

Recovering Untold Stories:

An Enduring Legacy of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Decision



A Project of The Brown Foundation for Educational
Equity, Excellence and Research

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**THE BROWN FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL
EQUITY, EXCELLENCE AND RESEARCH**

Cover art – *Brown v. Board of Education* Kansas Statehouse Mural

Designed and painted by Michael Young

Authorized by Kansas Senate Bill 54

Signed, 2010, by Governor Mark Parkinson

Progenitor – Charles Jean-Baptist, former President Kansas State NAACP

Cover image used with permission of the artist

eBook layout and design by Pam LeRow

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About the Cover Art

In May of 2010, then Kansas Governor Mark Parkinson signed Senate Bill 54 enacted by the state legislature to create a mural for the State Capitol building to commemorate the landmark United States Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*. The State Capitol Preservation Committee was given the responsibility of planning for the mural. Input from various stakeholders helped guide the selection of an artist to design and paint the mural and the selection of which wall within the building would become its permanent home.

Creating the mural took nearly a decade and began when Shawnee, Kansas, resident Charles Jean-Baptist, the former State President of the Kansas NAACP, petitioned the State Legislature to pass a resolution for such a mural. His efforts were much like those of McKinley Burnett, local Topeka NAACP President during the late 1940s early 1950s, whose vision to bring about integration in public schools, resulted in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Oliver L. Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka, KS, et al.*

For Mr. Jean-Baptist, having a *Brown v. Board of Education* mural on a wall of the State Capitol building, where depictions of John Brown and other aspects of Kansas history reside, was simply the right thing to do. It would bring Kansas history and the historic accomplishment of the NAACP full circle.

During committee deliberation, members of the Brown Foundation, a member of the Brown family, an associate dean from Washburn University, a member of the State Board of Education, representatives of the NAACP, and others provided public comment and were integral to the process of selecting an artist and an artistic concept. The Brown Foundation and a member of the Brown family shared historic background, testified to the significance of the *Brown* decision, and suggested ways of translating the historic narrative into art that would be a reminder of the story of living people, several of whom continue to reside in Topeka.

This U.S. Supreme Court decision is contemporary history that continues to resonate across the nation and around the world. *Brown v. Board of Education* is usually remembered for striking down the doctrine of “separate but equal” schools. But I believe the following excerpt from the fourteen-page opinion captures the ruling’s true meaning:

“[Education] is the most important function of state and local governments. . . . It is doubtful that any child can be reasonably expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity . . . is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms.”

Kansas native Michael Young was the artist selected to create a *Brown v. Board of Education* mural. It was decided that the mural would be placed on the wall adjacent to the historic Kansas Supreme Court Room in the State Capitol building. The room holds significance as the site of 11 school desegregation cases that predate the *Brown* decision.

In a newspaper account, Mr. Young shared his memory of visiting the State Capitol building in Topeka on a middle school field trip. Inside the rotunda, he was “in awe” as his eyes fixed on murals depicting significant moments in the state’s history on the walls of this prodigious house of government. Young remembers thinking: “I could never do anything like that.” In 2015, when he was selected to be the muralist, he is reported as saying: “This is a commission of a lifetime.”

For the Kansas NAACP and The Brown Foundation, it is an honor to be stewards of the legacy of the brave men, women, and children who took a stand for social justice. We are proud of the *Brown v. Board of Education* mural which is a fitting legacy now gracing the hallowed halls of the Kansas State Capitol.

Cheryl Brown Henderson, Founding President
The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research

Significance of *Brown v. Board of Education* Kansas Statehouse Mural

One of the great moments in American legal history arrived in 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court declared what obviously is true: Maintaining separate public education systems for children based on their race is prohibited by the Constitution of the United States of America.

Kansas was at the center of that famous judicial decision, *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kan., et al.*, and will be forever associated with the important societal change it both reflected and foretold. A beautiful and powerful mural capturing the case's consequence now holds a place of honor in the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka. As scholars have noted, Chief Justice Earl Warren understood the moment in history and the weight and importance of the Court's decision. That is why he worked diligently within the Court to ensure a unanimous decision. It is said he also worked to ensure that the decision itself would be brief and written in plain English, so it could readily be reprinted in the nation's newspapers and other publications for all Americans to read and comprehend for themselves.

Perhaps the most famous line from the *Brown* decision is this: "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." But in some ways, the Court did its most eloquent work in a less-noticed passage two paragraphs earlier that explained *why* the doctrine of separate but equal could not stand: (Paraphrased) "To separate (African American) children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of second class citizenship in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

That passage is the poetry that explains in human terms the real significance of the legal prose that *Brown* declared to be the law. And that is precisely why this new work is so important. Countless volumes have been published in law review articles, treatises, and history books about the case itself, the Supreme Court that decided it, the lawyers who argued it, the times from which it arose, and so much more. But this mural and these essays draw into focus an underreported but vital part of the *Brown* story – the memories of some of the plaintiffs whose lives were the impetus for bringing the cases in the first place, and the intra-family oral histories passed down by plaintiffs to their descendants and now retold.

These are the surviving personal and intensely human stories of *Brown*. They are the stories of how Jim Crow laws, recognized by the Court, affected the daily lives of these very real Americans and motivated them to action. These are the personal stories of how legally sanctioned segregation in education "affect[ed] their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

So, to all who worked on this mural and those who made this important work of history possible, our nation owes a debt of gratitude, as does our State of Kan-

sas. *Brown* is, of course, a giant in American constitutional law. But as these stories make plain, it also is an unparalleled declaration of American values that has been indescribably transformative for the individual lives of untold millions of Americans.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* Kansas Statehouse Mural reminds us of the human faces of *Brown*. Their stories are the real reasons it truly mattered.

Derek Schmidt,
Kansas Attorney General
October 2018

Foreword

A generation of young people were inspired to become civil rights lawyers by images of brilliant and crusading civil rights lawyers like Thurgood Marshall, Constance Baker Motley and Robert Carter who, in their own right transformed the course of our nation in the 20th century. These lawyers accomplished the goal that Marshall described as “breaking the back of Jim Crow” – that deeply entrenched and violently-maintained system of racial segregation that was the law of the land throughout the South.

But it is only once you become a civil rights lawyer that you learn that it is your clients – the men, women and even children who risk it all to challenge injustice – who are the real heroes of our civil rights legal stories. I learned this early on during my first tour of duty as an Legal Defense Fund (LDF) lawyer beginning in the late 1980s. Even then, meetings about our litigation in the rural South were often held in churches and funeral parlors – locations in which African Americans could feel a measure of security from the scrutiny of Whites who might retaliate against African Americans who were seen meeting with civil rights lawyers. Our clients and their families overwhelmed me with their quiet courage and dignity, with their warmth and with their sense of humor in the face of crushing inequality.

No clients were more courageous and inspiring than those families who formed the sprawling group of plaintiffs in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Across four states and the District of Columbia, these African American families stepped out of their ordinary lives into the glare of history. For some, the consequences were devastating. Harry Briggs and his wife Eliza suffered severe reprisals as a result of their participation in the South Carolina *Brown* case, *Briggs v. Elliott*. After losing their jobs they moved to New York, never to return to live in South Carolina. For others, the glare of the spotlight, the iconic photos that froze the “*Brown* children” in a sepia tableau, was its own pressure and challenge.

It is also critical to remember that the plaintiffs in these cases were not just swept up by history. They created history. It was 16-year-old Barbara Johns, who courageously led a school walkout of her fellow students in protest of the inferior resources provided at her segregated high school, that pushed LDF to file the first *Brown* case, *Davis v. Prince Edward County, Va.*

The lonely walk of so many of the children as they took those first steps into the hostile territory of newly integrated White schools has never been adequately explored. These children are veterans of America’s 20th century domestic war – the Civil Rights Movement. That war claimed victims across the South – some were literally killed in its battles. But the children who first integrated Southern schools were our soldiers. They braved the front every day, engaged in skirmishes, returned to the front day after day, with their wounded spirits freshly bandaged by the love and support of their families and communities. They should be embraced today as heroes. Their sacrifice and that of their families transformed the meaning of equality and democracy in our nation. They reshaped American identity.

What is most important today is that we take the time to read the accounts of these plaintiffs, the clients, those whose stories are hidden by the dismissive Latin expression “*et al.*” in the case captions. It is past time that we hear – in their own words – their reflections on what it meant day-to-day to accept the consequences of the decision that they and their families made to join this important litigation.

For those of us who are civil rights lawyers, these essays serve as a reminder that we must always be centered on the voices and needs of our clients. We work for them. They are not a means to an end. Good civil rights litigation is co-created with our clients. When civil rights lawyers do our job well, it means that we have created a platform and space in our legal system where the truth of our clients’ voices can be heard and understood.

I salute the authors in this collection and thank them for their willingness and enthusiasm in sharing, at long last, their stories in their own words.

Sherrilyn A. Ifill, the 7th President and Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Inc., the organization founded by Thurgood Marshall and which litigated Brown v. Board of Education.

Preface

Recovering Untold Stories: An Enduring Legacy of the Brown v. Board of Education Decision was initiated in 2016 by The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research. The title is in keeping with the continued resonance of the landmark United States Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

The project was intended to capture the first-person narratives of individuals who were plaintiffs or whose families were represented in the five cases consolidated by the United States Supreme Court in an opinion announced on May 17, 1954. The Court consolidated cases from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., under the single heading of the Kansas case, commonly known as *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*. However, the legal citation is *Oliver L. Brown, et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (KS), et al.*

We focused on the “et al.,” pronounced “et-ahl,” which is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase “et alia,” meaning “and others.” The United States judicial system uses this phrase as a reference in class action litigation in place of listing the names of all plaintiffs. In the instance of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, those four letters relegate several hundred men, women and children to what can be characterized as “legal wasteland,” rendering them largely unknown. This project uncovers and publishes some of their stories to provide a glimpse into the role of ordinary people who found themselves in the center of an extraordinary historic milestone.

Individuals involved in the cases consolidated under *Brown v. Board* participated in a series of in-person workshops convened by The Brown Foundation onsite at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. The workshops were facilitated by Cheryl Brown Henderson, Founding President of The Brown Foundation, and four University of Kansas scholars: Deborah Dandridge, Curator African American Experience Collections, Kenneth Spencer Research Library; John Edgar Tidwell, English Professor; Darren Canady, Playwright and Associate Professor of English; and Vincent Omni, Graduate Teaching Assistant, English Department. Workshop participants were guided through the process of writing a first person narrative.

The results of their work are contained in this collection of essays, within which each person shares personal experiences, or those of their parents, offering us a better understanding of the risk, challenge and courage of African Americans who refused to be denied constitutional rights in the era of “Jim Crow” laws.

In the following quotation from his 1994 book, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution 1st Edition*, Attorney Jack Greenberg, member of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund’s legal team in *Brown*, poignantly refers to the numerous individuals who are embedded within the legal shorthand “et. al.”:

Before lawyers can win cases there have to be clients willing to stand up for their rights. The American Blacks who proved willing to fight segregation and discrimination were organized for the most part by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), in an environment hostile to change in the kind of justice afforded Blacks.

Cheryl Brown Henderson, Founding President,
The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research

*Footnote – A Presidential Proclamation

On May 16, 2014, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the landmark United States Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research in partnership with the NAACP Legal Defence and Educational Fund, Inc., facilitated a White House gathering for those involved in the five cases consolidated as *Brown v. Board of Education*. All were welcomed by President Obama with an acknowledgment of gratitude for their sacrifice which contributed to his historic accomplishment by election as the first African American President of the United States of America. In honor of the decision, President Obama issued a proclamation to affirm *May 17, 2014 as the 60th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education*.

Introduction The Decision

In June 1950, Thurgood Marshall convened a conference of the NAACP's board of directors and affiliated attorneys to determine the next step in the legal campaign to desegregate public schools. After several days of debate, Marshall decided to shift the focus from the inequality of separate Black schools to a full assault on segregation. The NAACP immediately instituted lawsuits concerning segregated public schools in Southern and Border States.

Over the years, historians, political scientists, and others have unintentionally participated in a kind of historical erasure. They have unwittingly reduced the story of the effort to end educational inequity by citing only one of five actual cases that petitioned the courts for relief in the 1950s. The NAACP legal challenges to racially segregated public schools were from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. When their cases were unsuccessful in the lower courts, they appealed to the United States Supreme Court. Because each case sought relief from racially segregated public schools, the Supreme Court consolidated these cases under the heading of the Kansas case when issuing its opinion. Their unanimous decision became known only as *Oliver Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas), et al.*

These are the five cases that comprise the *Brown* decision:

Delaware – *Ethel Louis Belton (Sarah Bulah), et al. v. Francis B. Gebhart, et al.*

Kansas – *Oliver Brown, et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, et al.*

South Carolina – *Harry Briggs, Jr., et al. v. R.W. Elliott, et al.*

Virginia – *Dorothy E. Davis, et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, et al.*

Washington, D.C. – *Spotswood Thomas Bolling, et al. v. C. Melvin Sharpe, et al.*

By the fall of 1952 the U.S. Supreme Court had on its docket the cases from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia and Washington, D.C. all which challenged the constitutionality of racial segregation in public schools. Only in the Topeka case did the facts show that both the African American and White schools were fairly equal with respect to buildings, salaries, qualifications of teachers and other tangible factors. The issue before the Court was the constitutionality of racial segregation *per se* – the question of whether the doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* should be affirmed or reversed. The principle of the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, although it legitimized racial segregation in the area of public transportation, carried over to legitimize racial segregation in public schools.

The cases were argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in December of 1952. Shortly thereafter Chief Justice of the United States, Fred Vinson died. The death

of Chief Justice Vinson delayed the argument of the cases until December of 1953, after the appointment of Earl Warren as Chief Justice. In May 1954, the Court issued its historic decision which stated in part;

“Today education is the most important function of state and local governments . . . It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him adjust normally to his environment. In these days it is doubtful that any child can be reasonably expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.”

This decision, written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, was momentous. The social and ideological impact of the decision cannot be overestimated. The decision was unanimous. The issue of legal separation of the races was settled in finding that it violated the 14th Amendment to the Constitution and is therefore unconstitutional. Testimony concerning the effect of segregation based on race was included in the United States District Court for Kansas; and the Supreme Court adopted this language as the basis of its decision; citing the detrimental effect upon children, in particular, when segregation has the sanction of the law.

The *Brown* decision echoes the words of Justice John Marshall Harlan who famously wrote in his dissent in he *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision: “Our Constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates class among our citizens. In respect to civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law.” However, the landmark 1954 decision left open the question of implementing a plan for desegregation and achieving educational equity. In 1955, the Court attempted to present a response when it stated rather ambiguously in what is popularly known as *Brown II* that school districts should proceed “with all deliberate speed” to dismantle the scaffolding of segregation. In the ensuing decades, many school districts devised tactics to evade, dissemble, or outright reject the Court’s mandate. Efforts to circumvent *Brown* were seemingly legitimized in 1956 when nearly 100 members of Congress, from Southern states, issued what has come to be known as “The Southern Manifesto” or “Declaration of Constitutional Principles.” Their decree encouraged resistance to the Supreme Court decision using any lawful means. Nevertheless, *Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas) et al.* continues to serve as the foundational test of racial and educational equity in this nation. This collection of personal, previously untold narratives reveals the other side of the road to the important 1954 decision. The voices of the actual litigants and their descendants provide a human dimension to the narrative captured in history, political science, legal, and other scholarly texts. Here, in these heartfelt stories, this history comes alive.

John Edgar Tidwell, PhD
Harry A. Butowsky, PhD

Acknowledgements

The genesis of this book was part determination and part belief that if you don't tell your story, someone else will. For decades those involved in *Brown v. Board of Education* have been the subject of many writings. Yet, seldom has the story been told from the perspective of the plaintiffs in this momentous U.S. Supreme Court decision. Before more years past, it is now a matter of urgency to provide a platform for their voices to be heard in a record written by them that tells their truth.

In 2004, as the nation geared up for the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, it was the goal of The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research (The Brown Foundation) to ensure the commemoration would be authentic. We searched to find and contact as many of the plaintiffs as we could who were part of the NAACP cases behind the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision. The purpose was to lead a commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the *Brown* decision where plaintiffs had an opportunity to share their stories during a series of events that included a public program at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, a Capitol Hill reception honored by Congress where several of the original attorneys also attended, and a gathering of the plaintiffs at the White House at the invitation of First Lady Laura Bush. Each of these events in Washington, D.C. resembled a family reunion. There was an immediate kinship born of shared experiences. Many in this group of nearly seventy plaintiffs and descendants of plaintiffs have remained in touch, via conference calls, dinners, group interviews and for mourning the loss of some over the years.

During the 60th anniversary of the *Brown* decision in 2014, the Brown Foundation partnered with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc. and brought the group together at the White House to witness the historic continuum in the person of the first African American President of the United States, Barack Obama.

To share the legacy of the men, women and children who, in the 1940s and 1950s courageously stood with the NAACP by becoming petitioners in the school desegregation cases, it was time to revisit the idea of a written remembrance. To accomplish this, the Founding President of The Brown Foundation sat down with leaders of the Hall Center for the Humanities at the University of Kansas during the summer of 2015 for the purpose of laying out an idea for a book that would be a collection of essays written by those involved in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

We sincerely thank the Hall Center for understanding the vision and supporting our concept with grant funding. When the work extended beyond, one year of grant funding, through the generosity of the Walton Family Foundation, we were able to garner the additional grant funding needed to complete this project. With the backdrop of the National Museum of African American History and Culture whose education and public program staff so graciously hosted our group, we were able to come together to engage the plaintiffs and descendants of plaintiffs in the process of writing. With the assurance of our team of scholars from the Uni-

versity of Kansas, the plaintiffs and descendants of plaintiffs began this labor of love, turning their untold stories into a written record. They also searched through their keepsakes for photographs and other types of material that tell the story of *Brown v. Board* based on their experiences. The Foundation is grateful for their belief, trust, and commitment to the project.

We are indebted to Pam LeRow from Digital Media Services in University of Kansas Libraries for her expertise that helped make this book possible.

BELTON V. GEBHART (BULAH V. GEBHART)

Delaware

The final court challenge to segregated schools in Delaware was filed in the wake of a narrowly tailored ruling in state courts that granted relief from racially segregated public schools only for children of the plaintiffs named in the litigation, leaving the matter unresolved. Ending racial segregation in public schools statewide would require federal invention. In order to accomplish statewide change two cases bypassed state courts and were filed in federal court. One case was from Claymont, a suburb of Wilmington, Delaware and another from Hockessin, a rural district in New Castle County, Delaware.

The state court decision focused on the only high school open to African American students in the entire state of Delaware, Howard High School, which was located in an industrial business area in Wilmington, Delaware. For African American parents residing in Claymont, it meant that their children were forced to pass by Claymont High School, a spacious, well-maintained public school, and travel twenty miles round trip each day to Howard High School. Not only was the distance an adverse factor, class size, teacher qualifications in terms of advanced degrees, and the incomplete curriculum also angered African American parents. Students interested in vocational training courses had to walk several blocks to the run-down Carver Annex, regardless of the weather.

In March of 1951, eight African American parents sought legal counsel from attorney Louis Redding. At his urging these parents asked state education officials to admit their children to the local Claymont school. They were denied. Consequently, Redding filed a lawsuit on their behalf in July of 1951. Chancellor Collins J. Seitz, presiding judge of the Delaware Court of Chancery in Wilmington, on April 1, 1952 directed the *immediate* admittance of the African American plaintiffs' children into segregated all-White Claymont High School. Although challenged, his decision was upheld by the Delaware Supreme Court. The Delaware decision offered that the doctrine of "separate but equal" was unconstitutional, but decreed that any legal determination on the constitutionality of segregation would come on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Delaware Attorney General then instructed the Superintendent of Claymont schools not to admit the African American students because two cases from the state had been appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Determined to move forward, based on Seitz ruling, the Claymont Public Schools Board and school administrators defied state officials and decided that all African American students grades 7-12 would be enrolled. School Board members and administrators, in an act of defiance called the State Board of Education and the State Attorney General every hour requesting the legal mandate to allow the African American students to remain enrolled – knowing that the mandate would

have to be oral rather than written. At a special late-night Claymont School Board meeting the State Board of Education finally called and gave permission (an oral mandate) to enroll the students. With that, on September 4, 1952, a small group of African American high school students integrated public schools in Delaware prior to the *Brown* decision.

Although a victory for children of the named plaintiffs, Judge Seitz’s decision had not dealt the sweeping blow to segregation in public schools they had hoped for. The decision did not apply broadly throughout Delaware. His decision only directed that the twelve students who were children of the named plaintiffs would be immediately admitted to Claymont High School. As a result, the following students became known as the Claymont Twelve – Carol Anderson, Joan Anderson, Merele Anderson, Ethel Louise Belton, Bernice Byrd, Elbert Crumpler, John Davis, Spencer Robinson, Robert Sanford, Styron Sanford, Almena Short and Mrytha Trotter. However, Claymont School Board decided to enroll all African American high school students.

The challenge to racial segregation at the elementary school level emerged from the rural community of Hockessin where Mrs. Sarah Bulah wanted equal opportunity for her adopted daughter, Shirley Barbara. While a bus carrying White children passed her home each day, she had to drive Shirley two miles to an old one-room schoolhouse designated for African American children. Sarah Bulah decided to share her concern with state officials, so she wrote to the Department of Public Instruction and to the Governor. Their replies reaffirmed that no bus transportation would be provided because “colored” children could not ride on a bus serving White children. Undaunted, Mrs. Bulah made an appointment with attorney Louis Redding.

To accomplish more sweeping change Attorney Redding set out to challenge the general notion of racially segregated public schools and developed litigation filed using the names of Sarah Bulah and one of the parents involved in the Claymont case, Ethel Belton. Their cases named the State Board of Education as the principal defendant. The Board members were specifically charged. The first name among the members was Francis B. Gebhart. The resulting cases were filed as *Belton v. Gebhart* and *Bulah v. Gebhart*. The *Belton* and *Bulah* cases would ultimately join four other NAACP cases before the U.S. Supreme Court and become part of the May 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The following essays are by members of the Claymont Twelve: Carol Anderson (Neff), Joan Anderson, Bernice “Sandy” (Couch), and Myrtha Trotter (Randolph). Essays about the named plaintiffs in the Belton and Bulah cases are by Brigitte Brown, daughter of Ethel Louis Belton, and René Ricks-Stamps, daughter of Shirley Bulah. Virginia Tryon (Smilack) wrote the essay about her father; Sager Tryon, who was one of the district’s school board members who supported the Claymont Twelve.



Carol Anderson.

CAROL ANDERSON (NEFF)

LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE

I was born in 1939, in Wilmington, Delaware, the third of six children. Of course, I believed that my birth was the most important event in the history of the world. I think everyone believes that, but it turns out that there were a couple of other dates that were almost as important.

I grew up in an affluent Black family in Wilmington. My father was a doctor at a local hospital and we lived a very comfortable life as a Black family in the 1940's and 1950's. We spent our summers at the Catskill Mountains, in Atlantic City and other seashore vacation spots, and attended various summer camps.

Our home was wonderful, even included a library where we practiced our music. My sisters Merle and Joan played the piano, and I enjoyed the violin.

I started playing violin in the fourth grade and fell in love with music the day I saw the Wilmington Symphony Orchestra play. I was probably ten at the time. It eventually led me to getting a music degree from the Boston Conservatory of Music.

In spite of those wonderful times, we were still a Black family living in a segregated state in a segregated country. Even with our advantages, I could see that there were so many more opportunities available to White kids than Black. It didn't seem fair.

My father, Dr. Leon V. Anderson, was one of twelve children, with most of them graduating from college. When my father was drafted into the Army, it was the norm that doctors and other high level professionals would enter the service as officers. The exception to this was if one were Black. Because my father refused to serve at the lower rank of private, he was honorably discharged almost immediately.

My mother was adopted by Pauline Dyson, a single mom and school teacher who lived in a small Black community on Hickman Road, in Claymont, Delaware. It was a very small rural community of row houses which was only two or three blocks long. I'm not even sure if the road was paved.

Grandma Dyson was special. She never missed a holiday or birthday. I loved everything about her, especially her kindness, positive attitude, communication skills, and friendly smile. She was a strict and loving teacher who really cared about her students. She must have been. My mother graduated from high school at age 14.

It was exciting visiting the one-room school house where Grandma Dyson taught. You had to walk up a long dirt road to get to the small one room school

house at the top of the hill. It was for Black children whose parents worked at the steel mill. The White children went to a different and better-equipped elementary school. I wondered how she could possibly teach more than one grade at a time. But she did so very successfully.

It was special every time we visited and it never occurred to me that she was also involved in the same lawsuit that my parents were involved in that would take me away from Howard High School and into an unknown world of hate and prejudice.

BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION **UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT**

While I was growing up and enjoying my childhood, my parents and grandmother, along with many others, had been very busy fighting the State of Delaware's "separate but equal" legislation pertaining to school segregation. This decision changed the course of my education and life.

In 1952, two years before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, I was 13, and had just finished seventh grade. During the summer before entering eighth grade, my family moved to a new home in Ardencroft, a Wilmington suburb just two miles from Claymont.

I was attending Howard High School, the only Black high school in Wilmington.

I really enjoyed my first year at Howard. I thought that my two sisters and I would still be going there in September. I was looking forward to eighth grade because I could then be involved in sports and music at a higher level.

I was horrified to learn a short time before school started in September that I would not be going to Howard High School after all. They had the best sports teams, wonderful music programs and they put on operettas every year. The singers and musicians were amazingly talented. I couldn't believe I was going to miss out on all that.

My sisters and I would be attending the all-White Claymont High School. On Thursday, September 4, 1952. I became one of 11 Black students and 274 White students to attend a public Delaware high school. Delaware was the first state to initiate school desegregation, two years ahead of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, and I was in the middle of it.

Grandma Dyson prepared her handful of Black students who would be going to the all-White Claymont High School, along with us so that they would know what to expect and to adjust better. I never realized just how important that was and how valuable she and my parents were to that important 1954 landmark decision called *Brown v. the Board of Education*.

When Grandma Dyson retired a few years later, she was named Woman of the Year. I hope that the little one-room school house on the top of the hill is still there. It should be a state monument. It will be in my heart forever.

For those who need a refresher course, in accepting the eleven Black students to enter an all-White Claymont High School, Mr. Harvey E. Stahl, Claymont's

Superintendent of Schools, defied state law and changed the course of United States history.

Mr. Stahl refused to allow H. Albert Young, the Attorney General for the State of Delaware, to expel the Black students, believing that the decision had been made and the damage to the students would be too great if they were now not allowed to stay at Claymont. He also truly believed that every student in his school district deserved an equal education. The Attorney General took him to court. The Attorney General lost. We won and we stayed.

When *Brown v. Board of Education* went to the Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall, future Supreme Court Justice, argued that school segregation was a violation of individual rights under the 14th Amendment. He also asserted that the only justification for continuing to have separate schools was to keep people who had once been enslaved “as near that stage as possible.”

The people behind the fight included Thurgood Marshall, Jack Greenberg, Louis Redding, Chancellor Collins J. Seitz, Harvey E. Stahl, Mrs. Pauline Dyson, Dr. and Mrs. Leon V. Anderson, the NAACP, and many others. They devoted countless hours and years to obtain something that everyone had a natural born right to possess. Because of Grandma Dyson and my parents, I met many of the individuals who were instrumental in pushing for school desegregation, including Thurgood Marshall and Jack Greenberg, on multiple occasions. Louis Redding and his family were personal close friends.

But, back to that first day of school on September 4, 1952. For the three Anderson sisters, it was the first time riding on a school bus. We got on, waited, but hardly anyone paid attention to us. There were a couple of “hellos,” and that was it.

When we arrived at Claymont, there was no National Guard, threatening mobs, police, or news media. There were no parents hovering around outside and no fights erupted. We were quietly ushered into the Principal’s office. I do not remember what was said, but after the meeting we were taken to our individual classrooms.

When I entered my eighth grade class for the first time, I expected it to be noisy, but it wasn’t. I was met with a silence that was almost deafening. I then realized that the White kids were as unsure as to how to behave as I was; it was virgin territory for all of us. So, after a few hellos and taking my assigned seat, the chitchat of a normal classroom took over and remained. So while the first day of school was a bit different, special in that everyone knew my name, at the same time, my first day of desegregation passed generally unnoticed and uneventful.

Overall, I enjoyed Claymont High School. I knew I would be “under a microscope,” but that was okay because my parents had instilled in each of the kids good manners, proper social conduct under any circumstances, and self-control.

Claymont offered me a wide range of activities, and I took advantage of many of them, mostly in sports and music. I played as a starter on the girls’ softball team for 4 years, winning the state championship in 1956. It was a special year because my older sister Joan was also on the team and was one of the starting pitchers.



Carol Anderson in the Claymont High School orchestra.

I sang in the choir and performed in the school orchestra, being selected as one of four students to represent the State of Delaware in the All-Eastern Orchestra. I was even the girls' Sports Editor for the school paper. I was a part of Claymont High School.

I made friends and remember them as being very caring and protective of me, but most of all just normal high school students. After the initial barrage of questions about what it was like to be Black in a White school, etc., everyone settled down and spent little time involving themselves with political and social issues, including the impending Supreme Court lawsuit.

The only situation that was very noticeable was the fact that I was rarely invited to the homes of many classmates. While it is easy to say that it was because I was the "Black" student, it would be an unfair statement. I was also very busy with my musical studies, school activities and taking advantage of the opportunities offered to me at Claymont. I just did not have a lot of extra time.

Overall, I prospered and thrived at Claymont. But do you know what? I would have prospered and thrived at Howard High School also.

If pushed to remember any negative events, there are only two that come to mind. The first happened during the first week of school. The elementary school playground was next to the high school. One of the elementary school kids called me the "N" word. My new classmates were horrified and no one knew what to say

Girls' Softball Team Remains Undefeated

Thus Far As CHANTICLEER Goes To Press

By Carol Anderson, '37

Claymont's girls' softball team is currently compiling a season that may be the best in recent years. The girls, undefeated at the time the Chanticleer went to press, have won all of the games they have played to date. They are coached by Mrs. Joan Wagner and captained by Joan Anderson.

On Apr. 17, the girls played their first game of the season with Friends School on the Claymont field, defeating them by the enviable score of 29-4. This is the first year that Claymont has had competition with Friends in softball, and the Indians encountered only a weak defense.

Joan Anderson, the winning pitcher, struck out 7 persons on the Friends team.

Outstanding batters of the game were Doodles Seagraves, Carol Anderson, and Connie Duffy.

Mrs. Wagner stated that the team as a whole did a fine job of batting, and they did well by letting only four runs come in during the whole game. During the course of this game the infield only let 4 balls reach the outfield.

Claymont girls' softball team defeated Wm. Penn in another slug fest, played Apr. 19, on the Claymont field. Six walks and 18 hits were combined to produce the 19 runs for Claymont.

Wm. Penn led Claymont, 3-0, in the first inning, but Claymont rallied for 6 runs to take the lead, which they never relinquished. The final score was 19-9.

The line-up was as follows: J. Anderson, P; C. Lange, C; L. Speed, SS; E. Gentieu, 1B; C. Anderson, LF; A. Seagraves, CF; S. Mahla, RF; A. Duffy, 2B; C. Duffy, 3B; and C. Helms, substitute.

The girls added another victory to their record on May 1, by downing Mt. Pleasant's girls on the losers' field. Although Claymont's girls were leading in the fifth inning, 10-1, the threatening Green Knights bounced back with 9 more runs to end the game at the score of 14-10.

Outstanding performances of the day were made by Doodles Seagraves, Lorraine Speed, and Ann Duffy, who had three hits apiece, and pitcher Ming Gentieu, who allowed only one hit and struck out ten batters.

The girls remained undefeated after winning their fourth contest from Conrad, on May 3 at Claymont, two days after the Mt. Pleasant game. The final score was 12-5.

Another victorious game was pitched by Ming Gentieu who held Claymont's opponents to 5 hits in the seven innings played.

Gentieu and Seagraves had 3 hits each.

Winning Them All



Continuing through a most encouraging season are the members of the softball team. As pictured above, they are: first row, Pat Schuck, Ann Duffy, Lorraine Speed, Carol Anderson, Joan Anderson, Janet Stata, Sandra Boozo, Carol Lange, and Gail Patterson. Second row—Coach Mrs. Joan Wagner; Carole Helms, Eugenia Gentieu, Suzanne Mahla, Barbara Robinson, Cora Elder, Paddy Dutton, Teddy Collins, Connie Duffy, Aline Seagraves, and Betty Robinson, manager.

