

“Hell Is Popping Here in South Carolina”: Orangeburg County Black Teachers and Their Community in the Immediate Post-*Brown* Era

Candace Cunningham

When the South Carolina legislature created the anti-NAACP oath in 1956, teachers across the state lost their positions. But it was the dismissal of twenty-one teachers at the Ellore Training School that captured the attention of the NAACP and Black media outlets. In the years following Brown v. Board of Education, South Carolina’s Black and White communities went head-to-head in the battle over White supremacy versus expanded civil rights. The desegregation movement in 1955 and 1956 placed Black teachers’ activism in the spotlight—activism that mirrored what was happening in their community. This largely unknown episode of civil rights activism demonstrates that Black teachers were willing to serve not only as behind-the-scenes supporters in the equal education struggle but as frontline activists. Furthermore, it shows that South Carolina was an integral site of the long civil rights movement.

Keywords: Black teachers, South Carolina, desegregation, civil rights movement, public schools, NAACP

On the morning of May 15, 1956, school principal Charles Davis asked Cecil Williams, a teenager from Orangeburg, South Carolina, who would go on to become the state’s foremost civil rights photographer, to take a picture of the teachers at the Ellore Training School (ETS). The neatly dressed group of sixteen women and five men assembled in front of the building, where the name of the school appeared above

Department of History, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, USA

Candace Cunningham (ccunningham@fau.edu) is an Assistant Professor of History at Florida Atlantic University. Her areas of interest are African American history, women’s and gender studies, public history, and the digital humanities. Her research focuses on the role of Black teachers in the equal education movement.

their heads on the brick facade.¹ As she moved to the front of the group so that her petite frame would be visible, Elizabeth Cleveland, a newlywed and recent South Carolina State College graduate, wore a polka dot dress, white shoes, and matching white clutch.² On the far right of the group stood Principal Davis with one arm wrapped around the shoulders of his wife, Rosa Delores Davis.³

Although many of the teachers smiled as Williams photographed them, the moment's seriousness weighed heavily upon them.⁴ Days earlier, when the ETS teachers received their applications for the upcoming school term, they noticed new questions that asked if they were members of the NAACP and if they aspired to teach an integrated class. When the twenty-one Black teachers refused to distance themselves from the leading civil rights organization or to endorse prevailing segregationist practices, White school officials refused to rehire them for the upcoming school year.⁵ Their dismissal culminated in *Bryan v. Austin* (1957), an important civil liberties case for the rights of teachers and African Americans.⁶

Although the Elloree teachers' case has not been a central focus in previous historical scholarship, numerous preeminent scholars have mentioned it in their research.⁷ Historians such as Adam Fairclough and Vanessa Siddle Walker have positioned Black teachers as community leaders whose work was politicized because it challenged White supremacy.⁸ Furthermore, these historians established that African Americans believed education would play a central role in acquiring equal rights, which consequently placed Black teachers at the center of the civil rights movement. This scholarship presents Black teachers as

¹ Cecil Williams, *Freedom & Justice: Four Decades of the Civil Rights Struggle as Seen by a Black Photographer of the Deep South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), 124. The school had a total of thirty-one faculty members.

² Elizabeth Cleveland, interview by author, Sept. 25, 2010, Darlington, SC.

³ Williams, *Freedom & Justice*, 124.

⁴ Cecil J. Williams, interview by author, Sept. 18, 2010, Orangeburg, SC.

⁵ Williams, *Freedom & Justice*, 124.

⁶ *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (E.D.S.C. 1957).

⁷ Scott Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926-1972* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 110-14; Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom's Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 236; and Michael Fultz, "The Displacement of Black Educators Post-*Brown*: An Overview and Analysis," *History of Education Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 18.

⁸ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); and Vanessa Siddle Walker, "African American Teaching in the South: 1940-1960," *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2001), 751-79.



Figure 1. The twenty-one teachers who lost their positions for their refusal to comply with the anti-NAACP oath standing in front of the Elloree Training School in Elloree, South Carolina, on May 15, 1956. This photograph appeared in *Jet* magazine on June 7, 1956. (Image courtesy of photographer Cecil Williams, Cecil Williams Civil Rights Museum, Orangeburg, South Carolina.)

individuals deeply committed to their professional responsibilities and as advocates for education equality.

