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[00:00:00] **Jack Schneider:** Welcome to *HEQ&A*, the podcast of the *History of Education Quarterly*. I'm your host, *HEQ* co-editor Jack Schneider. Every few weeks, we'll dive into recent work from the journal, asking authors how their projects challenge or extend what we know about a topic, exploring what's interesting and surprising about it, and then taking a step back to consider broader implications. In the second half of the show, we turn our sights to teaching. So, if you're an educator, make sure to stick around until the end. And now let's hear from one of our authors.

[00:00:50] **Candace Cunningham:** My name is Candace Cunningham. I'm an assistant professor at Florida Atlantic University. And my article is about Black school teachers in South Carolina who were dismissed from their jobs after a law was passed in 1956, saying that teachers could not be members of the NAACP. So I think if we think about a larger kind of historiography of Black teachers, there have been a few evolutions, sort of the first was around Black teachers, teaching during Reconstruction and particularly learning that they were kind of the predominant teachers in the South.

[00:01:27] Moving away from a rhetoric that actually came from W.E.B. Du Bois of sort of White women in calico dresses in his history of Black Reconstruction so instead we learned actually that most of those teachers were African-American, overwhelming majority of them, of course, were African-American women.

[00:01:42] And I think the historiography moves a bit further and we learned how about some of the ways in which Black teachers were confronting racism in their classroom, and particularly trying to prepare their students for life in a sort of blatantly racist world. They were teaching things like citizenship, but across both of these histories where there was still this belief, I think that teachers were not civil rights activists. And so then the historiography moves a bit further and people began talking about teachers as sort of covert supporters of the civil rights movement.

[00:02:17] What my research is part of is—sorry—the next part of this historiography , which actually sees Black teachers as frontline defenders of civil liberties and as very active participants in the civil rights movement, in men and women who were quite literally willing to put their name on the line and risk the possibility of losing their livelihood in order to support the movement.

[00:02:44] I think the other thing that we can see in my work in particular is that they continue to be activists even through the move towards de segregation and this was despite the fact that they knew with certainty, that this was going to oftentimes result in job loss. You know I don't know if it's especially surprising, but the thing that I'm constantly reminded of, particularly kind of being steeped in this history of the South Carolina civil rights movement, is why people engaged in activism.

[00:03:17] I think we've often seen the civil rights movement, particularly through the lens of the late 1950s to early 1960s. And when it's very much around the history of people like,

uh, Martin Luther King, And John Lewis and Rosa Parks, and we see people quite frankly, engaging in activism for reasons that actually seem very grandiose.

[00:03:38] You know, if you listen to the language of King on the one hand, he is constantly winking his activism too. Economic rights. But on the other hand, it also links it to these really grandiose ideals of freedom and liberty, and that's necessary in order to kind of engage people and persuade people to really be active in the movement.

[00:03:58] But I think when we look at ordinary people like school teachers, like the parents that supported them, um, like the man and women who signed all of those desegregation petitions, they're engaging in activism for very tangible reasons. They want a very clear outcome and they're engaging in it because they actually believe his outcome is possible.

[00:04:20] These men and women who signed desegregation petitions believe it's, you know, there are children who are going to go to a de segregated school. They were going to get a better education, that was going to happen with in their child's lifetime. Um, so I think I'm constantly reminded that we have to remember why people are engaging in activism and that what they want again, it's very clear. It's very tangible, it's actually not this kind of grandiose ideal of freedom and liberty.

[00:04:49] So the general narrative of the civil rights movement, places that we think of most often are, of course, in Mississippi, we think of Tennessee. We think of Alabama to a lesser extent. Virginia comes into the conversation, Florida. South Carolina has not been a major part of the kind of major narrative of the civil rights movement. And so one of the things I hope that people learn is that there was in fact a broad, engaging, often successful civil rights movement, uh, in South Carolina. But that likewise there was also a very broad, engaging, often successful White, massive resistance movement.

