

*Stories of Struggle:*  
The Clash Over Civil Rights in South Carolina

By Claudia Smith Brinson

Reader's Group Guide

1. Brinson describes the book as “stories,” avoiding the term “history.” Why does she do that? What is gained by the reader understanding these events as character-driven narratives? Does this approach heighten the emotional impact? Does it make these events feel more or less urgent, recent, or real?
2. In chapter two petitioners face prolonged retaliation from White people in their communities, ranging from the cruel but legal to the violent and illegal. Even under this intense pressure, few petitioners relented. What would it take for you to withstand such a campaign of fear and violence? What would you stand up for? What could you unrelentingly fight for? What, if anything, would it take to make you back down from retaliation?
3. During the civil rights movement, Black elders and young teens and adults occasionally clashed on what should be the best path forward. How should younger and older people work together on complex societal problems? Does internal disagreement hinder or ultimately advance social progress?
4. The Black people in these pages repeatedly return to education as a fundamental civil right. Do you agree that education is a fundamental civil right? What factors, if any, are required to fully embrace a good education? What is it about education that empowers individuals to change the world?
5. Throughout the pages of this book, the names of celebrated civil rights leaders appear—for example, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King, and Thurgood Marshall. Famous cases of injustice and brutality, such as the lynching of Willie Earle and the blinding of Isaac Woodward, and the Orangeburg Massacre, appear in these pages as well. With that said, what is the effect of Brinson’s (a) focus on leaders and individuals who are *not* well-known and (b) attention to lesser-known or previously unknown events?
6. McCain, Ivory, Gaither, and several other civil rights leaders in these pages adopt nonviolence as the only viable pathway forward. Their nonviolence takes mental strength, “soul power,” or the ability to retain one’s humanity in the face of inhuman treatment. Discuss the concept of nonviolent protest. Does nonviolence work? Is it the best option? Does it take more moral strength to plan violence or execute nonviolence? Are nonviolent protests always “good,” and are violent protests, which often emerge in response to violence, always “bad,” and why?
7. Discuss the rise of White Citizens’ Councils (WCC) in the time period covered by the book. What were the WCC members’ motivations? What is the difference between a White citizen who joined a council and a White citizen who did nothing? What does it mean for White South Carolinians to grapple with the immediate, sometimes familial, history of bigotry and hatred? Do present-day

White South Carolinians have a moral responsibility to denounce their ancestors' beliefs and actions? How do White South Carolinians consider how they benefit from systemic racism?

8. During the national upheaval sparked by the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, phrases that echo throughout this book were weaponized once more against Black protestors as well as those of all races who were standing up against police brutality. Protestors were categorized as “outside agitators” who were “stirring up trouble,” rather than concerned and outraged members of local communities. Why is the strategy of marking protestors as “outsiders” lasting and pervasive? Is the use of tear gas, dogs, pepper spray, and rubber bullets by police ever appropriate?

9. Recent events in South Carolina including the Charleston Church Massacre and Walter Scott shooting serve as a stark reminder that violence and hatred against Black South Carolinians persist. Have South Carolinians' attitudes changed? How true was the prediction that South Carolina would never change its practices surrounding segregation?

10. Each chapter in *Stories of Struggle* makes clear the actual agonizingly slow pace of change and the incredible number of people who had to participate in a movement to effect changes to the law. What is the role of the law in determining societal behavior? Does social change or legal change come first? What contributed more to the eventual success of the civil rights movement: the NAACP's strategic focus on individuals' lawsuits or the students' strategic mass sit-ins, marches, and arrests in public spaces?

11. Mary Moultrie played an important role in the Charleston hospital strike. How did experiencing equal treatment empower her? Discuss the pros and cons of leaving home to live a better life or staying home to fight for a better life.

12. Women's place in civil rights protests, sit-ins, and rallies was sometimes limited by concerns about violence and by the sexism of the times. Although women did plan, participate, and accept arrest alongside men, they were rarely fully recognized as leaders. What unique burdens did the times place on women who decided to join public protests? How did sexism and racism intersect in their lives? How has this changed in today's world?

13. Read this quote by the sixty-third U.S. Attorney General William Rogers: “The standing of the United States as the leader of the free world suffers as the result of acts of racial discrimination.” Is this still true? How do these words make you feel from an American perspective; how might they make you feel if you grew up outside of the United States?

14. Some historians maintain that history is objective—merely a record of the past—while others argue that every act of retelling, framing, and remembering is political and reflects subjective interpretation. In the context of South Carolina, the latter opinion holds weight, since many of the local heroes detailed within these pages are not found in traditional history books. Which stories from this collection would you choose to add to a South Carolina history curriculum (typically taught in the eighth grade)? Why might it be important to teach students of all races about Black freedom fighters?

15. In her conclusion, Brinson disavows tidy, wrapped-up narratives and calls readers to action. How does that make you feel? Do you think she is convincing?