Spring 2024

The Charleston, South Carolina Hospital Workers' Strike of 1969: The Rise and Fall of Black Women's Labor Organizing in the American South

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Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2024

Thank you to my wonderful Senior Project advisor, Jeannette Estruth. It has been a true pleasure working with you on this project. I would not be the scholar I am without your wisdom.

Thank you to Myra Armstead for advising me through the last three years, and for your valuable insight on this project. Thank you to the entire Bard College Historical Studies faculty, especially to Rob Culp for programming a rigorous colloquium, and for being a truly fantastic professor.

Thank you to the archivists at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture at the College of Charleston and the South Carolina Political Collections at the University of South Carolina. This project is possible thanks to your work.

Thank you to Cyrus and all of my dear friends for sharing the last year of college.

Thank you to my parents; for everything, and for raising me in Charleston, South Carolina.

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Introduction

I chose the Charleston, South Carolina Hospital Workers' Strike of 1969 as the subject of this project because I wanted to tell a story about when workers triumphed over the owning class. I wanted to tell you the story of a grassroots resistance movement so mighty that it brought the power brokers in the city of Charleston to their knees. I wanted to tell you that story because there is a persistent imbalance of justice in Charleston. As a Charlestonian, I hoped that this strike represented a moment in the city's history when the scales of justice tipped in favor of working people. But over the course of my research, that is not what this story turned out to be. Rather, the archives told me a story about workers who fought very hard and still did not receive the labor protections they required. So despite my expectations, this project charts the rise and fall of the Hospital Workers' Strike of 1969 to demonstrate how a grassroots movement generated worker power even when the leaders of the movement had little political power of their own. At the same time, this story reveals how the movement met the limits of that power by the end of 1973.

The foundations for this project are the words of the people who lived through the strike. These were made available to me through two collections of oral histories. The first, is a series of interviews recorded by Keiran W. Taylor and Otha Jennifer Dixon McKinght in 2008 as part of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Southern Oral History Program. The second collection is the Steve Estes Papers at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture in Charleston, which was created in the mid-1990s by Estes while writing his graduate school thesis. This eventually became the 2015 book, *Charleston in Black and White: Race and Power in the South After the Civil Rights Movement*.

Most of the sources I gathered on the partnership between the Medical College Hospital and the State of South Carolina I obtained through access to the Governor Robert E. McNair Papers from the South Carolina Political Collections housed at the University of South Carolina. This

archive contains hundreds of interoffice memoranda and the governor's personal correspondences. By far the most illuminating sources are the thousands of telegrams from his constituents. Most of the telegrams are from prominent businessmen, doctors, and private citizens in the state voicing their support for the governor's hard refusal to negotiate with a union. The large number of telegrams from presidents of other hospitals or executives of manufacturing corporations warned against the precedent that would be set in the state if the hospital workers in Charleston were granted any concessions. This pattern immediately alerted me to the economic importance of anti-unionism as a political issue in this history. So, while this project is concerned with telling the story of workers and how they organized against the hospital and the State, there is also the story of anti-unionism as a political movement in South Carolina.

Chapter 1 is to proves that race, gender, and labor are the most relevant lenses through which to examine the rise and fall of the Hospital Workers' Strike of 1969. This chapter studies how capitalists, in service of profits, reified and constructed how race and gender located people within the labor force in the American South during the twentieth century. Beginning with a strike of employees of the American Tobacco Company in Charleston in 1946, this chapter will explore in-depth how union organizing became associated with Blackness and Communism, in Charleston and the American South on the whole. The chapter will then examine the chief concerns of the long civil rights movement in Charleston, and also the parallel development of the subordination of women in the US economy. This overviews the major issues of race and gender discrimination in Charleston in order to evidence the intersection of racism and sexism experienced by the Black, female nurses in the city's medical system. The chapter concludes with the story of early efforts to organize the hospital workers in 1968. The gender dynamics of nursing, and the relationship between civil rights and trade unionism, will be at the forefront of my analysis.

Chapter 2 momentarily pauses within the larger story of the rise and fall of a movement to parse in detail how gendered expectations of women operated in this strike. This chapter looks to other actors in the civil rights movement to understand how Black female activists subverted their roles as homemakers and mothers to unionize. The women of this strike were not just responsible for the "sex-specific" tasks of nursing, but also those similar tasks which comprise the work of rearing children and reproducing labor power in communities through housework. This chapter utilizes Angela Davis' analysis of the Wages for Housework movement to understand how Black women's housework was essential to mid-century American capitalism.[1] I will argue that the engine of this strike was the subversion of housework into the labor of reproducing the action of this movement. The subversion was two-fold. First, the hospital workers withheld their labor from both the hospital and the home, then they transferred their domestic skills to their fight for a union contract. Second, the intersection of race and class oppression that dictated their position in the secondary labor market and the daily material conditions of their lives also dictated the way they were able to construct themselves as activists. This chapter will examine how subversion can be a powerful tool for a movement and a source of inspiration and optimism, but ultimately illustrates the grim reality that institutionalized marginalization was an obstacle, not an asset.

As proven in Chapter 2, the strength of this movement can in part be attributed to the success of Black, female workers who transformed their domestic practices into a militant labor strike. However, these women were economically vulnerable and the State of South Carolina was comparatively wealthy. That ultimately resulted in a very ambiguous "victory" for the strikers. Chapter 3 will describe the successes and failures of the strike from March of 1969 to July of that same year. It will primarily concern the meeting of civil rights organizing with trade unionist organizing. In this story the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the 1199 Drug

[1] Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, (New York: Vintage Books Random House, 1983).

Hospital and Health Care Employees Union represent the elements of these broader movements that had their own motivations for pursuing a union drive in an anti-union state. The relationship between the SCLC and organized labor had just fractured after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated while supporting a labor strike of sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968. Civil rights philosophies were also shifting from non-violence to Black power. As an organization whose principles were firmly rooted in non-violence, the turn among younger Black activists towards militant Black liberation politics set some limitations on the SCLC's ability to organize the hospital workers. In Chapter 3, I will examine the benefits and pitfalls of the hospital workers' attachment to labor organizers and to civil rights workers, and how the coalition of these three parties contributed to a sub-par deal for the workers after 113 days on strike. However, I will propose that the main reason that the workers received this deal is a result of the coordination between business interests, and politicians in South Carolina, who intimidated and stonewalled and abused the strikers until they were left with little choice other than to accept the only conditions being offered by the State.

Throughout the three chapters, I tell the story of workers coming together on a crusade for dignity. Dignity, in this case, meant higher wages as an acknowledgement of hard work. Dignity meant the end to racial hierarchy in the workplace, including discriminatory hiring practices and discrepancies in pay for equal work. These workers were on strike for the ability to do their job without suffering sabotage and racist insults from their white co-workers. This fight relied on the strategies of unionism and the philosophies of civil rights to mobilize and unify over 600 workers and most of the city's Black citizens. Despite the scale of this movement, I am not telling the story of an unequivocal triumph. It was a strike where every small concession was hard-won and the workers exhausted their resources without ever receiving the opportunity for a fair negotiation. What follows is that story.

Chapter 1 - "I Am Somebody:" An Overview of Political Economy and The Long Civil Rights Movement in 20th Century Charleston

On May 10, 1969, Governor Robert McNair made a speech to the South Carolina Bar Association in Myrtle Beach and addressed the hospital strike in Charleston, which had lasted nearly two months already. He said, "This is not a simple test of will or a test of strength. This is a test of our whole governmental system as we know it in South Carolina."[2] His words demonstrate an astucious self-awareness from the highest government official in the State. He seems to be acknowledging that the State of South Carolina was reliant on their reputation for having a large pool of cheap, non-union labor at the disposal of any industry that might want to settle there. There is even a tacit acknowledgment that the price of labor is low in South Carolina because of power structures that oppress on the basis of race and gender and class.

This chapter takes the hidden implication in his speech and makes explicit how labor came to be cheap and non-unionized in South Carolina in the twentieth century. South Carolina has a history of labor organizing, and of civil rights organizing, and a simultaneous history of a reactionary counter-movement that created the governmental system McNair made reference to. The grievances shared by workers at Charleston Medical College Hospital and Charleston County Hospital were symptomatic of this governmental system. Though not the focus of this project, it should also be noted that the American medical system was a profit-oriented enterprise by 1969.[3] It is under that system that sexism and racism could be translated into capital profits. And it is under that system that Charleston hospital workers began organizing in 1969.[4]

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[2] Philip G. Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink: Robert McNair and the Politics of Civil Rights* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press), 249.

[3] For more information on how capitalism has shaped the US medical system, Naresh Khatri, *Crony Capitalism in US Healthcare: Anatomy of a Dysfunctional System* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

[4] For more information on the civil rights movement in South Carolina, Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015); For more information on CIO unionization of tobacco workers in the American South, Robert Rodger Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); for more information on unionization fo Black workers in the mid-twentieth century Scott Greer, *Last Man In: Racial*

1946: Operation Dixie and the Tobacco Workers' Strike

The national labor movement's attempt to implement a Southern strategy during the Jim Crow era is a helpful framework for understanding the attempt at hospital organizing in Charleston in 1969. The cooperation between unionism and the civil rights movement that formed the organizing coalition of the Hospital Workers' Strike of 1969 was rooted in the union drives of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the 1930s and 1940s.[5] The ingrained connection between anti-unionism and anti-Black rhetoric was also constructed through these union drives. Political and business elites in the South remained single-minded on the accumulation of wealth and in the twentieth century, that mission required the South to be competitive with the North in industrialization.

Historian Michael Honey, writing on the interests of business in the post-war economy of the American South said, "southern industrialization in their view continued to require keeping African Americans 'in their place' and keeping unions out."[6] If Black citizens had been granted the same legal rights as white citizens, then their labor would have cost the same amount, which would have narrowed profit margins for capitalists. An essential element of trade union organizing in segregated workplaces was to erode the racial barriers between workers to demand collectively, which could also have created more egalitarian labor structures. This observation, that racialized suppression and the exclusion of unions operate together to create profits for Southern industrialists, exemplifies Cedric Robinson's theory of racial capitalism. Racial capitalism is the

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Access to Union Power (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), and Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker: 1619-1981* (New York: International Publishers, 1981); for more information on Black women in the workplace in mid-twentieth century American, Bette Woody, *Black Women in the Workplace: Impacts of Structural Change in the Economy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992); for more information on Black nurses organizing in the American South Karen Brodkin Sacks, *Caring by the Hour: Women, Work, and Organizing at Duke Medical Center* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988); for more information on 1199, Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: A History of Hospital Workers Union 1199* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

[5] Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* (College Station, Texas: A&M University Press, 2000), 20-21.

[6] Michael Honey, "Operation Dixie: Labor and Civil Rights in the Postwar South," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1992): 439.

system wherein the racial oppression of a class of workers is essential in preserving the economic interests of a capitalist class.[7] In the American South, racial capitalism prominently relies on the oppression of Black workers in service of exploiting them for cheap labor.

The involvement of the CIO in Jim Crow era labor organizing in the American South was aimed wresting power away from this system, as was the Hospital Workers' Strike of 1969. The gradual defeat of the CIO by Southern business in the late 1940s to early 1950s, established a template for the tactics that would be deployed against the hospital workers' union in Charleston. The CIO's union drives of the 1930s appealed to both Black and white workers to resist the conditions of low wages and poor working conditions. Usually, due to workplaces being segregated, organizing workers happened simultaneously on both sides of the color line, without often crossing it. Black workers were often more willing to engage with the union, and "black churches provided a meeting place and organizing base for the CIO when many whites turned it away; such experiences caused many in the CIO to conclude that the cause of civil rights and for black people and the right of workers to organize were inseparably bound in the South."[8] This insight into how race dictated labor struggles in the South led the CIO to purposefully court Black workers when launching "Operation Dixie," in 1946.

Operation Dixie was an intensification of union drives all over the South accompanied by a pointed effort to educate Black and white workers in the principles of labor organizing through the Highlander Folk School in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Highlander was an adult education center founded by white socialist, Myles Horton. The purpose of the school was to provide a curriculum on "trade union philosophy and action." Due to its partnership with the CIO in this crucial time of union drives for Black workers in the South, it also became a hub of civil rights organizing and continued to play a central role in educating activists throughout the entirety of the civil rights

[7] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983).
[8] Honey, "Operation Dixie," 440.

movement.[9] Operation Dixie became immensely successful in the summer of 1946. For instance, by September of that year, the CIO was able to report twenty new locals affiliating per week.[10]

A year before the mass affiliations of Operation Dixie, the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers (FTA) under the larger umbrella of the CIO affiliated Local 15-A, a union for the workers at the American Tobacco Company plant in Charleston, South Carolina. This plant was responsible for drying and rolling tobacco into cigars and then packaging the cigars into boxes, which they also made on site. The jobs at American Tobacco company were segregated by race. Lillie Doster, who would eventually become a secretary for Local 15-A, worked on the fifth floor as a shop steward. She recalled that in 1946, Black workers worked on the fifth floor and the fourth floor and it was only Black workers on these floors "other than the mechanic, the foreman, and the oilers."[11] Black workers at American Tobacco were compelled to unionize for several reasons, but one of the greatest was to end discriminatory hiring practices. However, the plant did not employ only Black workers. Of the 1,200 employees at the plant, 300 were white.

Unionizing American Tobacco was one of the cases in the CIO's Southern strategy, where it became essential to cross the color line in service of trade unionism. The union was able to implement this kind of "egalitarian organizing" through the education program at Highlander that would later be a crucial part of Operation Dixie's success. Both white and Black workers at American Tobacco worked in sweatshop conditions only to earn an unlivable wage, but white workers often held an ingrained belief that Black workers were their subordinates, allowing their own exploitation under the illusion that they enjoyed privileges that Black workers did not.[12] The CIO used its partnership with Highlander to take workers of both races out of the segregated

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[9] Honey, "Operation Dixie," 442.
[10] Ibid, 443.
[11] Lillie Marsh Doster interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, June 25, 2008, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Special Collections Library at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, available online at https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04007U/#d1e10911, 11.
[12] Honey, "Operation Dixie," 440.

environment of Charleston, train them to be labor leaders in their workplace, and teach them the fundamentals of how a union operates.[13] These leaders were able to convince their fellow rank-and-file that they would be unable to bargain as a collective if they did not have the power to completely stop operations at the factory, and that would never be possible if the 300 white employees would not stand with the majority Black workforce. Local 15-A did not just want the ability to threaten work stoppages in theory; they intended to strike.