[00:05:31] And I think we've often thought of White massive resistance as sort of George Wallace. You know, saying “segregation today, segregation forever.” And that's not always what it looks like. So, you know, White massive resistance in South Carolina was oftentimes an intellectual endeavor. I thought of them as intellectuals in many ways.

[00:05:51] So I think one of the ways things play out differently in South Carolina is because of *Briggs V Elliott*. Right? So, *Briggs v Elliott* of course, the first chronologically, those five cases that made up *Brown v Board*. And so this means that a decade before *Brown v Board*, or even earlier, it was clear in South Carolina to anyone that was paying attention and segregationists absolutely were, um, that education has to change. That legally, federal courts, in particular the US Supreme Court, was no longer going to support inferior schools. So South Carolina segregationists jumped, or at least attempted to, jump ahead of this issue and began with they called school equalization.

[00:06:37] Um, and so they actually implemented a state sales tax. That's right. South Carolina, you have segregationists to thank for sales tax. They implement a new sales tax to pay for equalizing Black schools. Black school facilities didn't in fact, improve after this, many of them were still weren't quite equal, but there, there was, there was significant improvement in some of these schools.

[00:06:59] And so they went about massive resistance in a different way. It was not just extra-legal efforts. It was also legal efforts. Um, and so I think it's important to include that into part of the conversation because it accomplishes the same thing, but it does so without the embarrassments of George Wallace, sort of standing on those steps and saying "segregation forever." The third thing I would add is I think it brings up this question of what is an activist, because I think we've always thought of activist as the Septima Clark and the Rosa Parks and the, you know, the MLK s uh, the people who are full-time activists.

[00:07:39] And I think looking at teachers, in particular, really demonstrates that activists are often people who are engaging in activism, again, for clear, tangible reasons, but also for maybe one or two episodes. They may not be lifetime activists, but this particular case that I, I talk about in this article "Hell is Popping Here in South Carolina," it's actually a really important civil liberties case, but I only know of one of the teachers in my study who goes on to actually continue being an activist after this. So people, you know, they engage in activism, they make a really important difference, but they may not be what we've traditionally thought of as kind of these full-time, uh, activists.

[00:08:26] **Jack Schneider:** The second half of the show is dedicated to thinking about teaching. We ask authors to put on their guest lecturer hats and take students into the weeds. What should they pay attention to, methodologically speaking? What else should they be reading if they want to take a deep dive into the historiography? And where are there opportunities for further research?

[00:08:46] **Candace Cunningham:** I have heard tell that there are people who are able to go to one or two or three archives and, uh, complete their research. And I hear these stories and I'm shocked and baffled and quite jealous. I think one thing to know if you're going to study any group of oppressed people in any location, you have to kind of put in the footwork.

[00:09:13] So my research is on schoolteachers in South Carolina, but my sources are across the state of South Carolina. They are also in Georgia. And D C. I've even found sources in Tennessee, actually quite a few sources in Tennessee. And I can imagine that if I had the extra time and resources, I could continue finding source material at other locations, you know, and this is in spite, the fact that Black teachers were-- compared to other members of the Black population-- fairly well-recorded, uh, segment of the population. They had their own associations. They were actually doing much of the work that we think of professors doing, right. They were doing their own research. They're publishing. They were intellectuals. So they were producing their own work. Their lives were comparatively far more recorded, activists of course their, their actions are often recorded either in the case of newspaper articles and or legal, uh, suits, but still, right, there's that really big challenge. And so you think of it, you know, if you're interested in studying a group like this, you know, just kind of know that going in-- but the end result is really just so worth it. Um, you're able to really create something and find a narrative that other people maybe have not been able to put together.

[00:10:33] One of the things that's really interesting about this case is: everyone mentions it. Um, this case at twenty-one teachers being dismissed from one school is such a clearly

unconstitutional action. It's mentioned by many major scholars, but you know, it took some legwork to kind of, kind of get a whole narrative.

[00:10:52] So I really think, I think a great place to start, particularly if you're interested in learning about Black teachers is on the historiography of Black teachers during Reconstruction. I think once you kind of understand that history, you really understand what Black teachers throughout the 20th century, uh, were trying to accomplish and sort of what they were up against.

