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## SEGREGATION IN CHARLESTON IN THE 1950s: A DECADE OF TRANSITION

WILLIAM D. SMYTH\*

To be a Negro in a day like this  
Demands forgiveness. Bruised with blow on blow,  
Betrayed, like him whose woe dimmed eyes gave bliss,  
Still must one succor those who brought one low,  
To be a Negro in a day like this.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colorline, — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.<sup>2</sup>

Charleston in the 1950s was a segregated city. It ran a dual school system. Its hotels, restaurants, theaters, and recreational facilities adhered to strict codes separating the races. Signs told blacks where to sit on buses and from which water fountains they could drink. Like Greenville, Columbia, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, Savannah, Montgomery, Baton Rouge, Jackson, and so many other cities, Charleston had a color line that divided its people and institutions.

In 1950, Charleston had a little more than 70,000 inhabitants, 44 percent of whom were non-white. The greater Charleston community of incorporated places and non-incorporated areas boasted a little more than 120,000 inhabitants, 35 percent of whom were non-white. Throughout the decade, the city's population decreased to 66,000. As white families moved into the suburbs, the city's non-white population rose to 51 percent, higher than that

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<sup>1</sup>James David Corrothers, "At the Closed Gate of Justice," in James Weldon Johnson, ed., *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1931), p. 73

<sup>2</sup>W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: McClurg, 1924; repr., New York: NAL Penguin, Inc., 1969), p. 54.

of any southern city of comparable size except Lake Charles, Louisiana. At the same time, the percentage of non-whites in the Charleston metropolitan area fell to 31 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Charleston grew quickly after World War II. Its burgeoning naval and air bases, its shipyard, and its Naval Weapons Station brought prosperity and national attention to this already proud and self-possessed city. Visitors flocked to see Charleston's homes and famous plantations, which then were still relatively undiscovered. Charleston was certainly the historical center of this part of the country, if not, in some respects, the historical center of the nation, as J. Palmer Gaillard, mayor of Charleston from 1959 to 1975, liked to point out. Without a doubt, Charleston was the spiritual center of the South. "Even an Atlantan will tell you that," remarked Gedney Howe, a local attorney.<sup>4</sup>

Charleston was one of the last places where businessmen went home for a two o'clock dinner and a short nap before returning to work; it was also one of the places where virtually no white person thought of disturbing pre-existing roles between blacks and whites. Rules governing relationships between the races were etched in stone. The color line separated whites and blacks, assigning to each a different position in the social order and attaching to each position a different set of rights, privileges, and arenas of action. The line defined the approach of each racial group to the other. It limited the degree of access to each other. It outlined respective modes of conduct toward each other. The color line stemmed from a collective sense held by whites that blacks did not qualify for equal status and that they had no claim to be accepted socially. Thus, the color line expressed and sustained the social positions of the two groups along two fundamental dimensions — an axis of dominance and subordination and an axis of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>5</sup>

The rules governing relationships came into play when members of each race met each other as representatives of their respective groups, not on an individual basis. Collective definitions of social position were understood on both sides and were rarely challenged. Most white people referred to blacks by their first names or used pejorative terms like "auntie" or "uncle." Whites usually spoke to blacks first; blacks seldom initiated a conversation. Few whites would interfere in a relationship between another

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population, 1950* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 23; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population, 1960* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), p.19.

<sup>4</sup>Neal R. Peirce, *The Deep South States of America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1974), p. 428.

<sup>5</sup>Herbert Blumer, "The Future of the Color Line," in John C. McKinney and Edgar T. Thompson, eds., *The South in Continuity and Change*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965), p. 322.

white and a black person. Whites knew that to do so would mean economic, political, and social ostracism. Both sides understood each other. They knew what to say, and they knew when to say it.

Very few exceptions to racial etiquette existed. Whites adhered to strict codes and rarely varied from them. They held to the belief that age-old practices had made the South strong; quick changes might cause chaos. White Southerners claimed to know "their people" and what was best for them. If left alone, the South would take care of itself. Furthermore, whites argued, social practices could not be changed by legislation.<sup>6</sup>

Blacks, then, faced a boundary that could not be crossed by any amount of education, economic advancement, or social elevation. The boundary line, as Septima Clark, Charleston's leading civil rights activist, observed, divided Charleston into two castes. The dividing line was clear-cut, consciously felt, and easily observable. Classes divided the castes with more whites falling into the upper and middle classes and more blacks into the middle and lower classes. Class lines on both sides were fluid, but no one crossed caste lines. As Clark remembered, "I lived with the caste and class system all my life."<sup>7</sup>

After the second world war, one of the first southern white insiders to speak out against the color line was Marion A. Wright, a South Carolina lawyer who took up residency in North Carolina. Wright noted in a speech before the Greater Atlanta Council on Human Relations that it was all right for whites to have black cooks, maids, wash women, gardeners, and chauffeurs, but it was not all right for whites and blacks to play golf on the same course, use the same pool or part of the ocean, occupy the same waiting room, or eat together at a restaurant. While he lauded the fact that the days of "Cotton Ed" Smith, Cole Blease, and James K. Vardaman were over, Wright reminded his audience that when whites "fully uphold the master and servant relationship, with all the personal and intimate contact associated with it, and condemn the purely formal and conventional and incidental contacts detailed in the segregation code, it becomes evident that equal status is the last thing they will concede."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>John Hope Franklin, "The Two Worlds of Race: A Historical View," *Daedalus* 94 (Fall 1965), p. 917.

<sup>7</sup>Transcript of an interview with Septima P. Clark by Judy Barton, Septima P. Clark Collection, Robert Scott Small Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, S.C., fol. I/3a, p. 11. Excellent discussions of caste and class in the South can be found in Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), pp. 29, 58, 676-677, and Arnold Rose, *The Negro in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1948), pp. 224-227.

<sup>8</sup>Marion A. Wright, "Segregation Versus the Space Age," (n.p.: 1948) South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, S.C.

### JUDGE AND MRS. J. WATIES WARING

Although Wright was in North Carolina, he had a powerful ally and friend in Charleston with whom he corresponded and who had been speaking out since the mid-1940s. Named a federal district judge in 1942, J. Waties Waring was a southern gentleman. Born and reared in Charleston, Waring came from one of the old-line families with roots dating back nearly to the founding of the city. He attended the local college, read law in the office of one of Charleston's best attorneys, married a well-connected Charleston woman, served as assistant United States attorney for South Carolina, and settled into a profitable practice. Waring became city attorney under Mayor Burnet Rhett Maybank and worked hand-in-hand with him as well as with his successor, Henry Lockwood. Through his many connections, Waring rose rapidly within the Democratic Party and was the logical choice for a judgeship when one opened up.