In September of 1945, World War II ended in a victory for the allied powers, in no small part due to the efforts of American manufacturing. Labor striking had paused during the war to maintain the military's manufacturing exigencies, but after September of 1946, that pause was over. In mid-October of 1946 Black and white members of Local 15-A met together in the same hall for the first time and voted unanimously to continue meeting together indefinitely. On October 22, 1945, they walked out on strike as a single body. They upheld the strike for the following 5 months in the face of many of the same intimidation tactics that the State of South Carolina implemented again in 1969 against the hospital workers. There were constant arrests and brutalities committed against picketers by the police. Local merchants, even sympathetic ones, refused to come out in support of the strike. The State Chamber of Commerce along with several local papers were publicly opposed. There were white workers who would not ally themselves with a Black union and continued to keep the plant running. The workers out on strike were incredibly vulnerable to economic pressure– most of them were women and a great majority of them were Black– and five months without a paycheck was too long for many of them to weather financially. Many abandoned the strike and went back to work before any benefits were negotiated.[14] By the time American Tobacco officials came to the bargaining table at the end of March, 1946, a large contingent of the initial strikers had been

[13] Doster interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 21; Karl Korstad, "Tobacco Road, Union Style," *The New Masses* (1946): 14.
[14] Korstad, "Tobacco Road," 14-15.

effectively starved out and the remaining strikers were forced to agree to a raise of only eight cents an hour.[15]

Another factor that may have decided the end of the strike was the launch of Operation Dixie itself. In March of 1946, CIO pledged 1,000,000 dollars to begin their campaign of union drives. This likely redirected funds and attention away from the strike in Charleston. But the greatest factor that led to the decline of union prominence in Charleston, was the cultural reverberations of Operation Dixie's demise. The immense success of the program in linking the end of racial oppression to the rise of trade-unionism made the CIO the definitive target for segregationists who used virulent racism to meet their economic objectives. Honey argues that politicians protecting the economic interests of big business did not present white workers with the realities of the economic benefits of racism, because those benefits did not apply to all whites, only white capitalists. Instead, Southern politicians appealed to their constituents by stoking racist and anti-communist sentiments.[16] The CIO served as an emblem for linking those sentiments to anti-unionism in the public imagination.

In response to Operation Dixie, there was a "collaboration of employers, various elements of the right wing, and segregationists in circulating racist and anti-union propaganda in the South." A newspaper called *Militant Truth* issued by the Southern States Industrial Council circulated a "special 'labor edition,'" Which included the headline "Shall We be ruled by Whites or Blacks?" and argued to its readers that the prominence of the labor union and its crusade for fair employment would lead to the domination of the Black worker over whites. This campaign affiliated Blackness with labor unionism which was depicted as a blatantly communist ideology. This coalesced with a Klu Klux Klan revival that was responsible for violence and intimidation of whites with affiliation with the labor movement, and with a much greater frequency, the murders and beatings of African

[15] Ibid, 13.
[16] Honey, "Operation Dixie," 440.

Americans, whether they were involved with the labor movement or not.[17] This created strong incentives for workers to avoid becoming involved with unions; for Black workers it only seemed to increase the already ever-present threat of violence done against them, and for white workers it brought potential accusations of being a communist or a white person who cavorted with Black people, both positions with great social stigma.

In tandem with this always-looming, extra-governmental violence against African Americans and labor, there was a considerable anti-union political movement among conservatives in and out of the South which legitimized the anti-union propaganda campaign in the South. In 1945, before Operation Dixie even began, Southern Democrats and Republicans in congress formed the House Un-American Committee (HUAC). By the time Operation Dixie launched, HUAC was already engaged in reinvigorating outrage at the presence of communists in CIO leadership.[18] Over time, the pressure from HUAC inquiries created a destabilizing fracture between the CIO and the Southern Organizing Committee, which had initially been an important partnership driving Operation Dixie.[19] The crusade to expel the CIO from the South was complete with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947. This act allowed states to intervene against strikes and also allowed for states to pass "right-to-work" laws, which allowed employees under union contracts to opt out of paying union dues and banned the union shop.[20] It also included anti-communist provisions which forced the CIO to undertake a cleansing of militants and cut ties with many of its more radical branches including the FTA.[21]

By the beginning of the 1950s, the South was rigidly closed to unions. Institutions of labor organizing had been painted as Black and communist in the imagination of the Southern white worker, which aided politicians in their mission of clearing the way for business interests. The

[17] Honey, "Operation Dixie," 446.
[18] Ibid, 445.
[19] Ibid, 448.
[20] Ibid, 447.
[21] Ibid, 447-449.

Tobacco Workers' Strike of 1946 demonstrated that South Carolina could mobilize its centers of punitive and political power to defend its economic system, especially when the working class could be fractured by racism. The defeat of the CIO and labor organizing at large in the South alienated white workers from trade unionism. The complete dismantling of Operation Dixie and the harsh reality of months on strike for marginal gains for the tobacco workers in Charleston portended the issues the hospital workers would face over twenty years later.

The Long Civil Rights Movement in Charleston

Charleston is not often remembered for having a vast Black activist network in the twentieth century, but in fact it did. Those actors and the history they generated is essential to understanding the grassroots organizing landscape in Charleston at the time of the strike in 1969. One such actor, perhaps Charleston's most famous activist, was Septima P. Clark, a Charleston native who began her career as a school teacher in 1916 on Johns Island, one of the sea islands that makes up the Charleston harbor and guards the peninsula from the frequent hurricanes that blow up the coast from the tropics. In her first few years of teaching, Clark was exposed to the grinding poverty, rigid segregation, and high rates of illiteracy that affected the Black community on the isolated, rural island.[22] When she returned to Charleston peninsula in 1919, she joined the local branch of the NAACP. In 1945, she and some of her colleagues participated in a civil suit– with Thurgood Marshall as counsel– which won equal pay for Black and white teachers in South Carolina. Through her connections at the NAACP, she heard about the Highlander Folk School and the work Myles Horton was doing with civil rights organizers. In 1954, Clark began traveling to the school to attend workshops with other activists including Rosa Parks and Dr. King. In 1955 and '56, she began

[22] Jaqueline A. Rouse, "'We Seek to Know… in Order to Speak the Truth': Nurturing the Seeds of Discontent– Septima P. Clark and Participatory Leadership," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 99.

bringing bus loads of young Black activists from South Carolina with her to Highlander, including one of her former students from her early teaching days on Johns Island, Esau Jenkins.[23]

Jenkins was already an activist in his community on Johns Island. Because it was so difficult to get to the mainland from Johns Island, and the island itself had so few economic opportunities, Black Islanders were forced to find a way to commute for school and for work. Esau Jenkins, Clark's protégé, began driving an abandoned school bus to and from Johns Island to aid his neighbors who often had to make the journey.[24] It was on this school bus that he began his work on voter registration. Voting was an important issue on Johns Island, where a majority Black population was served by a white school board and council.[25] Under Jim Crow, voters could be subjected to a literacy test as a barrier to voting, which most often prevented Black residents from reaching the ballot box. On one ride downtown, a woman named Annie Wine, "told Jenkins she would register to vote if he would teach her to pass the literacy test."[26] Wine became his first student and soon Jenkins, while stills driving the bus, was using the forty-minute ride to teach dozens of his community members to pass the test.

Jenkins, realizing the potential breadth of implications literacy could have for his community, began considering how to establish a more permanent program for adult education on the Island. Thus the idea for the Citizenship Schools was born.[27] Septima Clark, Jenkins, and the Highlander Folk School collaborated and developed the first Black Citizenship School in 1957.[28] While its initial goal was to help people learn to read in order to pass the literacy test, Clark developed a curriculum in service of "education for empowerment," which not only taught reading and writing skills, but

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[23] Rouse, "'We Seek to Know,'" 105.
[24] Ibid.
[25] William Saunders interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon and Kieran Taylor, June 17, 2008, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Special Collections Library at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, available online at https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04007U/#d1e10911, 19.
[26] Rouse, "'We Seek to Know,'" 105.
[27] Rouse, "'We Seek to Know,'" 106.
[28] Ibid, 108.

aimed to "generate an understanding of the relationship of education to freedom and the acquisition of one's civil rights."[29] The model was to integrate lessons with the daily realities of students. For instance, mathematics that helped students write checks and calculate the cost of gas, oral presentations that would be delivered in church, and the writing and reading skills to fill out official documents.[30] The schools were such an asset to the community that Jenkins, Clark, and her cousin Bernice Robinson, with the help of Myles Horton of Highlander, developed schools all over the lowcountry, on Wadmalaw Island, Edisto Island, and in North Charleston.[31]

The success of their program coincided with the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) by Dr. Martin Luther King in 1957, an organization that was also concerned with uplifting Black Americans through voter registration. Dr. King and members of the SCLC met Clark through time spent at Highlander, and eventually, Clark began assisting the SCLC in establishing Citizenship Schools throughout the South. Between 1961 and 1970, Clark worked closely with Andrew Young and Hosea Williams, members of the SCLC, in establishing 897 Citizenship Schools in the American South.[32] The schools, located in areas where Black residents were concentrated, became a touchpoint for mass mobilization during the civil rights movement. Through this connection at Highlander, Clark came to know and trust many of the minister-activists at the SCLC. By 1969, when younger activists helping the hospital workers came to Clark for advice, as the heroine of the Charleston civil rights movement, she directed them to Young and Williams and the SCLC. [33]

Highlander and the Citizenship Schools were also the point of entry into a broader activist network for William Saunders, a Johns Islander who began his political education with Esau Jenkins

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid, 109
[31] Ibid, 110.
[32] Ibid, 112.
[33] Mary Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, July 28, 1982, transcript, Avery Research Center Oral Histories, Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston, available online at https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:23397, 10.

when he was a little boy in Jenkins' Sunday School bible study, and eventually became an instrumental figure in the Hospital Workers' Strike.[34] He often joined Jenkins and Clark on trips to Highlander and spent years under the tutelage of the non-violent school of thought prevalent in the SCLC and other Black activist organizations that connected through the school. However, in 1959, he lost faith in non-violent teachings in just one night. This watershed event was an "anti-communist," raid on Highlander where the police beat and arrested Septima Clark and several others during a workshop Clark was hosting.[35] Saunders recalled that he had been driving Esau Jenkins and a group of Black ministers in Jenkins' car near Highlander on that night when the police stopped them. The police insisted on searching the car and demanded the keys from Saunders. At first Saunders refused, but Esau protested. Saunders recalled, "Esau… and all these Black ministers came at me and chastised me and made me give [the police] the keys." After this, he saw the movement in a new light; "you've got to feel good about getting beat up… and that was not working for me."[36] This feeling that he had to allow himself to be degraded and abused and treated as subhuman to be a meaningful part of the non-violent movement started him on a path to Black Power militancy. He joined the school of Stokely Carmichael and Malcom X. By the end of the sixties, when he became involved with organizing the hospital workers, he felt at odds with the philosophy that guided the SCLC. In 1968 and 1969, Saunders had an important role in directing the strike because of his background in local politics. His ideological disagreements with the SCLC often created communication breakdowns between the organization and the hospital workers.

In addition to the work of the Citizenship School organizers and the NAACP, there was a burgeoning student movement growing in the civil rights movement. In 1960, four young, Black men sat down at the Woolworth "white's only" lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. This

[34] Saunders interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon and Kieran Taylor, 10.
[35] Rouse, "'We Seek to Know,'" 110.
[36] Saunders interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon and Kieran Taylor, 22.

action triggered dozens of similar sit-in protests across the South. Students at Voorhees College in Denmark, South Carolina quickly mounted a small sit-in of seven students at a local drugstore. When those students were arrested, a larger demonstration of seventy-five students was planned. They dressed in their nicest clothes and marched the three miles from Voorhees to the extremely segregated downtown of Denmark. The entire route of their march was flanked by watchful National Guardsmen, called in by Governor Ernest Hollings.[37] On April 1st, two months to the day after the Woolworth sit-in, two dozen students from Burke High School organized a sit-in at the lunch counter in a department store in downtown Charleston, S.H. Kress and Co. They sat for five hours reciting the Twenty-Third Psalm and the Lord's Prayer and singing hymns.[38] This moment marked a different kind of organizing in Charleston that had not previously been present. Though the founding of the Citizenship Schools and voter registration drives were clear acts of protest, they addressed the injustices of racism by creating uplifting structures within the Black community. These protests brought their discontent into the white community for whites to see and reckon with.

These movements in the early 1960s were in line with the philosophy of nonviolent organizing, but that changed on February 8, 1968 at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg. An organizing committee of Black students had been engaged in a campaign to integrate the bowling alley near the State College since October of 1967. On February 6th of 1968, nine hundred students and faculty and staff from State College staged a demonstration at the bowling alley that turned violent when the police on the scene called in firetrucks, an implicit threat to hose the students. The presence of the trucks caused chaos in the crowd and police began severely beating the demonstrators, sending twenty of them to the hospital.[39] Tensions were extremely high on campus following the incident at the bowling alley, when on February 8th, a large group of pro-civil-rights

[37] Cleveland Sellers "The Orangeburg Massacre, 1968," in *It Did Happen Here: Recollections of Political Repression in America*, ed. Ben Shultz and Ruth Shultz (University of California Press, 1989), 252.
[38] William D. Smyth "Segregation in Charleston in the 1950s: A Decade of Transition," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 92, no. 2 (1991): 121.
[39] Sellars, "The Orangeburg Massacre, 1968," 258.

students started a bonfire on campus perhaps in protest, perhaps just to stay warm.[40] Regardless, agents from the State Law Enforcement Department (SLED) were instructed by Chief J.P. Strom to break up the bonfire. Students taunted the officers, throwing bricks and debris at them, and one officer was struck in the head. The officers then began to open fire on the students, and continued to shoot even as the students turned and ran away.[41] Twenty-seven students were injured and three students, Henry Smith, Delano Middleton, and Samuel Hammond were murdered.[42]

No justice was done for the three students killed by SLED agents. Instead, Governor Robert McNair commended the agents for being "efficient and effective," and the nine agents involved received promotions.[43] The slaying of these three young activists, which came to be known as the Orangeburg Massacre, came right as the hospital workers began their organizing campaign in secret. The massacre was followed by years of misinformation and cover-up by SLED agents. Orangeburg sent a message to Black activists in South Carolina that the State supported the murder of Black activists, especially when they did not adhere to the model of peaceful marches. This was the ominous reality that loomed over the nascent hospital workers movement, and would set limitations on what kind of movement it could be.

Race, Gender, Housework and Nursing

To understand how Black, female hospital workers in Charleston subverted normative structures of women's work into revolutionary action, it is necessary to understand what was socially expected of them before the 1969 strike. It is imperative to understand what kind of labor they did inside and outside of the home and how that labor was classified and assigned value in mid-century America. Angela Davis in her 1981 essay "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working Class Perspective," writes that the defining characteristic of housework is its invisibility.

[40] Reid C. Toth, "The Orangeburg Massacre: A Case Study of the Influence of Social Phenomena on Historical Recollection," *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 4 (2012): 472.
[41] Toth, "The Orangeburg Massacre: A Case Study," 473; Sellars, "The Orangeburg Massacre, 1968," 259.
[42] Toth, "The Orangeburg Massacre: A Case Study," 473.
[43] Sellars, "The Orangeburg Massacre, 1968," 261.

Housework is a necessary part of reproducing workers, but it happens in the home. It is carried out by a marginalized class– women— and thus it is not seen as economic activity. It is invisible and therefore unwaged. The "housewife" is the woman for whom housework is her occupation.

