

JAMES A. ROGERS, PROGRESSIVE EDITOR,
AND THE 1969 RACIAL DISTURBANCES IN
FLORENCE, SC

By

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INTRODUCTION

In August 1969, Florence, South Carolina faced its only major racial disturbance during the civil rights era in the southern United States. At this time, the editor of the Florence Morning News (*FMN*), the only daily in the city, was James A. Rogers. Rogers described himself early in his career as being liberal and progressive. It was said in 1975 at his retirement, “When Rogers and Chaffin¹ sat down in a room together during the turmoil of the civil rights movement, the entire progressive press of South Carolina was in session.”²

With the majority of the South in the 1960’s identifying itself as conservative, it was surprising to find that Rogers would describe himself as liberal and progressive. One would assume that the liberal/ progressive editors would be located in the larger cities, not in a smaller rural area. So, the question arises, “What made Rogers a liberal and progressive editor?” To answer this question, four areas need to be explored. First, how did Rogers and the *FMN* report on and write editorials about the disturbances in Florence; second, how did this compare to The State newspaper’s coverage; third, how did Rogers present his views pertaining to racial matters at other times as editor of the *FMN*; fourth, how does he compare to other “liberal” editors in the South?

BACKGROUND

James A. Rogers was born in Blenheim, S.C., in 1905. Blenheim is located approximately 30 miles north of Florence, in the northeastern part of South Carolina known as the Pee Dee. Rogers’ father was a Baptist preacher and after graduating from Furman University, James Rogers

¹ J. Edward Chaffin, editor of The Greenwood Index Journal.

² Patricia G. McNeely, *Fighting Words: The History of the Media in South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Press Association, 1998) 121.

attended seminary and became a preacher as well. He began writing a weekly religion column for the Florence Morning News in 1939. On June 3, 1947, the publisher, John O'Dowd, hired Rogers as editor of the FMN. He left the Florence Morning News in the early 1950s to take a public relations position in Hartsville, South Carolina.³ Rogers then returned to the FMN on August 2, 1956 after the editor Jack O'Dowd, John O'Dowd's stepson, had to leave town due to threats from the Ku Klux Klan.

The racial disturbances in 1969 centered on picketing sponsored by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) of the *Little Farmers Market*, owned by Charles Smith, a white man. The market was located in a predominately Black neighborhood and Smith was accused of treating his Black customers harshly. The accusations ranged from verbal and physical attacks to brandishing a gun. The SCLC had come to town to help Blacks striking at Florence area factories. They stayed in town and established a local office.

On August 18, 1969, the picketing of Smith's store began. The SCLC's ultimate goal was to get Smith to close his store. During that morning, some bricks and rocks were thrown, but overall the picketing was peaceful. At 3 p.m. a meeting was held across the street at the Majority Baptist Church. The mayor of Florence, David H. McLeod, attended the meeting and appealed to those in attendance "to obey the law in conducting their protest."⁴ Following the meeting, around 200 of those who attended the meeting stood across the street from the store and cheered on the picketers. The crowds eventually cleared out after the police came and made Smith close his store for the day.

³ Rogers was public relations director for the Coker Seed Company.

⁴ "Windows Broken Following Picketing of Store Here," *Florence Morning News*, 19 August 1969, A1.

That evening, after the picketing was done for the day, bottles and bricks were thrown at passing cars, and windows of several businesses were broken. A fire was started at the market around midnight, but the local fire department quickly put out the flames. At least five arrests were made, mostly young Black men, ages 14 to 20.

On Tuesday, August 19, some 200 Black community members and leaders met at Cumberland United Methodist Church. The Black community leaders appealed to residents to go home for the evening and remain calm. A statement was released saying that the SCLC did not support the violence, but that the violent acts were caused by serious grievances the Black community had about the state of the area in which they were living in Florence:

The Members of the SCLC in Florence are concerned with all the injustices perpetrated against the black man in Florence. While we are genuinely interested in rectifying the many ills of Florence, and especially those perpetrated against the black man, we do not subscribe to, support nor condone the actions presently taking place in the streets of Florence.

We do feel that the actions now taking place are an expression of the frustrations, anxieties and disappointments experienced by blacks due to the long tenure of injustices forced upon the black community.

