REINTERPRETING SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORY:
THE SOUTH CAROLINA NEGRO WRITERS’ PROJECT, 1936-1937

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Ronald and Paula Hoffman, who have supported my academic career in every possible way. Their seemingly endless supply of advice, encouragement, and good cheer made this work possible and for this I am extraordinarily grateful.

This thesis is also dedicated to the friends I have made in Columbia during my stay here. Having a strong support network has let me remember that school isn’t everything and there is always time to relax a little.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my husband Todd, who read two years worth of papers, endured countless hours of complaints, and agreed to move to South Carolina just because I asked him to.
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It would only be fair to the reader to say frankly in advance that the attitude of any person toward this story will be distinctly influenced by his theories of the Negro race. – W.E.B. Du Bois, 1935

From 1936-1937 the South Carolina Negro Writers’ Project provided employment opportunities for blacks under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Writers’ Project. The project employed ten writers and gave them license to document the history of blacks in the state in their own words. The project’s goal was to produce a Negro Guide to South Carolina, and though it was never published because the project folded after sixteen months, the work fit into larger national trends in black history pioneered by the writings of black historians W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter Woodson. This thesis will discuss two themes evident in the project: how the South Carolina Negro Writers’ Project was representative of ways in which black Americans attempted to revise their history and how that reinterpretation was relevant to contemporary issues. In doing so, it will address specific topics in the draft of the Negro Guide and how those topics appeared in the published state guide, as well as discuss approaches of black writers’ projects in three other southern states. To place the Negro Writers’ Project in context, this thesis will first discuss contemporary black historians, the rise of academic black history programs, and the New Deal.

In 1941, the Federal Writers’ Project published *South Carolina—A Guide to the Palmetto State* which incorporated little of the text prepared by the Negro Writers’ Project. Because white editors ultimately decided what black history to include in the guide, the book was unrepresentative of the state as a whole and disregarded legitimate attempts to reinterpret black history. The South Carolina Negro Writers’ Project has not been examined since the Federal Writers’ Project folded and drafts were deposited at the South Caroliniana Library on the University of South Carolina campus. This New Deal initiative was part of a larger movement toward identifying with black culture and history, but because it has not been thoroughly examined to date, an important segment of documenting the state’s history has been overlooked for nearly seventy years. Discussing the Negro Writers’ Project in the context of larger advances for blacks in the early twentieth century offers a glimpse of how black South Carolinians viewed their placement in the state’s history. A discussion of the twin themes of revision and relevance and how they are reflected in the writings of black historians W.E.B. Du Bois and Carter Woodson will serve as a contextual basis for the motives of black writers in South Carolina.

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed a discovery in appreciation for black history and culture and at the helm of this movement was W.E.B. Du Bois. Interest in black Americans rose among both blacks and whites and stemmed from various sources: racism at home and abroad during World War I, the establishment of black history programs in colleges, conflicting interpretations of the role of blacks in Reconstruction, and the discovery of black folklore among white historians and sociologists. Du Bois focused on instilling pride among the nation’s blacks by refuting
derogatory historical accounts and urging blacks to appreciate their heritage and culture. One of the most popular historical works of the time was Ulrich B. Phillips' *American Negro Slavery*, a text reminiscent of antebellum apologist works that promoted the idea of a submissive and content slave society. Additionally, lingering schools of thought at such noted institutions as Columbia and Johns Hopkins universities promoted views of Reconstruction that sympathized with the white South and degraded blacks, and many historians in the early twentieth century supported these theories.\(^2\) In response, black historians refuted these claims and urged blacks to interpret their own history, as opposed to allowing white interpretations to proliferate. As the editor of *The Crisis*, the periodical produced by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Du Bois reached a growing audience of middle-class blacks. His reinterpretation of black history was strongest in his *Black Reconstruction in America* where he argued that the only histories of Reconstruction written at the time were produced by "passionate believers in the inferiority of the Negro."\(^3\) In his effort to correct these accounts, Du Bois drafted this 730-page essay that discussed the attributes of blacks during Reconstruction and also spoke of unfolding events and concerns for the 1930s and beyond.

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\(^2\) Norman Yetman, "The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection," *American Quarterly* 19 (Autumn 1967): 534-553. Yetman argues that this interest provided the basis for the collection of ex-slave narratives prior to a similar narrative collection undertaken by the Works Progress Administration and the Federal Writers’ Project. In Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction in America*, the author discusses white academic treatment of black history in a chapter entitled “The Propaganda of History.” On pages 713-719, Du Bois refers to the teachings of John W. Burgess and William A. Dunning at Columbia University, and a similarly oriented program at Johns Hopkins University. Du Bois states that the Columbia school of historians issued sixteen studies of Reconstruction in the Southern states between 1895 and 1935 that were based upon sympathy with the South, ridicule and contempt for blacks, and a judicial attitude toward the North. Today these views on Reconstruction are recognized as highly inaccurate.