Davis notes however, that the construction of housewife as a social category refers usually only to white, bourgeois women whose sex oppression is not compounded by oppression on the basis of class or on the basis of race. The bourgeois woman is confined within the home because her husband or father's wealth accrual is enough that her household does not need her income. The proletariat woman must leave the home in order to earn a wage to support her household. Davis notes that it is not just the "housewife" who is responsible for housework. Housework is the drudgery of the home assigned to all women, their status as a worker or housewife is irrelevant. She points to poor women and Black women; "while they have seldom been 'just housewives,' They have always done their housework. They have thus carried the double burden of wage labor and housework."[44] In Davis' analysis Black women and poor women are subject to the same toil as housewives, without the privileges. This intersection places them in an extremely precarious economic position.

According to Davis, even women who work are relegated to the status of extra-market actors, and not valued to the extent of a male worker. Women's contribution to capitalism is first and foremost conceived as reproducing male laborers through their work in the home.

> Having stepped outside their "natural" sphere, women were not to be treated as full-fledged workers. The price they paid involved long hours, substandard working conditions and grossly inadequate wages. Their exploitation was even more intense than the exploitation suffered by their male counterparts. Needless to say, sexism emerged as a source of outrageous super-profits for the capitalists.[45]

Davis observes how the devaluation of women's labor, because of the invisible nature of their housework, leaves women particularly vulnerable to exploitation by employers. Davis, along with

[44] Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, 231
[45] Ibid, 229.

several social economists writing in the seventies and eighties, looked back on the 1960s to observe how the emerging social trend of Black women serving as the head of their household further compounds vulnerability to exploitation as a worker. Black economist Phyllis Wallace conducted a study to expose the position of Black women in the labor force in the 1960s and 1970s, discovering that in 1968, 51% of Black women in America made less than 3,000 dollars a year ($27,477.89 USD in 2024).[46] She also learned that by 1976 "Black families headed by women accounted for two-thirds of all Black families below the poverty level," and in that same year, "approximately half of all Black families headed by women resided in the South."[47] Her research suggested that being a single mother, and being Black were both strong indicators for living in poverty. She also found that Black women who were the heads of their households were far more likely than white women in the same position to hold a menial job in the service industry, hospital employee being one such job.[48] That meant that Black single mothers were not just more likely to live in poverty because they were single-income houses, but also because they were segregated, by race, gender and marital status, into the secondary labor market.

The designation of hospital work as a secondary-labor-market occupation was, in itself, a product of sexism for profits. Socioeconomic theorist, Eva Gamarnikow, writing on nursing as a case study in the sexual division of labor, observed that nurses are subordinated to doctors much like the wives are subordinated to husbands in the patriarchal nuclear family. She argues that the social construction of a women's subordinated role in capitalism relies on the notion that women are biologically, or "naturally," inclined towards reproductive labor. Gamarnikow argues, "this 'naturalism' is seen to underpin women's labor in both the family and the wage sector, because both

[46] Phyllis A. Wallace, *Black Women in the Labor Force* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: the MIT Press, 1980), 64; Calculation of value in 2024 generated via the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator. Accessed April 26, 2024, https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl.
[47] Wallace, *Black Women in the Labor Force*, 81-80.
[48] Wallace, *Black Women in the Labor Force*, 80-81.

are characterized by sex specific task and job allocation."[49] She explicitly notes however, that this notion of the nature of care work that dictates women's position in the medical profession, subordinate to that of doctors, is an ideological construction.[50] Feeding and caring for the sick is reproductive labor because it produces able-bodied people who can serve as workers. It is socially constructed that reproductive labor– work done by nurse's assistants, dietary staff, housekeeping– is made up of sex specific tasks, so that it may be labeled "pink-collar," and devalued in service of paying workers a lower wage.

The sexual division of labor is evident in the wage taken home by workers in the positions designated for women in the hospital. Nurse's assistants, sometimes also called nurse's aides made between $1.30 and $1.90/hour, "Maids," women who worked in housekeeping or on the dietary staff, made between $1.30 and $1.60/hour, and LPNs (Licensed Practical Nurses) could make anywhere from $1.80 to $2.35/hour.[51] These wages were not enough to support a family in Charleston in 1969. Rosetta Simmons, one of the women who would soon be vice president of the hospital workers union in Charleston, recalled in an interview, "there [weren't] that many men in the first place because the salary was so low. They couldn't take care of their families on that meager salary."[52] So, this unlivable wage was part of the reason that very few men worked as non-professional hospital staff, and at the same time the low wage was a result of the job being designated as "pink-collar." Jobs that were socially imagined as feminized labor had a much lower wage attached to them, and were thus undesirable to men, reinforcing the notion that they were

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[49] Eva Gamarnikow, "Sexual Division of Labour: the Case of Nursing," in *Feminism and Materialism (RLE Feminist Theory): Women and Modes of Production*, ed. Anne Marie Wolpe and Annette Khun (Philadelphia: Routledge, 1978), 98.
[50] Gamarnikow, "Sexual Division of Labour," 101.
[51] "Nurse's Aide," memorandum, May 14, 1969, in box 32, folder "May," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Petitions and Resolution, March-May, University of South Carolina, South Carolina Political Collections, Columbia, SC (hereafter UofSC Political Collections).
[52] Rosetta Simmons, interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, June 25, 2008, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Special Collections Library at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, available online at https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04007U/#d1e10911, 14.

meant for women all along. Even the few men who did work in the non-professional class at the hospital earned slightly higher wages than the majority of female non-professional workers, with male attendants earning between $1.40 and $2.00/hour.[53] This discrepancy in wages put much more pressure on women to organize for better pay.

The low-status associated with gendered labor, which relegated nursing to a low-pay, secondary labor market occupation, was only compounded by the fact that jobs at Medical College in the 1960s were not just segregated by wage, but also still segregated by race, just as they were in the American Tobacco plant at the time of the 1946 strike. Registered Nurses, who were predominantly white, received higher pay than any other position in the "non-professional" class of workers.[54] There was also an understanding among Black nurses that white nurses were receiving higher pay for the same job.[55] The culture of racism was so explicit and entrenched that in 1965, the Medical College was investigated by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), after receiving "complaints of racial discrimination." The department requested further information on hiring and admissions practices for medical students and discovered that "no Black students, faculty, or professional staff worked there."[56] This investigation placed the Medical College under watch by HEW where it would remain for the entirety of the 1969 conflict. It eventually culminated in a report that would find the hospital in non-compliance with federal antidiscrimination laws. However, in 1965, this resolution was still four years away, and in the meantime the Black women employed in the class of "non-professional," hospital workers were still subject to verbal abuse in their workplace on a daily basis. The hospital had a workplace culture where racism was enacted structurally by the administration, implicitly endorsing the racism of lower level staff.

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[53] "Nurse's Aide," memorandum.
[54] "Nurse's Aide," memorandum; Mary Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, 4-6.
[55] Moultrie interview by Jean-Calude Bouffard, 5-6.
[56] Steve Estes, *Charleston in Black and White: Race and Power in the South after the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 23.

Black workers were called racist slurs and names like "monkey grunt" by their white colleagues with no avenues of recourse available. In fact, it was made extremely difficult to speak out about racist invective because most any white worker was able to have any black worker fired at any time. One worker said, "if a white [Registered Nurse] wanted to fire you, she could do it."[57] Not only did white Registered Nurses (RNs) have unquestioned firing capabilities, but it was also understood that if white nursing students "didn't like you and wanted you fired you were fired."[58] Despite the hospital being under investigation for exactly this kind of maltreatment, these incidents were a regular feature of working life for Black employees at the Medical College.

In this constant barrage of aggressions from white hospital workers, one in particular would serve as the impetus for the first organizing efforts by the Black workers at the Medical College. The incident took place in December of 1967, during the time when most other people, besides hospital workers, would be taking Christmas holiday. Five Black women, nurse's aides and LPN's reported for their shift to the white RN on duty. Usually, the RN would be responsible for providing the nurses coming on shift with a report on the condition of the patients on the floor and their treatment plans for the shift, but on this day the RN refused. The five nurses insisted on receiving a report arguing that it would be dangerous for them to provide care without knowing the status of the patients in their charge. Still the RN refused, telling the nurses, "Either you got to work and take care of the patients or you go home." So the nurses went home, and then they were fired.[59]

Initial Organizing

The story of the five fired nurses reached a young African American nurse on the eighth floor, Mary Moultrie. In 1967, Moultrie was 23 years old. She grew up in Charleston and knew Bill Saunders from an afterschool job at a restaurant owned by Esau Jenkins.[60] She graduated from

[57] Moultrie interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 5.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Moultrie interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 4.
[60] Ibid, 2.

Burke High School, just like Saunders and most other Black teenagers who were educated in public school in Charleston before desegregation. After high school, there was no money in her family to continue her education and few prospects for a young Black woman to enter the workforce in South Carolina, so she moved to New York and got a job at Goldwater Memorial Hospital on Long Island where she was trained as a waiver nurse. Her position as a waiver nurse was the equivalent of an LPN, simply under another title, but when she arrived back in Charleston, the Medical College deemed that her training and experience did not qualify her as an LPN in South Carolina. They would only hire her as a nurse's aide at 1.30 an hour.[61] After spending most of her working life in New York, Moultrie was particularly struck by the brazen workplace harassment and discrimination she and her Black colleagues faced at the Medical College. Overqualified and underpaid, she had a heightened awareness of the realities of institutional racism at the hospital. After those five women were fired, she saw an entry point for radicalizing her colleagues.[62]

From the start, Moultrie was a dynamic figure for the women in the hospital. She wore her hair natural in a tightly coiled afro and spoke with a southern drawl that was very distinctly a Charleston accent. Her earlier political education with Esau Jenkins and her time in New York created in her a vision of what kind of future she and her fellow workers could create for themselves and those who came after them, plus the connections to politically minded individuals to guide the realization of that vision. One of those connections was William Saunders, who she reached out to right away to see if there was anything to be done for the women who were wrongfully terminated. Saunders was able to activate his network of associates involved in different spheres of racial justice organizing, including Isaiah Bennett who was president of the tobacco workers' union, Local 15-A, and Reginald Barrett, a local liaison for HEW.[63] Barrett had been involved in the 1965 investigation

[61] Mary Moultrie interview by Steve Estes, October 20, 1994, in Charleston South Carolina, transcript, Steve Estes Papers, Box 1, folder 1-5, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina; Moultrie interview by Jean-Calude Bouffard, 4.
[62] Mary Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, 4.
[63] Moultrie interview by Jean-Calude Bouffard, 5.

into the Medical College's discriminatory hiring practices and was quick to put the five fired nurse's aides and LPNs in touch with representatives from HEW's who dealt with discrimination claims.

The five former employees met with the representatives from HEW, who "recommended" that the hospital reinstate them, which they eventually did.[64] Although the incident had been resolved in favor of the workers, the women employed by the hospital on different floors and in different departments had now begun talking to each other and realized that no matter where in the hospital they worked, they were all subject to the same cruelties. Moultrie and the initial five, plus a few others, continued to meet in Reginald Barrett's house with Bennett and Saunders in the style of consciousness-raising. They kept these meetings under wraps, only inviting in newcomers they were certain they could trust. She invited only women she knew at first, saying "'We got to keep it a secret, and next week when you come you bring your best friend,' and then the best friend would bring their best friend."[65] In this way, they built the group until it numbered several hundreds of women.[66]

This is when the political message of the strike began to form. Any worker in the medical system who was not an MD was referred to as a "non-professional worker." In these early meetings, the classification of "non-professional worker," and its demeaning insinuation, became a point of contention. The local Black Power activists that William Saunders brought to the nascent worker organization came to help define the political message that underpinned their labor struggle. It was a local Muslim leader, Otis Robinson, who came to one of the meetings and declared:

> There is no such thing as non-professional hospital workers. You are Professional. It takes a surgeon fifteen minutes to operate but you are there twenty-four hours a day with the patient. You are the most important part of the hospital.

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[64] Mary Moultrie, "'Reflections': 1969 Hospital Workers Strike," speech, draft with revisions, vertical file, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina.
[65] Moultrie interview by Steve Estes, 2.
[66] Ibid.

Robinson's declaration, "You are Professional," eventually became the defiant motto of the strike, "I am Somebody." This phrase, "I Am Somebody," instantly calls to mind the words "I Am A Man," lettered on hundreds of picketing signs being hoisted in Memphis at the sanitation workers' strike that was underway at that very moment.

The rhetorical connection between the two strikes was born of an ideological pivot in the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1960s that each of these strikes came to represent. Black Americans were fighting for the right to economic equality. The demand to be recognized as a "somebody," was the active resistance of the designation "non-professional worker." It was a declaration that no longer would the positions of nurse's aid, orderly, or kitchen staff be devalued on the basis of race and gender. No longer would Black women allow their labor, or their existence, to be classified as less important.

Even when their group was several hundred strong, the workers still had not identified themselves as a union. Although Isaiah Bennett's involvement in the group's leadership granted them a union connection, and use of the Local 15-A union hall as a meeting place, Saunders and other activists involved saw the path forward as more of an association of economic uplift for Black Charlestonians. He is often quoted saying that, at the time he "saw very little difference between George Meany and Richard Nixon."[67] Saunders was ten years old when Operation Dixie failed and the CIO pulled out of the South. He would have had little evidence that unions were interested in challenging racial capitalism in the American South. In fact, very few of the hospital workers were pushing for a union from the beginning. It was not until the workers' organization had made several overtures to hospital administration that were meant with silence, that the association began seriously looking for a union to represent them. Ironically, it was a cartoon circulated by the hospital

[67] Leon Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power: the Story of 1199B and Labor's Search for a Southern Strategy." *Southern Changes* 5, no. 2 (1983): 12.

administration– a crude drawing that showed a fat-cat, white union boss enjoying the company of "shapely female company," on the workers dime– that drove the women to look for a union.[68]

1199 and the Birth of 1199B

They first thought they might organize with Mr. Bennett's union, Local 15-A,[69] but they thought it best to reach out to a union that dealt specifically with health care workers and so they turned to the 1199 Drug, Health Care and Hospital Employees Union.[70] 1199 was a New York City-based union, known for its success in organizing Black and Hispanic service workers. Their militant campaigns often involved complete mobilization of not just the workers, but the communities they lived and worked in as well.[71] 1199 was initially unsure if it would be wise for them to attempt to organize in the South. They had a record of organizing Black and other marginalized work forces, which in the South, historically made your organization the target of political sabotage, as was the case with the CIO.[72] Another factor that may have made South Carolina particularly hostile to 1199 was the fact that many leaders were racially and politically "other" themselves. Leon Davis, who was a New York City pharmacist before founding 1199, and Elliott Godoff, the Director of Organization for the union and the man who would eventually lead 1199's involvement in Charleston, were both Jewish leftists.[73] Not only that, but several high-ranking members of union leadership– including Doris Turner and Henry Nichols who both spent a lot of time in Charleston during the strike– were Black.

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[68] Fink "Union Power, Soul Power," 12.
[69] Local 15-A originally affiliated under the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union of America (FTA) but in 1954, affiliated instead with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). At the time of the strike Local 15-A was affiliated with RWDSU.
[70] 1199 was originally affiliated under the CIO, but was expelled during the same wave of HUAC efforts to remove communist sympathizers from union leadership which forced the FTA out of the CIO. After 1199's expulsion, it also found a new affiliation with the RWDSU.
[71] Fink "Union Power, Soul Power," 9.
[72] Obadele- Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South*, 22-23.
[73] Ibid, 10.

