

“Irrespective of Race or Color”: The Reconstructed University of South Carolina, 1873-1877

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On October 7, 1873, Henry E. Hayne enrolled at the University of South Carolina. He was the first Black student to enroll in a public university in the South. Richard T. Greener, the first Black graduate of Harvard (1870), arrived on campus as the university’s first Black professor the next month. A year later a normal school was launched to train teachers, mostly Black women. That Black men and women would teach and study in the same spaces that had served as a think tank for secession and played a pivotal role in the launching of the Civil War is hard to imagine. Yet for nearly four years this is what happened. This talk will explain the events that led to the desegregation of the University of South Carolina, describe the life of the campus during its “brief moment of the sun” during Reconstruction until this experiment in education ended in 1877, and discuss the legacy of the Reconstruction-era university.

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