

**Testimony before the
Presidential Commission on University History
at the University of South Carolina**

November 2, 2020

Presented Virtually due to COVID-19

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During the past decade, and particularly in the last year, the long-standing discussion about race in America has intensified and become the dominant issue in almost every part of our country and around the world. A series of events across the country in which African Americans have been killed in confrontations with law enforcement officers has resulted a widespread protest movement and demands to “Defund the Police.” Those behind this movement have created a narrative that African Americans are being unfairly targeted by “racist” police. More significantly, the “racist police” narrative has morphed into a general condemnation of America on the basis that everything about our nation is racist. Over the past year this narrative has become accepted by many, even including some generally conservative Americans.

I and many other Americans believe that this narrative is totally false. While there are certainly bad policemen as there are bad lawyers, bad doctors and bad educators, the overwhelming majority of Americans in law enforcement are good, well-intentioned people who have a difficult job to do, but who are doing their best to serve our country and its communities. Some reforms in police procedures may be appropriate, but the wholesale “defund the police” policies would not be a positive development, particularly for the African American citizens who live in high crime neighborhoods across the country.

That the “racist police” narrative is put forth is remarkable because many of the so-called “racist” police and their superiors, including their chiefs of police¹ and mayors,² are African Americans themselves. Moreover, the protesters fail to acknowledge the fact that approximately 37.4% of the violent crime in America is committed by African Americans³ who constitute only 13.4% of the population,⁴ making it reasonable that a higher per capita percentage of African Americans are killed by police who are responding to violent crimes. While we all regret the deaths of those who have died in confrontations with police, even the deaths of those with long criminal records, these deaths constitute only a minor fraction of the enormous number of violent deaths in America for which our law enforcement professionals are charged with trying to prevent.

Further, the general condemnation that America today is racist is very unfair. Our nation provides more freedom and more opportunity for all of its citizens than any other country in the world. That is why so many people from other nations are clamoring to come here. Additionally, for more than half a century, African Americans have enjoyed the benefit of affirmative action programs, both formal and informal. These programs have had a very positive effect, elevating millions of African Americans to higher positions and better incomes than they would otherwise have enjoyed. Thus, the narrative that today’s America is racist is clearly false.

Our nation could have – and should have – been celebrating the end of racial discrimination as evidenced by the election and reelection of an African American president. Moreover, we should celebrate the fact that African Americans hold many top positions in

¹ The Minneapolis Chief of Police at the time of the death of George Floyd was African American. Seattle’s African American Chief of Police resigned because of the criticism and cutbacks that her department was facing.

² The Mayor of Chicago at the time of the riots by protestors in that city is African American. The Mayor of Atlanta where the shooting of an African American man by police occurred this year is also an African American.

³ Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018 Crime in the United States, Table 43.

⁴ United States Census Bureau estimate as of July 1, 2019.

corporations, government, education, entertainment, athletics, and the professions. We in South Carolina should celebrate that we recently elected an African American United States Senator by a substantial margin. We should also celebrate that we elected a woman of Indian descent as our governor. Indeed, there is substantial evidence that racism in America and in South Carolina has been radically reduced over the last half century to the point that only a miniscule minority of white Americans and South Carolinians can be fairly called racist in their core beliefs.

This is not to say that one will never hear an occasional racist joke or comment, or observe a racist confrontation directed against African Americans, or Jews, or Asians, or “Polacks,” or “Hillbillies,” or even Caucasians. People of all races and backgrounds can occasionally be thoughtless and hurtful, and some of them will occasionally say and do racist things which they do not in their hearts believe. When asked how we can end racism, the much-admired actor, Morgan Freeman, in a 60 Minutes interview in 2005, stated simply: “Stop talking about it. I’m going to stop calling you a white man, and I’m going to ask you to stop calling me a black man.”⁵ Truer words were never spoken. However, despite this sound advice and despite all of the evidence that racial discrimination is well behind us, many in our society continue to spread the false narrative that the American people are infected with “systemic and institutional racism.” This narrative is splitting our nation apart.

In a state like South Carolina, which is so rich in history and on which history much of the state’s economically-important tourism industry is based, local citizens and visitors alike must confront – and make sense of – the difficult issues of slavery, race and segregation which have absorbed the state during the vast majority of its long history. Most historians of recent decades have focused almost entirely on these issues in their analysis of our history, giving relatively less attention to the many other deserving subjects. These historians broadly condemn

⁵ CBS News, 60 Minutes, 2005, Interview by Mike Wallace.

those customs and institutions that have suppressed our African American population over the years and applaud those who played key roles in bringing these institutions to an end. The result of this is that these troubling institutions of our past are discredited and those responsible for bringing them to an end are appropriately acknowledged. That much is good.

