

“Gems of Negro Eloquence”: Memorializing the African American Rhetoric of the 1895 South Carolina Constitutional Convention

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In his study of Booker T. Washington’s 1895 Cotton States Exposition Address, Bradford Vivian discusses the contextual features at play in the orator’s decision to present the South’s past in a manner that pleased his White audience while erasing many of the memories of the Black population. “Washington’s appeals for black citizens to disavow substantial portions of their own historical experience,” Vivian writes, “functioned as a mode of roseate remembrance for white listeners, the further effect of which was to enshrine in public lore a warrant for prolonged forgetfulness of past and present African American history and culture in the post–Civil War South.” In making this case, Vivian seeks not to vilify the orator, but to better understand the causes and consequences of his choices, including the ways in which “norms of rhetorical invention (based on prudential judgments regarding the constraints of decorum) fundamentally condition one’s status and agency as a public witness.”¹

Yet there were other, bolder ways African American rhetors sought to create public memory in the mid-1890s South. This essay features the discourse of two such figures from South Carolina’s Sea Islands: Mary J. Miller and Sarah V. Smalls. Diverging from Washington’s response to “norms of rhetorical invention,” Miller’s *The Suffrage: Speeches by Negroes in the Constitutional Convention. The Part Taken by Colored Orators in Their Fight for a Fair and Impartial Ballot* and Smalls’s *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention, by Gen. Robt. Smalls. With the Right of Suffrage Passed by the Constitutional Convention* memorialize key deliberative discourse of the Beaufort County delegation to the 1895 South Carolina Constitutional Convention, in which African Americans pleaded unsuccessfully to defend Black suffrage in the face of the White majority’s publicly espoused doctrine of White supremacy. I investigate how collections of discursive texts produced by understudied marginalized figures can function as sophisticated sites of public memory, transforming stinging deliberative defeat into consolation, productive defiance, race pride, and dedication to a more egalitarian future. Embracing the creative, artistic essence of rhetorical scholarship, I seek both to illuminate and celebrate these bold acts of commemoration.²

¹ Bradford Vivian, *Commonplace Witnessing: Rhetorical Invention, Historical Remembrance, and Public Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 39, 41. Vivian’s portrayal of Washington as an accommodationist is contested by Paul Stob (“The Rhetoric of Work and the Work of Rhetoric: Booker T. Washington’s Campaign for Tuskegee and the Black South,” in *Nineteenth-Century American Activist Rhetorics*, Patricia Bizzell and Lisa Zimmerelli, eds. [New York: Modern Language Association, 2021], 76–88; “Black Hands Push Back: Reconsidering the Rhetoric of Booker T. Washington,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 2 [2018], 145–65.)

² See, for example, Bonnie J. Dow, “Criticism and Authority in the Artistic Mode,” *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 3 (2001), 336–48; Cara A. Finnegan, “The Critic as Curator,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2018), 405–10.

The Rhetorical Situation

Before taking up the scholarship of public memory and Miller's and Smalls's pamphlets, I will introduce the complex context of the texts' publication, which includes the African American rhetors who produced the arguments memorialized, the venue in which they spoke, and the chilling response they received from their Southern White audience. The 1895 South Carolina Constitutional Convention, held in the state capital, Columbia, began 10 September and concluded 4 December with the adoption of a new state constitution. Although many issues were debated at the convention, the elimination of the Black franchise was the White majority's "primary goal."³ The meeting was attended by 160 delegates: 42 White Democrat "Conservatives"; 112 White populist Democrat "Reformers"; and six African American Republicans. Five of the latter party represented Beaufort County: Thomas E. Miller, a freeborn native of the Sea Islands who later served as the first president of the Colored Normal, Industrial, Agricultural, and Mechanical College of South Carolina at Orangeburg (now known as South Carolina State University); William J. Whipper, nephew of noted activist William Whipper, who moved from the North to Beaufort after the Civil War; Robert Smalls, a former slave from the Beaufort area whose Civil War heroics helped launch his considerable political career; James Wigg, a former slave and farmer; and Isaiah R. Reed, an attorney.⁴

As Andrew Billingsley notes, the members of the Beaufort delegation at the 1895 convention "fought fiercely, ably, and honorably, earning the reluctant admiration of the whites" and "demonstrated a mastery of rhetorical and forensic skills as well as constitutional history, illustrating the important lesson that excellence in rhetoric, persuasion, and deportment knows no race, creed, or previous condition of servitude."⁵ Philip Foner and Robert Branham, who consider Miller's 26 October speech "the most eloquent" of the contingent's rhetorical efforts, anthologize it in *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900*⁶—thus canonizing the oration within Black rhetoric—and a number of other scholars have called attention to the orators' prowess.⁷

Yet despite the rhetorical strength of the Beaufort delegation's speeches, the convention's White delegates voted virtually unanimously to dismantle African American suffrage. In terms of the immediate White audience addressed, Delegates Miller, Wigg, Reed, Smalls, and Whipper

³ Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 445. For further discussion of the convention, see 443–48; George Brown Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes: 1877–1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 76–89; Andrew Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free: Robert Smalls of South Carolina and His Families* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 165–79.

⁴ In addition to the five African American delegates from Beaufort, Robert B. Anderson, a Black teacher, represented Georgetown at the convention.

⁵ Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free*, 167, 179.

⁶ Philip S. Foner and Robert J. Branham, eds., *Lift Every Voice and Sing: African American Oratory, 1787–1900* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 805–15.