A close examination of the Elloree teachers' dismissal, combined with the preceding events and the aftermath, underscores the fact that educating Black children was a highly politicized endeavor. Yet what happened in Elloree pushed teachers to move beyond the role of advocates and take up the explicit role of activists.⁹ Elloree, as a case study, proves that teachers were willing to come out from the shadows as behind-the-scenes supporters into the light as frontline activists. Equally important, this study places the incentive for that transformation from advocate to activist not in grandiose ideals, but in pragmatic concerns about education and civil liberties.

⁹Derrick P. Aldridge, "Teachers in the Movement: Pedagogy, Activism, and Freedom," *History of Education Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Feb. 2020), 1-23; and Charron, *Freedom's Teacher*, 236. Like Charron's treatment of Septima Clark and Aldridge's "Teachers in the Movement" project, the Elloree teachers' case proves that teachers were not only passive participants in the movement but active agents of change whose participation was crucial and impactful.

The Elloree case supports the research of James C. Clark, Caroline Emmons, John A. Kirk, and Sonya Ramsey, who argue that the partnerships teachers built with the NAACP, primarily through teacher salary equalization campaigns in the 1940s, strengthened teachers' political currency.¹⁰ Addressing teacher salary equalization was part of the NAACP's larger goal to equalize opportunities across all education levels, and historians have positioned these legal suits as a precursor to *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Elloree teachers' dismissal and the subsequent court case pulls that partnership further into the twentieth century, and shows that Black teachers' support of the NAACP and its goals continued to be integral in the immediate post-*Brown* years.

Finally, the Elloree case reveals that although clashes between activists and segregationists in South Carolina did not always create the spectacle emblematic of places like Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee, South Carolina was one of the most important sites in the struggle for racial equality. The Elloree teachers' plight garnered national attention, especially from Black media outlets. As Scott Baker and Peter Lau argue, South Carolina's segregationists led the charge in finding effective ways to prevent desegregation, especially in education.¹¹ The propensity to use legal and extralegal methods to protect White supremacy made the ETS teachers' dismissal possible and, as this study illuminates, initiated a protest movement.

Events Leading Up to the Elloree Case

The collective defiance of those Black teachers in the spring of 1956 was just one of a growing number of civil rights protests that aimed to challenge and dismantle social and racial inequity in the American

¹⁰James C. Clark, "Civil Rights Leader Harry T. Moore and the Ku Klux Klan in Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1994), 166-183; Caroline Emmons, "Not a Single Battle but Rather a Real War': The Fight to Equalize Teachers' Salaries in Florida in the 1930s and 1940s," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (2003), 418-439; John A. Kirk, "The NAACP Campaign for Teachers' Salary Equalization: African American Women Educators and the Early Civil Rights Struggle," *The Journal of African American History* 94, no. 4 (2009), 529-552; Sonya Ramsey, *Reading, Writing and Segregation: A Century of Black Women Teachers in Nashville* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 46-75.

¹¹Scott Baker, "Schooling and White Supremacy: The African American Struggle for Educational Equality and Access in South Carolina, 1945-1970," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters: Currents in the Civil Rights Movement of South Carolina During the Twentieth Century*, eds. Winifred B. Moore, Jr. and Orville Vernon Burton (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 300-318; Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality Since 1865*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 5-9.

South. Two years earlier, on May 17, 1954, the NAACP won its most historically significant legal victory when Chief Justice Earl Warren announced the US Supreme Court's decision regarding *Brown v. Board of Education*. When the highest court in the land ruled that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," it dealt a powerful blow to segregation's legal and intellectual defenses.¹² In 1955, when the Supreme Court issued its second decision in *Brown v. Board of Education (Brown II)*, it left decisions about implementing desegregation up to school officials and district courts.¹³

Even as the courts deliberated, White supremacists worked in advance of the decision to circumvent desegregation and shore up ideological, political, and intellectual support.¹⁴ In those immediate post-*Brown* years (1955-1956), South Carolina continued to be an influential battleground, simultaneously full of promise and despair. South Carolina's segregationists attacked the NAACP, its members, and its supporters in order to evade the law.¹⁵ Much of their focus was pinpointed on Black teachers—a group the *Brown* decision granted no protections or guarantees.