However, many of these historians also condemn most of those who have led our nation since its first settlement over 400 years ago, focusing only on their roles in perpetuating those institutions. They apply today's standards of morality and concepts of political correctness to people who grew up in an entirely different era, and whose views of the world were molded by personal experiences, conventional wisdom and moral standards far different from those of today. The result is that most of our forebears – including some of our historically most revered “founding fathers” – are now being characterized as evil and misguided persons, with little or no acknowledgment that they acted according to the widely accepted standards of their day, and that they made many positive contributions to our world.

These critics fail to acknowledge that the evils of slavery, segregation and the oppression of minorities were not the exclusive property of the white leaders of our American past, but were ancient and widely-embraced institutions for which the entire human race shares blame. Almost every civilization in recorded history – from the ancient Egyptians and Hebrews, to the Greeks and Romans, to the Chinese, to the Arabs, to the Aztecs and Mayans of the New World and even to the pre-Columbian Native Americans here in the Southeast – employed the institution of slavery in one form or another.

The critics also fail to consider that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, white servitude was in widespread practice. Many of the ancestors of white Americans found their way to the New World as “indentured servants” who were bound as unpaid laborers

normally for a period of seven years in exchange for their passage across the ocean. Although these indentured servants were more fortunate than the African slaves who had no realistic hope of being free in the future, it is important to appreciate the fact that white Americans of our past accommodated themselves to African slavery against the background of the general acceptance of indentured white servitude.

The critics also do not consider that the African slave trade was significantly enabled by African tribes enslaving members of other tribes and selling them to Arab, European and American slave traders who transported them to the Arab world and to the Americas. The extent of African involvement in the slave trade is illustrated by the example of King Tegesibu of Dahomey in West Africa who, in the single year of 1750, made approximately £250,000 from selling slaves.⁶ Also, many Africans who were brought to America had already been enslaved in Africa where it has been estimated that three quarters of the population in Sierra Leone was historically non-free.⁷ Further, more than a few free blacks in the South at the time of the Civil War owned slaves themselves.⁸ Even today, slavery – though technically illegal – is still actively practiced in some African countries.⁹ Thus, the evils of slavery are far from being limited to the white population. Slavery is not an American, or a white evil: It is a *human* evil, and all mankind throughout history bears guilt for the atrocities perpetrated under this institution.

It is also undeniable that from the very beginning of European settlement in America, there was a consistent and continuing effort on the part of the white population to institute and

⁶ Thomas, Hugh, *The Slave Trade, The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870*, Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 354. Thomas' book, an excellent survey of the Atlantic slave trade, contains a lot of interesting information about the slave trade, much of which is unfamiliar to historians and the general public.

⁷ Littlefield, Daniel C., *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1991, p. 78.

⁸ In South Carolina in 1860, there were 171 black slaveholders of which one, William Ellison of the Sumter District, owned sixty-three slaves. See Edgar, Walter, *South Carolina – A History*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, SC 1998, pp. 308-310.

⁹ "Slavery still haunts Africa, where millions remain captive," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 2013.

maintain a system which would hold its black population in a position of servitude and second-class citizenship. Even the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, was a racist by today's standards.¹⁰

Because of the far greater percentage of the black population in the Southern states, the effort to subjugate the black race was greater here. Beginning with the end of the federal occupation of the South in the 1870's, this effort intensified and by the turn of the twentieth century, a fairly universal system of "segregation," in which blacks were relegated to separate, and generally unequal, accommodations, was in place. Additionally, so-called "Jim Crow" laws were passed to ensure that blacks would be kept in their condition of subservience. At that time, the idea that the color of one's skin was indicative of one's worth was almost universally held, from the far reaches of the British Empire to even in the African American communities in America, where mulattos were considered to be superior to other African Americans.¹¹ Like slavery, this systematic repression of people based upon their skin color was not strictly an American or a white evil: It was a human evil and all mankind bears guilt for this misguided concept.