It was Doris Turner who decided that 1199 should be the union to organize the Charleston hospital workers. Turner recalls that on her way to Charleston from New York, she was unsure of this political move for 1199, but when she arrived, she was quickly certain they should support the hospital workers; her flight from New York was delayed and she did not arrive until midnight, but "before she went to her hotel, she decided to stop by the meeting hall, just in case somebody had remained behind. She found the hall full of Charleston Hospital Workers."[74] This display of dedication convinced 1199 to affiliate its first out-of-state-local, Local 1199B. An election was held which democratically appointed Mary Moultrie as the president of the local chapter, and thus the workers of Medical College Hospital and Charleston County Hospital were officially unionized. From the very beginning, the workers were guided by local actors and a labor union that both operated in the tradition of militancy, and that organizing approach was present even before work stoppages were on the agenda.

Soon after 1199B was born, they asked the hospital to recognize them as a union. Medical College President William McCord refused. McCord immediately emerged as the embodiment of the establishment the hospital workers stood against. He was the son of wealthy, white South-Africans, and did little to hide the racism and sexism that underlie his contempt for the strikers at his hospital. He is most remembered for saying, he was "not about to turn over a 25-million-dollar complex to a bunch of people who don't have a grammar school education."[75] The unionized workers staged several demonstrations and rallies to raise the community's understanding of the discrimination they faced, and the shaky legal basis for the anti-union position of the state. At one point they even took their fight to the door of the State General Assembly in Columbia.[76] The State's response to every demonstration was that it was the opinion of the Attorney General, Daniel McLeod that a state

[74] Fink "Union Power, Soul Power," 12.
[75] Ibid, 10.
[76] Isaiah Bennett, interview by Steve Estes, October 21, 1994, in Charleston South Carolina, transcript, Steve Estes Papers, Box 1, folder 1-7, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina.

institution could not negotiate with a union.[77] McLeod was no friend to the Black working class—his family owned the Mcleod Plantation, a historic site on James Island now famed for tours of their nearly intact slave quarters.

The community of Charleston was aware of the unrest long before the rest of the nation would ever hear of 1199B. The workers were garnering instrumental local support, from progressive leadership all over the state, Black and white alike. The Concerned Clergy Committee, a coalition of local clergymen representing a wide spectrum Christian denominations, from African Methodist Episcopal Reverends to white Catholic Priests, were supportive of the workers cause from very early organizing stages and were one of the first organizations to extend financial support to the workers and write to the Governor on their behalf after the strike was officially underway.[78] The early involvement of clergymen is both indicative of who was involved in the promulgation of union activity– women in their congregations– and representative of who were the gatekeepers of information in South Carolina in the 1960s. The clergy being aware of the discrimination faced by the hospital workers and ministering that awareness to their congregants was a major avenue of information spreading. The continued involvement of religious leaders sustained the movement at several critical junctures.

The Strike is On

In mid-March of 1969, after a year of underground organizing and a few very public demonstrations, J. Palmer Gailliard, then Mayor of Charleston, pressured Dr. McCord to hold a meeting with the contingent of workers who represented the interests of 1199B. Mary Moultrie and six others were invited by McCord to attend a meeting in the hospital auditorium. However, when they arrived they realized McCord had arranged for eight workers who were loyal to hospital

[77] Grose, *South Carolina at the Brink,* 248.
[78] William Joyce, "Peace with Justice Proposal," memorandum, May 27, 1969, Concerned Clergy Committee, vertical file, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina.

administration to attend as well, outnumbering the unionized workers. In response, the unionized group called on their network which showed up to support in numbers nearing a hundred.[79] McCord refused to meet with them on the grounds of the group being too large, but directed everyone present to write down their names in order to be invited to a subsequent meeting of 10-15 employees. They were then told that the hospital would not be negotiating with a union under any circumstances.[80]

Accounts of the workers' response to McCord's refusal to meet with them differ depending on who is telling the story and when, but an official hospital report and an interview given by Mary Moultrie in 1994 suggest that the workers occupied a second floor conference room across from McCord's office and "had a demonstration- a real big one".[81] Hospital administrators attempted to shut it down by ordering them to return to work. When they refused, the hospital invited the City Police Chief "to ask them to return to work or be removed from the premises."[82] The demonstrators reluctantly returned to their posts and worked the rest of their shifts. After the shift was over, 12 women were fired, including Mary Moultrie.

On March 20th, 1969, in response to the firing of these twelve women, 550 employees of the Medical College hospital– LPNs, nurses assistants, housekeepers, orderlies, dietary technicians, and laundry workers– walked off the job. A few days later, they were joined by close to a hundred employees of Charleston County Hospital.[83] In just a matter of days, the unsuccessful meeting with Dr. McCord had impelled over 600 healthcare workers to leave their posts and take to the streets, thus began a strike that would shut down the entire city of Charleston and last for 113 days. By the beginning of April, the union produced the official demands of the strike. They were chiefly, the

[79] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power," 12.
[80] Ibid.
[81] "Statement," memorandum, box 32, folder "March," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Petitions and Resolution, March-May, UofSC Political Collections, Columbia, SC; Moultrie interview by Steve Estes, 3.
[82] "Statement."
[83] Moultrie "'Reflections,'" 1.

reinstatement of the twelve fired workers, wage increases, a union dues check off from their paychecks, a clear grievance procedure, the establishment of a small committee of elected representatives from the employee base that would have the ability to serve as something like a union representative in, and a day off for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.[84]

The response from the local and state government was instant. On March 21st, 1969, the day after the work stoppages began, Judge Clarence Singletary passed down an injunction that declared that the strikers' "picketing [of the hospital] was limited to ten persons spaced twenty yards apart."[85] On the subject of the workers' demands, early meetings in Governor McNair's office produced a piece of paper with the union's demands typed out and someone's handwritten notes written in the margins. Each item of the list is marked with a check mark– presumably meaning the office was willing to grant this demand– or a big "NO." Something like a dues check off or a workers committee were immediately dismissed, marked "NO," given that state officials had worked tirelessly to make South Carolina friendly to big business and could not be seen conceding to demands with a unionist tone. Especially telling is the large "NO," next to the demand for a day off in observance of MLK day. The Governor's office denied the request to observe MLK day and offered instead the option to take off work for Confederate General Robert E. Lee's Birthday.[86] This denial reveals the racism in the conflict between worker and state, a prescient statement on the tactics of racist oppression the State would deploy over the coming months.

Conclusion

When this strike began, it was not well poised in terms of resources or political popularity. In the State of South Carolina, there was a long developing trend of union drives being linked to Black activism. Historically, that connection had been twisted by segregationists to the detriment of union

[84] "Union Demands," memorandum, typed with handwritten notes, April 29, 1969, box 32, folder "April," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Petitions and Resolution, March-May, UofSC Political Collections, Columbia, SC.
[85] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power," 13.
[86] "Union Demands," 1.

efforts in the South. Black activism was violently penalized in the Orangeburg Massacre just a year before the strike began. There was a considerable risk that strikers would face violence at the hands of the State. There was also a risk that the strike would last a long time and women would lose their wages– which were too low to begin with– for many months. The strikers chose to face those risks because of the treatment they faced at the hospital. The devaluation of their labor by the hospital system not only allowed the Medical College to under-pay them, but also subject them to rampant worker abuse. With no other avenues available, they chose to go on strike.

Chapter 2 - "Walking, Walking, Walking, and More Walking:" Women's Labor in Reproducing Revolution

The 1969 Hospital Workers' Strike is often historicized as a part of the greater narrative of the SCLC's Poor People's Campaign or as a case study of civil rights-unionism at work.[87] In recent years however, historians have begun to consider this strike through a lens of gender history.[88] William Saunders has expressed frustration with the newfound focus on gender. He said in 2009, "It was not about women, it was not about men, it was about the workers."[89] During the strike there was little discussion of gender discrimination; the political conversation was about race and poverty. To Saunders, the strike was about uplifting poor, Black workers, not the intersections of discrimination experienced by Black women in the workforce.[90] It is true that this movement was largely sustained by the organizing principles of Black liberation politics and workers liberation politics, but women's liberation politics were the third, mostly unspoken, pillar of the strike. Even without having explicitly feminist politics, the Charleston strike was a women's movement on par with any of the fights for women's liberation that erupted across the nation during this period. This is due to the gendered nature of hospital work and the social role of the predominantly female workers, before, during and after the strike[91]

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[87] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power." J.H. O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy to the Poor People's Campaign," *Freedomways* 9, no. 3 (1969): 197-211.
[88] Jewell C. Debnam, "Mary Moultrie, Naomi White, and the Women of the Charleston Hospital Workers' Strike of 1969." *Souls* 18, no. 1 (2016): 59-79.
[89] Mary Moultrie, William Saunders, Rosetta Simmons interview by Kerry Taylor, March 5, 2009, in Charleston South Carolina, transcript, Citadel Oral History Program, The Citadel Archives and Museum, Charleston, South Carolina, available online at https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:23445, 18.
[90] Saunders interview by Otha Jennifer, 3.
[91] For more information on women's reproductive labor in resistance movements, Jessica Wilkerson, *To Live Here You Have to Fight: Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2019); for more information on women on welfare in organized labor, Lane Windham *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the the New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); for more information on the history of Black women in medicine, Darlene Clarke Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1997); for more information on theories of care work in marginalized populations, Leah Lakshmi Piepnza-Samarasinha, *Care Work* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), and Mignon Duffy, *Making Care Count: A Century of Gender, Race, and Paid Care Work* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2011); for more information on Angela Davis and Black women in the Women's Liberation Movement, Charisse Burden-Stelly and Jodi Dean, *Organize, Fight, Win: Black Communist Women's Political Writing* (New York: Verso Books, 2022), and Joy James, *Contextualizing Angela Davis: The Agency and Identity of an Icon* (London:

Jacqueline Jones, in her monograph of Black women's work in America, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*, has a three-part thesis on the role of women in the civil rights movement. First, older Black women who inhabited integral roles in their churches, appear in civil rights narratives "as prophets and protagonists," because of their centrality and prominence in their communities.[92] The second prong of Jones' argument deals with the transformation of housework into the labor of reproducing revolution.

> Since many members of the dominant caste considered the housing and feeding of civil rights workers to be a politically subversive act, even Black women's domestic skills assumed great value.[93]

The "subversive act," is the most central part of the argument and can be extended beyond the deployment of domestic skills to understand all ways that women contributed to the hospital workers movement. The last element of Jones' thesis is that Black working-women in particular "served as a source of inspiration for other civil rights workers."[94] Subversion is the fundamental characteristic of the role of working women in a strike; the very nature of striking is to withhold one's labor from profit production and instead use that labor to maintain the community of workers. In the case of the Charleston strike, women recontextualized themselves as activists by subverting their roles as churchgoer, mother, homemaker, and worker.

While the politics of the strike were often directed by the presence of activist organizations headed by men, the Hospital Workers' Strike was a women's movement in service of labor rights and dignity. Their resistance movement made targets of the interwoven establishments of racism and worker repression, essential pillars of the system of racial capitalism which delineated boundaries surrounding those who could accumulate wealth and those who could not, even after Jim Crow.

Bloomsbury Academic, 2024); For more information on female civil rights activists, Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon, *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965* (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2009).

[92] Jaqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1985), 279.

[93] Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 279.

[94] Ibid.

Retellings of the 1969 Strike articulate linkages between the battle against institutionalized racism and the fight for a union, but often disregard sex in their historical treatment of the workers.[95] The discrimination of these hospital workers into low-paying, degrading positions at the hospital must be treated as a Black women's issue. The grassroots support that surged for the Charleston strikers should be remembered as a triumph of Black women as revolutionary social actors, whose reproductive labors as mothers, churchgoers, and heads of household defined the strike from start to finish.

The Politics of Motherhood

Black mothers in particular have emerged as protagonists of the strike because, in '69, when the eyes of the nation briefly turned to Charleston, they bore witness to a mass mobilization of hundreds and hundreds of women and children. In the many interviews conducted by civil rights historians since 1969, the women do not often wax on about movement politics when reflecting on those 113 days they were out of work. Their primary concern remained maintaining their first job– domestic duties to their husbands and children– and their second job, which once consisted of domestic duties to their patients and now, their domestic duties to the strike. The unwaged nature of housework remained unchanged, while simultaneously, they lost the wage for their work at the hospital. However, the support of the union provided a counterbalance. The division between reproducing labor power at home and selling their own labor power at the hospital was dissolved, and for a few months, bringing up their children became interwoven with the labor of reproducing revolution.

Women and children at the forefront of the strike, getting their pictures taken and being written up in the press had a distinct strategic advantage. As South Carolina State Troopers armed with bayonets bared down on the city, they were faced back with an army of high school students

[95] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power;" Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*; O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy."

and women pushing strollers, a moving and unifying image for thousands of onlookers.[96] The youth arm of the movement was a critical part of the SCLC's civil-rights organizing strategy. In fact, mobilizations of high schoolers, and even children were a consistent facet of civil-rights movements and non-violent actions throughout the 50s and 60s. Beyond the political motivations of children's involvement, the union hall and the picket line becoming a site where mothering happened rather than the home was significant to the movement because it rendered the invisible drudgery of the home visible. The visibility of children and mothers was important to the strike not just for the spirit of the movement, but pragmatically, to attract national interest. One of the most successful demonstrations for the strikers was a massive march on Mother's Day, which put pressure on Governor McNair and attracted record-breaking donations.[97]

It was rare to find a woman on the line who was not a mother. Mary Moultrie recalls, "the majority of the women were out there were single moms, heads of household. Some of them had as many as ten or twelve children." Moultrie, herself a single mother to a two-year-old girl at the time, was unfazed by the presence of children on the picket line. She brought her daughter to the union hall so that she and her young daughter would remain emotionally close, so that she "wouldn't lose contact with her."[98] Many women just simply needed their children looked after. Moultrie recalled, "we had people there who cooked, you know, every day, and they would just bring the whole, you know, their whole family of children there, and they would eat."[99] The presence of children on the line was necessitated by the head of household status that many women occupied. Children on the line were in their mother's eyeline and were often led in activities and games by the strike organizers.[100] For those who were both mother and sole wage-earner in their household, having

[96] William Walker, Jr., "Mr. Abernathy Leads 800 on Medical Center March," *Charleston News and Courier*, April 23, 1969, 15-A.
[97] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power," 16.
[98] Moultrie interviewed by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 12
[99] Moultrie, Saunders, and Simmons interviewed by Kieran Taylor, 25
[100] Ibid.

children beside them on the line meant that, despite the loss of their wage, their children were fed, and despite the sacrifice of their time to the movement, their children were cared for.

