in the investigations of the 1926 Aiken, South Carolina, triple lynching.<sup>55</sup>

While the *Leader* was largely a community paper, it took a broader, national approach in its agitation against lynching. The weekly frequently cited published pieces in other newspapers, including white publications, juxtaposing its opinions with theirs. In the January 1928 "Symposium of Editorials on Lynching Record for the Year," the *Leader* published editorial selections from white papers around the United States. Some papers, such as the *Norwich Bulletin* (Connecticut), did not blatantly decry lynching. Its December 1927 article "Mississippi Still Leads" simply reported the decline in lynchings from 1926 to 1927 and their geographical distribution. But the *Leader* brought the piece and others like it to the attention of its readership because they suggested that recognition of the South's lynching problem was widespread.<sup>56</sup>

Other white papers cited in the January 1928 summary, such as the *Baltimore Sunday*, condemned lynching outright: "So marked a decrease naturally encourages one to feel that we progressed considerably in civilization in the last year. But we can not have much to be really proud about until our lynching record has been brought much nearer to the vanishing point." The most potent statements pointed to specific incidents and injus-

<sup>55</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, May 11, 1935, p. 4; NAACP Administrative File, Subject File: Lynching, South Carolina, 1914-1936. See also Elizabeth Robeson, "The Lowman Lynchings of 1926," 1-19 (Paper delivered at the Citadel Conference on the Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina, Charleston, S.C., March 6, 2003, and available on the Internet at [www.citadel.edu/civilrights/papers/robeson.pdf](http://www.citadel.edu/civilrights/papers/robeson.pdf); accessed May 30, 2006). Robeson describes the events leading to the October 8, 1926, lynching. On April 25, 1925, at the farm of Sam and Annie Lowman, just outside of Monetta in northern Aiken County, the Lowmans' children Bertha and Demon and their nephew Clarence were involved in a shootout with Aiken County Sheriff Henry Hampton Howard and his deputies Nollie Robinson, A. D. Sheppard, and R. L. McElhaney. The sheriff and his deputies were purportedly there on a whiskey raid and somehow shots broke out between the officers and the Lowmans. Annie Lowman and Sheriff Howard were killed, and Demon, Clarence, and Bertha were wounded. Though there were no witnesses to Howard's death, the Aiken County Grand Jury indicted Clarence Lowman for the murder, as well as Demon and Bertha as accessories. They were found guilty on June 12, 1925, with Clarence and Demon to be executed by the electric chair and Bertha sentenced to life imprisonment. Because details and witnesses to the event were vague and unclear, the black community protested the sentencing, and eventually N. J. Frederick stepped in with an appeal to the South Carolina Supreme Court. He argued successfully for the exoneration of the three in October 1926, but jailer Rupert Taylor, Nollie Robinson, and A. D. Sheppard removed the Lowmans from their cells and drove them to the outskirts of Aiken, where one thousand people joined in their lynching. The incident received wide attention because of N. J. Frederick's contact with the NAACP and over three dozen dispatches by reporter Oliver Garrett to the *New York World*.

<sup>56</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, January 21, 1928, p. 1.

tices closer to home, however, while also calling for action. The *Enquirer-Sun* of Columbus, Georgia, declared: "Every thoughtful person knows that in Georgia the Negro charged with an offense is still usually given less consideration than the white man similarly charged . . . The next step for Georgians to take is to insure that when a prisoner approaches the bar, the scales of justice shall not be permitted to weigh his color."<sup>57</sup>

The *Enquirer-Sun* was not the only paper that spoke to discrepancies between the handling of white and black crime in the South. The *Palmetto Leader* used these differences as a means to convey its disapproval of lynching and its desire for racial equality. A May 1935 article entitled "The Value of Life—A Contrast" chronicled the trials of a white man and a black man arrested for murder in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Though their crimes were very similar, the white man received life imprisonment, while the black man was sentenced to only three years in jail. The most notable difference between the two cases was that the black murderer killed another African American male. The *Leader* easily explained this phenomenon: "The colored boy had taken only the life of another Negro—and such a life is not regarded too highly in the administration of the law."<sup>58</sup>