\(^3\) Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 381.
As a revisionist work, *Black Reconstruction in America* taught its audience that blacks throughout the South shared a significant and positive past, and this shared history should be promoted and built upon by professional black historians. Revealing the scope and relevance of Du Bois’s work, a review of *Black Reconstruction in America* stated the following:

The modern interpretation of history demands that the writer not only record historical events but that he interpret those events in terms of the social, economic, and scientific background of the era in which they took place. Judged by this standard, W.E.B. Du Bois’ latest book, *Black Reconstruction*, proves such method achieves an authenticity lacking in works whose sole purpose is to record without the recognition of consequential influences. Because of its revaluation of material that has been misinterpreted or glossed over for propaganda purposes, the book is a most significant contribution to American historical studies.\(^4\)

The review concluded by stating that regardless of its other features, Du Bois’s book was valuable for exposing previous writers of their “preconceived, biased opinions.” Du Bois ended his essay with a bibliography divided into several sections starting with “Standard Anti-Negro Sources,” which listed nineteen authors and their best known works in addition to a footnote that stated these authors believed that blacks were subhuman and unfit for citizenship and suffrage. Other bibliographical sections included “A Bibliography of Propaganda,” “Historians that are Fair to Indifferent on the Negro,” and “Research by Young Negro Scholars.”\(^5\) In his writings, both academic and mainstream, Du Bois stressed a revision of black history, brought attention to how that history played into contemporary events, and urged that more accurate accounts of black history could ultimately shape the future. Du Bois set a precedent to be followed by both his peers and later historians and effectively shaped how blacks wrote and interpreted their role in

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American history.

Like Du Bois, Carter Woodson worked to promote black pride and a more even-handed account of black history. In 1915, Woodson established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to educate the black public of their historical contributions to society. Woodson’s Association published the *Journal of Negro History* and the *Negro History Bulletin*, both of which served a literate black public and fostered continued interest and educational pursuits. Several of Woodson’s books including *A Century of Negro Migration*, *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis, 1800-1860*, and *Negro Orators and Their Orations* all served to spread awareness among blacks, both in academia and in the general public, of the wealth of information white historians neglected in their accounts of blacks in history. In 1935, Woodson wrote *The Story of the Negro Retold* to teach high school students the true history of blacks in the United States. Claiming history texts ignored blacks to that point, Woodson’s goal in this work was to teach black youths about their history in the hopes that they would ultimately think for themselves rather than let others act for them.

Woodson also wrote of current situations in black culture, including the state of public health, education, and social services and in doing so, wrote in a pedagogical tone to his audience.6 This particular work complemented Du Bois’ revisionist slant by teaching blacks of the contemporary lessons to be learned from history. In their writings, Du Bois and Woodson introduced blacks to many aspects of their own culture, reaffirmed beliefs that blacks held about their rich and worthwhile past, and instilled a sense of hope for the

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future.

These nationally-known historians sparked a trend in new interpretations of black history. Academic efforts at Fisk and Southern universities focused on documenting the history of black Americans in the form of ex-slave narratives. These schools instituted programs to interview former slaves in an effort to record the experience of slavery while those involved were still living. These particular projects also cultivated interest in black culture among white writers and historians, and introduced scholars of both races to the unique and varied experiences of blacks living in the South before 1865. In South Carolina, several white writers conducted similar interviews and published works written in dialect that fed the growing interest among whites in black culture. However, as similar as these efforts appeared to those of black writers, there existed a noticeable difference in the accounts of black history written by whites. The academic accuracy of local histories, the tone, and the attention to a lower economic class as opposed to the black middle-class that black writers concentrated on, all combined to create an entirely different approach to black history in the South and specifically South Carolina.⁷

While black historians stressed a need for more representative accounts of black history, Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided an

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⁷ Yetman, “The Background of the Slave Narrative Collection,” 541-543. South Carolina writers such as E.C.L. Adams and Julia Peterkin wrote of black folk life in the state emphasizing the daily routines, conversations, and concerns of blacks. In works like Congaree Sketches, Adams wrote short stories in black dialect about blacks living in the Columbia area. A review of the work stated that Adams did not use sociology, but rather included “just the record of what this certain type of Negro thinks about, talks about, and how he does both.” (E.C.L. Adams Papers, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, The State, 5 June 1927.) In Roll, Jordan, Roll, Peterkin used ex-slave narratives to link white customs to those of South Carolina blacks. Peterkin stated that with generations of contact with Negroes behind them, white southerners showed the influence of black ways and ideas. “They are infected with the Negro wish to please, the wish to live with a minimum of labor, and the willingness to discard ambition for contentment and enjoyment.” Julia Peterkin, Roll, Jordan, Roll (Thirty Bedford Square, London: Jonathan Cape, 1934), 19.
outlet for unemployed writers to document their state's history for a series of guidebooks under the Federal Writers' Project. Included under the umbrella of the project, black and white writers documented local histories by transcribing cemetery, church, and county records, though the primary focus of the project was the guide series. Federal Writers' Project workers also collected ex-slave narratives, blending earlier academic pursuits of blacks with the interest in black folklore expressed by whites. National Director of the Federal Writers' Project Henry Alsberg was determined to include black Americans in both drafting the guidebooks and in the written text, and in 1936 he established the Office of Negro Affairs headed by poet and Howard University professor Sterling Brown.

Brown hoped to make the guides “readable and appealing to intelligent, liberal Americans of whatever race,” and in his capacity as Editor of Negro Affairs, he worked to ensure that blacks were hired to work on guides and that black history was given fair attention within them, a problem more common in the southern states. At the urging of Alsberg, the South Carolina Writers' Project, directed by Mabel Montgomery, established a separate Negro Writers' Project in January of 1936 to employ black writers.

