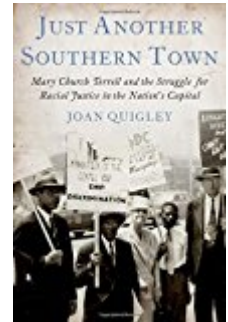


Joan Quigley. *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Nation's Capital.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 368 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-937151-8.



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On January 27, 1950, Mary Church Terrell, Reverend William H. Jernagin, Geneva Brown, and David H. Scull entered Thompson's Restaurant located on Fourteenth Street in Washington, DC. As they expected, the manager, Levin Ange, refused to serve Terrell, Jernagin, and Brown because "it was his company's policy not to serve Negroes," but since Scull was white, he was welcome to dine there (p. 6). To test the segregation policies in the District of Columbia, the group needed the manager's outright refusal to serve them. Terrell and her companions were "setting up a confrontation" in order to trigger a legal challenge "from the local courts to the federal judiciary, and ultimately all the way to the Supreme Court" (p. 19). The subsequent case, *District of Columbia v. John R. Thompson Co. Inc.* (1953), was one of many legal battles that slowly dismantled Jim Crow by testing the constitutionality of local and state laws that mandated separate facilities for blacks and whites. While the Supreme Court's decisions in these cases generally make their way

into the historical record, details, like the names of the African American plaintiffs and their local efforts, including those to build support to sustain the cases as they made their way through the appeal process to the Supreme Court, are often omitted. In *Just Another Southern Town*, Joan Quigley seeks to remedy this erasure by offering a richly detailed account of the case against Thompson's Restaurant and Terrell's role in it.

In the prologue, Quigley introduces the major figures in Terrell's life and the *Thompson* case, including her husband, Robert Heberton Terrell and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. As Quigley points out, Mary Church Terrell's life spanned ninety years, from Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Quigley then proceeds to trace the formation and history of the District of Columbia through the Civil War and Reconstruction, thereby setting the stage for the *Thompson* case in 1950. As Quigley reports, by 1870 local ordinances banned segregation in places of public entertain-

ment, restaurants, bars, and hotels in Washington, DC. However, by the mid-twentieth century, local officials were not enforcing these antidiscrimination laws, so the southern custom of racially segregated facilities became customary practice in Washington, DC. The *Thompson* case sought enforcement of the 1870 ordinances that barred racial segregation in public establishments.

Quigley organizes the book chronologically, with the first four chapters carrying the reader through the 1920s and focusing on Terrell's early life, including her strained marriage to Robert Heberton Terrell. In these chapters, the reader gains an understanding of the extent of Terrell's activism through publications, public speaking, and social and political connections. For example, Robert Terrell's appointment to a local judgeship in 1901 was due in large part to Booker T. Washington's advocacy. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt discharged, without honor, 167 African American soldiers for their alleged role in an incident at the army base at Brownsville, Texas. Mary Terrell approached William Howard Taft, Roosevelt's War Department chief, and attempted to intervene on the soldiers' behalf. With these chapters Quigley illustrates the extensive networking behind the scenes in the crucial years leading up to *Brown v. Board of Education*. Communication within this network supported activism on the ground and in the courts.

Chapter 5 begins with Terrell's efforts to pen her memoirs after her husband's death in 1925. After publishers Little, Brown & Company declined to publish the autobiography, Terrell published it on her own through Ransdell, Inc., commemorating the achievement with a celebration in 1941. The remainder of Quigley's work traces the *Thompson* case alongside other landmark segregation cases, including *Henderson v. United States* (1950), *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education* (1950), and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Terrell and her companions had to visit Thomp-

son's Restaurant three times in order to advance the case. Before it was heard by the Supreme Court, the local municipal and appellate courts ruled on the legality of the District of Columbia antidiscrimination laws. The Supreme Court published its *Thompson* ruling on June 8, 1953, more than three years after Terrell's first visit. The highlight of these chapters is Quigley's meticulous account of the progress and the setbacks in the *Thompson* case. Her behind-the-scenes account of the Supreme Court justices' conferences and memorandums adds a unique dimension to the historical record and provides insight into the process leading to the rulings.

Quigley's inclusion of Terrell's grassroots activism melds the top-down and bottom-up approaches to civil rights historiography. Along with the *Thompson* case, Terrell, as head of the Coordinating Committee, spearheaded boycott efforts at several Washington, DC, restaurants and shops, including Hecht's department store and Murphy's Dime Store. The boycotts successfully ended segregation at the establishments without the intervention of the courts. Furthermore, Quigley shows that Terrell's efforts presaged the direct-action campaigns of the 1960s.

Quigley argues that it was Terrell's challenge at Thompson's Restaurant and the subsequent case that made its way to the Supreme Court that ushered in *Brown v. Board of Education*. She asserts that, "with *Thompson*, [Terrell] had triumphed, achieving vindication that paved the way for public school integration nationwide" (p. 240). She also states that the case helped to unite the Supreme Court justices. Terrell did play a significant role in African American resistance to Jim Crow, especially in the District of Columbia. However, to attribute the success of *Brown* to Terrell and the *Thompson* case dismisses the African American plaintiffs in five communities whose activism reached back to the late 1940s and culminated in the *Brown* decision.

Just Another Southern Town's strength lies in the breadth and depth of Quigley's primary source research, as eighty-one pages of notes demonstrate. Quigley synthesizes her findings into a credible account of Terrell's life, the District of Columbia's status, and the Supreme Court. Still, her book lacks critical commentary and insight, most notably in the inadequate examination of the role of gender in Terrell's life and in considering Terrell's unique circumstances as a wealthy, educated African American woman. Instead, Quigley elevates Terrell as a heroine without taking notice that Terrell's privileged status insulated her, to an extent, from possible reprisals for her activism. Her experience was therefore far different from African Americans in the rural South who often depended on whites for their livelihood. Furthermore, Quigley fails to note that she had access to a wealth of primary sources precisely because of Terrell's elite status: Terrell had the time and money to travel and deliver speeches, submit articles to magazines, and keep a diary. The author does not locate her discussion of Terrell and *Thompson* within the larger body of feminist historiography and civil rights scholarship.

Overall, *Just Another Southern Town* offers excellent content for discussion and analysis in undergraduate or graduate courses dealing with civil rights law or African American activism. For critical commentary about these topics, supplementary materials are necessary.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-sawh>

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