⁷ See Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 83–87, 298–99; Okon Edet Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service: Robert Smalls, 1839–1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 142–48; William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 243–48; Asa H. Gordon, *Sketches of Negro Life and History in South Carolina*, 2nd ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), 65–68; Edgar, *South Carolina*, 445; Edward A. Miller, Jr., *Gullah Statesman: Robert Smalls from Slavery to Congress, 1839–1915* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 206–14; Lawrence S. Rowland and Stephen R. Wise, *Bridging the Sea Islands' Past and Present, 1893–2006: The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina*, vol. 3 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 76–79; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disenfranchisement in the South, 1888–1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 112–14; Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 404–05.

suffered what Billingsley labels a “historic” loss. Michael Perman concurs: “Despite the efforts of such experienced politicians and superb speakers to provoke them, the white delegates did not confront their fears and prejudices or start a fight among themselves.” Billingsley’s optimistic assertion, quoted above, that “excellence in rhetoric, persuasion, and deportment knows no race, creed, or previous condition of servitude” is true only in the abstract.⁸

White Southerners’ reflections on this failure form a critical element of the rhetorical context for Mary Miller’s and Sarah Smalls’s pamphlets. Tellingly, such commentary, even when published in the unsympathetic Democratic press, acknowledges that the African Americans’ defeat results from factors beyond the influence of a rhetoric of good reasons, particularly preordained, intractable disagreement. A revealing admission of the trumping power of White supremacy at the convention is found in a brief piece published in the *South Carolina State*. Although the column officially addresses arguments advocating women’s suffrage—which were defeated by the White delegates—it applies to other well-argued losing causes: “One of the delegates to the Constitutional convention was telling us of the debate yesterday morning on the question of granting the suffrage to property-owning women. . . . The logic, the merit, the advantage were all on one side, but the convention voted the other way. Why? . . . Most probably it was a sort of blind instinct that ‘Those should take who have the power. And those should keep who can.’ ”⁹ For the writer, the crux of the matter is power and privilege, which will be maintained by dominant South Carolinian White men, despite the strength of the arguments arrayed against them.

Additional White responses included trumpeting a perceived “fallacy” or disparaging the Beaufort delegation’s eloquence as derivative of White teaching, as demonstrated in a convention speech by Darlington delegate Henry Castles Burn. He begins in complimentary fashion: “[The Beaufort delegates] have, with consummate ability, given the history, marshaled the facts and statistics favorable to their side. They have displayed splendid argumentative abilities, keen sarcasm and telling humor, which does credit to them individually and as representatives of their race.” Burn then undermines their rhetorical achievement by accusing them of proving “too much,” thus committing the flawed argumentative strategy now referred to as “kettle logic.” To explain, he refers to “an anecdote of an old colored man” who tells three contradictory stories about a borrowed pot, indicating that the fallacy is particular to African Americans.¹⁰ “Between the lines the truth begins to shine,” Burn declares, suggesting the deceptive nature of the African American’s ostensibly strong argument. Then, after marking the Beaufort delegation’s positive “deportment,” “powers of reasoning,” “rhetorical ability,” and their “knowledge of the laws of the land, the common law, the statutory law and the constitutional law, both State and national,” he undermines his praise by suggesting that African Americans’ rhetorical skills are not of their own making, but are derived from the influence of “refined and cultured white people,” who have “led them to become good citizens.”¹¹

⁸ Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free*, 178; Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*, 114; Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free*, 179.

⁹ “One of the Delegates,” *South Carolina State*, 30 October 1895, 4.

¹⁰ “Women’s Suffrage. The Issue Presented Squarely to the Constitutional Convention,” *South Carolina State*, 29 October 1895, 2. Burn’s racist analogy suggests that using stories of borrowed vessels to reveal flaws in argumentation is not unique to Sigmund Freud (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey [New York: Harper Collins, 1955], 119–120) and, subsequently, Jacques Derrida (*Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998], 6), the usual sources for the concept of kettle logic.

¹¹ “Women’s Suffrage,” 2.

Paradoxically, at least one White Southerner, David Duncan Wallace of Vanderbilt University, disparages the Beaufort contingent's rhetoric for the opposite limitation, concluding, condescendingly, that "several of the negro delegates well made good the claim of their race to being natural orators." Wallace concludes his *Sewanee Review* article with this remarkable statement, which sacrifices to the primacy of local White power all arguments based on general principles: "Justice is not a theory that can be expounded from professorial and editorial chairs in distant localities with equal applicability to all quarters of the globe, but a practical matter, which can be secured only on the spot and by men who are wise and brave and strong."¹²

The African American press's treatment of the convention also contributes to the larger context for Miller's and Smalls's pamphlets. Stories from White papers were excerpted and commentary offered in Black publications such as the *Cleveland Gazette*, the *Indianapolis Freeman*, and the *Washington Bee*. The *Gazette* offered a brief but telling note declaring that the African American convention delegates "have advocated for the race's cause in a manner that will redound to their everlasting credit. They are honors to the race, too." Articulating the exigence for the pamphlets, the commentator adds, "The suggestion of a South Carolina contemporary, that their speeches be compiled and published, is a good one. We hope it is acted upon." The *Freeman* published a column by David Augustus Straker, the prominent African American attorney and civic figure, lauding the "masterly efforts" of the Black delegates to the convention, who warrant "the meed of praise as heroes." Such coverage demonstrates that across the country, African Americans were tuned to the Beaufort contingent's eloquence.¹³

Public Memory Scholarship as a Frame for Reading Miller and Smalls

"In its broadest sense," write Matthew Houdek and Kendall R. Phillips, "public memory entails the acts and processes, through which memories move beyond the remembering individual and become shared, passed on, and in this way, form a broader network through which people gather a sense of collectivity." Although scholars from several disciplines have contributed meaningfully to public memory research, those representing rhetoric and communication have occupied a central position. Their stake in public memory studies stems principally from the understanding that collective remembrance is both constructed and contested. "Memory," elaborates Barbie Zelizer, "becomes not only the construction of social, historical, and cultural circumstances but a reflection of why one construction has more staying power than its rivals."¹⁴

As David Tell reminds us, public memory study—since its beginning in the latter decades of the twentieth century—has been focused on "concepts of site and place," with influential early scholarship featuring "museums, memorials, coffee shops, shopping centers, and suburbs." Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott also emphasize the importance of physical locations in memory studies with their concept of "memory places," which they explain "enjoy a significance seemingly unmatched by other material supports of public memory." The "signifier" of a memory place "is an object of *special* attention because of its self-nomination as a site of significant

¹² David Duncan Wallace, "The South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1895," *Sewanee Review* 4, no. 3 (1896), 351, 360.

¹³ "The six Afro-American members," *Cleveland Gazette*, 16 November 1895, 2; D. Augustus Straker, "Colored Heroes," *Indianapolis Freeman*, 21 December 1895, 7.

