The Balance of Power
Harry T. Moore and Voting Rights in Florida

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On December 25, 1951, Rosa Moore awoke to a loud blast and the screams of her granddaughter, Peaches. The explosion came from the bedroom of her son and daughter-in-law, Harry and Harriett Moore. Rosa, Peaches, and nearby family members rushed into the couples' bedroom. A large hole remained where their bed once stood. In that hole, covered in debris, laid a barely conscious Harry and Harriet. After carefully digging the couple out of the rubble, family members rushed them to the closest hospital that accepted Black patients. This blast in Mims, Florida, represented one of several racist attacks on African Americans and other minority groups in Florida that year. White Floridians embraced the southern tradition of mass white resistance to African Americans' attempts to gain equality, which often entailed overt violence. Florida experienced an average of one bombing every two months between 1949 and 1951. Unfortunately, this included the assassinations of Harry and Harriett Moore. The doctor pronounced Harry T. Moore dead upon arrival at the hospital. Harriett held on long enough to mourn her husband's death before dying nine days later.[1]

The story of Harry and Harriett Moore's assassination swept both national and international news.[2] Their assassination marked two of the first martyrs of the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. Harry T. Moore was the Executive Secretary of the Florida State Conference of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Executive Secretary of the Progressive Voters' League of Florida. The perpetrators of the attack remain unknown to this day. In life, Moore blamed the federal, state, and local government officials for African Americans' experiencing violence and racism in southern states. After the Moores'

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[1] Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 195.
[2] A French newspaper published an article entitled "Un Leader Noir Est Assassiné En Floride." *The London Times* published the article "Bomb Outrages in Florida" discussing the multiple bombing that occurring in state in 1951.

death, the NAACP and Florida's Black community demanded the federal government protect African Americans from white violence. They held that President Harry S. Truman expected African American citizens to support the United States' Cold War politics while suffering at the hands of white supremacists at home. Elected officials had an obligation to their constituents. From the local tax collector to the United States president, they all had a responsibility to protect and make decisions in the interest of those who cast a ballot for them. In the case of Harry Tyson Moore, everyone failed. They failed because African Americans, particularly in the south, remained barred from political activity. Local voting registrars continuously turned away black Floridians, often violently, when they attempted to participate in the democratic process. When allowed to vote, Florida's political machine restricted those Black citizens to the Republican party. Harry T. Moore set out to change that. His outspokenness against Black voter suppression in Florida cost him his life.

This thesis details the significant transformation of Black political life in the United States during the 1940s. Specifically, it directly follows the activism of Harry T. Moore from 1944 to 1951. An examination of Moore's life demonstrates that the Supreme Court decision *Smith v. Allwright*, which legally ended all-white democracy primaries, transformed Black politics in Florida. It argues that activists attempted to adopt a political ideology that denoted Black political collectivism and localism previously embraced by earlier generations. This local movement involved registering African Americans to vote, teaching them how to assess candidates, and promoting Black collective voting as the key to Black electoral politics. Developing a cohesive movement required engaging with individual people, listening to their personal experiences, and understanding their plight. Subsequently, this scholarship wrestles with the contestation between local and national organizing. On various occasions, Moore's

focus on the local Black communities clashed with his obligations as a NAACP leader. Numerous National and Florida NAACP leaders critiqued his organizing efforts, with some even calling for his resignation. Nevertheless, until his death, Harry T. Moore remained dedicated to his community and the Black citizens in Florida.

Many scholars have directly linked Harry T. Moore's civil rights efforts and death to his protest against the arrest and trial of four African American boys in Lake County, Florida, known as the Groveland Case. Moore demanded that Lake County Sheriff, Willis McCall, be brought to justice. McCall claimed to have shot two boys in self-defense while transporting them from prison to a local jail. Scholars have accepted that Moore's outspokenness on the boys' court case, precisely his open critique of Sheriff McCall, led to his murder. In *Before His Time*, Ben Green highlights Moore's civil rights activism. However, Green dedicates most of the book to Moore's work on the Groveland case and the investigation around the Moores' assassination.[3] Gilbert King's book titled *Devil in the Grove* also mentions Moore. Yet, he is mainly a supporting character in the larger narrative of the Groveland case and the legal work of Thurgood Marshall.[4] Lastly, Moore's name makes a vague appearance in several more books, but only as a victim of racist violence. Moore is much more than a martyr for the Black freedom struggle. Moore took on multiple crusades in Florida. He dedicated years of his life building the NAACP's influence in Florida, fighting for equal educational opportunities and equal pay for teachers. Most importantly, Moore's beliefs on Black political participation remained intertwined in everything he did. Through Moore's political activism, we witness the continuous evolution of African American political understanding and behavior through the Black freedom struggle.

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[3] Ben Green, *Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore America's First Civil Rights Martyr* (Cocoa, FL: Florida Historical Society Press, 2017)

[4] Gilbert King, *Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America* (New York : Harper, 2012)

In the article, "Somebody Has Got To Do That Work: Harry T Moore and the Struggle for African-American Voting Rights in Florida," historian Carolina Emmons tells the history of Black voting rights in Florida through the lens of Harry T. Moore. Emmons highlights the broader changes occurring in Florida before the 1940s and demonstrates the impact of Moore's contributions. According to Emmons, Moore's efforts to register Black voters in Florida was incredibly effective. "Between 1948 and 1950, more African Americans registered to vote than at any other time in Florida's history, with the percentage rising from 16.9% to 31.7%.[5] While Emmons scholarship informs this work, this thesis primarily investigates Moore's organizing and political ideology. It illustrates how he foregrounded contemporary ideas of Black political engagement in Florida.