U. S. Senators E. D. Smith and Burnet Maybank had no idea in 1942 of the turn Waring would soon take. The first glimpse came in February 1944 when Waring heard the case of Viola Duvall and other black teachers and principals who sought pay equal to that of similarly trained whites. Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund agreed to represent Miss Duvall and figured he would get "the usual legal head-whipping" before he went along to the Circuit Court of Appeals. He was pleasantly surprised. Waring ordered full equalization of salaries by September 1946, with major adjustments beginning in September 1944. Other equally unexpected decrees followed.

Waring's seemingly sudden passion for justice further upset the legal establishment because of his 1945 divorce of his wife of nearly thirty-two years and his marriage to a twice-divorced Northerner. That Charlestonians would not accept. They turned on him, shunned him and his wife Elizabeth, and called her "the witch of Meeting Street." Undaunted and with more vigor than ever before, Waring took on as many cases as his time would allow. He heard a peonage suit that arose in 1947 which gave him further insight "into the dark side of the southern agricultural economy and the position of blacks within that system."<sup>10</sup> In 1951 he heard a wage-and-hour case. Before that, Waring tried the case of Isaac Woodward, Jr., the twenty-seven-year-old black man who, after being discharged from the army at Camp Gordon, was taken off the bus at Batesburg and was severely beaten and left blinded for life. The case of John H. WRIGHT, the black man from Edisto Island who sought entrance into the University of South

<sup>9</sup>Tinsley E. Yarbrough, *A Passion for Justice: J. Waties Waring and Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.43.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p.47.

Carolina Law School, came before Waring's court as did the very important *Elmore v. Rice* case challenging the all-white primary. The 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* Supreme Court ruling had already declared the Texas white primary unconstitutional, but within two weeks of the Court's pronouncement the General Assembly in South Carolina repealed approximately 150 state laws, erasing all mention of the primary from the state constitution. Nonetheless, Waring struck down the all-white primary in South Carolina on July 12, 1947, and opened up the political process for the first time to blacks. "It is time," he wrote, "for South Carolina to rejoin the Union. It is time to fall in step with the other states and to adopt the American way of conducting elections."<sup>11</sup>

While Judge Waring engaged in courtroom combat with South Carolina's segregationists, Mrs. Waring entered the throes in her own way. Invited by Septima Clark to speak at Charleston's black YWCA branch on Coming Street in the winter of 1950, she eagerly accepted. Immediately, Charleston was astir. Local whites and even some blacks tried to dissuade her. Elizabeth Waring could not be moved. She wanted to give white Southerners a piece of her mind. Calling southern whites a "sick, confused and decadent people ... full of pride and complacency, introverted, morally weak, and low," Waring explained what she and the judge were trying to do.<sup>12</sup> The speech so alarmed Septima Clark's elderly mother, who was sitting in the audience, that she thought Mrs. Waring would surely be shot.<sup>13</sup>

Soon after the Y speech, in early February, Elizabeth Waring gave a luncheon for *Collier's* magazine writer Samuel Grafton who was in town to do an article on the judge. She invited her closest black friends and, by doing so, hosted the first-known integrated luncheon in Charleston in years. It was a formal yet relaxed affair because, according to Ruby Cornwell, one of the participants, "Mrs. Waring was a very lively, bubbly kind of hostess." Cornwell remembers the luncheon lasting well into the afternoon. Grafton's complimentary article appeared in April 1950 with numerous photographs, several in color, including one large picture of Elizabeth Waring's luncheon.<sup>14</sup>

The affair had been known in the community long before the article came out, but the publicity heightened the displeasure of many white

<sup>11</sup>*Elmore v. Rice*, 72 F. Supp. at 528.

<sup>12</sup>"Wife of Judge Waring Speaks at Annual Negro 'Y' Meeting," *Charleston News and Courier*, January 17, 1950, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup>Yarbrough, *A Passion for Justice*, p. 131. For an interesting photograph of Elizabeth Waring holding the book *Caste, Class, & Race*, see Septima Poinsette Clark, *Echo in My Soul* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1962).

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Ruby Cornwell, 242 St. Margaret Street, Charleston, S.C., June 12, 1989; Samuel Grafton, "Lonesomest Man in Town," *Collier's* 125 (April 29, 1950), pp. 20-21, ff.



This photo of an integrated luncheon, staged in 1950 for *Collier's* reporter Samuel Grafton, upset many white Charlestonians. Judge J. Waties Waring sits at the head of the table, and the back of his wife's head is at the bottom left. From left to right are Septima Clark, Ruby Cornwell, Dr. Roscoe Wilson, Corinne Guenveur, Judge Waring, Lillian Wilson, Judge Waring's bailiff John Fleming, and Grafton (partially hidden).

Charlestonians. They felt betrayed. Judge Waring was a ninth-generation Charlestonian; he was one of them. Ruby Cornwell recalls: "This separation of the races was something that was very important, very precious to them [the whites] — more precious, I think, than life itself — to preserve that way of life."<sup>15</sup>

The Warings left town two years to the month after the luncheon was held. Much was accomplished, however, in the interim. Waring held a pre-trial conference in *Briggs v. Elliott* in November 1950 which started the ball rolling to what eventually became known as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark U. S. Supreme Court decision which called for the end of segregated school facilities. The Clarendon County school case, argued by Thurgood Marshall, alleged that schools in that county, under the South Carolina constitution and statutes, were segregated, and that those statutes were unconstitutional. Waring wanted the "false doctrine" of segregation attacked, and attacked in his court. He got his wish.

Hearings began May 28, 1951. The three-judge panel consisted of Waring, John J. Parker, and George B. Timmerman. Although in the final

<sup>15</sup>Cornwell interview.



**While scorned as a pariah by much of the white community, Judge Waring was praised by local blacks. Here, Charleston NAACP president A.J. Clement, Jr., speaks at a banquet in Judge Waring's honor. The judge sits to Clement's right. Photo courtesy of Avery Research Center for Afro-American Culture and History, College of Charleston.**

outcome Parker and Timmerman sided with school board chairman Roderick W. Elliott, Waring's strong dissent became the basis for the *Brown* decision, written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, three years later.