Such disparity in punishment between blacks and whites may have been the basis for the *Leader's* unspoken policy of emphasizing white crime. The weekly not only pointed to extreme cases of white brutality, terrifying instances of mob mentality, and the ever-increasing numbers of whites in jails, but also accentuated white crime through its use of rhetoric and typographic style. A March 1925 article about an ex-policeman who killed a young African American in Florida noted that he was justly sentenced to twenty years. The *Leader* called attention to the crime by quoting a correspondent of the NAACP: "The evidence submitted to the consideration of the jury must have been so convincing and damaging that they brought in a verdict of guilty against the WHITE murderer of a Negro!"<sup>59</sup> The sarcasm suggested by the tone and the exclamation point, as well as the capitalization that emphasized the race of the criminal, doubtless would have made an impression on the reader.

The *Palmetto Leader's* most frequently employed method of stressing white crime was to call attention to its brutality. Headlines such as "Stabs Colored Boy to Death," "Refuse to Prosecute White Man Who Attacks a Colored Woman," and "Lynched Thru Prison Walls" ran frequently on the front pages of the *Leader* throughout the 1920s.<sup>60</sup> In the body of such articles, reporters often explained the brutality of white crimes in much detail. A

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., May 11, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., March 7, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., November 21, 1925, p. 1; *ibid.*, July 31, 1926, p. 1; *ibid.*, May 22, 1926, p. 1.

March 1935 article, "Negro Sings at Lynching," offered a meticulous account of a grizzly lynching that was perpetrated by fifty white men:

He was placed atop a small coach automobile, with a rope around his neck. The other end of the rope was suspended to a tree. One of his captors drove off in the car, throwing him from the top, and leaving his body dangling at the end of the rope.<sup>61</sup>

A similarly graphic account of police brutality appeared in a February 1936 editorial about how several law officers in Mississippi obtained murder "confessions" from three blacks: "They were beaten with straps in which there were nails, and a rope was placed around the neck of one."<sup>62</sup> The *Leader* also evoked the image of mob violence, which inherently conjured many frightening connotations for blacks. In a February 1926 article, "Eleven Men Assaulted a Colored Girl," the *Leader* depicted the horrific account of the three-day kidnapping in which the fourteen year old was held without food and subjected to repeated assaults.<sup>63</sup> Though this was not an example of a lynching, it was an equally effective display of the threat of white mob violence. Highlighting the fact that the victim was a child and giving details of the incident allowed the *Leader* to make white crime seem more unpredictable and appalling.

In 1925, according to the *Palmetto Leader*, white crime was on the rise. The newspaper repeatedly pointed to statistics indicating that whites had outdone and continued to outdo African Americans in the realm of criminal activity. A July 1925 report originally published in the *Greenwood Record* stated, "More than 80 per cent of the crime of today is being committed by white people."<sup>64</sup> Two weeks later, an editorial noted that of the 599 inmates in the South Carolina State Penitentiary, whites greatly outnumbered blacks.<sup>65</sup> The *Leader* also quoted many judges as authorities on these trends. In January 1925, a circuit judge in Abbeville, South Carolina, said, "The Negro in court is now the exception to the rule."<sup>66</sup>

Reports of high numbers of incarcerated whites still prevailed in 1935. An editorial on the Columbia police report for May of that year stated that 375 white men were arrested during the month, as compared to 276 black

<sup>61</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, March 23, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, February 1, 1936, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, February 13, 1926, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, July 4, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, July 18, 1925, p. 4. The *Leader* noted at the time that this statistic could have been deceptive, as many more blacks were sent to various county chain gangs.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, January 17, 1925, p. 4.

men.<sup>67</sup> A contemporary work, Arthur Raper's socioeconomic study *The Tragedy of Lynching*, corroborated the *Leader's* claims. Raper noted that assessments of prison populations and court records in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina pointed to a slight increase in white crime, accompanied by a decrease in black crime.<sup>68</sup> Reporting such statistics helped the *Leader* to spread its message of black self-respect, while attacking widespread stereotypes of black criminality. "Evidently colored people are trying to obey the law more than the whites," the *Leader* editorialized. "They know there are no 'pulls' for them."<sup>69</sup>