Within the field of civil rights studies, this work embraces a focus on personal experiences, grassroots organizing and leadership as well as a longer periodization of the movement. Referring to them as the "socially invisible generation," historian Charles M. Payne emphasizes the implications of African Americans' local and personal connections on the modern-day Civil Right Movement.[6] In viewing the movement through the lens of Moore's life,

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[5] Caroline Emmons, "'Somebody Has Got to Do That Work:' Harry T. Moore and the Struggle for African-American Voting Rights in Florida," *The Journal of Negro History* 82, no. 2 (1997): 232–43, 242.

[6] Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1995). For more on information the field of civil rights studies also see, John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, Blacks in the New World, The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, Black Communities Organizing for Change (New York, London: The Free Press, Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1984); William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*, Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 1, 2005; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, A Radical Democratic Vision, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

it become apparent the he was a part of "the process that prepared the way" for the modern movement.[7]

Specifically, Moore's efforts represented the Black political movement's resurgence. In *Emancipation Betrayed,* Paul Ortiz's draws a direct connection between his study of the Black political movement surrounding the 1920 election in Florida and Black organizing during the modern Civil Rights Movement. While intense white violence subdued most organizing, it re-emerged within Moore and others' efforts in the 1940s. [8] By examining Moore's multifaceted role in Black voting rights efforts in Florida, this thesis highlights the early conflict between local level organizing and mass movements predating the modern Civil Rights Movement. Harry T. Moore attempted to address this conflict by balancing the use of "personal ties of mutuality to create a politics that embraced the needs of ordinary people" while remaining attentive to the larger national movement spearheaded by the NAACP.[9]

Additionally, the NAACP's civil rights work throughout the twentieth century is a testament to Moore's actions and the Black freedom struggles' transition into the modern Civil Rights Movement.[10] This continuity reflects Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's "Long Civil Rights Movement" thesis. Specifically, examining the NAACP and voting rights requires acknowledging Moore's work in the 1940s as a part of the expansive civil rights movement

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[7] Patricia Sullivan chapter "Southern Reformers, the New Deal and the Movement Foundation" in *New Directions in Civil Right Studies.* According to Patricia Sullivan, the historical study of the Civil Rights Movement has begun to shift from the popular movement of the 1950s and 1960s, to understanding the actions in the 1930s and 1940s that shaped later years.

[8] Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed,* The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida From Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[9] Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed,* 236.

[10] See Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*.

which burgeoned in the 1930s.[11] Moore's voting rights activism builds off the previous activist's work while simultaneously creating the foundation for future organizers. The founding of the Progressive Voters' League of Florida by Moore and other NAACP members foreshadowed the youth run-voter education drives occurring throughout the 1960s .

Moore's views on voting rights reflected his beliefs of Black political collectivism, the importance of Black voter education, and the need for local grassroots activism. He saw voting rights as the prologue to African Americans' involvement in law and policymaking, especially on a state and local level. As a NAACP state official, Moore contributed to one of the longest operating civil rights organizations in the United States.[12] Voting rights work is one of the longest-running initiatives implemented by the NAACP. In *The Ticket to Freedom,* Manfred Berg argues the NAACP's voting rights work not only began at its founding in 1909, but demonstrates the NAACP's strive to create social and racial change that went beyond their well-known legalistic identity. According to Berg, scholars have wrongfully excluded the NAACP from the study of the grassroots mobilizing tradition. The organization's voting rights work best illustrates its influence on the grassroots organizing tradition.[13] For example, Moore's push for Black voting rights began by educating people in his small town of Mims, Florida and other towns in Brevard County.

Florida mirrored the deep-seated racism ingrained in southern society. Moore's role as Executive Secretary of the NAACP Florida State Conference required him to travel around the state establishing and maintaining branches. Moore knew the danger of his work. Due to the

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[11] Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past." *The Journal of American History*, vol. 91, no. 4, 2005, pp. 1233 - 1263.
[12] See Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009).
[13] Manfred Berg, " *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

severe violence occurring throughout the year of his death, Moore kept a .32 caliber pistol in his car's glove compartment.[14] With broad-reaching support, the Ku Klux Klan thrived in Florida with free range to terrorize citizens at their will. Within the two years leading up to Moore's death, the bombing of Jewish synagogues, Catholic churches, and Black homes had become regular occurrences. Florida experienced "rampant Black violence in forms of murders, vicious beatings, and other acts of terrorism."[15] After rape allegations involving a white woman and four Black men spread through Groveland, white rioting caused the families of the accused and other Black people to flee for their lives. White mobs often enforced vigilante justice by taking African Americans from the jails to execute justice on their own terms. All-white police forces stood by and, at times, assisted the mobs. Harry T. Moore's critique of local law enforcement, especially the county elected sheriffs, stemmed from their support and encouragement of racist white vigilante justice.

Notably, Harry T. Moore documented much of his beliefs through letters, essays, announcements, press releases, and other written materials. Moore was an exceptional writer and considered it a useful tool. He occasionally gave speeches. However, Moore felt he had a soft voice, making him incapable of projecting his words in ways he believed others could. Therefore, Moore often wrote speeches for fellow community members whom he felt could convey his message better.[16] His writings and extensive travel throughout the state widened his circle of supporters. Moore's substantial use of written correspondences does not undermine his grassroots activism and direct impact on voting and civil rights activity. In fact, it had the

[14] Ben Green, *Before His Time*, 15.
[15] Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 195.
[16] Green, *Before His Time*, 81.

opposite effect, gaining him plenty of supporters and enemies in his fight for Black political participation.