In condemning our white forebears for slavery and segregation without consideration of the historical context in which the forebears lived, and without acknowledgement of their many positive contributions, modern critics are as guilty of de-humanizing their fellow man as the most strident segregationist was of de-humanizing black citizens of a century ago. *The fact is that, given the same background and faced with the same circumstances, the overwhelming majority of us – black and white, rich and poor, old and young – would have acted just as those*

¹⁰ Lincoln, Abraham, Fourth Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Charleston, Illinois, September 18, 1858, contained in Baser, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume III, pp. 145-146.

¹¹ Edgar, p. 310. See also the "Story of Macedonia Church" by Bettis C. Rainsford, Sr. where discrimination by skin color was rigidly enforced in this African American church in Edgefield in the early 20th century.

leaders did in the times in which they lived. Ours are not the sins of the *white* race or the *black* race, but rather they are the sins of the *human* race.

One of the most important truths in Christian theology is illustrated when, on Thursday night before the crucifixion just before Christ was arrested, he told Peter that he – Peter – would deny him thrice before the cock crew. Peter refused to believe it, saying “No, Lord, not I,” but then he did deny knowing Christ three times during the night as he was questioned, and immediately after the third denial, he heard the cock crow.¹² So, too, we may say that “No, we would never be guilty of that which our forebears did,” but, the reality is that the cock may very well crow for us too. As soon as we accept our own personal fallibility and adopt an attitude of moral humility, we will be better able to help our fellowmen overcome any racial prejudices which they may have, and to help our world embrace peace and goodwill among all mankind.

Our objective should be to encourage racial harmony, and, as Morgan Freeman has suggested, the best way to accomplish that is to “stop talking about it.” We should not seek to change the names of our buildings or to remove our historical monuments, because such actions will inevitably create more racial divisiveness which will hurt our nation and its people. Instead we should seek to honor others whose contributions may have been overlooked and to devote our energies to doing those things which will bring our people together.

It is amazing that there have been calls for the University of South Carolina to remove the name of Strom Thurmond from the Strom Thurmond Wellness and Fitness Center. No name is more appropriate for this facility than that of Strom Thurmond, for he personified wellness and fitness and constantly preached of the benefits of good health habits and exercise throughout his long life.

¹² *Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Chapter 26, verses 33-35, 69-75; *St. Mark*, Chapter 14, verses 29-31, 66-72; *St. Luke*, Chapter 22, verses 33-34, 56-62; *St. John*, Chapter 13, verses 36-38, Chapter 18, verses 17-18, 25-27. It is significant and instructive that this story appears in all four of the Gospels.

More importantly, for our State's flagship university to have a building named for Strom Thurmond is most fitting, for no South Carolinian in our history was more devoted to enhancing the educational opportunities for young people than he was. Indeed, Strom Thurmond began his career as a teacher and coach in our public schools. In the ensuing years, as he became County Superintendent of Education, State Senator, Circuit Judge, World War II soldier, Governor and United States Senator, he never lost his passion for trying to help young people.

As a United States Senator, he took great pride in developing his renowned Page Program in which hundreds of young South Carolinians had the opportunity to serve as Senate pages and see first-hand how their government worked. Realizing that only a limited number could participate in the page program, he then created his own Intern Program in which thousands of other young South Carolinians had the opportunity to go to Washington and see the Federal government in action.

Senator Thurmond was also driven to help young people obtain college educations by establishing the Strom Thurmond Foundation which helps to educate 40 to 100 needy, worthy students annually. He has provided fifty-two separate scholarships at forty-five colleges, universities, and technical schools in South Carolina and beyond, including a scholarship at Howard University.¹³

With respect to the Wellness and Fitness Center, Senator Thurmond worked tirelessly with University officials to assemble the funding for this facility. Not only did he bring federal funds to the table, but he also secured contributions from a number of companies and individuals. Some have apparently made much over the fact that Senator Thurmond contributed only \$10,000 to this particular project. However, this overlooks the fact that, over the years

¹³ Interview of the author with Robert R. "Rob" Smith, II, Esq., Secretary Treasurer of the Strom Thurmond Foundation, October 29, 2020.

Senator Thurmond, his foundation and family contributed more than \$1.5 million to various programs, scholarships, endowed chairs and buildings at the University of South Carolina.¹⁴

From early in his life Senator Thurmond understood that because of the positions he held, he was uniquely situated to help many ordinary people with many of their ordinary problems. Unlike most of our current political leaders who either do not understand how much they could help our individual citizens, or do not care to do so, Strom Thurmond derived enormous satisfaction from helping the people of our state. It was his most consuming impulse. Whether it was assisting some elderly person in getting her Social Security benefits, or getting the military to provide leave for an enlisted person to come home for a family funeral, or helping a city or county in South Carolina to obtain a grant for some local worthy project, Strom Thurmond was relentless in his commitment to help his constituents. At the time of his death it was estimated that over the course of his long career, he had provided some personal help of some kind to at least one-third of all families in South Carolina.