The *Palmetto Leader* de-emphasized black crime, on the other hand, either by portraying the offenses as harmless and petty or by pointing out blacks who were accused of crimes they did not commit. In commenting on the 1925 record of Columbia's Juvenile Court, N. J. Frederick reported information from the chief probation officer: "Colored offenders led the whites in petty larceny charges while the whites led the colored in grand larceny cases. Count on the whites always for the grand things, while the colored brother seems satisfied with the petty things."<sup>70</sup>

In contrast with its emphasis on the brutality of white crime, the *Palmetto Leader's* articles on black crime were rarely sensationalized. For example, the *Leader* focused on relationships between black men and white women, which though taboo, were not nearly as serious as the appalling acts of white violence that it reported. A press account about Herman H. Jackson, a Los Angeles black man who married a white woman in Tia Juana, Mexico, and was later arrested for "attempting to see" her, made the news as a minor crime with a potentially harsh prison sentence of two-to-one hundred years.<sup>71</sup> In a similar Associated Negro Press article, a judge in Philadelphia ordered a thirteen-year-old African American boy to "cease any 'kissing activities' for the rest of his life" after he kissed a white girl in the schoolyard.<sup>72</sup> Another minor black offense that the *Leader* frequently profiled was the common traffic violation. The April 1925 article "The

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, June 15, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 34. Raper cites studies by Hugh Fuller for the Georgia Department of Public Welfare, H. C. Brearley's *Homicide in the United States*, and J. F. Steiner and Roy M. Brown at the Institute of Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina.

<sup>69</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, June 15, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, January 17, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, April 16, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, January 24, 1925, p. 3.

Negro Always at Fault" expressed disgust with the common practice of blaming blacks for car accidents:

If a colored person is unfortunate enough to run down a white person, he is a drunken brute, a speed demon, a reckless scoundrel. If on the other hand, a colored person is run down by a white driver, it is an unavoidable accident—or rather the colored person ran into the white man's automobile . . . The car, useful as it is, has added one more burden to the Negro, has intensified his problem.<sup>73</sup>

As it did with the automobile accidents, the staff of the *Palmetto Leader* often highlighted news stories in which blacks were wrongly accused. In such cases, whites sought to take action both extralegally and through the court system. In Maryland, the *Leader* reported, a mob tried to lynch a black man accused of rape by a sixteen-year-old white girl. The man was innocent of the crime altogether, as the girl later confessed that the real perpetrator "was a white man whom she was trying to 'protect.'" The *Leader* then denounced such false accusations and lynchings as a whole: "We wonder just how many colored men have been sent to eternity for the 'protection' of some white brute. Lynchers don't want the truth, they want beastial [sic] fun."<sup>74</sup> The *Leader* also pointed to wrongful-guilt cases arrived at by due process of law. In an Alabama trial, four young black men were legally condemned to life in prison for a murder committed by a white woman, and they served their sentences until the killer's accomplice, on his deathbed, finally confessed.<sup>75</sup>

The weekly also highlighted incidents in which other newspapers falsely accused blacks of crimes and misdemeanors. The March 1925 article "Looting by Negroes" reported on supposed looting that occurred following a fire at two hotels in Palm Beach, Florida. The commentary noted that newspapers were quick to blame blacks present at the fire for the looting: "The highly imaginative reporter . . . flashed to the waiting world that much looting was done, 'chiefly by Negroes.'" The front pages of the newspapers of the country took pride in spreading the report.<sup>76</sup> Officials later discovered, the *Leader* reported, that blacks had actually carried the white-owned goods to safety.<sup>76</sup> In a similar July 1927 piece with the byline "Negroes previously thought to have started riot innocent of crime," the *Leader* noted that officials had wrongfully accused blacks of an assault that incited a riot in Coffeyville, Kansas.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, April 25, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, August 22, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, July 24, 1926, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, March 28, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, July 9, 1927, p. 1.

