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## Book Review - A Church, a School: Pulitzer Prize-Winning Civil Rights Editorials from the Atlanta Constitution

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## Off the SHELF

### **A Church, a School: Pulitzer Prize-Winning Civil Rights Editorials from the *Atlanta Constitution***

By Ralph McGill, with a new introduction by Angie Maxwell (University of South Carolina Press, 2012: ISBN 978-1-61117-129-7, \$14.95)

The University of South Carolina offers the contemporary reader more than a simple reissue of Ralph McGill's 1959 Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Church, a School* in its current Southern Classic Series imprint.

McGill's role in the American Civil Rights Movement is unique but often forgotten. Rather than participating in marches or offering fiery speeches, McGill wrote for southern whites about a glut of issues in which he would sprinkle anti-segregation and pro-integration rhetoric. Already influential locally as a reporter and editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, his reach expanded nationally once his column entered syndication. McGill was able to affect more whites (whom he believed to be largely sympathetic to the Civil Rights struggle, even if for self-serving reasons) than any other white writer, and he supplemented African American leaders who spoke to African American audiences and more liberal whites.

Dr. Angie Maxwell, Assistant Professor of Political Science, and Diane D. Blair, Professor of Southern Studies at the University of Arkansas, begins the reprint of *A Church, a School* with a succinct but highly detailed and well-researched introduction to McGill and his writing. Even more importantly for the reader, she incorporates annotations of the collected

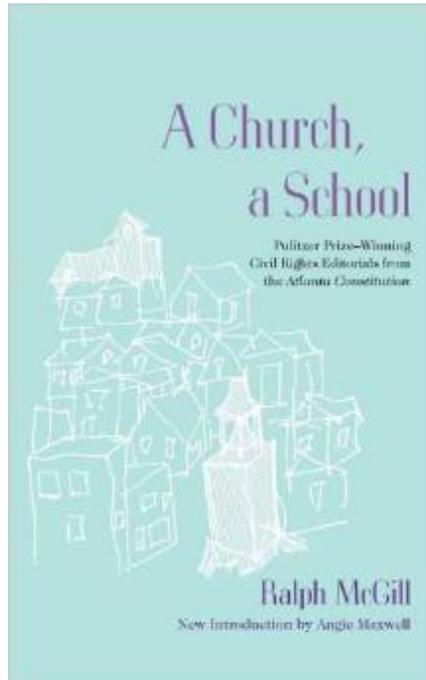
essays, intertwining them into her biography of McGill.

The only drawback of the expanded and reprinted *A Church, a School* is the lack of context for contemporary readers of McGill's essays. Notes on the actual essays would have proved very useful, similar to the value of

Maxwell's introduction. Even those readers who are very familiar with the individual tragedies of the American Civil Rights Movement, such as the 1958 Atlanta synagogue bombing, would benefit from notes providing a clearer context. Basic notes simply identifying court cases, events, and persons would be very welcome. The collection, existing as a time capsule of Civil Rights commentary of the day, loses some of its impact with the lack of context that McGill's original readers would have had in 1959.

As a collection of readings to supplement other texts (perhaps in a high school or college course), *A Church, a School* proves most useful. Reading straight through the essays is difficult not only due to the lack of context but also because they were not originally planned as a single volume. Although they were compiled in 1959 after McGill's Pulitzer win, they first appeared as newspaper columns and were thus a series of individual works that one would have read over the course of a year.

For those libraries that already own a copy of the 1959 *A Church, a School*, the current reprint is well worth the low list price—truly, the



introductory essay alone is worth the purchase. For those institutions (academic, school or public) that never purchased the original—especially those in Atlanta or the American South—this small, pleasantly-printed volume will be a great addition. As an introduction to

Ralph McGill and his role in the American Civil Rights Movement, it also succeeds.

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