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8 For detailed background information on the New Deal and the WPA, see William F. McDonald, Federal Relief Administration and the Arts (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1969). In his introduction, McDonald writes that “Federal One” which included the Federal Arts, Theater, Writers' and Music Projects, grew from two ideas: “that in time of need the artist, no less than the manual worker, is entitled to employment as an artist at the public expense, and that the arts, no less than business, agriculture, and labor, are and should be the immediate concern of the ideal commonwealth.” Information regarding the New Deal that is specific to South Carolina can be found in Jack Irby Hayes, Jr., South Carolina and the New Deal (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001). For general information on South Carolina blacks in the 1930s see I.A. Newby, Black Carolinians (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1973) and Edwin D. Hoffman, “The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Equal Rights in South Carolina, 1930-1939,” The Journal of Negro History 44(4): 346-369.

The project, lasting only sixteen months, was eventually terminated due to staff reductions.\(^{10}\)

South Carolina's black writers incorporated growing academic trends by attempting to correct misconceptions about black history and instill pride for black contributions. From January 1936 to July 1937, ten black writers collected contemporary and historical information about blacks in the state and drafted essays and biographical sketches for the proposed Negro Guide to South Carolina. Ultimately the guide was never published, and a limited amount of the work was incorporated into one chapter entitled "The Negro" in the 1941 South Carolina guide.\(^{11}\) The essays the black writers prepared abided by current thoughts among black historians to reinterpret the history of blacks in America. Essays also focused on how that revised history applied to contemporary events and concerns in the form of essays on the state of education, the economy, and religion. Due to Alsberg and Brown, black WPA writers executed creative license in their interpretations of black history and culture. For South Carolina's black writers, this license resulted in interpretive essays on blacks in the state under slavery, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow.

\(^{10}\) WPA Records, Record Group 69, Administrative Correspondence, Box 42, "Employment." Mabel Montgomery was an upper-class white woman from Marion County, South Carolina and she directed the state writers' project from 1935-1941. Montgomery held a degree from Winthrop College, and her professional background included teaching, writing for several newspapers, working the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and preparing material for the state's adult education program. Under her tutelage, seventy-six writers prepared essays and driving tours for *South Carolina — A Guide to the Palmetto State.* (Mabel Montgomery Papers, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.)

Led by Elise Ford Jenkins, a black Columbia woman, nine men and women collected information through personal interviews and sources at segregated black libraries in an attempt to relay the history of blacks in the state on their own terms. Negro Writers’ Project writers were Samuel Addison, Jr., Lillian Buchanan, Eva Fitchett, Mildred Hare, Augustus Ladson, Laura Middleton, Hattie Mobley, Robert Nelson, and Simmie Smith.\(^{12}\) Jenkins, educated at Benedict College, Fisk University, the Hampton Institute, and South Carolina State College, taught in Columbia schools and maintained an office for the Negro Writers’ Project at Benedict College in Columbia. Her husband and brother-in-law were prominent physicians in Columbia and established the city’s first hospital for blacks near the Jenkins’s home in the Waverly neighborhood. As supervisor of the Negro Writers’ Project, Jenkins edited material prepared by the black writers, worked with her staff to prepare an outline and index for the guide, and worked directly under State Director Mabel Montgomery. In choosing what topics to include in the guide, Jenkins concentrated most heavily on state history, with 1865 acting as a focal point, and also on guide material for travelers, especially important for blacks traveling through the Jim Crow South. At the urging of Brown and the Office of Negro Affairs, Jenkins shifted her focus to more contemporary accounts of black life in the state, although because the project was short-lived most material documented the original focus.

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\(^{12}\) The “List of Negro Workers on Federal Writers’ Projects” can be found in the WPA Index, Cabinet K, Drawer 1, Folder 21 (hereafter noted K-1-21), Manuscripts Division, South Carolinians Library, University of South Carolina. 1939 Columbia City Directory, (Richmond, VA: Hill Directory Co., Inc.); 1936 Charleston City Directory, (Charleston, SC: Baldwin Directory Co., Inc.) Though it remains unclear whether or not the NWP writers knew each other prior to working on the Negro Guide, according to South Carolina State University’s Catalog and Announcements, Mildred Hare and Augustus Ladson attended the Adult Teachers Summer School at SCSU in 1935. Eva Fitchett attended Summer School at SCSU in 1934 and Elise Jenkins attended in 1929 and again in 1938; Jenkins could have sought employees for the Negro Writers’ Project at SCSU based upon her experience there in 1929.
on historical events. Throughout her tenure as supervisor for the Negro Writers' Project, Jenkins adhered to the project's goal of "affording a very valuable contribution to the life and history of the Negro race in South Carolina."\textsuperscript{13}

Representative of the academic direction Du Bois and Woodson initiated, South Carolina's Negro Writers' Project chose revision and relevance as prevailing themes within the proposed Negro Guide. One essay written by Mildred Hare and entitled "Slavery of the Negro in South Carolina" stressed the lengths to which slaves went to be educated. While the published 1941 guide hardly mentioned education for slaves, Hare's essay accentuated its importance in gaining freedom from white slaveholders. "Realizing the value of learning as a means of escape, and having a longing for it too because it was forbidden, many slaves continued their education under adverse circumstances. Things went on with the slaves snatching a little knowledge here and there until the Reconstruction period."\textsuperscript{14} This essay not only stressed education as desirous for blacks, it emphasized the fact that blacks were not merely contented slaves as earlier historians taught and white writers implied in the published guide. While offering this reinterpretation of black education, Hare also addressed the importance of blacks gaining an education, a critical and controversial belief in the 1930s South. Hare again attempted to revise common thought and educate her audience with an essay entitled "Politics

\textsuperscript{13} Personal interview with Dr. Noble and Carol Cooper, son-in-law and daughter of Elise Ford Jenkins, 12 November 2004; "D.K. Jenkins Named to Replace Brother as Superintendent of Waverly Hospital," The Palmetto Leader, Columbia, SC 18 January 1936; WPA Records, Record Group 69, Administrative Correspondence, Box 42, "Instructions to Negro Field Workers," 10 March 1936. Also see Appendix II, "Index for the Negro Guide Book" for additional information regarding contents for the guide.