¹⁴ Matthew Houdek and Kendall R. Phillips, "Public Memory," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 2, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.181>; Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12, no. 2 (1995), 217.

memory of and for a collective. This signifier commands attention, because it announces itself as a marker of collective identity.” Or, as Tell characterizes the role of place in the formation of public memory, “Site secures memory, anchors memory, modifies memory, intensifies memory, and even performs memory.”¹⁵

Because public memory scholarship hones in on the contested nature of corporate remembrance, it is not surprising that issues of marginalization, ideology, and hegemonic control are central concerns, as is, correspondingly, commemorative work of and about oppressed peoples, including African Americans. Vivian’s analysis of Washington’s speech stands as a prominent example of this emphasis, as is Tell’s work on sites dedicated to the preservation of Emmett Till’s memory, both referenced above. Also representing this important research strand are Megan Eatman’s study of the annual reenactment of the 1946 Moore’s Ford lynching near Monroe, Georgia, which suggests how this “space of loss also becomes a site of community building and resilience,” and Thavolia Glymph’s exploration of how the memory work of former slaves steered them to confront the oppressive conditions of the postbellum South. Glymph’s work articulates the pressing need for African American memorializing in the late nineteenth-century South: “The reconstitution of the power of white southerners after the Civil War was accomplished by segregation, disfranchisement, rampant violence against black southerners, and *memory-work*. . . . Language and contesting memories lay at the heart of postbellum struggles.”¹⁶

In a recent study that in a number of ways forms a backdrop for this one, Shevaun Watson explores the memory work of marginalized nineteenth-century African American residents of Charleston, South Carolina, following the Civil War. She demonstrates that their vandalism and mockery of that city’s statue of antebellum White icon John Calhoun can be viewed as improvised rhetorical practice intended to communally reject idyllic White supremacist myths of the old South. Watson suggests that these acts of protest “served not just as unflinching resistance to white supremacy but as deliberate memory-creation and memory-sharing practices in their own right.” Furthermore, by marshaling Vivian’s principle of “public forgetting,” she employs her exploration of monument defacement to argue that the rhetorical study of memory, in addition to “fill[ing] in historical gaps to counter collective amnesia or historiographical neglect,” can also help society “find a way to forget some things, to ‘strategically excise’ (Vivian 9) parts of our collective past that have become hindrances to beginning again,” such as the racist White Southern narrative of the Lost Cause.¹⁷

¹⁵ David Tell, “Remembering Emmett Till: Reflections of Geography, Race, and Memory,” *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 20, no. 2 (2017), 123; Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, “Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, Dickinson, Blair, and Ott, eds. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 24–25; Tell, “Remembering Emmett Till,” 123. See also Edward S. Casey’s use of *stabilitas loci* (“Public Memory in Place and Time,” in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 28), which Tell specifically references.

¹⁶ Megan Eatman, “Loss and Lived Memory at the Moore’s Ford Lynching Reenactment,” *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 20, no. 2 (2017), 164; Thavolia Glymph, “‘Liberty Dearly Bought’: The Making of Civil War Memory in Afro-American Communities in the South,” in *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850–1950*, Charles M. Payne and Adam Green, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 127 (emphasis added).

¹⁷ Shevaun E. Watson, “Beginning Again, Again: Monument Protest and Rhetorics of African American Memory Work,” in *Nineteenth-Century American Activist Rhetorics*, Patricia Bizzell and Lisa Zimmerelli, eds. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2021), 228, 222. Watson draws Vivian’s concept of “public forgetting” from *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

Within this scholarly context, I approach Mary Miller's and Sarah Smalls's pamphlets—comprising introductory remarks, texts of the Beaufort contingent's rhetoric gleaned from local newspapers, and compilations of commentary on the speeches—as sophisticated repositories of eloquence and civic engagement, crafted to contribute positively to American public memory. Curating the arguments employed by the Beaufort delegation, Miller and Smalls create discursive sites of remembrance for African Americans, as well as—to borrow Delegate Wigg's characterizations—for “enlightened public opinion” beyond the Black population and “the arbitrament of a Christian civilization.”¹⁸ Establishing alternative sites from Southern White accounts such as Wallace's *Sewanee Review* article and the *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of South Carolina*, which for the most part elide the African American oratory that distinguished the Beaufort delegation, they memorialize the Beaufort contingent's eloquence, accounting for its power despite its failure to persuade fellow White delegates.

Wesley Hansen and George Dionisopoulos's rhetorical framework concerning the commemoration of loss adds further depth to this interpretative approach. In their study of the aftermath of the passage of Proposition 8 in the California general election of 2008, which temporarily suspended gay marriage in the state, Hansen and Dionisopoulos argue that because “political loss can be felt on a deep emotional level analogous to death,” it often stimulates “a concomitant coping mechanism,” including strategies such as “eulogistic rhetoric.” Examining gay-rights discourse in the wake of the passage of Proposition 8, Hansen and Dionisopoulos show how “the postelection dialogue aimed at consoling and unifying those most devastated by the loss while motivating them toward the recommitment necessary to continue the political struggle to enact positive change in the future.” Writing more generally about responses to such loss, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian posit that “attention to remains generates a politics of mourning that might be active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary.”¹⁹

Viewed from this perspective, the devastating rout of the Beaufort delegation could function for the South Carolinian African Americans as a kind of collective death that invites corresponding rhetorical action, which will, ideally, lead sympathetic audiences to rededicate to the cause. Responding to this exigence, Mary Miller and Sarah Smalls can be seen to produce their pamphlets as epideictic rhetoric, sophisticated eulogies of the Beaufort contingent's rhetorical campaign. Like the activists studied by Hansen and Dionisopoulos, Miller and Smalls perceive the political defeat of their group “as not only a devastating loss of their collective rights, but a public devaluation of their humanity” that calls not for “ceas[ing] hostilities or restor[ing] peace,” but for a fundamental reframing of the state of affairs.²⁰ Hansen and Dionisopoulos's perspective on political loss and the function of eulogy, when applied to the pamphlets produced by Miller and Smalls, helps to deepen our understanding of the exigence they faced and the specific memory work they sought to accomplish.

