

First Biography of Consequential Congressman Rewrites History of Black Political Leadership

In "House of Diggs," Marion Orr presents the first biography of Charles C. Diggs Jr., perhaps the most important Black legislator in U.S. history.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Congressman Charles C. Diggs Jr. was a towering figure in American politics at the height of the civil rights era. In the newly-released biography "[House of Diggs: The Rise and Fall of America's Most Consequential Black Congressman, Charles C. Diggs Jr.](#)" ([The University of North Carolina Press](#), September 16),

award-winning author, political scientist, and the inaugural Frederick Lippitt Professor of Public Policy at Brown University, [Marion Orr](#), restores Diggs to his rightful place in history. "House of Diggs" is the first full-length biography of the Michigan lawmaker who shaped the trajectory of



Dr. Marion Orr, political scientist and Frederick Lippitt Professor of Public Policy at Brown University

“

The definitive biography of the civil rights legislator we never should have forgotten.”

Van Jones, CNN host and New York Times best-selling author

Black political power for a generation. Orr's work on Diggs was honored with the Biographers International Organization's prestigious Francis "Frank" Rollin Fellowship, underscoring the groundbreaking nature of his research.

From his election to Congress in 1954 as Michigan's first Black representative to his departure in 1980, Diggs left an indelible mark on the nation. He worked behind the scenes with Martin Luther King Jr., was the only federal official to

attend the trial of Emmett Till's murderers, and was the founder and first chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. In addition, Diggs spearheaded the return of home rule to Washington, D.C., and, beginning in the 1960s, played a pivotal role in sparking the American anti-apartheid movement.

Orr's account is based on extensive archival research, including Diggs's personal papers, FBI files, and documents from six presidential libraries covering the administrations of Eisenhower through Carter. Interviews with Diggs's family members and political associates provide further insight into the man behind the public figure. What emerges is a portrait of a serious legislator whose strategy of careful moderation proved more effective than the confrontational politics of contemporaries such as Adam Clayton Powell and more dynamic than the conservative approach of William Dawson.

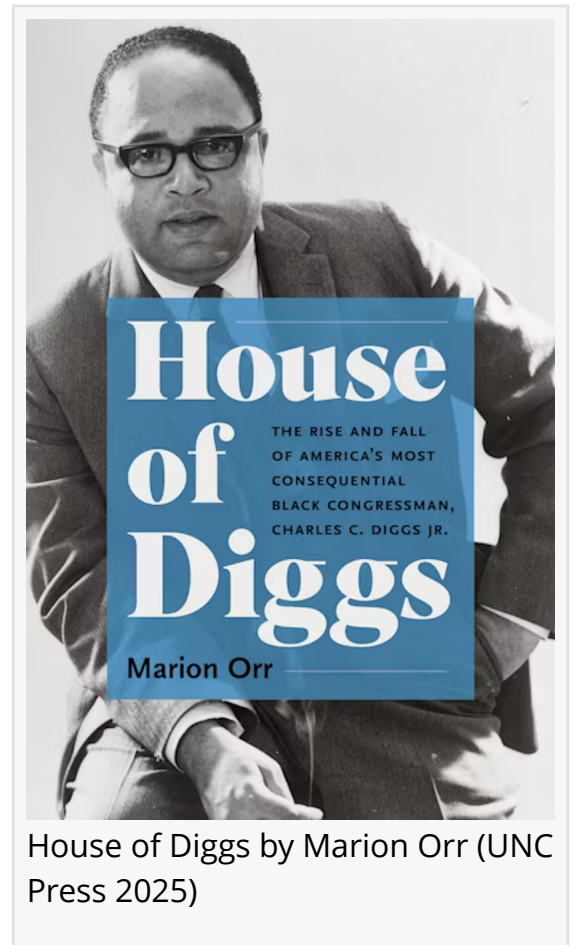
"House of Diggs" also confronts the contradictions of Diggs's life. While celebrated as a legislative lion, his career was marred by scandal, culminating in criminal charges over payroll violations that led to his resignation. A special feature in the book is the revelation from Diggs's FBI file that Randall Robinson, Diggs's protégé and the best-known anti-apartheid organizer in the US, was the confidential informant who reported Diggs's payroll violations to the U.S Justice Department.

Reviewers have hailed Orr's work as a long-overdue reassessment of a civil rights-era statesman. Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Tamara Payne praised its "engaging, essential, and meticulously researched" account of a pivotal political figure, and New York Times bestselling author James McGrath Morris called it "a highly readable portrait of an important civil rights leader, long overdue for recognition." Other leading scholars, including Pulitzer Prize-winner Jonathan Eig, as well as Dianne Pinderhughes and Thomas Sugrue, highlight the book's fresh insights into both Diggs's career and the broader history of Black political leadership.

Orr positions Diggs as one of the most influential Black members of Congress in U.S. history, an architect of change whose impact stretched from Mississippi courtrooms to the global stage of anti-apartheid activism. At once riveting and sobering, "House of Diggs" offers a nuanced account of a man who reshaped American politics, only to see his achievements overshadowed by personal failings. In reclaiming Diggs's story, Orr ensures the congressman's contributions are finally recognized as central to the history of civil rights and Black political power in America.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marion Orr is a political scientist and the inaugural Frederick Lippitt Professor of Public Policy at Brown University. An award-winning author, his publications include "House of Diggs: The Rise and Fall of America's Most Consequential Black Congressman, Charles C. Diggs Jr.," "Black Social



House of Diggs by Marion Orr (UNC Press 2025)

Capital: The Politics of School Reform in Baltimore;" and "The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education." He was awarded the Biographers International Organization's Francis "Frank" Rollin Fellowship for his work on Congressman Diggs.

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