The greater transformation of Black life in the United States during the 1940s attributed to the evolution of African American political activism in Florida. At the end of World War II, many African Americans expected their support and participation in the war to translate into liberation at home. The NAACP and other civil rights organizations promoted the "Double V" campaign. "Double V" referred to two victories: democracy abroad and at home.[17] The NAACP's Florida State Conference meeting in 1944, entitled "Unrestricted Suffrage," suggested just as much. From the conference organizers' perspective, African Americans were well on their way to equality. This campaign led to a surge in NAACP membership. In a letter to the Director of Branches, Ella Baker, Moore disclosed that a few members attending the 1944 state conference created the Progressive Voters' League of Florida. Moore ensured her that they "were doing everything possible to get [their] people interested in voting. [They] are determined to fight [their] way into the Democratic Primary in Florida."[18]

Earlier that year, the Federal Supreme Court deemed all-white primaries unconstitutional in *Smith v. Allwright*.[19] The ruling led to an expansion in voter rights registration drives throughout the South. After witnessing the success of the "Texas primary decision," Moore and other NAACP members jumped at the opportunity to fight the all-white Democratic primaries in Florida. In a letter to the NAACP Director of Branches, Gloster B. Current, Moore broke down

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[17] For a greater explanation of the creation of the "Double V" campaign, see Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 85.

[18] Correspondence from Harry T. Moore to Ella J. Baker, September 24, 1944, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-007-0690 Florida State Conference,1941-1945 Library of Congress, Washington D.C., 123, https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001493-007-0690&accountid=14678.

[19] *Smith v Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944).

his three post-*Smith v. Allwright* goals: "(1) to get the Democratic Primary open to Negro voters in every county in Florida, (2) to encourage the masses of our people to register and vote, and (3) to make contact with the various candidates and to make recommendations to our voters on the basis of the candidates' records and attitudes."[20]

Moore, conference president at the time, also formulated new ways to build Florida NAACP branches. His branch building philosophy revealed his intentions of growing membership in small towns. During his time as state conference president, and later as executive secretary, Moore remained a proponent of reducing the membership requirement necessary to establish a branch. The NAACP held that areas needed fifty members to institute a branch. Moore felt this inherently excluded small-town communities, neglecting many who needed the NAACP's assistance the most. Moore saw small-town folk and city dwellers as equally significant to the civil rights cause. As Moore transitioned into the Executive Secretary of the NAACP Florida State Conference, the organization's participation in Florida continued to increase. By 1945, Florida consisted of forty-eight branches.[21]

As the United States progressed into the Cold War, the southern Democrats, often referred to as Dixiecrats, held tightly to the party's fading segregationist ways. African American support of the Democratic party grew during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal era. When Harry S. Truman became president, his support of civil rights gained the party more patronage from Black Americans. However, this occurred primarily in northern states. Most African Americans in southern states remained barred from the party. Moreover, the Republican

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[20] Correspondence from Harry T. Moore to Gloster B. Current, September 18, 1946, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-007-0826, 6.

[21] Moore "Open Letter to Florida NAACP Branches, September, 8, 1945, Group II, Series C, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, FOLDER: 001493-007-0690, 130.

party lacked authority in these states. Therefore, Black Republicans found themselves politically powerless. In a letter to the state legislature, Moore reminded state officials that everyone knew that the Democratic primaries "was the election in Florida." African Americans needed to vote democrat if they wanted governmental representation.[22]

Moore and a few NAACP members officially incorporated the Progressive Voters' League of Florida in 1946. It gave them an outlet to promote their political beliefs. The NAACP regarded itself as a bipartisan organization and did not directly support any political party. The voters' league openly endorsed specific politicians in the state of Florida. Educating African Americans on their voting rights and political candidates was in the Black community's best interest. As executive secretary of the voters' league, Moore wrote letters to candidates running for positions in the state and local government. He asked them questions about their political platform and their opinion on the Black community's current problems. Based on the candidates' responses and their track record, the voters' league executive board members announced whom they believed African Americans should vote for.

To the NAACP's national office's chagrin, the NAACP Florida State Conference and the Progressive Voters' League of Florida remained undeniably linked. The voters' league utilized the established connections of the NAACP's Florida branches to promote political participation. For example, the Marion County Branch of the NAACP ran an article in the *Ocala Star-Banner* newspaper announcing to all African American Democrats the importance of their participation in the 1946 Democratic state primaries. The article stressed the importance of voting as a group and listed information about the candidates alongside an example ballot with an 'X' marked next

[22] Correspondence from Harry T. Moore to Legislature and Chief Executive, April 4, 1947, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, Folder: 001493-007-0928, 88.

to “suggested” candidates that Black citizens should vote for. The branch emphasized that these suggestions belonged to the Progressive Voters’ League of Florida. The Marion County Branch stated they had a duty to pass along these suggestions to the African American community. This strategy allowed the branch to bypass the NAACP’s bipartisanship. Over the years, it became common for executive members of the voters’ league to speak at the NAACP state conference about strategies to improve voting and announcing the voters’ league’s current achievements.

Moore’s adoption of voter education as a primary tool of racial uplift stemmed from his personal views on education. A teacher by trade, Moore often brought ballots to class and taught his students voting terminology and how to properly fill out a ballot.[23] Moore believed that African Americans collectively voting amplified their power within the political arena. The creation of a comprehensive Black political force depended on African Americans viewing themselves as a Black aggregate. Southern anti-civil rights politicians understood this as well. In response to Moore’s letter in 1946, Congressman Joseph Hendricks expressed his concern with Moore publicizing Black mass voting. Concerning the Black voter, Hendricks writes that “if he voted independently and thinks before he votes he will advance himself. If he is herded by communists or those kin to them into voting in groups for measure which are opposed to the best interests of this nation, then he will retrogress.”[24] After the Federal Supreme Court deemed all-white primaries unconstitutional in 1944, this 1946 congressional election was the first time some African Americans in the South had voted as registered Democrats. The southern white community still fought and used terror tactics to “persuade” African Americans not to vote. Yet,

[23] Green, *Before His Time,* 40.
[24] Correspondence from Joe Hendricks to Harry Moore, March 27, 1946, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-007-0826, 17.

politicians were the most vocal and commonly used anti-communist rhetoric to reject the country's gradual shift toward supporting African Americans' civil liberties.