¹⁸ “Now on the Suffrage. The Convention at Last Takes Up the Vitaly Important Problem. Negro Members Speak. Miller and Wigg Both Make Strong Speeches Before the Convention,” *South Carolina State*, 26 October 1895, 8.

¹⁹ Wesley D. Hansen and George Dionisopoulos, “Eulogy Rhetoric as Political Coping Mechanism: The Aftermath of Proposition 8,” *Western Journal of Communication* 76, no. 1 (2012), 25, 40; David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, “Introduction: Mourning Remains,” in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, Kazanjian and Eng, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 2.

²⁰ Hansen and Dionisopoulos, “Eulogy Rhetoric,” 40.

Mary Miller’s *The Suffrage: Speeches by Negroes in the Constitutional Convention*

There is scant information extant about Mary Miller. Billingsley identifies her as Thomas Miller’s wife, but she may have been his mother or daughter.²¹ Modestly produced, her twenty-three-page pamphlet, which Foner and Branham note was “published at her own expense,” lists neither a publisher nor a place or date of publication.²² But despite its very basic format, the document contains ample textual evidence of Miller’s rhetorical skill as an editor and memorialist. Relying on the coverage of the convention from White South Carolina newspapers, Miller features speeches advocating African American suffrage and civil rights produced by her relation, Thomas Miller, as well as Delegates Wigg and Reed. To a considerable extent, she follows the White editors’ decisions concerning these speeches, but alters their texts in several places to suit her purposes.

To augment these oratorical selections, which occupy most of the pamphlet (pp. 5–23), Mary Miller includes a dense preface comprising her own commentary and a compilation of published White responses to the speeches (pp. 3–4). She also provides a photograph of Thomas Miller, which furthers her epideictic intentions. In ominous tones, her preface emphasizes the gravity of the outcome of the Constitutional Convention: “Nothing that has transpired since the days of Succession has so thoroughly awakened this nation to the sense of its great danger from a legalized fraudulent ballot.” “In the name of white supremacy,” she continues, authoritatively, “the editors and orators of the south (and the north in part) have taught the nation to believe that the presence of the negroes in the south means the destruction of progress and pure government.” Nonetheless, Miller confidently informs her reader that although the African American convention delegates lost the vote, they achieved a major victory in the process. Despite the racist efforts of the White majority, “by their acts and speeches,” the Beaufort delegation “taught the nation the true object of the majority of the late convention,” namely, “legalized, fraudulent election machinery.” Demonstrating the profoundly constructed nature of public memory, Miller responds to the position perpetuated by the dominant Whites of South Carolina by setting forth an affirming perspective on the rhetorical work of the Beaufort delegates. She is bold to construct a shared account of dignity, truth, patriotism, worthiness, and eloquence in the face of systematic oppression.²³

Notably, Miller draws published commentary about the Beaufort delegation’s oratory exclusively from White Southerners whom she identifies as members of “an opposing press and the delegates of the convention” to demonstrate “how well these six negroes played the part of statesmen and patriots.” She focuses on the predisposition of White delegates to unfairly discount the arguments of the Beaufort contingent—despite their acknowledgment of its undeniable eloquence. Miller’s treatment of the testimony of Henry Castles Burn, discussed above, is telltale. She features his comment about the “consummate ability” with which the Beaufort delegation has “given the history” and “marshaled the facts and statistics favorable to their side,” as well as his remark about their “splendid argumentative abilities, keen sarcasm and telling humor, which does credit to them individually and as representatives of their race.” Then, after silently eliding by ellipsis (* * *) Burn’s charge of kettle logic, she repeats his comment “Between the lines the truth begins to shine,” which, within the rhetorical context she creates, suggests not deception but the

²¹ Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free*, 167.

²² Foner and Branham, *Lift Every Voice*, 806.

²³ Mary J. Miller, *The Suffrage: Speeches by Negroes in the Constitutional Convention. The Part Taken by Colored Orators in Their Fight for a Fair and Impartial Ballot* (n.p., n.d.), 3.

strength of the Beaufort delegation's rhetoric, particularly since she also reprints Burn's praise concerning their "deportment," "powers of reasoning," "rhetorical ability," and their "knowledge of the laws of the land, the common law, the statutory law and the constitutional law, both State and national," considered by the White author to be unprecedented among "oppressed people." Tacitly, she also omits Burn's charge that Black oratorical skill is imitative.²⁴

Next, Miller reproduces commentary from the *South Carolina State* reporting that the "very strong delegation" from Beaufort was "amply able to present the cause of their race with logic and eloquence." She quotes the article's claim that Delegates Miller and Wigg are "exceptionally good debaters and on more than one occasion have impressed the convention by their ability. Their speeches last night were full of telling hits and adroit reasoning which moved the admiration of many opponents." The excerpt goes on to praise Delegate Miller's rhetoric, which "commanded a close attention which was the highest tribute to its force that could have been given." His "extemporaneous" pieces, "sandwiched into the set speech he had prepared," were considered by the White writer to be "some of the best passages" of his performance. Delegate Miller is particularly commended by the excerpted commentator for his strategy of pleading "the cause of the 'poor white man,'" which strengthens his ethos as an impartial advocate of disadvantaged people, regardless of race. Mary Miller continues quoting, however, to show how the *South Carolina State* commentator attempts to undercut the ultimate persuasiveness of Delegate Miller's strategy by declaring—without providing reasons or evidence—that it "compels our admission of its cleverness, although we do not agree with the conclusions he drew."²⁵ By including these comments, which originate directly from unsympathetic Whites, Mary Miller reveals the strength of the Beaufort delegation's rhetoric while simultaneously exposing the moral weakness of White Southerners, who are able to recognize good rhetoric when exposed to it, yet allow their prejudices to override their reason.