\textsuperscript{14} WPA Index, "Slavery of the Southern Negro in South Carolina," K-1-2, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
Among Negroes: Early Reconstruction." Hare's essay attempted to correct misunderstandings about black political activism after the Civil War. The essay began: "Referring to the Reconstruction period as a time of Negro rule is a misconception. It discloses a feeling of antagonism to participation of all elements of the population in the government because most of the local offices in the state were held by white men." Hare continued by stating that "the assertion that all Negro office-holders were ignorant and illiterate is false. Most Negroes fortunate enough to reach higher positions had attended colleges, and some of them had been graduated with distinction."\(^{15}\) Compared to the brief mention of black Reconstruction politicians given in the 1941 state guide, Hare’s essay defended black leaders and reinforced their capabilities as educated, qualified men while striking out against earlier schools of thought regarding Reconstruction.

This essay in particular presented two distinct messages. For white readers, Hare’s essay reinforced the educational achievement of blacks and aimed to "set the record straight." For black readers, the essay reminded them that blacks were prominent figures in state history and in doing so promoted racial pride. In considering the prevailing viewpoints on blacks and Reconstruction, black writers indeed would have brought a fresh perspective to the topic if their opinions were noted and published. A proud, defensive voice dominated this and other essays written by the black writers. Samuel Addison, Jr., addressed a particularly significant topic in his essay "The Emancipation." Addison wrote, "the Emancipation of the Negro marked a great day in

\(^{15}\) WPA Index, "Politics Among Negroes: Early Reconstruction," K-1-2, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
Negro life; it marked the breaking of the shackles that bound the race physically."16 Like Hare's work, this essay stressed a positive experience for blacks in the state that attempted to educate blacks of their past and inspire them to achieve in the present and the future. Other essays addressing historical topics included writings on "tribal" origins, slave revolts, and blacks in the military before and since 1865.

In addition to reinterpreting black history in the state, the Negro Writers' Project writers made a concerted effort to stress the importance of utilizing this history in everyday life by discussing contemporary issues and urging blacks and whites to work cooperatively during the hardships of the Depression. One essay entitled "Negro Education in South Carolina" took whites to task for their indifference to inadequate educational standards for blacks in the state, though it also mentioned a willingness from some white leaders to help improve education for blacks. Quoting Eleanor Roosevelt and including startling statistics, the author stated, "considerable progress in the education of the Negro in South Carolina has been made in recent years, but today we find conditions rather deplorable." The author went on to say that conditions were so bad because whites did not know the real situation in black schools.17 Another essay, written by outside consultant O.D. Reid and entitled "The Economic Future of the Negro in South Carolina," revealed the grim conditions blacks faced in the 1930s. Reid claimed that black farmers failed to adjust to changing economic conditions during the Depression, thus resulting in their majority status as poor tenant farmers and sharecroppers.

16 WPA Index, "The Emancipation," K-1-2, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

17 WPA Index, "Negro Education in South Carolina," K-1-2, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, no author listed.
However, he also considered the attitudes of white landlords in his essay, and blamed both blacks and whites for the state’s stagnant economy. While earlier essays positively discussed black history in the state, the goal of these two in particular again reflected the need for blacks and whites to organize and work cooperatively. Additional contemporary themes included a survey of black literature and authors, significant black educators, and travel information including accommodations, theaters, and restaurants that welcomed a black clientele.

In addition to discussing contemporary issues in an attempt to unify and organize blacks, the Negro Writers’ Project also made efforts to impart the proud heritage and noteworthy accomplishments of earlier and contemporary South Carolina blacks by including biographical sketches on prominent black leaders. These biographies focused predominantly on contemporary figures but they included many Reconstruction politicians as well. The black writers collected the majority of their biographical information from the individuals themselves, and all nine workers contributed to the biographical sketches. Educators, artisans and politicians received the most attention from the black writers, with religious leaders and heroic slaves complimenting the more contemporary information. The Negro Writers’ Project writers touted national leader Mary McLeod Bethune as the greatest educator of her day; teacher Celia Dial Saxon as “the most beloved and outstanding Negro woman in all of South Carolina;” and college

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18 WPA Index, “The Economic Future of the Negro in South Carolina,” K-1-4, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

19 WPA Index, “Outline for Negro Material” and “Materials for Guide Proper,” C-1-7, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
president Dr. John J. Starks as a man who, "in spite of handicaps due to racial identity," made "enviable achievements" to his country.²⁰

Non-contemporary figures receiving biographical sketches also supported the Negro Writers' Project's objective to let history shape contemporary figures and events. Reconstruction politicians Francis L. Cardoza, Thomas Ezekial Miller, and Beverly Nash received praise for their legislative accomplishments. Several of the Reconstruction politicians the black writers included were also mentioned in Du Bois' Black Reconstruction in America, thus supporting their merit as national, rather than simply local figures. Artisan E.A. Harleston merited the most expressive title for his biography: "A Negro of Genius Who Should Most Certainly Be Widely Known, Harleston! Who Is E.A. Harleston? Portrait Painter of Rare Renown." These biographies celebrated the accomplishments of South Carolina blacks, many of whom left the state to achieve their goals. Instilling pride and documenting success, the Negro Writers' Project writers intended to inspire their audience with these biographies, however few of the individuals singled out by the black writers appeared in the published state guide.

