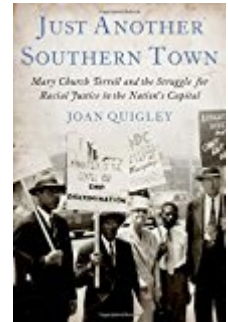


**Joan Quigley.** *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Nation's Capital.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 368 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-937151-8.



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Joan Quigley's *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Nation's Capital* is a welcome, if limited, contribution to the history of the civil rights movement for its documentation of the politics surrounding a relatively little-known early 1950s campaign to desegregate lunch counters in Washington, DC. Local laws implemented by the city's biracial legislature in 1869-73—before Congress stripped the District of its right to self-governance—prohibited the segregation of theaters, restaurants, bars, hotels, bath houses, barber shops, and ice cream parlors. Although initially enforced, the laws were eventually excluded from the District's legal code. Almost half a century later, a meticulously researched, well-publicized, and controversial report published in December 1947—*Segregation in Washington*—traced the evolution of these Reconstruction-era laws and speculated they they may still be enforceable. Mary Church Terrell's role in testing these laws and in successfully advocating for their legal validity is at the center of Quigley's narrative. Terrell was eighty-six years

old when she began her campaign in early 1950 and nearly ninety by the time the Supreme Court ruled that the segregation of DC eating establishments was unconstitutional in *District of Columbia v. John R. Thompson Co., Inc.* (1953).

A former business reporter and federal government attorney whose earlier work documents the events surrounding a massive underground coal mine fire in Pennsylvania, Quigley is a newcomer to the rich history of civil rights activism in the nation's capital. As a result, she draws heavily upon Terrell's own memoir and local news accounts, but does not significantly engage DC's broader civil rights history. Pauli Murray and her peers at Howard University Law School, for example, had staged successful sit-ins at another DC restaurant in 1943-44; it was during this campaign, in fact, that Howard University's law librarian had uncovered the so-called lost laws outlawing segregation.[1] The struggle to desegregate Washington's schools, which has also been well documented elsewhere, is largely confined to a discussion of the legal strategy used by Thurgood

Marshall and his NAACP colleagues in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and its DC companion, *Bolling v. Sharpe*. The latter case is dryly described as having arisen “when the Washington Board of Education refused to admit African American students to an all-white junior high” (p. 197), ignoring the mass protests that had begun years earlier over the substandard and overcrowded school buildings assigned to black students. Likewise, there is just one paragraph on the years-long campaign to desegregate the workforce that operated the city’s streetcars.

Certainly Quigley credits picketing and boycotts for having an impact; in fact, those organized by Terrell and her colleagues on the Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of DC Anti-Discrimination Laws resulted in some of Washington’s most prominent department stores reversing their lunch counter policies as the *Thompson* case moved through the courts. However, more attention to existing scholarship on the *essential* role of grassroots protest in the many civil rights battles eventually fought in local and federal courts would provide a broader perspective and deeper understanding of the issues central to the author’s narrative.[2] Quigley instead paraphrases NAACP executive secretary Walter White: because of Mary Church Terrell’s “distinguished role, the democratic change in Washington had flowed from the Supreme Court, without violence or bloodshed” (p. 234). The violent tenor of demonstrations around the contemporaneous desegregation of Washington’s swimming pools, among other contested sites, further belies this interpretation of events.[3]

Quigley’s work also gives short shrift to the history of Jim Crow segregation, which she describes as a system designed to make African Americans embarrassed, ashamed, and inferior. She neglects to give sufficient attention to the insidious role of segregation in defining racial categories, promoting economic exploitation, and justifying violence as means of maintaining racial or-

der. The less dangerous aspects of Jim Crow segregation were often those highlighted by Terrell herself; being banished to colored-only train cars or being forced to eat standing up at segregated lunch counters was especially insulting to a woman of her Victorian propriety. On the other hand, Terrell wrote and lectured about far more serious issues, specifically the rape of black domestic servants by their employers and the unchecked practice of lynching across the South. Clearly she knew there was much more at stake, which may also help explain the NAACP’s reluctance to become involved in her case during a period when its primary focus was on desegregating schools. (In fact, the segregation of DC’s public schools had been cited as precedent for the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* [1896], which continued to justify racial exclusion by the very establishments Terrell sought to desegregate.) The NAACP also refused to work with Terrell and her colleagues for fear of being branded communist.

While Quigley neglects to contextualize Terrell’s campaign in the wider world of mid-century black Washington, her sharp focus on Mary Church Terrell’s personal and professional relationships exposes the strict class and gender boundaries within which Terrell operated and the limitations they imposed. Although eventually a successful lecturer, Terrell was forced to quite teaching when she got married; she instead spent much of her time using political connections to advance her husband’s career. Quigley’s work is also valuable for elucidating the inner workings of the Supreme Court, as she is especially interested in how the justices’ personalities, interests, relationships, and political views influenced their thinking on civil rights. Quigley seems to have a special affection for archival minutiae, whether Mary Church Terrell’s shopping list or handwritten jokes passed by Justice William O. Douglas to a colleague. The author might have instead given more attention to the justices who initially heard DC’s civil rights cases and their appeals. Judge Henry White Edgerton, for example, who served

for thirty-two years on the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, was an influential dissenter in local cases involving the segregation of schools and housing.

*Just Another Southern Town* may ultimately be of most interest to students of the Supreme Court as well as those interested in the role of anticommunism (and specifically the House Un-American Activities Committee) in dividing and sowing fear among mid-twentieth-century civil rights activists. It also brings renewed attention to Mary Church Terrell's important standing as a successful national political campaigner (she stumped for Warren Harding during his campaign for president in 1920); as a highly respected lecturer throughout the United States and abroad; and most importantly, as a local civil rights hero.

#### Notes

[1]. Pauli Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat: An American Pilgrimage* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 229-230.

[2]. See, for example, Marya Annette McQuirter's "Our Cause Is Marching on": Parent Activism, Browne Junior High School, and the Multiple Meanings of Equality in Post-War Washington," *Washington History* 16, no. 2 (2004/2005): 66-82; or Genna Rae McNeil, "Before *Brown*: Historical Context and Vision," *American University Law Review* 52, no. 6 (2003): 1431-1460.

[3]. See Martha H. Verbrugge, "Exercising Civil Rights: Public Recreation and Racial Segregation in Washington, DC, 1900-49," in *DC Sports: The Nation's Capital at Play*, ed. Chris Elzey and David Wiggins (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2015), 105-127; and Martha H. Verbrugge and Drew Yingling, "The Politics of Play: The Struggle over Racial Segregation and Public Recreation in Washington, D.C., 1945-1950," *Washington History* 27, no. 2 (2015): 56-69.

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