Carol Anderson, Claymont High School sports.

or do, but my teacher certainly did. Saying nothing, he walked up to the young boy and slapped him hard across the face, then silently turned around and walked away. Recess was over. It never happened again, and the teacher was not fired.

The second event happened the night my sister Merle graduated from Claymont. It is important to note that she was the first Black student to graduate from the high school.

Traditionally, the graduating seniors walked in couples down the middle of the aisle. This time, however, the father of a young man refused to let his son walk down the aisle with the Black student, who in this case was my sister Merle. While the son was very embarrassed, the father did not mind that there was media at the graduation or that he was not receiving any support for his racist stance. He just did not care.

But it was an easy thing to fix; the school decided on the spot that the students would file down the two outside aisles, thereby keeping anyone from walking down the middle, as had been done in the past. The student involved was booed when he walked across the stage to receive his diploma. By the way, he was given a blank piece of paper instead of the actual diploma, which he did receive at a later date.

On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the unanimous ruling. "We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

While Claymont and the surrounding area showed how school integration can work and paved the way for others to follow, that was not the case everywhere. There was violence, even in Delaware. Mobs and police fought each other and many public schools closed so that their schools would not have to integrate. It is such a shame, as Claymont proved that all students can be important to each other, teaching the skills necessary to be successful adults.

* * *

As a side note, Claymont High School is now the Claymont Community Center. Within its walls is the History Room, where one can look at documents and photographs (including those of me and my two older sisters) from before Brown v. Board of Education and its aftermath. I am a graduate of the class of 1957.

OAK PARK SYMPHONY CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

At the beginning of this essay, I stated that I was part of one event and the catalyst for another. We now know that I was part of the *Brown v. Board of Education* lawsuit. But because of my love for music, the Oak Park and all Illinois symphonies are now racially integrated. That happened in 1963.

After graduating from Claymont High School, I attended the Boston Conservatory of Music, graduating in 1961. Even though I had just spent four years playing my violin, I moved to Chicago and got a job as a social worker. They were taking anyone with any kind of college degree at the time, so they hired me.

It was completely different from anything I had ever done. I was now involved in other people's lives and problems. I needed that for my own personal growth. There were social and economic issues I didn't even know existed and it fascinated me to be part of it.



Newspaper article by Carol Anderson in the *Chicago Defender*.



Carol Anderson challenges the all White Oak Park Symphony in Illinois.

Two years later, February 1963, lightning struck again and fate tapped me on the shoulder. But, this time it was in the form of an orchestra performance. I was still working as a social worker and working on my masters. I was also playing violin in the North Side Symphony. The conductor was Milton Preves, the principal violist of the Chicago Symphony. He also conducted the Oak Park Symphony.

One of my orchestra friends invited me to play with her in the Oak Park Symphony in Oak Park, Illinois. Playing in another orchestra was not something I could manage time wise. I barely had time for school and work

She mentioned that they would be playing Tchaikovsky's 6th Symphony. I had never played it before and thought it would be exciting to go and play it at least once. So I did. And I shouldn't have.

I enjoyed the experience. As I was getting ready to leave, Mrs. Gustav Palmer, the Orchestra Manager and Principal Cellist approached me and requested that I not return. She stated that she was sure I was a nice girl, but that if I stayed, the community would withdraw its support from the orchestra. She was sure that I would understand.

It is a shame that she did not let me leave after rehearsal without saying anything, as I had no plans to be a part of the Oak Park Symphony due to my busy schedule.

Although Chicago was knee deep in the Black Power Movement and other racial issues, I had already lived through *Brown v. Board of Education* and had no interest in getting involved in another social issue. I only wanted to look ahead. So



Carol Anderson wins racial challenge in Illinois.

page three of the *Chicago Tribune* quickly turned into page one, changing three lives immediately. After the *Chicago Tribune* article, the incident was part of the evening news. On that Monday, my work requested that I take the day off because the switchboard could not handle all the calls. They also said that NBC, CBS and ABC were on their way to my apartment.

The situation kept growing. By now, Mrs. Palmer could not keep her opinions to herself and the media kept trying to get me to say that she was a bigot, which I would not do. I felt that her beliefs were her own and she was entitled to them. I was only 23 at the time and I knew after my high school experience to be very careful about what I said publicly.

I didn't have to say much at all because after attacking me for my color, she went after Mr. Preves for being Jewish, stating that he should be grateful that he was allowed to conduct the Oak Park Symphony at all.

Without realizing it at the time, I had just accomplished what had been nearly impossible – desegregating orchestras in Illinois. Along with hundreds of support letters from all over the United States, every orchestra in Illinois contacted me with an invitation to perform with them.

Oak Park high school students got involved. Every Jewish organization in the country got involved. The clergy were insulted by the anti-Semitic remarks made by Mrs. Palmer, becoming the main focus of discussion in the religious section of the *Chicago Tribune*. Now everything was completely out of control.

High school students started saying that unless I was allowed to play in the upcoming concert and Mrs. Palmer resigned, there would be no concert.

when Mrs. Palmer asked me not to return, it was just another racial incident I knew I could endure and ignore. I was too tired and busy to fight a new battle.

But when Mr. Preves found out what Mrs. Palmer had said, he was furious. After asking me what I wanted to do to change the situation and hearing me say "nothing," he went ahead anyway and contacted the *Chicago Tribune*. I was made to feel that it was my civic duty not to let that incident go unnoticed. It had to be fixed. And, of course, he was right.

The newspaper called me the next day, wanted to conduct an interview and take pictures. I worried for a brief moment that this incident might take on a life of its own, but I did agree to meet if Mr. Preves and Mrs. Palmer were also both interviewed and had their pictures taken too.

What appeared as an article lost on



Carol celebrating victory after challenge to racially segregated symphony in Illinois.

That was one of those times where you take a deep breath and say, “What the heck just happened? I only sight read the music once. Now I’m playing it in a real live concert.”

All that commotion and all I did was to innocently sit in on one orchestral rehearsal in Oak Park, Illinois. Amazingly, there was nothing else going on in Chicago at the time?

The only solution was to agree to play in the concert, which I did under the condition that Mrs. Palmer made a public apology to Mr. Preves for her anti-Semitic remarks.

On February 17, 1963, I performed Tchaikovsky’s 6th Symphony with the Oak Park Symphony to a sold-out crowd. When it was over, Conductor Preves shook hands with his concertmaster, which is customary. Then he shook hands with me which is not customary. And yes, there was a standing ovation.

Making a long story short, Chicago crucified Mrs. Palmer so badly that I did feel sorry for her. I was totally surprised that such a small incident could escalate so quickly.

I received hundreds of letters from all over the country and several outside the USA. Only four letters were hate mail. There were even some marriage proposals and I got invitations to join every orchestra in the state of Illinois. So I guess I was instrumental in desegregating orchestras in the state of Illinois without knowing it at the time.



Carol Anderson Neff.

My celebrity status made me feel not only uncomfortable, but unworthy of all the unnecessary attention. I got awards for doing nothing. I couldn't even leave my apartment for months.

The scariest part was that a well-known *Chicago Tribune* columnist stated in an article that it was okay for one of Al Capone's right hand men to live in Oak Park but that Carol Anderson could not play her violin there. That was scary. My name was linked to the mob.

REFLECTION TIME

I found out later from a school teacher friend that I had made an impression on Black school children. They

wrote about the Oak Park incident for their current event assignments and got to see that there are non-violent ways to handle difficult situations. They felt that I handled what could have been an ugly situation with grace and dignity and they wanted to be like me. So maybe I deserved a small award after all – sort of.

I have had wonderful jobs and experiences. I was General Manager at the Robin Hood summer theater in Ardencroft, Delaware, at age 17 right before I entered college. I graduated from the Boston Conservatory in 1961 and moved to Chicago and was a Social Worker there for six years.

Then I moved west away from cold weather and humidity. I worked as a music coordinator at Paramount Studios where I met my husband, Tom, who was working on "The Lucy Show." We later owned and ran The Union Sub Shop in Van Nuys, California, for almost twenty years.

I was food coordinator for Fencing and Volleyball for the 1984 Summer Olympics and was manager of the Santa Monica Symphony, in Santa Monica, California.

After moving to Oregon in 1988, I managed the Marylhurst Symphony, just south of Portland. I was also General Manager for the Metropolitan Youth Symphony in Portland for over seven years and also spent a few years in sales and marketing. I even tried Multi-Level-Marketing and got raked over the coals. It was the most unsuccessful thing I ever got involved with, but I did learn how to make lemonade out of rotten lemons.

I'm retired now, but continue to play violin in the Marylhurst Symphony Orchestra, volunteer at a local food bank, and watch my grandkids develop and grow.

Life has parallels and you don't always recognize them when they appear until much later. Oak Park, Illinois happened in February 1963. It was Presidents Day, it was 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, and, yes, the year J.F. Kennedy was assassinated.

I met lots of Black performers while I was in Chicago who agreed with me that change is inevitable as long as we keep plugging away at it. I won't mention any of their names. They're all rich and famous now and have passed on their wisdom, patience, and dignity to the next generation. With success comes failures and vice versa. You keep fighting, you never give up, and you choose your battles wisely and with dignity.

Brown v. Board of Education and Oak Park guided me a long way without getting lost.

And, thanks, Mom and Dad. You taught us well.

CONCLUSION

Sixty-three years later and I wonder, have things improved? *Brown v. Board of Education* ignited the Civil Rights Movement, which is progressing very slowly. Hate groups keep popping up all over the world and hate crimes continue.

My parents always told us to feel sorry for the people who have hate in their hearts and not let that hate breed in ours. They also taught us to make sure our steps are firmly built before we climb them and that slow change is better than instant change. It will last longer.

And to my fellow classmates of Claymont High? Your peaceful desegregation of an all-White high school is part of our heritage. We were allowed to grow with dignity and grace in spite of bigotry, ignorance and prejudice. We all have something wonderful to pass along for many generations to come. I never said "Thank You."

It's hard to change what's in a person's heart. I don't have the answers and maybe I never will. Let's see where we are in another 100 years.

JOAN E. ANDERSON

ESSAY ON THE INTEGRATION OF CLAYMONT HIGH



Jr. High School, eighth grade. Before I knew I would be one of the first to enter an integrated school.

If my parents had told me when I was a child that I would be part of the integration of the public schools in America, or that I would be one of the first Black women to be an actress in a soap opera, I would have been glad to hear that. However, I may not have believed them. I was born and raised in a segregated environment. The women in those days graduated from high school, got married, and raised children, as my mother did. That was expected of me, and I accepted it.

I was the second of six children born to Leon and Beulah Anderson. We lived in Wilmington, Delaware. Even though Wilmington was segregated, there were some integrated residential areas. My family lived in one on East 9th Street. I grew up playing with Blacks, Hispanics and a few White children. My father, being a medical doctor, worked in the local hospital in an integrated setting and attended to all patients.

We lived in a large house which was fun to run around in. There were lots of nooks and crannies to explore. It also had a large enclosed yard, which enabled us to play sports and other games. I enjoyed having neighborhood children and relatives come to visit. We had lots of trees; some bore fruit, and there was a garden of vegetables. We had a pet dog named Ming Toy, who was part chow and part collie. We also had a pet chicken. I don't remember the name of the chicken. Probably because he wasn't with us too long. Amazingly, both of our pets coexisted with each other. And our dog did not eat the chicken. Without our knowledge, we ate the chicken. We were told that the gate was left open and the chicken ran away, but he somehow ended up on our table that night. I wasn't too happy when I found out about it.

My life was fairly normal, with school studies, picking fruit and vegetables, raking leaves and playing games. Some were more enjoyable than others. We had one Black movie theatre, which was a Saturday favorite for me. There was also a White theatre, which integrated before my family moved. We were among the first to see a movie there, and we were treated well.

I attended the only Black elementary school and also Howard High, grades one through eight. I was comfortable in this environment, being adjusted to the segregation in Wilmington. As a child, I didn't think it would be any different, because of the segregation laws.



My grandmother, Pauline Dyson, in front of her one-room all-Black schoolhouse, State Line School.

A favorite for me was visiting relatives, especially our grandmother Pauline Dyson. She taught all grades – kindergarten through sixth – at State Line School, in Claymont, Delaware. It was a one-room school for the Black students living on Hickman Row in Claymont. I was amazed to see it and how she could accomplish all that she did. She was a favorite grandmother to me, and I enjoyed those visits, which were many.

Our grandmother was also involved in helping the children and their families in all aspects of their lives, with additional food and clothing during the depression and war era. Over the years she extended her efforts into the larger community: tutoring and beginning a thrift shop which is still running at the Claymont Community Center. She was youth choir director, Boy Scout leader, and superintendent of Sunday Schools of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Wilmington district, for twenty-eight years.

In addition, our grandmother played a primary role in making the 1952 integration of the Claymont schools succeed – counseling students and working with the other school personnel. She was asked by the superintendent of schools, Mr. Stahl, to ask the parents if they wanted to send their children to Claymont High School. They all said yes, which was the beginning of plans for the 1951 lawsuit – *Belton v. Gebhart*.

Things changed for my family in the spring of 1952. We moved to a suburb of Claymont, Delaware. Our new home was in Ardencroft. The neighborhood was completely White. There were two other Black families who also moved there. The area was known as the three Ardens. Segregation didn't exist at Arden. They had contacted the NAACP to see if there were any Black families who wanted to live there. My parents responded to the invitation. We were accepted 100%.



My parents, Dr. Leon and Beulah Anderson, and my sister Linda (seated on the floor), who worked hard for the integration process in Arden, Claymont, and Wilmington, Delaware.

It was a heavily wooded area, difficult to get around if you didn't live there. We quickly learned our way around, especially how to navigate to the grocery store, going through a densely-wooded area and creek, which had creatures in it. I was frightened and ran most of the way.

The drive to our new home on Veale Road was breathtaking. The road was lined with beautiful tall trees, so tall that they formed an arch at the top. Our dog was with us. There was no fence, as at the Wilmington house, so he was able to bite some people who came to visit. There were no lawsuits in those days, but they got excellent medical care from my father. Strangely, the dog never bit the chicken while in Wilmington.

After moving to Ardencroft, we were faced with the prospect of being bused to the all-Black Howard High School in Wilmington. However, our parents got involved in the school situation, which I watched with great anticipation. By the end of the 1952 spring school year at Howard, I didn't know which school I would be attending in September. It made me a little nervous about my future. My parents were great though, with their involvement and support.

The two lawsuit cases in 1951 were *Belton v. Gebhart* and *Bulah v. Gebhart*. The two Lawyers were Louis L. Redding, who filed the cases and Jack Greenberg, who assisted. Chancellor Collins J. Seitz presided over them and rendered the



With my Claymont High School classmates in a yearbook photo.
I'm in the back row, fourth from the left.

decision based on the cases and visiting the schools. Also, Thurgood Marshall became involved in the school desegregation cases.

It was August now, and all Delaware cases had been won. With the verdict was the mandate that the schools had to integrate immediately. Claymont was the only school that decided to accept all students eligible to attend grades seven through twelve, including those who were not part of the *Belton* case. It meant that I and my two sisters, Merle and Carol, would be attending Claymont High. There was much relief for me.

The strange thing about all of this for me was to have moved from an almost segregated environment (Wilmington) to an all-White environment (Ardencroft) and then to an all-white school. But I was happy with all the decisions my parents made. And I knew I would continue to get a good education and make new friends.

It seemed all was going well in preparation for the opening school day. The final verdict had been rendered August 28, 1952. However, we needed a written mandate to attend and it was not being sent by the Attorney General's Office. It was now September 3, 1952 and I was getting a little anxious, due to the fact that school was scheduled to begin the next day. And I wondered if I might still have to attend Howard High. But the Claymont School Superintendent, Mr. Harvey Stahl, decided to enroll us anyway. I still remember being in his office on the 3rd and receiving his warm welcome. But he also told us that he wasn't having any problems at his school. I was a little concerned at the time that there might be problems. That night I had anxious moments, because we still didn't know where we would be attending school, even though we were enrolled at Claymont. Later that evening, we received a call that we had been granted a verbal mandate to attend Claymont. I immediately felt peace that it was resolved.

On September 4, 1952, we attended Claymont and received a warm welcome from all, including my new teacher. There were no police or reporters. It had

been decided to keep it as quiet as possible. Whatever nerves I had were quickly relieved. Everyone was friendly. I remember my mother telling me that many of the staff and teachers hugged her and told her how happy they were that her children were attending Claymont High.

On September 5, 1952, Mr. Stahl received a call from the Attorney General's office, telling him to send us home because we didn't have a written mandate to attend. Fortunately, he refused, and the teachers signed a petition that they wanted us to stay. Later that day, Mr. Young's office

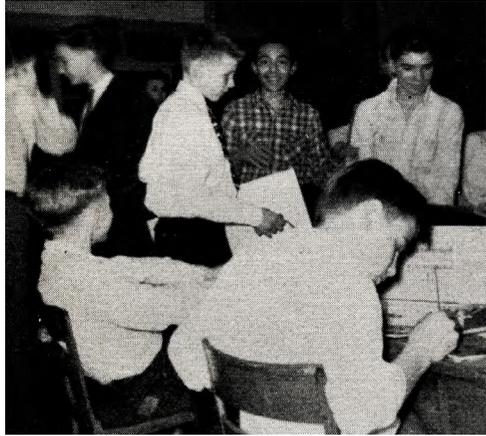
called back to say we could stay, but that no other schools could integrate. I found out about it when I arrived home from school that day, and was glad I could stay. I was already getting adjusted to the school routines.

The school schedule was okay and I made some friends. I was immersed in the classes and homework. A couple of weeks into the school year, my two sisters and I had a situation which we didn't know how to resolve. Being in an all-White school, we realized that our Aunt (sounding like Aunt) was no longer an Aunt, but actually an Ant (spelled aunt). We didn't know what to do about it. Finally, we decided that at home she was aunt and at school she was Ant (spelled aunt). I still use this interchangeably to this day.

There were activities I was interested in. I joined the Glee Club. I had convinced myself that I had a good singing voice. However, I had difficulty staying on key. I was put in the alto section and was told to sit close to the person next to me and try to follow along. There were times I just had to open my mouth and let nothing come out. But I tried.

I found that it wasn't difficult getting adjusted to being in an all-White school. I had been living in an all-white community for a few months. There was an adjustment in the new environment and new routines. But I was happy to be in Claymont High.

In addition to trying to sing in the Glee Club, I also signed up for softball and basketball, as I enjoyed sports. Basketball was a little difficult, because in those days, girls weren't allowed to run up and down the court. We had half-court basketball. I usually had to play guard and that meant staying under the opponent's basket. I rarely had a chance to shoot the ball, probably because the ball wouldn't go in the basket for me. But before I graduated, a picture was taken of me trying to do a layup for the yearbook. Fortunately, it doesn't show that I missed. Of course, women's basketball is totally different today.



My brother Victor, in the plaid shirt, with the Art Club at Claymont High. He started attending Claymont High with me after helping to integrate Arden Elementary.

Softball was different, and I excelled at it. I was the pitcher for the team. My first game I was so nervous, I pitched the first ball over the fence. I cleared everything, including the batter, catcher and umpire. I settled down and we won – I think. Maybe I just thought we won.

One incident that happened was a White softball team refusing to play us. We were very disappointed, but consoled ourselves with each other and the staff. We decided to move on, forget it and start preparing for the next game. They did forfeit the game, but we would have liked to have earned the win. It was a reminder to me of the segregation around me. My classmates were great though, always supportive of me. Again, I have to say that I was happy at Claymont.

* * *

My senior year, we had a new coach. She was totally different. In order to step onto her field, we had to run around the track. In those day, girls didn't run much, especially the track. After a few days of that, I was exhausted. She grilled us, drilled us, and yelled at us on occasion. There were times we ran the track again. But we discovered we were winning games. So, we accepted her program. In fact, we won all of our games, including the state championship. We almost lost our last game. My sister Carol was an outfielder, and the last ball I pitched looked like it was going to sail over her head. But, she reached up and back and caught it with one hand. We all ran and hugged her. High-fives hadn't been invented yet. Thinking about it today, our coach reminded me of some of today's coaches.

All was not over with our championship, due to the fact that the boy's team had a zero championship, having lost all of their games. So, we were forced to play them, so they could say they won a game. I was not happy about it and neither was the team. But, we fought hard and didn't lose by much. I was slid into, run over, and spiked during the game. It was not fun. But I was glad we put up a good showing.

After settling into Claymont's routines, I felt comfortable being there. I had new friends and enjoyed the many activities. I remember visiting the home of one of my friends. Her parents were very nice, and that put me at ease.

The big day came when Claymont had to host Howard High's football team. Everyone knew Claymont would probably lose. Howard's football team was exceptionally good. Everyone, students and staff, wondered which side of the football field we would sit on. My sisters and I took two minutes to decide. We entered the stadium that day, walked to the left side where Howard High fans were, waved to those we knew, and continued around to Claymont's side. We felt this was our school now and we should support it. In fact all eleven of us African American students sat on the Claymont side, much to the relief of all Claymont High students and staff. Of course, we lost.

We still had relatives in Wilmington, whom we visited and who visited us. We were also part of a social group called the Jack & Jill Club [Jack & Jill of America, Inc.]. It was an organization that had meetings and social events for Black children. We continued to attend some functions and I enjoyed the friend-

ships. These groups mainly met in Philadelphia, which was north of Claymont. I enjoyed the trips to Philadelphia, because we had many relatives there also.

It was a good time for me at Claymont High. It was a warm environment and I had close friends. However, when we left the area for school field trips, I was a little nervous. It reminded me of the fact that outside of my new environment, most of the area was still segregated. All of the field trips were in all-White communities. I didn't know how I would be received. After a few trips I discovered that I was well received. There were no problems.

There were only three racial incidents at Claymont High. The first being the softball game. The second one involved a White boy taunting my sister Carol. A teacher walked over to the White boy and slapped him really hard. Then the teacher calmly started teaching again, as though nothing had happened. It was instant punishment. Of course, today you couldn't get away with it. Back in those days you could.

The third incident involved my older sister Merle. She was in her senior year, and there was a rehearsal for the Baccalaureate service. The girls were supposed to come into the auditorium on one side and the boys on the other. Then they would meet in the center aisle and walk down together. However, when Merle started down the center aisle, the boy who was supposed to walk with her bolted out of the auditorium. But the boy behind him quickly moved up to take his place. And no one really saw it. But the staff saw it. They decided to have them go down separate aisles at graduation. But at the rehearsals for graduation, they started the students on stage, so there would be no further problems. When the diplomas were given out, the boy who bolted was given a blank one. Later, they did give him his diploma. Merle was an excellent piano player and played during the service and received a standing ovation. I was always impressed with her skills, and she played exceptionally well that day. It was a very proud moment in my life.

Although my two sisters and I had successfully integrated in Claymont, my other two sisters and brother were faced with the prospect of being bussed to the Wilmington Elementary School. However, Ardencroft had an elementary school. The Ardencroft School Board of Trustees decided at a special meeting to admit the three children. On September 7, 1952, they officially met and invited them to attend the school. The state of Delaware did not approve because Ardencroft had not gone through the courts. The cases had applied only to Claymont High School and the African American elementary school in Hockessin. But Ardencroft insisted and finally after months of discussion, the state allowed the children to remain. Thus, the Arden school became the only one in Delaware to integrate without a lawsuit.

My first two years were somewhat eventful in regards to the integration. Besides reading, writing and arithmetic, there were many times we were called to the lawyer's office. They were preparing for the U.S. Supreme Court case. They would ask us all kinds of questions as to how things were going. I saw it as a constant interruption in my daily activities. I didn't really have to concern myself with the case because my parents were deeply involved in it. In those days, parents were in charge of the children's activities. I do remember when Thurgood

Marshall interviewed my mother. I was excited about that.

* * *

Later, I discovered the magnitude of the Claymont integration. So, it made sense that we were called into the lawyer's office so often. We were being used as an example of how integration can work. It was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court that "integration can work, because it's been working for two years at Claymont High School." It became an exciting event, since our experience was so peaceful and had been going well for at least two years. I was also saddened by the fact that there were negative events in some of the other schools.



Sr. High School, 12th grade graduation.
After four years of integration.

During my four years at Claymont, school work, glee club, and sports kept me busy. One thing I had the opportunity to do was to be an announcer of local events on a local radio station. I enjoyed this tremendously, and thought I might later study acting.

I graduated and was excited to leave high school and pursue college. My parents were wonderful in providing for higher education for us. They made us go to college. There was no choice. For this I am still thankful. Education was always a high value in our family. Most of my father's eleven siblings graduated from college. This was also a time when not too many, especially women, attended college. In fact, there were only two of us in my graduating class who attended college.

I had a good upbringing and my parents worked at instilling character in us. I look back and feel I was blessed to have them.

I decided to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. I was immediately thrust into deep-South segregation. Fisk was a predominately Black university. There were a few White exchange students. This was segregation as I had not known. And I did not feel comfortable enough to venture out to other parts of Nashville. I stayed within the confines of the university area. We had one colorful character there. He was the guard on campus, and his job was to protect us. We called him "WillShoot," because he did shoot his gun. No one knew his real name. It wasn't uncommon to be wakened at night to the sound of gunfire. He took his job seriously. My only face-to-face contact with him was when I was walking down the road on campus with another student. Suddenly he jumped from behind a bush, came up to me and asked if I was all right. I quickly said "yes" and he disap-



Graduating from Boston University. I was one of only two women from my integrated Claymont class to attend college.

peared. I was quite taken back at this, but glad he was doing his job. These were good years at Fisk, because I made friends and had decided to pursue an acting career.

After two years, I transferred to Boston University, where I graduated with a BFA degree, in 1960. I had decided to pursue a drama career. My sister Carol was also in Boston attending the Boston Conservatory of Music. It was nice having her close by. BU was mostly a white school in those days. I enjoyed living in Boston and making new friends. There was much to see and do, and attend drama classes and theater productions.

Boston was also the place of the biggest event in my life. I became a Christian, accepting Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord. This gave me a

purpose in life and peace. I also became involved in church activities and prayer groups.

At this time, things were going extremely well for my grandmother Pauline Dyson. Her awards were many. She was the only woman to have received a Boy Scout leader award. In 1953, she was recipient of the American Legion's Outstanding Woman of the Year Award and named Woman of the Year by Delaware's Phi Delta Kappa Sorority in 1955 and national recognition by the sorority in 1960. Grandmother Dyson was also involved in several conferences studying integration in 1955. She spoke at the *New York Herald Tribune* forum on the "Progress of Freedom in the United States," and received a standing ovation.

In addition, she was named to the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame in 1989 and named one of the fifty Delaware Outstanding Women by the Delaware Commission of Women in 2006.

I was so very proud of her. She was a wonderful person and a great grandmother. She was much beloved by me and others.

After BU, I moved back to Delaware for a while, attending the Philadelphia Academy of Theater and Acting.

Next, I moved to New York. I fell in love with New York City and still feel that way. I got a job doing secretarial work, and spent much time sight-seeing, trying to find acting jobs and making new friends.

My acting career really took off at this time. I was able to get an acting job on two television soap operas: "Search for Tomorrow" and "Another World." Since there was already an actress going by the name of Joan Anderson, I changed my name to Elizabeth Anderson. I played a nurse on both of these television shows for

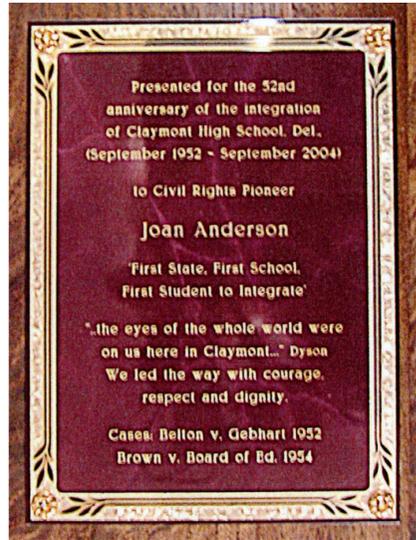
about two years. It turns out that I was one of the first Black actresses to perform in television's soap operas. This was in 1967, when the field was just opening up for Black women actresses in the soaps. I was fortunate to have a speaking role at times and worked about two to three days a week on "Search for Tomorrow." I must confess, all the times I was on "Another World," I was never able to figure out the story line. That's how complicated it was. This was an exciting time for me. Being with the other actresses and staff was a great experience, and I learned so much. Also special was being able to attend Mary Stuart's (star of "Search for Tomorrow") Christmas party.

I changed careers after that, first working in a drug rehabilitation center, called Teen Challenge, which was a rewarding experience. Afterwards, I started to use my talents in the field of accounting. I worked for 21 plus years in the Finance Department of the American Institute of CPA's [AICPA] in New Jersey. It was a really good job. I had a reverse commute and took the ferry to work. I remember those beautiful days ferrying across the water. However, the ferries I rode were small and the waters were a bit choppy, to say the least. Once, we had a "cowboy" driver. We were sliding all over in our seats. When we departed at the New York Harbor, the ferry had trouble docking because of the overly choppy waters and wind conditions. Quite often the ferry slammed into the dock, almost sending us flying. Sometimes we got a little wet. But I was not hurt. I really enjoyed being on the water.

I was still at the AICPA when 9/11 happened. I usually traveled to work through the World Trade Center area by commuter train or the ferry at approximately 8:45a.m. each day. I could never get up in time to leave earlier. In May, before 9/11, the Lord woke me up, and I was able to get to work by 7:30AM. At the time I didn't know why, but I was able to leave early every day thereafter. It wasn't until 9/11 that I understood why. I should have died that day, but I had divine protection. It was a horrific event, very difficult to describe. Fortunately, all of our staff was safe. We had to remain in New Jersey for the night. Our company secured hotel rooms for us. That night many of us gathered for prayer. The next day, I was able to get back into the city. What a shock awaited me. Everywhere I looked, there were signs: "God Bless America" and "In God We Trust." The city was plastered with these signs and also American flags. The homeless men on the streets were singing and playing their instruments to "God Bless America." I couldn't believe this was NYC. One of the most incredible things was a cross made of steel beams that workers had found in the rubble. Every day at the office, we gave thanks to the Lord for protecting us.

When my company moved South, I got a temporary job with Major League Baseball for several months. What a great job that was, especially since I enjoyed sports.

There is one other thing about living in New York. I had to learn how to commute by subway and bus. I remember once getting on a crowded subway and stood on my toes to let someone by me. This person stood in the space where my heels were before, so, I had to ride the whole way home on my toes. Another time



Honored by the State of Delaware on the 52nd anniversary of the Claymont integration.

due to the crowds, I ended up having to ride at a three-fourths degree angle. I soon abandoned those routes.

Presently, I'm still living in NYC, and still working in the accounting field. I found an incredibly good job at Landor, the global brand consulting and design company. The talented staff are really great to work with, and we do really neat things on special days, like giving back to our community. Recently, we helped serve lunch at a senior center.

In looking back on all of the various events in my life, Claymont High School was key to my education and upbringing in preparing me for the future. The staff and people I interacted with and, the segregation and integration of schools and places helped provide me with a well-rounded life. The various professors and other people I met along the way have been an encouragement to me. My parents were wonderful and did all they could to provide for me and help me grow. They picked Claymont High for me to attend, which enabled me to pursue my plans and purposes for life. I felt I could do whatever and become whoever I wanted to be, because I was so well prepared. And, my faith in Jesus made me a better person.

I consider myself blessed to have led a wonderful life thus far, for which I am thankful. The activities I enjoy are being with special friends and family, attending spiritual events, sight-seeing, and some sports events.

One other thing as I reflect on my life in its entirety, I would divide it into three worlds – planet X, planet Y and planet Z. That's how different life was. Planet X where I was born and raised was a family-oriented life where the parents were in charge. Many moms were stay at home moms. All revolved around the home and church. Most decisions were made by parents. They could spank the children, the teachers could as well, and when in college we were protected by

guards. There were no drugs and no gang wars. We came close to a fight once when the boys who lived in Claymont came to fight the boys from Arden. However, the boys from Claymont couldn't navigate the Arden terrain. I call it the rumble that never happened.

Life today in planet Z is completely different and doesn't resemble X. One thing is pretty much the same though, and that is education. Some on planet X didn't have the opportunity to attend college. I'm grateful I did. Today, many more go on to higher education.

Planet Y is mainly for transitioning from X to Z.

Last but not least, I appreciate all the help I received in preparing for this essay:

My parents who loved me and raised me to be who I am today, they worked hard on the integration and made great provisions for me. I appreciate and love them still.