The Negro Writers' Project existed for sixteen months organizing and collecting material for the Negro Guide. Evidence of this work was shown in the "Index for the Negro Guide Book" for the state which outlined ten separate sections of material: "The Economic Future of the Negro in South Carolina," biographies, institutions, organizations, churches and religious organizations, music, folklore, folkways,

²⁰ WPA Index, Biographical Folder, K-1-1, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
miscellaneous, and "Negro Material by Whites." The Negro Writers' Project staff noted biographies for sixteen notable blacks in South Carolina, though eventually added many more, and miscellaneous topics included "Education of the Negro in Charleston Prior to the Civil War," "Memorable Scenes of the Coast," and "Inscription on Monument to Slaves in Fort Mill." "Negro Material by Whites" included essays that white writers prepared on topics such as superstition, folk customs and religious institutions, and each of these essays required Jenkins's approval. Though Jenkins and the black writers devised an index and outline for their guide, they only completed selected works before the Negro Writers' Project folded in 1937. The essays the Negro Writers' Project completed discussed slavery, politics, rural life, emancipation, and slave insurrections, in addition to business ventures, educational pursuits, and ministerial work by South Carolina blacks. These essays presented a strikingly different portrayal of black life than the 1941 guides' brief essay entitled "The Negro."

The essays prepared by the black writers addressed both historic and contemporary issues faced by blacks in the state, though their intended audience remained questionable, no doubt influenced by state office staff. Although the Negro Writers' Project aimed for a black audience, it contended with white supervisors, the possibility of white readership, and funding recommendations from a white-run state office. Perhaps due to these factors, several Negro Writers' Project essays addressed a white audience more so than black. One essay by Robert Nelson entitled "Early Negro

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21 WPA Index, C-1-7, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina. An April 1937 criticism of Negro material specifically asked about the economic future of blacks in South Carolina. Unfortunately the essay by that title was never published, thus leaving the question unanswered.

22 WPA Index, K-1-18, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
Life in the South Carolina Low Country" referred to black butlers as being loyal and taking great pride in copying the sayings of their masters. The same essay discussed friendly relations between blacks and whites in Charleston, and stated that "nearly all of the slaves had proved their love for their masters by staying at home during the four years of the war." An essay by Mildred Hare entitled "The Old Slave Market" stated that, "unfortunately the word 'slave' was given to the African...but the condition of the southern slave was the best of any peasantry in the world." Even if these ideas were in any way true, they spoke more to a nostalgic white audience than to a black audience only seventy years removed from slavery.

When the Negro Writers' Project folded in 1937 because of employment reductions, the white staff for the South Carolina Writers' Project was left with the work prepared by the ten black writers. Rather than publish the work as the intended separate guide or weave the essays and biographical sketches into the state guide, Mabel Montgomery chose to have white writers speak for blacks and draft new material. This eventually became the chapter entitled "The Negro." This decision eliminated any legitimate black representation in the state guide and skewed the image of life in the state for both blacks and whites. White writers simply could not appreciate or represent the perspective of blacks in the state, and because of that, they could neither interpret black history fully nor accurately speak of contemporary concerns felt among blacks.

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23 WPA Index, "Early Negro Life in South Carolina Low-Country," K-1-2, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

24 WPA Index, "The Old Slave Market," K-1-2, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
In their efforts to represent a black voice in the state, white writers left much to be desired. Memos from Washington, D.C. of that year claimed the material sent by South Carolina, though enormous in volume, was virtually worthless. The Office of Negro Affairs commented that “after devoting so much space to the ‘War Between the States,’ Reconstruction, Wade Hampton and his Red Shirts, and their connection with Negroes, naturally there was not wordage enough to present a realistic picture of the Negroes in South Carolina.” Additional editorial comments from the Office of Negro Affairs suggested that some of the redundant passages about Reconstruction be replaced with information concerning black South Carolinians, as they represented a large portion of the population. In their focus on Reconstruction, white writers did not follow the trends set by Du Bois and Woodson, but rather continued writing of the time period from a distanced white viewpoint. Furthermore, Alsberg requested that Montgomery “bring the Negro population into the contemporary scene whenever possible,” and noted that any outstanding contributions to the community should be mentioned.26

Ultimately the final South Carolina guide incorporated a minimal amount of the information black writers gathered over the sixteen months the Negro Writers’ Project existed, thus leaving the black residents of the state, which at the time comprised forty-five percent of the population, effectively silenced.27 Due to the closure of the Negro

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25 WPA Records, RG 69, Reports and Miscellaneous Records Pertaining to Negro Studies, Box 1, memo of 19 October 1938 from the Office of Negro Affairs to W.T. Couch, Federal Writers’ Project editor.

26 WPA Records, RG 69, Editorial Correspondence, Box 46, letter of 26 October 1938 referring to black population in Aiken, Anderson, Florence, Greenville, Greenwood, Rock Hill, Spartanburg, Beaufort, and Camden.