Timmerman and Parker's arguments, respectively, about states' rights and the precedent of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (the 1896 Supreme Court decision that recognized "separate but equal" facilities) drew applause from whites throughout the state and, of course, in Charleston. Nevertheless, South Carolinians knew that with the *Briggs* decision appealed they would have to support wholeheartedly Governor James F. Byrnes's \$75-million bond issue and 3-percent sales tax to finance a broad school construction program



designed to equalize black and white school facilities. Equalization was South Carolina's only possible hope to ward off future cases like *Briggs*. Even then, there was no assurance that cases would not be brought, because NAACP lawyers were arguing that segregation was per se inequality. The whole picture worried Byrnes enough for him to state, "South Carolina will not now, nor for some years to come, mix white and colored children in our schools."<sup>16</sup>

### SCHOOL EQUALIZATION

In May 1951 a fifteen-member legislative committee headed by State Senator L. Marion Gressette began mapping strategy as a "preparedness measure." The Gressette Committee suggested that the state adopt a constitutional amendment relieving South Carolina of its obligation to provide a free public-school system. The legislature acted promptly, and the state's voters approved the amendment in the November 1952 general election by better than a two-to-one majority.<sup>17</sup>

South Carolina's equalization program moved ahead quickly. School officials targetted needs and set goals for new schools and improvements to existing schools. The situation in Charleston was especially critical. There were only six schools for blacks to attend: Avery, Burke, Archer, Buist, Rhett, and Simonton served 7,139 pupils.<sup>18</sup> Burke, Archer, Buist, and Rhett were so crowded that double sessions were held. Even then, teachers at Archer and Rhett had sixty-two students in their first-grade classrooms.<sup>19</sup> Leonard Taylor, a student at Buist at that time, summed up the situation: "I think we got all second-handed everything back then — second-handed schools, second-handed books, and whatever, and I think black people for some reason or other really got shortchanged."<sup>20</sup>

Burke, the only public high school for blacks, was in dire straits. It served all the eighth-through-twelfth graders in District 20, the area encompassing the city, a district 60.8 percent black.<sup>21</sup> Built in 1910, the school had

<sup>16</sup>James F. Byrnes, "Bias Suit to be Pushed," *New York Times*, March 19, 1951, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup>Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950's* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 45.

<sup>18</sup>"Negro Pupils in Majority in 6 of 8 Districts," *News and Courier*, November 24, 1953, p. 8-A. Five of these six schools were public. Avery was a private school which closed in 1954.

<sup>19</sup>"Increase in Students Noted in City Schools," *Charleston Evening Post*, September 16, 1953, p. 13-B.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Leonard Taylor, 9 Peachtree Street, Charleston, S.C., June 5, 1989.

<sup>21</sup>"Negro Pupils in Majority," p. 8-A. Whites in District 20 had two high schools and a vocational school to which they could go.

been condemned twice. It needed a complete overhaul. School officials earmarked a half-million dollars to raze the old structure and put up five separate buildings, making Burke the first multiple-building high school in the state.<sup>22</sup> The new Burke was a state-of-the-art masterpiece for its time. It boasted a 30-foot by 108-foot reading room in the library; biology, chemistry, and physics laboratories; cooking, tailoring, clothing, and home nursing departments; an 800-person auditorium; and a gymnasium with bleachers for 1,080 people.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly after construction began at Burke, plans were begun for a new elementary school near the foot of the Cooper River bridge. City Council already had authorized the construction of 216 new units to extend the America Street housing project. With that many families moving into the area, a new elementary school was surely needed. The East Bay Street Negro Elementary School, now called Sanders-Clyde Elementary, opened in 1955. Two years later, a few blocks to the south, the Columbus Street School, now Wilmot J. Fraser Elementary, opened. Both of these schools eased the crowded conditions at nearby Archer Elementary, and no more than thirty to thirty-five students were placed in a class.<sup>24</sup> Then, at the end of the 1950s, school officials took Courtenay Elementary, a white school, and gave it to the school board governing black schools in the city. Alec C. Papageorge, writing for the city's *News and Courier*, stated, "No school originally designed for Negroes would have been built on the same blueprint."<sup>25</sup> The transfer represented a last-ditch attempt to ward off integration of city schools. As long as blacks had classroom facilities, whites figured, their arguments for the necessity of integrated facilities would be weaker.

Construction with Byrnes's sales tax money — "Jimmy's three cents," as it was called — and revenue bonds transformed the deplorable schools in the West Ashley, North Charleston, and East Cooper areas, too. Twenty-five school expansion programs began during the summer of 1953; fourteen of these directly benefitted black students. Charleston County spent \$4-million to finance new construction and additions for Lincoln, Laing, Jennie Moore, Gresham Meggett, Liberty Hill, Bonds-Wilson, Bethune, New, Lincolnville, Haut Gap, Rockville, Wallace, Baptist Hill, Edisto Island, and other schools.<sup>26</sup> With these new schools, blacks no longer had to make the

<sup>22</sup>"Make Way for the New," *Charleston Evening Post*, July 24, 1953, p. 10-A.

<sup>23</sup>Jack Leland, "Modern Plants Are Planned for City Schools," *Charleston News and Courier*, September 28, 1952, p. 10-A.

<sup>24</sup>Interview with Lillie Hill, 66 Maple Street, Charleston, S.C., May 30, 1989.

<sup>25</sup>Alec C. Papageorge, "NAACP Plans Segregation Challenge in Charleston," *Charleston News and Courier*, June 19, 1959, p. 1-B.

<sup>26</sup>Betty Pugh, "County's \$4 Million School Expansion Program Numbers 25 Building Projects," *Charleston News and Courier*, May 26, 1953, p. 10-A.

long and all but impossible trek into the city of Charleston to attend high school. Furthermore, schools like the Deming School and Phillips Negro School, where the teacher and her pupils started the stove, swept the floor, and used an old-fashioned pump to get water, and where eight grades were crowded into two rooms with two teachers, were closed.<sup>27</sup> By consolidating smaller school districts into larger ones, blacks enjoyed better facilities, and the county reduced its overhead costs in running more than 100 individual schools.

The thrust behind the rapid building expansion that took place in Charleston and the surrounding area in an attempt to provide equal facilities for blacks fizzled on May 17, 1954, when Chief Justice Warren read his decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. He stated, "We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does."<sup>28</sup> More than \$100-million had been spent across South Carolina by the State Educational Finance Commission, 65 percent or more on projects directly affecting black students.<sup>29</sup> Many whites felt angry and defeated. Their plans to circumvent segregation had backfired.

