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Book Review: Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century

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Moore, Winfred B., Jr. and Orville Vernon Burton, editors. *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina during the Twentieth Century*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2008. ISBN 13: 978-1-57003-755-9, ISBN 10: 1-57003-755-8. 470 p. \$49.95.

This book is a joy to read. The product of a conference on civil rights history held in 2003 at the Citadel (located in Charleston, S.C.), *Toward the Meeting of the Waters* is an engrossing collection of essays, addresses, question-and-answer sessions, and first-hand accounts concerning the civil rights era in South Carolina. The format of this work is unusual in that it is a mixture of scholarly essays and first-person accounts by South Carolinians, black and white, who were direct participants and witnesses of the civil rights movement in South Carolina during the 1950's and 1960's.

An important theme arising out of the conference was the relative silence of journalists and academics sympathetic to the civil rights cause during this era. This silence is explained but not excused by the rigidity of segregation at the time and also by the self-censorship often practiced by journalists and others. However, this book is not a collection of *mea culpas* but is, instead, a far more interesting investigation into the rise and ultimate success of the civil rights movement in one of the strongholds of the segregated South.

The context for the civil rights era is set by several of the historical essays covering the early and mid twentieth century concerning topics such as lynching and the Ku Klux Klan. This is followed by more essays in regard to civil rights efforts by the NAACP, the freedom riders, and others, and then a section about those who fought back against the rising civil rights movement. The "Retrospectives" section is particularly fascinating with assessments of the success (or lack thereof) of the civil rights movement in South Carolina made by historians as well as participants of the movement.

For this reviewer, one of the most affecting accounts was provided by the major civil rights historian, Dan Carter (Emeritus Professor of History at the University of South Carolina), who provides an assessment of the changes he has witnessed over the course of his life. Growing up as a rural white South Carolinian, Carter noted that he at first uncritically accepted segregation as the "normal" order of things even though he had no personal animus toward blacks. However, his growing awareness of the evil and injustice of racial segregation is vividly depicted starting out in 1952 when as a 12-year old boy he witnessed the harsh enforcement of back-of-the-bus seating by a bus driver on a terrified young black girl. Tellingly, Carter notes that what struck him at the time was the rudeness of the bus driver rather than the injustice of his action. A more personally disturbing encounter with the consequences of segregation occurred to Carter while fishing with a couple of older black friends one day. Carter thought he was being complimentary when he innocently remarked upon the attractiveness of the young black women he and his friends (on different days, thanks to segregation) had seen at a burlesque show at the Florence County Fair. To Carter's shock, his friends immediately "recoiled as though they were physically struck" and one walked away.

The authors and speakers at the 2003 conference include such notable historians as John Hope Franklin, Dan Carter, and Tony Badger; civil rights activists such as Harvey B. Gantt, Matthew J. Perry, and Constance Curry; as well as public figures such as former South Carolina Governor and U.S. Senator Ernest "Fritz" Hollings.

Toward the Meeting of the Waters makes an important contribution to the historiography of the civil rights movement in general and it is especially important due to its focus on South Carolina. Compared to other Southern states such as Alabama and Mississippi, relatively little has been written about South Carolina's experience of the civil rights movement.

This reviewer can enthusiastically recommend the book to anyone interested in the history of the civil rights movement and it would be appropriate for both public and academic libraries. This title fits perfectly in collections emphasizing Southern history, African American history, and civil rights history. Thanks to its unique combination of short essays and first-person accounts, *Toward a Meeting of the Waters* would be a

good work for college professors to assign to students to read either selectively or as a coherent whole. *Toward the Meeting of the Waters* is that relatively rare book that will appeal to both the academic community and to members of the general public.

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Brinkmeyer, Robert H. *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950*. Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. ISBN 13: 978-0-8071-3383-5. 413 pp. \$49.95.

In this study, Brinkmeyer, professor of English and southern studies at the University of South Carolina, focuses on the ways white southern writers of the 1930s and 1940s were influenced by the rise of European fascism, and to a lesser extent, communism, in their depiction of the south. The title refers to the three ghosts which Lillian Smith, in Killers of the Dream, cited as major influences on southern culture: black women, whose liaisons with white men cast a shadow over southern life; the rejected children of such liaisons; and the black mammy, who was adored by white children and then rejected. Brinkmeyer argues that, during the 1930s and 1940s, southern white writers “turned outward” and emphasized European fascism to the extent that it became a fourth ghost.

The author discusses both non-fiction and fiction writers. Among non-fiction writers, he includes the Agrarians, a group of intellectuals centered in Nashville, Tennessee, including Allen Tate, John Crow Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Robert Penn Warren. Their most famous work was a book of essays entitled I’ll Take My Stand, whose title implies a defense of the traditional southern way of life. The Agrarians found much in the pre-modern feudal society of Europe which they admired, but they rejected comparisons of their ideas with those of the Nazis. William Alexander Percy, a Mississippi writer whose most famous work was his memoir Lanterns on the Levee, also favored traditional southern ways but felt that modern industrial society had killed those forever. As a first hand observer of events in Europe, Percy blamed modern, not traditional, society for the rise of fascism.

Two other non-fiction writers, W.J. Cash and Lillian Smith, equated southern culture with fascism. Cash, whose major work The Mind of the South emphasized continuity between the old south and new, saw a resemblance between the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. Smith, a native of Clayton, Georgia, opposed segregation and warned parents not to raise their children like “little Nazis.”

The fiction writers also emphasized the connections between southern culture and fascism. Carson McCullers and Lillian Hellman agreed with Cash and Smith that southern culture resembled the authoritarian state of Nazi Germany. Hellman, a strong defender of the Soviet Union, saw an unbroken line of capitalist influence running throughout southern history, but Katherine Anne Porter changed from attacking traditional southern culture to defending it and connected fascism with modern society. William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Robert Penn Warren all became nationalists in the 1940s. Faulkner and Wolfe both supported World War II, but Wolfe kept his prejudices against blacks and Jews, while Faulkner called for a gradual move toward integration of the races. Warren, on the other hand, thought that writers should stay away from promoting the war effort, believing that there should be “many contending voices” rather than just one or two.

Brinkmeyer’s book is an interesting and clearly written review of some of the most important writers of southern literature. The author makes a convincing argument that European fascism strongly influenced these authors. He does not, however, show that fascism rose to the level of importance of the three ghosts (black women, rejected children, black mammy) presented by Lillian Smith. These ghosts, all tied to the concept of race, are deeply ingrained in southern history and culture over time. European fascism was a