An excerpted article from the *Columbia Register* further documents the powerful predisposition of White delegates to reject the arguments of the Beaufort contingent, despite their undeniable eloquence. The unnamed writer allows that "abler representatives the colored race could not have had if the State had been raked over with a fine tooth comb," but suggests that they were "wholly unable to arrest the relentless movement in the direction of the accomplishment of the object of the calling of the convention," namely the destruction of the Black franchise. The excerpt goes on to further elaborate the point in a manner that vividly demonstrates the author's belief in the inevitable superiority of naked self-interest over righteous eloquence: "Miller's speech Friday was an eloquent appeal on behalf of the negro. While listening to his soaring flights, many of the delegates regretted that they felt an inexorable determination not to accede to his plea, a determination born of stern necessity."²⁶

Finally, Miller includes an editorial note from the *Sumter Watchman and Southron* that offers an overwhelmingly positive assessment of the Beaufort contingent's rhetoric, demonstrating their ability to gain the moral high ground, whence they look down with some degree of condescension upon their rhetorical adversaries. "The way Miller, Smalls, Wigg, and Whipper . . . have been bullyragging the constitutional convention for the last few days on the suffrage question," she quotes, "is too ludicrous for anything. These negroes have decidedly the best of the situation, and so far have had altogether the best of the argument. . . . [T]here is no dignified way

²⁴ Mary Miller, *The Suffrage*, 3. Miller's artful elisions have been overlooked by several historians of the convention.

²⁵ Mary Miller, *The Suffrage*, 3.

²⁶ Mary Miller, *The Suffrage*, 3–4. Tellingly, many decades earlier Frederick Douglass dubs the *topos* of "necessity" "the tyrant's plea" ("The Haytian Emigration Movement," *Douglass' Monthly*, July 1861, 484).

out of the dilemma into which the majority of the convention has been forced. . . . Is all the talk about the rule of the intelligent and superior race all buncombe?” The excerpt reproduced by Miller goes on to actually endorse the Beaufort delegation’s argument that an across-the-board “educational and property qualification” for suffrage would justly settle the matter by “eliminating the votes of the ignorant and irresponsible of both races.”²⁷

By grafting previously published commentary concerning the speeches produced by begrudgingly complimentary, yet unmoved Southerners to her prefatory remarks, Mary Miller practices rhetorical accretion, an art employed by African American rhetors since the eighteenth century to create complex, multifaceted texts.²⁸ Suzanne Bordelon notes that feminist scholarship on rhetorical accretion has exposed instances of “men overlaying or ‘respeaking’ a woman’s text” in order to gain control over it, yet rhetorically savvy White and African American women of the late nineteenth-century such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Miller employ rhetorical accretion with discursive artifacts produced by men, who typically exercise the power over them, to strengthen—rather than to diminish—the arguments of marginalized people.²⁹ Rhetorical accretion, in effect, enables Miller to recontextualize Southern Whites’ frank admissions about African American arguments. By marshaling these unlikely, often conflicted White male witnesses in support of the Beaufort contingent, she subversively crosses lines of race *and* gender to provide powerful evidence of the value of African American eloquence. Secondly, she strengthens her ethos as a compiler of a variety of texts, including White men’s words. In the late nineteenth-century context, her role as the authoritative editor of the Beaufort contingent’s eloquence—who writes confidently in the first person—suggests a strong public character.

Miller closes her preface by reminding her readers that all the excerpted comments concerning the featured oratory were produced by Democrats. Resisting “quoting one expression from any paper that is politically friendly to these delegates or a single word from any Republican,” she suggests *a fortiori* the power of the Beaufort delegation’s oratory. “That the country may read these speeches and learn to know these brave and true men,” Miller concludes, “I have edited a few of their arguments and prepared this pamphlet. I regard them as gems of negro eloquence.”³⁰ Thus, she self-assuredly emphasizes the memorializing function of her text, race pride, and—more specifically—her goal of delivering a corrective, restorative commemoration of the Beaufort delegation’s role in the convention to an enlightened national audience.

Thorough analysis of the outstanding oratorical excerpts Miller includes in her pamphlet would be the subject of another study, but I will reflect on one particularly powerful moment in a speech by her relative Thomas Miller that suggests the kind of “public forgetting” Vivian and Watson both explicate and endorse. In order to dismantle the defense of slavery set forth by Delegate H. Cowper Patton of Richland—explicitly characterized by Thomas Miller as “a very feeble shoot of the lost cause”—who suggests “that God intended and did make one race inferior to the other races for the sole purpose of sustaining a slave-holding class,” the featured speaker reviews periods in European history in which White people held other White people in bondage. Having established this counter evidence to Patton’s claim, he drives his refutation decisively home by reminding his audience that White women—some of whom were the likely ancestors of

²⁷ Mary Miller, *The Suffrage*, 4.

²⁸ See, e.g., Glen McClish and Jacqueline Bacon, “Taking Agency, Constituting Community: The Activist Rhetoric of Richard Allen,” *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 11–12 (2008), 1–34.

²⁹ Suzanne Bordelon, “Embodied *Ethos* and Rhetorical Accretion: Genevieve Stebbins and the *Delsarte System of Expression*,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2016), 106; Glen McClish, “Ethos, Agency, and Pathos in Ida B. Wells’s ‘Lynch Law in All Its Phases,’ ” *New North Star* 2 (2020), 12.

³⁰ Mary Miller, *The Suffrage*, 4.

his fellow White delegates—were sold as slaves by White men in old Charleston. Through this rebuttal, which exposes “this curse of slavery, inflicted upon all the races in every stage of the existence of the human family,” orator Thomas Miller (and, subsequently, editor Mary Miller) constructs an implicit case for “public forgetting” the Lost Cause narrative of an idyllic, divinely inspired, slavery-based antebellum South that continued to block racial progress thirty years after the close of the Civil War.³¹

Speeches at the Constitutional Convention, by Gen. Robt. Smalls

Sarah Voorhees Smalls (Williams), Robert Smalls’s daughter, left a more substantial biographical record than Mary Miller. She attended both the Miner Normal School in Washington, D.C., and the Boston Conservatory of Music. After marrying and moving to Colorado, she soon returned to Beaufort, where she took care of her father and other family members. She would go on to teach music at the Colored Normal, Industrial, Agricultural, and Mechanical College of South Carolina. Smalls’s twenty-nine-page pamphlet, which provides a printer and place and date of publication on its title page, has a more professional look about it than Mary Miller’s. Whereas Miller features the discourse of three of the Beaufort rhetors, Smalls focuses exclusively on her father’s rhetoric (pp. 5–11, 16–19). In addition, she contextualizes her father’s oratory by reproducing his proposal for suffrage (pp. 4–5) along with the objectionable version eventually adopted by the convention (pp. 11–16). Included, as well, is a brief narrative of Delegate Smalls’s principled refusal to sign the final draft of the constitution (p. 20).