The Dixiecrats perceived the rapid transition in race relations as a danger to the United States' international Cold War interest. Accusations of communist affiliations stifled the work of many organizations.[25] The NAACP and other civil rights organizations had to tread lightly to avoid federal and state investigations. Previously, several southern states had ignored the Federal Supreme Court's 1944 ruling. Florida's Democratic machine utilized communist rhetoric to limit African Americans' voting rights. On April 26, 1945, in a case led by the NAACP, the State Supreme Court ordered the Democratic Registration Supervisor, Fleming Bowdon, to register Jacksonville resident Dallas J. Graham.[26] Allegations of communist conspirators attempting to infiltrate the Democratic party through African American voters began to spread. State Senator John E. Mathews used this rhetoric on his campaign flyers just weeks after the court decision. He described the growing number of Black Floridians desiring to vote in the Democratic party as a ploy by the communist to control the election. Mathews claimed the Congress of Industrial Organizations-Political Action Committee had inspired this strategy.[27] The CIO remained under continuous scrutiny from anti-communists even before the creation of the Political Action Committee.[28] Mathews had no trouble spinning a fake narrative around the organization to explain why African Americans in Florida should not be allowed into the Democratic party.

In many ways, the Florida Dixiecrats succeeded in restricting the Black vote. A large portion of African Americans still could not vote as Democrats in the 1946 state primaries. The

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[25] Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 167.
[26] Press Release, April 25, 1945, Group II, Series B, Papers of the NAACP, Part 04: Voting Rights Campaign, 1916-1950, FOLDER: 001517-006-0971, 12.
[27] Ibid. 19.
[28] In *Rising Wind*, Plummer describes how unions, like the CIO, handle accusation of communism from the federal government. CIO eventually expelled nearly a million workers from its ranks.

Florida Conference of the NAACP, mainly Moore, received complaints from Black Floridians explaining their inability to change their party affiliation from Republican to Democrat. Moore had to contact Florida's Attorney General J. Thomas Watson and the NAACP Special Counsel Thurgood Marshall to alter his party membership. He explained the issue of voter registration in Brevard County, specifically in his small town of Mims. Watson claimed it was not his business to protect registration. However, Watson did send every supervisor of registration in the state a copy of a legal opinion about Black Americans' right to vote in the Democratic primary. Moore and a few additional African Americans registered for the Democratic party that year.[29] His letter to Attorney General Watson was one of several he sent to state government officials. Moore believed each citizen needed to express their grievances directly to government officials. Sadly, for most African Americans, fear of white backlash stopped them. In previous years, the NAACP took on large-scale voter discrimination cases, assisting in areas such as West Palm Beach in 1940. Yet, the organization continued to struggle to help small towns, where white Dixiecrats dominated local government.

Harry T. Moore claimed a voting rights victory for himself in Brevard County. However, he still needed to confront the fears that hindered political participation among the majority of Black Floridians. African Americans feared losing their jobs the most. These fears became a reality for Moore. In 1946, he lost his job as a Titusville Colored School principal due to his participation with the NAACP.[30] Still, Moore confronted the concerns of Black citizens by developing personal connections to individual communities. Moore supported African Americans in establishing their local groups with local leadership. Moore paid attention to small

[29] Correspondence from Attorney General J. Tom Watson to Harry Moore, February 19, 1946, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-007-0826, 63-64.
[30] According to Ben Green, Moore held the position of both principle and full-time teacher.

towns in Florida to the dismay of many of his superiors in the NAACP. As executive secretary, Moore received criticism for neglecting large branches and their internal problems. However, Moore understood the level of autonomy necessary for a productive branch and the extra assistance small towns needed. This sentiment stemmed from his personal experience.

Harry and Harriett Moore lived in the small town of Mims, Florida. They chose to build a house on land owned by Harriett's family. Unlike most African Americans in the area, the Moore family had one of the largest homes in the area. Harry and Harriet Moore were both educators. People in town often referred to Harry T. Moore as "Professor Moore." The Moores' lifestyle contrasted with the average Black family in Mims, Florida. "The Moores were educated, professional, relatively middle class, compared to most Black families who worked in the [orange] groves." Amenities in a small southern town, such as electricity, was something the Moores' had before most of their neighbors.[31] Their education and economic status did not hinder their ability to understand the plight of their neighbors. The Moores resonated with the Black community, and its members held them in high regard.

In Harry T. Moore's 1947 article, "The Work of the NAACP in Florida," he explained the plight of the small-town Black citizen to his readers to give them a sense of why these areas needed assistance organizing. Moore described Florida as having "the problem of 'space' and small communities." These areas suffered the most from lack of public education, transportation, and other services. Small towns also struggled the most to find leadership. Additionally, many citizens refused to entertain the NAACP out of fear of backlash from the local white community. Moore saw Black ministers as the answer to these problems. Ministers were leaders in these Black communities. Ministers had the allegiance of their congregations and had the potential to

[31] Green, *Before His Time*, 82.

increase the NAACP's membership and the number of Black voters.[32] Time could be set aside during church services to educate their members on the Black freedom struggle's current issues and encourage them to participate.