We therefore call upon the power structure and the total white community, which that power structure represents, to immediately address themselves to the oppression, repression and alienation of black people in this community.⁵

Smith closed the store for good and at a meeting held that evening at the Majority Baptist Church a list of grievances to present to Florence City Council was considered. The disturbances that evening began at 9 p.m. with more rock and bottle throwing. A fire was set, as well, inside a trash container and three arrests were made during the night.

⁵ Statement released by the SCLC printed in the "Florence Morning News," 20 August 1969, A1.

After midnight on Wednesday, August 20, a total of 27 arrests were made; most of those arrested being teenagers. Wednesday night saw less damage. Ten arrests were made; four were white men ages 24 to 35. The other six were Black males, four of those teenagers. Although less damage was reported Wednesday night, one officer received a laceration from a brick and several patrol cars were dented.

Trials were held Thursday for half of those arrested Wednesday night. Sentences for those involved ranged from \$30 or 15 days to \$100 or 30 days. Charles Smith finally talked to the FMN. He could not be reached prior to this due to the fact that he did not own a telephone. Smith stated that:

...pastor of Majority Baptist Church planned to close me up. People of the congregation came out of the church after the service and told me what was being preached...They told me what was going to be done and they knew it was a bunch of lies.

I closed Monday afternoon voluntarily because of the situation...As far as I know, I was forced out of the business by the city...They want to put me out of business to settle up with the colored people, instead of enforcing the law and protecting my place of business.⁶

No disturbances were reported Thursday night.

On Friday, August 22, there was another flare-up of violence starting around 11 p.m. Two firebombs were used to ignite two warehouses, rocks were hurled at businesses, and a woman was cut by a broken bottle. By 2:30 a.m. Saturday, 46 people had been arrested, nearly half on public drunkenness charges. Saturday night saw no disturbances.

A meeting was held Sunday, August 24, at Cumberland United Methodist Church. The SCLC, NAACP, and the Committee on Community Affairs sponsored the meeting that was

⁶ "Florence Reported Quiet After 3 Nights of Unrest," *Florence Morning News*, 22 August 1969, A2.

attended by almost 200 members of the Black community. Attendees were told “a unification process has taken place in which the black community has put their minds and energy together to accomplish a purpose; that purpose is demanding justice and freedom for all black people in Florence and an end to injustice”⁷

No other reports of disturbances were reported.

METHODOLOGY

Three questions were developed after compiling the background information in order to show Rogers’ liberal/progressive stance:

1. How did the Florence Morning News’ coverage differ, if at all, from The State’s?
2. How did Rogers approach the situation editorially?
3. What are some examples of other times he showed liberal/progressive views?

To answer these questions, every article published in the Florence Morning News and The State covering the disturbances was examined. Six articles were gathered from the Florence Morning News and six were collected from The State newspaper. Some of The State articles also included pictures of the picketing. The State was chosen as the comparative newspaper because of its known conservative stance. It was also the only other paper to have a bureau located in Florence and the only other paper to have a significant number of subscribers in Florence. Four editorials from Rogers addressing the situation were found, along with some writings from his

⁷ Robert Roberts, president of Florence’s chapter of the SCLC, quoted in “Negroes Hear Call for Unity,” *Florence Morning News*, 25 August 1969, A2.

personal collection at Rogers Library⁸ on the campus of Francis Marion University in Florence, S.C.

RESULTS

Rogers' Liberal/Progressive Stance

Rogers always considered himself to be liberal/progressive. On his first day as editor of the Florence Morning News in 1947, Rogers wrote that the paper would be liberal and progressive. He was sure to recognize the progress already taking place in the Pee Dee, although he did not specifically address race in this editorial. He wrote, “To place itself [the Florence Morning News] in the vanguard of this progress and to become an instrument for the further implementation of it will be a motive underlying every publication.”⁹

Although he did not publish anything about race that first day as editor, Rogers was sensitive to racial matters. In a memo to the city desk employees at the paper, Rogers wrote what could, or could not, be published, including racial matters:

No local story involving racial difficulties – demonstrations, violence, or integration of business establishments...or organizations – [will be published] without first clearance from the editor, or, in his absence, the publisher.¹⁰

In an editorial, soon after he arrived in 1947, Rogers commented on a meeting of “members of the white and negro races in Darlington [S.C.]”. The topic of this meeting, convened following

⁸ Rogers was instrumental in the establishment of Francis Marion. He also served on the founding board of trustees of the university. Because of his dedication to the founding of the university and his dedication to the Pee Dee, FMU named the building in his honor.