Like Miller, Smalls interprets the convention’s ill-fated African American discourse—with which the Beaufort delegation seems to win the arguments, yet lose the votes—as worth preserving because of the vital memory work it enables. In the spirit of her father’s blunt, confrontational rhetoric, Sarah Smalls approaches this project of public commemoration more defiantly than Miller. “Indeed,” she writes in her brief, forthright introduction to the pamphlet, the convention “may have been, an object lesson, planned by the All-wise God, to teach the haughty, boastful sons of Carolina that there are Negroes capable and amply qualified in every respect to protect themselves whenever it becomes necessary to do so; that those few representatives of the race were but a *very small* part of the rising host that time and education are bringing forward day by day in spite of lynching, caste prejudice or any methods used against them.”³² She also touts “the manly spirit displayed by [Robert Smalls] and the other colored delegates, whenever the rights of their race were in jeopardy.” Her memorial to her father’s oratory refutes dominant White accounts of the loss of the African American franchise in South Carolina. The drawing of Robert Smalls she includes, like the photograph provided by Mary Miller, indicates this memorializing function.

Particularly powerful is Smalls’s inclusion of her father’s response to Article 34 of the proposed Constitution, which strictly forbade interracial marriage, but was silent about White men’s sexual relations with Black women outside of legally sanctioned relationships. In order to expose the South’s discriminatory sexual code, which enabled the summary lynching of African American men if sexual impropriety was suspected, yet looked the other way as White men routinely sexually assaulted and cohabitated with African American women, Smalls intrepidly moves that “any white person who lives and cohabits with a Negro, mulatto, or person who shall have one-eighth or more of Negro blood, shall be disqualified from holding any office of

³¹ Mary Miller, *The Suffrage*, 10.

³² Sarah Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention, by Gen. Robt. Smalls. With the Right of Suffrage Passed by the Constitutional Convention* (Charleston, S.C.: Enquirer Print, 1896), 3.

emolument or trust in this State, and the offspring of any such living or cohabitation shall bear the name of the father, and shall be entitled to inherit and acquire property the same as if they were legitimate.” Mary Smalls also features her father’s cogent case for his amendment, which directly exposes the myths of White moral purity and an idyllic antebellum South. Addressing the reality of the large number of mixed-race people in the South, a phenomenon Southern Whites condemn, as Article 34 suggests, while ignoring its principal cause, Smalls declares, “We have, sir, as pure colored women in South Carolina and in this country, as any race upon this earth. Sir, that evil, known as slavery caused all of this [miscegenation]. This wrong was done by you all, owning them as your slaves.” By featuring her father’s trenchant exposure of standard lies about racial purity and Southern sexual relations, Sarah Smalls not only commemorates her father’s rhetoric, but—like Mary Miller—contributes to an implicit case for “public forgetting” the mythologies essential to the narrative of the Lost Cause.³³

In alignment with Mary Miller, Sarah Smalls practices rhetorical accretion, but whereas Miller exclusively appends the conflicted voices of White Southerners in order to expose the hypocrisy of Southern Whites—who recognize yet refuse to accept the better argument—Smalls primarily features sympathetic commentary (in the form of editorials, a telegram, and letters) from writers beyond the South (pp. 20–26). Thus, she includes a column from the *New York Press*, a Republican organ, which is highly favorable of the Beaufort contingent’s oratory while ironically acknowledging its heroic ineffectiveness. “We can recall no more brilliant moral victory of a parliamentary minority,” the article declares, “than that gained on Thursday in the South Carolina Constitutional Convention by the representatives of the race about to be disfranchised for lack of intelligence wherewith to vote.” The reproduced text suggests that the Beaufort delegation’s inability to persuade their audience stems from the pernicious double bind inevitably faced by the African American orators, who are doomed to fail whether or not they exhibit civic excellence. Weak speech demonstrates a lack of the intellectual and moral capacities necessary for participation in public life, yet rhetorical prowess, which intimidates ruling Whites and disrupts their centuries-old prejudices, is even worse: “And in no one other way could the Negroes have so convincingly proved to the world their right to the ballot than by this victory of black mind over white matter. . . . It is not Negro ignorance, but Negro intelligence, that is feared.” With the publication of the pamphlet, however, an audience beyond racist White South Carolinians, namely “the world,” can memorialize—and eventually act upon—the worth and dignity of these African American orators.³⁴

Highlighting the disruptive power of Robert Smalls’s proposed amendment to Article 34, discussed above, the *New York Press* column marshals a martial metaphor to suggest the Beaufort delegate’s strategic superiority over his White foes: “In this case the white majority laid themselves open to the flank movement, which Robert Smalls had evidently meditated throughout the session, by introducing a quite supererogatory article for the amendment of mixed marriages.” Concerning Smalls’s quip that if White men’s sexual practices were policed in the same manner as their African American counterparts, “this Convention would have to be adjourned for lack of a quorum,” the writer declares, “The ‘burst of laughter’ which followed this threw an interesting light on the morals and manners of South Carolina. It showed the state of civilization depicted in ‘Tom Jones.’ ” Yet even though, in the writer’s words, Smalls’s “seizure of a parliamentary advantage in so sudden and effective a manner . . . cause[d] the majority leader to abandon his forces and leave them to expose their moral nakedness to the world,” the Beaufort delegate fails to move his

³³ Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 16, 18.