27 Federal Writers’ Project, South Carolina, information found throughout essays; population figure found on page 42.
Writers’ Project, the following information listed in its index never appeared in the published South Carolina guide: “The Economic Future of the Negro in South Carolina, twelve of the sixteen biographies, any of the four institutions, five of the six organizations, and three of the four churches and religious organizations. The guide also failed to include essays on black music, though the Negro Guide planned for eight such articles. Additionally, the 1941 guide included none of the “miscellaneous” topics. The guide covered folklore and folkways, though minimally in comparison with what the index indicated. In the one chapter devoted to blacks in the published guide, several “distinguished Negro leaders” were mentioned, although as stated above, only four overlap with those listed in the index. Presumably the black leaders referenced in the guide qualified as acceptable to a white audience, as white writers chose who to include.28 The few indexed topics the guide included were weak revisions of what the black writers initially prepared.

The nonexistent black voice in the 1941 guide exposed social viewpoints that South Carolina blacks and whites held in direct opposition. The issue of slave riots in particular reflected how both races accepted historical events differently. In a discussion of a slave uprising at Stono in 1739, the published guide reported from the viewpoint of Lieutenant Governor Bull, referring to murderous rebel slaves executed for their mischievous deeds. Alternatively, if the guide included the Negro Writers’ Project passage on the same event, black and white audiences would have read, “There must have been some substantial cause for this feeling of hatred evinced by so many Negroes

28 WPA Index, C-1-7, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Federal Writers’ Project, South Carolina, chapter entitled “The Negro,” particularly page 52.
toward their masters. The Negro slaves were human, and only a spark was needed to set such headed tinder to flames." Other instances of missing information further proved to discredit black material written by whites. The 1941 guide reduced entire essays the black writers produced to mere sentences. White editors transformed two essays on the 1822 Denmark Vesey insurrection to six sentences in the guide, abridged an essay that highlighted the oldest continuous lumber manufacturing operation in the South to two sentences on the J.J. Sulton Lumber Company in Orangeburg, and shortened an essay entitled "The Origin of the Color Line in Charleston" to two paragraphs. These changes resulted in fitting the black experience in South Carolina neatly within just ten pages. Though state officials commended the Writers' Project for their treatment of blacks in the state guide, the abbreviated text left holes in the state's long and distinguished history and clearly exhibited the history white writers and editors thought most important.

The perspective of white audiences can also be seen in editorial remarks on material submitted by the black writers. One essay prepared by Mildred Hare received compliments from Assistant State Director Louise Jones DuBose, though her remarks indicated the direction the state office believed appropriate for the Negro Writers' Project. Hare wrote an essay on lodges and quoted a ballad in her work. In DuBose's response, she commented that she was "excited to get as many of the ballads, work day songs, and real songs as we can get for the Negroes." Rather than focusing on folk songs, an increasingly popular subject among whites, Hare's essay discussed lodges that

29 WPA Index, "The Stono Insurrection," K-1-2, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina; Federal Writers' Project, South Carolina, 46-47.

30 WPA Index, K-1-21, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, letter of 18 September 1936 from DuBose to Jenkins.
accommodated black tourists, a topic relevant to the segregated policies that businesses employed in the 1930s. During that time in the South, most white-owned hotels and lodges did not welcome black tourists, a fact that Hare addressed in her essay. This piece showed the confrontation between the contemporary issues the Negro Writers’ Project wanted to address, and the cultural material white editors thought white readers would enjoy. It also proved how removed whites were from the contemporary black experience in the state, and how difficult it would be for whites to communicate effectively with a black audience. The themes of revision and relevance essentially disappeared when white writers wrote the essays intended for Jenkins and the black writers.

Black history seen through white eyes could not and did not accurately convey the personal investment black writers expressed in their own words. Evident in the comments from the Office of Negro Affairs, the content of the South Carolina guide lacked depth without the work of the black writers. The information on South Carolina’s black residents published in the guide essentially described blacks through their subservient past rather than depicting them in a present-day life. Because of the severe editing of material prepared for the Negro Writers’ Project, the efforts of blacks to revise their history and discuss its relevance in the present day appeared nonexistent. However, it is clear from the Negro Writers’ Project drafts that South Carolina blacks were not only familiar with larger trends in writing black history, they were directly in tune with the goals of Du Bois and Woodson, and therefore representative of the revisionist movement at large. However, South Carolina blacks did not stand alone on this frontier. Projects for black writers existed in three other southern states: Virginia, Louisiana, and Florida,
and South Carolina’s counterparts recognized the same larger trends in historical writing, though they chose to address them in varying ways.\textsuperscript{31}

Harkening to the progressive call of Du Bois and Woodson, writers in Virginia, Louisiana, and Florida, like their South Carolina counterparts, attempted to reinterpret black history in their state and place it in a larger context in order to motivate, organize, and inspire blacks throughout the South and the nation. Writers’ projects in these three states operated under the assumption that they would promote their local black history, but each met that goal in ways different than South Carolina. As the only published guide written by blacks, \textit{The Negro in Virginia} focused on instilling pride through the state’s storied colonial history. The Louisiana project attempted to eradicate racist behavior in the state by reinterpreting white-held beliefs of passivity among blacks. Similarly, black writers in Florida attempted to revise their history by focusing on the significance of folklore in the state. Each of these states offered new perspectives on black history and each merits discussion accordingly.