⁹ James A. Rogers, “A Personal Word,” *Florence Morning News*, 3 June 1947, 4.

¹⁰ James A. Rogers, memo to “The City Desk,” item 10. In James A. Rogers Papers, Rogers Library, Francis Marion University, 1947. Box 2, folder labeled: Correspondence 1947.

the criminal assaults of white women by black males, was the unification of the races. Rogers wrote:

The Morning News believes that there are no inter-racial problems which cannot be worked out satisfactorily to both races if a sincere, orderly and intelligent approach is made to the issues at stake.

Thoughtful Negroes are at one with thoughtful whites in wanting to live in racial peace and goodwill. There are biased, rowdy elements on both sides of the racial line which would stir up strife, but so long as there are level-headed Negroes, there is hope for racial understanding.¹¹

Rogers did not mention the need for “level-headed” Whites along with “level-headed Negroes” probably because it would be assumed that Whites were naturally “level-headed.” This editorial did not mention equality of the two races nor integration. At this time, Rogers believed in the notion of “separate but equal,” as did most White Southerners.

Roger’s belief in “separate but equal” continued into the 1950s. The idea that forced integration of Blacks into southern society would not work is on par with the general feelings of Whites in the south. Many “liberal/progressive” and even “moderate” southern editors also held the same sentiment. Writing about Ralph McGill, editor of the Atlanta Constitution from 1942-69, Walter Goodman wrote, “Like many other Southerners of his generation, he held that changes in racial attitudes could not be legislated.”¹²

McGill was considered to be a moderate editor. Moderates had to walk a fine line between their liberal ideas and their conservative readers. They may have wanted have a more liberal stance, but their knowledge of southern ideals kept them from speaking out:

¹¹ James A. Rogers, “Darlington Shows the Way,” *Florence Morning News*, 14 June 1947, 4.

¹² Walter Goodman, “Civil Rights and a Southern Journalist,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1989, B4. Quoted in Alf Pratte, “‘...But There Are Miles to Go’ Racial Diversity and the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1922-2000,” *The Journal of Negro History* 86:2 (Spring 2001): 164.

To have spoken with a stronger voice at that time would have resulted in McGill and other white southern editors having no voice at all. McGill acknowledged this when he wrote in 1957 that moderates had learned to run on the fence-not merely sit on it. The moderates developed a sort of technique of survival. They knew just how far to go in telling his people the truth.¹³

Rogers, too, knew of the importance of only going so far when presenting ideas in his editorials. :

Writing about those troubled days years later, Rogers said upon his return [to the Florence Morning News] that, “deliberately and with forethought, I set my course, as an editor, to try to stay at least one step ahead of prevailing opinion, but not too far least I render void any capability for leadership.”¹⁴

It would also be pertinent to compare Rogers to Harry M. Ayers, editor and publisher of the Anniston (Alabama) Star. Like Rogers, Ayers was considered a liberal editor. He (Ayers) felt that liberalism meant supporting the rights of the common man. Most southerners thought liberalism meant that one had to support racial progress and that would be a threat to the social order they always knew. Ayers and Rogers were “representative of a largely overlooked group of community, ‘country’ editor-publishers whose loyalties were deeply rooted in the South, its culture, history, and traditions.”¹⁵

It is difficult to draw the line between those referred to as “moderates” and those called “liberal.” In reading about editors labeled as either of these terms, a distinction between the two titles is hard to detect.

¹³ Pratte, 164.

¹⁴ Don Stewart, “A Progressive, Courageous Man,” *Florence Morning News*, 30 September 1990, A1.

¹⁵ Kevin Stoker, “Liberal Journalism in the Deep South: Harry M. Ayers and the ‘Bothersome’ Race Question,” *Journalism History* 27:1 (Spring 2001): 22.

Rogers and Ayers supported segregation in the 1950s. Rogers eventually came to support integration, but writing in 1956, he wrote:

The positive ground upon which the South can stand in its defense of segregation is the sincere belief that it is for the best interest of both races. Viewed in that light, segregation is not an evil scheme to keep the Negro in subjection but a high road along which he can achieve maximum development in an atmosphere without tension or ill will.¹⁶

Unlike Rogers, Ayers never accepted full integration:

Ayers had progressed to advocating economic, educational, judicial, and electoral equality for blacks-stands comparable to the vertical segregation supported by southern liberal journalists...[however] Ayers did not retreat when confronted with the civil rights movement; he simply halted his forward progress on the issue...he championed democratic action and the rights of the common man but refused to accept the common man's right to use democratic action in determining his own rights.¹⁷