Virginia Smilak, our historian, who provided me with historical documents, she also was instrumental in compiling information on my grandmother, Pauline Dyson.

My sister Lynn Anderson and brother Victor Anderson, who also contributed historical information.

Photos were enhanced by Landor employees.

ETHEL LEE AND ETHEL LOUISE BELTON

LESSONS FOR A LIFETIME

BY BRIGITTE LOUISE BROWN



Ethel Louise Belton 17 years old

Ethel Louise Belton high school photo.

June 11, 1981, is a day forever etched in my memory. It is the day my mother, Ethel Louise Bleton, died. The day before had been filled with lots of excitement. I was going to be married in a month and so mother and I went shopping for a dress for her as well as gifts for my sister and her family, who were coming the next day. We found the perfect dress for mother. As she tried it on, I could see how beautiful, elegant, and full of life she felt in that light blue chiffon pleated dress, with a bodice covered in lace. She took a few fabric-flowing spins in it, which made the whole store radiate with her glowing happiness. After we purchased a few gifts for my older sister Andreia's family, we returned home and declared the shopping trip a complete success.

Andreia and her family arrived the next day. Her husband was an officer in the military and was being transferred 2800 miles across country to Ft. Lewis in Tacoma, Washington. They were excited about the long trip, which they were making in a brand new Volkswagen van. When Mother and I saw their new vehicle, the most amazing thing happened. Mother said the muffler looked loose! Andreia and I stared at each other, puzzled. How could she know this, when she never dabbled in mechanics?! Besides, my brother-in-law had not noticed it either. Her observation proved to be correct and fortuitous. It extended their stay just enough, while the muffler problem was resolved.

Then came the events that shattered our world. While on my bed, playing with her grandson, mother asked me whether it was time for her heart pills. I told her that she was ten minutes early. Suddenly, frantic took over mother's voice. She said she needed them now. I ran to her room, retrieved the medicine, and shouted to Andreia to call 911. Mother had lost consciousness and we worked feverishly to revive her. The paramedics arrived and used a defibrillator a few times to try resuscitating her. Having no success, they rushed her to the hospital. We picked up medical and insurance information and followed in a panic.

When we got to the hospital, we were escorted to a small room. I had taken my mother to the hospital many times, but this was my first time seeing this room. My sister, her husband, and I were sitting there for what seemed like an eternity. Then a doctor walked in and uttered the absolute worst words one can imagine in that situation: "I'm sorry. She's gone." That day, my life changed. I was forced to



Brigitte in the foreground with her mother Ethel Louise Belton, her sister Andreia and her brother William.

grow up. I discovered that before I could go forward, I had to understand what my mother's life had meant to me.

The next week was the hardest one of my life. I had to make most of the arrangements and decisions about mother's funeral. We buried her in the elegant light blue gown that she had bought to wear at my wedding. I was the only one to see her wear it when she was alive. Then began the inevitable efforts to interpret signs that perhaps mother knew her end was near. Before Mother and I went to shop for the gown and gifts, we stopped at her lawyer's office for her to sign and pick up her last will and testament. How odd the muffler falling off a brand new vehicle; had it not delayed Andreia's trip, I would have been left alone to handle the details of mother's homegoing. Cell phones were not widely owned in the 1980s, so Andreia would not have gotten the word about mother for several days. In one of the most inexplicable coincidences, mother passed away on June 11th, the same day her father had left this world 43 years earlier!

Perhaps the biggest part of mother's life I came to understand and value before I could move on was her involvement in the *Belton v. Gebhart* case. I am

Brigitte Louise Brown, daughter of Ethel Louise Belton and granddaughter of Ethel Lee and Louis Belton. Mother had been born with a congenital heart defect, which was made worse by an episode of rheumatic fever. This delicate condition would haunt my mother for her entire life. After my grandfather's death, in 1938, my grandmother and her fragile two-year-old daughter moved to Hickman Row in Claymont, Delaware.

Claymont, Delaware was a predominately White town, so White that Hickman Row was a row of houses strictly designated for Blacks. The houses on Hickman Row had their own history. There were two blocks of row houses that were constructed by the Worth Steel Corporation in 1919, for their Black workers, less than two miles from the steel mill. The houses were approximately 1,350 square feet with one bathroom and three bedrooms. Eventually, these homes were sold to Blacks who lived and worked in and around the steel mill in Claymont.

For many years, Delaware had only one high school for Black students in the entire state: Howard High School. It was located in an industrial area in the city of Wilmington in New Castle County. If you lived in one of the lower counties such as Kent or Sussex, most likely your education stopped around the eighth grade, unless you had a relative that you could live with up in New Castle County. Transportation was not provided to the Black students to attend school.

All-Black Howard High was built in a not-so-desirable part of Wilmington, bordered by industrial buildings and factories. The Black children who went to Howard High from Claymont had to ride the city bus which cost the parents money each day. Wilmington was about 10 miles away; because the students rode a city bus, there were local stops on the route, so the students were looking at about an hour to get to school in the morning. Once off the bus, Howard was still another four blocks away. The frustrating part, my mother told me, was that Black students had to walk about a mile to the bus stop, past the all-White Claymont High School. This was humiliating and degrading. In fact, my mother said, they passed a total of three White high schools on the way to Wilmington.

Compared to Howard High, Claymont High was well maintained in a beautiful setting with many extracurricular activities including sports and clubs. Students had new books while Howard had old, handed-down books from white schools. Howard High had approximately 1300 students in attendance while Claymont High had approximately 400 students. Now remember every Black student in the State of Delaware had to go to Howard High. For me, just the thought of only one Black high school in an entire state makes me angry.



Brigitte with her mother
Ethel Louise Belton.



Ethel Louise Belton's parents.

It was now time for my mother to begin high school. My grandmother wanted her daughter to go to Claymont High. One reason was that it was closer to their home and another was her daughter's congenital heart condition. In addition, Claymont High had many classes that were not offered at Howard, including business courses which Ethel Louise was interested in. If she could attend Claymont High, this would relieve a tremendous amount of stress off both of them.

Grandmother's family, as well as others on Hickman Row, owned their homes, which meant that the taxes they paid went into maintaining and fortifying Claymont High School. Before my mother started attending Howard High, my grandmother appealed to the Claymont High School Board to allow her daughter to attend its all-White school. Even with the knowledge of her medical disability, they denied

her entrance to the school. They did so simply because of the color of her skin; they showed no regard for her fragile condition. My grandmother said: "We are all Americans, and when the state sets up separate schools for certain people of a separate color, then I and others are made to feel ashamed and embarrassed."

Grandmother sought help from the only Black lawyer in the state of Delaware: Louis Redding. Redding was himself a graduate of the all-Black Howard High and Harvard Law School. He was the first Black to be admitted to the Delaware Bar Association. At the time my grandmother sought him out, he was a prominent lawyer, civil rights activist, and member of the Wilmington NAACP. Redding, along with attorney Jack Greenberg of the New York NAACP, sought other Black parents on Hickman Row whose children were denied admission to Claymont High and had them sign the petition for entrance. Once denied, their case went to the Delaware Superior Court where Chancellor Collins Seitz looked at everything from



Ethel Louise Belton's mother, Mrs. Ethel Lee Belton, in later life.



Ethel Louise Belton's graduation photo.

drinking fountains to toilets in the school. He basically found that everything at Howard was inferior to Claymont. He knew there was no way to make the school equal, so Chancellor Seitz concluded that “the facilities and educational opportunities at No. 107 (Black School) are substantially inferior in a Constitutional sense, to those at No. 29 (White School). For the reasons stated in connection with Claymont I do not believe the relief should merely be an order to make equal. An injunction will issue preventing the defendants and their agents from refusing these plaintiffs, and those similarly situated, admission to School No. 29 (White School) because of their color.” In 1952, my mother’s case, *Belton v. Gebhart*, won in state court. Thurgood Marshall saw that this case would add credibility to the *Brown v. Board* consolidated case, since it was the only one to

win at the state level in Delaware. *Belton v. Gebhart* was added two weeks prior to *Brown v. Board* going to the U. S. Supreme Court.

My mother had never given up hope of attending Claymont High. In an interview with *Jet* magazine in 1964, she said: “Even when I was in the tenth grade. I still hoped to enroll. Howard didn’t have business courses, so two times a week, after school, I walked 15 blocks to Carver Vocational School to take shorthand and typing. Those nights I went home alone. Some nights, it was cold and dark and lonely.” My mother graduated the year the decision came down. She also said: “I’ve always been sickly. That’s why my mother fought so hard to get me into a school close to home. I felt kind of great. It wasn’t everybody who took a stand like my mother and me. Schools are ‘open’ now because we took a stand. I’m glad I helped start the change in Delaware. The only hurting part is that I didn’t get a chance to go to Claymont . . . but it helped my children and others. I feel very privileged to be a part of the change in Delaware.”

I am very proud of my grandmother and my mother for initiating the educational change in Delaware. Nothing came easy for decades in Delaware and change was slow. By the time I went to high school in the 1970s, it still felt segregated. My high school at the time had close to three thousand students and approximately 30 were Black. The situation was still so dire in Delaware that in 1979 the state enacted forced bussing which remained into the 2000s. Even my children were bussed to suburban schools, while the suburban school students were bussed into the city.

My mother, Ethel Louise, married my father, William Brown in 1955. Thanks to her extensive business knowledge, she landed a position as the private secretary to Louis Redding that same year. She went to Delaware State College but was unable to finish because she was constantly sick. In 1975 at the age of 39, my mother was forced to go on total disability because of her illness; I became her caretaker at 15 years of age. As I think back on what her life meant to me, I return to determination and commitment to the importance of education. She taught my siblings and me that knowledge is power and equal education is paramount. Knowing my mother's history has empowered me. With her strength, I have found the inspiration to move forward in my life.



My parents' home at the time of
Belton (Bulah) v. Gebhardt.

Editor's Note: Ms. Brown permitted the editors to emphasize the personal experiences that she provided in her narrative.



Shirley Bulah.

SHIRLEY BULAH

A MOTHER'S COURAGE

BY RENÉ MICHELLE RICKS-STAMPS

When I was asked to write an essay about my mother, Shirley Barbara Bulah, I was in awe. I did not spend time with my mother until later in her life. When we began sharing what our lives had been like during the time we spent apart she did not talk to me about the *Brown* era. She was quiet and meek about her experiences. I was unaware that she had been part of the Delaware school desegregation case

of *Belton (Bulah) v. Gebhardt* until she died in 2003.

After my mother's death I began to research. I found family, friends, photos, books and even a play. There were also newspaper articles about their case and found letters her mother had written and notes to attorney Louis Redding. He had worked with my grandmother to challenge racial segregation in Delaware public schools. Louis Lorenzo Redding was the first African American attorney in Delaware. He was a member of the NAACP and known for being an advocate for civil rights.

When I finally learned the story about my grandmother on my mother's behalf, like Joseph or Moses, I felt like I had been lost but now found. I had uncovered family history and I was a part of that legacy.

It was my oldest daughter who encouraged me to learn about my mother's life. I have three biological children and a household of four children altogether, a son and three daughters. As a parent I worry that in some cases there are schools with limited resources. Like my grandmother, I continue to battle for equality.

It seems my daughter's curiosity about my mother and her family was based on her appearance because what makes us who we are is a multiplicity of ethnicities, cultures, and heritages, which accounts for our physical differences. Ultimately, we discovered that my oldest daughter, unlike her siblings, resembled my biological mother whose biological mother was of Asian descent. Her interest led us to find out more about her grandmother, my biological mother, to answer her question: "What family member do I look like?"

I discovered that around the age of twenty-one my mother was married and expecting her third child. She was in the Army. I believe she was trying to focus on her military career and, in 1965, it just was not easy for an African American woman to be in the military with children. She was an Army nurse and later continued her nursing career in Wilmington, Delaware. She later became an African American Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) minister in Maryland. Mother eventual-



René with her mother, Shirley Bulah.

ly returned home to Delaware. She lived in Wilmington until she died of a heart attack in 2003.

I do not believe either of our lives were mistakes. After all she is part of history. There is so much to my story that I can't begin to share all the details in an essay. Someday I hope to write a book and will call it *Queens of My Heart*, because once I understood this history, that is how I viewed my mother and grandmother.

As I attempt to tell my mother's story, let me assure you that much of what she experienced is no different than many other women. If my mother was here today, I'm sure she would want to share the historical spotlight with each one of you.

My mother's story of hardship started when her biological mother, who was of Asian descent, gave birth to a child whose father was of African American decent. Her mother made what I believe must have been a difficult decision to not raise her own child. It appears she did not discuss her plans with anyone in authority. She simply left her infant, my mother, in a public space and walked away. When my mother was found a few blocks from the train station in Wilmington, Delaware, a story appeared in the local paper about an abandoned infant. Sarah and Fred Bulah read the newspaper account and felt compelled to give this infant a home and decided to make her part of their family. In my view this was supposed to happen. It was fate.

My mother was born in 1945, the day and month we do not know. But what we do know is that Fred and Sarah Bulah adopted her and named her Shirley Barbara. With the addition of Shirley, the couple had nine children in their household. My grandmother Sarah was quoted as saying: "She only wanted the best for her Shirley." And: "All she wanted was for a child to get their due." Her eight siblings welcomed the infant and helped care for her. She quickly became the center of attention and once she reached elementary school age my grandmother grew more and more concerned about the circumstances still surrounding education for African Americans in Delaware. The other Bulah children were well past elementary school age and had been educated in the same segregated school that Shirley was attending.

As the story goes, a school bus transporting White elementary students passed their home every day, yet my grandmother had to drive my mother to the one-room school for African American children. She was angered and frustrated that her youngest child was not able to attend classes at the large brick building with a playground and library. She could not tolerate one more moment that a school



Shirley Bulah.

bus passed their home every day and would not pick up my mother because of the color of her skin.

My grandmother Sarah was known for often speaking with their church pastor about the injustices and indignities witnessed in the community. She became more and more concerned about the circumstances still surrounding education, the inequalities experienced by African Americans in Delaware. She talked to him about how women struggled to be recognized for their contributions and that it seemed they had no power to make things better for their children. She confided in the church pastor that she could no longer stand idly by while Black people were being spit on and beaten to death just because they

wanted to use the restroom, get a drink of water, or board a bus and get a public ride home.

The pastor of their church listened politely but encouraged my grandmother to be patient and wait for change to come. She understood that he was not willing to take direct action, so she decided to write a letter to the Governor of Delaware. The response to her letter made her even more determined. He told her the school district simply did not provide bus transportation for African American children. The letter offered no apology nor promise to make change.

After receiving the governor's reply, my grandmother knew it was time to take action herself, so she called local attorney Louis Redding. She discovered that he was already working with the NAACP on the matter of school segregation at the high school level in Delaware. With that she moved ahead asking him to help her on behalf of her elementary school daughter, Shirley. Consequently, a case was developed to file a legal challenge to segregated elementary schools.

A small group of African American parents had already pursued legal action in state court against racially segregated high schools. Their case involved only twelve children. They were successful in having their children admitted, but that did not apply to all high schools and did not open the doors for my mother.

My grandmother did not stop, to help her was Attorney Redding, who worked with members of the legal team from the NAACP headquarters in New York. Now the NAACP cases for Delaware challenged racially segregated high schools and elementary schools. The cases were filed together as *Belton (Bulah) v. Gebhart*.

My grandmother's case, on behalf of my mother, was heard as part of *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, my mother did not have an easy time attending integrated schools. My mother was quoted as saying

that she was spit on and kids would put gum in her hair and pulled her hair. And, many times she would need to call home and have grandma come pick her up because things were unbearable.

After learning so much about my family's involvement with school desegregation, I wanted to talk to someone who had been there. Almost all of the participants were deceased. I was able to find one of the attorneys, Jack Greenberg. I found out he was a professor and Dean of Columbia University Law School in New York. So, I called and left a message and he called me right back within minutes of hearing my message. I remember telling him on the message that I was the daughter of Shirley Bulah. I remember him being in awe and speechless. It seemed as though he was reliving the history, but then he asked me how he could help me, and I began telling him I wanted to know the story of *Bulah v. Gebhart*.



René Ricks-Stamps.

Jack and I would email each other. He wanted me to come meet the NAACP Legal Defense Fund team, which for me was a little easier said than done. I remember telling him on several occasions: “I got to come see you.” I told him, “I just want to hug your neck and just say thank you.” I told him one day: “I have now adopted you as my uncle.” I believe with all my heart that he loved me. Finally, I met Jack and we sat together enjoying coffee and his favorite apple pie. I asked him what he wanted me to do. I asked him how I could be part of this legacy. How could I make him proud of me? And, he told me: “You’re already doing it.” He said, “Teach your children and tell the story.” And, with tears in my eyes and in his, I promised I would.

I am so proud of my grandmother and grandfather, as well as my mother, for standing up for what they believed in. I’ve figured out that this madness is not about color. It’s about equality, which has no color. People continue to fight for equality. Maybe not the same way they did sixty years ago, but we all fight daily to be respected and appreciated. We fight daily to overcome injustice. But no matter if you stand or sit or kneel, never stop believing and having hope in a better tomorrow. Tomorrow is our future and our future begins with you.



Bernice Byrd.

BERNICE "SANDY" BYRD (COUCH)

GROWING UP ON HICKMAN ROW IN CLAYMONT, DELAWARE

My birth name is Bernice Willis but I was called "Sandy" due to the natural color of my hair. I was raised in Claymont, Delaware by my paternal grandparents. They took care of me when my father, Roosevelt Byrd, went in the military during World War II. They wanted someone to remind them of their son while he was away. I rarely saw my mom, Gwendolyn Willis. After moving in with my father's parents, I became known as Sandy Byrd. We lived on

Hickman Row until I was in the seventh grade but then moved up the block, still on Hickman Road, because my grandparents had built a house there.

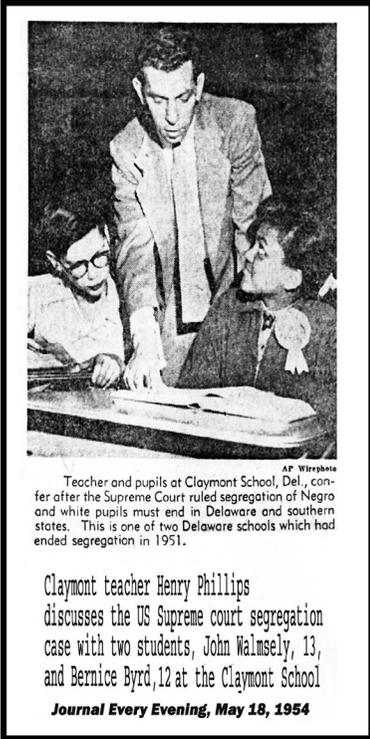
There were people living on Hickman Row who were related to us. Right next door to me was my grandfather's brother and his family, and a few houses down, is where my grandmother's niece and her family lived. Since it was a small community, we all knew each other and the children played with those who were their same age. Most of the families established gardens behind their homes and raised vegetables.

Up the hill, behind the "Row," there was the one-room school house for African American children from the first through the sixth grades. Its name was State Line School. The school's name was derived from its location on the state line between Delaware and Pennsylvania. The school building was built by the Pierre S. Dupont Company for Black kids in Claymont. It was actually a two-room building – one room was used for the school and one was used for the church, Union Baptist.

There was one teacher for all the grades, Mrs. Dyson. Mrs. Dyson would move students around in the school room so they were studying at the level that was best for them. In my case, I skipped one grade.

All of the men living on Hickman Row worked at the Worth Steel Company. The White families who worked at the steel company lived in another neighborhood. Both of these neighborhoods had been built by the mill for their employees. Once inside the mill, all the men, White and Black, would work side by side. On Saturdays, the men sometimes would go into Pennsylvania and eat and drink together.

Throughout my fifth and sixth grades, my grandmother spoke on the telephone to people about integrating the school system. No one asked me anything about what I thought. Once the decision was made to integrate the schools in 1952, my grandmother sent me down the hill to catch the school bus on my first



Desegregating Claymont High School.

day of school. She just said: “Go get on the school bus.” I had no choice. The other kids waiting for the bus totally ignored me because of my age. I was the youngest.

When the school bus arrived, we got on it. The driver was White and we picked up other White kids. When we arrived at the school, the press, T.V. cameras, and radio personnel were waiting for us. The superintendent, principal, and some teachers were also waiting for us.

I was surprised to be attending school in such a huge building. We were quietly escorted from the bus into the school. I was very nervous because of the size of the school. I was the only Black kid in the entire seventh grade, as well as, the youngest in my seventh grade class. I was taken to my locker and to my very first class. I was overwhelmed by the extensive space inside the building and because I did not know anyone in my class. The fact that everyone was White did not bother me. Instead it was just that everything was new to me.

I met two girls who became my friends. Throughout the next years, if one of us got into trouble, the other two were sent for in order to check on their involvement. I ate lunch with both of them. Sometimes I would go to another White girl’s house for lunch. Othertimes, we would go to the Sub House down the street for lunch or eat at school. However, after school I would play with the Black kids in my neighborhood.

The school was very different, not only because it was so large, but because we were all studying the same thing together in one classroom. Different classes and studies were not going on at the same time in one room like there had been in the one-

my first day was uneventful. I received my books and assignments and had lunch. I

received my books and assignments and had lunch. I

received my books and assignments and had lunch. I

received my books and assignments and had lunch. I

received my books and assignments and had lunch. I



Claymont seventh grade class 1952-1953. Teacher Mrs. Snyder. Bernice Byrd lower right front row.



Bernice Byrd (Couch) viewing Belton (Bulah) v. Gebhart exhibit.

room school house. I never had any problems with my school work nor did I ever have any problems with any of my classmates. I always felt welcomed. Of course, the older children ignored me (and my classmates) because we were younger.

In the last four years of high school, I managed the hockey team, the softball team and basketball team. Although I couldn't play basketball or hockey or softball, I wanted to be on the team so they made me the manager. I am also one of those who cannot sing, play a musical instrument, or dance. My talents were getting along with everyone, being good in my studies, and knowing how to organize.

On Saturday, I spent the day going shopping with my grandmother. On Sunday, I attended Sunday school, then church. Afterwards, I went home with my grandparents for Sunday dinner. On some Sundays the minister came for dinner. This means that I spent my weekends with Black people. However, starting on Mondays, I spent the week with white kids. Surprisingly, I never could figure out the difference. And I still can't.

When my school class had proms, I attended. During my junior year, I met a good looking Black guy and invited him to my junior prom. During my senior year I had met another guy and invited him to my senior prom. We fell in love, married and a year later, in 1959, I had our first child.

Those years in Claymont were good. No one treated me any differently than my other classmates. I believe that my six years of experiences in an all-White school confirmed my feelings that all people are the same, regardless of race. Some people are good and some are bad.

After graduation, I had two children. When I divorced, I moved to Atlantic City, New Jersey, with my children to work as an assistant director at the Atlantic

City Detox Center where I later became director. However, in order to be the director, I needed a college degree, so I enrolled in the nation's first university established for African Americans, Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania. By including my work experience as part of my credits, I earned a Master's degree in Human Services in 1987. I worked at the Detox Center until I retired. Since then, I have been involved in political committees and the local school board.

As a young person I did not realize that going to Claymont High School had any significance or that we had become part of the *Brown v. Board* cases. I just went to school. It was many years later that I became aware of the fact that we were the first Black students to go to an all-White high school in the segregated states in 1952, two years before the *Brown* decision. At different commemorations in Claymont, Delaware, I was fortunate to meet Collins Seitz and Senator Joe Biden.

After becoming aware of the significance of the *Belton* case and the integration of Claymont High School by me and my friends, I have given speeches about my experiences attending Claymont High School and being one of the first Black students to integrate the school. I try to make others aware of how things used to be between the races in this country and how families and individuals helped make changes that made things better.

Attending Claymont High School made me more aware that I need to see people for who they are, not just their color. That is how I have lived my life. I choose my friends according to who they are and not what they look like.



Bernice Byrd "Sandy" Couch.



Myrtha Trotter.

MYRTHA DELORES TROTTER (RANDOLPH)

MY STORY: FROM A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL TO CLAYMONT HIGH SCHOOL

I grew up in an area in Claymont, Delaware, called Hickman Row. This was housing built by the Worth Steel Mill for their Black workers. Several of these families had moved from Pennsylvania to work for the Steel Mill and lived in Hickman Row together. Most of the men worked in the mill. Some of the families were related, but not all of them.

During my early school years, I went to State Line School, an all-Colored, one-room elementary school for the kids of Hickman Row. It was part of the Claymont Public School District. Our teacher, Mrs. Pauline Dyson, who also lived in Hickman Row, taught all six grades – first through sixth. All the younger children in our community walked up the hill to this one-room school. I didn't think about going to any other school. It was in our community so we just went. There were three of us in my class. We studied English, math, science, spelling, history, geography, art, and music. Being a small community school with only one teacher meant that we could learn at the level we needed in any subject.

When I was ready for seventh grade, I attended Howard High School, in Wilmington, Delaware. This all-Black school is where everyone in my community completed grades seven through twelve. The state of Delaware, through New Castle County, paid for us to ride public transportation to school. The bus ran seven days a week and was also used by working people. We walked a long distance to the stop then stood out in the weather waiting for the bus. Some of the drivers would close the door on whoever was the last one getting on or off the bus. It happened to me. We sat in the back of the bus. I never knew why we had to sit in the back; it was the norm because we were Negroes. We traveled 18 miles roundtrip each school day, passing three White high schools along the way.

Seven parents in Hickman Row decided in 1951 to register their older children at Claymont High School, which was only two miles away from where we lived. We applied for attendance on January 29, 1951, but were denied because the state law banned integrated schools. A class-action suit was brought against Claymont Public Schools. It named my father, Mr. Hollan Trotter, and six other parents. Mrs. Ethel Lee Belton was one of the plaintiffs. She wanted her daughter, Ethel Louise Belton, who had a heart problem, to go to a school closer to her home. Belton was the first name to appear alphabetically among all plaintiffs, so

the case became known as *Belton v. Gebhart*, with Francis B. Gebhart representing the Claymont School Board.

Attorneys Louis Redding and Jack Greenberg argued our case in the Court of Chancery in Wilmington, Delaware. Chancellor Collins Seitz heard the argument, and on April 1, 1952, he decided in favor for the students to attend Claymont High School immediately. Parents from *Belton v. Gebhart* should be given credit: they endured the entire process without any sign of fear. My parents were glad to be part of history. I didn't have any feelings one way or the other. I knew I had to go to school until the age of 16.

Hickman Row students, along with the Anderson siblings from Ardencroft, integrated Claymont High on September 4, 1952, nearly two years before the Supreme Court ruled on *Brown v. Board of Education*. We were, in fact, the first Black students to attend a public high school in the seventeen states where racial segregation was mandated by law in phases of public life. I was fourteen years old and a sophomore then. I had no idea what to expect. I felt depressed and dejected those first few days when there was name calling and eggs thrown at our school bus. I missed the friends I left at Howard High School. We understood each other. Still, I endured.

I eventually made friends at Claymont High School. I participated in sports activities and my teammates were very supportive. I played J.V. girls' basketball and was voted captain of the team. With the exception of Chichester High School (Boothwyn, PA), we played all-White high schools. I was the only Colored girl on the court. It gave me a sense of pride that there weren't any incidents. I also played field hockey during my junior year. Almena Short, Styron Sanford, another African American student and me, were invited to a prom party by one of our new classmates in our junior year. We really enjoyed ourselves. We were also invited to Howard High's class of 1955 prom. It was very nice. Our dates were members of the class of 1955, and were gentlemen. I graduated June 16, 1955.

While we were attending Claymont High School, our case, *Belton (Bulah) v. Gebhart* was added to the *Brown v. Board* case at the U.S. Supreme Court. I was just going to school and doing what I had to do, and not paying attention to what was going on in the courts. Later, I realized that not only was our case part of *Brown*, but that our Hickman Row students, having already been in school, helped influence the decision. I was very proud of our community.

I did not go to college but worked in two medical university libraries. I was the first Black Acquisitions Assistant with the Scott Memorial Library at Thomas Jefferson University, and the first Black Librarian Assistant at the Pennsylvania Hospital Medical Library, University of Pennsylvania. Both jobs were in Philadelphia.

There were two African Americans working at Scott Memorial Library. I loved my job. I had a typist, but I typed the monthly booklist that was sent to departments, medical school libraries, and doctors. I was the only African American working at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania.

We at Claymont were a part of history.



Myrtha Trotter Randolph.

I was in *Life Magazine*, *Ebony*, *Red Book*, and a few African American newspapers. On March 24, 1956, the Teachers' Union of New York City recognized me at the Biltmore Hotel. Mr. Harvey E. Stahl, former Superintendent of Claymont School District, Newcastle County, accompanied me. There were 1,700 teachers in attendance. Eight of us were given citations for the tenth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* during a President Lincoln's dinner at the Hanover Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, DE, February 11, 1964.

In 1997, a historical marker was placed in front of the old Claymont High School. That building is now the Claymont Community Center. Judge Collins J. Seitz, who rendered the 1950 decision to integrate the University of Delaware and ordered the integration of Claymont schools, attended the commemora-

tion when the historic marker was unveiled and met with some of the students who had integrated Claymont.

The students who attended Claymont in 1952 and their families received recognition during a commemoration at the Claymont Elementary School on September 18, 2004. This was a commemoration for the 52nd year that Claymont had integrated, and the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board* decision. Mr. Jack Greenberg, a lawyer from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who worked on our case – came from New York City to speak of his memories of the events. Several local politicians also spoke at the events. A local newspaper ran our story and finally people of the area began to realize the significance of what we had done in Claymont, integrating peacefully two years before *Brown*. We were recognized as civil rights pioneers.

I have a daughter and a son and one granddaughter. My daughter is a civil engineer and my son was in the Delaware Wing Civil Air Patrol. My children are proud that their mother was a civil rights pioneer.

SAGER TRYON

LEGACY

BY VIRGINIA TRYON SMILACK



Sager Tryon as a young man.

Early in January 1988, I drove to Claymont, Delaware, to visit my parents, Evelyn and Sager Tryon, who were still living in my childhood home. I found my parents in the living room, surrounded by papers everywhere! The floor, chairs, couch and the organ bench were covered. I had to move some of them before I could sit on the ottoman. “What’s going on?” I asked. Sitting in his rocking chair, pipe in hand, dad said, with a sense of urgency, “The Claymont story must be told.” Over the years, dad had never really talked in detail about the events of 1950-1954; nor had he told us how he, a white man, had become so emotionally invested in racial equality. Now he fervently expressed his desire to finally tell the story of the community of Claymont, Delaware, and its stand for school integration. As I sat and listened to dad reminisce, sharing his memories of being actively involved on the School Board and in the decisions they made, my mind awakened to my own recollections of those years. Although I was very young when the events that led to school integration occurred (I was born in 1947), I had retained memories – some clear, some disjointed, from that time. Now my childhood memories began to fall into place: the phone calls, going with dad when he talked to people, the meetings in the house, the tears, the anger, the hope, and the joy.

PUTTING MY MEMORIES INTO CONTEXT

My job as the youngest child was to call dad to dinner each night. One evening, I went into the living room where he was sitting in his rocking chair. He was reading the newspaper and not sleeping as he sometimes did. I was startled when he spoke out loud; “Now we can do it!” He stood up before I could even get his attention. He passed by me, probably not even seeing me, and headed towards the dining room. Where was he going? It did not seem to me that he was going to dinner. However, when he saw that the food was on the table, he stopped and sat down. It was obvious by his movements and the energy in his voice that he was excited. He told mom he needed to make a phone call. Within a few minutes, he could wait no longer and went to make that call. I do not actually remember what was said. Years later he related that he had called Superintendent Harvey Stahl. After he told him about the Delaware Chancery Court’s decision to admit a few Black students to the all-White University of Delaware, Mr. Stahl agreed that now, August 1950, was the right time to integrate Claymont High School. With this positive development, dad said, they could see a way forward. After seeking



Virginia Smilack her dad Sager Tryon, around 1950.

and getting approval from Black parents, the quest for school integration began; the parents began the process by suing for the admittance of their children into the all-White Claymont High School.

I remember several meetings at my home. At one meeting, I recall being asked to hang a lady's coat on the newel post. The coat had fur on the collar. The lady was much shorter than the men, and she had graying hair and wore a beautiful dark blue dress, like a Sunday church dress. I remember her because she spoke to me. I now know that the lady who came to the meeting was Mrs. Pauline Dyson, a leader of Claymont's Black community. I am not sure who the men were, other than Mr. Stahl. Lawyers, maybe? Board members? I only remember Mrs. Dyson being there at the one meeting, but my sisters say she came to our home several times.