In April 1947, State Senator Mathews, still determined to keep African Americans out of the Democratic Party, introduced a bill designed to divorce the primary elections from state control. This bill would make the political parties private organizations, which would allow the Democratic party to reject African Americans. [33] Also, it was not the only legislation introduced to disenfranchise the eligible Black voting pool that year. In April, Moore found out the State Senate passed a proposed constitutional amendment that required Florida citizens to read a section of the state and federal constitutions to qualify to vote. Moore directly wrote to the State House of Representatives urging them to defeat this proposal. Literacy tests were standard in southern states to keep African Americans and poor white citizens from voting. In his letter to the state legislature, Moore mentioned how similar legislation in other states often only affected undesired voters.[34] He told them that African Americans were systematically disenfranchised and received a poorer education. So, why should they be "penalized now for being victims of a system over which they had no control."[35] With individual Florida legislature members dedicated to keeping African Americans out of the Democratic party, Moore pushed Black citizens harder to become active in the political process and confront these issues head-on.

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[32] The Work of the NAACP, March 29, 1947, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-007-0928, 84-85.
[33] A letter to Florida Citizens, April 16, 1947, Group II, Series B, Papers of the NAACP, Part 04: Voting Rights Campaign, 1916-1950, FOLDER: 001517-006-0804, 126.
[34] Julian Maxwell Hayter, *The Dream is Lost: Voting Rights and the Politics of Race in Richmond, Virginia* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 28. Hayter explains that southern states responded to *Smith v Allwright* by separating the selection of party candidates from under government control and establishing literacy test.
[35] A letter to Florida Citizens, April 16, 1947, Group II, Series B, Papers of the NAACP, Part 04: Voting Rights Campaign, 1916-1950, FOLDER: 001517-006-0804, 127.

Over time, Moore began to see his work in the Progressive Voters' League of Florida and the NAACP as one and the same. Often signing his announcements as the executive secretary of both organizations, Moore listed individuals whom African Americans needed to contact to show their disapproval of the Mathews bill. These lists included the names of senators and representatives from several districts. Moore was adamant that African Americans express their digressions directly to political figures and organized with other Black people in their community. Moore wanted Black Floridians to demonstrate to politicians that they understood state politics. As a united political group, these politicians would have to consider their grievances. Moore frequently wrote to his "fellow negro citizen" and "co-workers" explaining this reasoning and his African American community's expectations.[36]

On several occasions, Moore found himself explaining to his supporters that the criticism the NAACP and the voters' league received from outside forces was an attempt to scare them away. As the United States became more immersed in the Cold War, white politicians continued to accuse Black activists and their allies of being communist sympathizers. The NAACP attempted to fight accusations of communism on a national level, but the voters' league heavily relied on Moore's words.

On January 23, 1947, in a letter to his "co-workers" Moore condemned accusations that the voter's league was communist inspired while using the organization's accuser's patriotic and anti-communist rhetoric against them. Moore explained that the Progressive Voters' League of Florida did not support any "foreign-ism." He wrote this to push back against the accusation that they were communist sympathizers. By referring to communism and fascism as "foreign-isms,"

[36] Moore referred to his audience as "co-workers" when writing to members of the NAACP or the voters' league. He referred to his audience as "fellow negro citizens" when writing to the larger black community.

Moore placed himself and the voters' league on the United States' side as the country entered the Cold War.

Moore utilized nationalistic, anti-communist, and anti-fascist rhetoric to protect his voting rights efforts. Moore stated that this organization represented democracy and that all American citizens had a "right to participate in the affairs of their government." In reference to World War II, Moore reminded his audience that people of "all colors and creeds have sacrificed freely to help with the recent struggle for democracy" and that they "all should share equally the fruits of victory." He informed Black Floridians that they deserved the right to participate in the political system they had fought to protect. Conversely, Moore believed that the racist members of the Democratic Party more accurately represented communism and fascism due to their belief in withholding the vote from African Americans because of their skin color.[37]

In other cases, Moore directed his opinion undeviatingly at politicians. In a letter to the Florida legislature denouncing the Mathews bill, Moore called the bill a representation of communism and fascism. Moore directed his comments at State Senator Mathews, stating that the senator and the larger Florida population understood two things. First, the Democratic primaries are the true election in Florida. Second, the general election is just a formality. Mathews knew that anyone who did not vote in the Democratic primaries was "almost completely disenfranchised." Mathews said African Americans seeking voting rights were communist, but Moore told the legislature that he knew these statements were nothing more than propaganda to stop Black people from voting.[38] The boldness of Moore's rhetoric must be noted.

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[37] Open letter from Harry T. Moore, January, 23, 1947, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-007-0928, 81.
[38] Correspondence from Harry T. Moore to Florida Legislature, April 4, 1947, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-007-0928, 88.

He directly criticized state officials in a state where African Americans constantly feared for their lives. He was unafraid and unapologetic in his scrutiny of Florida's politicians. The Mathews bill did not pass. Moore saw this as another victory for Black Floridians, but they still did not have equal voting rights. The upcoming presidential election had the potential to place Moore one step closer to his goal.

Truman's decision to publicly announce his support of civil rights during the presidential race contributed to his victory in the 1948 election. His declaration gained him the support of northern African American Democrats and the small portion of African Americans able to vote in southern states.[39] Moore's voting rights campaign thrived on the positive news of Truman's victory. Immediately after the election, Moore magnified how the collective voting of African Americans tipped Truman's election. This election placed Black Americans one step closer to political equality. Unfortunately, as Brenda Gayle Plummer discusses in *Rising Wind,* Truman's support of "increased federal assurance of civil rights for the Black majority" included "curtailing Black radical dissent."[40] This "curtailing" placed an even tighter constriction on civil rights organizations.