This shows that although both were labeled as "liberal" editors, differences could still exist between those falling into that category. Rogers also accepted democratic inclusion of Blacks in White society, as long as the local community issued that democratic action.¹⁸

He argued that the demands of non-southerners to integrate schools would only cause problems for blacks and that mixing the two races together would not benefit either community. Segregation was not a matter of racial superiority, but rather a means for "maximum racial development without sacrifice of either racial pride or racial integrity."¹⁹

¹⁶ James A. Rogers, "On This Positive Ground South Can Stake Case for Segregation," *Florence Morning News*, 5 August 1956, 4.

¹⁷ Stoker, 31.

¹⁸ See page 18 of this paper.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Rogers also showed his liberal thought in an editorial discussing recent “ravishings²⁰” of white women soon after assuming editorship in 1947:

A Florence white man is allegedly involved in a ravish case involving a white girl which, if reported circumstances be true, outstrips in criminal atrocity any in the recent wave of inter-racial ravish cases.

Is a man a lesser criminal who commits a ravish act simply because his skin is white?²¹

Although he did not answer the question directly, it is implied that Rogers did not feel the color of one’s skin should make a difference in the distribution of justice.

A surprising editorial published in the Florence Morning News would be one that Rogers wrote in support of the U.S. Supreme Court’s refusal to review the appeal of a case involving the Richland County, S.C. Democratic Party allowing Blacks to vote in its primary in 1948.

Failure of the court to review this case comes as no surprise, since it was generally conceded that it was a lost cause...

...We believe, and have so stated, that the best interests of both races would be served if educational voting practices would be established. This would tend to eliminate undesirable elements of both races and would further safeguard good government by removing the temptation of politicians to exploit ignorance for their political gain.²²

Though it may not be a “liberal” idea, the last paragraph of the above quote is progressive and was certainly radical for the time period in which it was published. For a White southerner to take the stance that Blacks should have the right to vote would have been shocking in the 1940s. Nearly all white southerners did not see a reason for Blacks to vote, so for Rogers to acknowledge

²⁰ A sexual assault or rape

²¹ James A. Rogers, “Is He Less a Criminal?” *Florence Morning News*, 14 June 1947, 4.

²² James A. Rogers, “The Question Settled,” *Florence Morning News*, 21 April 1948, 4.

that some Blacks should be able to vote, and that some Whites should not, he separated himself from the majority of his fellow White southerners. Rogers continued:

And this newspaper, as one which has stood in favor of their suffrage, would encourage Negroes to exercise their suffrage in the spirit of fairness and goodwill.²³

Coverage of the 1969 Racial Disturbances

The Florence Morning News' coverage of the disturbances in 1969 presented a view of "here are the problems between the races, now how can we fix them?" Both sides were represented; the police and city leaders trying to maintain order, and the leaders of the Black community trying to better the conditions they were living in. The articles appearing in The State had the underlying feel of troublemakers stirring up the waters and how they had to be put back in their places.

The first articles about the incident appeared in the following morning's editions of the Florence Morning News and The State. The article published in the FMN was titled "Windows Broken Following Picketing of Store Here." It presented a very calm and factual account of the disturbances, picketing, and meetings. The account of the picketing presented the situation as one that was very orderly and non-threatening. The disturbances occurring later were caused by teenagers out to make some trouble is the feeling one gets from the article.

The State's article titled "Patrolmen Called Into Florence," made the whole situation sound like it was rowdy and riotous:

...a large squad of Highway Patrolmen were called into Florence to augment police after day-long demonstrations in opposition to an open air-market...The Highway Patrolmen appeared in riot-type uniforms

²³ Ibid.

near the city police department poised for possible trouble late Monday night.²⁴

The Florence Morning News' coverage made no mention of the Highway Patrolmen, only stating that, "Several special agents of The State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) were dispatched to Florence as observers."²⁵ The article published by the FMN on Tuesday, August 20, was titled, "Negro Leaders Voice Appeal to Avoid Racial Disorders". This article not only recounted Monday's events, but also carried the entire statement released by the SCLC.²⁶