There were times when dad would take me on errands with him and I was always happy to be allowed to go along. Being the youngest child, I felt special to go alone with dad on an errand. One trip stands out because it didn't make sense to me. We had gone to Fletcher's Dry Cleaning Store, and dad and the owner (Mr. A. Eugene Fletcher, President of the School Board) waited until another customer had left before talking. Why were we in the cleaners when we took nothing to be cleaned and we brought nothing home? I do not know specifically what they talked about, but it was during this time so I know they were planning something about integrating the schools. Another afternoon, dad took me with him when he walked across the street to visit our neighbor, Mr. George Brown. He had told mom he was going to try and persuade Mr. Brown to replace a man going off the Board. All the Board members were white and dad needed someone on the Board to support the integration plans. He talked with Mr. Brown while I stood nearby listening. I noticed that Mr. Brown seemed uncomfortable. Then I went to watch the older boys playing ball on the side lawn. Finally, when we headed home, I noticed dad was contentedly smoking his pipe and that he was happy. Mr. Brown had finally agreed to run in the next School Board election, which he would go on to win.

HOW TO INTEGRATE ON OPENING DAY 1952

After the Delaware courts had found for immediate integration, Claymont was ready to admit all high school aged Black students into the school. However, tensions had mounted because the state court had affirmed the decision to integrate Claymont but no official mandate had come from the State Board. On September 3, 1952, the day before school was to start, dad stayed home from work. Certainly, it was unusual for him to be home on a week day. I watched him as he paced back and forth, from his rocking chair to the phone. Mom paced in the kitchen. Both were anxious. Several times during the day, dad was on the



Virginia Tryon Smilack.

phone, talking with Claymont administrators and Board members and with the State School Board office. Legally, the students could not be enrolled without a mandate. However, the school made the decision to enroll the students anyway – without a mandate, and the parents were informed. But, finally, late that night a representative from the State Board called and gave verbal authorization, a verbal mandate, to admit the students. The students could attend school legally.

The next morning, dad left for work later than usual because he was still home when my sisters and I were getting ready for school, leaving just before we did. Mom drove me to the Stone School for my first day of kindergarten. Dad had gone to the high school with all the other School Board members to greet the Black students and to be there in case there was a problem. The students exited the buses, walked into the school, and were taken to their homerooms. September 4, 1952, passed like any other school day. There were no problems on opening day. Although the next day the state demanded the children be sent home, Claymont stood firm and the students remained. The school year had started.

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL

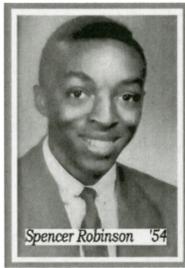
For me, kindergarten began that same day that the integration of the high school occurred. I was excited to go to school. Yet the year did not turn out to be a good one for me. My kindergarten teacher obviously did not like me. I entered kindergarten reading a little and came out unable to read. I spent too many hours sitting in the dark, damp, moldy coat room being punished without understanding what I had done wrong. It was not until many years later that I wondered if she had been angry at dad for his support of integrating the schools and simply took it out on me. I wish I had known then that this could have been another reason and that I was not simply a bad, stupid kid. I still do not know.

A DAY THAT CHANGED ME

The day was very hot, the sun shone relentlessly, and the grass itched my legs. One boy said to me in that tone when you know you are being put down, that his mother did not like Black people and neither should I. He used a term, the “N” word, that I learned was a racial slur, I had never heard. Here I was, four years old when my accusing friend sprang his mother’s racial bias on me. At that age I did not have the benefit of historical or literary knowledge to understand the meaning or use of this term. I had no practical knowledge with which to refute this awful expression, since it was never imparted to me at home or by other friends. But something visceral spoke to me. The way he said it, all nasty and mean, made me feel that he was disparaging all people of color. Then it clicked. As I sat there in



Merle Anderson '54



Spencer Robinson '54



Styron Sanford '55



Almena Short '55



Myrtha Trotter '55

“The Claymont Twelve”
The eleven black students who integrated Claymont High School in 1952. Also, Louise Belton, whose name was on the case (Belton v. Gehart) and who testified in court but then chose not to attend Claymont and remained enrolled at Howard High School. These students and their families were truly civil rights pioneers.



Joan Anderson '56



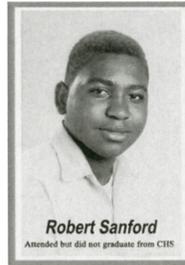
Elbert Crumpler '56



Carol Anderson '57



Bernice Byrd '58



Robert Sanford
Attended but did not graduate from CHS



John Davis
Attended but did not graduate from CHS



E. Louise Belton
Never attended CHS but her name was on the case.

Claymont Twelve poster.

a cascade of confused thoughts and feelings, something rushed over me. I said to him: “Do you mean someone like Fanny?”, who was a Black woman. “Yes,” he said. “Well,” I said, “You love Fanny too!”

Fanny Brown felt like part of our family and was very important to me. She was often there to take care of me and talk to me although she did not live with us except when we went on vacations. Today I guess Fanny would be considered a parttime nanny or housekeeper. To me, she was my friend, almost like a second grandma. My sisters felt the same: she made us feel special as she sat and talked with us. Being so young and naïve, I had no idea that people could hate others just because they were different and that words could be used to deeply hurt others. It is apparent that my parents tried to protect us kids from the controversy in the community over integration; yet here I had run into it full force.

Looking back, I am proud of that little girl. I knew I had to resist the terrible words and feelings I was hearing, although I did not really understand them. And despite the pain, anger, and confusion I was feeling, I stood up to him. At that moment I changed. An awareness entered my mind and soul; I came to know that people could dislike others who were not the same as they were, including something so trivial as the color of their skin. Even though I was only four years old, I could never think like my friend. I knew Fanny was special and everyone should love her.

ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Nearly two years went by without any major problems in Claymont High School, that is, until the night of graduation in June 1954. Claymont High School had two Black students who were to graduate just one month after the *Brown v. Board* decision. Preparations went smoothly until one graduating white student refused to march into the auditorium next to one of the Black students. His defiance was nothing short of disrespect, and school administrators were not going to permit it. For some, graduation night was really tense. At the ceremonies, I sat next to Mom. My sisters were playing in the orchestra. Mom kept looking around and wringing a Kleenex in her hands. She said: “There’s the man. He has a photographer with him. Which ones are the policemen?” Sitting on a folding chair right where he could block the students when they entered from the middle entrance was the father of the boy who had refused to walk in his assigned place. The policemen were in plain clothes. Mom could not tell who they were, but she knew they were there. I was scared that there was going to be a fight. The music started and then from the entrances on each side of the auditorium the students walked in in single file, not side by side: the girls from one side, the boys from the other. Dad was leading the girls; another board member was leading the boys. They walked down the sides of the auditorium and up to the stage, meeting for a brief moment in the middle as they filed into their seats. The man remained quiet throughout the graduation. He must have thought he had won because his son had not marched in with a Black student. The students exited as they had entered. Graduation went peacefully.

But the evening did not end there. When the boy opened his diploma folder, there was no diploma inside. The school had not given him one. Outraged, his father called the newspapers. Our phone rang all night long with calls from re-



Virginia Smilack.

porters, other Board members, administrators, and angry people. Threatening phone calls continued to the point that mom first cried and then became angry. For the next few days, my sisters had to be driven to school. On Sunday, I answered the phone as we were leaving for church and an angry voice said: “How can you sit in church and do the terrible things you are doing to that boy?” Mom was uneasy in church for many months.

Finally, the boy’s family, the School Board, and the administrators met and reached a decision: the boy would receive his diploma since he had actually completed his work. With this resolution, the controversy died down; but the family, absolutely dissatisfied with the new racial climate, chose to move out of Claymont. Dad, as he later told me, felt bad that they had not stood their ground: either make the boy walk where he was supposed to or not allow him to graduate. But the Board felt it was more important that the graduation of Claymont’s first Black students go smoothly and thus sustain the legacy of peaceful integration.

FULFILLING DAD’S WISHES

In 1990, I began doing research to find documents to corroborate dad’s memories. Based on that research, and mom and dad’s memories, mom and I (dad had died) were able to write a speech about the 1952 integration that she was able to present. Another way we honored dad and the community was by creating a history room in the Claymont Community Center and by organizing programs to celebrate Claymont’s high school integration. These programs were covered by the TV news and newspapers, thereby telling the story to more people. After mom died, I continued to present the story in speeches as well as in display posters at different libraries and museums.

LEGACY

Claymont did the right thing by standing firm in its insistence that White and Black children go to school together and enjoy equal opportunities. Claymont was the first school in the segregated states to enroll and graduate Black students and had been able to implement this policy quietly and *legally*. I am really proud of my father for the crucial role he played in this initiative. From his example, I learned a great deal about respect for others and respect for myself. Growing up in our household taught me that freedom, equality, and justice should be available to everyone. I try to live by these ideas and to continue, in my small way, to improve communications and acceptance between people. I want a world where we all sincerely listen to each other and learn from each other. Having said this, maybe, just maybe, I have not lost the idealism of that little four-year old girl who was unable to understand why anyone could hate others just because they are different.

BROWN ET AL. V. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA

Kansas

In the fall of 1950 members of the Topeka, Kansas, Chapter of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) agreed to again challenge the “separate but equal” doctrine governing public education. The road to their decision came by way of eleven school desegregation cases dating from 1881 to 1949 that had been argued in the Kansas Supreme Court. Kansas law permitted but did not require racially segregated elementary schools in what they defined as “first class” cities with populations of 15,000 or more. Several of the early cases heard by the State Supreme Court successfully integrated schools in Kansas towns that did not meet the population standard of a “first class” city.

For a period of two years prior to legal action McKinley Burnett, President of the Topeka NAACP, attempted to persuade Topeka school officials to integrate their elementary schools. The Topeka Board of Education did in fact have leeway to comply with the NAACP request to desegregate the elementary schools, since the community met the standard of being a “first class” city thereby permitting but not requiring racially segregated elementary schools. The NAACP felt that school board refusal to end the practice of racially segregated schools necessitated litigation. Junior and senior high schools in Topeka had already integrated.

The strategy for legal action was conceived by the chapter president, McKinley Burnett, attorneys Charles Scott, John Scott, Charles Bledsoe, Elisha Scott and NAACP chapter secretary, Lucinda Todd. Their plan involved enlisting the support of fellow NAACP members and personal friends as plaintiffs in what would be a class action suit filed against the Board of Education of Topeka Public Schools. A group of thirteen parents agreed to participate on behalf of their children. Each plaintiff was to watch the newspaper for enrollment dates and take their child to the elementary school for White children that was nearest to their home. Once they attempted enrollment and were denied, they were to report back to the NAACP which provided attorneys with the documentation needed to file a lawsuit against the Topeka School Board.

African American schools appeared equal in facilities and teacher salaries. However, with only four elementary schools for African American children compared to eighteen for White children, attending neighborhood schools was all but impossible for African American children. In many instances the schools for African American children were forced to use out-of-date textbooks and were not permitted to participate in district wide programs. What was not in question was the dedication and qualifications of the African American teachers and principals assigned to these schools.

The NAACP with the assistance of the national organization’s legal team led by attorneys Robert Carter and Jack Greenberg filed suit against the board of edu-

cation on February 28, 1951. At that time the name of Oliver Brown was assigned as lead plaintiff. It is suspected that this was a strategy to have a male leading the roster since he was the only man among the local plaintiffs. Their case became *Oliver L. Brown et. al. vs. The Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas)*. The District Court ruled in favor of the school board, forcing the NAACP to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. At the U.S. Supreme Court, the Topeka case joined four school desegregation cases from Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia and Washington, D.C. already on the Court docket. The Court consolidated the five cases under the heading of *Oliver L. Brown et al. vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, et al.*

On May 17, 1954 at 12:52 p.m. the United States Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision, ruling that it was unconstitutional, violating the 14th Amendment, to separate children in public schools based on race. *Brown vs. The Board of Education* ushered in a period of unprecedented change. One year later, in December of 1955, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decree that desegregation of public schools should occur “with all deliberate speed.” Their pronouncement is known as *Brown II*.

The process of school desegregation proved to be a challenge for school districts across the country. In 1979 a group of young attorneys concerned about policy in Topeka Public Schools that allowed open enrollment, fearing it would lead to re-segregation, filed suit against the local board of education. They believed that this choice would encourage White parents to take their children out of schools with diverse student bodies thereby creating predominately African American or predominately White schools. As a result, these attorneys petitioned federal court to reopen the original *Brown* case to determine if Topeka Public Schools had in fact complied with the 1954 ruling.

The 1979 case is commonly known as *Brown III*. The attorneys involved, Richard Jones, Joseph Johnson and Charles Scott, Jr. (son of one of the attorneys in the original case) in association with Chris Hansen from the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) in New York, proved the premise that the local school board was presiding over “racially identifiable” schools and had failed to fully end the practice of racial segregation. In the late 1980’s Topeka Public Schools were found to be out of compliance. The Topeka Board of Education appealed the case to the U. S. Supreme Court, but the Court declined to place the case on the docket. On October 28, 1992, after several appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a final denial. Instead, the Federal District Court directed the Topeka Board of Education to develop plans for compliance. The approved plan entailed building three magnet schools. These schools are excellent facilities and made every effort to be racially balanced. Ironically, one of these new schools is named the Scott Computer and Mathematics Magnet School after the Scott family attorneys for their role in the *Brown* case and civil rights.

The following essays are by three children whose mothers were among the thirteen named adult plaintiffs in the Kansas case. The other essay is based on an interview with Leola Williams Brown (Montgomery), the widow of the namesake of the 1954 Supreme Court decision, Oliver L. Brown.



Maude Lawton.

MAUDE LAWTON

**THE QUEST FOR
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
IN TOPEKA**

BY VICTORIA JEAN LAWTON BENSON

I was six years old when our family joined the effort to integrate the Topeka Public Schools. Some of the details have fled from my memory, like fleeting pre-dawn dreams. But I remember my mother's (Mrs. Maude Ester Sudduth Lawton) determination to see me not have to walk

so far to get to Buchanan Elementary School (for Colored kids) when Lowman Elementary (for White kids) was only a block away. Since we lived in an integrated neighborhood, she was outraged that her children couldn't enjoy the freedom of choice to attend their nearest neighborhood school. It was about equal opportunity – the right to have the equal access and convenience to which we were entitled.

I suspect her determination came from the fact she was multi-talented. She was more than a terribly efficient homemaker. She had an artistic gift too. How she could play the piano!! And she was not formally-trained; she played by ear!! And her voice!! She sang beautifully, like an angel on loan from the celestial choir. And how smart she was!! Her gift for writing resulted in a book she titled *Cottage Number 9*. I sure wish I had a copy of her notes; I would see to it that her papers get published. She was the model of a fine but demanding work ethic, which sometimes got me into trouble.

All nine of us kids in our family were taught the importance of working *hard* and working *together*. Each of us was assigned specific chores. I never liked dusting all of mother's ceramic whatnots or washing dishes. My father would awaken early in the morning and often take care of my responsibility so I didn't suffer the consequences of being a disobedient child. But he didn't always let me get away with that. While he was loving, he was not doting to the point of spoiling me and undermining the family's work ethic. So I still learned our family's values.



Victoria Jean and Carol Kay Lawton.



Victoria Jean Lawton (Benson).

When I was older, I came to learn more about our involvement in the case, much of it by understanding the community we were part of. Mind you, even though we were segregated, I never felt inferior. Our neighborhood had a distinguished history!! My mother was a descendant of the founders of Lane Street Church of God and was quite active in the church. One of its members was McKinley Burnett, president of the Topeka NAACP. Our participation in the case was probably encouraged by him, since he initiated and helped recruit plaintiffs in Topeka to mount the legal challenge against school seg-

regation. And our parents were friends with Charles S. Scott, the lead attorney in the Topeka case. He lived near us on Lane Street.

And the school in our neighborhood, Buchanan School, also contributed to our sense of community. Our teachers lived in our neighborhood, went to our churches, and shopped at the same stores we did. Our relationships were more than teacher and student. Our teachers were in constant contact with our parents, and they had high expectations for us. I remember many of them: Mrs. Abbott, Mrs. Dorothy Crawford, Mrs. McBrier, Mrs. North, Mr. Lewis, and Mrs. Flossie Holland. Our principal was Mrs. Montgomery, who always wore a gray suit with huge shoulder pads. She didn't take no stuff. If you were called into the office, you knew you were getting a spanking with the electric paddle! All of them were brilliant, having earned at least a Masters' Degree in Education. And yet, as I think back, I never understood why the junior high and high schools in Topeka were already integrated, but not the elementary schools.

The integration of some schools and segregation of other others was only one indication of something contradictory and confusing. Our neighborhood was racially-integrated, and we were treated with respect and kindness by our White neighbors. We would beat a path to Mr. Hess's, our white neighborhood grocery store. Mr. David Keller, a white painter, subcontracted plastering jobs to my father and brothers. We washed our clothes at Grace's Laundromat, another white owned and operated business. But Miss Grace also owned the Caravan Club – a Whites-only establishment.

If nothing else, I learned from these experiences that everything takes time to absorb and put into practice. We are more alike than we are different. My parents taught us to be proud of our heritage and to respect ourselves, other people, our environment, and most of all, God. We could do anything we set our minds to and make contributions wherever life took us. Always give your best, they told us. Family, school, and church have taught me this: when each of us gives our best, the world is a better place.

Editor's Note: Mrs. Benson very generously provided the project with recollections, connections, and perspectives on her family's involvement in the Topeka case. With her permission, the editors combined them into the final version her narrative takes here.



Lena Carper.

LENA CARPER

STANDING UP FOR TRUTH AND FRIENDSHIP

BY KATHERINE CARPER SAWYER

My parents and I lived about four blocks west of Gage and Huntoon. In 1946, this was out of Topeka's city limits. I had to walk four blocks to catch the bus for Buchanan Elementary, one of the schools designated for Black kids. As a little girl, four blocks looked like a mile. The streets were just dirt; when it rained, dirt turned

into mud. On came the rubber boots and raincoat. My mother and I would walk up those muddy roads stopping about every block so mom could find a stick or something to scrape the soles of our boots because the mud was so thick that it made walking hard. After getting to the place where the bus would pick me up, there was no place to stand for shelter. So, I stood in the wind, snow, and rain, hoping the bus would be on time.

Snow days were especially tough. The cold, wet, blowing snow nearly froze my tender face. It would be so cold and I would be so bundled up that just getting to the bus stop tired me out. When I was in the third grade, a couple opened a little store about a block on the east side of Gage. Mom and I would go to this store and the owners would let us wait inside when the weather was bad. One day, instead of going to school, mom told me that we were going to a big room at the court house and I would be asked some questions. These men wanted to ask me about my school and the bus ride. I had no idea what all of that meant. I do remember going to a meeting with mom and being told that these men would be lawyers. When I went into the court room that day, I only understood that I was going to be asked some questions about school and I was to tell the truth. At ten years old, I felt this was the biggest room that I had ever been in! Although it was packed full of people, I do not remember having any fear!

I was asked about the bus ride to school. Unlike today's practice of dispatching school buses to pick up students, we rode the regular city buses that ran downtown every day. When I got on the bus, there were not a lot of kids on it. So, the ride to school was not as bad as the ride home because we picked up kids along the way. Coming home, however, was a different story. The bus would be very full leaving the school; some of the kids did not get a seat and had to stand up until someone sitting got off. Sometimes there would be three or four in a seat designed for two. At times it was scary because there would be fights on



Katherine Carper.

the bus. Often the only adult was the White bus driver, and he did not care what was going on. These are some of the things I told the court. It was after the day in court that I became scared because I began to understand a little of what was going on. I began to wonder what my teachers would think about my testimony. Are they going to be mad at me for what I said before all these people? I had great teachers, and, to my relief, they all were just the same to me.

By the time the case settled in 1954, I was in my first year at Capper Junior High. I went from an all-Black school with all-Black teachers to the

complete opposite – all-White kids and teachers. In the first weeks of junior high school, I felt lost and afraid. All the friends that I had been with since kindergarten were not in this school. Many of them had been assigned to go to Boswell Junior High. Just when I was feeling very alone, Mary, a little red-haired White girl who wore glasses, and her friend Janice along came. We quickly bonded. We would eat lunch outside on the school lawn. Soon there were others with whom I became friendly.

I had an experience that stands out to me even today. It happened during football season. Because Capper Junior High did not have school buses, our parents would take turns getting us to the game and then back to the school. In my case there were four of us girls who had formed a close friendship – Kathleen, Virginia, Marilyn, and me – who would ride together. Well everything was going fine until Marilyn's mother took all of us to a game for the first time and returned us back to the school. Later that evening I got a phone call from Kathleen. She told me that Marilyn's mother had told Marilyn she was not to have anything to do with me. So Marilyn called Virginia and Kathleen and told them what her mother said. Now Marilyn wanted the other two girls to agree not to be friends with me also. Kathleen called to tell me that they did not agree and we three should stay friends. And true to their word, we remained close friends throughout our years at Capper Junior High. Marilyn never talked to us anymore.

As I look back over those years, I learned some valuable lessons. First, standing up in court taught me never to be afraid to tell the truth. And second, we should never choose our friends by the color of their skin because we might miss the opportunity for a great friendship. My husband and I have four adult children. When I look at their lives, I can see that they all learned those lessons too.

VIVIAN SCALES

WHAT MY PARENTS WANTED WAS EQUALITY

BY RUTH ANN SCALES EVERETT



Vivian Scales.

Before the [Supreme Court] decision came down, I tell you I enjoyed those days more than I do now. I did.

I'm an only child. I didn't have anybody to go back and forth to school with. I lived on Lime Street [in East Topeka]. We went past Parkdale Elementary and on down Tenth Street to Washington Elementary

School. [I attended Washington] until third grade, and then I transferred to Monroe.

There wasn't much here for us, [Black people] in Topeka. There wasn't very much here for us to do. Things were not open for us: all of the things that opened up, like swimming and all those things, restaurants, all of the public things that needed to be opened anyway. It was different then. But still, we did what we wanted to do with what we had. I don't remember us wanting to do things that we couldn't do. It may have happened, but I don't remember it.

At that time [East Topeka] was not a real rundown place. It was just... Black people doing their little thing. Things were closer knit, the groups were. In some ways, I'm not a good one to expound on integration because I don't see where that really helped us, because I kind of enjoyed the Black schools, and the camaraderie that we had. I was twelve or fourteen at the time of desegregation. I think that camaraderie left right with the desegregation. I knew most of the teachers and most of them knew us and so it was pretty comfortable. Really!

I remember the [plaintiff meetings] met out at Washburn at – what is it – 12th and Washburn at a church. We played out under the streetlight while the [adults] had the meetings, but we didn't go in. I remember my mama dragging me around to different churches and things, but we didn't know what they were talking about at the time.

I know men were not invited because they couldn't be involved because they'd lose their jobs. That's why there was only one man who was a plaintiff. So my dad, George Scales, wasn't involved at all. He worked at Santa Fe, and he wanted to continue to work there. Daddy wasn't thinking about any of it really. He wasn't into it. He was doing all he could to keep [his job] from being threatened. They knew that it would be if they got involved with this controversial thing.

My mother, Vivian Scales, didn't work; she was home all the time and did other things. She was feisty, and I guess she was just born that way! But my father

was quiet, laid back, and kind of depended on mama to talk in whatever had to be done other than work.

I don't think the case changed my parents' lives. I guess they felt like they'd reached one milestone, but there was a lot more to do. And some people may not have been interested in the "lot more." I don't think it bothered my father one way or the other. My mother might have said something, but I don't remember her saying much about the change because nobody was really that happy about the change. I didn't hear much from anybody, at least that I can remember.

I enjoyed going to school – I did! But integration?! It just wasn't that great. It was something I can't explain. But it wasn't great. It wasn't what we thought it was going to be. It happened, but it wasn't the way we wanted. I think people thought we wanted to be with White kids so badly we'd do anything, and that was not the case as far as I'm concerned.

I was already in junior high school at the time, so I didn't really experience going to school with very young [White] children. That made a big difference. I do remember there were girls – White girls – that I played with in the summer. I never had a problem with White kids, I really didn't. I got along with some of them. Then we did our thing in September and separated. And I just couldn't understand why the younger kids had to be separated. I still don't think it made sense. I guess we talked about it a little bit: they couldn't believe that we couldn't go to school with them, and I let that go way down – I didn't want to be bothered with them. I still know some of them. I've had to straighten out several of my [White] peers in recent years: "We didn't really want to sit next to you in school." That was not the important thing. What my parents wanted was equality. *Equality*.

Well, [after the decision] it wasn't anything spectacular. We just went to school with some Whites, and it wasn't any big celebration or anything. I don't know . . . it isn't anything that shouldn't have already happened many years before!



Ruth Ann Scales.



Leola Williams (Brown).

**LEOLA WILLIAMS (BROWN)
(MONTGOMERY)**

ALL THEY CAN DO IS SAY NO

**BY VINCENT OMNI AND
CHERYL BROWN HENDERSON**

Ninety-seven-year-old Leola Brown Montgomery doesn't have any qualms about the education she received at racially segregated Monroe Elementary School. "Oh, I loved it," she said during an oral history interview in 1991. "We

got a fantastic education there . . . we had fantastic teachers and we learned." What was less than fantastic was the distance she traveled to reach the segregated school each day. She grew up just west of The Bottoms, a multiracial community situated in the Topeka's southeast sector. In 1927, when she began attending Monroe, a newly constructed elementary school for African Americans, Brown Montgomery had a five block walk partially through a railroad yard to a bus stop where she waited, at times in inclement weather, for a bus to carry her to school.

Brown Montgomery went on to attend the integrated Lincoln Jr. High School and Topeka High School, where classes were integrated but extracurricular activities were segregated. During an oral history interview she recalled being one of two Black Topeka High students inducted into the National Honor Society in 1938. Shortly after graduation, she married Oliver Brown, a young man she met during her senior year in high school. The couple settled into family life typical of the 1930s, with Leola tending their home and Oliver as the "bread winner." Over the course of their marriage he engaged in several occupations from waiting tables at a White-only supper club, to driving a truck for a local coal producing company, to finally becoming a skilled tradesman as a welder in the shops of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. Years later he would study for the ministry, ultimately serving as an African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) pastor at St. Mark A.M.E. in Topeka, Kansas, and Benton Avenue



Oliver Brown.



Leola Williams (Brown) (Montgomery).

A.M.E. Church in Springfield, Missouri, where he pastored until his death in 1961.

In 1943 Leola and Oliver welcomed their first child, Linda. Over the next eight years their family expanded with the addition of two more daughters, Terry and Cheryl. Like their mother, Linda, the eldest daughter, and Terry the middle daughter attended Monroe Elementary, navigating the same route their mother had traversed some twenty years earlier. This cycle concerned Brown Montgomery. “I was very much afraid for them, especially when walking through the rail yard.” There was concern for all the African American children in

their neighborhood. They traveled five blocks to catch the bus for a fifteen-block ride to Monroe Elementary when there was an elementary school just four blocks away, in their neighborhood, which was not accessible to them because it was segregated for White children.

So, in the summer of 1950 when Charles Scott, an attorney for the Topeka NAACP, and a childhood friend of Oliver’s asked him to join the organization’s efforts to file a desegregation law suit against the local school board – she thought he should do it. “All they can do is say no.” By the fall of that same year, the NAACP had assembled a group of thirteen parents who would comprise a roster of plaintiffs. Each parent was instructed by the local NAACP to take their child, or children along with an adult witness and attempt enrollment in a segregated White school close to their homes. Oliver Brown did just that. Without another adult to witness he simply took his eldest daughter, Linda, by the hand and walked four blocks to the White school nearest to their home and asked to speak to the principal. As his daughter sat in the reception area Oliver Brown was invited into the principal’s office and once the door closed he was told that enrollment for his daughter was not possible there because school board policy was that children were assigned to schools based on their race and this is a school for White children. In fact, officials across the district rejected the attempts by all thirteen parents to enroll their African American children in Whites-only elementary schools.

When the NAACP filed a suit against the Topeka Board of Education, in 1951, their case was cited as *Oliver L. Brown, et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka*. NAACP attorneys argued the case in federal district court and lost. Their unsuccessful attempt resulted in an appeal to the Supreme Court in 1952. The high

court consolidated the Kansas case with four other school desegregation cases from Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

Two years later, after the NAACP arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court, on May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren announced the Justices' unanimous decision. On that day, Mrs. Brown (Montgomery) was ironing the family's laundry and listening to the radio when regular programming was halted for a breaking news story. The announcer shared that the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Brown Montgomery said, "I was just overjoyed, you know, and I could not wait until my family got home that evening. First the children came, and I told them, and they were just really happy. And when my husband came in, and I told him, oh, we just had a hallelujah time."

This victory, joyful though it was, did not prove a panacea for racial inequity. While Brown Montgomery notes that Topeka Public Schools began desegregation efforts shortly after the watershed Supreme Court decision, she observes that other aspects of public life in Topeka – restaurants, stores, hotels – remained segregated until the Civil Rights legislation ushered in changes during the 1960s. Meanwhile, Black folk worried about the fate of their schools: Monroe, McKinley, Buchanan, and Washington elementary schools and their teachers. They were good schools with dedicated teachers. "What's going to happen to our schools?" she recalls during an oral history interview. "Are they going to tear them down, or are they going to become integrated?" She did not think White people would go to what had been Black schools.

Monroe Elementary remained open until 1975. Ironically the children of her daughters, Linda and Terry, attended school at Monroe post *Brown v. Board*



Brown family in 1959. From left to right Terry, Cheryl (seated on the floor), Leola, Oliver, Linda.

and their family legacy with this particular school would persist when her daughter Cheryl taught sixth grade there from 1972 until 1974, then went on decades later to work with the U.S. Congress to establish the building as *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site, legislation that was signed by then President George H. W. Bush, in 1992. In 2004 the building opened

in its new role as a site to interpret this historic milestone. In the presence of local, state and national dignitaries, during her introduction of then President George W. Bush, her daughter Cheryl Brown Henderson said that preserving Monroe as *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site was "A dream realized."

South Carolina

In 1947 a chance encounter between Rev. James Hinton, president of the South Carolina NAACP, and Rev. J.A. DeLaine, a local school teacher, led to a push to improve access to public education for African American children living in Summerton, South Carolina. The NAACP leader, in a speech attended by DeLaine, issued a challenge to find the courage to test the legality of the discriminatory practices aimed at African American school children.

Rev. J. A. DeLaine was teaching in St. Paul Rural Primary School while serving as the pastor of several small African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) churches. Historically, schools for African Americans in Clarendon County held classes in churches and later moved into buildings designated as schools. Consequently, many schools and churches in Summerton and throughout Clarendon County had the same names, such as Liberty Hill A.M.E. and Liberty Hill Elementary. The establishment of these schools presented a challenge for African American parents because they were located miles from where many of the children lived.

At issue was the lack of access to school bus transportation for African American school children in the county. While taxes paid by African American parents helped support the busses used by White students, their children were forced to walk as far as eight miles each way in order to attend their public schools. To challenge these unequal conditions, Reverend Delaine appealed to the school officials, but failed to secure school buses for African American students in the county. The Clarendon County school officials justified their refusal by claiming that since the African American community did not pay (collectively) much in taxes it would be unfair to expect White citizens to provide transportation for African American school children. Even a letter writing campaign launched by Rev. DeLaine yielded no assistance from state educational officials. Determined to lessen their children's long trek to school, African American parents collected donations within their community and purchased a second-hand school bus. Eventually continual repairs on the bus proved to be too costly for the parents.

Afterwards, Rev. DeLaine tried to garner support from the District Superintendent L.B. McCord. It was hoped that since McCord was a fellow clergyman, he would be sympathetic. However, he refused to even consider Rev. DeLaine's request. As the NAACP state president, DeLaine determined that litigation was the best course of action.

On March 16, 1948 local attorney Harold Boulware, along with Thurgood Marshall, filed in U.S. District Court the case of *Levi Pearson v. County Board of Education*. Their case was dismissed on a technicality about where Mr. Pearson paid his taxes. Since his land straddled more than one school district, the court ruled that Pearson had no legal standing because he paid taxes in District 5 while his children were in schools in districts 22 and 26.