Faced with the threat of lynchings, wrongful accusations, and general disrespect, African Americans often turned to the church and Christian morality as a way of dealing with feelings of alienation from white society. According to one study, over 30 percent of the *Leader's* content was "religious comment." Church bulletins comprised entire pages of the paper and traced the religious happenings in black communities throughout the state. This study also noted that "community and church news often overlap."<sup>78</sup>

Given the prominent role of the church in African American life, the staff of the *Palmetto Leader* naturally called on Christian leaders to take some responsibility in denouncing lynching. A November 1930 article, "Lynching and the Church," commended the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America for the words offered against lynching during an October meeting. The *Leader* published the council's statements concerning the sudden increase in lynchings in 1930:

In such a situation the churches cannot stand inarticulate and inactive. Unflinchingly they must face the question 'What are the churches doing to prevent these barbarities and to change the state of mind that produces them? . . . We are gratified to note encouraging signs . . . by the outspoken declaration of a body of influential Southern churchmen, calling upon every pastor in their denomination to 'cry aloud against this crime of crimes.'

The importance of church support was increasingly clear to the *Leader*: "We feel sure that the cooperation of the Federal Council is greatly needed, for the place where the lynchings take place is commonly called the 'Bible Belt.'"<sup>79</sup> The *Leader* felt that the church should take a stand against people who let "Christianity and lynching go hand-in-hand."<sup>80</sup>

The *Leader* not only relied on the church for moral guidance in the fight against lynching, but also published its own articles designed to lead blacks down a moral and honest path in life. Many of these pieces had black youths as their target audience. In a January 1925 series, "Moral Code for School Children: In God We Trust," the *Leader* told children that to be "happy, useful citizen[s]," they needed to possess courage and hope, truth and honesty, and helpfulness and unselfishness. The *Leader*, attempting to raise a morally conscious generation that would be prepared to embrace methods of black agency, advised children to "always be hopeful because

<sup>78</sup> Behling, "South Carolina Negro Newspapers," 61-62.

<sup>79</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, November 15, 1930, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, January 2, 1937, p. 4.

hope is power for improvement."<sup>81</sup> "Short Talks to Young Folk," an article by S. D. Redmond, furthered this goal of youth outreach:

And when we are talking to the youth of today, we are talking to the men and women of tomorrow, and the men and women of tomorrow can be no better than the foundations the youth of today are laying. We shall reap no better harvest than we sow.<sup>82</sup>

Associated Negro Press articles, which included reports on ministers nationwide who called children to a religious life, also appeared in the *Leader*. One such piece, "Christian Conduct Will Solve Race Problem," quoted Rev. Charles A. Tindley of Philadelphia: "It is imperative that the Negro must believe in Christianity if he is to raise himself." In paraphrasing Tindley, the article concluded that "if true Christianity is taught in the home there would be few wayward children."<sup>83</sup>

The *Leader* not only appealed to the morality of children, but also to that of adults. The newspaper spread its moral message in the 1920s to older readers partly through a poetry section that William D. Robinson compiled entitled "Stray Leaves." Robinson called for both "amateurs and poet-aspirants" to send him "type-written, 'real poetry.'" The works that he decided to publish, though usually not making direct references to lynchings, encouraged brotherhood and unity in a time marked by fear and inexcusable deaths. "Our Little Worlds," a poem by Robinson, asked readers to empathize with their fellow Americans:

What would life be if all of human cares  
Fell upon each of us,—if every heart  
Was torn by humanity's every pang?  
If each would taste each other's sweat and tears and blood?<sup>84</sup>

The poems also frequently called for personal strength in response to the great adversity that African Americans historically faced. One such work published in the *Leader*, "Shells," encouraged blacks to triumph over their hardships and helped them realize that these trials would in fact make them stronger: "Have the fierce buffets of the storms of strife / Polished to beauty thy rude shell's rough curls?"<sup>85</sup> The "Locals and Personals" section offered

<sup>81</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, January 31, 1925, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, April 11, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, March 28, 1925, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, April 11, 1925, p. 3.



bits of encouragement to its black readers, as well. A poem by Mrs. E. S. Nelson in 1925, a year of much reporting on crime, told blacks to:

Hang on, Cling on,  
No matter what they say;  
Push on, Sing on,  
Things will come your way.<sup>86</sup>

The poems, many of which came from the paper's actual subscribers and readers, embodied the beliefs and sentiments of the Columbia community that the editors targeted each week.