Yes, it is true that in his early political career Strom Thurmond, like almost all political leaders in the South in that era, supported segregation and resisted the Civil Rights movement. But those who focus only on these years should consider the following:

- In 1930, as the newly elected Superintendent of Education for Edgefield County, Thurmond initiated a literacy program for African American citizens which resulted in a 25% decrease in illiteracy among black citizens.¹⁵

¹⁴ University of South Carolina Foundations, Thurmond Funds Project Summary Report as of 2-13-19.

¹⁵ Bass, Jack and Marilyn W. Thompson, *Strom, the Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond*, Public Affairs, New York, 2005, pp. 38-39. In the first year of the program black illiteracy dropped by more than one fourth. "A black teacher wrote in 1930 'Our county superintendent is leaving no stone unturned in helping us to eradicate illiteracy in our group. He has been instrumental in helping to obtain efficient teaching faculties and is urging every colored teacher to support the work.' A young black principal told his children that he could 'get what he needed from Thurmond.'"

- In 1947, as the newly elected governor of South Carolina, he vigorously and persistently demanded that the perpetrators of the last lynching in South Carolina of a black man be punished, thereby earning the editorial praise of the *New York Times*.¹⁶
- In 1970, as a United States Senator, Thurmond was the first of any Southern member of Congress to hire an African American in a senior staff position.¹⁷
- In 1971, Thurmond secured the first federal funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities.¹⁸
- In 1974, Thurmond befriended an ambitious young black teenager from Marion, South Carolina, Armstrong Williams, and helped him launch his career as a political commentator, entrepreneur, author, talk show host, and owner of numerous television stations.¹⁹
- In 1975, Thurmond secured the appointment of Judge Matthew J. Perry to the federal bench.²⁰
- In 1982, Thurmond supported the extension of the Voting Rights Act designed to insure fair election procedures for minorities in the South.²¹
- In 1983, Thurmond supported the establishment of the Martin Luther King holiday.²²
- In 1984, in appreciation of his tireless efforts to help them, the state's fourteen black mayors named Thurmond "legislator of the year."²³

¹⁶ Bass & Thompson, pp. 82-84. Cohodas, Nadine, *Strom Thurmond and the Politics of Southern Change*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1993, pp. 99-100.

¹⁷ Bass & Thompson, pp. 239-242. Cohodas, pp. 412-413. Thomas Moss was the senior staff member whose job was to give special emphasis to the state's black population. Moss worked for the Senator for thirty years and "[n]ot once did he feel that Thurmond let him down." Bass & Thompson, p. 242.

¹⁸ Bass & Thompson, pp. 240-241.

¹⁹ Bass & Thompson, pp. 243-249.

²⁰ Bass & Thompson, pp. 242-243.

²¹ Bass & Thompson, pp. 292-297.

²² Bass & Thompson, p. 301. Cohodas, pp. 482-484.

²³ Cohodas, p. 484.

- In short, Strom Thurmond worked hard over many decades to help African Americans even in those times when segregation prevailed, and he ultimately earned the full support of a large number of his African American constituents.

A man who knew Strom Thurmond intimately for over thirty years, Senator, Vice President and now Presidential Candidate Joe Biden, had this to say about Thurmond:

I do not believe that Strom Thurmond at his core was a racist I was honored to work with him, privileged to serve with him, and proud to call him my friend. His long life may well have been a gift of his beloved God, but the powerful and lasting impact he had on his beloved South Carolina and on his nation is Strom's legacy, his gift to all of us.²⁴

When any of his critics are able to demonstrate that they have done even 5% of the good that Strom Thurmond accomplished for our state and for individual South Carolinians over his long lifetime, then perhaps they have earned the right to criticize him. Until then, they should spend their time studying our state's history and the life of this remarkable South Carolinian who did so much to help our state and its people.

If our flagship university cannot honor this man who served our state so well for nearly three-quarters of a century, then no man deserves to be so honored. Strom Thurmond was truly a South Carolinian for all seasons!!

²⁴ Short, R. J. Duke, *The Centennial Senator, True Stories of Strom Thurmond from the People Who Knew Him Best*, OJJDP, Department of Justice, 2006. 367, 442.