#### RESPONSES TO *BROWN*

Upon hearing that the doctrine of "separate but equal" had no place in the schools anymore, Governor Byrnes registered "shock" but asked everyone to exercise restraint and preserve order.<sup>30</sup> U. S. Senator Burnet Maybank went to the Senate floor to denounce the decision, saying, "The Supreme Court decision shocked me. In my judgement it was a shameful political move, rather than a judicial decision."<sup>31</sup>

U. S. Representative L. Mendel Rivers called the decision a tragic mistake and said it created "one of the gravest problems to confront the white people of the South since the days of Reconstruction."<sup>32</sup> Moderates

<sup>27</sup>Jennings Cauthren, "St. Andrew's Parish Boasts New High School for Negroes," *Charleston Evening Post*, August 12, 1953, p. 5-A; "Contrast: A Schoolhouse Saga," *Charleston Evening Post Supplement*, August 14, 1953, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup>Luther A. Huston, "'Separate but Equal' Doctrine Held Out of Place in Education," *New York Times*, May 18, 1954, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup>W.D. Workman, Jr., "Effects May Be Year or More Ahead," *Charleston News and Courier*, May 18, 1954, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup>W.D. Workman, Jr., "Gov. Byrnes 'Shocked' By Court Ruling," *Charleston News and Courier*, May 18, 1954, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup>"Decision is Denounced by S.C. Congressmen," *Charleston News and Courier*, May 18, 1954, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

were less pessimistic and saw the opinion as more or less inevitable. Blacks, of course, were ecstatic. "That was the most exhilarating time," recalls Eugene Hunt.<sup>33</sup> *Brown* gave blacks hope and strength, and the decision encouraged blacks to speak out for other rights.

Representatives from NAACP chapters in seventeen states and the District of Columbia lost no time. They met in Atlanta for a two-day conference on May 22 and 23 to plan a program of action to implement the Supreme Court's decision. Reverend James M. Hinton, president of the South Carolina state conference of NAACP branches, was chosen chairman. The national board of directors instructed all the branches "to petition their local school boards to abolish segregation without delay and to assist these agencies in working out ways and means of implementing the Court's ruling."<sup>34</sup> At the end of the conference, the state presidents, representatives, and lawyers approved a ten-paragraph position statement, the Atlanta Declaration.

Hopes were high in the black community. NAACP officials met in Atlanta again following the Supreme Court's May 31, 1955, implementation decree. The Court had required the defendants to make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance. Blacks were optimistic they would see changes in September at the beginning of the 1955 school year. Just in case some school boards dragged their feet, *The Crisis*, published by the NAACP, supplied an eight-step directive that local NAACP branches could use in getting school boards to comply. *The Crisis* also supplied a sample petition.<sup>35</sup>

While blacks believed the best and relied on good-faith compliance, whites searched the Supreme Court's decision for loopholes. They quickly realized that the Court had not set any specific date for compliance. Furthermore, Warren had said that lower courts would consider problems related to administration arising from the physical condition of the school plants, the school transportation systems, personnel, and revision of school districts and attendance areas. This opened Pandora's box. The Court, carried away by its own optimism, had temporized its own decision.

Without any hard-and-fast procedure for desegregating the schools or any deadline for doing so, southern whites realized time was on their side. They controlled the state governments. They knew Washington, D.C., bureaucrats were not about to move too quickly in the South on the segregation issue. They also knew the NAACP lacked finances and man-

<sup>33</sup>Interview with Eugene Hunt, 192 Dunnemann Avenue, Charleston, S.C., June 12, 1989.

<sup>34</sup>"Along the N.A.A.C.P. Battlefield," *The Crisis* 61 (June-July 1954), p. 358.

<sup>35</sup>"Statement of the Emergency Southwide NAACP Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, June 4, 1955," *The Crisis* 62 (June-July 1955), p. 337.

power to do much of anything and that the rest of the nation was unwilling to take a strong desegregation stand. Southern whites had nothing to lose and everything to gain by being defiant. As U. S. Representative Charles C. Diggs of Michigan lamented, "There is little question that the Deep South had won the first round in the battle for compliance."<sup>36</sup>

By September 1956, only 723 of the South's 10,000 school districts had been desegregated, and the eight South Atlantic and Gulf Coast states (including South Carolina) remained completely segregated at the primary and secondary school levels.<sup>37</sup> Blacks in Charleston were disillusioned, recalls Eugene Hunt. There was a spirit of skepticism.<sup>38</sup> "All deliberate speed" had become "every possible delay." The South Carolina state legislature stopped all funds to schools under desegregation orders and limited the amount of funding any black school could receive.<sup>39</sup> For every dollar the state spent on white students, it spent seventy-seven cents on black students.<sup>40</sup>

### STRIKING BACK

Black Charlestonians began to take matters into their own hands. Students, teachers, and citizens in the community began to strike back — first in small ways, then in more deliberately organized fashions. A group of citizens led by Ruby Cornwell, Lois Moses, and Eugene Hunt, among others, had already caused the cancellation of a local, all-black production of DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's play *Porgy* because there were no satisfactory provisions for integrated seating.<sup>41</sup> Before that, in 1946, food and tobacco workers staged a strike and chose as their theme song the great hymn that would later be adopted by the national civil rights movement, "We Shall Overcome." Individuals had defied theater and bus officials, too, as they stood up against regulations they did not believe in.<sup>42</sup>

Students at Burke were particularly active. Led by Harvey Gantt, James Blake, Minerva Brown, and others involved in the NAACP Youth Council,

<sup>36</sup>James W. Vander Zanden, *Race Relations in Transition* (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 91.

<sup>37</sup>Dewey W. Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History* (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 135.

<sup>38</sup>Hunt interview.

<sup>39</sup>Francis M. Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (New York: George Braziller, 1973), p. 143.

<sup>40</sup>Relman Morin, "Great Leap Forward," in Patrick McCauley and Edward D. Ball, eds., *Southern Schools: Progress and Problems* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Education Reporting Service, 1959), p. 3.

<sup>41</sup>For a complete history of this debacle, see the *Charleston News and Courier* for May 8 and 11, 1952, February 21, 1954, and March 17 and 18, 1954.

<sup>42</sup>Cornwell interview.