Unwilling to give up, Rev. Delaine gathered enough signatures to file a second legal challenge in 1949. The national office of the NAACP agreed to represent the parents. In May of 1950, with the help of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the case of *Briggs v. Elliott* was filed. Their legal strategy shifted from simply pursuing equalization of facilities and obtaining buses, to attacking racial segregation.

The court ruled against the NAACP argument to end the practice of racial segregation in the public schools of Clarendon County. Instead the court ordered schools to be equalized, focusing on equalization and ignoring the broader question of the constitutionality of racial segregation. The states action resulted in an NAACP appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court where the Briggs case became part of the *Brown v. Board of Education* litigation.

The Briggs case evoked extreme reaction by whites opposed to desegregation. The petitioners, who were African American parents of school aged children, suffered swift and severe hardships for their courage. Harry Briggs was fired from his job. Annie Gibson lost her job as a motel maid and her husband lost land that had been in his family for eight decades. Rev. DeLaine saw his home burned to the ground. Federal Judge Julius Waites Waring, who sided with the parents, was forced to leave the state by a joint resolution of the South Carolina House of Representatives.

By appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court where the *Briggs* case was consolidated with four cases already on the court docket it became part of the final ruling on the matter of racially segregated public school. On May 17, 1954 Chief Justice Earl Warren announced in an unanimous decision, by the U.S. Supreme Court, that racial segregation in the nation's public schools was unconstitutional.

The following essays are by descendants of plaintiffs in Briggs v. Elliott. They include an essay by Nathaniel Briggs about his parents, Harry, Sr. and Eliza Briggs, who were plaintiffs, and a collection of essays by children of William Stukes, who was also a plaintiff.



Harry and Eliza Briggs, 1930s.

HARRY BRIGGS, SR.

SOUTHERN WATERS! TROUBLED!

BY NATHANIEL BRIGGS

Clarendon County is located in the heart of South Carolina's Low Country and, like so much of the South, never even made a pretense of providing "separate but equal" school facilities for Black children. In Clarendon County, South Carolina, Levy Pearson and Rev. J. A. DeLaine, along with Harry Briggs, Sr., and nineteen other petitioners of courage, were the first to attempt to gain some relief for the children in racially segregated

Black schools in District 22, where there was no school bus to take them to school. These schools were unequal to the White schools in District 22. Rev. J.W. Seals said that they were not going to take it anymore. Rev. Seals also said that he just wanted his son to have the same privileges any other South Carolina child received which are equal school provisions.

Attempts to gain relief from the school board were also made by the Black citizens of the county, and their requests were either ignored or denied. Even in the eyes of Southern danger, they pressed on with courage and determination, not knowing the sacrifices to come.

Because of their protest against racially segregated public schools, my father, Harry Briggs, Sr., along with William Stukes, Annie Gibson, Rev. J.A. DeLaine, William Ragin, and Rev. J.W. Seals were forced from their jobs (fired!). Rev. DeLaine's house was burned to the ground. Our house was 200 yards away. Because of this, precautions were taken in the Summertown community.

The first court case, *Briggs et al. v. Elliott. et al.*, was filed in 1947, with the assistance of members of the national NAACP legal team, including attorney Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, and local South Carolina attorney Harold R. Boulware.

During that time, life in the South, especially in South Carolina, was totally segregated. The notion of supremacy of the Confederacy, fostered by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, White Citizens' Councils, and bigoted individuals, was very prevalent. The Black community experienced murders, lynchings, castrations, mutilations, etc., committed by Whites. The supremacy of the Confederacy still stands today. This can be evidenced by the statues that can be seen at court houses, state

buildings, county and municipal buildings, the plaques in squares, and the names given to schools, streets, libraries, lakes, etc.

Undeterred, the petitioners fought for self-determination, knowing that retribution would come for standing up for the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

Before dawn on the morning of May 28, 1951, the first day of the trial, my mother met her neighbors at their family church, St. Mark A.M.E. Church, in Summerton, SC, and joined a caravan of cars headed for Charleston. Black men and women began lining up outside the Federal courthouse at sunrise and continued coming all morning. By the time the lawyers arrived, the line stretched from the second-floor court room which seated only 150 people, down the hall, down the front steps and along the sidewalks. Five hundred people waited outside in the hot temperature of the Southern summer heat without air conditioning!



Nathaniel Briggs.

My parents were guaranteed seats, given that the case bore their family name. James Gibson, a farmer who drove from Clarendon County, was among the hundreds who lined up outside. “I never got tired of standing that day,” he said. He also said: “The fact that Judge Waring was up there [on the bench] meant that we were going to get a hearing.”

Whenever the NAACP lawyers made a point, someone got up and whispered it to the line, and it would travel right down the corridor and down the steps to the throng outside.

James Hinton of the NAACP wrote: “The very sight of the trial lifted them to deeper appreciation of the NAACP and its aims and purposes. As for [Thurgood] Marshall, Charleston was a measure of how far they had traveled in four short years when he first began laying the groundwork for a frontal attack on Jim Crow.” “The Blacks from Clarendon County and from all over the South jammed the courthouse, standing shoulder to shoulder, hot and uncomfortable, for a single purpose—to demonstrate to all the world that Blacks in the South are determined to eliminate segregation from American life.”

Judge Waring wrote: “Segregation is wrong. It is an evil that must be eradicated.” Judge Waring’s bold statement defied Southern tradition and was met with his being ushered from South Carolina by way of a legislative resolution to ouster him. He moved to New York where he lived until his death.

With the rebuke of Judge Waring, the plaintiffs in *Briggs v. Elliott* were denied relief in the lower courts, leaving the NAACP no choice but to file an appeal with the United States Supreme Court. Upon appeal NAACP attorneys began considering the argument to be made against racially-segregated public schools.



Harry and Eliza Briggs.

Various experts were consulted including Doctors Kenneth and Mamie Clark, psychologist and social scientist. Their work focused on somehow documenting the psychological harm done by racially segregating children in public schools, sanctioned by law. To prove their hypothesis, they administered what has become known as the “Doll Test,” which asked Black children a series of questions using Black and White dolls to punctuate their answers. My sister, Catherine Briggs Smith, participated in the “Test.” Ultimately the Black children who were questioned, believed the dolls that looked like them were undesirable and without value. The Clarks’ “Test” could reasonably assert that there was psychological harm inherent in racially segregating public schools.

The United States Supreme Court consolidated cases that sought the same relief from racially-segregated public schools, and on May 17, 1954, under the heading of the Kansas case, Chief Justice Earl Warren announced that the Court had reached a unanimous decision in *Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas), et al.* Their decision was heard around the world and changed the United States forever. No longer will Kansas, Virginia, Delaware, Washington, DC, or especially South Carolina, or states throughout the nation, accept inferior schools.

WHAT A DILEMMA!

To be a son of the untelevised revolution of *Brown v. Board* and having to live with the Confederate flag in South Carolina and to see that flag in the Republic of Viet Nam on U.S. Government tanks and at some of the barracks, I found it to be insulting. The builders of the South became the “Rejected Stone” – the Chosen People. The builders who made cotton “King” became the cornerstone and the most patriotic citizens.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

“You go to school, you study about the Germans and the French, but not about your own race. I hope the time will come when we study Black history too.”

Author’s Note: Some of the material for this essay was taken from the book Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement, by Patricia Sullivan.



Stukes family.

STUKES FAMILY STORY

BRIGGS V. ELLIOTT



Denia Stukes Hightower.

NOTES FROM DENIA STUKES HIGHTOWER: PLAINTIFF AND DAUGHTER OF PLAINTIFFS WILLIAM “BO” AND GARDENIA STUKES

My family ranked among the 107 parents and school-aged children who in 1949 legally petitioned Clarendon County School District 22 for equal opportunities in education for Black students. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) Legal Defense and Education Fund took the case. Most of these lawyers were trained at Howard University by Charles Hamilton Houston, a visionary lawyer credited with conceiving and leading the legal strategy to end segregation in the United States. During symposiums held in 2004 at Howard University Law School to commemorate the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, esteemed historian John Hope Franklin shared with me how people worked tirelessly to support school desegregation. Black and White, rich and poor, raised or sent funds to keep the process moving forward. Their efforts, sadly, did not stop that first petition from failing. Nor did it shelter petitioners from retribution.

I can vividly remember the night our father, William “Bo” Stukes, came home with his face beet red! My mother’s eyes were so wide. The eldest son, Will, was sent out to buy cigarettes. I was sent to the bedroom to look after the youngest daughter, Ada, who was a little more than two years old. Of course, I knew that something was wrong and found a way to stay close enough to hear some of their



William "Bo" and Gardenia Stukes.

conversation. My father, like so many others, had been fired from his job and was told that he could have his job back if he took his name off of the list. Local Whites insisted that everyone on that list had to be fired – no exceptions. My mother asked repeatedly, through tears, “Stukes, what are we going to do?” My father immediately set up a secret shop in the back yard. Less than two months later, baby Gregory was born, on January 19, 1950.

My father was a skilled mechanic who had held a salaried job and had the capacity to make extra money independently. Others did not fare as well. Some, having lost their jobs moved North, or left their families in Summerton and went elsewhere to find work and send money home.

Only 20 parents, representing 46 minors from Clarendon County, remained, and they revised their demands to include equal educational opportunities for their children. Attempts were made to find parents who were in a better position to withstand the economic and direct pressure that would fall upon those who signed the new petition. It was crucial that these plaintiffs not bow to pressure and remove their names from the petition. Not everyone who signed the new petition would meet such criteria, but they signed anyway.

I remember so well the night we signed the new petition in the home of Harry and Eliza Briggs. It was a big, happy party. Though I did not understand everything, I knew that we were doing something very important, and that everyone was happy and proud that chilly November night.

The new petition, *Briggs v. Elliott*, was filed in the U.S. District Court in Charleston, South Carolina, and was argued by Thurgood Marshall before a three-judge panel. At the pretrial hearing, Judge Julius Waites Waring asked: “Why are the plaintiffs suing for equality? Isn’t that what they have in theory, in the separate but equal doctrine?” Mr. Marshall re-filed the case, asking for desegregation of Clarendon County schools. *Briggs v. Elliott* became the first case to address the concept of school desegregation.

What amazes me most is just how young my parents were: In 1947, when the first petition was signed, they were still in their twenties. I never realized how courageous they were, and the older I became, the more I understood the gravity of the choices they made. My mother never really spoke about regretting their decision to sign. They believed firmly in what they were doing at the time. Even though she lost her husband, she thought that it was the right thing to do, that they were making a difference not only for their children, but for all children.

**NOTES FROM
ADA STUKES ADDERLEY:
DAUGHTER OF PLAINTIFFS
WILLIAM “BO” AND
GARDENIA STUKES**



Ada Stukes Adderley.

I am the daughter of William “Bo” and Gardenia Stukes and sister of Will Jr., Denia, and Louis Stukes, who were all plaintiffs in the *Briggs v. Elliott* case. My younger brother Gregory and I were not yet of school age, so we were not eligible to sign the petition. Our father was a skilled mechanic who lost his employment because he would not remove his name from the petition. He wanted

the best for us! I was told that he set up a mechanic shop in the back yard of our house, in order to continue to provide for our family. We might still be in South Carolina had my father not died at the age of 31 in a work-related incident. One day while working under a car, the jack gave way and he lost his life instantly. Shortly after his death, we moved to Philadelphia, where our mother’s sister and brother-in-law resided. They were instrumental in our successful adjustment to a new life in the North.

One of my earliest memories is getting dressed up because the local Philadelphia newspaper came to photograph and interview our family about our participation in *Briggs v. Elliott*. Though I was very young, and did not really understand what occurred in South Carolina, I knew that it was something important. I was excited and proud.

I was especially proud of my sweet mother. I really respected her. She was a dynamic woman, and throughout our school years in Philadelphia, she was always deeply involved. She was the PTA president, Brownie leader, and a constant school volunteer. She was a compassionate neighbor and friend to all families in our community. She demanded that we do our best, taught us to appreciate the fact that we were able to attend school, and encouraged us to be involved in community events.

As I grew older, I realized that our family’s participation, in *Briggs v. Elliott*, along with that of other plaintiffs, changed the lives of Black students for the better. When I became a wife and mother to my own children, I worked hard to instill the positive influences that were modeled for me. Once my youngest child went to first grade, I went to work for the School District of Philadelphia, serving in various capacities. Two of my four children are professional educators, impacting young lives to this day! My other children actively take on mentoring and teaching roles within their fields, ensuring that those that come after them are encouraged, motivated, and developed into the best they can be.



Louis Stukes.

A few events that have kept me connected to our struggle include:

- Taking my family to Summerton, South Carolina, my birthplace, for family reunions in the 1980s. The trips brought back many memories, both sad and joyful. We visited: Liberty Hill AME Church, where the petition was drawn up; Scott Branch High and other local schools; and the gravesite of my father.
- Attending the Philadelphia performance of *The People of Clarendon County*, a play written by Ossie Davis.
- Traveling with my sister Denia to the Levine Museum of the New South (Charlotte, North Carolina) to view *Courage: The Carolina Story That Changed America*, an exhibit that chronicles the

stories of Clarendon County citizens who fought for equality in education. We also attended workshops and discussions led by the likes of John Hope Franklin and Juan Williams.

- Hosting students from KIPPAMP Academy, a school founded by my son, Ky Adderley, for a special viewing of *Courage* at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (Harlem, New York).
- Watching the movie *Separate but Equal* starring Sidney Poitier.
- Attending the Brown v. Board of Education 50th Anniversary Gala (Washington, D.C.), with my sister Denia and brother Will. This was another event where I felt tremendous pride, but also a great sense of responsibility to continue the fight for justice.
- Participating in this essay writing project: It has been a great experience. I have learned so much from this process and am constantly passing the history and knowledge on to my children and grandchildren. Our story must be told.

Overall, I am so grateful to my parents and siblings for their courage and perseverance. Knowing the history of their journey makes me proud and determined. Still, I find myself overcome with sadness and empathy for my family and for all who had to fight so hard for what should be a basic human right. Even today, in 2018, we have a long way to go, and many Black and Brown students are not receiving an equal education. I will continue to fight, and feel great pride knowing that my children know our history and have chosen to fight in the trenches to provide better education within their communities.



Gregory Stukes.

NOTES FROM GREGORY STUKES: SON OF PLAINTIFFS WILLIAM “BO” AND GARDENIA STUKES

I am Gregory Stukes, son of William “Bo” and Gardenia Stukes. Though I wasn’t born at the time of the signing, my life, of course, was affected in many ways.

I remember the day in Philadelphia when the newspaper representatives came to take a picture of my family. I wasn’t sure why they wanted our picture, but I was certain that it was something important and I was told that I should be proud. It wasn’t Sunday, or my

birthday, but I had to wear a suit and that let me know something wasn’t ordinary. Even at five years old, you can figure some things like this out. Time passed, and I matriculated to elementary school. By second or third grade, I realized that my mom’s name was on letters that I had to take home, as the children were required to give to their parents. The principal’s signature and that of my mother were on the papers. When I asked, I found out that my mom was the president of the PTA. I didn’t really know what that meant, but other children seemed to be impressed that this was my mother.

As I grew, I often wondered why I wasn’t lucky enough to still have a father like many other kids. My siblings helped fill in missing information about our family history in Clarendon County, South Carolina: the racial inequity, the unjust school district, and the petition to desegregate school that is now a part of U.S. history. That petition caused my father to be fired. Being a strong man of principle, he refused to remove his name from the petition in order to reclaim his employment. In an effort to support his wife and five children, he did “shade tree” mechanic work in the back of our home. This course of action unfortunately took his life because he wasn’t able to afford the proper equipment that his previous employer had to ensure his safety.

My mother had to be both mother and father. She was the “rock” of the family. I remember on one occasion, as my grades were starting to slip in school, she told me the story about the struggles in Clarendon County and that a lot of sacrifices had been made so that I could have this opportunity. I made an immediate course correction so as not to disappoint my mother.

I finished school, joined the U.S. Marine Corps, and retired after 31 years of service. It was a privilege to teach and train thousands of young people from all walks of life. Education is paramount in the things that I share and mentor with young people. I guess I never really connected the dots as to how my family’s experience has affected what is important to me, but it’s obvious that there is a definite connection. I’m proud and honored to be the son of parents who had the courage to stand up for what’s right, and to expand the range of opportunities for others.



William M. Stukes Jr.

**SUBMITTED BY THE
SIBLINGS OF DECEASED
WILLIAM M. STUKES JR.:
PLAINTIFF AND SON OF
PLAINTIFFS WILLIAM “BO” AND
GARDENIA STUKES**

Will Jr. was perhaps the proudest of the Stukes children who signed the petition to desegregate public schools in Clarendon County, South Carolina. At age 10, he was old enough to understand what it meant, and its potential impact. After the devastating loss of his father, Will did not allow himself to grieve in front of his mother or younger siblings, so as not to further upset them. He and his sister Denia made a pact to stay strong for their family, and to be positive role models for their younger siblings as the family made a fresh start in Philadelphia.

At age 17, Will joined the United States Marine Corps and that same year he deployed to the first Beirut, Lebanon crisis, in 1958. All who knew him realized how much he loved being a Marine and traveling the world. After an honorable discharge from the Corps, he took a job with the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P), where he rose to the position of department manager. Upon his retirement, he was able to devote more of himself to family, community, and friends. He volunteered in voting polls, block and park clean-up projects, and the neighborhood “town watch.” Tireless in his giving, Will always offered to assist those in need, and to improve the lives of others in some way. After his death in 2013, neighbors relayed how Will bought plants and flowers for the women residents in the neighborhood throughout the year. A small gesture simply to make them feel special. His efforts inspired others in the neighborhood to continue his tradition of giving.

Will was honored to have been a part of history and the impact that his signing that petition had on future generations. Never at a loss for words, he explained in great detail the challenges he faced as a young boy, but also the hope that he had for his future. He displayed the signed document in his home with pride and educated all who visited him about its significance as the beginning of the school desegregation movement in our nation.



Ky Adderley.

NOTES FROM KY ADDERLEY: SON OF ADA STUKES ADDERLEY AND GRANDSON OF PLAINTIFFS WILLIAM “BO” AND GARDENIA STUKES

I am the grandson of William “Bo” & Gardenia Stukes

I am the son of Ada Stukes Adderley (Nelson Adderley)

I am the nephew of William Jr., Denia, Louis Sr. and Gregory Stukes

I am the descendant of Pain, Struggle, Perseverance, Love, Fight and Justice!

I am Ky Adderley.

I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1975 to Nelson and Ada Stukes Adderley. I learned from an early age by watching and mimicking the people closest to me that our family fights! We fight for justice, we fight for what is right, and we make great sacrifices to make our world a better place for the boys and girls, men and women, who look like us.

Black and Brown children (people) deserve the same opportunities in life as anyone else. I have made this my life’s work. My grandparents looked after the children in their neighborhood and were known as servants for what was good and right. My mom and dad worked in schools and in social services. My siblings are teachers and trainers. My aunts, uncles, and cousins are sergeants, veterans, leaders, community developers, and educators. Along with a strong mix of athletics and sports, our family has dedicated our lives to social justice! This is only fitting given the roots of our family in the early struggles for justice and equality on behalf of Black and Brown children of our world.

My personal journey took me from Philadelphia to Georgetown University as a student athlete, to a 6th grade teacher in Washington, D.C. Public Schools. I was recruited to Brooklyn, New York, where I created and founded a school to serve the under-resourced community of Crown Heights. I served as principal for seven years before I was recruited to the beaches of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for the next six years. In Brazil, I trained leaders how to address the deficits in their public school systems. I worked with educators and government officials to create schools, train teachers, and encourage Black and Brown children to reach for new heights!

Education has never meant more to me than the moment I became a parent! While in Brazil, my wife and I welcomed our wonderful baby girl. We realized that our life journey has been preparing us for this moment and that the blessing of bringing a child into this world comes with great joys, but also with great responsibilities and duties. We must be her first teachers and role models, educating her

at home, preparing her as our parents and elders prepared us. We must be a living example of justice through education, character, tradition, and courage.

I come from a family of giants who never settled for less for their own and their community. Being part of this project, learning firsthand from the participants in these cases, reignited my flame to continue my work, and family legacy, of creating opportunities for Black and Brown children all over the globe.



Ada Stukes Adderley with son Ky Adderley.

DAVIS V. COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD OF PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY

Virginia

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the only way an African American could receive a high school diploma in the early twentieth century was by attending a private academy. Private high schools were operated by Catholics, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians in Virginia. The public schools for Blacks were elementary schools (grades 1-8) operated by county school boards. The fact that school boards were county affiliated rather than city or town affiliated might have something to do with the relatively rural population of most school districts.

In Prince Edward County, Virginia, public schooling for Blacks was considered “progressive” compared to neighboring counties. Due partly to the fundraising efforts of the Farmville Colored Women’s Club, the Robert Moton School added grades 9-12 by 1947. Prior to 1947, African Americans “graduated” from high school after the 11th grade. Given that the number of school years were fewer than in the White schools, African Americans from neighboring counties came to Farmville to attend the Robert Moton High School in the 1930s and 1940s. The original building was a two-story frame building that later became the elementary school once the “new” Robert Moton High School was built in 1943 across the street. The “new” school was never large enough, necessitating the use of tar paper covered buildings hastily constructed on the campus for use as classrooms. It was the use of these temporary buildings as classroom space that sparked a student strike in 1951.

One hundred and seventeen African American high school students chose to strike rather than attend Moton High, which was in need of physical repair. The students demand was simple. They wanted a new building with indoor plumbing to replace the old school. The students who provided leadership for the strike were from families who were all long-term residents of the surrounding area. Their spokesperson, Barbara Johns, had a family distinguished by activism. Barbara was the niece of Vernon Johns, the legendary minister who served in the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church the ten years prior to Martin Luther King, Jr. Vernon Johns was an outspoken critic of segregation and was involved in numerous protests throughout his career. Although he lived miles away, in Montgomery, Alabama, community members reported that he was influential in giving advice to the striking students. His wife was a former teacher at Robert Moton High School, and he still had numerous family ties in the community of Farmville and the surrounding area.

The Johns family knew the social politics of the area. Farmville is an hour and a half southwest of Richmond, on the same route Robert E. Lee followed during his retreat from Richmond in the spring of 1865. Farmville is just two miles from where the Confederacy made its last stand at the Battle of Sailor’s Creek. Even in 1950 life in the rural South still carried certain risks for African

American adults whose livelihoods were inextricably linked to a group of Whites who controlled commerce in the area. Opinion was divided within the African American community over whether segregated conditions in Farmville should be challenged.

The students were supported by the Rev. Francis Griffin, a local pastor and civil rights activist, who considered the situation unacceptable and used every opportunity to address the need for change. As President of the local NAACP and Chair of the Moton High School PTA, he was well positioned to push for change. He joined Moton High principal M. Boyd Jones in petitioning the school board, asking that the obvious disparity between the county high school for African American and White schools be addressed. In short, they called for a new building to replace Moton High. After several months of inactivity by school officials the stage was set for the Moton students frustrated with their circumstances to take action.

On April 23, 1951 a student strike organized largely by Barbara Johns was underway. School principal Jones was called away by a false claim of racial problems at the bus station downtown. With him absent the students assembled under pretense of a school sanctioned gathering and Barbara spoke of the plan to strike. The strike amounted to students walking out of school with instructions, from strike leadership, not to leave the school grounds. Some of the students were given signs to carry that expressed their goal of better facilities. With the strike underway Barbara Johns and classmate Carrie Stokes sought legal counsel from the NAACP in Richmond. The students received a response in the form of a commitment by NAACP attorney, Oliver Hill, agreeing to meet with them. The strike lasted ten days. Hill promised that action would be taken on their behalf. With that, the students returned to school on May 7, 1951.

After a month of legal maneuvering a suit was filed in Federal Court by Oliver Hill's colleague, Spottswood Robinson, citing the students' complaint. Surprisingly, when the case was filed it did not carry the name of Barbara Johns as its lead plaintiff. It was by happenstance that the first student listed was a ninth-grade girl, daughter of a local farmer. Her name was Dorothy Davis. The *Virginia* case was filed as *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*. After filing this case Spottswood Robinson immediately traveled to South Carolina where the case of *Briggs v. Elliot* was scheduled to be argued in another Federal Court.

In the case of *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, the U.S. District Court ordered equal facilities be provided for the Black students, but "denied the plaintiffs admission to the White schools during the equalization program." Attorneys for the NAACP filed an appeal with the U.S. Supreme Court. Their case would eventually be argued with appeals from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina and Washington, D.C., all of which became part of the Court's unanimous ruling as *Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas), et al.*

County officials ultimately defied the Supreme Court ruling and closed public schools for five years, from 1959 until 1964. It would require another action against the county school board to reopen the schools. Rev. Griffin led the push,

becoming the named plaintiff in Griffin v. County School Board. The courts directed the Board of Supervisors to immediately reopen and desegregate its public schools. Because this ruling was met with international media attention and the threat of federal enforcement, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors reopened and desegregated its public schools in 1964.

The following essays are by the sister and a cousin of the student strike leader, Barbara Johns, and three essays by students who experienced the state's closing of public schools in Virginia in response to the 1954 Supreme Court decision.



Alfred L. Cobbs at 15 years.

ALFRED L. COBBS

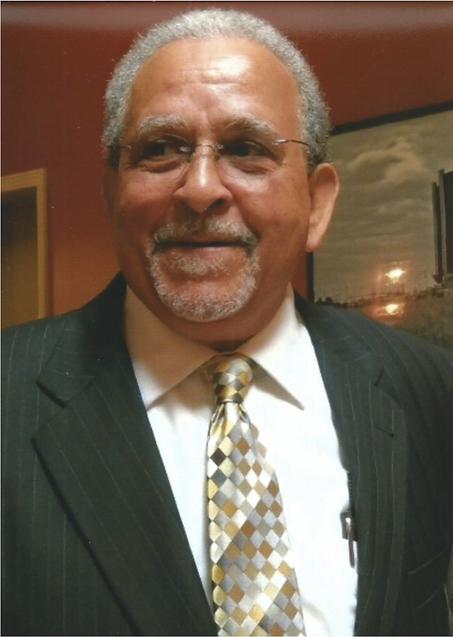
THE IMPACT OF THE PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY SCHOOL CLOSING ON MY LIFE

When buses did not roll on the first day of school in 1959, my brothers, Samuel, Freddie, and I did not want to believe it. I was entering the tenth grade, Samuel the eleventh, and Freddie the eighth. We thought this closing was some kind of a power play on the part of the Board of Supervisors in Prince Edward County, VA.

It was a show of authority, we thought, to frustrate the efforts of the Supreme Court order to desegregate county schools “with all deliberate speed” (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). Being naïve and not “schooled” well in the ways of Southern segregationists, we assumed schools would re-open in a few days. We were happy, then, to have an extended summer vacation. The first day, however, turned into days, the days into weeks, the weeks into months, and eventually the months into years – five to be exact. A cruel reality dawned on us during this time: we, along with countless other Black students in the county, were losing the opportunity for a public education, a right guaranteed by the Virginia Constitution to all school-aged citizens, regardless of race or class.

In the face of this reality, and the frustration that accompanied it, Black parents and students struggled to figure out what to do, what course of action to take. During the first year, some families sent their children to live with relatives in other states and other school districts. Other families moved away from Prince Edward County, or the state of Virginia altogether. Training centers and summer catch-up programs were established for those students who remained. Such programs, held in private homes and churches, attempted to offset the educational loss with limited instruction in reading and arithmetic. They also focused on citizenship, Black history, and current events. Freddie participated in one of these programs. Ultimately, some families – inside and outside the state – welcomed children into their homes to afford them an opportunity to acquire an education. This is how my brothers and I were able to complete our education.

Mr. and Mrs. E.N. Taliaferro, Jr., took me in from 1959 to 1962. Mr. Taliaferro was the principal of East End High School, a segregated building in South Hill, VA. He was a man of very high standards and served as an excellent role model for me, his son, and other Black boys in the school. This kind and generous family allowed me to return to their home each fall until I graduated in 1962. I had a love for mathematics and my mathematics teacher was fantastic. The two years of Latin I studied at East End High, however, laid the foundation for my success in mas-



Alfred L. Cobbs at 70.

tering the German language during college and eventually becoming a professor of German studies. There is a great irony in this development because it was very unusual in the 1960s for a rural segregated high school in the South to offer Latin to Black students.

Samuel and Freddie benefitted from similar arrangements. A number of families in Moorestown, NJ, took Samuel into their homes from 1960 to 1962, the year he finished high school. A family in Arlington, Virginia, took Freddie in from 1961 to 1963, at which point he returned home to attend the Prince Edward County Free School, a yearlong, privately-funded initiative undertaken by the Justice Department in 1963. This program set up a non-graded school system for educational

deprived children in the hope that public schools would be reopened the next year, which they did. When Freddie graduated from high school in 1965, his class was the first to matriculate from the re-opened Prince Edward County public schools.

I always felt cheated because I did not have an opportunity to graduate from high school in Prince Edward County. At times, it still feels like unfinished business. I don't have a real connection to a peer group or a high school graduating class – a reality that will never change. It's as if a birthright has been taken away from me. I've spent fifty years coming to terms with this reality.

Despite the anguish, uprootedness, and adversity that school closings caused me, I still succeeded. I excelled academically at East End High School, where I was class valedictorian. I matriculated to the integrated Berea College in Kentucky to study mathematics. A change of heart, however, derailed my plans. I decided to pursue German studies instead. In this major I found excitement and eventually my calling in life. After Berea I pursued a master's degree in German at the University of Missouri-Columbia and eventually earned a doctorate in German studies from the University of Cincinnati, in 1974. After receiving my Ph.D., I was very fortunate to enjoy a long and distinguished career of 44 years teaching and researching German studies at several institutions: The University of Cincinnati, the University of Virginia, and Wayne State University, where I spent the last 34 years of my career.

The closing of schools in Prince Edward County, a response to mandated desegregation, changed my life in profound ways. Still, I did not give up on my quest

for education. I've come to realize, looking back, that I turned this derailment into an asset, which gave me joy, an income, and a good retirement. However, like many others, I did not escape unscathed psychologically. The experience has left its wounds. I cannot shake the fact that countless others were not as fortunate as I. Without schooling they lost their way and became part of the "lost generation" of Black students in Prince Edward County. I count my blessings anew when I think of this tragedy. I can only wish that fate had been as kind to those students as it has been to me.



Cobbs brothers (l. to r. Freddie, Alfred, Samuel) late 1950's.

FREDDIE COBBS



Freddie Cobbs at 13 years.

THE PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY SCHOOLS CLOSING DAVIS V. PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, FARMVILLE, VIRGINIA

I had just completed the 8th grade when the public schools were closed in Prince Edward County in 1959, in defiance of the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. I did not have any formal education for two years. During this period, I worked on the farm with my father. Some informal classes were held in some of the local churches during those years. A physical education teacher from Hoffman Boston Junior/Senior High School in Arlington Virginia volunteered at Prospect Baptist Church, and he realized that I had a desire to learn. He said that he knew of a couple in Arlington who wanted to keep a girl from Prince Edward County; however, he recommended me. From 1961-1963, I stayed with Ernest and Mignon Johnson. He was Supervisor of Recreation for Arlington County and she was a Counselor in

the District of Columbia School System. In September of 1963, I attended the Prince Edward Free Schools Association which was a wonderful experience because they had excellent teachers who showed much concern for the students. In 1964, when the public schools reopened, I completed my senior year and graduated from Prince Edward High School, in June 1965. After high school, I became a student at Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia and graduated in 1971 with a B.S. Degree in Electronics Technology. During my final two years at Virginia State, I joined the Cooperative Education Program which enabled me to work two semesters and two summers with International Business Machines Corporation in Endicott,



Freddie Cobbs at 72.

New York. Upon graduation, I was one of the first two African Americans hired as an Industrial Engineer by the General Electric Company, in Lynchburg, Virginia. After working for GE for ten years, I was employed as a Manufacturing Engineer by the Stackpole Components Company in Farmville, Virginia and the first African American engineer to work for this company, which was later sold to a switch company out of Stoughton, Massachusetts known as Ark-less Corporation. I worked for the two companies for 22 years and the majority of these years in Quality Engineering. During my employment with Stackpole and Ark-less, I had the opportunity to work in Taiwan, Mexico, Haiti, Hong Kong, and Communist China. I truly enjoyed my work experience and the places that I was able to visit.



Cobbs brothers (l. to r. Samuel, Freddie, Alfred) 2017.



Samuel Cobbs at 19 years.