#### CONCLUSION

By 1940, the *Palmetto Leader* had made much progress in the achievement of its social goals. During the year of the inception of the paper in 1925, barely a week passed in which a headline on lynching did not appear on the front page. In both 1925 and 1926, lynching headlines were all but inescapable. Articles entitled "13 Lynchings Are Recorded in the First Six Months," "Eighteen Lynchings in U.S. in 1925," and "Lynching—First Six Months 1925" dominated the pages of the *Leader*.<sup>87</sup> South Carolina and the nation were in a panic over escalating levels of crime during the mid 1920s. With the end of World War I and the onset of Prohibition, the underworld of organized crime emerged. Both the white and black communities came to view this new form of more "mobile" and "random" crime as increasingly frightening.<sup>88</sup> In 1925 the *Leader* frequently reported on crime across the United States. A January 1925 article, "Fighting the Pistol," discussed black fears associated with increasing levels of crime: "There is a homicide mania throughout this country. It is dangerous to walk through the streets of our cities."<sup>89</sup> The paper also identified problems in specific cities. An October 1925 article reported on a crime wave that struck Birmingham, Alabama, and a January 1925 editorial pointed to the paper's hometown as the recent scene of many homicides: "There have been of late entirely too many murders in and around Columbia."<sup>90</sup> A climate of fear of lynchings and crime in general was prevalent throughout the reports of the 1920s.

Nineteen thirty marked the last year of heavy reporting on individual lynchings. In July of that year, the *Leader* employed rhetoric that harkened back to 1925, and articles such as "Mob Spirit Rampant in White South"

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, August 8, 1925, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, July 24, 1926, p. 1; *ibid.*, January 9, 1926, p. 1; *ibid.*, July 11, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 337.

<sup>89</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, January 31, 1925, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, October 3, 1925, p. 1; *ibid.*, January 10, 1925, p. 4.

reappeared. In the first six months of 1930, there were nine lynchings across the country, which equaled the number of lynchings that had occurred by July of each of the years 1925, 1926, and 1927, the *Leader* reported.<sup>91</sup> As the 1930s progressed, headlines on lynchings became less frequent, and the fearful mood waned noticeably. Articles on lynchings moved to the latter pages and to the editorial section and frequently addressed very specific aspects of the problem. An August 1935 article, "States Rights Lynchings Go Right On," expressed concerns over the use of states' rights arguments in suppressing federal anti-lynching legislation. The emphasis had shifted from reporting on lynchings to focusing on staff opinions of lynching politics. The number of lynching articles in general had diminished, as well.<sup>92</sup>

While the *Palmetto Leader* would be published until 1959, N. J. Frederick's death in September 1938 marked a turning point in the newspaper's content and purpose. Arlecia Simmons, in her study of advertisements in the *Palmetto Leader*, argues that the paper shifted to almost exclusively church and social news in its final two decades. Zack Weston, one of the last editors of the *Leader*, attributed financial problems to the paper's demise. Simmons, nonetheless, also suggests that John H. McCray's competing newspaper, the more militant *Lighthouse and Informer*, which began publication in 1938 in Charleston and moved to Columbia in 1941—and which Weston himself called the "real newspaper at the time"—had become the more influential of the two by the 1940s.<sup>93</sup> Charles F. Behling supports this claim, noting that there was "almost no interracial or intraracial news on any of the front pages" of the *Leader* in 1939 and that there was a "sharp decline in such comment" in the editorials, as well.<sup>94</sup> In

<sup>91</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, July 5, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, August 10, 1935, p. 4.

<sup>93</sup> Simmons, "Advertisements in *The Palmetto Leader*," 60-62. Simmons suggests that the *Leader* was successful as a means of black uplift for the middle class of Columbia, promoting black businesses of all varieties, including those of women, and black education. The *Palmetto Leader* itself suggested that its reach went well beyond professional Columbian blacks. On July 26, 1930, on p. 1, it quoted George Shuyler in his column "Views and Reviews" from the *Pittsburgh Courier*: "It is one of my pleasures each week to read Roy Wilkins' column in the *Kansas City Call*," as well as "the editorials in the *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, S. C.)." On January 3, 1931, on his p. 4 editorial, N. J. Frederick suggested the *Leader's* extensive reach: "That the *Palmetto Leader* is respected is shown further by the nationwide quoting of its editorials by the black and white press alike." Frederick nonetheless acknowledged failures of the *Leader* to reach certain groups. On February 6, 1932, on p. 4, he noted, "It is really pathetic how colossal is the ignorance of Negroes of school and college age concerning happenings of moment to their racial welfare," which he attributed to their "lack of acquaintance" with the black press.

