Antebellum and Civil War

African American presence at the antebellum South Carolina College was limited to slaves owned and hired by the college to perform maintenance of grounds and buildings, cook and serve meals, and wash laundry. Construction of the Horseshoe buildings and manufacture of the bricks themselves also were done by slaves. Faculty members were allowed to bring their personal slaves with them, and behind each faculty residence was a building that housed a kitchen and slave quarters. The only remaining one of these structures is in the President’s House garden.

Slaves also maintained the college grounds during the Civil War when it functioned as a hospital.
A New South Carolina

In 1868, a new South Carolina Constitution was passed requiring that universities be “free and open to all the children and youths of the state, without regard to race and color.” In 1869, the General Assembly passed a bill stipulating that the university would “make no distinction in the admission of students or the management of the university on account of race, color, or creed.”

In 1873, Henry E. Hayne, South Carolina’s secretary of state, enrolled in USC’s medical school and became the first known African American student. Additionally, Richard T. Greener, the first black graduate of Harvard College (1870), became the first black faculty member, teaching mental and moral philosophy at USC.
The End of Reconstruction

By 1876, the student body was predominantly African American. Notable students included Lawrence Cain, Francis Cardoza, J. W. Morris (a law school graduate who later served as president of Allen University), T. McCants Stewart, and Cornelius Chapman Scott.

The South Carolina Normal School, designed to train teachers, met in Rutledge Chapel. Graduates included legendary Columbia educator Celia Dial Saxon.

In June 1877, the last graduates of the school were awarded diplomas signed by Governor Wade Hampton. During the next year, the General Assembly passed an act that called for USC to be reopened as a comprehensive university for whites only. USC did not admit African American students again until September 11, 1963.
A Segregated University

During segregation, African Americans’ presence continued only in areas of domestic and service assistance. Black applicants were repeatedly denied admission. Charles Bruce Bailey was denied by the USC School of Law in 1937 and John H. Wrighten in 1946. When Wrighten sued on the principle of “separate but equal,” South Carolina established an all-black law school in Orangeburg in an attempt to alleviate the situation.

In 1954, Dean Samuel L. Prince of the USC School of Law bluntly explained why African American law students were charged $100 per semester hour compared to $17 for whites:

“GENTLEMEN, WELL I’LL TELL YOU. THE PRICE OF PREJUDICE IS VERY HIGH.”
A New Beginning

This period bore fruit from the long struggle for access to USC. Between 1958 and 1962, students from Allen University, South Carolina State College, and throughout the state unsuccessfully attempted to gain admission.

On September 11, 1963, Henrie Monteith, Robert Anderson, and James L. Solomon, Jr., were enrolled in USC, crushing state-supported segregation at the university. In 1966, the TRIO programs were established.

By 1967, African American student leaders pushed the university to address issues surrounding curricular offerings, library holdings, African American numerical presence, janitorial staff pay, and the creation of a Black Studies Program. By 1969, the History Department offered “Negro History” taught by Dr. Tom Terrill.
Rejoining the Community

African American students made significant impressions upon the campus both physically and culturally. The 1970s witnessed the chartering of the first black fraternities and sororities, the first black student body president, Harry Walker, and the first black homecoming queen, Gail Ransome.

USC established the African American Studies program headed by Willie Harriford in 1971, as well as the Office for Minority Student Affairs headed by Charles L. McMillan.

African Americans also diversified USC athletics with the recruitment of the first black basketball player Casey Manning and football star George Rogers, who received the Heisman Trophy in 1980.
Academics and Athletics

African American presence during the 1990s helped make USC competitive in academics and athletics on a national scale. Michael Boone, a 1997 graduate, received $225,000 in national scholarships, more than any student in the university’s history. In 1999, the History Department hired Dr. Daniel C. Littlefield, a nationally renowned historian of African American colonial history.


In 1997, Allen University appointed USC alumnus John Waddell as its president, making him the youngest president ever of a four-year historically black college or university.
Moving into the 21st Century

African Americans continue to distinguish themselves. In 2004, Burne Venable Powell was named dean of the School of Law, making him the first African American dean at the University of South Carolina. In 2007, the university organized the Institute for African American Research, headed by Dr. Daniel C. Littlefield.

Dr. Kwame Dawes, the James Louis Frye Scudder Professor of Liberal Arts, won a News & Documentary Emmy Award in 2009.

In 2010, Dr. Bobby Donaldson became the first African American principal of Preston Residential College. In 2011, Dr. Lemuel Watson was appointed dean of the School of Education.