SAMUEL A. COBBS

THE IMPACT OF THE PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY SCHOOL CLOSING ON MY LIFE

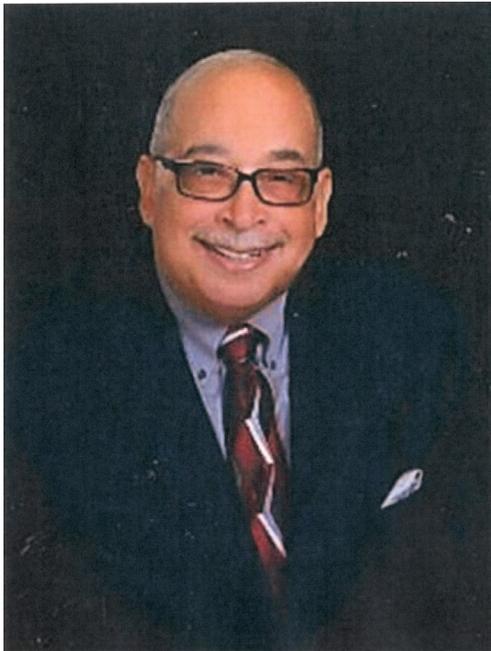
I'd just completed the tenth grade when Prince Edward County schools announced they would close to avoid court ordered desegregation. It was 1959. I, along with hundreds of other students, was devastated by this negative and depressing news. How long would this closure last? What would happen to the roughly 1,300 Black students who relied upon these public schools? I was out of school for a year. My younger brother, Freddie, was out of school for two years before he was afforded the opportunity to live with a family in Arlington, VA.

Freddie and I worked on the family farm during this time. We helped our daddy tend crops, which brought him the security of knowing that he'd have assistance with the chief cash crop – tobacco. Corn and wheat did not require the manpower that tobacco did, so having us around to help raise and harvest tobacco was essential. In our free time, which was minimal, we were hired out to White farmers to help them harvest their tobacco. Once, Mr. Leslie Harris hired us to help him harvest corn by hand, which was a grueling job, but we did it. I suppose it worked out because he paid us with a small portable television. Freddie, my parents, and I were extremely grateful, for now we could participate in cultural and historical programs that broadened our horizons and our knowledge base. Our time out of school, then, was not without limited exposure to the outside world. However, the enrichment programs offered in the County catered to elementary school students and really offered nothing that specifically focused on the needs of high school students.

A year later, representatives from the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization located in Philadelphia, PA, visited First Baptist Church in Farmville. I learned of this meeting one Sunday morning at our church. The group interviewed students who were interested in furthering their education. Signing up for this program meant having to leave home to live with families that we had never met before then. Although I was angry that the closing of schools in Prince Edward County forced me to leave home, I was grateful for the opportunity to continue my formal education. I wanted desperately to complete high school and I did not want any roadblock to keep me from doing so. I always wanted to be a teacher and knew that without a high school diploma it would be impossible to pursue a degree in education. My mother wanted me to complete my high school

education. She wanted me to have a better life than she and my father had. Daddy was opposed to my leaving because he wanted me to help him on the farm. I had mixed emotions when I left home because I was leaving my parents, my youngest brother, and several friends. It was a difficult initially, but I adjusted over time.

I was placed with a delightful couple. Mr. & Mrs. Clarence Baylor lived in Moorestown, NJ. They did not have any children. To all of the families who opened their homes and hearts to students from Prince Edward County, I, and many others, am forever grateful. I wanted to attend the local public high school, but was enrolled instead at Moorestown Friends School, an all-White Quaker institution. I was the first Black student to enroll in the school's 175-year history. I was a bit anxious, but my first-day jitters did not last long because the environment and the atmosphere of the school were positive. All of the teachers and students



Samuel Cobbs at 74.

that I came in contact with were friendly. Students and teachers treated me very, very kindly. I never encountered any signs of overt racism, never felt that I was in any physical danger. I did, however, wonder what the next two years would be like.

I lived with this couple for a year and a half. I was never privy to their financial situation, but they both had good jobs. She was a school teacher and her husband worked as a produce manager at a Safeway. I learned from my Quaker sponsor that they almost lost their home to foreclosure. Under these circumstances, my sponsor felt that it was wise to move me out of that home. The family had been nice, and I hated to leave them. They introduced me to gourmet meals and took me on trips to

New York City and Atlantic City. It took some time getting used to them. I was placed with a different family each month during the last semester of my senior year. I lived with two Quaker families, one French Canadian family, and a Black family. This arrangement was a unique and sometimes difficult experience. I had to adapt and fit into each new family. As soon as I got settled and adjusted, I was uprooted and moved to another family. It got to be frustrating at times because I did not have an opportunity to forge lasting friendships with any of the children in any of the four families with whom I lived. However, I had to stick it out if I wanted to get my high school diploma.

Completing my high-school education proved to be quite a daunting challenge. At times, I felt like giving up. I certainly would not want to repeat the experience. Overall, though, it was worth it: I earned the prize I'd been seeking – my high school diploma. I am so glad that I toughed it out and graduated. Moorestown Friends School gave me a four-year scholarship to attend Hampton Institute and complete my education. This experience, along with my training at Indiana State University, prepared me well for a teaching career that took me from the inner city of Gary, Indiana, to middle schools in Hampton, VA. I have been blessed to have a satisfying and rewarding career of more than 30 years mentoring and nurturing youth and helping them find their way in life.

I am grateful to all who helped me pursue my formal education. I never would have been able to attend a private school without substantial financial help. Last, but not least, I am eternally grateful to the Baylors and to all the other families and individuals who helped make my two-year experience living in Moorestown, New Jersey a success story.



Barbara Johns in her high school graduation photograph.

BARBARA JOHNS

A STORY OF COURAGE: BARBARA ROSE JOHNS AND STUDENTS OF ROBERT R. MOTON HIGH SCHOOL, FARMVILLE (PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY), VIRGINIA *as told to sister Joan Johns Cobbs*

We were fond of our teachers. My favorite, and the one who had the greatest impact on my young life, was Miss Davenport, my music teacher. She introduced us to Bach, Beethoven, and other classical musicians. She permitted full expression in her classroom, something quite foreign in that day and age. Teachers taught, and you listened, then responded to their comments when requested. Miss Davenport, though, felt that, as with music, everything in life lent itself to a variety of opinions, thoughts, moods, moments. She encouraged us to respond that way.

I got to know Miss Davenport more intimately when my sister and I began taking music lessons after school. I felt I could share my innermost thoughts with her and she wouldn't consider them ridiculous. This is how I happened to mention to her how unhappy I was with the school building and its inadequacies. I told her it wasn't fair that we had such a poor facility, equipment, et cetera. Our White counterparts had a huge facility, with an atrium, science laboratories, a separate gym, and a cafeteria. I warmed to my subject then looked to her for some answer to my frustration. She paused for a few moments and asked, "Why don't you do something about it?" I was surprised by her question, but it did not occur to me to ask her what she meant. I just slowly turned away, as I felt dismissed by her reply.

What could one do about such a situation? I had no idea. I spent



The Johns children, Barbara Rose, (16), Joan Marie, (13) and Ernest Everett (10) taken at their grandmother's house on a Sunday – after attending church. The year was 1951.



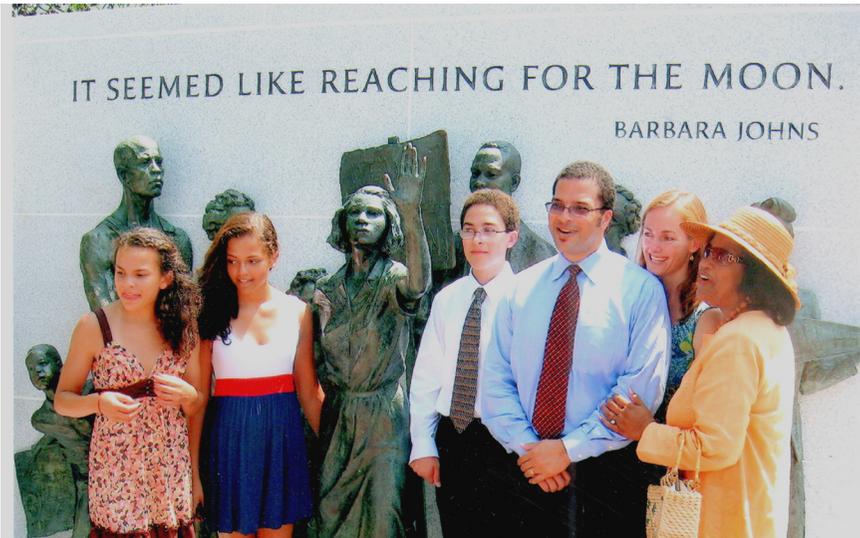
Barbara Rose Johns – 1979.

many days in the woods, on my favorite stump, contemplating my next move. Sadie Red, our family horse, drank from a nearby creek while I sat there thinking. My imagination ran rampant. I dreamt that some mighty man of great wealth, through God, built us a new school building, or that our parents got together and surprised us with this grand new building, and we had a big celebration. I even imagined a great storm came through and blew down the main building, shattering the shacks to splinters. Out of this wreckage, rose a magnificent building, and all the students rejoiced, and the

teachers cried. But then reality set in, and I was forced to acknowledge that nothing magical was going to produce a new school.

Then there were times I just prayed. “God, please grant us a new school,” I said. “Please let us have a warm place to stay, where we won’t have to keep our coats on all day to stay warm. God, please help us. We are your children, too.”

This line of thinking went on for months, sometimes as I chopped the wood, sometimes as I fed the pigs. It would crop up in my mind. We were not treated like other students. They were not cold, they didn’t have to leave one building



Joan’s family standing with a sculpture of Barbara Johns. The sculpture was unveiled in 2007 on the Virginia State Capitol grounds.



Barbara Rose Johns.

and transfer to another. Their buses weren't overcrowded. Their teachers and bus drivers didn't have to make fires before they could start class.

One morning, I was so busy rushing my brothers and sister down the hill to school that I forgot my own lunch. I rushed back up the hill to retrieve it. The bus arrived, picked them up while I was gone. I stood there by the roadside, waiting to thumb a ride. An hour later, I was still waiting for a ride when the "White bus" drove by – half empty – on its way to Farmville High School. It would have had to pass by my school to get to that school, but I couldn't ride with them.

Right then and there, I decided that, indeed, something had to be done about this inequality – though I still didn't know just what. Thoughts whirled around my mind all day, and, as I lay in my bed that night, I prayed for help. What happened next may have been a dream, though I believe I was still fully conscious. A plan – divine inspiration, really – began to take hold in my mind. The plan was to assemble student council members, whom I considered the "crème de la crème" of the school. They were smart and thinkers. I knew and trusted them because I was a part of them. We decided to strike. We would call an impromptu assembly. There would be signs, and I would give a speech stating our dissatisfaction, and we would march out of the school. People would hear us, would see us and understand our difficulty, would sympathize with our plight, and would grant us our new school building. Our teachers would be proud, and the students would learn more. It would be grand, and we would live happily ever after.

I arose early the next morning and rushed everyone out of the house. I could hardly wait to get to school to call the impromptu meeting. I was self-sufficient and independent – because my mother was not around to rely on or to consult. My father was too busy plowing, planting, and harvesting to be bothered with my fantasy. He may have never agreed with my plan, viewing it as foolish, but would not have stopped me. I was permitted free rein in my thinking and actions. As he put it, I was too stubborn – too determined to have my way – so why bother trying to change my mind? I also neglected to consult my Uncle Vernon. He wasn't around much then, and really, I didn't feel a need to consult anyone anyway. It had been given to me – all I had to do was do it.



The Vernon Johns family.

VIRGINIA JEANNE JOHNS (ADKINS)

A REFUGE FOR BARBARA

It was the summer before I entered ninth grade at Alabama State University Laboratory School when I learned that my cousin, Barbara Rose Johns, was coming to

Montgomery, Alabama, to attend her senior year of high school. I was very elated that Barbara was coming, but also unhappy about the reason she had to move and because she was separated from her immediate family during her graduation year.

Many in Virginia, where Barbara was living, suspected that my father, Vernon Johns, had something to do with the law case against racial segregation in Prince Edward County, Virginia. But that was not the case. Instead, he was a civil rights activist in Montgomery, Alabama, where he also served as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. However, my dad was infuriated about the unequal school facilities for African American students were forced to attend in Prince Edward County and because of the death threats that Barbara received.

Barbara adjusted easily to being in a new state and a new school. She would have been a top student wherever she'd gone, and she immediately made friends and got involved in various school activities. In addition, she caught the eye of many of the young men in the area. I only remember being jealous one time, and that was at Easter when Barbara's mother, Violet Johns, sent her this huge box containing an Easter dress with shoes and a purse. The frocks of me and my two sisters could hardly compare with her complete outfit.

We all had a very pleasant year, which ended with Barbara heading to Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, that fall.



Jeanne Johns (Adkins).



Joan Johns.

JOAN JOHNS (COBBS)

A STORY OF COURAGE: BARBARA ROSE JOHNS AND THE STUDENTS OF ROBERT R. MOTON HIGH SCHOOL, FARMVILLE (PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY), VIRGINIA

My name is Joan Marie Johns Cobbs. I was 13 years old in 1951 when my sister, Barbara Rose Johns, led 450 students on a strike at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia. Barbara was a junior at the school, where conditions were deplorable. Rather than build a new high school for students, the county put up three structures that resembled “tar-paper shacks” around the existing building to accommodate a growing student body. These structures were cold and drafty and heated with pot-bellied stoves. The students who sat closer to the stove were too hot and the other students were too cold. During the winter, we often sat in class wearing our coats and boots to keep warm. When it rained, we helped our teachers place pails around the room to catch the water and, at times, opened our umbrellas. We moved our desks around so that water would not drip on our notebooks. We were not comfortable in our classrooms. This was not fair.

We had excellent teachers. They pushed us to excel and demanded our undivided attention. They not only expected us to do well in their classes, but to go on to college to further our education. They even bought many supplies, which – along with science labs, a gym, lockers, and a cafeteria – we did not have. Barbara confided in her favorite teacher, Miss Inez Davenport. Miss Inez Davenport was one of these caring professionals. She taught music, and was my sister’s favorite teacher. Barbara discussed the conditions of the school with her. Our teacher listened to Barbara and then said, “Well, why don’t you do something about it?” This question surprised Barbara, who said it did not occur to her to seek clarification from Miss Davenport. Instead, Barbara felt dismissed, and eventually devised a plan that she felt was given to her from on high while sitting on her favorite stump in the solitude of the woods behind our house. There, she planned the strike.

April 23rd began as a normal school day for me. I had no idea that Barbara, along with other trusted students, devised a scheme to get our principal, M. Boyd Jones, out of the building. I later learned that John Watson, one of Barbara’s co-conspirators, put a call into Principal Jones’ office. Speaking through a handkerchief, he reported that a number of Moton High students were downtown when they should have been in school. Barbara leapt into action as soon Mr.

Jones left the building. She sent a note to the teachers asking them to bring their students to the auditorium for an impromptu assembly. She signed the note with the principal's initials. We students were asked to stay. The teachers were asked to leave. When one of the male teachers resisted, two male students led him out of the auditorium.

Principal Jones' absence struck me first. He did not stand in his usual position which was behind the lectern on stage. Instead, Barbara stood there. It shocked me so that when she began to speak, I slid down in my seat – as low as I could go. She explained to us that the conditions at our school were intolerable and that we needed to strike for a better school. She asked us to please cooperate with her and tell our parents to support us. She made it very clear that this was the only way we would get any results. When one of the students asked if we were going to get into trouble for this, she replied that the Farmville jail was not big enough to hold all of us, so we should not worry. We followed her out of school that day – and stayed out for two weeks! I was nervous during this time, afraid that our actions would, in some way, bring harm to our family from the White community. Our grandmother told us stories about the Ku Klux Klan, and I worried they would come to our house.

There were, of course, consequences. Stores in town that once offered credit to our parents stopped doing so, which threatened the financial security of our family farm. This was a difficult time in my life. My clothes did not fit, since my mother bought them to last for more than one year. I only had one pair of decent shoes that I could only wear to church. I often went barefoot on the farm. My mother took a job in Washington, D.C., to help support the family. She worked Monday through Friday, which affected me a lot. I missed her. Barbara was thrust



R. R. Moton High School Cheerleaders.

into the role of “mothering” my three brothers and me during the week, a tremendous responsibility for a young girl. In an effort to help make ends meet, she and I often sawed down trees.

Like me, our parents were shocked by the consequences and very concerned. They received threats and decided to send Barbara away to finish her senior year of high school. She moved to Montgomery, Alabama, to live with Vernon Johns. He was a civil rights activist, pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and, more importantly, our uncle. Barbara went on to graduate from Alabama State Collegiate Preparatory High School.



Joan Johns Cobbs.

After organizing the strike in Farmville, Barbara realized that we were going to need some support. She contacted Reverend L. Francis Griffin, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Farmville. Reverend Griffin recruited attorneys from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Richmond to represent Moton High students. He also opened his church to serve as a meeting place where the community could discuss recent developments in the school court case.

Barbara and fellow student Carrie Stokes wrote a letter to prominent civil rights attorneys Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson III from Richmond, VA, to ask for help. The legal duo refused, at first, citing their tight schedules. Barbara was persistent, though. She called Oliver Hill personally, convincing him and Robinson to stop through Farmville en route to another place. They saw how serious we students were and offered to help if we persuaded our parents to register us as plaintiffs in a suit that would become part of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. One hundred nineteen parents permitted their children to become plaintiffs in *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*.

Barbara was a brave, courageous, and fearless young person who saw an injustice and decided to do something about it. She stood up for what she believed, and her actions on April 23, 1951, changed the course of the nation when the United States Supreme Court declared segregated schools unconstitutional in 1954.

When I think of Barbara, a Bible scripture, Isaiah 11:6, comes to mind: “The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.” After Barbara’s death in 1991, I consider this verse and reflect back on how Barbara led 450 students out of school on a strike.



Joy Cabarrus Speakes.

JOY CABARRUS SPEAKES

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MOMENT AND A MOVEMENT IS SACRIFICE

My name is Joy Cabarrus Speakes. I am an African American female and was born in my grandparents' home, built by my grandfather, in Darlington Heights, Virginia, about 18 miles southwest of Farmville.

The first school that I attended was Triumph School, a one-room frame building, behind Triumph Baptist Church. In those days there was always a school house built next to a church. My grandmother, Emma Evans Morton, was my teacher. *You can imagine how that was.* I had to walk a strict line and be a role model for all the other students. If I got out of line, it was not a good day or week for me.

My mother, Grace Cabarrus Morton, came to visit my grandparents and took my sister and me back to New York to live with her and my father. I attended Public School 55, an integrated public school, in New York, for two years. After two years, my mother decided to send us to back to Virginia to live with my grandparents. She felt this would be a much healthier environment to grow up in and a better opportunity for us.

My grandparents lived on a one-hundred acre farm and supported the family through agricultural labor. They grew wheat, corn, sugar cane, and tobacco. They also had a garden with all types of vegetables and watermelon. They had cattle, pigs, chickens, guineas, and all types of fruit trees, apples, peaches, cherries, plums, pecans, strawberries, blackberries, blueberries – and horses. This shows many aspects of race and class, in the sense that primarily people of color were farmers and hard laborers. My grandfather, the one hundred acre farmer had made them a wealthy family. However, wealth is defined as the amount of material possessions and resources that one has. Counting the number of resources that we had to fall back on, we were a middle class family.

When I returned to Virginia, I attended Mercy Seat Elementary School, a two-room frame school in Hampden Sydney, Virginia about 11 miles from where we were living in Darlington Heights. After attending an integrated school in New York, I found it to be unfair and different to travel miles to go to an all-Black school that was unequal to the White school and the supremacy of race that was practiced.

In 1951 I attended Robert Russa Moton High School located in Farmville, Virginia about 16 miles from where I lived. The school was built in 1939 by the Martha E. Forrester Council of Women to hold 180 African American students.

In 1951 there were over 400 students attending the school. Our parents had been attending PTA, school board, and visiting Superintendent T. J. McIlwaine's office with no success in getting a new school building. My grandfather had become so involved in fighting to get a better school and resources for us. He attended one meeting and addressed the school board members stating that if they could not find any land to build a new school or funds to finance it, then what about us bringing our children to your big school and let them attend classes there. My grandfather was told not to come to any more meetings. My grandfather and Mr. Otis Scott, a striker and plaintiff in the *Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board* case had let the school board know that they could secure land to build a school, but they did not want to hear anything from them.



Joy's grandparents Mr. and Mrs. Morton.

Barbara Johns' family and my family lived only about five miles apart and attended the same church and some social events. Everyone loved her grandmother, Mrs. Croner. Barbara became very frustrated with the overcrowded and inferior conditions at the school. We had no cafeteria, no gym, no lab, and the school buses were used. The books that we received had torn out pages, vulgar racial statements and epitaphs written in them. They put three tar paper shacks, *chicken coops*, on the grounds for us to attend classes in place of a new school. The tar paper shacks had a large wood stove and if you sat near the stove, you had to take off coat and sweater, but if you were near the door you had to keep your coat on to be warm. When it rained you had to hold an umbrella over your head to keep the water off your paper that you were writing your notes on. In the auditorium there would be two teachers teaching different classes at the same time. *Can you imagine trying to concentrate!!* We also took classes on the old buses that we came to school in. A lot of times we would have to leave school early because of the condition of the buses.

Mrs. Inez Jones was Barbara's music teacher and her favorite teacher. One day she said to Mrs. Jones that something had to be done about the deplorable conditions that we endured and Mrs. Jones said to her: "Then do something about it." At the time Barbara did not understand why she gave her that answer, but it was because she could not tell her what to do. Her job would be in jeopardy if she gave her advice.

Barbara began to put a plan together with a committee of students that she felt she could trust to execute the plan. Barbara took care of her siblings because her mother worked in Washington, DC. One day they all went down to wait for the bus and Barbara realized that she had left her lunch at home. She went back home to retrieve her lunch, when she came back, the bus was gone. There she was on the side of the road, hoping and praying that someone would pass that would take her to school. The White school bus passed and they could not pick her up because she was an African American. This angered Barbara. The next incident was the school bus accident that occurred in March at Elam Crossing, Prospect, Virginia, where five students were killed. They were all in the same family and one of them was Barbara's best friend. Those two incidents made Barbara put her plan into action immediately.

On April 23, 1951, I went to school and it seemed like any other day, but it was very different, it was the beginning of a 13-year struggle for equal rights in public education. Barbara had John Watson, one of the planning committee members go downtown and make a call back to Principal Boyd Jones, to tell him that some students were creating a problem downtown at the bus station. Barbara knew that when Mr. Jones got the call, he would leave the building immediately. Mr. Jones was very strict and always instructed all students that they represented Robert Russa Moton High School and the community, and that they were not to get out of order at school or in the community.

When Barbara got the signal that Mr. Jones had left the building, she went into action, sending a note to all classrooms to come to the auditorium. The note was signed BJ, her initials, which were the same initials as Boyd Jones, the principal.

When we arrived in the auditorium and the curtains opened, there was Barbara Johns on the stage, with John Stokes and his twin sister Carrie Stokes. We were all in shock with the exception of the ones on her planning committee. Barbara asked all of the teachers to please leave the auditorium because she did not want them to get into trouble. Most of the teachers left and the ones who refused Barbara had some of the football players escort them out. None of the teachers knew of the plan. When Barbara began to speak, telling us that we did not have to accept the deplorable conditions that we were exposed to, her sister Joan, was three seats in front of me and she kept sliding down in her seat because she did not know what Barbara was going to say next. I know that it was divine intervention because after Barbara spoke saying that we should seize the moment, God was on our side and the Bible said that a little child should lead. One student said: “*What if we are all put in jail?*” and Barbara answered with a stronger voice: “The *Jail is not big enough to hold all of us.*” She also said in a very firm voice: “*We will go on strike and stay out until we get a new school.*”

John Stokes stood up and started to chant: “One bit, two bits, all in favor of the strike stand up and holler.” All of the students, over 400, began to walk out of the auditorium to go on strike. Some went down to the superintendent’s office, some held up signs on the grounds, and some went home. I went home and was more afraid of what my grandparents would say when I told them that Barbara Johns had led over 400 students out of the school and we were on strike. As expected, my grandmother was not pleased. She was a school teacher and we were taught not to rebel or disrespect our teachers, elders, or individuals when we were under their supervision. My grandfather was in support because he was a civil rights activist and had been attending many meetings with Otis Scott, a striker and plaintiff in the *Davis v. Prince Edward School Board* trying to get a new school for the African American students that was equal to the White school. The high school for Whites was only a few blocks from the school for Black students, but the difference was as if it was in another country.

Barbara and Carrie wrote a letter to the NAACP, asking them to come down to help them. At first, they were not interested in coming down to talk to children, but Barbara and Carrie was so persistent that Oliver Hill and Spotswood Robinson said that they would come to Farmville. Divine intervention again, Oliver Hill and Spotswood Robinson were on their way to Pulaski County but ended up in Farmville.

The lawyers agreed to take the Prince Edward case on the condition that the students and parents would sue to challenge the constitutionality of segregation, not just to improve the school conditions. The parents and students agreed, and the case became *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*. Dorothy Davis’s name was the first on the list and that is why the case was named *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward*. Rev. L. Francis Griffin became a shepherd to us. He went to parents’ homes encouraging them to support Barbara and the students. Rev. Griffin was the pastor of First Baptist Church on South Main Street in Farmville, and he let us hold meetings in the basement of the church. An emergency meeting of the county-wide PTA was announced for May 3, 1951, at

8:00 p.m. at First Baptist Church. The church was crowded with people standing all around the church. My grandmother and other relatives were there with me along with so many other parents and students. Oliver Hill, Spotswood Robinson, and attorney Martin were present. Rev. Griffin reminded everyone: “The eyes of the world are on us.”

Barbara spoke on the students’ complaints regarding the deplorable conditions that existed at Robert Russa Moton High School. Mr. Pervall was at the meeting and he interrupted attorney Robinson as he was telling the students to return back to school. He was against segregation and only wanted a new school. Everyone was surprised at his statement. When the audience was asked if they wanted schools that were not segregated? You could hear the loud applause from all over the church. Barbara was determined that no one would stop her and the students from securing justice and she said to the crowd: “Don’t let Mr. Charlie, Mr. Tommy or Mr. Pervall stop you from backing us.” She was very disturbed.

All of the students returned to school on May 7, 1951. The attorneys had taken the case and said that if they did not receive information by May 8, 1951, from the school board, they would file suit in federal court. On May 23, 1951, the NAACP filed in federal court the petition for desegregation. As I remember that’s when it all began. My Aunt Frances drove my grandfather, grandmother, and me to court for each session. We did not win in federal court. Superintendent J. McIlwaine fired Principal Boyd Jones, and others lost their jobs, among them John Lancaster, Prince Edward County farm agent and Vera Allen. Vera Allen lost her license in Virginia and had to move to North Carolina to teach, leaving her two girls, Edwilda and Edna, with their father until the weekend when she would return and have to leave out again to be in North Carolina to teach.

You had to have property to be a plaintiff. I remember my grandparents one evening discussing the amount of property you had to have – one acre – and after that they said you had to have two acres. I guess that this was done because a lot of families had one acre. I recall my grandfather measuring out to see if one of the neighbors had two acres. Some people wanted to sign but they were sharecroppers and could not sign. Others were afraid that they would lose their job. My grandfather agreed to put up the acreage for those who wanted to sign the petition but did not have the required acreage. He was advised not to do that but he said he still would.

When we were not successful in federal court, the case *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* advanced to the U.S. Supreme Court along with three other states: Kansas, South Carolina, and Delaware, along with Washington, D.C. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court rendered a decision in the five cases in *Brown v. Board of Education* declaring segregation in public education unconstitutional. This decision overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* 1896 Supreme Court decision that had established the “*separate but equal*” doctrine. We all know that “*separate but equal*” was never equal.

My initial view of the strike was being happy that we had a leader like Barbara Johns. When the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education* was handed down on May 17, 1954, I was overjoyed. Our parents were overjoyed.

I felt that this would improve our level of education and the opportunities that would be afforded the Whites and African Americans would be the same attending the same schools. We would receive the educational tools that we did not have at R.R. Moton.

It was mixed reactions for some who felt they would be targeted. They were concerned that they would not be able to sell their crops in some cases or get credit from stores or banks. At that time, as students, we never thought that we would get the massive resistance that we received from some White citizens and that the board of supervisors would have the power to close all public schools in Prince Edward County for *five* years. Prince Edward County was the only county in the United States of America where schools were closed for five years. Our parents had to own land and pay taxes to be a plaintiff, but the county had the power to close all public schools and the land owners still had to pay taxes. That was the practicing of **Jim Crow**.

The strike led by 16-year-old Barbara Johns preceded Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Ruby Ridges, and many others of the Civil Rights movement and was the only student-led movement. The parents initiated all others. Barbara received death threats and was sent to Montgomery, Alabama, to live with her uncle, Vernon Johns, a civil rights activist; therefore she could not be with us to continue the movement. The 117 plaintiffs, including myself, continued the fight for equal rights in public education.

When I look back on my high school years and that period from 1951 to 1964, I am very happy that I was a part of the movement. Barbara seized the moment that became a movement. *The difference between a moment and a movement is sacrifice.*

There were a lot of sacrifices made by the parents and students. The case had severe consequences for Prince Edward County. Private schools were opened for the Whites. There was a cross burnt on the school yard. The Johns family went away and when they returned home their house was burnt to the ground. To this day they still do not know who started the fire. The school closing adversely affected so many lives. Many students had to leave home for the first time and relocate with families that they did not know. My brother, Henry Cabarrus, was affected by the school closing. The Quakers came to Farmville and took some of the students to live with different families and finish school. He was sent to Ohio to live with a White family. The reason why the schools were closed was that the White families did not want African Americans attending school with their children. He had to adjust to living with a White family and attending a school with all-White students. He said that the first day he attended school one of the girls in the class stared at him the whole time that they were in class. When the class was finished he asked her why she was staring at him, and she said because she had never seen a Black person.

I feel that the end results from the strike far exceeded our goals because we were striking for a new school and new books. On April 23, 1951, students led by Barbara Johns walked out with her, making Robert Russa Moton High School the birthplace of the student-led Civil Rights Movement. This history changed Prince

Edward County, Virginia, and all of America. There would not have been a case if Barbara and Carrie Stokes had not written the letter to the NAACP and insisted that the lawyers come to Farmville and meet with them.

In 1953, a new school was completed for the African American students and the old building became Mary E. Branch #2.

The new school did not fully address our concerns because petitions had been signed authorizing the NAACP to file a lawsuit for integration in the public schools. The school was quickly completed and opened because the White resisters to integration wanted the courts to feel that they were honoring the separate but equal doctrine and did not want the schools integrated.

The long term impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* opened up many doors for minorities. Barack Obama became the first Black president in 2008 and Dr. Chris Howard became the first African American President of Hampden Sydney College, which is about 10 miles from Farmville, Virginia, located in Hampden Sydney, Virginia. We have African American CEO's in Fortune 500 companies, Women were given more opportunities, and nevertheless, we have a lot of work to do to maintain what we fought so hard to gain. We are still on the train and have not arrived.

The lawyers who fought the case and the judges who reviewed the case resulting in the decision handed down by Chief Justice Earl Warren did an awesome job. Although, it was a 13-year struggle and despite the displacement of many students because of the five-year school closing, there were students who became doctors, lawyers and other very successful individuals.

My experience and life after the movement was inspiring. I knew that I could make a difference; the color of my skin could not stop me. ***I learned that in all good, there is a price to pay and a sacrifice. Nothing comes free. Stand up for what you feel is right and don't wait for someone else to declare your destiny. I want people to remember me as an advocate of equality and rights for all human beings,, regardless of ethnicity or gender, as one of the students who walked out with Barbara Rose Johns on April 23, 1951, and a plaintiff in the Davis v. Prince Edward County Board of Education, one of the five cases in Brown v. Board of Education.***



Joy Cabarrus Speakes.

I cannot end this story without writing about my grandparents who were the inspiring force in my life and helped me to build the foundation I needed to deal with life's course and my life's journey. My grandparents did not teach racism and did not support racism. They saw no color. They always said: "Joy put God first in your life."

My grandfather's words to me were:

Remove the word can't from your vocabulary – Put God first
in your life. . . .

Joy, you will have . . . peaks and valleys in your life, hopefully
more peaks than valleys.

God has granted you the gift of life as a person of color.

In this world there are persons of color and White people.

Do not judge a person by color, creed or religion.