Rogers published his first editorial, "Racial Progress a Task for All," addressing the disturbances that day. He said that Florence citizens of both races "have sought too hard to avoid such acts to be burdened by them." He made sure not to try to assess the causes of the problems, or why the disturbances occurred, only that something had to be done to stop them from happening again. Rogers also wrote that Florence has its problems just like any other city, but that Florence is on its way to solving any problems that may have been neglected. He emphasized the efforts by leaders of both communities to help bring about equality for Black and Whites. He also had an extremely positive outlook for the future of race relations:

The years ahead are bright ones indeed if we but will them so. But it must be a collective will, void of conflict stemming from disregard of the rights and needs of others, and careful not to engage in acts that incite tensions and feed prejudice. To that end, we urge all citizens, of whatever creed or color, to bend their continuing efforts.²⁷

²⁴ Pee Dee Bureau, "Patrolmen Called Into Florence," *The State*, 19 August 1969, B6.

²⁵ "Windows..." *Florence Morning News*, A2.

²⁶ See page 3 of this paper.

²⁷ James A. Rogers, "Racial Progress a Task for All," *Florence Morning News*, 20 August 1969, A4.

Rogers praised Mayor McLeod in the editorial for his strong leadership and restraint of officers in dealing with the crowds. He did, however, say that there should be limits to the restraint shown by officers:

But it should be emphasized that due preservation of law and order requires that restraint must give way to all necessary force if and when a point is reached that only force is effective. We hope and pray that this point may not be reached. We are certain that the overwhelming majority of Florence citizens of both races share this feeling.²⁸

In the same issue of the FMN, a letter to the editor was published addressing the disturbances. W. E. Hickey, a white man, shared the sentiments of Rogers and the Florence Morning News. He believed that race relations in Florence had been good and conditions for Blacks were improving each day. He deplored the violence and people taking the law into their own hands. He thought that there was a better way to solve the problems; he was interested in the well being of the city.

I'm concerned with each individual, regardless of race or color. I have known and do know many Negroes. I have worked in my occupation with them side by side and consider they are my friends. I know they weep in their hearts for this to have happened in Florence.²⁹

That same day in *The State*, two articles appeared; one titled "Policemen March to Disperse Crowd" and the other "Florence Relatively Free Of Clashes." John V. O'Neill was given the byline for these and subsequent articles on the situation, whereas Tuesday's article was attributed only to the Pee Dee Bureau. O'Neill continued *The State's* coverage in the same vein as before.

Squads of highway patrolmen, State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) agents and city police marched through glass-littered downtown Florence late Tuesday night to disperse a crowd of about 150 Negro

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ W. E. Hickey, "City Street Disorder Deplored," *Florence Morning News*, 20 August 1969, A4.

youths at the corner of Darlington and Dargan Streets...Mayor David H. McLeod followed the troops wearing a riot helmet. Some business owners were seen in front of their establishments with shotguns.³⁰

O'Neill referred to the actions of Charles Smith as "alleged incidents of discourtesy and gunplay."³¹ News of the list of grievances and the meeting at the Majority Baptist Church were given little coverage at the end of the article. In "Florence Relatively Free of Clashes," the grievances are addressed at the end of the article. Employment matters and paving of streets are mentioned as the grievances.

Articles on August 21 and 22 showed a real disparity in the approach to reporting the violence. The Florence Morning News published on August 21 reports from police of possible shots fired during the disturbances of the preceding night.

...five sounds of gunfire came from the vicinity of the 300 block of North Dargan could not be confirmed by police. They said it could have been firecrackers. It was heard by officers in the distance. Police have not fired any shots.³²

The State wrote, on August 21, of the incident, "Police also reported gun shots in the 300 block of Dargan Street near a night spot which was shutdown after reported incidents of bottle throwing."³³ Then, on August 22, O'Neill reported in The State, "One burst of five shots was fired in the direction of policemen on Dargan Street, but officers, busy making another arrest, didn't return the fire and the youth with the gun scurried away before he could be caught."³⁴

³⁰ John V. O'Neill, "Policemen March To Disperse Crowd," *The State*, 20 August 1969, B1.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Florence Racial Disorder Leads to 10 More Arrests," *Florence Morning News*, 21 August 1969, A1.

³³ John V. O'Neill, "Police Arrest 40 In Florence," *The State*, 21 August 1969, B1.

³⁴ John V. O'Neill, "60 Jailed In Florence Since Monday," *The State*, 22 August 1969, B1.