³⁴ Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 20–22.

audience to embrace a more consistent approach toward anti-miscegenation. Continuing with the allusion to Henry Fielding's portrayal of eighteenth-century immorality and hypocrisy among the English gentry, the writer pronounces the inevitable fate of Smalls's trenchant argument: "A Convention composed entirely of Squire Westerns would have met such an impeachment in a precisely similar way. Having satisfied their sense of humor the delegates killed the amendment and passed the mixed marriages article."³⁵

Sarah Smalls also reproduces a glowing letter from an E. C. Bossett of Philadelphia—who, Okon Uya reports, represents an African American congregation—declaring that "the dignity, courage and signal ability with which you and your Republican colleagues at Columbia, have asserted and maintained manhood rights and the just claims of all citizens to fair play under the supreme law of the land as well as under the civilization of our times, have touched the heart of the great North and called forth its soberest approval and its high admiration." The implication, of course, is that although the Beaufort delegation failed to persuade the entrenched White delegates, their arguments appealed to a more enlightened national audience beyond the South, thus constituting a "moral victory," to borrow the phrase from the *New York Press* article cited above. Bossett's explicit request for a printed copy of the speeches Smalls delivered at the convention articulates the exigence for Smalls's (and Miller's) commemorative work. He concludes by comparing the Black delegation to the great warriors of the ancient Greek world: "Indeed, it is felt here that, in your statements, your arguments and warnings, you have covered the whole case and done lasting honor to the Negro race and to American patriotism. All hail to you and your noble band of Spartans at Columbia!"³⁶

Sarah Smalls does provide evidence of the Beaufort delegate's rhetorical prowess from a more local, less sympathetic source in the form of an editorial published in the *News and Courier*, which she describes as "the Leading Democratic Paper of Charleston, S. C." Addressing his primary attention to the anti-miscegenation portion of the convention, the unnamed editorialist declares that the decision to ignore Smalls's controversial amendment "was a mistake" because "the addition was a proper corollary to the section adopted, and should have been extended to disqualify from voting, as well as holding office, the class of offenders at which it was aimed," thus demonstrating her father's superiority in the debate.³⁷

The final letter of support included in Smalls's pamphlet, produced by Englishman Horace J. Smith, once again extolls Smalls's proposed amendment to the anti-miscegenation law. "We have read over here the telegraphic report about the metaphorical bomb you threw into the Constitutional Convention, with the greatest glee," Smith begins, expressing his delight in Smalls's defiance by recirculating an ordnance-based metaphor already popular in the press.³⁸ Smith continues to praise Smalls's rhetoric, suggesting that it "will do more to make the scales drop from people's eyes than even Douglass' admirable tract 'Why is the Negro Lynched'" —the address Douglass's biographer David Blight dubs "the last great speech of the orator's life."³⁹ Smith also

³⁵ Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 21–22. Squire Western, the father of central protagonist Tom Jones's love interest, Sophia, is a hard-drinking country gentleman more concerned with his hounds, his horses, and his bottle than moral reasoning.

³⁶ Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service*, 145; Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 24.

³⁷ Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 22–23.

³⁸ Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 25. For an example of the martial metaphor in the popular press, see "No Mixed Marriages. Decisive Action of the Constitutional Convention," *Charleston Daily News and Courier*, 4 October 1895, 1.

³⁹ Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 25; David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 736.

compares Smalls’s argument favorably to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.⁴⁰ Although hyperbolic, it is difficult to doubt the sincerity of Smith’s assessment of Robert Smalls’s rhetorical prowess, which is included by his daughter to demonstrate the international favor bestowed upon him. In Sarah Smalls’s hands, such supportive reviews recast the bitter convention defeat, commemorating this discourse for the broad audience of sympathetic Whites, as well as “the rising host that time and education are bringing forward day by day.”⁴¹ Smalls concludes her pamphlet by reprinting a detailed open letter the Beaufort contingent sent to the Democratic-leaning *New York World* exposing the White delegates’ fraud, thus amplifying their commitment to reach a broad audience (pp. 26–29).⁴²

Employing complementary, yet individualized strategies, Mary Miller and Sarah Smalls—who did not enjoy reputations as editors or significant public figures in either the Black or White communities of South Carolina—produced repositories of eloquence and commentary, artfully curated to shape progressive American memory. In addition to marshaling African American rhetoric, they applied the strategy of rhetorical accretion, intrepidly reaching across lines of race and gender to contextualize Black oratory with public responses and to further establish their ethē as skilled editors of multiple, conflicting voices. *The Suffrage: Speeches by Negroes in the Constitutional Convention* and *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention, by Gen. Robt. Smalls* constitute early exemplars of published discourse crafted by rhetorically sophisticated women of color not only to present powerful arguments concerning civil rights—which Ida B. Wells accomplishes so brilliantly a few years earlier by publishing *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892), *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition: The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature* (1893), and *The Red Record* (1895)—but also to commemorate eloquent, if initially ineffective rhetoric in order to motivate present and future action.

Practicing a multifaceted eulogistic rhetoric, Miller and Smalls draw inspiration from a kind of civic death to continue the struggle. Beyond acts of familial devotion, their pamphlets were intended to console, to defy and even taunt, to celebrate, to rededicate, and—in some instances—to deliberately forget, as well as to constitute character and fortitude for African Americans suffering through what has often been referred to as the nadir of the African American experience. As Billingsley notes, Miller and Smalls “captured” for their readership the enhanced “reputation” the speeches of the Beaufort delegation gained for African Americans. Of the nineteenth-century memory work of former slaves, Glymph writes, “It could not prevent lynching, restore the vote to black men, or of itself establish equitable educational and economic opportunities. This did not, however, make it nothing,” since “it helped steady them for the fight for freedom and civil rights and helped arm them to live with as much dignity as possible.”⁴³ Miller’s and Smalls’s pamphlets, themselves “gems of negro eloquence,” to borrow Miller’s characterization of the Beaufort delegations’ oratory, contribute to these efforts.

⁴⁰ Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 25–26.

⁴¹ Smalls, *Speeches at the Constitutional Convention*, 3.

⁴² The letter to the *New York World* was subsequently reprinted in the South Carolina press (“Negroes to the North,” *Columbia Daily Register*, 4 October 1895, 2).

⁴³ Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free*, 179; Glymph, “Liberty Dearly Bought,” 130.

Conclusion

This essay, a study of rhetorical loss and renewal, began with the eloquence of the Beaufort delegation at the South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1895. Second, I scrutinized the contingent's inability to persuade their fellow White delegates to preserve African American suffrage, demonstrating the inevitable failure of convincing rhetoric in circumstances in which political power trumps civic deliberation. Principally, though, I have sought to elucidate and celebrate the memory work of Mary Miller and Sarah Smalls, the pamphleteers who reframed and commemorated this failed deliberative rhetoric. Resisting "the constraints of decorum" that Vivian argues dominated Washington's contemporaneous speech, these pioneering women of color celebrate powerful civil rights arguments, ably contextualized in order to motivate present and future action.