Judge the person by your experience and evaluation only.

Society has set standards of superiority for the White race,
which are unequal.

Every White person does not agree.

Chart your course as a person with standards of superiority and
equality with assurance of equal rights.

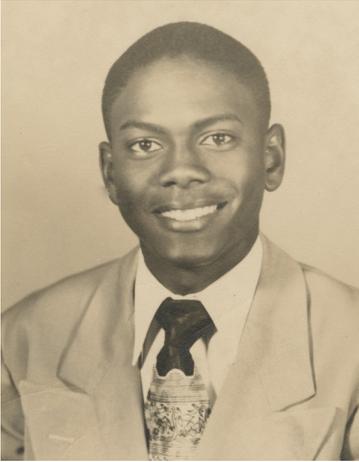
Being a person of color is not a disgrace or compromise of any
negative force.

It is an honor that we are one of God's children, born equal,
given the gift of life, and it is our individual responsibility
to demand that equality.

This has been my motto, based on my grandparents' teaching, and it has enriched my life with success.

To this generation and future generations:

You are the leaders of tomorrow; learn your history, the sacrifices that were made by your ancestors to give you the opportunities you have today. Cast your vote during elections because many of your ancestors gave their lives so that African Americans would be able to vote. You can make a difference. Barbara Johns was 16 years old when she led the only student-led strike when I was 12 years old. The conditions that the students were subjected to at Robert Russa Moton High School were deplorable, and Barbara seized the moment to do something about it. The action that was taken changed Prince Edward County Virginia, the state of Virginia, and America.
You can make a difference!!!!



J. A. Stokes.

J. A. STOKES

OUR MANHATTAN PROJECT

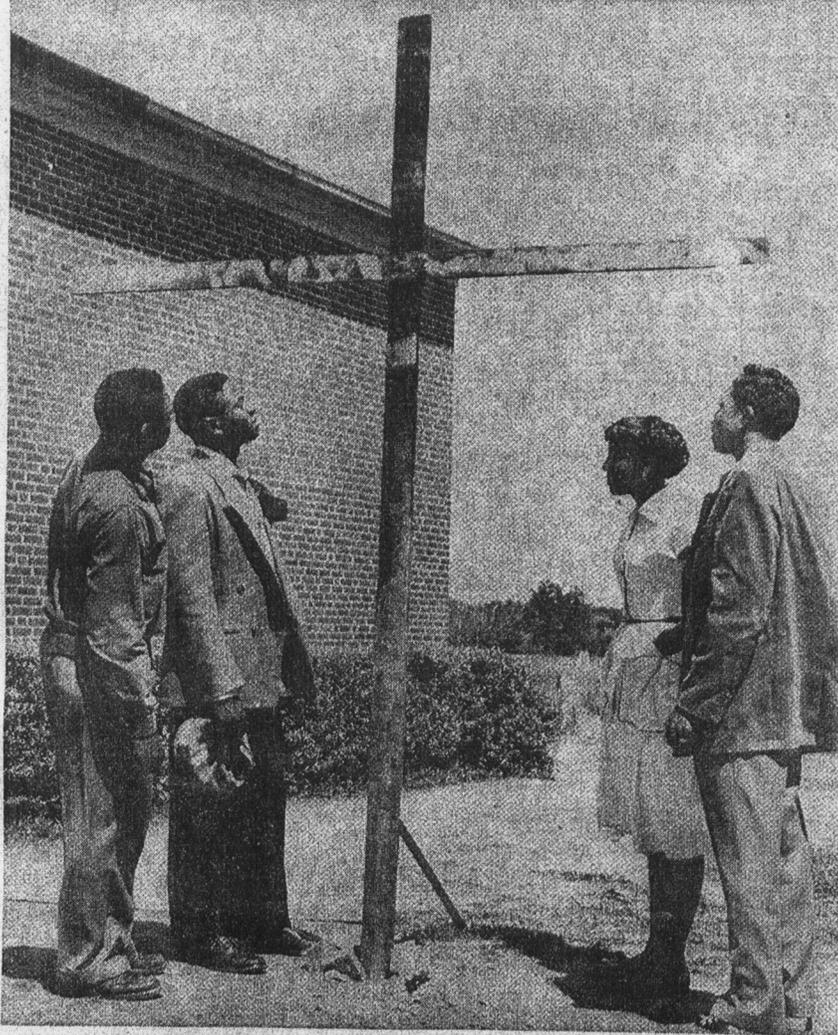
The smoldering cross dwarfed us. As the four of us – Admore Joiner, Thelma Allen, Rome Allen, and I – craned our necks and fixed our eyes on the menacing reminder of racist terror, it sent chills through our entire beings. No, this was not an imagined threat; this was real. The burning rags wrapped around the top portion of this heavy wooden structure had begun to burn out and fall to the ground. Its remnants were now curling around the base, withering like snakes, and

slowly dying out. The pungent odor of chemicals and residue that had been used for this ungodly, eerie act filled the air with an intense putrid odor that penetrated the entire atmosphere surrounding the school. The inner portions of my nostrils burned as I stood there. In that moment, the stench seemed to encompass the whole universe. The deadness settling over the area created a knot that gripped the pit of my stomach, making me want to regurgitate. This horrendous symbol was intended to intimidate us and to get even with the Colored people who had filed a lawsuit against the Prince Edward County School Board and the man we called “Oligarch”: Superintendent of Schools McIlwaine. We had to wait for things to cool down before we could take a photo of this sight.

Yes, this atrocious act was an attempt to instill fear into our hearts and minds so that we would remove our names from the petition declaring our opposition to unequal schools. Causing fear had been a traditional tactic used by the power structure to control the mindsets, concepts, ideals, idea, progress, and upward mobility of the downtrodden, the needy, the weak, the humble, and persons of color in Prince Edward County. Those in authority wanted to control all facets of our lives. Once the powerful had weakened their victims, they would then gain full control. As a result, the Oligarchy felt that they had lost control when Colored folks in this bucolic area of Virginia rose up and challenged the Establishment. They felt angry, even helpless, because a bunch of Colored children had led the charge.

The *Farmville Herald* newspaper editor and other writers had a field day with our rebellion. Most of them could not fathom how a bunch of Colored high school students were successful in pulling the wool over the eyes of the Establishment in such a manner. After calling us Communists, they decided to ask questions: “How did the parents of these children permit them to do such an evil thing?” “Who gave these Colored children permission to do this to us Whites, people who have been so kind to the Colored people in this community?” “How come the parents of these disobedient children did not whip them for being disrespectful to White

Pupils Look at Cross Burned in Moton Schoolyard



This is cross that was burned in the yard at the Robert R. Moton High School in Farmville, Saturday. Pupils of the school who left are Admore Joyner, John

asked end of racial segregation in Prince Edward County schools. Looking at cross, from Stokes, Miss Thelma Allen and Rome Matthews. EXCLUSIVE AFRO PHOTO BY HENDERSON.

BRUTALITY UNSTEMMED:

No Victory in Croquet

John Stokes and classmates viewing cross burned in their schoolyard.

folk?” “Who taught these children to act this way and think this way? There must be some outsiders who are teaching them how to think!!” “Our races will be ruined if we permit the White students and the Colored children to attend school together!!” And, of course, the most irrational fear of all: “Our poor little White girls will be raped!!”



J. A. Stokes – President of Class – 1951.

Boldly, we put our names on this petition for equality and justice for all. We knew that we would have targets on our backs for the remainder of our lives. Standing beneath this monument of evil reinforced my resolve to change this practice that had existed well before *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). With every fiber of my being, I vowed to change the status quo. It was then I decided to become an active member of the Civil Rights Movement.

Barbara Rose Johns initiated this movement when she approached us for advice. By us I mean my sister, Carrie D. V. Stokes, and me. Carrie and I were two of the senior leaders at Robert Russa Moton High School. Carrie, my twin sister, had been elected president of the student body and held key roles in multiple clubs and organizations. I was president of the senior class, state president of the New Farmers of America (N. F. A.) for the state of Virginia, managing editor of the *Motonian*, the school newspaper, captain of the track team, and captain of the debating team. Barbara knew that we had leadership skills. We knew the lay of the land. As she told us: “I need you all because I know that I can trust you and because you know the students here.” Barbara had seen us operate; she realized that we knew how to bridge the gap that existed in schisms within the Colored community.

Our first meeting took place on the hard cinder block bleachers that served as part of our athletic field. The four of us – Barbara Johns, Carrie Stokes, Irene Taylor, and I – were the founding members. With this meeting, we launched one of most influential civil rights movements in the State of Virginia. In my view,



J. A. Stokes – A Boy Scout.

we jump-started our own *Manhattan Project*. Remember. We were war children. We had experienced World War II and the Korean Conflict. In our minds, we developed the ability to offer critiques and analyze secret missions – spy concepts. I had listened to war stories via battery-operated radios. Instead of playing cowboys and Indians, we played soldiers and spies. When I became involved with this project at school, it became a top secret project whereby only a few trusted and tested friends would be invited to join.

Each selected student had to pass a litmus test. Our inner-circle would have to be totally trustworthy in order for us to succeed. There would be no space for the slightest error. Everything had to be planned as minute as a gnat's eyebrow. We were on a very dangerous mission. We knew that we would be

navigating “uncharted waters.” No group of students had ever pulled off such a feat. What did we plan to do? The dangerous task we sought to undertake was to stage a student strike to protest the inequalities at our high school: the segregated Robert Russa Moton High School, in Prince Edward County, Farmville, Virginia!! Our objective? Simple!! We wanted a new building to replace the tar paper shacks. I understood why Barbara Johns needed our help. You see, within this segregated community of Colored folk, we had to deal with the many Judases among us. I felt a parallel between our situation and the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*. We had to unite persons who, at times, did not get along with each other and who, at times, did not really like each other. Our challenge was to bring enough people together in order to defeat a common foe. That foe was the Oligarchy!!!!

Our high school principal, Mr. M. Boyd Jones, has to bear some responsibility for our unification effort at the high school. His leadership skills included hiring a staff that taught my twin sister and me how to operate within the confines of our society. In other words, we learned to be leaders without showing up on the radar screen. It was like the old story about seeing a duck gliding over the water; its feet moving rapidly below the surface could not be seen – unless the water was clear. We even practiced, at times, the old saying: “Never let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.”

A long history of discrimination was against us. The Colored students in Prince Edward County had been programmed for failure from day one of the inception of public education there. Inequality had been so pervasive that we felt it bordered on being crimes against human beings. Although there were more registered Colored students in the county at that time, the property value for all of the White schools in the area was in the millions. Comparatively, the property value for the Colored students was in the thousands of dollars. Some White schools

were stately, all brick buildings and others were constructed of some type of cinder-block or stucco. Each building for White students had its own indoor plumbing facility, central heating unit and stood alone on its own property – owned by the county. Each building had multiple classrooms. One elementary school for Whites in Farmville stood on the campus of Longwood University. This school was used as a laboratory facility for future teachers. Farmville High was a state-of-the-art edifice. This huge, majestic, multi-leveled structure represented Utopia to the ruling class. It had a gymnasium, cafeteria, science lab, huge auditorium, atrium, and an athletic facility that was second to none in the state of Virginia.

In stark contrast, all 13-15 elementary schools for Colored children in Prince Edward County were of wood construction and were built on Colored church grounds. Students had to use outdoor toilets and drink well water or pump water. There was no central heat; a potbellied stove was the heating source for each site. The principals and teachers at each school had to start their own fires on wintry mornings.

I remember my brother Clem serving as the teacher/principal at New Hope Elementary School. He was in a running battle with Superintendent McIlwaine concerning the mere necessities for students in his one-room wooden school. The parents would have fundraisers in order to purchase school supplies for their children. In fact, Clem often took money out of his pocket to purchase lime to kill the maggots or just to diminish the odor in the outdoor toilets. How many times Clem bought wood so that his students would not be cold!! *Truly, this was separate,*

but equal?



R. R. Moton High School – 1950's.
John A. Stokes and Loreda Branch
(main brick building in background).

Robert Russa Moton High School, one of the two schools built of brick for Colored students, was constructed to accommodate 180 students. When we went on strike in 1951, more than 450 students occupied those grounds. Instead of putting up brick buildings to house the overflow, the Oligarchy constructed three tar paper shacks. Unlike the White schools, Moton High had no cafeteria, no gymnasium, and no adequate auditorium for proper seating of students. The three tar paper shacks were in worse shape than housing for chickens, cows, and other farm animals. And I should know. I had a job milking twenty cows per day for a German dairy farmer. His cows were housed in a more insulated facility than our temporary school buildings were. Yes, the barns even had running water. There was no plumbing in any of the tar paper shacks.



R. R. Moton High School Cheerleaders. Front Row: T. Allen, V. Bigger, M. Dennis
Back Row: J. Stokes, M. Goode, L. Branch, B. Zabresky, M. West.

Our source of heat was one potbellied stove in each classroom in each shack. Students had to run to the main brick building to use the toilet – rain, shine, sleet or snow. These tar paper shacks could not be hidden from the eyes of the public. They were located on Route #15 which ran right through the town of Farmville, Virginia. Travelers questioned us about a chicken farm being located so close to a school. The travelers were astonished when Colored students poured out of those chicken coops to change classes or go home. In addition to the inadequate facilities, we had to tolerate used buses, used books, used furniture, and more. The books had been “endorsed” with racial slurs as they were handed down to the Colored students.

We had grown sick and tired of the injustices and the inequalities. Carrie and I attended school board meetings with my brother Clem, our parents, or members of the community. The board members would always respond by indicating that things were in the works and we would have to be patient. In fact, the more uncivil board members had the nerve to state “yawl have equality.” In both cases, we were being asked to accept a steady diet of lies and untruths as indications of progress. Our God-given senses told us differently. We could:

Smell the odor of the outdoor toilets that the elementary school children had to use in the rural areas of the county which were located on church grounds rather than school board property. Some had been stung by insects and frightened by snakes and other creatures who took up residence in the outdoor toilets.

Observe and evaluate the stark differences between the well-insulated brick buildings for White students and poorly constructed wooden structures for Colored students. Many Colored children had to walk past those well insulated

brick structures for Whites in order to reach their poorly constructed wood school buildings.

Smell and taste the choking soot that spewed from the hot stove pipes when they fell down (among scattering pupils) in the tar paper shacks as students were attempting to complete their studies.

Feel the burn of the overheated potbellied stoves that were located in each tar paper shack. Feel the wind and rain when it cut through the walls that had not been insulated or water proofed.

See the obvious differences between the public school facilities for White students and Colored students in the county.

See the racial slurs that were put in the used books that we were required to use after the White students had used them.

Evaluate what we saw, felt, smelled, heard as the hand-me-down buses were rumbling along before constantly breaking down.

After our first meeting in October 1950, our final secret preparedness session took place at the Stokes' home place near Hampden Sydney, Virginia, on Sunday, 22 April 1951. We fine tuned our movements on that date/day.

On 23 April 1951, we walked out of Robert Russa Moton High School demanding equality. We did not strike for integration. We only wanted a new facility and all that came with it. Events took place very rapidly that day. Reverend Francis Griffin, a civil rights advocate, spokesperson for the needy, and the pastor of The First Baptist Church in Farmville, Virginia, heard of our walkout and came to lend his assistance. Reverend Griffin suggested that we contact the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People headquarters in Richmond, Virginia. Carrie, Barbara and Catherine followed up on this suggestion. The NAACP informed them that all requests must be submitted in writing. Carrie, Barbara and Catherine drafted the letter, typed and signed it, and delivered it, with trepidation, to the post office box at the main post office. Fearing that the letter might get "lost," we felt we could not trust the mail service. We asked for a meeting with the Superintendent of Schools on the very same day that we walked out



New Farmers of America State Delegation Annual Conference – Petersburg, Virginia.
President: John A. Stokes (Front row extreme right – standing).

of school, but he refused to honor our request. He indicated that he would not meet with us until we had gone back to classes.

Pressure from the community, the board or someone caused the Superintendent to change his mind. He met with us on 24 April 1951. My twin sister, Carrie, kept a diary of a few events during that period. Her record tells us how low in esteem the Superintendent held the education of Colored people. He showed more interest in the monies that the county was losing each day by us being out of school than addressing the obvious issues at hand. He refused to permit us to have a call meeting with members of the School Board.

On 25 April 1951, we met with our NAACP lawyers. They convinced us to file a lawsuit for integration rather than one for equality. They informed us that they were merging our case with four other cases which would go forth to the Supreme Court. They felt that our case had many merits because it was the only one of the five cases that was *student-led*.

Later that week, Lester Banks, executive director of the NAACP held a community meeting with parents and students to discuss strategies as we moved forward with the lawsuit. A few community members objected to our decision to sue the authorities. Lester Banks responded thusly: “There is no such thing as separate but equal . . . Elsewhere in America, Negro students are attending White schools and, mind you, the skies haven’t yet fallen.” Once Mr. Banks spoke, the Judases in the meeting were quieted.

In May 1951, I along with others signed the petition for integration. But the Prince Edward County School Board refused to accept the 1954 Supreme Court decision. All of the public schools in the County closed from 1959 to 1964, rather than integrate. White groups opened a private school for White students only. But ultimately, we prevailed.

The image of the smoldering cross has always been embedded in the inner-most recesses of my being. Instead of surrendering to its intimidation, I found the courage to resist its efforts to frighten me into submission. You see, that cross-burning ignited in me a passionate desire to change our political, educational, economic, and justice systems. I wanted to change the entire world! That



John Stokes.

burning cross taught me something. It illustrated just how much the White Power Structure feared us. They were unnerved by thoughts of intelligent, well-informed Colored people and the changes they could make. That cross was also a sign that said: “Divide and Conquer!” To counter the politics that sought to separate us, I made it my job to unify individuals for the common good – regardless of creed, color, or belief. Our class mascot was the Bald Eagle, from which we derived our class motto: “Eagles soar high.” Perhaps this was inspired by Isaiah 40:31, my mother’s favorite verse: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, *and* not faint.” Scripture gave me my enduring strength to continue to press on, even in the face of adversity. And for nearly 50 years, I have soared like an eagle – as an educator and a public servant.

BOLLING ET AL. V. C. MELVIN SHARPE, ET AL.

Washington, D.C.

Since its inception, Washington, D.C. has been home to a significant population of African Americans. Yet as the nation's capitol, the District of Columbia, did not set a positive example regarding race relations; it merely followed custom. Washington, D.C. was firmly rooted in racial segregation.

After World War II, the country moved to integrate the military, but Washington, D.C. seemed uninterested in challenging racial custom. By 1950 the traditional African American community leadership, i.e., churches, sororities, lodges, had failed to organize any protest about rundown facilities that served as schools for their children. Even most parents with "good" wages from government jobs remained silent in the matter of substandard segregated schools. That same year the owner of a local African American barbershop stepped forward and filled the leadership void in the matter of better schools for their children. His name was Gardner Bishop, a man who simply knew civil right from social wrong.

It has been reported that on September 11, 1950, Bishop led a group of eleven African American children to the city's new Junior high school for White students. The school, named for John Philip Sousa, was a large modern building, boasting of multiple basketball courts and spacious classrooms. At that moment Gardner Bishop asked for admittance for the African American students that had accompanied him to see Sousa Junior High School. It seemed clear that the building could accommodate a higher enrollment. His request was denied, ensuring the African American students a continued unequal educational experience.

Bishop had been organizing, parents to act regarding the poor school their children were assigned to. After his field trip to Sousa High, it was time for action. He approached Attorney Charles Houston on their behalf. The idea was to request a facility, equal to that of Sousa High, constructed for their children. Houston worked on this case independently; it was not a NAACP case.

In 1950 while preparing the *Bolling* case, Charles Hamilton Houston was stricken with a heart attack. As a result, he asked colleague and friend James Nabritt, Jr. to help Gardner Bishop and his group. At that point the idea of equalization of facilities was rejected by Nabritt and replaced by a challenge to segregation per se.

In 1951 in U.S. District Court, the case of *Bolling v. Sharpe*, was filed. This case was named for Spottwood Thomas Bolling, one of the children who accompanied Gardner Bishop to Sousa High. He was among those denied admission based solely on race.

Although unsuccessful, Nabritt trusted his concept of an all-out attack on segregation. The *Bolling* case would later meet with success as one of the cases combined under *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The following essays are by members of families who were among the plaintiffs representing schools in the nation's capital.



Jennings family school integration photo.

ADRIENNE JENNINGS (BENNETT)

“SEPARATE BUT UNEQUAL”

I was twelve years old in 1950, when the Campbell A.M.E. Church in Washington, D.C., under the leadership of its pastor, the Rev. Samuel E. Guiles, hosted NAACP strategy meetings and rallies to fight segregation in public schools. My parents, James C. and Luberta W. Jennings, were members of Campbell A.M.E. Church, and were actively involved in these meetings. They never attended a segregated school, having lived

in New Jersey. After witnessing their children’s experience in the “Separate But Equal” school environment, they were dissatisfied with its doctrine. As concerned parents, rather than having their daughters – me and my sister Barbara – travel miles outside of their neighborhood to Langley Junior High School, they felt that it made more sense for them to attend the newly completed John Philip Sousa Junior High School, which was a segregated school for White children located in their own neighborhood of Anacostia. My parents later joined the Consolidated Parents Group, under the leadership of its president, Mr. Gardner Bishop, and actively participated to further the group’s mission to desegregate schools. In 1952, along with my father (Mr. James C. Jennings), and sister Barbara, we were named as plaintiffs with six others on the *Bolling v. Sharpe* case, which was combined with four other United States segregated schooling cases and became known jointly as *Oliver L. Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas) et al.* In 1954, after the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its decision to end segregation in public schools, I continued my education and graduated from Spingarn High School, a desegregated school in Washington, D.C. Because of the extraordinary education I received during my years within the “Separate But Equal” school system, I was inspired to join the teaching profession. I obtained a Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education and later taught in the D.C. public school system, teaching second and third graders for thirty-one years. At the time of this writing, I continue to reside in my hometown of Washington, D.C.

THE TRIP TO JOHN PHILIP SOUSA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Monday, September 11, 1950, was a regularly scheduled school day within the D. C. public school system. However, on this day, I did not attend Randall Junior High School, which was my current school in the southwest section of D.C. Rather, on this school day, I anxiously assembled with a group of students and parents at the Campbell A.M.E. Church to ready ourselves to travel to John



Jennings family.

Philip Sousa Junior High School in hopes of gaining admission to attend this newly built segregated “Whites only” school in Washington, D.C. which was in my neighborhood of Anacostia. We gathered in a caravan of cars and proceeded to travel to the new school.

While riding to the school, I was anxiously anticipating what would happen once we arrived and what my first day would be like at the new school. Although I was looking forward to attending the new school, I was having some reservation because I wanted to stay at my current school with my longstanding classmates. Nevertheless, I was excited, carrying my new notebook and other new school supplies.

Once we arrived at the school, I assembled in line with the other students and parents behind Mr. Gardner Bishop, the president of the Consolidated Parents Group who escorted us to the front entrance of the school. The school principal greeted us at the school’s front entrance and informed us that we would not be admitted. We then peacefully returned to our cars and traveled back to our homes.

It was of no surprise that our request for admission was rejected. Our civil act to seek admission through our trip to John Philip Sousa Junior High School served as our “test case” to desegregate schools, which aided in our legal quest to end the “Separate But Equal” doctrine.

Now that I was not granted admission to attend John Philip Sousa Junior High School, I was eager to return to my current school, and continue my learning experience in an environment where the teachers were devoted to educating and “growing” African American students.



Adrienne Jennings Bennett

THE DAY OF THE DECISION

It was Monday, May 17, 1954. I arrived at Spingarn High School, located in the northeast section of Washington, D.C., for a typical school day. While sitting in my French class in the early afternoon, listening to the instructions of my teacher, Mrs. Valerie Parks, I heard a voice echoing from the school's public address system. The voice announced that the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its decision concerning the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. We won the case! Classes have ended for the day!

I quickly gathered my belongings, as did other students, and proceeded to leave the school building. The school's hallways were filled with voices

of excitement and celebration from the victorious outcome of the case.

While walking down the hill from the school to the bus stop, I was approached by a reporter, who startled me by rudely placing his microphone directly in my face, forcefully asking me about my reaction to the decision. Before I could respond, my bus arrived, and I quickly ran to board the bus.

As I sat on the bus, many passengers were excitedly discussing the outcome of the case. I, too, was excited and couldn't wait to get home to celebrate with my parents. However, I was thinking about how soon the D.C. schools would implement desegregation. This concerned me because I was in the eleventh grade, and like many teenagers, my friendships with my classmates were very important to me. My desire was to remain at my current school to graduate with my fellow classmates in the event that desegregation would be implemented before my graduation. Would the desegregation date be effective before or after my high school graduation? That was the question. I didn't know if I would have an option to remain at my current school.

Once I arrived at home, my mom greeted me and said that this was a great day for D.C.! She mentioned that reporters would be stopping by to conduct interviews and to take pictures. Throughout the evening, as I was working to complete my homework assignments, my parents continued to share their excitement with family and friends. This was indeed a great day for the District of Columbia!

WITHIN THE WALLS OF “SEPARATE BUT EQUAL” SCHOOLS

I was always excited to learn as a student and looked forward to attending class daily. I was blessed to have been taught by the most dedicated and experienced educators in D.C.’s “Separate But Equal” school system. They lovingly demanded the very best from each student, as they nurtured us in all areas. Our teachers were especially skilled at motivating us to do our very best and to excel in all that we did. They went above and beyond the call of duty. They visited the homes of students to encourage parental involvement, as they knew that this was key to a student’s academic and social success. When I was ill and out of school for a period of time, my teacher brought all of my school assignments to my home so that I could keep up with the my class. Teachers often provided supplemental school supplies, and even articles of clothing when students were in need.

Although “Separate But Equal” facilities were void of many resources, my teachers were very creative and resourceful in their use of limited resources, as they developed supplemental teaching materials that were necessary for us as students to survive in this society. While our society called it “separate but equal”, our resources were not equal to those in segregated white schools. Our textbooks of instruction were used, often falling apart with missing pages, along with worn classroom furniture, and our school building facilities, old and in need of repair.

“Separate But Equal” also meant that we often did not attend our neighborhood school. My siblings and I used public transportation to commute to schools that were several miles outside of our immediate neighborhoods, passing several segregated “White only” schools that were closer to our neighborhoods and under capacity.

Despite these differences, I received an excellent education chiefly due to the love and concern of our teachers and the strength of the African American community.

CONCLUSION

As I think about this case and its significance, I find myself reflecting on the awesome role that my parents and church had in their fight against civil injustice caused by the “Separate But Equal” doctrine. You see, my parents were passionate about taking a stand to “right this wrong.” The providence of God made it very clear to my parents that “change” had to come. So as leaders in their church and local community, who never accepted the status quo, it was of no surprise that my parents would be involved in the pursuit of social justice. And yes, the Campbell A.M.E. Church was right there in the center of much of the planning activities, serving as a catalyst that hosted the meetings for parental involvement in seeking social justice for young people, and, through its mere presence, reminding us of God’s existence throughout this journey of social change. My deepest gratitude to Mrs. Sarah Bolling, the mother of Spottswood and Wanamaker Bolling, William Briscoe, the father of Sarah Louise Briscoe, and the Consolidated Parent Group, Inc. for accepting the challenge of seeing this case to its historical victory. To God Be The Glory.



Barbara A. Jennings

BARBARA A. JENNINGS

THE DISCOVERY

BY LETITIA ALEXANDER

My name is Letitia Alexander and my mother was Barbara Anne Jennings (deceased). I have three siblings, Kent McIntosh, Kim Relaford, and Pamela Primis.

I, along with my siblings, discovered that members of my family, specifically my mother, aunt, and grandfather, were original plaintiffs in the landmark case *Bolling v. Sharpe*, one of the cases consolidated under the landmark case *Brown v. the Board of Education*.

We actually didn't find out until we were adults. I remember my cousin Renee calling me after church one Sunday saying: "Tisha, you're not going to believe what happened in Church today." It happened to be Black History Month and they had a program that day to celebrate. She stated that her mom, Adrienne Bennett, our grandfather Chester Jennings Sr., and my mother, Barbara A. Jennings, were original plaintiffs in one of the most significant events in African American history. Words cannot completely express how stunned, surprised, and proud I felt at that moment.

I was on the phone in awe as I was told how my grandparents, along with our family church Campbell AME, spearheaded the events that led up to one of the five cases that were part of the *Brown* decision. Their case was *Bolling v. Sharpe*, a school desegregation case in Washington, D.C.

Suddenly, it was as if a light bulb came on in my core alerting me that "this is the reason I am the person I have developed into." I often wondered why I would always speak up when I saw injustice. Without any fear of retaliation. It was something I just had to do. It would have made my life easier if I didn't speak up, especially working in the legal environment, but there were certain things I just couldn't let go without addressing them.

There were many times throughout my life that I could not sleep because of something that happened earlier in the day that I felt was not



Letitia Alexander

fair or was an injustice to me or someone else. It's as if I have this sensation in my core where I must address it or will not be able to have peace of mind or sleep until I confront the issue. Now I know why. The same blood that runs through me is the same that ran through my mother and grandparents.

Also, when I realized that after all these years of celebrating Black History Month, I felt deprived of the privilege to celebrate my mother and other family members who made such a significant impact on the lives of the African American community. I then thought about how proud my daughter, Dominique Alexander, and grandson Demari Jordan Tucker will be to know that their family members were part of this landmark decision.

Delaware (*Belton [Bulah] v. Gebhart*)

Carolyn Anderson (Neff) was born in 1939, in Wilmington, Delaware, to Dr. and Mrs. Leon V. Anderson. She graduated from Claymont High School in 1957. At age 17, she was the General Manager of the Robin Hood summer theatre in Ardencroft, Delaware. This theatre was the first Equity summer theatre in the country.

In 1961 she graduated from the Boston Conservatory of Music with a bachelor's in music. While a student there she served as the senior class president. After she completed her music education, she moved to Chicago in 1961 and worked as a social worker for six years. During her time in Chicago her love of music continued as she played in the Chicago North Side Symphony as a violinist for six years.

In 1967 she moved to California where she worked for three years in the music department at Desilu Studios which became Paramount Studios a year later. In California she played violin in the Santa Monica Symphony for 20 years and was the General Manager for the last three years.

Carolyn added entrepreneur to her name when she opened a fast food restaurant in 1969 called Union Sub Shop. Shortly thereafter she married Thomas Neff III, in 1971. The couple had two sons, born in 1973 and 1978.

Her career as a restaurateur led her to become the Food Coordinator for Fencing and Volleyball for the 1984 Olympics. She sold her restaurant nearly 20 years later and moved to Portland, Oregon with family in 1988. That same year she joined the Marylhurst Symphony and served as its manager from 2000 until 2003. During that time she began a career in sales and marketing which spanned from 1988 until 2002.

As General Manager of the Metropolitan Youth Symphony 2002-2009, she traveled to Europe several times with the Santa Monica Symphony and the Metropolitan Youth Symphony. She retired from playing in the orchestra in 2018. She currently works in internet marketing.

Joan Elizabeth Anderson was born in 1938 to Dr. Leon and Beulah Anderson in Wilmington, Delaware, where she and her siblings lived for many years. She attended Wilmington Elementary and Howard High Schools. The Anderson family moved to Ardencroft, a suburb of Claymont, Delaware, in the late spring of 1952, at the invitation of the Ardencroft community, which wanted Black families to live there. She attended Claymont High School and became part of the *Brown v. Board of Education* lawsuit. Joan graduated from Claymont in 1956. She attended Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, for two years, and transferred to Boston University, where she graduated in 1960, with a BFA degree. She lived in Wilmington, Delaware and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for a couple of years. She then moved to New York, and worked as an actress, under the name of Elizabeth

Anderson, in soap operas, and did secretarial work in the mid- to late 1960's. Joan later worked as a counselor in a drug rehabilitation center called Teen Challenge. In 1978, Joan graduated from the L.I. Bible School and taught Sunday school classes. She worked in the accounting department at the American Institute of CPAs from 1985 to 2006. Also, in 2006, Joan was honored, along with 11 other Claymont students, with a plaque "First State, First School, First Student to Integrate." Also the Delaware State Senate honored her with a certificate of appreciation for being part of the first court-mandated integration of a public school in the United States. In 2007, Joan worked in the accounting department at Major League Baseball. Presently, she is working as an accounts payable specialist at Landor, the Global Brand Consulting and Design Company.