Social Reproduction During the Strike

The symbolism of women and mothers was also essential in rallying the black community of Charleston behind the strike, despite the immense stigma that blanketed any talk of organizing in the anti-union South. Ultimately, it is women's which labor reproduces culture on every level; their washing, mending, cooking and cleaning produces the labor power of their husbands and themselves as a commodity that is consumed by their employers, their purchasing power, determined by the profits they earn from their labor, becomes the consumption that both drives the economy and determines what kind of food, textiles, and leisure is available to their families, and their child rearing inculcates the next generation with the values of workers. Mariarosa Dalla-Costa, in "Women and the Subversion of the Community," dubs this process the commodification of labor power in the "social factory".[101] Writing in Italy in 1975, just a few years after the strike, Dalla-Costa theorizes the role of the housewife's labor as the hidden work of cultural production.

The productive power of the Charleston strikers in the social factory operates differently than that of the Italian housewives Dalla-Costa observed, and is perhaps better understood through Angela Davis' response to Dalla-Costa in *Women, Race, and Class*. Davis points out that black women have historically carried the "double-burden," of working to reproduce the commodified labor of their husbands and children, while also having to sell their own labor commodity day in and day out, not as a part of the capitalist system, but as a granted "precondition."[102] While Dalla-Costa's work spurred an international demand for women to receive wages for their housework, Davis points out that many black and working-class women already receive wages for housework, in low-wage,

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[101] Mariarosa Dalla-Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, ed. Mariarosa Dalla-Costa and Selma James (Bristol, England: Falling Water Press, 1972), 33-34.
[102] Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, 234.

feminized jobs like maid or, in the Charleston case, nurse. In Dalla-Costa's theory the wage is liberatory, because it makes hidden domestic labor visible and allows for collective bargaining. Davis points out however, that in economies reliant on racial capitalism, a wage does little to shield the Black working-class woman from worker exploitation. Thus, Davis argues that militant worker organization is critical to women's liberation, especially for the Black working woman.

In the Charleston strike, this worker militancy is interwoven with women's liberation, in a self-supporting circuit; women trapped in the double burden of feminized housework and hospital work, subvert their roles in the social factory to draw upon the labor of their community that they themselves helped to produce. The networks of black culture in Charleston– like church– that SCLC and 1199 learned to invoke, were initially created, and then re-fastened together and concretized by the socially-reproductive force of hundreds of mothers turning their labor power towards bringing-up the revolution. Worker militancy was a dangerous engagement for Black Southerners, as demonstrated by the violence during Operation Dixie, so the movement required the presence of black women as protagonists to fuel the flames of revolution on a personal level and cultural level. Mary Moultrie summed this up quite succinctly, "it was somebody's family, somebody's wife you know? They're in somebody's church, so they got on board like that."[103]

The role of 1199B in Charleston's community can be likened to the function of the Neighborhood Union and the Gate City Free Kindergarten Association, both founded in Atlanta in 1908 by Lugenia Burns Hope and a network of Black mothers and teachers. These two organizations focused on providing social welfare and community support to the Black community of Atlanta, especially women and children, in the Jim Crow South. The Gate City Free Kindergarten Association was a response to the conditions of poverty faced by many Black mothers in Atlanta which forced them to "work long hours for low wages," and left them perpetually needing childcare.

[103] Moultrie, Saunders, and Simmons interviewed by Kerry Taylor, 18.

The NU was born out of the original mission to create humane conditions in Black neighborhoods, often through programs to uplift Black women and children. These efforts were wide ranging including exposing discriminatory shopkeepers, investigating the conditions of Black public schools, providing direct relief of food and clothing to struggling families, and establishing the Neighborhood House, a community center opened in 1913 which offered programs for both children and adults in homemaking and vocational development.[104]

Much like the anatomy of 1199B, Tera Hunter argued that the "distinctive infrastructure [of NU] enabled and required the participation of working-class women."[105] While the scope of the NU's community welfare was much broader than that of 1199B, there is a fundamental similarity between these two associations, founded by women to support other women. The nature of women's work in the household is atomized, invisible to the public eye, and thus difficult to organize. The mandate of the NU and 1199B is to bring the work of women into the public eye on every level, by concretizing a network of women who deploy the hidden work of reproducing their communities in the form of a community run organization of women's uplift. 1199B, made public the struggles of working black mothers, and created a visible linkage between the racialized, feminized labor of their hospital work and the civil rights movement on the whole; their position as workers engaged in withholding their labor, bolstered them as inspiration workers pushing the whole movement forward in their struggle.

Working and Sacrificing for the Cause

Although the domestic skills of the striking women becoming visible as tools of revolutionary reproduction did have benefits for the movement, there was not much glory to be had in this the work they had to do to maintain the union. Much of what successfully kept the

[104] Hunter, Tera W. *To Joy my Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 138.
[105] Hunter, *To Joy my Freedom*, 140.

movement afloat, was activities like cooking and child wrangling, which mirrored, in many ways, their labor at home. For example, besides picketing, some women did secretarial work for the union. Carrie Mitchell reflected on her role in the union office during the strike; processing donations and allocating them to strikers on the basis of need.

> It was hard because we had to do whatever people bring me, their bills, and stuff, whatever, so you can't pay all of those, but you had to pay it. If someone get their lights cut off today, of course you have to pay that and you have to give your brother some money for food… it wasn't enough money to help anybody, you know, to help everybody.[106]

Carrie Mitchell's memory of the choices made in the union office provide insight into the larger economic and personal sacrifices made by the women of the strike. The work she did for the union mirrored the kind of decision making that the women, classified as heads of households and "working poor," would make every day to keep their families afloat. For women who already lived close to or under the poverty line, being out of work created huge financial burdens. The stress of striking was compounded by the stress of navigating access to food stamps or relying on donations to keep your electric bill paid every month.[107]

Despite the sacrifices, it was the issue of disrespect and the fight for human dignity that caused many hospital workers to feel that the decision to walk out and stay out of work was absolutely mandatory. The pillar of dignity that is so central to their movement emerges again in the language and agenda of the economic boycott executed on King Street, the city's largest shopping district. A handbill "found among several other copies scattered in the street opposite the Friendship AME Church, Mount Pleasant, SC, May 29th, 1969, the day after a rally in the church," reads "Soul money is soul power! Don't spend your money until the man respects hospital workers. Don't buy in

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[106] Carrie Mitchell, interview by Jennifer Dixon, June 25, 2008, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Special Collections Library at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, available online at https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04007U/#d1e10911. 18.
[107] Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, 15.

Charleston!"[108] This handbill, cosigned by the SCLC and 1199B, was distributed as part of the economic boycott campaign exacted by the community to halt Charleston's economy.

The economic boycott developed over the month of May as an arm of the SCLC's approach to the political organizing of the movement. Andrew Young, the SCLC's representative for the Charleston movement was quoted at the time as saying, "it is only when you create the kind of crisis in the life of the community as you have in the lives of the workers that the community will give in."[109] Activists from the SCLC encouraged Charlestonians to politically deploy the non-violent strategies of economic boycott and the practice of getting arrested, in tandem, to create the atmosphere of unrest that moved Governor McNair to declare a state of emergency and impose a 9 o'clock pm to 5 o'clock am curfew. With the dollars of Black consumers taken out of the economy on principle and the dollars of tourists taken out of the economy by fear of unrest and the imposition of the curfew, the economy of Charleston was severely curtailed.[110] These strategies, while developed in earlier stages of the civil rights movement, became unique in Charleston because now these mechanisms of resistance were mostly carried out by women.

After Judge Singletary's March 21st injunction on the number of strikers allowed to picket outside of the hospital was handed down, the 600 some workers who took up the line put their bodies in peril every day. Of this group, all of them were black and only about 20-25 were male by Naomi White's estimate.[111] Although the participants and the people arrested in the many mass marches that followed in the next three months were by no means exclusively Black women, a great many of them were. Jessie Jefferson, a 30 year old nursing assistant on strike who went to jail three

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[108] "Charleston Hospital Strike Boycott Handbill, 1969." Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Charleston, SC, 1969. South Carolina Historical Society.
[109] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power," 15.
[110] Dixon-McKnight, Otha Jennifer. "'We Shall Not Always Plant While Others Reap': Black Women Hospital Workers and the Charleston Hospital Strike, 1967-1970," (PhD diss. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2017), 134.
[111] Naomi White, interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, June 25, 2008, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Special Collections Library at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, available online at https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04007U/#d1e10911, 10.

times, remembers that when they were arrested, Rev. Abernathy of the SCLC made sure that they never went in alone, and they made sure that once they were in there, they did not leave until money had been raised for the entire group to be bailed out together.[112] In this, it is revealed that the political aims of the SCLC and 1199 relied on the physical presence of Black women on the ground and their ability to mobilize their friends, families and community to support. It is also revealed that the women relied on the physical presence of their network too; they needed each other for strength in numbers.

Each day, striking women took to the streets in an intensifying powder-keg of police, scabs, and marchers. In a retrospective article about the strike, Leon Fink memorializes the words of many women, lesser known in the broader strike history. He includes a quote from "Claire G. Brown, obstetrics technician at MCH, [who] had five children, some of whom joined her during two strike-related trips to jail."

> It was one of the most exciting, hardest and important periods of my life. The walking, walking, walking, and more walking. The hours and efforts spent trying to get programs together for mass meetings… for anything else I know if I could help it I would never permit myself to be jailed, looking back I know if I had to do it again I would do the same thing.

Claire Brown's account reflects not only how much sweat the strike required, but also that much of the sweating was done by women who may not have laid their bodies down for another cause. Interestingly, when Dixon-McKnight interviewed different strike participants in 2009, she often began by asking if her interlocutor had been politically involved before the strike and many women said no.[113]

For example, when asked about the civil rights sit-ins of the mid-sixties, Carrie Mitchell said, "I wasn't involved in none of it. I didn't really have the time I had children." This sentiment suggests

[112] Jessie Jefferson interview by Steve Estes, October 22, 1994, in Charleston South Carolina, transcript, Steve Estes Papers, Box 1, folder 1-6, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina, 7.
[113] Mitchell interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 2; White interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 3; Simmons interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 2.

that, for some of the women, the objectives of the strike were both political, and directly tied to the welfare of their household. Mitchell expressed regret that the strike took so much of her time away from her children and set her back financially, but she also expressed pride that her labors might have created more equal opportunities for her children, one of whom became a nurse herself.[114] The great personal sacrifices of many of the women were then motivated by complex interplays between their desires for better pay and treatment in the workplace, political and social advancement of their community, and also personal hopes for their own homes and children. Women's work was made visible by heading up the movement and women's sacrifices were widespread across the whole city.

The boycott on King Street exemplifies the kind of dynamism of women as front line activists, because as women were the force behind the boycott, they were simultaneously the group most affected by it. Although it was under the SCLC's organization, it can be seen as a uniquely feminized form of protest when black women's connection to housework is considered. Picketing outside stores with children in tow and "shop-ins," where checkout lines were inundated with protestors poised as shoppers served as a salient reminder that the consumers that would typically patronize these businesses were the very women who were now utilizing them as sites of political action.[115] Black women's presence on the frontlines of the boycott made use of their hidden labor as the heads of their household by turning what was once hidden into a high-visibility militancy.

Agitating for Dignity

Because much of the work women did to reproduce the strike represented a significant exodus of their labor from the private sphere into the public, it inevitably departed from the delineations of "respectable" roles for women and crossed into the realm of agitating for change. For example, just a few days after the strike began, Naomi White was on the picket line, when a young woman attempted to break the picket line to go to work with the help of a man who had been hired

[114] Mitchell interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 7.
[115] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power," 15. Carrie Mitchell interviewed by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 8.

to protect her while she entered the hospital. White, a rank-and-filer who has been mentioned in the record more than some of her fellow strikers due to her notoriety as an agitator, recalls a verbal altercation with the pair which culminated in a physical fight and White's arrest: "She, [the scab] had a bunch of chains and stuff around her neck and I grabbed them, and that's when the free-for-all started. [Laughter] I got arrested.[116] This instance of street-justice does not necessarily align with the SCLC's image of churchgoing mothers engaging in non-violent protest, but is equally representative of the inspiration-work women conducted during the strike. Naomi White is remembered as one of the great heroes of the hospital workers fight, in particular because of her defiance in the face of white supremacy.

It is no question, also, that White and her role in the strike has been so often written about because she gave a lively, funny interview, but also because she was someone who embodied the aim of disruption very explicitly. Naomi White pulled together a group of mostly women who took on the role of community enforcement called the "Hell Angels," named with a nod to the notorious outlaw motorcycle gang, the Hells Angels. According to White, they defended the objectives of the strike by force. Her crew would lie in wait near the hospital around shift changes for people attempting to cross the picket line, and in White's words, "ripped them scabs up."[117] This group also physically enforced the economic boycott on King Street. White attests that when people in the community did not adhere to the boycott and went shopping on King Street, White and the Hell Angels "relieved them of their shopping." When it was clear that shopping on King Street would not be possible some people headed to smaller shopping centers in West Ashley, a borough just across the Ashley River, but the Hell Angels cropped up wherever the strike was being violated to intimidate people into their solidarity.[118]

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[116] White interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 7-8.
[117] White interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 11.
[118] Ibid, 12.

Mary Moultrie and Rosetta Simmons as well rose as representatives of the black women of the movement and their words which survive them, along with accounts from other women on the frontlines, remain a powerful reminder of what it meant to be on-the-ground as an activist. They unified the labor union politicking and the wide-ranging mission of the SCLC's Poor People's Campaign with the realities of Black women, many of whom had not previously been a part of organized resistance. Simmons' constant reiteration of the pillar of dignity recontextualized the routine workplace discrimination as a violent reification of racial caste and closely aligned the strike with the civil rights movement, while maintaining it as a workers struggle as well. In a 2009 interview with Kerry Taylor, Simmons recollected what she deemed the chief aim of the strike,

> Management needed to know that we are human beings, and we ought to be treated with dignity and respect. Money will come later, but just those things, being treated as human beings and being treated with dignity and respect.[119]

Simmons' use of the word respect, in this interview and in most of her public speaking during and after the strike, de-abstractifies, through language, the articulation between the workers and the politics of civil rights that defined the 1969 resistance.

Mary Moultrie, Union Leader

Mary Moultrie, as the elected President of 1199B, became the figure that most embodied the movement to the public. Her speeches at rallies and marches tied together civil-rights work and unionism and disseminated these ideas through the voice of a community member and working Black woman. A particular triumph for Moultrie was the iconic Mother's Day March. The attendance of not only the usual SCLC representatives, but also Corretta Scott King, as well as the powerful symbol of working-class mothers and their children marching together on one of Charleston's biggest tourism days of the year, innately centered Black women's activism. The Charlestonians who marched that day were joined by thousands of labor union activists and civil

[119] Simmons interview by Kerry Taylor, 17.

rights workers from all over the country. Walter Ruether, president of the United Automobile Workers Union, made an appearance to march along with several liberal congressmen who had been taking notice of the conflict from the hill in Washington.[120] The presence of Reuther came with pledges of large amounts of financial support from the UAW, followed by George Meany of the AFL-CIO and other labor organizations around the country.[121] Titans of American labor militancy rallied very visibly in Charleston on the day of, and in response to the Mother's Day March. Their economic support was extremely valuable in carrying the hospital workers through the rest of the conflict– which would continue for almost two more months– but more than that, they marched arm-and-arm with Mary Moultrie. Her national visibility beside these union leaders legitimated her as a labor activist.

