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USA

Scott Colom’s Victory over Mississippi’s Long Violent Racist History

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The Democrats overwhelmingly defeated Republicans in the midterm elections in states across the country, but one victory particularly stands out. Scott Colom won the race for Senate in the state of Mississippi, the state with the highest proportion of Black people (38%) where there had not been a Black senator for 145 years. It is hard to appreciate this victory if you don’t know the history of decades of racist discrimination and horrific violence visited on the Black population. [[1]]

A former slave state in the Deep South, the state’s enslaved population only won their freedom after Republican president Abraham Lincoln and General Ulysses S. Grant led the Union Army to victory over the Confederacy in 1865. Throughout the South, however, Confederate leaders and the white population refused to accept their defeat and the freedom of the Black people who constituted the majority of the population in Mississippi. For two years, from 1865-67, President Andrew Johnson permitted whites to continue to run the state, imposing discriminatory laws called the Black Codes on the former slaves.

Disgusted with this, the U.S. Congress took control of the Reconstruction of the South, sending the Union Army to occupy the southern states, creating the Freedmen’s Bureau, a social welfare agency to provide for the welfare of former slave families, and establishing public schools for the illiterate slave population. During this period known as Radical Reconstruction, Black people became free citizens with the right to vote and run for office, and, a majority in the state, they were able to elect two senators: Hiram Revels (1870-71) and Blanche K. Bruce (1875-81).

But Radical Reconstruction ended in Mississippi in 1875, brought about by the Mississippi Plan, a white supremacist campaign of violent voter intimidation and electoral fraud. In 1877 the Republicans withdrew the union army and the Ku Klux Klan and the state government used violence, including lynching, to subjugate the Black population. By 1890 most of the Black people in Mississippi had lost the right to vote, were racially segregated, and labored as sharecroppers on the plantations, becoming a poverty-stricken population.

When the Black civil rights movement began after World War II, the white rulers of Mississippi were determined to maintain their power. Black people in Mississippi who wanted to vote were often denied registration, had to pay a “poll tax,” which they could not afford, and take a literacy examination, sometimes given to them in a foreign language, such as Latin. As the civil rights movement grew, white supremacists in Mississippi also murdered many voting rights activists: Rev. George Lee in 1955, Lamar Smith that same year; Medgar Evers, an organizer for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, assassinated in 1963; and in 1964 three young activists—James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Henry Schwerner were murdered by the Klan.

While the violence largely subsided after the legislative victories of the movement with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, still white politicians created obstacles to discourage Black voter registration or gerrymandered voting districts to dilute the Black vote. Finally, in November 2026, after all of the struggles and sacrifices of Black activists came the victory of Scott Colom, the result of intense personal campaigning, buoyed up by the Democrats’ blue wave.

In his victory speech Scott Colom talked about the civil rights activists, such as Medgar Evers, who had “kept the faith” in the possibility of winning their rights. As he put it, thinking about that long, hard history, Colom said,“God didn’t want us to get it the easy way—he wanted us to get it the Mississippi way.”

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[1] Photo: Scott Colom Rally.jpg

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