



SOUTH CAROLINA HALL OF FAME



Correlation with South Carolina Standards

Matthew Perry



South Carolina Social Studies Standards

Matthew Perry

Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries-The Civil Rights Movement

Topics include – Segregation, Institutionalized racism, Jim Crow Laws, SC State Law School, Civil Rights attorney, Civil Rights demonstrations, NAACP, US Court of Military Appeals, US District Judge, SC

Standard 3-5: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the major developments in South Carolina in the late nineteenth and twentieth century.

3-5.5 - Summarize the development of economic, political, and social opportunities of African Americans in South Carolina, including the end of Jim Crow laws, the desegregation of schools (Briggs v. Elliott) and other public facilities; and efforts of African Americans to achieve the right to vote.

Standard 5-3: The student will demonstrate an understanding of major domestic and foreign developments that contributed to the United States becoming a world power.

5-3.2 - Explain the practice of discrimination and the passage of discriminatory laws in the United States and their impact on the rights of African Americans, including Jim Crow laws and the ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson.

Standard 5-5: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the social, economic and political events that influenced the United States during the Cold War era.

5-5.3 - Explain the advancement of the modern Civil Rights Movement; including the desegregation of the armed forces, Brown v. Board of Education, the roles of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, the Civil Rights acts, and the Voting Rights Act.

Standard 8-7: The student will demonstrate an understanding of the impact on South Carolina of significant events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

8-7.2 - Analyze the movement for civil rights in South Carolina, including the impact of the landmark court cases Elmore v. Rice and Briggs v. Elliot; civil rights leaders Septima Poinsette Clark, Modjeska Monteith Simkins, and Matthew J. Perry; the South Carolina school equalization effort and other resistance to school integration; peaceful efforts to integrate



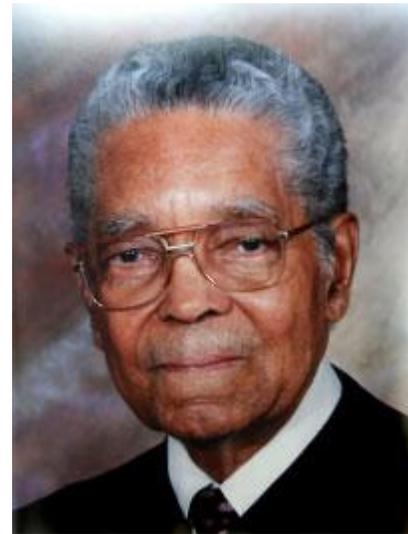
beginning with colleges and demonstrations in South Carolina such as the Friendship Nine and the Orangeburg Massacre.



S.C. Hall of Fame Biography

Matthew Perry

Matthew J. Perry was born in Columbia in 1921. Perry served in the U.S. Army from 1942-1946 and received his bachelor and law degrees from S.C. State College (now S.C. State University). Perry opened a law practice in Spartanburg and while handling routine cases and began to devote time to civil rights work.



This work soon consumed his professional time and led to his appointment by the S.C. NAACP as its chief counsel in 1957. Perry strategically selected cases to attack the state's scheme of racial segregation. In *Cummings vs. City of Charleston*, Perry successfully challenged Charleston's public golf course segregation. Perry also prevailed in cases involving segregation of state parks, hospital waiting rooms, state colleges and universities, and public schools.

Perry's representation of civil rights marchers arrested at the State House led to the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Edwards vs. South Carolina*, considered by many scholars to be one of the most important First Amendment cases in modern American history. In 1976, President Gerald Ford nominated Perry on the recommendation of Sen. Strom Thurmond to the U.S. Court of Military Appeals, marking the first time a black man from the deep South had been nominated to the federal bench.

Three years later, President Jimmy Carter nominated Judge Perry as the U.S. District Judge for the District of South Carolina, where he served with distinction for more than 25 years. In 2004, the new U.S. Court House in Columbia was named in honor of Judge Perry.



Transcript

Matthew Perry

During the Reconstruction, black South Carolinians helped draft the state constitution, held posts in the state legislature and US Congress, and gained their education at the University of South Carolina alongside white students.

But by the time Matthew James Perry, Junior was born in Columbia, on August 3, 1921, South Carolina had entered a period of intense backlash against racial egalitarianism. Segregation had been reinstated. Blacks were systematically disenfranchised. State politicians openly sought to perpetuate white supremacy. As he grew older, he began to question the validity of the culture of institutionalized racism he'd grown up in.

the business of wondering about how society might justify the racial practices that I had become increasingly aware of, uh, weighed with me. Uh, could I enter some field or study some field that might better equip me to understand what I was looking at, to understand the reasoning for it, and to perhaps, uh, along with others, try to find some solutions to them? And I think that these were the considerations that prompted me to turn and to decide upon the study of law.