[00:11:12] So I'd recommend starting with people like Heather Williams, or James Anderson, read literally anything and everything by Vanessa Siddle Walker. Every single thing that she writes is valuable. [chuckle] In fact, you know, I really recommend looking at what scholars in colleges of education are researching and writing about.

[00:11:33] Not just teachers, but about whole Black education more broadly ranging from, you know, elementary and high school, but also to university level. So think about it really broadly. The other thing is sort of delving a little bit deeper into South Carolina's, uh, civil rights movement. So of course, people like Peter Lao, um, have produced some really valuable research.

[00:11:57] And also look at things that maybe don't seem like they're directly connected to your research. You'll be surprised when you find inspiration or connections. So I think if someone's trying to consider where maybe what their next research project is going to be, especially if you are a graduate student, there are few lines.

[00:12:17] One is: be willing to just spend some time in an archive and looking at a collection that you find interesting. That's actually how I came about my whole dissertation topic. My dissertation was on the role of black schoolteachers in the South Carolina civil rights movement. And I actually found this narrative in the NAACP. They talked about the role of schoolteachers, and I kind of realized that there was a lot, a longer narrative that I could dive into. So that would be the first thing.

[00:12:43] The second thing is I think there's a lot of space at looking at what happens after desegregation. And on the one hand, we started asking questions now, right, about what happens at black schoolteachers after you segregation. That's something that I look into a little bit.

[00:12:59] The other thing that I think is really important to consider is what happens to Black teachers' associations after desegregation. The Palmetto Education Association was the Black teachers' association in South Carolina. And the reason why it was so important was because, uh, in South Carolina, it was very difficult to form labor unions. And so the kind of cure for that in South Carolina was for the teachers' association to form this really clear partnership with the NAACP. Right. And through that, they were able to accomplish many of the things that a teacher's union would accomplish, like salary equalization, like job protections, or hiring Black teachers in the first place.

[00:13:40] After desegregation though, these Black teachers' associations are merged with White teachers' associations. And I think if we take a closer look at those, what we'll see is

something that actually imitates what happens in schools, which is that Black teachers lose positions of power. They oftentimes lose funding. They no longer have an association, a professional teachers' association that's clearly engaging with protecting them and specifically the issues that they face as Black teachers. So I think what's happening, uh, to teachers, both in terms of their profession, but also in terms of their associations after desegregation.

[00:14:21] And then thirdly, the, I think the harder question, but I think one that's equally important is what happens to Black students during desegregation. I know for a while, uh, Millicent Brown was actually trying to, uh, Millicent Brown is a civil rights activist. She helped, desegregate schools in Charleston, South Carolina. She went on to be a scholar in her own right. I know for a while, she was trying to collect as many names as she could. Of people who had desegregated schools and really asking a really important question, which was, you know, what happens when you put children in harm's way? What happens when the kind of the load of carrying out de segregation falls on the shoulders of children?

[00:15:02] So I think we also need to look at the experiences, uh, of the children, some of them quite young, what happens to them when they're desegregating these schools? Um, so I think this kind of post desegregation issue, and also the degree to which de segregation is, is carried out. Um, and the ways in which it, you know, we all know that it continued to be maintained. I think linking that to pre desegregation era. Those are really important questions of research to follow up on.

[00:15:32] **Jack Schneider:** Check out *History of Education Quarterly* online. The journal is published by Cambridge University Press and it's carried by most academic libraries. You should also be sure to follow *HEQ* Twitter handle: @histedquarterly, which regularly sends out free read-only versions of articles, and the show's Twitter handle @HEQandA. And don't forget, subscribe to the show so you don't miss forthcoming episodes. We're available on iTunes, Stitcher, and wherever you get your podcasts. HEQ&A is produced at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Our producer is Jennifer Berkshire and our theme music is by Ryan Shaw. I'm Jack Schneider. Thanks for joining us.