Nowhere in the Florence Morning News' coverage did it mention that officers were shot at while making an arrest, nor did it mention that they were anywhere near the location where the sounds came from. Did O'Neill make this up? Looking at the articles from the day before, the answer might be "yes." However, it might have happened the way O'Neill wrote about it and the Florence Morning News might have purposefully left it out. As an example of not mentioning all of the facts, the headline of the article from August 21, "Florence Racial Disorder Leads to 10 More Arrests," is a little misleading. While it was true that 10 people were arrested Wednesday night, readers had to read to the second page of the article to find that 27 people were arrested after midnight and into early Wednesday morning.

Rogers wrote another editorial on August 21. It spoke of the appeal by Black leaders printed in that morning's edition of the paper. He stated how the appeal was necessary in both presenting their desires to the rest of Florence and that dialogue, not violence, was the answer to solving any problems. He also wrote of the need to build "goodwill" between the two racial communities. This "goodwill" would allow the breaking down of barriers, allowing Blacks "opportunity and representation in the private sector." Then a daring statement appears:

While any break in the peace of a community is deplorable, the current spate of disorders and vandalism can be made to serve a useful purpose if they focus attention on real needs and bring imagined ones into true perspective; and further, if they emphasize, as they should, that the best in leadership of both races must continue to work understandingly and cooperatively to remove just causes for grievance. Progress in race relations, as elsewhere, does not come simply by maintaining the status quo. Inevitably, the motion must be forward.³⁵

Rogers actually seems to somewhat support the unrest. He does say that the violence was deplorable, but hopefully it made the White community see that everything was not equal between

³⁵ James A. Rogers, "Initiative That Was Needed," *Florence Morning News*, 21 August 1969, A4.

the two communities. He specifically uses the word “progress” to show that not moving forward would stagnate the forward growth of Florence as a whole.

Charles Smith finally talked to the Florence Morning News on August 21. The article containing the interview was published on August 22. The article recapped what had happened the night before and what had happened in trials held on the 21st. The interview with Smith did not present it with any bias. There was just straightforward reporting of what Smith said. The State did not have an interview with Smith. O’Neill’s article continued to recap the events that had already unfolded during the week and what had happened the day before. This included the reporting of the five shots fired at officers.

Rogers published another editorial on August 22 addressing two letters to the editor. The content of the letters furthers the view of Rogers and the FMN that calm needs to be at the top of the list of priorities. Escalations in violence would only fuel more violence until a meeting of the two communities would be impossible and the situation would spiral out of control. Rogers seemed to know that publishing any letters radically supporting either side (if any were received) would not accomplish anything.

...a Florence black spokesman engages in straight talk on the question of racial unrest in Florence during recent days. On the other side of the color line, a white spokesman warns that continued disorders could lead to gang warfare between white and black youths and an invasion by the Black Panthers and the Ku Klux Klan.

Both voices speak with clarity and concern. We pray that good sense will triumph, and that the energies expressing themselves in unrest will be channeled into constructive enterprises that seek to build and not destroy.³⁶

³⁶ James A. Rogers, “Straight Talk,” *Florence Morning News*, 22 August 1969, A4.

Up to this point there had been a balance between the two sides represented. Two letters published had been from Blacks, and two from Whites.

The next time articles appeared in either newspaper was on Sunday, August 24. The Florence Morning News' article was headlined "Calmness Prevails For Third Night," even though it reported two fire-bombings that occurred Friday night. The article also reported that 46 people were arrested between Friday night and Saturday morning, though most charges were for public drunkenness or loitering.³⁷

The State published on Sunday its final article covering the disturbances. Written by William Chaze for the Associated Press, the article was very sympathetic to the black community. It highlighted many of the grievances of the black community, and it even stated, in the second to last paragraph of the article, that the disturbances were caused by "jobless youths which...is the result of a white business community that prefers to hire whites, even though many local industries are national companies that advertise as equal opportunity employers."³⁸ This article was not typical of The State's coverage. It was a wire service article, and a short-staffed Sunday crew might not have read beyond the headline, or first couple of paragraphs, before inserting it into the paper.

Published in the Florence Morning News that day was a letter to the editor by C. Jasper Smith, minister³⁹ of Cumberland United Methodist Church. He listed 12 points that he felt the city needed to address in order to correct the problems faced by the two communities.⁴⁰

³⁷ "Calmness Prevails For Third Night," *Florence Morning News*, 24 August 1969, A2.

³⁸ William Chaze, "Florence Unrest May Indicate Negro Frustration," *The State*, 24 August 1969, B6.