Dixiecrats on all levels of government continued to accuse civil rights organizations and leaders of being subversives. Truman's declaration did not guarantee the implementation of new civil rights legislation. Still, African Americans who voted held political power. Moore wanted this same feeling of power to manifest in state and local politics. That same year, Fuller Warren won the Florida governor's race. A southern white moderate, Warren did not wholly support African Americans' civil rights but spoke out against racial violence.[41] He had been the

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[39] For more information see William H. Chafe, *Unfinished Journey: American Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[40] Plummer, *Rising Wind*, 194.
[41] Gilbert King, *Devil in the Grove*, 108.

Progressive Voters' League of Florida's suggested candidate. The voters' league identified Warren as the "lesser of two evils." According to the voters' league, Warren would support Claude Pepper for U.S. Senator in the upcoming 1950 election. Moore saw Pepper as the "South's most liberal statesmen," and Warren's inclination towards supporting Pepper showed his concern for Black constituents.[42]

Warren's victory only reinforced Moore's conclusion that African Americans' votes mattered. Whether the African American vote represented the defining factor that won Warren the governorship is unclear, but the voters' league's preferred candidate's victory is notable. Moore claimed that Warren defeated his opponent Dan McCarthy by less than 22,000 votes. He contributed this to the efforts of the Progressive Voters' League of Florida. In the article, "Taking Political Stock in Florida," Moore tells Black Floridians to keep their momentum after experiencing this moment of a "balance of power" between the Black and white community. Additionally, Black citizens needed to hold their local officials accountable. Moore told his audience of how Black people in Hillsborough county had successfully elected a new sheriff by a small margin.[43] Other counties had the potential to see similar changes as African Americans' political activity increased. Moore hoped that Black Floridians saw the possibility of change and the power they had to create it.

In 1948, African Americans in Florida made a statement. The Progressive Voters' League of Florida's witnessed a few of their suggested state and local candidates win. Furthermore, some of their supported candidates only lost by small margins, which the voters' league believed

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[42] Progressive Voters' League of Florida Endorses State Candidates, May 16, 1948, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0001, 123.

[43] Taking Political Stock in Florida report by Harry T. Moore, July 26, 1948, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0001, 143.

demonstrated the rise of collective Black voting. Moore received criticism about his beliefs on "bloc voting" from both the white and Black communities. He always maintained, "it is only by voting together that we can weld the balance of power."[44] In his opinion, voting collectively was the Black community's only option. Unified Black voting represented a political form of self-defense from the Dixiecrats who still controlled Florida's politics. When the Progressive Voters' League first began endorsing Truman, Moore heavily emphasized that Black Floridians needed to pay attention to their local election. In a 1948 "Open Letter to Florida Negro Citizens" Moore wrote,

> "But as important as the presidential election is, we must not overlook the fact that the election of state and county officials is of equal importance to us. These are the officials who have direct control of our every-day affairs. Most Negroes in Florida to-day have never seen a president. But practically all of us know our tax collector, our sheriff, and out county judge. We know the circuit judge, the state attorney, and the clerk of the court, because we often have to come in contact with these officials…The safety and welfare of the Florida Negro citizens depend very largely upon the attention of our sheriffs, judges, and other law-enforcement officials."[45]

In addition to acknowledging the considerable amount of power held by local leaders, Moore believed Florida needed new legislation. Moore and other Florida NAACP members called for anti-lynching and mob violence legislation. Even though it often deterred a larger portion of Black citizens, the blatant violence against African Americans was a driving force behind much of their desire to participate in voting. Moore realized Black Floridians needed to

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[44] 1948 Annual Report to Florida NAACP Branches, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0001, 47.
[45] Ibid. 46.

know they had the power to push local officials out of office who allowed and supported local Black communities' subjugation. Black southerners still did not have the protection of their state and local law enforcement. This violence became national attention when a white woman accused four Black youth of sexual assault in Groveland, Florida.

On July 16, 1949, Norma Lee Padgett accused Charles Greenlee, Sam Shepherd, Walter Irvin, and Ernest Thomas of sexually assaulting her. She claimed they attacked her and her husband, Willie Haven Padgett, after their car stalled in Groveland, Florida. According to the Padgetts, the four Black boys pulled over to help them with their stalled car. After exiting their car, the four boys attacked Willie Padgett. While he laid incapacitated, Willie claimed they grabbed Norma, pulled her into their car, and drove off. After creating distance between Willie and Norma, they pulled over and assaulted her. In the early hours of the morning, a sheriff deputy drove Willie Padgett around in the local Black neighborhood looking for the boys' car until Padgett claimed he found it. All four of the Groveland boys swore to have never been near that area that night.[46] When the accusation of rape spread through the community, Groveland's white citizens began terrorizing nearby Black neighborhoods. A mass exodus of approximately four hundred African Americans fled from Groveland in fear. Ernest Thomas fled Groveland out of fear only to be gunned down by a posse sent by Sheriff McCall. The other three boys were picked up and beaten into admitting guilt, except Irvin, who refused to submit to the terror.[47]

Even with the NAACP's legal assistance, it did not take long for an all-white jury to convict all three boys. Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP immediately began working to appeal the cases of Shepherd and Irvin. Both boys were sentenced to death. The NAACP chose not to

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[46] For information on the Groveland boys recalling of the incident see Gilbert King, *Devil in the Grove.*
[47] Correspondence from Harry T. Moore to Republican Congressmen, June 14, 1947, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0001, 113.

risk appealing Greenlee's sentence of life in prison. He had received a lighter sentence because he was sixteen.[48] By 1951, the case made it to the Federal Supreme Court on appeal. The court overturned the previous verdict and gave the boys a new trial in the lower courts. Yet, one of the boys never made it to trial.