South Carolina's Black teachers had already spent decades organizing for equal education through their professional organization, the Palmetto Education Association (PEA). The PEA, created in 1900 to improve Black teachers' educational and training opportunities, experienced almost uninterrupted growth through the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁶ When membership declined in the World War II era, South Carolina's African American leaders took advantage of the historical moment to transform the PEA from a moderate organization to a militant one. Through the teacher salary equalization campaign, the NAACP and the PEA forged a partnership in which the PEA emerged as a politically engaged organization.¹⁷

Yet South Carolina's segregationists laid the groundwork for resistance years before *Brown*. Argued in the US District Court in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1951, *Briggs v. Elliott* (chronologically the first of the five cases to make up *Brown*) put the state in the spotlight

¹² *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), at 495.

¹³ *Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955), at 294-301.

¹⁴ Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 26-27, 88-94.

¹⁵ Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 207.

¹⁶ John F. Potts Sr., *A History of the Palmetto Education Association* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1978), 15, 31.

¹⁷ Wim Roefs, "Leading the Civil Rights Vanguard in South Carolina: John McCray and the Lighthouse and Informer, 1939-1954," in *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, ed. Charles M. Payne and Adam Green (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 472.

and made Black and White citizens aware that changes in the public education system were a legal imperative.¹⁸ Adamant that these changes would not result in school desegregation, Governor James Byrnes turned to the state legislature to start “preparedness measures.”¹⁹ In 1951, he appointed a fifteen-member committee “to study and report on the advisable course to be pursued” in the event federal courts mandated desegregation.²⁰ Known as the Gressette Committee—named after its chairman, L. Marion Gressette, a state senator from Orangeburg County—South Carolina had a well-established, state-mandated agency explicitly designed to protect racial segregation.²¹ When the *Brown* decision was handed down, the committee concluded that it did not apply to South Carolina and recommended that schools open “according to the present pattern of pupil classification and assignments in keeping with previously established policy” for the 1954–1955 school year.²² They argued that the Supreme Court had not made “any order or decree which might have the effect of forcing an immediate change in local school policy or procedure.”²³ They downplayed Black Carolinians’ efforts to desegregate schools and said that “sentiment in favor of separate schools and against integrated schools” had hardened.²⁴

In contrast to these claims, African Americans in cities like Charleston, Elloree, Florence, Georgetown, and Orangeburg filed school desegregation petitions in 1955. In reaction, Governor George Bell Timmerman Jr. announced that the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) was investigating the NAACP to establish the “manner” in which the petitioners were secured.²⁵

¹⁸ *Briggs v. Elliott*, 342 U.S. 350 (1952).

¹⁹ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 45.

²⁰ Interim Report of the South Carolina School Committee, July 28, 1954, box 32, William D. Workman Jr. Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina (hereafter cited as Workman Papers).

²¹ Charron, *Freedom's Teacher*, 209–20.

²² Interim Report of the South Carolina School Committee, July 18, 1954, Workman Papers, 5.

²³ Interim Report of the South Carolina School Committee, July 18, 1954, Workman Papers, 5.

²⁴ Interim Report of the South Carolina School Committee, Dec. 14, 1955, box 5, L. Marion Gressette Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina (hereafter cited as Gressette Papers).

²⁵ “SLED Investigating School Petitions,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), Sept. 24, 1955, B1.

However, state agencies were not the only, or even the most powerful, organized efforts to silence desegregation petitioners. On July 11, 1954, the first chapter of the White Citizens' Council was founded in Mississippi and quickly spread across the South.²⁶ In South Carolina, county seats such as Orangeburg, Charleston, and Sumter became "bastions of Council strength."²⁷

In fact, the first two South Carolina chapters were founded in the summer of 1955 in Elloree and Orangeburg after African Americans in Orangeburg County School Districts 5 and 7 filed desegregation petitions.²⁸ Yet while the petitions were certainly central to the Council's decision to begin its operations in Orangeburg County, the choice could also be attributed to the fact that it was the home of a Black community so committed to racial equality that *Jet* magazine once referred to it as the "home of the militant Negro intelligentsia."²⁹

