

*Resisting Equality: The Citizens' Council, 1954-1989*. By Stephanie R. Rolph (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018) Pp. 240. Hardcover, \$48.00.

The fight for Civil Rights and racial progress has no shortage of moving characters, suspenseful dramas, and cruel twists of fate for historical examination. One of the lesser examined histories surrounds the various groups of white southerners who resisted desegregation. In the past three decades, historians have pondered the supporters, motivations, and influence of these movements. Stephanie Rolph's *Resisting Equality: The Citizens' Council, 1954-1989* engages this literature and argues the Association of Citizens' Councils of Mississippi and the Citizens' Councils of America leveraged racist, white supremacist ideology to win numerous allies around the world.

As Rolph explains, the Citizens' Council officially formed in Mississippi as a protest organization in the wake of the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision that deemed school segregation unconstitutional. The Citizens' Council viewed itself as a respectable alternative to other white supremacist organizations, like the Ku Klux Klan. Although Rolph acknowledges the Council used terrorist tactics, *Resisting Equality* focuses on the internal workings and transformation of the Council over time. Rolph purposefully focuses attention on the organizations in Mississippi as the standard bearer for the rise and fall of the Citizens' Council. Rolph does not place the Council in juxtaposition to the Civil Rights Movement, nor is that her purpose. Instead, Rolph wants the reader to follow the simultaneous rise of conservatism and nation-wide white supremacy.

The official timeline for the Council's existence is 1954-1989, as advanced by Neil McMillen, but Rolph extends the ideological roots and longevity of the Mississippi born organization. To begin her account, Rolph argues that 1930s conservative thinkers, including Albert J. Nock, Friedrich A. Hayek, Peter Viereck, and Bernard Iddings Bell, equated the rise of fascism and communism in Europe with an attack on personal liberties in the United States. Although these men wrote about the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe as a warning to Americans about the consequences of government gone awry, they were not inherently political nor were they mainstream. Rolph follows this conservative ideology into the 1940s and 50s, during which time conservative media grew a national audience. This nation-wide audience became the base for massive resistance movements after *Brown*.

The Council movement peaked from 1954-1964. During this period Rolph notes that the organization spawned throughout the South but its headquarters in Mississippi had far greater goals. Council organizers created networks of communication and support throughout the North, even expanding to the world stage. Council leaders believed their groups could flourish by leveraging ideas of white supremacy, fears of big government, and discontent among the white middle class. Capitalizing on these beliefs, they were able to maintain the status quo of segregation long after the *Brown* decision was handed down. Rolph argues that the Council reached its pinnacle in 1959, with the election of Council member Ross Barnett as Mississippi governor. Under Barnett, the Citizens' Council became a state funded and nationally connected organization. The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission provided tax-payer funded grants, information, and political connections to the Citizens' Council. While new organizations and

localized white resistance proliferated outside of the Council after the Civil Rights legislation of 1964 and 1965, the Council began to capitalize on its national networks in these years.

Rolph argues Bill Simmons took the Council's message to a national audience and became its public face, "By 1963, Bill Simmons *was* the Citizens' Council" (127). Simmons oversaw *The Citizen* and *Forum*, the official media of the Council, and it was under his leadership that the Council leveraged the fear of communism that existed during the Cold War. Rolph explains that *Forum* produced numerous accounts of foreign affairs in the early 1960s, the same years that saw more civil rights protests and violence against activists in Mississippi. According to Rolph, Simmons argued that Americans viewed communism and communist influence as the biggest threat to national security. Rolph argues that this showcases how connected Simmons and the Council were to national leaders and trends. The focus on communism and the supposed communist influence on the Civil Rights Movement also suggests a new strategy developing within the larger anti-civil rights movement. Rolph argues that by the early 1970s and going forward the political, social, and institutional resistance that the Council promoted had become mainstream with the gutting of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, white flight, and the success of private academies.

Rolph builds upon the work of massive resistance and civil rights scholars, most notably Neil McMillen's *The Citizens' Council*.<sup>1</sup> Rolph is also building on the scholarship of Numan V. Bartley, Jeff Woods, George Lewis, Clive Webb, Yasuhiro Katagiri, and others in her analysis of the Council's use of massive resistance and Cold War politics to combat civil rights across the southern United States.<sup>2</sup> Rolph extends the periodization of the Council's ideology back to the 1930s and extends the Council's influence through the present. Rolph's work also focuses solely on the Council in Mississippi, while McMillen explores the influence of Councils across the South. Rolph justifies this focus by observing that the state was the birth and death place of the Citizens' Council, arguing that the Mississippi Council offers the best account of the Council's ideological longevity. Future studies of the Citizen's Council and massive resistance could replicate this state-level focus which would offer a body of case studies for a new synthesis.

Rolph's diligent archival research brings the history of the Citizens' Council to life. The book is filled with excerpts of letters, speeches, and broadcasts from politicians, citizens, supporters, and protestors. These sources add a personal element that is invaluable to the narrative. *Resisting Equality* will surely find an audience among scholars of massive resistance. *Resisting Equality* is an important work that carefully examines the long-term success of the Citizens' Council, placing Council ideology at the center of modern politics. As Rolph says, "my

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<sup>1</sup> Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction 1954-1964* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971, 1994)

<sup>2</sup> Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969, 1997); Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Clive Webb, ed. *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (London: Hodder Education, 2006); Yasuhiro Katagiri, *Black Freedom, White Resistance, Red Menace* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

hope is that the reader will not track the arc of the organization's demise but find in these pages evidence of its survival" (12).

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