**After realtor J. Arthur Brown became president of the Charleston chapter of the NAACP in 1955, the group's membership began to grow dramatically. Photo courtesy of Avery Research Center for Afro-American Culture and History, College of Charleston.**

they met after school with teachers like Eugene Hunt several times a month and planned programs. Some programs on racism and voter registration were given to the public. "We kept something going all the time," recalls Blake, who not only served as president of his class for all five years he attended Burke and as president of the NAACP Youth Council but became national president of the council in 1959 and was elected to the NAACP's national board of directors in 1960 where he served twenty years.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time that students began to organize at Burke, their parents actively began to support the local chapter of the NAACP. Realtor J. Arthur "Joe" Brown became the local chapter president in 1955, taking the reins from A. J. Clement, Jr., and spearheading a membership drive which took the membership from 300 to 1,500 within two-to-three months.<sup>44</sup> Brown

<sup>43</sup>Interview with Rev. James G. Blake, Morris Brown AME Church, 13 Morris Street, Charleston, S.C., June 6, 1989.

<sup>44</sup>Interview with Bernice Robinson, 107 Maple Street, Charleston, S.C., June 20, 1989. By the end of the 1950s, membership surpassed the 2,000 mark.

had an executive committee of about twenty-five members and all participated in the six-week membership drive. Reports came in each week, coordinated by Bernice Robinson, the secretary, and Charlie Mason, the treasurer. Brown worked tirelessly while still running his real estate business and caring for his family. He had fingers in many pies, his daughter Millicent and others recall.<sup>45</sup>

Joe Brown's willingness to lead the local NAACP chapter came at the perfect time. He was young and energetic. He had a well-established, successful business. Everyone in the black community knew Brown and liked him. He could motivate people; he had charisma. The times were right, too. There were causes to fight for. The Supreme Court had handed down its *Brown* decision the year before. Already, astute blacks could see the handwriting on the wall. They knew how the white community was responding, and they knew what they had to do. The first matter of business was to band together and organize. Although local NAACP membership increased rapidly, it did not occur without a great deal of fear and apprehension on the part of many people. Teachers and domestics had to be especially careful. After 1956, when Septima Clark and Jessica Brown, two teachers, lost their jobs for admitting that they belonged to the NAACP, few teachers joined. If they or others similarly afraid did join, they had their membership cards delivered to the home of Bernice Robinson or Joe Brown. Their copies of *The Crisis* went there as well. "Nobody trusted even the mailman," remembers Robinson.<sup>46</sup> Hunt felt the same way. "Everyone knew that to be too aggressive was to endanger one's job. You did not know whom to trust."<sup>47</sup>

In 1955, the NAACP was still very much a controversial organization. People had to be careful about being associated with it. For this reason, local leaders in Charleston tended to be ministers, self-employed businessmen and businesswomen, and federal employees. Some of the most active members included Reverend B. J. Glover, pastor of Emmanuel AME; Reverend Z. L. Grady, pastor of Morris Brown AME; Reverend I. deQuincey Newman, pastor of Wesley United Methodist; Reverend J. C. Dunbar, pastor of Morris Street Baptist; Reverend Fred Dawson, pastor of Calvary Baptist; Reverend F. Perry Metz, pastor of Olivet Presbyterian; Ruby Cornwell, wife of Dr. A. T. Cornwell; Septima Clark; Esau Jenkins, John's Island community leader; Delbert Woods, longshoreman and later local NAACP president, and his wife Thelma; John Chisolm, once a business partner with Joe Brown; Herbert Fielding, owner of his own funeral home;

<sup>45</sup>Interview with Millicent Brown, Avery Research Center for Afro-American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, S.C., June 1, 1989.

<sup>46</sup>Robinson interview.

<sup>47</sup>Hunt interview.

Richard Whitney, owner of a grocery store at Ashley Avenue and Line Street, and his sister Etta Clark; and others already mentioned. Some of the most active members had lived elsewhere at one time, like Bernice Robinson (New York) and Reverend William Barnes (Mississippi), pastor of St. Luke's AME. Robinson, a seamstress and owner of a beauty parlor, returned to Charleston in 1947, having already registered to vote and worked for an assemblyman in New York. When she found she could not vote in Charleston, she joined the NAACP right away. "I was willing to do whatever I could do to bring about some changes," she remembers.<sup>48</sup>

### VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration became one of the main goals of the NAACP. Although blacks began to register after Waring's 1947 decision, it was not until 1957 that the big push began. In January of that year, Bernice Robinson, a cousin of Septima Clark, began the first Citizenship School. Classes were held in an old, dilapidated school building on John's Island bought for \$1,500 and fixed up in the front to look like a store. Robinson taught her fourteen students — three men and eleven women — two nights a week for two hours each night. Classes ran through February, the end of the laying-by season.<sup>49</sup>

A beautician by trade, Robinson had no formal teacher training. Therefore, she jumped into this new role with both feet and asked her students to relate their everyday life experiences. Robinson wrote down these stories and went over them with her students, helping those who stumbled over various words. She and her students practised reading the parts of the U.S. Constitution with which they would have to be familiar in order to register to vote. Robinson also taught her students how to fill out money orders and how to write their names in cursive. At the end of February, Robinson took her students into Charleston on one of the three days the registration office was open and assisted her charges through the registration process. "They didn't get a whole lot of hassle when I was there with them," she recalls.<sup>50</sup>

The next year, classes met in December, January, and February. Many people wanted to sign up for them. Word spread to Wadmalaw Island, and Esau Jenkins's daughter Ethel started a class there. Soon, Robinson was supervising five schools on the islands. Other schools opened in Accabee, Charleston Heights, and in the Citizens' Committee Office on Cannon Street.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Interview with Sylvia Barnes Green, 13 Elmwood Avenue, Charleston, S.C., June 7, 1989; Robinson interview.

<sup>49</sup>Septima Clark, *Ready from Within* (Navarro, Cal.: Wild Trees Press, 1986), pp. 47, 51; Robinson interview.

<sup>50</sup>Clark, *Ready from Within*, p. 50; Robinson interview.

<sup>51</sup>Clark, *Ready from Within*, p. 51; Robinson interview.