As noted above, Thomas Miller, Robert Smalls, and their colleagues have garnered some praise from historians of the period (although little from rhetorical scholars), yet Mary Miller and Sarah Smalls, despite their significant rhetorical achievement, have been for the most part relegated to footnotes. As Billingsley notes, their "important and personal perspectives on the participation of these black delegates have long been buried in obscurity."⁴⁴ This negligence may have something to do with the fact that as strictly written works of public memory, they were not connected to specific "memory places," discussed above. In this sense, perhaps, Miller's and Smalls's pamphlets align with the initial Jewish memorials to the Holocaust, which, as James Young explains, "came not in stone, glass, or steel—but in narrative. The Yizkor Bikher—memorial books—remembered both the lives and destruction of European Jewish communities according to the most ancient of Jewish memorial media: words on paper."⁴⁵ Miller and Smalls's medium, of course, was dictated not by ancient tradition, but necessity. As Southern African American women, they exerted little control over public spaces and thus resorted to the resources they commanded, namely words. Students of public memory should continue to scrutinize the material and cultural requirements for establishing physical commemorative sites, the gatekeeping function such requirements perform, and the innovative strategies disempowered groups call upon to create alternative acts of commemoration.

However, if Miller's and Smalls's roles in public memory work have not received adequate recognition in historical and rhetorical scholarship, the pamphlets themselves have borne fruit from the remains of the initial failures of the featured rhetors. Scholars and anthologists of the stony road traveled by African Americans in post-Reconstruction South Carolina have relied on the pamphlets as sources, and traces of Mary Miller's and Sarah Smalls's rhetorical work appear in later writings.⁴⁶ Subtly yet significantly, these two nineteenth-century African American women shape the modern historical narrative of the convention and its aftermath.

Notably, a few twenty-first-century writers cite the speeches featured in the pamphlets in a manner that explicitly extends the public memory work of Miller and Smalls. Foner and Branham, who, as noted above, anthologize Miller's principal speech, identify Mary Miller's pamphlet as the source of their text for the oration and specifically quote from its preface. Billingsley (a sociologist), who pronounces the pamphlets "an important contribution to

⁴⁴ Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free*, 167.

⁴⁵ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), 7.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Uya, *From Slavery to Public Service*; Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*; Edward Miller, *Gullah Statesman*.

scholarship,” directly echoes their work, quoting generously from the speeches and White commentary selected by Miller and Smalls, as well as their introductory comments. (The pamphlets are, in fact, the principal sources for his quotations.) By retracing Miller’s and Smalls’s work, Billingsley pays tribute to the pamphlets as he places this late-nineteenth-century eloquence within the context of twenty-first-century race relations.⁴⁷

Furthermore, in his chapter on the 1895 convention in *Voices of Black South Carolina: Legends and Legacy*, historian Damon L. Fordham celebrates the oratory of Thomas Miller and Robert Smalls (as well as the rhetoric of Whipper, which is not included in either pamphlet) by excerpting significant sections of their convention speeches, not simply for the purpose of close analysis or for supporting a detailed historical narrative, but as deliberate acts of commemoration. Furthermore, following the strategy practiced by the pamphleteers, he reproduces praise for the speeches featured in White Southern papers. Writing for an audience of interested citizens, rather than scholars, Fordham transfers the essential memory work of the nineteenth-century pamphlets into a twenty-first-century context. After quoting from Sarah Smalls and her father’s intrepid proposal to amend the anti-miscegenation code, discussed above, Fordham calls attention to the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court ruling that overturned such hypocritical bans on interracial marriage, thus demonstrating the slow arc of racial progress. He notes that although the ban on miscegenation in the state constitution survived *Loving*, “On November 3, 1998, exactly 103 years, one month and one day after Robert Smalls’s speech, South Carolina voters voted to remove Section 34, banning interracial marriage . . . with a majority of 62 percent of the votes cast.” Fordham closes this chapter by stating, very much in the spirit expressed by Mary Miller and Sarah Smalls over one hundred years earlier, that despite the loss of rights experienced by African Americans following the convention, “the speeches of Robert Smalls, Thomas Miller, and William Whipper and their colleagues show that these developments were not met unchallenged.” Fordham extends the public memory work of his activist female predecessors, not merely reporting, but celebrating past oratory wielded in support of causes that continue to require attention. The final words of Fordham’s epilogue directly challenge the reader to translate memory to action: “Will people learn from these mistakes? Will the events of recent times lead to an age of increased understanding and better relationships between different races? The answer, just as this book, is in your hands.”⁴⁸

Finally, I note that the *Zinn Education Project*, which, as described on its website, “promotes and supports the teaching of people’s history in classrooms across the country,” provides a page titled “This Day in History: Sept. 10, 1895: South Carolina Constitutional Convention Convened” featuring information about both Robert Smalls and Thomas Miller, as well as brief explanations of the import of their contributions to the convention. Also on this page, links to Sarah Smalls’s pamphlet place her public memory work into the hands of legions of digitally savvy twenty-first-century students.⁴⁹

Billingsley, Fordham, and the *Zinn Education Project* merge public commemoration of past discourse with partisan discussion of present issues. Along with their rhetorical predecessors Mary Miller and Sarah Smalls, they vivify Young’s exhortation that “the shape of memory cannot

⁴⁷ Foner and Branham, *Lift Every Voice*, 806–07; Billingsley, *Yearning to Breathe Free*, 167.

⁴⁸ Damon L. Fordham, *Voices of Black South Carolina: Legend and Legacy* (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2009), 74, 85, 154.

⁴⁹ “About the Zinn Education Project,” “This Day in History: Sept. 10, 1895: South Carolina Constitutional Convention Convened,” *Zinn Education Project* (Washington, D.C.: 2021), <https://www.zinnedproject.org/about/>, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/sc-constitutional-convention>.

be divorced from the actions taken in its behalf. . . . For were we to passively remark only the contours of these memorials, were we to leave unexplored their genesis and remain unchanged by the recollective act, it could be said that we have not remembered at all.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 15.