\textit{The Negro in Virginia}, noted since 1940 as a rich source of historical information, focused almost exclusively on colonial black history and folklore in the state. Black scholar Roscoe E. Lewis directed the project and worked cooperatively with Virginia State Director Budora Ramsay Richardson, a woman he described as being “unencumbered by racial bigotry.”\textsuperscript{32} In his preface to the text, Lewis stated that blacks were perhaps the most widely discussed and least understood element in America’s

\textsuperscript{31} Negro Writers’ Projects also existed in Little Rock, Arkansas and New York City, as well as in Illinois and Nebraska.

“racial pot-pourri;” it therefore seemed fitting that an all-black staff of educated writers prepared the states’ Negro Guide.33 Proudly claiming that most blacks could trace their ancestral roots to the New World in Virginia, The Negro in Virginia concentrated its text primarily on colonial and antebellum history rather than more current topics. The Hampton Institute sponsored the work and it was the only separate book on blacks the Federal Writers’ Project published.

The Negro in Virginia covered topics such as the community element of “slave row,” holiday celebrations for slaves, slave religion, and the slave trade. Rather than moving chronologically through time, the book includes topical essays with quotes from noted historians and ex-slaves, the latter of which are written in dialect form. The first 214 pages of the 352-page text spanned the period from 1619 to 1865, leaving approximately 130 pages to discuss history since the Civil War in addition to current issues like education, labor and the arts. The final chapter of The Negro in Virginia mentioned the “centers of Negro life” in each Virginia city, and said that “for a block or two everything is Negro; here is a little oasis—‘our street.’ Race pride is triumphant; here one need bow and scrape to no one.” In closing the book, writers stated that among blacks, “the cleared forests, the rolling farmlands, the bridged rivers, the thriving cities and towns, the stately mansions are mute testimony to his labors. Work has been his heritage, and his hope is that he may come some day into a fair share of the fruits of his labors.”34 Unlike the South Carolina Negro Writers’ Project which focused most on black society during Reconstruction, The Negro in Virginia concentrated most on a time


not when blacks were empowered, but rather when they were enslaved. Not only was this the opposite approach South Carolina’s black writers took, black writers in Virginia also revisited antebellum black history, a theme not quite in line with larger academic trends but of great importance to Virginians, especially white Virginians. In this way, The Negro in Virginia walked a fine line in that it recognized histories that appeased both white and black audiences – whites in their proud colonial and antebellum past as slaveholders, and blacks as enigmatic, living contributions to Virginia’s social scene.

Similar to the Virginia project in its focus on black history rather than on more contemporary events, the Louisiana Writers’ Project included a unit of black writers who worked on the Dillard Project, the state’s black unit based at Dillard University. This project stemmed from an overabundance of black writers in Louisiana seeking WPA employment. Like Virginia, the Negro Writers’ Project in Louisiana employed several professional writers, and it too focused predominantly on antebellum history. Invoking the message that black revisionist historians promoted, the goal of the Louisiana Negro Writers’ Project was to eradicate racist views by correcting myths of black passivity throughout the state’s history.35 Beginning in January of 1936, Dillard University history professor Lawrence D. Reddick directed the project, bringing with him prior experience in both black cultural studies and federal relief work. He guided the writers not only with his historical expertise, but also with experience he gained when collecting ex-slave narratives for Fisk University. Although the work prepared by Louisiana’s black writers never saw publication, Gumbo Ya-Ya, a book of folklore that Louisiana’s

white writers compiled, was printed in 1945. This text focused on romanticizing antebellum slavery in Louisiana, as opposed to stressing the cultural contributions of blacks, as the Dillard Project planned. *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, though a relevant source of local folklore, ultimately acted as an example of whites speaking for blacks, and lost some of the richness blacks could provide in the process. Like in South Carolina, the national academic trends of blacks reinterpreting their history were cast aside for white interpretations.

Presenting a more unique local approach, black writers in Florida concentrated on their rich heritage through folklore. Additionally, by concentrating on sociological and contemporary issues in addition to significant historical events, Florida’s black writers included more interpretive essays on their varied past. Though not named director until 1938, noted author Zora Neale Hurston supervised Florida’s black writers and due to her expertise on the topic, brought studies of local folklore to the forefront of the project. Unlike in Louisiana, there was no overabundance of black writers in Florida—employment quotas allowed for ten positions, though only rarely did writers fill more than half the available jobs. Chapters for *The Florida Negro* included “What the Florida Negro Does,” “Amusement and Diversion,” and “Unusual Negro Communities,” in addition to historical essays on slavery. As in South Carolina and Louisiana, none of this work was published, leaving a significant portion of the state’s population silenced. Also much like South Carolina’s Negro Writers’ Project, the published guide to Florida incorporated little of the work prepared by black writers. Mentions of slavery sounded benign and paternalistic rather than revealing the horrors former slaves recounted to the

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black interviewers. In Florida, as in Louisiana, South Carolina and many other southern states, white state editors ultimately had the last word in recounting their states’ imperfect past.

Each of these state projects exemplified the larger goals the black writers of the early twentieth century sought. Efforts to reinterpret state history from the perspective of blacks were intended to educate readers and provide a foundation for building present-day and future achievements. The larger trends of revision and relevance to contemporary events acted as a starting point for blacks to move toward a more equal footing with their white counterparts. Reinterpretations of slavery and Reconstruction, though bold at the time, could have strengthened the organizational structure of blacks in America and led to more immediate recognition for their valuable contributions to society. However, the trends orchestrated by historians like Du Bois and Woodson were not only ignored in state guides, but suppressed with the absence of more black guides. In particular, South Carolina’s black writers expressed their revisionist views more blatantly than did any of the other southern black writers’ projects and because this manuscript was never published, their progressive approach to history was not only suppressed, but forgotten as well.