The idea of Citizenship Schools came from a conference Jenkins, Robinson, and Septima Clark attended in 1955. They had participated in a week-long workshop on the United Nations held at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee. Toward the end of that week, the participants had to tell the others how they would put into practice what they had learned. Jenkins said he wanted to start a school to help the people of John's Island learn to read, write, and understand how their government worked. Within a year and a half, his dream became a reality.<sup>52</sup>

Other blacks from Charleston began attending conferences at Highlander. They included Bernice Robinson's brother and niece, Septima Clark's niece, Herbert Fielding and his sons, Lillie Doster and her husband, Bill Saunders, Eileen Wood, and lots of people from the islands. Joe Brown took his family beginning in 1956. Millicent Brown remembers meeting Rosa Parks, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Fred Shuttlesworth and his children there.<sup>53</sup>

With so many civil rights leaders going to Highlander from Charleston, students at Highlander took a great interest in what was happening in the Lowcountry. Before the June 1959 election for mayor and aldermen, Highlander students came to Charleston to assist with the April 29 to May 9 voter-registration drive. They instructed first-time voters how to vote using a sample ballot, and 1,422 people registered.<sup>54</sup> Some time before, Septima Clark had used a similar strategy by creating an eighteen-page reading book which included sample forms and information on political parties, taxes, social security, health services, how to address officials, and how to complete mail and money orders.<sup>55</sup> Highlander students stood outside the registration rooms coaching blacks and providing moral support. Whites sometimes hung around the polling places to intimidate, call names, and make snide remarks, Reverend Perry Metz remembers. "Some people needed a lot of convincing," recalls Sylvia Green.<sup>56</sup>

To dissipate fears about voting, meetings were held in churches to help blacks understand the procedures. Mayoral candidate Oliver T. Wallace set up one such meeting in a Morris Street church in the early 1950s. He brought

<sup>52</sup>Robinson interview.

<sup>53</sup>Brown and Robinson interviews. As early as 1950, Judge Waring agreed to become one of Highlander's sponsors. He called the school a "small but bright beacon" in the cause of human rights. See Yarbrough, *A Passion for Justice*, p. 125.

<sup>54</sup>Transcript of a conversation with Justine Wise Polier, Septima Clark, and Myles Horton at the Highlander Folk School, May 1959, Septima P. Clark Collection, fol. I/2, pp. 1-2.

<sup>55</sup>Clark, *Echo in My Soul*, pp. 199-201.

<sup>56</sup>Polier, Clark, Horton interview; interview with Rev. F. Perry Metz, 1876 Taberwood Circle, Charleston, S.C., May 31, 1989; Green interview.



**Bernice Robinson, above, began the first Citizenship School in 1957 on John's Island. The classes, which Robinson and her cousin Septima Clark planned with (below, left to right) Esau Jenkins of John's Island and Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School, were crucial components of the voter registration campaigns. Photos by Ida Berman, courtesy of Avery Research Center for Afro-American Culture and History, College of Charleston.**



a voting machine and taught blacks how to vote as a bloc.<sup>57</sup> Ministers frequently spoke from the pulpit about voting procedures, giving encouragement and allaying anxieties. Congregations listened to their ministers, who were always well-informed about what was going on in the community. Few other community members were more respected. They were bridges to the outside world.

Churches were used as centers for all kinds of purposes: they served as community centers, meeting places, distribution centers, relief centers, and spiritual oases. They were also the sites for Sunday afternoon mass meetings. These two-to-three-hour meetings following morning services were frequently held to inspire, motivate, and inform all those in attendance. In Charleston, mass meetings took place at Emmanuel AME, Morris Brown AME, Ebenezer AME, and Morris Street Baptist, among other churches. These could accommodate the largest congregations. Speakers, sponsored by the local NAACP chapter, included Benjamin Mays, Roy Wilkins, Thurgood Marshall, Arthur Spingarn, Kelly Alexander, and Lena Horne. Toward the end of the 1950s, the Charleston NAACP Youth Council organized a meeting and brought in attorney A.T. Walden.<sup>58</sup>

#### LOCAL BUSINESSES

Churches served one more important function. They were centers where information was disseminated. Organizers of events, meetings, and boycotts wrote letters which were delivered to pastors and read them from the pulpits Sunday morning. If problems needed attention, they were addressed at that time. Parishioners who had had problems with a particular store, for instance, let them be known and pastors named those stores from their pulpits.<sup>59</sup>

The worst offending businesses were the five-and-dime stores — Edward's, Silver's, F. W. Woolworth, Ward's, and S. H. Kress on King Street. Clerks would not let black customers try on hats, gloves, shoes, or sometimes other items. They usually confessed that these policies did not reflect their own personal beliefs nor those necessarily of the store's owner; the policies were such because other customers — white shoppers — minded. Regardless, the absurdity of not being able to try on clothing and shoes, compounded with the fact that none of the lunch counters was open to blacks, caused some black families to take their business elsewhere.<sup>60</sup>

The alternatives were slim, however. In the 1950s blacks owned few

<sup>57</sup>Political Flyer, 1951 Mayor's Campaign File, William McG. Morrison Papers, City Archives, Charleston, S.C. State senator Wallace ran against Nathaniel Wilson Cabell and the incumbent William McG. Morrison. All three men were white.

<sup>58</sup>Blake interview.

<sup>59</sup>Metz interview.

<sup>60</sup>Hill interview.

retail stores besides corner groceries and fish markets. If blacks did not want to patronize certain stores like Kerrison's Department Store — "the be all and end all" — they could shop outside of Charleston. Friends in New York and other cities could send items to Charleston. Ruby Cornwell, for instance, bought Elizabeth Arden products through a friend in New York rather than buy them locally.<sup>61</sup> But to most black Charlestonians, this was out of the question. The more realistic alternatives included speaking to store managers and telling them why one was going to shop elsewhere in Charleston, thereby pressuring them to change their policies, or just keeping quiet. Some younger shoppers found that by drinking from the "whites only" water fountains in the five-and-dime stores and then spitting in them they released some of their pent-up frustrations.<sup>62</sup>

The dearth of black-owned stores and businesses was reflected elsewhere in the city, too. Until the St. James Hotel was built in the fall of 1951 at the corner of Spring Street and Hagood Avenue, there was no full-service hotel in the city for blacks. Visitors had to stay in private homes. But once the St. James opened, excellent accommodations were available. The four Washington brothers who operated it entertained the likes of Fats Domino, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, James Brown, and Hank Aaron. Performers who stayed at the hotel could perform right there in the Azalea Room, a large ballroom. The Washington family also owned the Ashley Grill next door, the largest black-owned restaurant in the city at that time.<sup>63</sup>

Just as Charleston had only one full-service hotel that blacks could enjoy, it had only one black-owned theater. On King Street, near Spring Street, the Lincoln Theater, owned by David I. Thomas, catered to local blacks. Most other theaters in town — the American, Garden, Gloria, Palace, and Riviera — seated blacks only in the balcony area. Blacks entered from a side door, paid their admissions, and went upstairs. If they wanted refreshments, they could ring a bell — that is, if refreshments were provided at all.<sup>64</sup>

### RECREATION

After school, on weekends, and during the summer, young black children had few places where they could play. The three parks specifically

<sup>61</sup>Cornwell interview.