Perry attended a newly-founded law school at the all-black South Carolina State College. The barebones new program, which Thurgood Marshall famously referred to as a "\$1.50 law school" was established in accordance with Jim Crow laws, in order to avoid integrating the law school at the University of South Carolina. Nonetheless, many graduates of the South Carolina State law school went on to become respected civil rights lawyers, and Perry would become the greatest among them.

Upon graduating in 1951, Perry opened a law office in Spartanburg, becoming the county's first black lawyer.

"Of course, there was a lot to be done when I graduated from law school in 1951."

-fade to white-



“I went headlong into it almost immediately”

“Because of his personality and his skills, he quickly gained a lot of attention, because he was this assertive black lawyer appearing in the—particularly, the criminal courts in Spartanburg.”

Perry was motivated not by financial gain, but by a genuine, deeply held commitment to the ideal of equality for all South Carolinians. His firm’s reception room was often packed with homemade cakes and pies, and baskets of fresh fruits and vegetables—gifts from clients who were unable to pay for his services.

“Always in demand, more work than he could possibly do, and yet he wasn’t producing that much money. Because of his concern for justice, he put his emphasis on, really, putting all his legal expertise at the...at the disposal of his client rather than...than trying to... build up the coffers of his firm.”

As his notoriety steadily grew, Perry played a central role in nearly every noteworthy civil rights case in South Carolina.

In the 50s and 60s, Perry helped earn acquittals for nearly 7,000 civil rights protestors. Many of the demonstrators arrested were very young, college and even high school students.

“When he becomes the lawyer of record for many of the young activists across sc, I think he fully realizes that the Harvey Gantts will be the ones who probably will fully realize this effort of desegregation and so his job is to be the legal architect. [crossfade] The students of schools all across the state are ready to become the witnesses he needs to dismantle the Jim Crow policy and segregation.”

“On a national basis, his work on behalf of the civil rights demonstrators in South Carolina created precedent after precedent, establishing the right of all citizens to be able to protest against their government when, uh, when they want to.”

Perry’s fast-growing reputation as one of South Carolina’s leading civil rights attorneys led to his appointment in 1957 as chief counsel of the state NAACP.

“The NAACP, particularly in South Carolina, was a civil rights organization. Matthew Perry was its counsel—judge, he becomes of course, the beloved judge Matthew Perry, that everyone, uh, sings his praises today, but when I was a young boy, he was one of the most hated men in SC



but he was also one of the most successful civil rights attorneys and he worked through the NAACP. It had been central to the civil rights movement of SC-perhaps more than any other state.”

“His victories as a lawyer...changed South Carolina. He brought South Carolina into the 20th century and beyond. Uh, there’s not a facet of life that was not segregated in South Carolina before Matthew Perry entered the Bar. And he basically tore down all the walls, all the barriers, whether it was the public schools, um, the colleges, the state parks, uh, every facility, bus stations, everything was desegregated because of Matthew Perry’s work.”

In 1976, President Gerald Ford nominated Perry to the US Court of Military Appeals, marking the first time an African-American from the Deep South had been nominated to the federal bench.

“And so I thought about it and I reflected, never before had any person such as I been named to a federal judgeship.”

-fade to white-

“It meant a great deal. It meant a step forward. And I had decided that I could do the job.”

Three years after Perry’s appointment to the Court of Military Appeals (’79), President Carter nominated him as the US District Judge for the District of South Carolina.

“I know that there was great excitement in the African-American community as well as in the legal community, because Perry was so well-respected, and you have to remember that Perry had been on the US Military Court of Appeals, so had left Columbia and been gone for 3 years and it was a big highlight when he had gone to the Military Court of Appeals, but for South Carolina, it was a great day to bring him back to South Carolina, and have him sitting on the federal bench in a courthouse in Columbia.”

“He’s number one. He’s the most important civil rights lawyer in the history of the state, without question.”

The Honorable Judge Matthew Perry served with distinction until his death on July 29, 2011, just short of his ninetieth birthday.



Credits

South Carolina Social Studies Standard Correlations were provided by Lisa Ray

The purpose of the [South Carolina Hall of Fame](#) is to recognize and honor both contemporary and past citizens who have made outstanding contributions to South Carolina's heritage and progress.

Funding for Knowitall.org was provided by the S. C. General Assembly through the K-12 Technology Initiative.

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