<sup>94</sup> Behling, "South Carolina Negro Newspapers," 60-61.

contrast, nearly 40 percent of the front page of a 1943 issue of the *Lighthouse and Informer* concerned interracial topics, with 36 percent of editorials dedicated to such issues.<sup>95</sup> Theodore Hemmingway likewise concluded that, "although the *Lighthouse and Informer* echoed the concerns of the *Leader*," it was McCray's paper that delivered the "most telling blows against racial inequality within the state."<sup>96</sup> With the loss of N. J. Frederick, a major example of black uplift, the most important chapter in the history of the *Palmetto Leader* closed.

When in 1997 historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage suggested that "we need to know more about the lasting effects of lynching on the cultural sensibilities of blacks and whites," he meant that a comprehensive study of lynching will come only when we understand the true emotional impact that these extralegal activities have had on people of both races.<sup>97</sup> The *Palmetto Leader* was not simply an amalgam of articles aimed at reporting news. It represented the voice of a people who took a brave stand at a time when their lives and dignity were in jeopardy. By outright denunciations of lynching, the weekly made known its goal of standing up to mob violence. Stressing white crime, while minimizing black crime, N. J. Frederick and his staff gave their black readers confidence that they were not an inferior, unruly people. Finally, by pointing to religious activities and righteous codes of conduct, the paper gave its subscribers a moral message of hope that ultimately came from within. What was seen in this distinct set of tactics was not only a highly organized call to end lynching, but also a means of black agency, a way of awakening a community to do something for itself, of which the *Leader's* staff, especially N. J. Frederick, was the ultimate example. By 1940 the *Palmetto Leader* had told "of the progress of our people," a progress that would continue to be achieved through the modern civil rights movement and beyond.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>96</sup> Hemmingway, "South Carolina," 301.

<sup>97</sup> Brundage, *Under the Sentence of Death*, 14.

<sup>98</sup> *Palmetto Leader*, August 31, 1940, p. 2.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The South Carolina Encyclopedia*. Edited by Walter Edgar. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. Pp. xxiv, 1078; \$75, cloth.)

With this splendid volume, University of South Carolina historian Walter Edgar and a team of dozens of editors and hundreds of contributors have brought forth an immensely absorbing and truly prodigious work of original scholarship. Book reviewers who read the *South Carolina Encyclopedia* from cover to cover, of necessity, will approach it differently from the intended readers. The latter will sample, savor, and revisit it to their profit for years to come. But reading it straight through has its rewards, particularly for non-natives. That has especially been the case for this reviewer, whose exposure to the Palmetto State outside the history books has been limited to all-too-brief visits to Charleston, South of the Border, and Pawleys Island. There is in these expansive, heavily illustrated pages, much, much more.

The reader does not have to go far into the alphabet before being impressed with the variety of topics. Here are entries on politics and battles, to be sure, but also on cuisine, popular culture, religion, geography, and most gloriously of all, a wealth of mini-biographies of the great and the not-so-great: poets and entrepreneurs, saints and rogues, sports figures and naturalists, and dozens of ordinary people who showed quiet courage during the civil rights era that changed the whole South. A random sequence of contiguous entries from just two pages (pp. 1022-23) gives a flavor of the variety: "White, Vanna," "White lightning," "White primary," "White-tailed deer," and "Whitefield, George." Longer essays on broader themes, such as slavery, rice culture, the Civil War, the textile industry, World War II, and the civil rights movement, ground the volume in the broader flow of southern and American history.

The diversity and comprehensiveness of subject matter are no flukes. Edgar wisely began by researching the few similar projects commissioned by other states. He assembled a distinguished board of advisers of more than fifty individuals from around the country, each with some special knowledge about South Carolina, its history, and its people. Even more wisely, he devoted significant time and budget to planning the elaborate architecture of a project that would span nearly a decade and involve hundreds of authors. He enlisted associate editors in charge of nineteen broad subject areas. These, in turn, drew up lists of potential entries and recruited authors. It must have been a fascinating dialectical process when Edgar and the associate editors gathered to consider, sift, and perhaps horse-trade about which suggested subjects to include. Not all made the