<sup>62</sup>Blake and Green interviews.

<sup>63</sup>Barney Blakeney, "James Hotel a Part of Area Black History," *Charleston News and Courier*, February 14, 1989, p. 4. Accommodations were so scarce for blacks in the South that *The Crisis* advertised a directory of vacation spots unrestricted as regards race. The directory promised "vacation and recreation without humiliation." The St. James Hotel was the only Charleston establishment included. See "Travelguide," *The Crisis* 61 (June-July 1954), p. 375.

<sup>64</sup>Brown, Hill, and Metz interviews.

for blacks were Harmon Field on Fishburne Street, Martin Park at the corner of Lee Street and America Street, and the park bounded by Calhoun, Concord, and Washington streets. The park at Harmon Field had a swimming pool. Parks on Elizabeth Street and at Hampstead Square were off-limits to blacks. White park supervisors warned intruders and then, if necessary, called the police. James Blake knows. He purposely entered the Elizabeth Street park in the late 1950s, was arrested, and was taken to the police station.<sup>65</sup>

Blacks could enjoy Hampton Park but not the nearby ballfield. There was a black YMCA on Cannon Street and a black YWCA on Coming Street, but neither had the facilities of the white Ys. Blacks had no regular access to the Gibbes Art Gallery, Charleston Museum, or the public library (though the staff of the old Dart Library on Kracke Street attempted to serve reading needs as best they could). All in all, facilities and opportunities were second-rate or nonexistent. As Leonard Taylor remembers, "Black people just got overlooked."<sup>66</sup>

Finding a beach at which to cool off was an even harder problem than finding a park. Although Charleston boasted beaches at the nearby Isle of Palms, Sullivan's Island, and Folly Beach, none was open to blacks. Blacks could go to Riverside Beach in Mt. Pleasant near Remley's Point and Mosquito Beach on James Island, but neither was really a "beach." Both were places along rivers and had nothing but shady areas and concession stands. At one time, the city considered buying Morris Island and allowing blacks to swim there, but nothing ever came of it. If Charleston blacks wanted to go to a real beach, they had to drive nearly 100 miles north to Atlantic Beach near Myrtle Beach.<sup>67</sup> Going to Atlantic Beach often meant an all-day excursion on a bus. These trips were lots of fun, area blacks remember, even if they took a long time. They also served as important fund raisers for local organizations.

Riding the city buses around Charleston was not nearly so entertaining. For the same ten-cent fare that whites paid, blacks rode in the back of the buses. Occasionally the status quo was changed. Eugene Hunt remembers a few blacks getting on the buses after 1954 and sitting in the front. James Blake recalls taking a seat in the front of the bus around 1956 and being told by the bus driver to move. Blake refused to move, and the driver shook his fist. Driver Tyler Davis, however, called a policeman when a black woman

<sup>65</sup>Blake interview.

<sup>66</sup>Hill interview; Metz interview; *City Council Journal, 1951-1955* (n.p., 1956), pp. 411, 427-429, 437; A. J. Clement, Jr., "Letter to the Editor," *Charleston News and Courier*, July 21, 1951, p. 4; Taylor interview.

<sup>67</sup>Brown, Metz, and Taylor interviews; "Chamber Seeks Morris Is. as Negro Beach," *Charleston News and Courier*, September 23, 1953, p. 10-A.

sat down in the front of his bus; she was fined \$100. Not until November 1956, after the Fourth Circuit Court overturned South Carolina's Jim Crow bus law, could blacks ride in the front of the buses. Even then, the Jim Crow signs stayed in place until the spring of 1960. The South Carolina Electric and Gas Company, operator of all city buses, hired its first black driver, Johnny Kinloch, in March 1962.<sup>68</sup>

More than a decade before Kinloch was hired by the bus company, the city of Charleston hired its first black policemen. Nine blacks were hired in 1950 after city council conducted an extensive study of other southern cities using black policemen. Everywhere it had been successful because black policemen "knew the habits and temperament of their own people and were resented less than a white officer would be in an all-Negro area."<sup>69</sup> The police departments reported less crime and juvenile delinquency overall and better relations with the public.

In Charleston, the black officers received the same pay as whites with the same insurance and retirement plan.<sup>70</sup> Most of the black policemen the city hired walked beats in Wards 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. These were the residential areas north of Calhoun Street, an area that had always attracted black families, including many free blacks before the Civil War. Fewer and fewer blacks lived behind the homes of whites south of Broad Street. That era had passed. Yet Charleston was not a residentially segregated city by any means. In fact, Charleston had the lowest index of residential segregation of any of the 109 cities for which data by city blocks were published in the 1950 census and which in 1950 had 1,000 or more non-white-occupied dwelling units.<sup>71</sup> Many blacks like James Blake, who grew up on Nassau Street, remember having as many white neighbors as black ones. The city

<sup>68</sup>Hill, Hunt, and Blake interviews; phone interview with Tyler Davis, June 22, 1989; Catherine A. Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow: The Desegregation of Southern Transit* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 248; "End of 'Jim Crow' Signs in Buses Asked By NAACP," *Charleston News and Courier*, February 3, 1960, p. 7-A; phone interview with Johnny Kinloch, July 12, 1989.

<sup>69</sup>*Year Book 1949-1950-1951, City of Charleston, South Carolina* (Charleston: Nelson's Southern Printing, 1952), p. 16. Two years after the city hired its first black policemen, the Charleston County Medical Association admitted black members, and five black physicians began practising in area hospitals. A year after that, the white nurses' association permitted blacks to apply for membership. See I. A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), p. 301.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>Letter, A. J. Tamsberg to Honorable William McG. Morrison, mayor, June 13, 1949, William McG. Morrison Papers; Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 40, 45.

provided equal services, including water and sewer lines, to all incorporated areas. It spent approximately \$45,000 in the early fifties to extend sewers into the northeast section of the city, part of Ward 9 where many blacks lived.<sup>72</sup>

### BUILDING BRIDGES

Charleston never experienced the strife that other cities did, perhaps in part because blacks and whites had grown up together. They lived and worked alongside each other. Neighborhoods were not segregated, and Charleston never had a zoning ordinance to separate the races. Most white Charlestonians never wanted their community to be known as a backwards, racist, segregated society. Charlestonians had panache. Traditions of gentility were important for both blacks and whites to uphold. The Holy City's citizens valued dignity, orderliness, and reasonableness.<sup>73</sup>