This new trial meant Shepherd and Irvin no longer had to sit on death row. Instead, they were transferred to a jail. Sheriff McCall was placed in charge of transporting Irvin and Shepherd from death row at Raiford Prison to Tavares Jail. While in route to the jail, Sheriff McCall suddenly pulled over. The sheriff alleged that he had a flat tire and ordered the two inmates to get out and fix it. McCall claimed the two men attacked him when they stepped out of the car. He shot both boys, killing Shepherd.[49] The FBI investigated the incident and exonerated McCall of any wrongdoing. Convincing state officials to hold McCall accountable for Shepherd's death became a top priority for Harry T. Moore. Originally, he began rallying support for the "Groveland boys" when the accusations became public. Now, Moore directed his efforts to getting McCall out of office.

The injustice of the Groveland case consumed Moore's activism from 1949 to 1951. However, it did not completely overshadow his desire to increase NAACP membership or support voting rights. In many ways, Moore incorporated it into his current work. He no longer asked Floridians to join the NAACP's ongoing projects. Instead, Moore questioned how the Groveland case did not inspire them, specifically Black citizens, to become active. The Florida NAACP chapters' signup now asked, "Do you want to secure justice for the Groveland

[48] The possibility that Greenlee could receive the death penalty the second time around worried Marshall. Therefore, he chose not to pursue an appeal.
[49] Irvin later stated that he laid still and pretended to be dead until other police officers came.

Negroes?" and concluded with "the next time it might happen in your community."[50] In the NAACP annual report, Moore directly discussed his policymaking ambitions and its connection to the Groveland case. Moore argued that cases like this one signified the need for civil rights legislation. Citizens needed to encourage lawmakers to support civil rights legislation. If lawmakers failed to do this, Moore exclaimed, "we must consolidate our voting strength in future elections in an effort to replace these congressmen with men who are more favorable to our case."[51] The injustice these young boys experienced at the hand of a locally elected official validated Moore's stance on the necessity of Black voting rights. He believed white racists like Sheriff McCall should not be allowed in office.

By the beginning of 1949, Moore had accomplished a great deal in his voting rights effort. Since the *Smith v. Allwright* decision, according to Gilbert King, Moore's vigorous voting rights campaign had "brought nearly seventy thousand new Black Democratic voters into the system, and with Florida's Black population growing significantly every year, Moore's voter registration drive represented the single greatest threat to the citrus belt, to the Southern way of life, and to Willis V. McCall."[52] Lake County voters elected McCall as sheriff in 1944. Like other sections of the citrus belt in central Florida, this county consisted of tiny communities and orange groves. It made the perfect backdrop for McCall's reign of terror to flourish. He was aggressive and openly racist. Just three months into his first term as sheriff, McCall was charged with brutality, peonage, and involuntary servitude of six African American fruit packers. An FBI

[50] Will you help the NAACP to Secure Justice for the Groveland Negroes? NAACP Branches Fifth Congressional District, September 1949, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0001, 92.
[51] 1949 Annual Report, The Florida NAACP Branches, November 25, 1949, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0001, 107-108.
[52] King, *Devil in the Grove*, 83.

investigation determined that they lacked enough evidence for a case.[53] The African American community members were at McCall's law and mercy. McCall did not hide his association with the Ku Klux Klan. He never openly claimed membership in the organization, but his support of KKK member and Orange County Sheriff, Dave Star, spoke volumes.[54] The KKK had both members and supporters within Florida's law enforcement—a theme within police departments throughout the south. These sheriffs could also elect to keep all the fines they collected up to a max of seven thousand and five hundred dollars.[55] This incentive promoted intense policing that disproportionately targeted African Americans.

Corrupt policing made Moore especially vocal about the importance of African Americans participating in the election of law enforcement. Additional comments in his "Open Letter to the Florida Negro Citizen," just a year before the alleged Groveland incident, expressed as much. In this open letter, Moore reminded his readers of the previous violence against African Americans in Florida. Since the beginning of Moore's work with the NAACP, Florida officials had willingly allowed the murders of multiple African American men. In 1944, a group of white men forced a tied-up Willie James Howard to jump in a river and drown himself for sending a Christmas card to a white woman. In 1945, after Jesse James Payne confronted the landlord about his unfair business practices, his landlord spread false rape accusations. Police arrested Payne only to allow a white mob to take him from the jail and lynch him.[56] Moore reminded his audience that local law enforcement had actively supported this violence. Law enforcement had

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[53] McCall claimed his action were in accordance with "work or fight" statue that administer a warrant for the arrest of anyone for vagrancy who was not employed. See Green, *Before His Time*, 65.
[54] King, *Devil in the Grove*, 141.
[55] Green, *Before His Time*, 65-66.
[56] An Open Letter to Florida Negro Citizens from Harry T. Moore, January 10, 1948, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0001, 117. See Tameka Bradley Hobbs' *Democracy Abroad, Lynching at Home: Racial Violence in Florida* for more details of the murders of Willie James Howard and Jesse James Payne.

either participated in or stepped aside and allowed these murders. Everything from the white rioting that occurred after the initial Groveland accusations to the shooting of Samuel Shepherd took a toll on Moore. He had reached his breaking point with local officials, the state government, and Sheriff Willis McCall.

Like other civil rights activists, Moore faced reprisals for his activism. Moore's success with the Progressive Voters' League of Florida did not translate into success as the Executive Secretary of the Florida State Conference of the NAACP. He struggled to establish and maintain the number of branches expected by the national office. African Americans supported the NAACP's work, but for many, being a member was still too risky. After Moore lost his job as a principal, the Florida conference had hired him as a full-time worker. However, his salary came from money collected by local branches for the conference. With so much violence and hostility toward Black Floridians, Moore found himself struggling to establish branches and support his family. This also placed him in trouble with the national office and other state conference officials. Before his death, the NAACP's state conference demoted Moore from a paid position to a voluntary one.[57] As Moore struggled to fulfill his duties, his patience with the Florida political system wore thin.