Moultrie's speech on that day invoked the universal struggle of workers against the owning class, specifically addressing the structure of wealth accumulation in South Carolina.

> In tomorrow's papers we're going to read all about outside agitators who come here to mess up Charleston… I'll tell you something. We've got more in common with you hospital workers from New York… packinghouse workers from Chicago… steelworkers from Pittsburg– we've got more in common with all you so called outsiders than we'll ever have with those fat cats from Columbia and those hospital trustees from Charleston.[122]

To welcome outside, union forces in this manner was very generous of Mary Moultrie. In a city where anti-unionism was the norm and racial discrimination in the workplace was rampant, it would be incredibly difficult to convince the Black working-class to put their livelihoods in the hands of a labor union. Part of Mary Moultrie's role in reproducing revolutionary action is as a kind of inspiration worker, per Jones' analysis of Black working-women's role in the civil rights movement. Her work for the union, however, came with its own unique form of exploitation. The Local 1199

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[120] Pillow, W.K. and Stewart R. King, "Thousands March in Support of Strike," *Charleston News and Courier*, May 12, 1969, 7-A.
[121] Fink "Union Power, Soul Power," 16.
[122] Pillow and Stewart R. King, "Thousands March in Support of Strike," 7-A.

used her power as a speaker who represented the changing face of the rank-and-file to inspire people all over the country. She often traveled to make speeches in cities where Local 1199 was attempting to recreate the satellite model of 1199B. This expansion, from inspiring her own community to serving as a national figure for the labor movement of the late sixties, took a huge physical and emotional toll on Moultrie.[123] Despite the taxing nature of her work as a union rhetorician, her work had direct benefits to her comrades in the hospital strike. Her approach was persuasive to the women that had been her colleagues at the hospital, and women all over the state who faced similar conditions in their own homes and jobs.

Conclusion

Over the course of the strike these women actualized themselves as radicals; advocates for their own dignity. The labor militancy of the striking women represented a disruption of the Charleston political economy that Governor McNair worried could inculcate the entire state with virulent unionism. The potential zealotry for working class organization that McNair feared on the horizon was heightened by the double burden carried by the black working-class mothers and wives of the strike. The subversive acts of feeding and caring for each other's children and turning the hidden labor of housework to revolutionary aims were only strengthened by the political visibility of marching in the streets and going to jail for the cause. By withholding their dollars from the Charleston economy, providing for each other communally and not contributing to the economy that benefitted only their oppressors, the strikers proved just how powerful their collective action could be. The feminized skills of housework were not made visible to institutions of power when waged in the form of nursing, but they were made visible when positioned as tools of revolutionary action.

[123] Saunders, interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 21.

Chapter 3 - Soul Power: The Life Cycle of a Grassroots Movement

In Charleston, the postwar period was characterized by a huge economic boom due to the success of the North Charleston naval base and the rapid expansion of the Charleston port.[124] Charleston was becoming a major asset in the State's larger plan for economic development. South Carolina's development strategy was a curated combination of "favorable tax and regulatory climate, and a system of state financial incentives that included relatively cheap industrial sites developed largely at state expense," since termed "smokestack chasing,' for its emphasis on courting industry.[125] The center of the smokestack chasing agenda was a political commitment to anti-unionism. Governor McNair was under immense political pressure to refuse to recognize worker collectivization in Charleston. His constituents and business connections warned him that if he did, he would set a precedent that could snowball into union drives at institutions all over the state.[126]

Governor McNair was, in many ways, the heir of this development plan rather than one of its key architects. He was one in a long line of South Carolina governors who had protected this plan. Some were explicit segregationists and some were not, but all maintained a hard line against civil rights activism to discourage African Americans from further disrupting racial capitalism.[127] The Charleston strike gained significant momentum, but ended in a symbolic, unsatisfying victory for Local 1199B. This end was a result of the successful union-busting strategies deployed by the State, and the disarticulations between the political organizations invited by the strikers to provide support. Police brutality backed by a widespread economic investment in racism created an incredibly

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[124] Robert N. Rosen, *A Short History of Charleston*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2021), 149-150.
[125] Lacy K Ford and R. Phillip Stone. "Economic Development and Globalization in South Carolina." *Southern Cultures* 13, no. 1 (2007): 21.
[126] For more information on mid-Twentieth century Southern industry; Bryant Simon, *The Hamlet Fire: A Tragic Story about Cheap Food, Cheap Government and Cheap Lives* (New York: The New Press, 2017), and Philip Scranton, *The Second Wave: Southern Industrialization from* the 1940s to the 1970s (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); for more information on the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Dr. King, David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William and Morrow Company, 1986); for more information on the shift from nonviolence to militant organizing in the civil rights movement, Curtis J. Austin *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008).
[127] Ibid, 22-28.

protracted conflict that, eventually, could not be supported by the workers and their political backers.

In the 113 days following the walkout on March 20th, 1969, Charleston became a battleground for several different fights. The primary battle was the revolution of Black workers against the State. However, once the strike had begun to mobilize a large swath of the Charleston community, the future of the city, the civil rights movement, and the Southern labor movement all appeared on the table for renegotiation. The presence of New York's Local 1199 Healthcare Workers Union and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were undoubtedly a huge help to the Charleston hospital workers. The strike likely would not have existed without the national attention they brought to the city. However, the political infighting exacerbated by the presence of the outsider political entities was fatal to the movement. The eventual conclusion of the strike was not a decision made by satisfied strikers, but a decision made jointly by labor union representatives and civil rights workers who no longer found the movement to be politically viable.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference Comes to Charleston

Judge Singletary passed down his picketing injunction on March 21st. The City of Charleston Police Department were on the picket lines armed with the ability to arrest strikers for violating the injunction by the end of the day. Thus, the friction between strikers and law enforcement– and the legal system– began almost immediately. Going to jail was something the women on strike had to get comfortable with as soon as the injunction was issued. Anyone going out on the line understood that what they were doing had been criminalized, and they were liable to be escorted into a paddy wagon and taken to jail.[128] So while the antagonism of the police department was established quite early, at the same time, the strikers were planning a non-violent movement. Early on, movement leaders established a relationship with City Police Chief Joe Conroy, who many strikers considered to

[128] Doster interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 6.

be a somewhat upstanding member of the white power structure. In fact, almost every single member of the movement who was local to the city made a point of saying a word in his favor. Although the police force was oppressive, Conroy by all accounts "knew when to pull the troops back."[129] The relationship between the strikers and Conroy's police department would ebb and flow throughout the months that followed while the strike navigated working inside of and outside of the law.

The injunction was ignored and the strikers maintained their picket despite arrests. But the strikers wanted the movement to encompass more than just their picket. They were attempting to organize as employees of a State institution, so their battle encompassed the needs of poor working people all over the State. As illustrated by the rapid issuance of the injunction, the ability of the State to immediately apply legal pressure would always far outstrip that of the union. Realizing that Local 1199B would need a different kind of pressure on their side alerted the strike leaders to the necessity of broadening their ranks. Even with the six hundred some workers out on strike, they would need far greater numbers to successfully challenge the force of resources allocated for union-busting in the state of South Carolina. Under the advice of Septima P. Clark, they reached out to the SCLC. They needed complete community mobilization and they needed the eyes of the national news media, and this was the SCLC's specialty.[130] The SCLC was also well known for their connection to the labor movement, specifically 1199. In March of 1968, Dr. King gave a speech to Local 1199 in New York where he praised the union and called himself "a fellow 1199-er."[131] However, that relationship changed dramatically between March 1968 and March 1969.

When 1199B called upon them, The SCLC was in the midst of a national movement championing economic justice, referred to as the Poor People's Campaign. Dr. Martin Luther King

[129] Isaiah Bennet, interview by Steve Estes, 6; Jessie Jefferson interview by Steve Estes, 4; Mitchell interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 9.
[130] Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, 10.
[131] 1199SEIU, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Addresses 1199 Healthcare Workers in 1968," January 15, 2016, youtube video, 00:13, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpA9mcTdJsM.

Jr. was assassinated the year before in Memphis, marching with striking sanitation workers as part of the mission of the Poor People's Campaign. After he was killed, the SCLC executive board– Dr. King's friends and comrades– called a march of the American poor to Washington. They were expecting the Sanitation Workers union to call a general strike in support, but they did not. Hosea Williams of the SCLC executive board remembers this as the fracture between civil rights and unionism, which made him, and other high-ranking members of the SCLC wary of joining the fight for union representation in Charleston; "I almost saw Charleston as a fight between the union and the city. I also felt the union had not been our best friend."[132] In addition to damaging the relationship between the SCLC and labor unions, Dr. King's death also led to the succession of Rev. Ralph Abernathy to the position of executive chair of the SCLC. Hosea Williams also recalls that his comrades in the SCLC did not put their support behind Abernathy in the way that they had Dr. King, which he saw curtailing Rev. Abernathy's ability to be a strong leader within the organization.[133]

And so, Rev. Abernathy was tasked with carrying on Dr. King's legacy of the Poor People's Campaign, with a newfound uneasiness among his executive board towards unions and questions about his ability to fill the huge void of leadership. Charleston Historian Steve Estes wrote of the SCLC at the end of the 60s that the organization was seeing "its nonviolent approach to civil rights and its role at the forefront of the movement slipping away," and thus, it was essential that Charleston appear as a national victory for the SCLC or perhaps they would lose their prominence.[134] And so, Rev. Abernathy mobilized the SCLC in full force to Charleston. Andrew Young and Carl Farris were assigned as the SCLC's leading point-men in Charleston, tasked with

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[132] Hosea Williams interview by Steve Estes, February 9, 1996, in Atlanta, Georgia, transcript, Steve Estes Papers, Box 1, folder 1-5, Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture at the College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina, (hereafter Avery Research Center) 6.
[133] Williams interviewed by Estes, 5.
[134] Steve Estes, *Charleston in Black and White: Race and Power in the South After the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 25.

liaising with Local 1199B and Elliot Godoff and Henry Nichols of Local 1199, but dozens more SCLC volunteers were instructed to descend onto Charleston.[135] This influx of experienced civil rights workers transformed the movement from the Hospital Workers Strike to what is now often termed the Charleston Movement. Beginning in the first days of April, the SCLC began holding daily marches, and critically, mass meetings in churches throughout the city.[136] These meetings in churches served as a space where Charlestonians could see Abernathy, Mary Moultrie, and on a few occasions, Corretta Scott King ministering from the pulpit.

Black Power, Soul Power

The SCLC's strategy when they arrived right at the start of April, 1968, was a fairly straightforward adaptation of previous, successful organizing campaigns of the civil rights movement. Andrew Young, who became one of the SCLC's main tacticians in Charleston described it with his characteristic matter-of-fact approach to revolution.

> "The model was somewhat borrowed from the Birmingham-Selma experience, when you could not get the local government to negotiate– either the state or local government– you had to mobilize the whole community, the churches, and the high school students in a total program of non-cooperation or economic withdrawal. So, we had a boycott on Charleston for one hundred days, and we had demonstrations by high school kids and, by and large, we kind of kept the city on edge until they were willing to come around and talk about justice for these hospital workers."[137]

This complete non-cooperation was a continuation of the ideology behind the bus-boycotts or the marches on Selma, but the greater context of the Black experience in America– and in Charleston– had evolved since the early to mid-sixties. A larger tide, turning away from nonviolence and towards the teachings of figures like Malcolm X, had captivated many of the teenagers in Charleston that the SCLC mobilized for the workers' cause. Instead of chanting "Black Power," the slogan of the

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[135] Robert Ford, interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, June 25, 2008, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Special Collections Library at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, available online at https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04007U/#d1e10911, 2.
[136] Ford interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 4.
[137] Andrew Young interview by Leon Fink, January 31, 1980, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, transcript, Steve Estes Papers, Box 1, folder 1-4, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina, 4.

movement in Charleston became "Soul Power." Many of the foot soldiers of the movement did not seem to see much distinction between the two. Jessie Jefferson said that she and her compatriots "considered that you had to be Black to have Soul Power."[138] "Soul Power," as a slogan, whether or not it encompassed the same theoretical lens as "Black Power," did capture the religiosity that underpinned the movement that grew around the strike. The SCLC's mandate as a Christian organization helped them to capitalize on the momentum of the clergymen's ongoing involvement in supporting the strike. William Saunders noted in an interview in 2009, "the Black community is a very religious community," and religious leadership was critical in connecting political struggle to spirituality and faith, "and then folks could stand up."[139]

The development of Black churches as sites of resistance has its roots in slavery, where Christian services became one of the only places enslaved Africans were permitted by slave masters to congregate, likely imagining that "a message of deliverance in the afterlife," would provide a reason to endure a daily life of bondage.[140] Often church had the opposite effect for enslaved peoples; instead "messages of deliverance were not read as heavenly promise, but as an earthly goal."[141] In 1816, The first African American Episcopal Church was founded in the free city of Pennsylvania by a Black Minister named Richard Allen and some of his followers. The AME Church was very politically active in the fight for the abolition of slavery, and after emancipation, the expanding AME network sent missionaries to establish congregations in the American South to provide political, and apolitical spaces, where Black people could congregate for worship.[142] The nature of Jim Crow segregation preserved the Black church as a cultural institution; in some places

[138] Jefferson interview by Steve Estes, 5.
[139] Moultrie, Saunders, and Simons interview by Kerry Taylor, 32.
[140] T.V. Reed, *The Art of Protest: Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 11.
[141] Reed, *The Art of Protest*, 11.
[142] Clarence E Walker, "The A.M.E. Church and Reconstruction," *Negro History Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (1985): 11.

the Church was the only institution that had the ability to raise money or, through sermons, safely spread political messages.[143]

Thus, Black churches became sites of organizing during the civil rights movement, and Black ministers– like King and Abernathy– rose as leaders. A study of the SCLC's organizing work in Chicago beginning in 1965, suggested that Dr. King's SCLC emerged at the forefront of the movement by developing a strategy for direct action that was derived directly from theology. It was the contention of the study that the principle of nonviolence, derived from Christian teachings, "was able to transform and redirect religious sensibilities," which allowed Black Christians "to release their energy for direct action." In the Charleston context, the SCLC's strategy of nonviolence was persuasive for Black and white Christians alike. While the SCLC may not have been able to reach the average white Charlestonian, their presence strengthened the resolve of the multi-ethnic Concerned Clergymen's Committee and in general deepened the religious community's personal identification with the movement. Church was a place where the entire community converged, and ministers acted as gatekeepers who often used their power on the strikers' behalf. Workers who were afraid to strike or be seen talking about unions, of course, still came to church. Mary Moultrie recalled "Some of the ministers on Sunday would tell them 'You either come on out of the hospital, or you get out of the church."[144]

The space of the Church was also important to the Charleston movement because of the long tradition of freedom songs that evolved from spirituals sung in Black churches and praise halls. The mass meetings held in churches became a place where the narrative of the fight in Charleston was made– and made righteous– by connecting the movement's present to the long history of Black struggle in South Carolina. The span of this struggle, from slavery to the Hospital Worker's Strike, could be connected by song. Many of the freedom songs developed by Guy Carawan, the music

[143] Reed, *The Art of Protest*, 12.
[144] Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, 10.

director of the Highlander Folk School, borrowed heavily from hymns sung at a praise hall on John's Island called Moving Star Hall.[145] One of the most famous freedom songs of the 1960's, "We Shall Overcome," was actually once a slave spiritual, "I shall overcome."[146] It was transformed by a Black woman named Lucille Simmons in 1946, on the line of the Tobacco Workers' Strike, while she marched for her rights as an industrial worker.[147] Thirty-three years later, and just a few blocks up, the hospital workers sang that same song fighting the same segregation of their workplace and degradation of themselves as workers and human beings.