The Council did not officially employ physical racial violence. Instead, it recommended the "application of economic pressure to 'trouble-makers.'"³⁰ South Carolina's Black intellectuals, such as Walker E. Solomon, executive secretary of the PEA, knew that the Council coordinated its efforts with state officials. Solomon used national Black media outlets to bring attention to the equal rights struggle in South Carolina. He believed the Councils were "cooperating with the legislature for a last ditch stand against desegregation."³¹ For example, a principal founder of the South Carolina Citizens' Councils was S. Emory Rogers, the state's lead attorney in the *Briggs v. Elliott* desegregation suit.³² In yet another example, in January 1956 the Gressette Committee held a conference with Council executives to discuss its program.³³ It appeared that the idea to have SLED investigate the NAACP originated with the Council.³⁴

²⁶ Charron, *Freedom's Teacher*, 236.

²⁷ Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 93.

²⁸ John W. White, "The White Citizens' Councils of Orangeburg County, South Carolina," in *Toward the Meeting of the Waters*, ed. Winfred B. Moore and Orville Vernon Burton (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 261.

²⁹ "South Carolina's Plot to Starve Negroes," *Jet*, Oct. 20, 1955, 8.

³⁰ Elizabeth Geyer, "The 'New' Ku Klux Klan," *The Crisis*, March 1956, 140. The article quoted a form that the Mississippi Councils sent to prospective members.

³¹ W. E. Solomon, "The Problem of Desegregation in South Carolina," *Journal of Negro Education* 25, no. 3 (Summer 1956), 320.

³² Bartley, *Rise of Massive Resistance*, 93.

³³ Gressette Committee (statement of Sen. L. M. Gressette), Jan. 6, 1956, box 32, Workman Papers.

³⁴ "SLED Investigating School Petitions," B1. Council leaders had been calling for an investigation into the NAACP's methods of obtaining petition signers.

Orangeburg and the neighboring small town of Elloree serve as apt examples of how Council members leveraged their political and economic power to squelch the local school desegregation movement. Two such Council members were Orangeburg mayor Robert Jennings Jr. and Elloree mayor W. J. Deer. Each was credited with organizing the local boycott of Black businesses.³⁵

A number of Orangeburg County African Americans faced job dismissals.³⁶ The school desegregation effort in Elloree brought about such a coordinated and concerted effort on the part of local White supremacists that one state NAACP leader, A. C. Redd, was prompted to announce, "Hell is popping here in South Carolina."³⁷ When businesses such as the Coble Dairy refused to deliver milk to the homes of petition signers, *Jet* magazine reported that the "vicious squeeze" was "denying milk and bread to countless children."³⁸ The lack of a healthy, complete diet was clear to Black teachers. As Cleveland recalled, "In Elloree . . . we had to do so much for them . . . you know a child cannot learn anything if they have not had something to eat."³⁹ Her comments reflect that she understood the community in which she worked. Like many other African American teachers, Cleveland acquired middle-class status through her profession, yet empathized with her constituency because of her own working-class background.⁴⁰

Most local African Americans demonstrated a serious commitment to seeing school desegregation through to the end, but the Council's members, who South Carolina NAACP president James Hinton pronounced were "acting like jackasses," were sometimes successful.⁴¹ For instance, one Elloree man asked that his name be removed from the petition after his White employer threatened

³⁵"South Carolina's Plot to Starve Negroes," 9.

³⁶NAACP, "Dixie Catholic Bishop Denounces Economic Reprisals as 'Sinful,'" press release, Oct. 6, 1955, box A-99, series D, part 3, NAACP Papers, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina (hereafter cited as NAACP Papers).

³⁷A. C. Redd to Miss Lucille Black, Aug. 25, 1955, box C-182, series A, part 26, NAACP Papers.

³⁸"South Carolina's Plot to Starve Negroes," 11.

³⁹Cleveland, interview.

⁴⁰Walker, "African American Teaching in the South," 769-71. Walker uses a set of oral histories with Georgia teachers to argue that Black teachers understood the communities they worked in because they were from those or similar communities.

⁴¹NAACP, "Negroes Can't Be Held Back, Hinton Warns White South," press release, Oct. 27, 1955, box A-625, series C, part 3, NAACP Papers.

him.⁴² In Orangeburg, twenty of the original fifty-eight petitioners asked that their names be withdrawn.⁴³

But the economic squeeze taught Orangeburg County's Black citizens some valuable lessons. The most important of these was that "you can't do business with Citizens' Councils."⁴⁴ It was this lesson that turned the Elloree and Orangeburg struggle on its head.