³⁹ One might assume that his title would be pastor, but the signature of the letter identifies Smith as "minister."

⁴⁰ C. Jasper Smith, "Neglect Breeds Crisis in City," *Florence Morning News*, 24 August 1969, A4.

The final article on the disturbances appeared in the Florence Morning News on Monday, August 25. The article covered a unity meeting held at Mount Zion A.M.E. Church on Sunday. The article also reported that both Saturday and Sunday nights had been quieter than the previous nights.

Rogers published his last editorial on the disturbances in the Sunday, August 24, edition of the FMN. His other editorials on the disturbances were much shorter and appeared with editorials on other subjects. This editorial was almost half a page in length and addressed his “Perspective on Race Issues” and how to help tackle the problems faced by the Black community.

The past week of disturbances in the black community has emphasized the importance of increasing the level of positive thinking on the subject. We use the word “increasing” advisedly, for we know that a great deal of positive thinking has been a feature of both private and public thought for many months, even years, as any objective examination of the results will show.

Yet it is only fair to acknowledge that the results have been only partial, that much yet remains to be done. Smugness is never a safe attitude in a situation where unselfish business poses a continuing crisis...⁴¹

He highlighted the need for Blacks to be afforded the opportunity to have better paying jobs, with job performance being the basis of evaluation, not skin color. His ideas of integration showed through when he wrote that public and private organizations, and the general community, needed to work to do away with prejudices. On the issue of Black representation in local government, Rogers wrote in the same editorial:

Many would agree, including ourselves, that capable Negro membership on the City Council and the [school] Board of Trustees is desirable, as votes have indicated – especially in trustee election – but the democratic process requires a majority decision to accomplish this end. The time will come when Negro membership is won by majority decision, but it

⁴¹ James A. Rogers, “Perspective on Race Issues,” *Florence Morning News*, 24 August 1969, A4.

is not an accomplishment lending itself to instant achievement, or by dictation of any existing body.⁴²

CONCLUSION

While the FMN and The State had slightly varying accounts of the disturbances, for the most part they both reported the same facts, just with a different emphasis. The State did seem to shy away from presenting most of the views from the Black community. The FMN was much more forthcoming with the feelings and viewpoints of both sides. There is a question of how much sensationalizing The State used to report on the disturbances. Its coverage seemed to have the disturbances more violent than the Florence Morning News'. Rogers may have been trying to control the extreme factions on both sides of the issue by not reporting the true nature of the violence during the disturbances. It is hard to tell which paper told the exact true story of the disturbances, assuming that one did, although, to the author of this paper, the reports of the FMN seem to be more accurate.

This paper attempts to bring forth many insights into James A. Rogers and the Florence Morning News' liberal/progressive viewpoints on the violence in Florence and other instances, but there are many areas of continued research on Rogers and the Florence Morning News. One research possibility would be to try to discover why Rogers was so liberal and progressive. Why did he have the courage to offer up such "radical" ideas to a conservative state in the midst of the civil rights era? Another possibility of research is on the publisher of the FMN during Rogers' tenure as editor, John O'Dowd. Did he have any influence on Rogers' liberalism? Rogers' own accounts reveal that O'Dowd pressured him into writing editorials supporting a West Virginia

⁴² Ibid.

miners' strike in the late 1940s. Why did O'Dowd support the miners? How much influence did he have over Rogers? Did he hire Rogers because he knew that Rogers was progressive?

In examining Rogers, it is apparent that at some point, he went from supporting segregation to supporting integration. When did this happen? What influenced him to change his opinion? Had he always supported integration, but did not want to make too large of a wave in society so that his voice would no longer be listened to?

And finally, 83 boxes of Rogers' papers and photographs and three of his scrapbooks are housed in the archival room of Rogers Library at Francis Marion University. A wonderful opportunity exists for someone to index the subjects of his papers and other items. At this time, only a general overview of what each box contains is available.

It is hoped that this paper brings to light the addition of James A. Rogers to the list of Southern liberal editors. His views, in relation to the disturbances in Florence, were definitely more liberal than those of The State. He also shares the views of other liberal editors in the South. He even exceeds the liberal attitudes of some like Ayers as Rogers eventually supported integration, while Ayers never did. Rogers deservedly should be remembered for his contribution to the advancement of relations and integration between Blacks and Whites in the Pee Dee Area of South Carolina. To not do so would be a great injustice indeed.