Protest historian T.V. Reed identifies this effect of freedom songs, "instant historicizing," whereby the alteration of old spirituals to reflect new struggles instantly connects the memory of the past to the material conditions of the present.[148] One night in Morris Brown AME Church, a site of many mass meetings over the summer of 1969, Mary Moultrie was speaking at the pulpit to a malcontented crowd of her fellow strikers. Things had begun to drag on too long and people were struggling to pay their bills. She spoke to them of the need to persist, but morale remained low. Finally, she began to serenade the crowd with Jerry Butler's "Only the Strong Survive." When she sang the chorus "You gotta be strong. You gotta hold on. You gotta keep going. Only the strong survive!" William Saunders said "the church just went mad!"[149] Freedom songs were an essential part of rallies, marches, demonstrations, and picketing for the Charleston movement, precisely because of Charleston's dark history as a major slave trading hub with an intense plantation economy. The religiosity of the Black community in Charleston was deeply intertwined with the rich cultural

[145] Guy Carawan, "South Carolina Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: A Conference on the History of the Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina, 1940-1970," November 5-6, 1982, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, The Charleston Museum, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina, 119.
[146] Peter Dreier and Dick Flacks, "Roots of Rebellion: Music and Movements: The Tradition Continues," *New Labor Forum* 23, no. 2 (2014): 100.
[147] Doster interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 21.
[148] Reed, *The Art of Protest*, 15.
[149] Estes, *Charleston in Black and White*, 28.

history of church hymns. Freedom songs, thus "instantly" connected the workers' battle to the often-unspoken Black history of Charleston.

Children in the Movement

Another SCLC strategy with roots deep within the movement was the mobilization of children and teenagers. Children were on the picket lines with their single mothers out of necessity, long before the SCLC arrived and employed this as a tactic, but the SCLC and the union recognized the importance of children as a visible arm of the movement, and organized their involvement strategically. John Lewis, once the chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee which worked closely with the SCLC on numerous civil rights campaigns, thought of children and teenagers as the "ground crew," the four-foot figures that appear in the history books staring down dogs and hoses, but often are not remembered by name.[150] This philosophy was controversial, even within the movement, but the terror of allowing children to stand in harm's way was weighed against the value of what children activists contributed to the movement. Children stood at the center of the movement from *Brown v. Board of Education*, to the vision of a future where Black children grew up without the yolk of Jim Crow laws. They represented the purity of the movement's aims. Americans watching the violence unfold on TV were most horrified by the brutality faced by children; the image of a child on the front lines of battle was enough to convert the skeptic.[151]

The SCLC had mobilized children to march and be arrested in the Birmingham Children's Crusade in 1963, again in Selma in 1965. Even in the face of harrowing police violence, children seemed particularly unwavering on their intent to fight for justice.[152] So in Charleston, Abernathy preached for children to boycott their schools and instead favor a different kind of education through political action. A 1981 article published in *The Chronicle*, a weekly newspaper founded in

[150]John Lewis and Sheyann Webb, "Youth in the Civil Rights Movement," in *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Tragedy of Children's Rights from Ben Franklin to Lionel Tate*, ed. Barbara Bennett Woodhouse (Princeton University Press, 2008), 136.
[151] Lewis and Webb, "Youth in the Civil Rights Movement," 144.
[152] Ibid, 150.

1971 as part of a national coalition of Black-owned news media called the National Newspaper Publishers Association, quoted one of the students who spoke in 1969 on their experience of participating in the movement "We belong with workers and will stay with them. We closed the schools, but learned much more outside the classroom, in the streets and our workshops."[153] These workshops the students organized themselves with the help of SCLC, along with school walkouts and demonstrations.[154] One morning, students staged a mass basketball dribbling down King Street, the major shopping district on the peninsula.[155] William Saunders remembers that, at the time of the strike, it was often students that drove the school buses in Charleston, and "a lot of the bus drivers brought their bus downtown and just parked it and joined [the] strike… forty [to] fifty buses."[156] These students were engaged in a solidarity strike. With student bus drivers refusing to drive to school and students refusing to go to class, the hospital workers' strike was beginning to spread to a widespread sympathy strike in Charleston.

Tensions Rise in Charleston

However, the trouble with involving teenagers in a direct-action campaign was that they were unpredictable; they had their own experiences with racism and their own ideas of how to combat it. The marches were usually non-violent, however Abernathy recalled incidents of "crowds of young Blacks..becoming more unruly." There was an occasion he pinpointed in mid-April when an altercation between a striker and a police officer led to the officers being pelted with bottles and bricks by the crowd. The organizing efforts of the SCLC were in constant back and forth with the police. The route of the marches would often be given to police beforehand for preservation. Conroy and his men would walk alongside, but often did not intervene beyond the occasional heckling. Despite Conroy's ability to maintain a semi-amicable relationship with the stickers– or

[153] "Students Speak Out During 1969 Hospital Strike," *The Chronicle*, March 14, 1981, article, vertical file, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina.
[154] "Students Speak Out."
[155] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power," 15.
[156] Moultrie, Saunders, and Simmons interview by Kerry Taylor, 25.

perhaps because of his ability– by April 4th, county police, SLED agents, and federal marshals had all been ordered to join the city police force in Charleston.[157] This level of firepower only escalated action by protestors.

The demonstrations became more irksome to the white establishment, marching into neighborhoods where wealth was extremely concentrated like the Battery District.[158] The lines between what activity was considered picketing and what activity was considered a demonstration was blurring constantly as workers on strike and protestors moved seamlessly between each role. Hundreds were arrested for violating the picketing injunction in April, but the demonstrations did not cease.[159] In late April, there was a string of marches where high profile arrests took place,[160] accompanied by an escalation of property crimes. It began with break-ins at local businesses and rose to the level of sporadic fire bombs set off around the city and a school, a downtown store, and other private property being set ablaze.[161] Leaders of the hospital workers' movement maintained that this violence in the city was perpetrated by opportunists that were not involved with the strike.[162] In fact it was discovered that some of the break-ins had been perpetrated by a group of private detectives led by a retired police officer.[163] Nonetheless, this violence led Governor McNair to impose a state of emergency and the 9 pm curfew on May 1st, 1969.

This seemed to intensify mistrust between militant actors like Mr. Saunders and the SCLC. Both Andrew Young of the SCLC and William Saunders feared that the FBI was surveilling their movements in Charleston, and it was true that indeed the FBI was watching the SCLC,[164] but this

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[157] "Case Study: The Charleston Hospital Strike," *Southern Hospitals*, March, 1971, article, vertical file, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina, 20/12.
[158] White interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 11.
[159] "Case Study: The Charleston Hospital Strike," 22/14.
[160] Abernathy was arrested on April 25th, two Catholic priests were arrested on April 27th, and roughly 100 high school students on April 28th.
[161] "Case Study: The Charleston Hospital Strike," 22/14
[162] Jefferson interview by Steve Estes, 3.
[163] Moultrie, Saunders, and Simmons interview by Kerry Taylor, 36
[164] "Re: Poor People's Campaign– 1969 Southern Christian Leadership Conference, June 23, 1969, Richmond, Virginia, report, Steve Estes Papers, Box 1, folder 1-16, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina.

paranoia led to conflict within the movement.[165] Young stated in an interview in 1980 that he did not communicate with Saunders, who he thought to be too "close to the existing white establishment," for fear he was in the employ of SLED or the FBI.[166] Saunders has gone on record several times expressing that he often felt members of the SCLC were leaving him and the 1199B out of the loop, operating for some political aim that was greater than what they hoped to accomplish in Charleston. In fact, many members of the movement who were local to Charleston seemed to feel that the SCLC did not understand the unique politics of the city, and were not concerned with protecting the workers on the ground. The SCLC's policy of non-violence offended Mr. Saunders, who felt if Black people were being beaten in the streets, they should be empowered to hit back. He found relationships to the white establishment to be a more useful form of protection in Charleston's climate.

However, the most useful currency that the strikers held in their battle was their money. The SCLC, 1199, and the workers' movement were all in agreement that, to get the attention of powerful people, they needed to freeze the Charleston economy. Over several weeks in April, the workers, with the help of 1199 and the SCLC, circulated pamphlets in the local Black community and mounted pickets against stores on King Street.[167] The pamphlets and mass meetings centered around the battle cry, "don't shop on King Street," and the Black community was encouraged to cancel their charge accounts at business on the thorofare.[168] It was understood by those organizing strategy for the strike that Charleston was a tourist economy, and by shutting down shopping activity in the shopping district not just populated by locals, but by tourists too, the city stood to lose "billions of dollars."[169] The strikers agenda was compounded by the 9 pm curfew, William Saunders recalled "all

[165] William Saunders interview by Leon Fink, March 1, 1980, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, Steve Estes Papers, Box 1, folder 1-4, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina, 5.
[166] Young interview by Leon Fink, 8.
[167] Moultrie interviewed by Estes, 9.
[168] O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy," 202-203.
[169] Moultrie, Saunders, and Simmons interviewed by Kerry Taylor, 26.

these hotels and fancy restaurants, totally empty."[170] Businesses could not be open past 9 pm so tourists stopped coming to town; Charleston's tourist economy was halted in the middle of the busiest season. The economic boycott was the greatest tool in the pockets to the workers to remind the state that they held power in the economy; although the state had the power to deny them a fair wage, they had the power to deny the state access to their dollars in return.

State Response; **Police Brutality and Legal Maneuvering**

In addition to the declaration of a state of emergency, the State of South Carolina deployed SLED and the local police as a grindstone, meant to wear the workers down and demoralize them through constant arrests and an unending sensation of standing at the end of a loaded bayonet.[171] There were several instances of police brutality against Black women during the strike. One of the nurses, Thelma Buncum was arrested on the picket line and taken to jail, a common procedure under the umbrella of non-violent protest. The specifics of her confinement are unclear, but it is certain that when she was in her cell in county jail, she was attacked by a police officer, and had to be hospitalized for her injuries. Jessie Jefferson, who was also one of the original twelve fired, remembers the atmosphere of county jail and the demeanor of the officers.

> They said that when we were out there, they said that was Black power; when we came into jail, that was white power. They took over. That's what they said.[172]

The role of the local police and of SLED was to violently reassert the hierarchy of power in the State. Chief of SLED, J.P. Strom sent reports back to Governor McNair's office of the actions of the strikers, declaring that the crowds were "becoming more angry," as justification for requesting that the Governor's office hold strong with the "700 National Guardsmen, 100 Highway Patrolmen, and

[170] Ibid.
[171] "Case Study: The Charleston Hospital Strike," 22/14.
[172] Jefferson interview by Steve Estes, 5.

45 SLED agents," that comprised the state law enforcement presence in late April of 1969.[173] As the intensity of policing in the city continued to grow, the city only seemed to suffer. The presence of police even further curtailed the tourism that Charleston's economy relied on, especially in the summer months. And although this fact should have been cause for celebration for the movement, the presence of so many law enforcement officers also created a heightened sense of fear for the city's Black population. While Conroy's police department may have been able to prevent the movement from becoming violent on the scale of Selma or Birmingham, with more police in the city, more policemen were emboldened to enact violence indiscriminately.

The racial profiling and bad faith practice the police were perpetrating during the months of the strike, were exemplified by their arrest of a young Black woman named Dorothy Ann Richards. Richards was only downtown amongst the King Street picketing on Saturday July 3rd, 1969 to run an errand with a girlfriend. She did not come to stand in solidarity with the workers, in fact she had come to cross the picket line. She made a move to go into London's Drug Store when she was seized by a police officer. She told him repeatedly she was not involved in the strike, but nevertheless he raised his club to her head. She instinctively reached up and grabbed it. Later she said, "I was scared, and I didn't want him to hit me". The officer severely beat her, threw her in the back of a paddy wagon, and took her to county jail. After the fact, when she tried to take her case to court, no lawyers would take her case, and evidence of the brutalization she endured was destroyed before she could find representation.[174] Richards was not a part of the strike at all, in fact she was crossing the picket line by entering London's Drug Store that day, but that did not matter. Blackness in

[173] J.P. Strom, "Report from Chief Strom," April, 28, 1969, Charleston, South Carolina, report, box 32, folder "April," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Correspondence, February-April, UofSC Political Collections, Columbia, SC.
[174] Dorothy Ann Richards, "South Carolina Voices of the Civil Rights Movement: A Conference on the History of the Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina, 1940-1970," November 5-6, 1982, in Charleston, South Carolina, transcript, The Charleston Museum, Avery Research Center, Charleston, South Carolina, 275-276.

Charleston had become synonymous with political radicalism and the white power structure had aligned against any perceived insurgency, from Governor all the way down to beat cop.

The Governor's office and hospital administration presented to the movement and the watching nation, a unified front that would not relent to any demands made by a collectivized organization. Their legal standing for refusing to negotiate with a union was shaky. There was no clause in the right-to-work laws about State-run institutions not being able to negotiate with a union. Their argument relied only on Attorney General McLeod's professional opinion.[175] There was not a single written legal precedent for their position. To remedy this problem a resolution was passed by both the House of Representatives and Senate of the South Carolina General Assembly to affirm Governor McNair's position that there is no authority for the state to negotiate with a collective bargaining body of state employees.[176] That was the only Governor McNair legal action needed to affirm his position. In a 2009 talk to a history class at the Citadel, a student asked William Saunders "Isn't that illegal," to which he responded "There's nothing illegal in South Carolina."[177]

And it seemed that Saunders was right; neither McNair nor McCord faced consequences for these legally dubious maneuvers. They hardly faced backlash; for every telegram McNair received from his constituents that morally decried his actions, he received fifty more from supporters. The gubernatorial archives from 1969 contain thousands of messages from South Carolinians who felt that they held some claim to the bounty of the white establishment. Letters from healthcare workers using thinly veiled language to complain about the threat that these so-called "nonprofessionals," posed to the healthcare system, [178] letters from private citizens forewarning that without violent

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[175] Grose, *South Carolina on the Brink*, 249.
[176] Concurrent Resolution, South Carolina House of Representatives. April 29, 1969, box 32, folder "April," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Petitions and Resolutions, March-May, UofSC Political Collections, Columbia, SC.
[177] Moultrie, Saunders, and Simmons interview by Kerry Taylor, 21.
[178] Warren Smith, letter, April 19, 1969, box 32, folder "April," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Correspondence, February-April, UofSC Political Collections, Columbia, SC.

suppression by police, "the next thing that will happen down there is a riot," [179] and most of all, businessmen concerned for the precedent that would be set if a union was recognized by a state institution. Macon Miller, the executive vice president of the South Carolina State Chamber of commerce wrote to Governor McNair on March 28th,

> Your determined stand to combat the illegal action of outside forces causing unrest at your facility is encouraging to the business community of this state. We commend your actions and share your wishes for a quick return to order and the fine relationships you have enjoyed.