Brigitte L. Brown, a proud mother, and daughter of **Ethel Louise Belton**, the plaintiff from Delaware in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. the Board of Education*. She was raised with two siblings and the knowledge that her mother was instrumental in the pursuit of equality in education for all people of the United States. Brigitte was born and raised in Wilmington, Delaware, and attended William Penn High School in New Castle County. She attended the University of Delaware on an academic scholarship and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts/Visual Communications and a minor in Biology. She has pursued her creative ideas as an artist, inventor, and entrepreneur. Ms. Brown received a United States patent for her invention on a multi-image display unit which she called a D-II. She coordinated a Federal Upward Bound Program for over four years. She worked on and received her certification in Computer Technology before moving to San Antonio, Texas, where she pursued a Master's Degree in Instruction and Curriculum at the University of Texas, San Antonio. Ms. Brown contracted her services out to the City of San Antonio in the area of computer literacy for five years, concentrating on technology for senior citizens. This was extremely rewarding, and she still independently works with seniors when she can. In 2015 Brigitte opened up a successful consulting and contracting company, utilizing her cumulative knowledge and skills. Her company is named B.I.G. Consulting and Contracting; B.I.G. stands for "Because I'm a Girl."

René Michele Ricks-Stamps was born in 1965 in Denver, Colorado, to **Shirley Barbara Bulah-Stamps**. She was raised by family members Terry and James Travick. The couple gave her their last name, Travick. René went through pre-school, elementary, jr. high School and high school with the last name Travick. Shortly after starting elementary school her foster mother, Terry Travick, died. For a short time, she was raised by Mr. Travis, who was a counselor at the Community College of Denver. While in elementary school she went to live with Mrs. Travick's mother, and thought of as her grandmother. At age 10 she experienced the death of her foster grandmother. She then went to live with the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Travick.

René was educated in Catholic schools. Throughout her teens she worked a series of jobs at various fast food restaurants. After high school she attended trade

school to become a bank teller. Her career pursuits also included Stapleton International Airport where she worked as a custodian, then baggage clerk and later as a security guard. She is currently employed by the United States Postal Service.

Rene' is the mother of four children. She and her late husband, Mathew Ricks, raised her two children. The couple later had two children. She is now a widow.

After the death of her husband, René searched for and reunited with her birth mother, Shirley Bulah-Stamps. She later discovered that her birth mother was the named plaintiff in the historic Delaware school desegregation case *Belton (Bulah) v. Gebhart*, one of the five cases consolidated by the United States Supreme Court in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

Bernice “Sandy” Byrd (Couch). Bernice Willis was born in 1941 and became known as Bernice “Sandy” Byrd when she moved in with her grandparents, Lee and Sarah Byrd. She was raised by her grandparents in their home on Hickman Row in Claymont, Delaware. Her early years of schooling were in the State Line School, which was the school for Black students, grades 1-6, in Claymont. The next school Bernice was supposed to attend was Howard High School in Wilmington, Delaware, but instead she was the youngest of the eleven students who integrated Claymont High School in September 1952. After she graduated from Claymont in 1958, she got married and had two children. After Bernice divorced, she moved to Chester, Pa. and did volunteer work at the Crozer Medical Center in the detox unit. She was hired by a detox center in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, then moved to Atlantic City to become the Assistant Director of the Atlantic City Detox Center. Later Bernice became the Director of the Center and attended and graduated from Lincoln University. She worked at the Detox Center until she retired. After retiring, Bernice became active in political committees and the local school board. The last few years she has given presentations on her experiences as one of the first Black students to integrate in the Southern states. Bernice's children and grandchildren live in Washington, D.C. and Delaware.

Myrtha Trotter (Randolph) grew up in Wilmington, Delaware, in area called Hickman Row. The neighborhood was established in 1919 by the Worth Steel Corporation to serve as segregated housing for the company's African American workforce. Many residents were part of the great exodus of African Americans who fled the South to escape racism and pursue economic opportunity. It was during her high school years that her family found themselves in the midst of social change. Her father joined six other parents in attempting to enroll their children in Claymont High School, closer to home. The segregated African American school was an hour away. However, because Claymont was for Whites only, they were denied. The result was a lawsuit heard by Delaware Judge Collins Seitz, who two years before the *Brown* decision granted the plaintiffs relief demanding that the children named be immediately enrolled in Claymont High School. To bring about more sweeping change their case later became part of *Brown v. Board of Education*. After high school, Myrtha became Mrs. Randolph and over the years had a stellar career as the first African American Acquisitions Assistant for the

Schott Memorial Library at Thomas Jefferson University, and later the first African American Librarian Assistant at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital Medical Library. She is now retired and enjoys spending time with her children and grandchildren.

Virginia Tryon Smilack, was born in 1947 to Evelyn and **Sager Tryon** of Claymont, Delaware, the youngest of three daughters. She lived in Claymont until going to college in Westerville, Ohio, where she met and married Michael Smilack and moved to Dayton, Ohio, where we lived for eight years. After graduating from Wright State University, she worked for two years for the Montgomery County Association for Retarded Citizens with children who were mentally challenged. Then she remained an at home mom to raise two children. Her family then moved to New Jersey. We adopted a teenage boy who was older than our biological children. She worked part-time as a substitute teacher and an administrative assistant until my youngest child was a senior in high school when she became a mainframe programmer for an insurance company. After working for ten years, she quit in order to have time to care for my mother, an aunt, and then my mother-in-law. Currently she is retired. They have two grandchildren who live in Missouri. Over the last 25 or more years she has worked to present the unique role of Claymont, Delaware (*Belton v. Gebhart*) in the integration of America through displays and speeches and commemoration. Her goal is to honor her parents, the plaintiffs, the students who integrated the Claymont High School, and the people of the Claymont community for integrating two years before *Brown v. Board of Ed.* and for being part of the *Brown v. Board of Ed.*

Kansas (*Brown v. Board*)

A native of Topeka, Kansas, **Victoria Jean Lawton (Benson)** grew up in the home of her parents, Mr. Richard and Mrs. Maude Lawton, along with her eight siblings. Her father was one of the few African American skilled plasterers in Kansas and her mother was a homemaker and a descendant of the founders of today's Capital City Community Church of God, which was founded at the beginning of the 20th century, in Topeka, Kansas.

She attended Buchanan School, one of the four elementary schools designated for African American students in the 1951 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* court case. After graduating from Topeka High School, she pursued vocational training in cosmetology. Her application to attend the city's leading beauty school was the first one granted to an African American. When she completed her training, she began her career as a beautician that has continued for more than fifty years. She is also the mother of two adult children and three adopted children. An active member of her church, she serves as a member of the Board of Trustees and as a Deaconess for Capital City Community Church of God.

Katherine Sawyer (Carper) attended Buchanan Elementary, one of four all Black schools in Topeka Kansas. These schools became central to *Brown v. Board of Education*. She was the only child to testify in this court case, during oral arguments in *Brown v. Board* before the federal district court here in Topeka, Kansas. After graduation from Topeka High in 1959 she married James Sawyer and they have four adult children. They have remained living in Topeka for fifty-nine years and are the grandparents of seven children and great grandparents to seven. She feels blessed to have been a part of this very important landmark case.

Ruth Ann Scales (Everett) was a student at Monroe Elementary School in Topeka, Kansas when her mother joined the local NAACP campaign to desegregate public elementary schools in the city. Ironically, her mother's sister, Shirila Fleming, also became part of this legal action on behalf of her son, Duane Fleming. Their families were among a group of thirteen who were plaintiffs in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*. By the time the high court reached a decision, Ruth was enrolled in East Topeka Junior High School. Junior high schools in Kansas had been desegregated years earlier. She graduated from Topeka High School. She married her high school sweetheart, Darl Everett, a cousin of case *Brown* namesake Oliver Brown. After high school she began a career with the State of Kansas. She and her husband were the parents of two children – her late daughter, Terry Lockhart, and a son, Darl Jr. She retired from the Topeka State Hospital. She continues to reside in Topeka, Kansas, where she enjoys spending time with her grand and great grandchildren.

Leola Williams (Brown) (Montgomery) was born, 1921, in Marvel, Arkansas. Her parents were sharecroppers in Arkansas and in the early 1920s relocated to Topeka, Kansas, after her father found work with the Santa Fe Railroad. Along with her brother Robert, she attended racially-segregated Monroe Elementary School from the first to eighth grades. Her ninth-grade year was spent at racially-integrated Lincoln Junior High. In 1939 she graduated with honors from racially-integrated Topeka High School. In 1939, she married Oliver Leon Brown. Years later, in 1950, Oliver Brown began studies for the ministry. That same year he was asked by a childhood friend, attorney Charles Scott, to join other parents recruited by the Topeka NAACP to file a lawsuit against the Topeka Board of Education aimed at desegregating elementary schools. Oliver Brown, along with twelve other parents, became plaintiffs for the NAACP lawsuit filed February 28, 1951. At the time of filing, their lawsuit became known as *Oliver L. Brown, et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka*. In 1953, while working for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, Oliver Brown became an ordained minister for the African Methodist Episcopal denomination. Shortly thereafter on May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court, after consolidating cases from Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia and Washington, D.C., issued a landmark ruling in favor of the plaintiffs finding that racial segregation in public schools violated the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Oliver Brown's name is now part of history. Rev. Oliver Brown died in 1961.

Throughout her adult life Mrs. Brown Montgomery has been involved in church and civic activities. She was employed with J.C. Penny's for 13 years, then with Merchants National Bank in Topeka, Kansas, where she retired after 13 years. Her church membership spans more than 50 years. During that time, she was active in the missionary society, church choirs, usher board and chaired various special events. She is a longtime member of the national organization Church Women United. She is also a charter member of the Board of Advisors of the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research. She is a grandmother, great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother. Mrs. Brown remarried in 1973 to Thrikiel Montgomery. He died in 1993. She continues to reside in Topeka, Kansas.

South Carolina (*Briggs v. Elliott*)

Nathaniel Briggs was a student at the historic Scott's Branch School in Summerton, South Carolina, located in Clarendon County. His parents, Harry and Eliza Briggs, decided the time was right to band together with the townspeople to fight for better educational facilities and equal amenities, i.e., teacher pay, new books, school buses, etc. A petition was generated on the behalf of the children of School District 22 of Clarendon County, South Carolina. The Briggs name appeared first alphabetically on the petition, and therefore for whom the case was named. As a result of this decision, pressure from the power structure in Summerton caused Harry and Eliza Briggs to lose their jobs along with other petitioners.

The case was filed through local attorney Harold Boulware, and N.A.A.C.P attorney Thurgood Marshall. Their decision to take the case to the South Carolina Court in 1949 resulted in the case of *Briggs v. R.M. Elliott*. Eventually, this case became one of the cases consolidated as *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka*.

As a result of taking this stand, the family was split apart between Miami and South Carolina, and then Miami and New York City, while Harry and Eliza sought employment opportunities. Nathaniel was enrolled in Benjamin Franklin High School, in East Harlem, New York City. He was then drafted in 1968 and sent to Vietnam. After serving a tour of duty, he returned to New York and began working for Ford Motor Company. He retired from Ford Motor Company after 32 years. He also served for two years in the United States Army and 13 years in the New Jersey National Guard. After the military, he got married to Octavia A. Hilton and became a member of the Masonic Order.

Nathaniel currently resides in New Jersey and has served as President of the Bergen County N.J. Branch N.A.A.C.P. and as third Vice President of the New Jersey Conference of Branches of the N.A.A.C.P. He has served as trustee chair at Varick Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church of Hackensack, N.J. and as parade marshall of the annual *Briggs v. Elliott* Parade in Summerton, South Carolina. He remains active in the struggle for human and civil rights by attending demonstrations, marches, and has participated in panel discussions in Topeka, Kansas, over

the years. He is currently serving as First Vice President of Bergen County, New Jersey Branch N.A.A.C.P. His life's motto is "just give back."

Ada Stukes Adderley was born in 1947 in Summerton, South Carolina, to Gardenia and Willie Stukes. Her siblings were Willie Stukes, Jr., Denia Stukes Hightower, Louis Stukes, and Gregory Stukes. Ada was not school age at the time when her parents and older siblings were involved with the case *Briggs v. Elliott*, the first case that was consolidated under the United States Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

In 1951 Ada's mother moved the children to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to unite with family and to give them all a better future, after the death of her husband. In Philadelphia, Ada attended public schools – Gideon Elementary School, Roosevelt Junior High School, and Germantown High and Temple University.

Ada has always been a lover and student of the arts, performing in many singing, acting, and dancing performances. After getting married and raising four children and one daughter in love (stepdaughter), Ada's joy for the arts, passion for children, and legacy of education in her family led her returning to the workforce in 1986 where she was employed by the school district of Philadelphia in special education as well as the Creative and Performing Arts School of Philadelphia (CAPA). Ada retired from the Philadelphia School District in 2011 after finishing her career in the employee health services department.

Ada has the same generous spirit she learned from her mother and spent many years volunteering in the community while supporting her children with their involvement in school, sports, and dance specifically.

In 2008 Ada became a widow after her husband lost his life to kidney disease. She has dedicated her life to her family and is the loved matriarch, going the extra mile for everyone in the family! Ada currently lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania after renovating the home her mother purchased in 1958. She enjoys traveling throughout the U.S. and the world while visiting her five children, 10 grandchildren, as well as bonus grands and one great-grandchild.

Ky Adderley was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1975. He is the son of Ada Stukes Adderley and Nelson Adderley. Ky is a leadership and education expert, mentor, super connector and networking guru – a persistent link between people and their dreams. Having conducted school reviews and training for teachers and principals on three continents – North America, South America, and Africa – Ky works to increase the number of quality schools and leaders available to low-income children worldwide. Ky advocates for social justice education, nicknamed by some: "Know Justice, Know Peace." Ky has been a leader in the education sector since 2001 and works as an education leadership consultant globally, where he led teams learning to implement best practices in their schools and organizations. As a leadership consultant, Ky worked with teams in the opening of the groundbreaking Olympic development, college preparatory public school, where students from throughout Rio de Janeiro enjoy a substantive mix of both academics and Olympic sports practice.

In the seven years before moving to Brazil, Ky was the founding principal at KIPP AMP Academy, a public charter school in Brooklyn, New York, that he was recruited to found while working four years in the trenches of education as a sixth-grade teacher in Washington, D.C., as a Teach For America Corps member.

Ky was an All-American athlete in high school and college, and obtained both bachelor and master's degrees from Georgetown University where he excelled in track & field. After years of training for the 2000 Olympics, Ky now runs for pleasure. Ky is expected to earn his doctoral degree in educational leadership in spring 2019. Ky relocated back to Philadelphia in 2018 with his wife, Shanna, daughter Gisela, and dog Xango after six years of living abroad. While abroad Ky and his wife created a non-profit sports program for children in low-income Brazilian communities called PLAYLIFE, offering elite-level soccer, track, and basketball training paired with character education and English courses. They look forward to expanding the program throughout the U.S.

Denia Stukes Hightower is the eldest daughter of William “Bo” and Gardenia Stukes. In 1949, at the age of nine, Denia, her parents, older brother Will, and younger brother Louis were petitioners in a local effort to challenge the constitutionality of school segregation in Summerton, South Carolina. This effort, *Briggs v. Elliott*, was argued by the Honorable Thurgood Marshall before U.S. District Court Judge Julius Waites Waring, and was later combined with four additional school desegregation cases in other states to become *Brown v. Board of Education*. Signing the petition did not come without risk for the families involved: Denia's father lost his job (as did the other adult petitioners), and ultimately his life at the age of 33. Following this family tragedy, Denia, her mother and four siblings relocated North to Philadelphia, where she excelled academically at Jay Cooke Junior High School, and Germantown High School. Denia graduated with a bachelors degree in world languages from Howard University, in 1962. She married in 1963, and the births of her two children followed in 1965 and 1968.

Denia's lifelong interests in the arts, education, and culture would become her reality as she traveled extensively throughout the world, and lived with her family in Monterrey, Mexico and Paris, France. She is proud of having traveled to multiple countries on every continent, with the exception of Australia. Education and the arts have remained her passions and priority through her charitable efforts with various non-profit organizations, including the establishment of The Stukes-Hightower Library at a primary school in Lesotho, Africa. Denia has hosted and mentored students in her home in the U.S. and in France, and along with her former husband, established the Hightower Family Foundation to provide scholarships to students in need.

Over the years, Denia has enjoyed the opportunity to work closely with The Brown Foundation and the various milestone celebrations in honor of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

Denia's greatest joy remains being a loving “Manou” to her six grandchildren.

Virginia (*Davis v. Prince Edward County*)

Alfred Leon Cobbs was born in 1943 to W. Lacy and Minnie R. Cobbs in Pamplin, Virginia, a farming community. He was the ninth of ten children. He and his other nine siblings tended to their assigned chores as well as helped with the farming tasks and harvesting of the crops, tobacco being the most labor-intensive and most challenging of them. During the two years he spent in high school in Prince Edward County, he was an excellent student and among those at the top of his class. When the schools were closed in the county rather than integrate, he, like his two brothers Samuel and Freddie, went without formal schooling until a family took him in so that he might continue his education.

For three years he lived with the family of the principal of East End High School, in South Hill, Virginia, where he attended school. When he graduated from high school in 1962, the public schools in Prince Edward County were still not open. After graduating from high school, he attended Berea College (KY) and received his bachelor's degree in German in 1966. He then went on to the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he earned a Master of Arts degree two years later. In 1974, he received his doctorate in German studies from the University of Cincinnati. During his 44 years in higher education, he not only taught German, he also served on numerous committees and commissions and held a number of administrative positions. He worked at the University of Cincinnati, the University of Virginia, and Wayne State University, from which he retired as a tenured professor in 2013. Among his interests are listening to classical music and jazz, singing in the choir, reading, traveling, and exploring other cultures.

Freddie Conley Cobbs was born in Pamplin, Virginia, in 1945 as the youngest of twelve children to Willie Lacy and Minnie Booker Cobbs. His father was a farmer and a sharecropper. Freddie's brothers and he worked in the tobacco, corn and wheat fields along with their father. When the Prince Edward County Schools closed in 1959, Freddie had just completed the eighth grade. His father could not let his three sons go away to school all at one time; so he let one son leave the first year and a second son leave the second year as he was reducing the amount of crops that must be harvested. He let Freddie go to stay with a family in Arlington, Virginia, after he had stayed out of school for two years. Freddie stayed with the Supervisor of Recreation for Arlington County and his wife, who was a Counselor in the District of Columbia School System. When the Prince Edward Free Schools Association opened in September of 1963, Freddie attended that school in his junior year. He completed his senior year in 1965 when the Prince Edward County Public Schools reopened. Freddie then attended Virginia State College in Petersburg, Virginia, and graduated in 1971 with a B.S. in Electronics Technology.

Freddie's first job after graduation was an industrial engineer with General Electric Company, in Lynchburg, Virginia, where he was employed for ten years. On August 28, 1971, Freddie married Gertrude Patricia VanDunk of Binghamton, New York, whom he had met in 1969 when he was a cooperative education student working for IBM Corporation. Freddie then got a job as a manufacturing

engineer with Stackpole Components Company in Farmville, Virginia. In 1985, Stackpole transferred Freddie to Raleigh, North Carolina, to work at its headquarters. Stackpole opened a plant in Mexico and sent Freddie there to train operators to assemble and test switches for electrical appliances. They also sent Freddie to Haiti to train operators in the assembling and testing of keyboards for home computers. In the mid-1990's, the company opened a plant in mainland China, and they sent Freddie there to train operators in the assembling and testing of switches. From 1986 to 2016, Freddie and his wife volunteered with the Boy Scouts of America at Wake Chapel Baptist Church and Redeeming Love Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. They both received the highest award that a Scout Council can give a volunteer, which is the Silver Beaver Award. Freddie has been married to Gertrude (Pattie) for forty-six years.

Samuel Alfonza Cobbs, was born in 1942 to W. Lacy and Minnie Cobbs in Pamplin, Virginia. He was one of ten children – five boys and five girls. He is the eighth child out of ten. He had a great childhood growing up on a farm with his siblings. He attended school in the local county until schools were closed during the summer of 1959. He was out of school for a year before a Quaker organization [The Friends Society of Philadelphia] intervened in the closed school situation. The Society provided assistance in placing about 100 students with foster families in several states in order for them to further their education. He was fortunate enough to have been placed with a wonderful family in southern New Jersey. He lived there for a year and a half and had to move because the family had some financial difficulties. During his last semester in high school he had the opportunity to live with four different families for a month at a time. He wanted very much to run track but that aspiration died because he was not able to do so, since he was moving from family to family each month.

After graduation from high school, he enrolled in Hampton Institute and earned a degree in education. Rather than getting a teaching position after graduation, he joined the National Teacher Corps, through which he earned a Master's Degree from Indiana State University after two years of study and interning in the Gary, Indiana, public school system. He is married to his wonderful wife, Sadie, and they have a son and two grandchildren. He worked for 31 years as a public school teacher in the Gary, Indiana, and Hampton, Virginia public school systems. He also worked for four years in a federally-funded early childhood education program at Hampton Institute. He retired in 2001 after working 35 years in education. He enjoys family, friends, church, listening to music, travel, and reading, which is his favorite pastime.

Barbara Rose Johns was born in 1935, in Harlem, New York, the eldest of five children – Joan, Ernest, Roderick and Robert – born to Robert and Violet Spencer Johns. Later, she lived in Washington, DC, then moved to Darlington Heights, Virginia, where she grew up on a farm, working in tobacco, corn, and wheat fields. She and her sister Joan also sawed down trees for billets to sell for extra income for her family.

After years of frustration with the poor facilities at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia, Barbara decided to do something about it. On April 23, 1951, at the age of 16, Barbara led over 400 students on a strike for two weeks for a better school. Her idealism, planning, and persistence ultimately gained the support of NAACP attorneys Oliver W. Hill and Spottswood W. Robinson, III, who filed suit in federal district court. *Dorothy E. Davis, et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia* was one of five cases argued before the Supreme Court of the United States, and in 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional and that “separate but equal” was inherently unequal. Barbara’s courageous, brave, and fearless actions, along with her fellow students, helped to change the course of history in the nation.

In August 1951, because of threats against her life, Barbara was sent to complete her senior year in Montgomery, Alabama, where she lived with her uncle, the Reverend Vernon Johns, pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and an activist in his own right. She graduated from Alabama State College Preparatory High School in 1952. After graduation, she attended Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, and Antioch College in Ohio, and later graduated from Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with a degree in Library Science. She was a librarian in the Philadelphia school system.

Barbara married the Reverend W.H.R. Powell. They had five children: Tracy, William, Kelly, Terry, and Dawn. After her death, six grandchildren were born: Andrew Jr., Alexis, Jared, Morgan, Avery, and Jacob. Barbara Rose Johns Powell died on September 25, 1991.

Jeanne Joyce Johns (Adkins) was born in 1938 in Charleston, West Virginia, the last of six children born to Reverend Vernon Johns and Altona Trent Johns. At the age of three, the family relocated to Virginia, the place of her father’s birth. The summer before she turned 10, her mother was offered a job teaching music at Alabama State College (now University) in Montgomery, Alabama, and that same year, her father became pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.* She is a graduate of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and retired at age 75 from the position of Editor at Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia. She was married to the late Dr. Aldrich W. Adkins and is the mother of two daughters.

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. preceded her father, Rev. Vernon Johns, as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.

Joan Marie Johns (Cobbs) was born in 1938 to Violet and Robert Johns in Darlington Heights, Virginia, a tobacco farming community, where she and her siblings, Barbara, Ernest, Roderick and Robert, tilled the land and sawed down trees to help the family make a living.

During her high school years at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia, Joan was part of a student strike, led by her sister, Barbara Rose

Johns, to protest conditions at their racially-segregated school. Along with her classmates and other students, Joan became a plaintiff in *Davis v. County Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia*, one of five cases that became the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision that declared segregation in the nation's public schools unconstitutional.

After graduating from high school, Joan attended Howard University, in Washington, D.C. She was later employed by the United States Department of Agriculture and attended their graduate program. In 1961, she married Claude Cobbs and moved to Montclair, New Jersey. From 1961 to 1972, Joan was employed by the Treasury Department, Internal Revenue Service. From 1972, she worked for the Department of Justice, United States Marshals Service, and retired in 1995. Since retiring, Joan volunteered at Cancer Care in Millburn, New Jersey, and tutored children at First Baptist Church in her community of South Orange, New Jersey, where she also serves as a missionary.

Joan and her husband, Claude, have two children, Todd and Melonie, and six grandchildren, Lacey, William, MaryGrace, Xavier, Bryce and Braedon and currently reside in South Orange, New Jersey.

Joy Cabarrus Speakes was a student at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia located in Prince Edward County when she joined a band of fellow students, led by classmate Barbara Johns, in organizing a strike to protest conditions at their school. The school was part of a divided and racially segregated district.

Their strike resulted in the case of *Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board* which, on appeal, became one of the cases consolidated as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

Joy left Virginia after graduation from Robert Russa Moton High School in 1955. She attended New York University after which she eventually became Sales Director for Magic Marker Corporation, where she worked for 35 years. She went on to serve as the Secretary of the Corporation as a member of the Magic Marker Board of Directors. She continues to use her sales expertise with Wilpak Industries and Friends, Inc.

Joy returned to Virginia to live in 2007 where she is active with the NAACP, and she serves on the Robert Russa Moton Museum Council and is a Moton Museum Trustee. In addition, she is a member of the Prince Edward County Board of Equalization and Moton Museum Family Challenge Development Chair.

John Stokes is best known for his role as one of the organizers and leaders of a student strike to protest conditions at Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia, in April 1951. The student strike resulted in the NAACP school desegregation case of *Davis v. Prince Edward County School Board*, which, on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, became one of the five cases consolidated as *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Mr. Stokes served in the military during the Korean conflict. He went on to complete his college degree, eventually teaching at the elementary and secondary

levels. He was selected to be an intern with the Rockefeller Foundation and a master teacher. Before retiring he served as a junior high school principal.

Over the years he received many local and state awards for his work to raise the academic achievement levels of students in Baltimore, Maryland, who were labeled as “inner city” and unreachable. Since retiring he has been an adjunct professor at a various colleges and universities.

In 2004, he was appointed to a steering committee for the Virginia General Assembly which was charged with crafting a bill to provide funding for the state’s *Brown v. Board of Education Scholarship Program and Fund*. The bill, and its two million dollars in funding, provides scholarships to persons who were locked out of public schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia, from 1959 to 1964, when the state of Virginia withheld ten million dollars from Prince Edward County Public Schools in defiance of the *Brown* decision.

He has received numerous awards for his role in the cases consolidated as *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 2007, those involved in the *Davis* case, including John Stokes, were memorialized in the form of a four sided sculpture on the grounds of the statehouse in Richmond, Virginia. His story has appeared in more than a dozen newspapers and magazines. He is the author of *Students on Strike: Jim Crow, Civil Rights, Brown and Me*, published by the National Geographic Society. John Stokes often says that throughout his career he has never forgotten whose shoulders he has stood on. Hence he has never forgotten his roots.

Washington, D.C. (*Bolling v. Sharpe*)

Adrienne Jennings (Bennett) was born in 1938 to James C. and Luberta W. Jennings and grew up in the Barry Farms community of Anacostia. She was nurtured in a Christian household with her six siblings, who attended Campbell A.M.E. Church in Washington, D.C. Adrienne, her parents, and her sister Barbara actively participated in several activities to further the mission of the Consolidated Parents’ group to desegregate schools under the leadership of the group’s president, Mr. Gardner Bishop. In 1952, Adrienne, her father, and her sister Barbara were named as plaintiffs with six others on the *Bolling v. Sharpe* case, which was combined with four other United States segregated schooling cases and became known jointly as *Oliver L. Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka, (Kansas), et al.* In 1954, after the U.S. Supreme Court rendered its decision to end segregation in public schools, Adrienne continued her education and graduated from Spingarn High School, a desegregated school in Washington, D.C. In 1960, she earned her Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education from the District of Columbia Teachers College. Adrienne started her teaching career at Stanton Elementary School in Washington, D.C., and retired after thirty-one years of teaching 2nd and 3rd graders. She’s been married to Curtis H. Bennett for sixty years and they have two children and three grandsons. Adrienne continues to reside in her hometown of Washington, D.C., where she enjoys serving in many Campbell A.M.E. Church ministries and tutoring youngsters in her neighborhood.

Letitia Alexander was born in Washington, D.C. in 1960. She is the third of four children born to her mother, **Barbara A. Jennings**. She, along with her siblings, spent her childhood years living in the nation's capital. Letitia was educated in the public school systems of the District of Columbia (DCPS) and of Arlington, Virginia (APS), attending Stanton Elementary (DCPS), Garfield Elementary (DCPS), Gunston Middle (APS), and Ballou High School (DCPS), from which she received her high school diploma. She attended worship services with her mother, siblings, and other family members at Campbell AME Church, located in the Anacostia community of Southeast D.C.

Throughout her school years, Letitia was unaware that her mother (Barbara A. Jennings), aunt (Adrienne Jennings Bennett), and grandfather (James Chester Jennings, Sr.) were named plaintiffs with six others in the *Bolling v. Sharpe* case, which was combined with four other United States segregated schooling cases that became known jointly as *Oliver L. Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas)*. It was many years after Letitia's dear mother passed away, and after she had become a mother and grandmother herself when she discovered her family's role as social activists and change agents in contributing to our country's civil rights movement. She now understands the inner voice that she's heard and continues to hear to "take action."

Letitia is a paralegal in the business area of intellectual property law. She is the proud parent of one child, Dominique Janea Alexander, and the grandparent of one grandson, Demari Jordan Tucker. Letitia often and proudly shares the family legacy with her daughter and grandson, emphasizing the courage that their family had to stand up for equal rights during such a difficult time in history, all the while reminding them that this same courage is inherently in the blood that runs through their veins, as well. Letitia recently relocated to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to be closer to her daughter and grandson.

EDITORS**PROJECT DIRECTOR:**

CHERYL BROWN HENDERSON Is one of the three children of the late Rev. Oliver L. Brown, namesake of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka (KS)*. She is Founding President of The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research, established in 1988, and owner of Brown & Associates, an educational consulting firm which she established in 1984. She has a background in educational administration, business, civic leadership, public policy, and federal legislative development and has served on and chaired various local, state and national boards. She holds a Bachelor's in Elementary Education, minor in Mathematics, from Baker University, a Master's in Guidance and Counseling from Emporia State University, an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Washburn University, and an Honorary Doctorate of Education from the University of South Florida. She is the recipient of numerous awards and recognition for her work in education and community service and has presented at numerous conferences, conventions, and universities. Her published work includes articles in academic journals, newspaper opinion editorials, anthologies, and curriculum on *Brown v. Board of Education*.

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EDITORS:

JOHN EDGAR TIDWELL, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Kansas. He has earned degrees in English from Washburn University, Creighton University, the University of Minnesota and is the recipient of an Honorary Doctor of Literature from Washburn University. Among several honors, he has won awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Council of Learned Societies. These have enabled him to publish widely in African American literature and to focus especially on writers Sterling A. Brown, Frank Marshall Davis, Langston Hughes, and Gordon Parks. His latest book, written with Carmaletta M. Williams, is titled *My Dear Boy: Car-*

rie Hughes's Letters to Langston Hughes, 1926-1938. He also serves Humanities Kansas! as a member of its Speaker's Bureau and its Talk About Literature in Kansas (TALK) program.

DARREN CANADY's work has been produced at the Alliance Theatre, Congo Square Theater, Horizon Theatre, London's the Old Vic Theatre, M Ensemble, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, American Blues Theater, and others. His awards include the Alliance Theater's Keneda Graduate Playwriting Award, Chicago's Black Excellence Award, the Black Theatre Alliance Award, and the American Theatre Critics Association's Osborn Award. His play, *You're Invited*, appeared in *The Best American Short Plays 2010-2011*. His work has been developed at the Fremont Centre Theatre, Premiere Stages, and Penumbra Theatre. He is an alumnus of Carnegie Mellon University, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, The Juilliard School, and is a former member of Primary Stages' Dorothy Strelsin New American Writers Group. He is an artistic affiliate of the American Blues Theater and Congo Square Theatre. He currently teaches playwriting at the University of Kansas.

VINCENT OMNI is a second-year MFA Creative Writing student in the Department of English at the University of Kansas. His academic interests lie in fiction, creative nonfiction, and literature of the African diaspora. He has written for *The St. Croix Avis* (U.S. Virgin Islands) and *The Topeka Capital-Journal*. His work with the latter publication earned him the 2003 Journalism and Communications Award from the social justice coalition, Living the Dream, Inc.

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