1. How do you grade SC on coming to grips with its history of segregation? Where do you see SC in the next 5-10 years with respect to its history and its teaching?

Answer: F. State officials have refused to confront this history in meaningful ways. Sure, they might post a historic marker here or there, but they have doubled down on policies that have been proven to harm minority communities. Consider “school choice,” for example. Or they way judges are elected. Or the gerrymandering that preserves white power. Or voter ID laws. Fortunately, a reckoning is underway within the state’s particular communities, among academic and nonprofit organizations, among artists and writers… And activists have found a voice. They are emphasizing the ongoing injustice and persistent disparities. This is all good, and likely to have an impact. Though I must confess I am pessimistic. South Carolina’s paternalism runs strong and deep.

2. What can Charleston learn from the aftermath of the Orangeburg Massacre?

Answer: That truth is essential. That facing truth in a timely manner is essential. They we must strive as a community to admit wrongs and right them, to foster dialogue and healing, and to address in a serious way the underlying issues that fuel violence and unrest. We will not achieve justice for all unless we work on it together, with deliberation, commitment and urgency.

3. What type of economic clout does the African American community have now?

Answer: Allow me to rephrase the question: Can you imagine what sort of economic clout the Black community would wield had the playing field been leveled in 1865? Had Black people been given land grants and capital by way of apology for slavery? Had they been able to participate fully in the country’s economy since then? Imagine if, every time they asserted themselves they were not lynched or shot or marginalized but, rather, invited in? Imagine what the country would look like had all that happened in lieu of Jim Crow, white terrorism, exploitation, discrimination, militia and police violence, redlining and other unjust housing and banking policies, segregation and denied access to schools and other institutions, damage to communities inflicted by road projects, church burnings and other efforts to destroy Black communities? Imagine THAT America.

4. How do you grade the quality of the recent PBS special on Black Churches (Gates was moderator)?

Answer: I’ve seen three-quarters of it and enjoyed it immensely. It’s a great primer for white people, and an affirmation for black people.

5. Will you speak to the question of who should write stories about race for a community newspaper such as the Post and Courier.

Answer: We touched on this during the talk. The answer is, in my view, the more the merrier, but that a much more diverse pool of newspaper writers is needed so that we have access to more perspectives and experiences.

6. Besides your book, what literature do you recommend for newcomers to the SC/Charleston area in learning our history? Culture?

7. What is Cleveland’s most memorable event in the black freedom movement?

Answer: I suppose it’s the Orangeburg Massacre. He has spent the better part of his life demanding truth and reconciliation.

8. Is the black lives matter movement just another name to the continuing civil right movements of sellers?

Answer: Yes! It’s a mistake to think of the civil rights movement as an uprising of democratization that occurred between Brown v. Board and King’s assassination. That decade or so now is referred to as the heroic period of the movement, or the integrationist period of the movement. The movement itself began the instant the first enslaved African unwillingly set foot on North American soil. Its first manifestation was the quick acquisition of survival techniques, but many more manifestations followed, from assertions of culture to slave revolts large and small, to the development of a unique faith tradition and cohesive community under the weight of segregation to the successful legal battles waged by the NAACP during the 1940s and ’50s. So long as injustice has persisted, so has the effort to address it. We’ve seen activists protesting the so-called war on drugs in the 1980s. We’ve seen the emergence of hip-hop music, which can be a form of protest music. We’ve seen efforts to empower and educate African Americans by African Americans across history – another expression of rebellion against the status quo. And now we have the Black Lives Matter movement – which is not new! The Black Panthers spoke against police violence. Martin Luther King spoke against police violence. The NAACP fought against police and mob violence. And so it goes.

9. How did Adam come to write about Cleveland Sellers?

Answer: I have covered race and history informally for The Post and Courier almost since the moment I arrived in 2004. I wrote about annual commemorations for the Orangeburg Massacre and got to know Jack Bass and Cleveland Sellers (and others). Over the years I write several stories on the topic. Then Jack Bass suggested I wrote a profile of Sellers for the newspaper, which I did – it was a giant profile divided into four large “chapters,” each 100 inches or so that ran on four consecutive Sundays in 2008. That led me to pitch a book project.

10. The civil rights act was signed by President Johnson in 1965. Numerous of these white abuses against blacks have been recorded throughout history since. Why are we waiting for “stars to align” for changes to happen? Politicians need to make this a priority for the country’s equality to happen.

Answer: Indeed!