The South Carolina Negro Writers’ Project made a noble effort to reinterpret and relate black history to black and white audiences on paper, but because the Negro Guide never saw publication it would be nearly seventy years before its work could be examined and appreciated. Like Du Bois and Woodson, the Negro Writers’ Project did not revise black history in an attempt to reinvent it, but rather to study it from a black perspective and utilize it to move forward in the twentieth century. The Negro Writers’
Project was representative of larger trends in analyzing black history through the dual
efforts of revising interpretations of black accomplishments, particularly during
Reconstruction, and educating the black public of their noteworthy history in order to
relate contemporary events to past experiences. These measures taken to rewrite history
in the state proved the depths to which the messages of Du Bois and Woodson reached,
and suggested a resounding theme of pride and encouragement toward the past, present,
and future for blacks in South Carolina.
APPENDIX I

Outline for Negro Material & Material for Introductory Essays

I. The People
   Tribal origins
   Conditions of their introduction into the country
   Primitive culture

II. Negro History in America
   Before 1865
   Social and cultural conditions
   Race consciousness and revolts
   Folklore and folkway with emphasis on addition and changes brought about by
       new environment
   The Negro in our wars before 1865
   Post-war history (1865 -)
   Reconstruction
   Agrarian history
   Industrial history
   Social and cultural development
   Literature, art and music
   Education and religion
   The Negro in our wars after 1865

Material for Guide Proper (Points of Interest, etc.)

Negro towns and sections of cities
Housing conditions
Accommodations (general)
Theatres (historical)
Institutions of higher education or schools with unusual histories and purposes
Calendar of important events
Historic Negro houses and monuments

Bibliography

37 WPA Index. Both the Outline for Negro Material and the Index for the Negro Guide Book can be found in C-1-7, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
APPENDIX II

Index for the Negro Guide Book

1. Economic Future of the Negro in South Carolina

2. Biographies:
   Bates, Clayton (Peg-Leg)
   Beckett, Bishop William
   Bethune, Mary McLeod
   Cardoza, Francis L.
   Chappelle, Bishop W.D.
   Harleston, E.A.
   Jaggers, Rev. Charles
   Jenkins, Edmond S.T.
   McCrory, Henry Lawrence
   Miller, Thomas E.
   Saxon, Celia Dial
   Smalls, Robert
   Sinclair, William A.
   Starks, Dr. John J.
   Thomas, Ireland (Negro Theatre in Charleston)
   Wilkinson, Robert Shaw

3. Institutions:
   Avery Institute
   Charleston Normal & Industrial Institute
   Mather School
   Wallingford Academy

4. Organizations:
   The J.J. Sulton & Sons Lumber Academy
   The Negro Hospital & Training School for Nurses
   The Negro Volunteer Fire Department
   The Ashley River Asylum
   The Charleston Y.W.C.A.
   Organizations in Charleston, S.C.

5. Churches & Religious Institutions:
   Big Zion Presbyterian Church
   Camp Welfare
   Emanual African Methodist Episcopal Church
6. Music:
   Research on Negro Spirituals
   Negro Spirituals
   Survey, Negro Spirituals
   Negro Folk Songs
   Folk Songs

7. Folklore:
   Superstitions of the Negro
   Dreams and their Interpretations
   Voodooism
   Folk Customs
   Early Negro Life in South Carolina Low Country
   Folk Customs and Folklore
   Negro Sayings

8. Folkways:
   Street Cries of Charleston
   The Emancipation

9. Miscellaneous:
   Export and Trades
   Education of the Negroes in Charleston, S.C. Prior to the Civil War
   Memorable Scenes of the Coast
   Dr. H.U. Seabrook Makes Major Advance in Radiation Treatment
   Negro Interests in Charleston, S.C.
   Inscription on Monument to Slaves, Fort Mill, S.C.

10. Negro Material by Whites (Approved by Negro Supervisor)
    Negro Spirituals
    Folk Customs
    Folk Lore
    Folkways of Lancaster County, S.C.
    When I Saw the Congo
    Faith Cures of the House of Prayer
    Religious Institutions
APPENDIX III

Survey of Negro Literature

W.E.B. Du Bois – Black Reconstruction in America, 1935
Richard Coleman – Don't You Weep, Don't You Moan, 1935
Herbert Ravenel Sass – Look Back at Glory, 1923
James Henry Rice – The Aftermath of Glory, 1934
Rafael Sabastine – The Carolinian, 1930
Kelly Miller – The Choice of a Profession, 1918
Janie Screven Heywood – Songs of the Charleston Darkey, 1912
A.B. Caldwell – History of the American Negro, 1919

APPENDIX IV

List of Outstanding Negro Authors and Educators who lived or have lived in Charleston or the Low-Country

1. Kelly Miller, Professor Emeritus, Howard University
2. Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and president of Bethune-Cookman College
4. Joshua Henry Jones, educator
5. Joseph Winthrop Holey, only Negro on Board of National Missions of Presbyterian Church
6. Ernest E. Just, professor of biology at Howard University
7. Daniel Wallace Culp, noted editor

38 WPA Index, "The Survey of Negro Literature" and the "List of Outstanding Negro Authors and Educators can be found in K-1-7, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.
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