The final line of his letter, a subtle nod to the cooperation of the Governor's office and big business interests, seems to contain a veiled reminder of all that the State feared they might lose if a union was allowed to get a foothold in a State-run institution.

The Strike Must be Resolved

By mid-May, Elliott Godoff and his colleagues from the 1199 National had a private understanding amongst themselves that 1199B would never be an unequivocal success. They were already only surviving off of donations, and it seems they came to understand that in a right-to-work state like South Carolina, union dues coming straight off the workers' pay-checks was going to be nearly impossible to win. This was the beginning of the end for 1199B, as the National quietly looked for a way to extricate themselves without admitting a "nationally humiliating defeat."[180] In early June, the investigation by HEW, triggered by the wrongful termination of those 5 workers back in December of 1967, finally came to a dramatic head. Hugh Brimm from HEW's Atlanta office had been hounding Dr. McCord for months, requesting an Affirmative Action Plan, which would bring the hospital into compliance with federal anti-discrimination policy. Finally on June 5, 1969, Brimm wrote to inform McCord that Medical College Hospital had been in non-compliance for far too

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[179] J.B. Garvan, letter. April 18, 1969, box 32, folder "April," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Correspondence, February-April, UofSC Political Collections, Columbia, SC.
[180] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power," 17.

long. The hospital was advised to rehire the "magic twelve," as a "first step in the demonstration of an equal employment opportunity program," or be liable to lose millions of dollars in federal funding.[181]

With pressure mounting from HEW, the Board of Trustees at the hospital agreed to a sit-down meeting with a group of hospital workers organized by William Saunders and hospital administrator William Huff. The meeting was a turning point in the stalemate. Saunders and Huff had developed a relationship that circumnavigated McCord's authority. McCord's roots as a wealthy, white South-African were off-putting to the strikers, but Huff was someone they felt comfortable talking to.[182] Backed into a corner, Dr McCord capitulated to the rehiring, one of the most politically visible demands. It seemed a deal was on the table, however, the letters pouring into the Governor's office from concerned citizens saw these twelve women as violent insurrectionists and rioters. On top of that, there was a group of white nurses at MC who were threatening to quit if the twelve were reinstated.[183] It was incredibly politically unpopular to reinstate the workers. Knowing this, Congressmen Mendel Rivers and Strom Thurmond intervened at the top levels of HEW in Washington.[184] Their efforts seemed to produce assurances for Dr. McCord on the issue of federal funding, because he retracted his decision to rehire the twelve and "suddenly became 'ill' and unavailable for further talks."[185] This juncture seemed to Local 1199 officials and SCLC activists to be the moment when Charleston was finally going to explode.

While Local 1199 scrambled in Washington to put the deal back together, the SCLC was proving their worth as an ally with a tactical understanding of the inner workings of Southern racial politics. Under threat of fire bombings across the city and mass arrests at night marches, activists like

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[181] Ibid, 18; Hugh A. Brimm, letter, June 5, 1969, box 32, folder "June," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Petitions and Resolutions, June-August, UofSC Political Collections, Columbia, SC.
[182] Grose, *South Carolina on the Brink*, 257.
[183] "Case Study, Charleston Hospital Strike," 28/20.
[184] Ibid.
[185] O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy," 206.

Hosea Williams continued to play the role of the "agitator." On the night of June 20th, he was quoted at a rally:

> White folks are crazy. White America is insane. We have played around with Charleston long enough. We are going to march in Charleston tonight or we are going to die.

This kind of rhetoric intensified the pressure from white constituents on Governor McNair to disperse the Charleston Movement. Williams and Abernathy served as the faces of the SCLC's public conviction to upend the entire city until justice was done to the hospital workers. When Abernathy and Williams were arrested on the night of Williams' speech, they declared that they "were going to fast and die," until the strike was settled.[186] Before being arrested, Abernathy was also using his national profile to call on other union efforts across the nation to pay attention to Charleston. In a speech in Harlem on June 11th, 1969, he called for the New York Local 1199 to picket national textile corporations' headquarters. He specifically singled out J.P. Stevens, Deering-Milliken Company, and Lowenstein & Sons– all textile companies whose plants represented major employers and engines of South Carolina commerce, and all corporations that had sent telegrams to McCord expressing the importance of quelling the strike. He also announced his intention to speak to the higher-ups of the AFL-CIO, which represented the Longshoreman's Union, and pressure them to close the Charleston port.[187]

Even with the possibility of a Longshoremen sympathy strike as a powerful leveraging tool, The SCLC, along with the union, were starting to feel that the conflict needed to reach a conclusion, even if that conclusion did not result in the best possible deal for the workers. Andrew Young had built a rapport with Dr. McCord over the course of the conflict, and upon hearing that McCord would not, in fact, reinstate the first twelve fired, Young and fellow SCLC organizer, Stoney Cooks, phoned him and asked for a meeting. Young recalled that they "just listened to him for about two

[186] Williams interview by Steve Estes, 8.
[187] O'dell, "Charleston's Legacy," 205.

hours," complaining about the embarrassment of the strike and the ungratefulness of the strikers. Young said nothing in the workers defense, only at the end of McCord's tirade, he said the SCLC was only interested in getting the hospital workers back at their posts.[188] With the public pressure being put on the State, they seemed to be looking for an avenue to conclude the strike and Young was providing that avenue.

According to Young, by June of 1969, "both the SCLC and 1199 had put all the money in it they could afford to put in it."[189] There had been some movement in negotiations when a group of workers and advisors, including Mary Moultrie and William Saunders, were invited to meet with the Board of Trustees from the hospital, but McCord's steadfastness to not rehire the twelve workers had stalled that progress.[190] The final Memorandum of Agreement was not produced through negotiations between the workers and the hospital, but mostly through deals made by Young without the workers' knowledge. It was Young that spoke to the white nurses and convinced them not to quit if the striking workers were reinstated.[191] It was also Young with friends in the Governor's office who ran negotiations with McCord through Columbia.[192] These negotiations were aided by two federal labor-dispute mediators ordered to Charleston by President Nixon. On June 27th, these negotiations produced a settlement.[193] Mary Moultrie, President of 1199B was out of town for a speaking engagement and did not learn of the settlement until after it had been reached.[194]

The memorandum agreed upon the establishment of a credit union, a grievance procedure, a 30-cent raise, and the rehiring of the twelve fired workers and anyone else on strike who wished to

[188] Young interview by Fink, 10.
[189] Ibid, 9.
[190] Saunders interview by Fink, 17-18.
[191] Fink, "Union Power, Soul Power," 19.
[192] Young interview by Fink, 10.
[193] "Case Study: Charleston Hospital Strike," 30/22.
[194] Moultrie, "Reflections," 3.

come back to the hospital. What the settlement did not allow was the recognition of a union.[195] The deal lacked material benefits for the hospital workers and mostly only provided a conspicuous victory that served the political aims of the SCLC and 1199. Though the coalition of the SCLC, union, and workers began as a triumphant resistance to the economic oppression of Black workers in the South, the eventual resolution of the strike and conclusion of the movement left behind the very people it claimed to represent.

[195] "Case Study: Charleston Hospital Strike," 30/22.

Epilogue

In documenting the history of the 1969 Charleston Hospital Workers' Strike, two historicizations must exist side by side. First, it is necessary to analyze the successes and pitfalls of this resistance movement; Why were they compelled to act when they did? How did this coalition come together and why did it fall apart? What is the human cost and the significance in the individual lives impacted by this strike? The second issue is the broader implication of the State of South Carolina's aiming its resources towards suppressing a grassroots movement of workers. While this strike was lost as a result of the State's deliberate dismantling of their organizing coalition, it is still a testament to the power of labor militancy. Understanding the intricacies of the battle waged by the strikers reveals the magnitude of effort required from the State to crush it.

The final memorandum of agreement refused to recognize the 1199B union as a collective bargaining agent, thus refusing to automatically take union dues off of workers' paychecks or to acknowledge an elected bargaining committee to speak on behalf of the workers in any grievances going forward.[196] With ever dwindling resources to dedicate to the Charleston strike, the SCLC and 1199 made the decision to hasten the resolution. This left some of the women who had given months of their life to this struggle wondering if it had really been worth it. As Carrie Mitchell reflected in 2009, "If we had gotten the union… then I would feel like, OK, we have done that."[197] And although 1199B was affiliated, since the hospital would not recognize it there was little it could do for the hospital workers going back to work.

Because South Carolina was a right-to-work state, employees could be represented by a union without having to pay union dues. Since the hospital was not granting an automatic dues check-off, officials from 1199 would have to collect the money for the union themselves. This was

[196] "Memorandum," memorandum, box 32, folder "June," Robert E. McNair Papers, Gubernatorial, 1965-1971, Topical Files, Civil Rights, Medical College of South Carolina, Strike, 1969, Petitions and Resolutions, June-August, UofSC Political Collections, Columbia, SC, 1.
[197] Mitchell interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 14.

an especially difficult task since the only union officials were Rosetta Simmons and Mary Moultrie. When 1199 left, they did not provide behind any personnel to help Moultrie and Simmons run 1199B. The women, who both went back to work at the hospital after the strike, were left to juggle work, motherhood, and now a union local all on their own. 1199B struggled to stay afloat financially and eventually had to cease operations in 1973.[198] Many of the organizers felt that 1199 completely abandoned the project after the symbolic victory of the memorandum of agreement. Isaiah Bennett remarked in 1994, "all they did [was] just raise hell and leave… that's one of the greatest disappointments I had, when they left the people here with nothing."[199] This sentiment of resentment towards the union and to the SCLC appears often in strikers' interviews even decades after the strike concluded. However, many also expressed that right after the strike ended, there was a more ambiguous attitude on the notion of victory.

Right after the strike, there were reasons for celebration, but also indicators that some conditions had not meaningfully changed. After the memorandum of agreement, the work stoppages were over, and the hospital began to reinstate the strikers. The emotional and physical strain of 113 days out of work and constantly under siege was immense, and the end should have been a great relief. And in some ways, it was. Many women did report huge changes to the culture of racism from white hospital workers. Mary Moultrie noted that the practice of self-segregating to eat lunch ended after the strikers returned to work. She also felt that white workers no longer felt emboldened to blatantly demean their Black colleagues with racial slurs.[200] These were significant improvements to the working conditions the women faced before going on strike, however, the structural issues remained intact in the hospital. In many cases, the strike created an even more

[198] Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, 21.
[199] Bennett interview by Steve Estes, 7.
[200] Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, 22.

adversarial relationship between hospital administration and the Black women who they imagined to be responsible– as a group– for the work stoppages.

When the women were rehired, they were assigned to new positions so as to not work with anyone else involved in the strike. Some women who spent years learning how to exist and assist in pediatrics or obstetrics would suddenly end up on the floor in medicine or radiation.[201] Rosetta Simmons, as the most senior representative of 1199B from County Hospital, had to fight to be rehired even months after everyone else she had been striking with was back at work. Most strikers went back to work in July of 1969, but the hospital did not rehire Simmons until November 10th, 1969.[202] When she did get back to work, the hospital scheduled her to work three shifts per week, which would have been against hospital policy. She felt that the hospital was trying to wear her down, but she was well accustomed to circumnavigating the hospital's intimidation tactics. After calling in sick every third-shift for a month and a half, the hospital finally acquiesced and stopped assigning her three shifts a week. Her stonewalling strategy worked; however, this kind of issue should have been resolved through a grievance procedure guided by her union representative, but it was not.

The women had won an official grievance procedure in the agreement, but because the hospital had refused to allow workers to be represented by the union in any way, 1199B could not be involved in settling disputes. For that reason, Simmons had no representation to assist her when the hospital deliberately over-assigned her to three shifts. Employees were allowed to have one of their colleagues present, but ultimately, the grievance procedure was governed by the hospital. Mary Moultrie recalled that the moderate success of the grievance procedure was quickly dismantled by hospital administration.

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[201] Mitchell interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 13.
[202] Simmons interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 9-10.

> It worked for a little while. They would allow an employee to take someone in to represent them. They allowed me to do that a few times, then after that "Oh no you can't bring Mary Moultrie, you have to get somebody else." That lasted for a little while, but after that things just reverted back to how they were almost.[203]

Moultrie, and most of the other strikers interviewed, felt that their gains were vindictively taken back from them once they re-entered the hospital. The way that the hospital took apart the concessions it had granted during the strike made a lot of the workers more dubious of unionizing then they had been before. To be out of work for that long had a markedly negative impact on some of the strikers' finances and the union had not delivered on earlier talks of repatriation, not to mention that 1199B was now requesting a chunk of their paychecks without them having received a significant raise or many lasting institutional changes. Especially for Mary Moultrie and others who had been highly visible figures in the strike, their colleagues who had been with them on the pickets no longer wanted to be seen with them for fear of retribution from the hospital. Moultrie said that after the strike, "[the] togetherness wasn't there anymore."[204]

The one thing that everyone seemed to agree on, was that it changed race relations in Charleston for the better. Many of the strikers, in their later interviews, have attributed the uptick in the election of Black politicians, to the mobilization of the community in 1969. In 1970, Herbert Fielding was elected as a State Senator in the South Carolina General Assembly and in 1993, he was joined by Robert Ford who had been an SCLC member assigned to help organize the hospital workers in 1969. Women of the strike also pointed to the appointment of Charleston-based civil rights activist, Majorie Amos Frazier, as Chairwoman of the South Carolina Public Service Commission as an example of how things had changed after the strike. They saw the hiring of Black doctors and the admission of Black nursing students to the Medical College as a sign that, even if their conditions had not improved much, they had uplifted Black people in Charleston– especially

[203] Moultrie interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 18.
[204] Ibid, 16.

Black women– on the whole.[205] Mary Moultrie said "just to see Black women, lets young Black women know that if you train properly and you're educated enough you could get these positions."[206] Before, she felt that no level of education was enough for a Black woman to become an accredited physician or to be elected into public office, but that began to change after the strike.

The purpose of this project is not to make an assessment on the success of this movement. This project is about how the movement grew, and how it reached the limits of space available to grow into. This project examines what kind of boundaries resistance was able to push backwards, and what kind of boundaries had been imposed by institutions of power for the express purpose of being immovable. My research guided me to write a case study in labor organizing at the intersection of race and gender, however these archival materials contain the seeds of many different potential historicizations. I chose to write a history of the civil rights movement and labor trends leading up to this moment in 1969, but there is another version of this story that begins with this strike. These archives also contain a narrative of this strike that reveals how Charleston has become the city it is today.

[205] Moultrie interview by Jean-Claude Bouffard, 23-24.
[206] Moultrie interview by Otha Jennifer Dixon, 18.

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