The attention and violence surrounding the Groveland case began to concern state government officials. Civil rights organizations in Florida saw this as an opportunity. Throughout the Black freedom struggle, some white politicians found themselves attempting to appease civil rights groups without drawing concerns from their white southern constituents. In Florida, Governor Warren tried to appease the Dixiecrats and Black civil rights leaders. In light of the states' current situation revolving around the Groveland case, Black leaders wanted

[57] In addition to the national office receiving a few complaints about Moore, the NAACP state conference could not afford to pay him.

Governor Warren to deal with the cases' violent backlash. Warren remained publicly unobtrusive about discussing the logistics of the Groveland case, but he showed moderate concern about combating white citizens' use of violence against African Americans.

On November 9, 1949, Moore coordinated a conference between Governor Warren and a group of Black leaders across the state. These leaders came from the NAACP, the voters' league, and churches. They discussed Black citizens serving on state commissions and policy-making boards, police brutality against Black citizens, the protection for Black voters against intimidation, and inequality in schools and job opportunities.[58] This meeting represented a major achievement for Moore and the Black community. Moore's ability to orchestrate a meeting with the governor demonstrated how much political progress African Americans had made in Florida. These topics represented the Black community's concerns through the lens of their leaders, but specifically Harry T. Moore. In addition to working toward voting rights, it also became essential to obtain African American representation in state commissions and policymaking. To ensure their interests were accounted for, African Americans needed to hold positions in local and state electoral offices. He knew the Black community might not have the capacity to change racist white Floridians' personal beliefs. Still, Moore believed Black people had a right to ensure racism did not influence state's political system.

In the last two years of Moore's life, while Marshall worked on the Groveland case in appeals court, Moore took his activism a step further. Moore began directly writing to U.S. Senators Spessard Holland and Claude Pepper, explaining the importance of new civil rights legislation. Particularly, Moore disapproved of Spessard's stance against civil rights programs. Spessard believed civil rights programs created by the federal government infringed on states'

[58] Press Release, November 17, 1949, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0001, 97.

rights. Moore stated that the three living Groveland boys continued to experience injustice because of states' rights and the power given to the local government officials who unfairly handled their case.[59] After Shepherd died in 1951, Moore orchestrated mass meetings and protests to call for justice. In the face of financial trouble, Moore helped get Samuel Shepherd's body to his family. He also helped Shepherd's family find a new place to live. Their home had been destroyed during the rioting in 1949 after the allegations of rape became public.[60] The Groveland case pushed Moore even deeper into his work. Like McCall, several elected officials and law enforcement officers got away with depriving the Black community of their rights. This time the deprivation led to murder.

Until his death in 1951, Moore dedicated his time fighting for African Americans' full political participation in Florida. Throughout the last year of his life, Moore supported Black people struggling for rights in small towns like his own. He worked extremely hard in his county to maintain Black political participation. On November 11, 1951, Moore and the Progressive Voters' League of Florida in Brevard County worked with the sheriff to hire the first Black deputy sheriff in the entire county. Moore's years of organizing and lobbying in his county contributed to a greater openness by local officials to work with him to place African Americans in positions of authority.[61]

Even after this victory, Moore could not let go of his animosity toward Sheriff McCall. Once the FBI declared McCall's actions justified, he continued as the Sheriff of Lake County,

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[59] Correspondence from Harry T. Moore to Spessard Holland, February 28, 1950, Group II, Series C, Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955, Series A: The South, FOLDER: 001493-008-0153, 18.
[60] King, *Devil in the Grove*, 249.
[61] *Miami Times* Newspaper Article, November 17, 1951, Box 1, Folder 26, Harry T. Moore Documentary Collection, University of Florida Smathers Libraries Special and Area Studies Collections, Gainesville, Florida.

while Irvin continued the process of appealing his case. Just twenty-three days before his death, Moore wrote to Governor Warren asking again for the suspension of Sheriff McCall. Governor Warren had not taken any action regarding the Groveland case, and Moore continued to confront him about it. If Governor Warren truly supported African Americans as he claimed during his campaign, he needed to demonstrate it by getting rid of McCall. Moore reminded Warren of the support he received from the Black community during the 1948 election. Yet, African Americans sought "no special favors; but certainly [they] have the right to expect justice and equal protection of the laws even for the humblest Negro. Shall [they] be disappointed again?"[62] A few weeks later, Florida's Black community would again experience disappointment with the death of Harry and Harriett Moore.

Harry T. Moore's political activism from 1944 to 1951 demonstrates the power of voter education and Black collective political participation. Through studying local leaders, such as Moore, scholars can begin to understand how the political ideologies of the modern Civil Rights Movement were formed.[63] The Black political collectivism Moore preached in his stance on voting and political participation, in many ways, foreshadows the later efforts of the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party and Lowndes County Freedom Organization. The creation of these political parties in the 1960s indicated African Americans desire to have a voice in the United States political arena.[64] Significantly, the "radical democratic vision" of Moore's former colleague Ella Baker took amplifying the experiences, voices, and ideas of Black southern

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[62] Green, *Before His Time*, 193.
[63] See Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*.
[64] For more information on these political parties see Clayborne, *In the Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1995) and Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York : New York University Press, 2009).

communities to new heights.[65] They saw potential in Black political education and collectivity. Most importantly, they recognized the power of small and rural Black communities. Moore is a part of the evolution of the larger Black freedom struggle. He demonstrates that political participation and voting rights can be used to better understand the transition into the modern Civil Rights Movement. Moore's story illustrates the possibility of a balance of political power in the 1940s.

[65] Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, A Radical Democratic Vision, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.