White Charlestonians knew how far they could go and when they had to capitulate. They did not want to get on the front page of the newspapers or on television. Whites also knew that national sympathy would rally behind local blacks if they were shown to be mistreated. The Charleston papers carried news about Montgomery, Little Rock, and similar places. Whites were determined that those scenes would not be repeated in Charleston. An optimism prevailed that differences could be ironed out.<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, there were individuals who closed their eyes and ears and turned their heads. Some white Charlestonians joined the racist Citizens' Councils. In the mid-fifties, the greater Charleston area had six councils. Micah Jenkins served as the chairman of the Charleston County Citizens' Council and was president of the state umbrella organization. Eventually, the state had fifty-eight chapters, most of them in the Lowcountry, but they faded away in the first half of 1956 as quickly as they formed during the last half of 1955.<sup>75</sup> The Ku Klux Klan was much less active in Charleston than were the Citizens' Councils. No rallies were ever held in the city in the 1950s, although there were some in nearby Ladson, Mt. Pleasant, Goose Creek, Red Top, and on James Island. Over 100 Klansmen

<sup>72</sup>For a good map showing the wards of Charleston, see Dale Rosengarten et al., *Between the Tracks: Charleston's East Side During the Nineteenth Century* (Charleston, S.C.: The Charleston Museum, 1987), p. 8; Blake interview; Speech, 1951 Mayor's Campaign File, William McG. Morrison Papers; *Year Book 1949-1950-1951*, p. 185.

<sup>73</sup>Taeuber and Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities*, p. 48; Blake and Brown interviews; Benjamin Muse, *Ten Years of Prelude: The Story of Integration Since the Supreme Court's 1954 Decision* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. 256.

<sup>74</sup>Robinson and Blake interviews.

<sup>75</sup>Hunt interview; "County's Sixth Council Formed," *Charleston News and Courier*, November 30, 1955, p. 12-B; Vander Zanden, *Race Relations in Transition*, p. 28.

drove through Charleston Heights one night in May 1950. Blacks watched the parade silently but seemed to have no fear, the *Evening Post* reported. In the late fifties, several small white crosses soaked in oil were thrown on the stone steps of Joe Brown's house. One caused the awning to catch on fire so the fire company was called. Brown and his family also received annoying telephone calls, as had Judge and Mrs. Waring earlier.<sup>76</sup>

Charlestonians, black and white, who were more interested in building bridges than in burning them, supported such organizations as the Charleston Interracial Committee. This group, with roots back into the 1920s, promoted good race relations by sponsoring programs such as Race Relations Sunday. Held on the Sunday closest to Lincoln's birthday, Race Relations Sunday brought together white and black congregations. Services took place in different churches each year. In 1956, at Morris Street Baptist (a black congregation), ministers from Holy Communion Episcopal (white), Olivet Presbyterian (black), and St. Mary's Roman Catholic (white) participated. Burke's choir sang. Some congregations invited others to worship with them on Young People's Sunday in January.<sup>77</sup>

A few names stand out among many people who worked toward good race relations in the 1950s: Clelia McGowan, Margaretta Childs, Marybelle Howe, Ruby Cornwell, William Halsey, Josephine Pinckney, Edwin Harleston, Reverend C. S. Ledbetter, Robert Morrison, Septima Clark, Reverend Paul Hardin, Jr., and Louisa Stoney are just a dozen. Meetings were held at Citadel Square Baptist, Holy Communion Episcopal, Morris Street Baptist, and other sites, including the YWCA. Members got involved in community programs, education programs, and a variety of organizations that brought the races together.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, by the end of the decade and the beginning of the next, some blacks showed themselves ready to adopt a more aggressive stance than they had in the recent past. On Friday, April 1, 1960, a day when school was not in session because of a Palmetto Education Association meeting of black teachers in Columbia, two dozen Burke students, led by high school senior James Blake, sat down on the stools at S. H. Kress Co. For more than five hours they hummed songs and recited the Twenty-third Psalm and Lord's

<sup>76</sup>Robinson interview; "Crosses Burn in County," *Charleston News and Courier*, December 3, 1957, p. 1-A; "Ku Klux Klansmen Stage Procession in North Area," *Charleston Evening Post*, May 13, 1950, p. 1-A; Brown interview.

<sup>77</sup>Cornwell interview; "Inter-Racial group to Hear Mr. Lumpkin," *Charleston News and Courier*, February 12, 1956, p. 11-C; Metz interview.

<sup>78</sup>Blake, Cornwell, Hunt and Robinson interviews; Ralph E. Cousins et al., *South Carolinians Speak: A Moderate Approach to Race Relations* (n.p., 1957), p. 81; Septima P. Clark, interview by Jacquelyn Hall and Eugene Walker, July 25, 1976, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Septima P. Clark Collection, fol. I/4, p. 62; Clark, *Echo in My Soul*, p. 108.





**In 1960, two months after the Woolworth's sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina, Charleston high school students organized a lunch-counter demonstration at S. H. Kress Co. Among them were (above, left to right) Alvin Latten, David Richardson, Verne Jean McNeil, Minerva Brown, and Fred Smalls. Photo courtesy of the *Charleston News and Courier*.**

Prayer. After someone phoned in a bomb threat, the police cleared the building and took the students to jail. Charlestonians read about the incident in detail in the newspaper the next morning.<sup>79</sup>

The 1960s, beginning with the Kress demonstration and ending with the 1969 hospital workers strike, were marked by even more challenges to Charleston's segregation. Nonetheless, throughout the 1950s Charleston remained a segregated city. A color line divided its white citizens from its black citizens in many ways. Facilities and accommodations were not

<sup>79</sup>See "24 Arrested Here in Demonstration", *Charleston News and Courier*, April 2, 1960, p. 1-B. For reminiscences by the participants thirty years later, see David W. MacDougall, "Reflections on Charleston's sit-in at Kress", *Charleston News and Courier*, April 1, 1990, p. 1-F.

equal. A gulf separated the extremes of living standards and job opportunities. Although schools and recreational facilities remained segregated, some changes had taken place by the end of the decade. All was not perfect by any means, but cracks in the walls — most importantly, black participation in the democratic process — could be seen. In the 1960s, those walls themselves would begin to crumble and come tumbling down.