African Americans began boycotting Council-owned businesses. Hinton argued, "economic reprisals' can be two-way streets as well as sharp two-edged swords."⁴⁵ He called not only for a local boycott but also a national boycott against the companies Council members represented.⁴⁶ Some African Americans seemed to heed his advice. In March 1956, a medical center in New York City removed its Coca-Cola machine after reports surfaced that a "Coca-Cola distributor in South Carolina is spearheading the White Citizens Council boycotts of Negroes who signed desegregation public school petitions."⁴⁷ Black college students at Claflin University and South Carolina State College also agreed to boycott Mayor Jennings's products (Coca-Cola, Sunbeam Bread, and Paradise Ice Cream) and to stop shopping at Council-owned downtown stores. Women teachers and other prominent community women closed their accounts at Becker's Department Store, and encouraged other Black women to do the same.⁴⁸

The boycott of Council-owned businesses proved to be effective. In Elloree, the absence of Black patronage left Main Street, normally bustling with business on Saturdays, "ominously barren."⁴⁹ As one unnamed Elloree man said, "The NAACP's done put the white man out of business around here."⁵⁰ One company (most likely Sunbeam) had been forced to accept the return of almost eight hundred bread

⁴²"Oklahoma City Joins Integration Parade, *Baltimore Afro-American*, Aug. 16, 1955, 5.

⁴³"South Carolina's Plot to Starve Negroes," 10.

⁴⁴Rivera, "Big Corporations Exerting Pressure," 4.

⁴⁵James M. Hinton to State NAACP Membership and Other Concerned Citizens, memo, Oct. 18, 1955, Modjeska Monteith Simkins Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁴⁶"South Carolina's Plot to Starve Negroes," 11.

⁴⁷"Moving Day," *The Crisis* 63, no. 3 (March 1956), 181.

⁴⁸Rivera, "Big Corporations Exerting Pressure," 4.

⁴⁹Rivera, "Big Corporations Exerting Pressure," 4.

⁵⁰John H. McCray, "Council 'Pressure' Unites Elloree Squeeze Victims," *The Afro-American*, Dec. 15, 1956. Clipping in box A-279, part 20, NAACP Papers.

loaves from a White-owned store.⁵¹ One of the most successful signs of the boycott was that it caused some White merchants to close up shop.⁵²

What Council members had likely not anticipated was that the economic squeeze positioned the NAACP—the very organization segregationists endeavored to destroy—“in the role of savior” and it mobilized the Black community to action.⁵³ When Hinton attended an Orangeburg NAACP meeting at a local church, he found a packed house.⁵⁴ Levi Byrd—who founded the Cheraw branch and was the chief organizer for the SC NAACP State Conference of Branches—told Thurgood Marshall, director of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, that the Council’s persecution of him increased his status in the community and made “more Negroes [sic] stick with The N.A.A.C.P.”⁵⁵ One Elloree man said, “T’hell with the white man now.” Another argued, “We are closer together here now than ever before. In one way I think the White Citizens’ Council’s economic pressure campaign was the best thing for unifying us.”⁵⁶

As African Americans engaged in protests, boycotts, and petitions, state authorities and agencies renewed their effort to ensure state-sponsored segregation remained intact. *The Crisis* magazine reported, “State after state is using its legislature or its court, or both, in efforts to bar the NAACP from operation.”⁵⁷

Teachers were often the targets of this legislation. Indeed, the Georgia Board of Education voted to revoke the license of any teacher who supported school integration. Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana all created legislation to monitor public employees’ organizational memberships. Southern legislatures modified teacher tenure laws. At the heart of all these new efforts was a belief that Black teachers and the NAACP were indivisible. Segregationists understood that to dispense with Black teachers was to weaken the NAACP. To dispose of Black teachers was to destabilize the civil rights movement.⁵⁸

⁵¹“South Carolina’s Plot to Starve Negroes,” 11.

⁵²“Friction in Deep South Is Spreading,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 28, 1956, A4.

⁵³Rivera, “Big Corporations Exerting Pressure,” 4.

⁵⁴J. M. Hinton to Mr. Wilkins, Sept. 26, 1955, box C-182, series A, part 26, NAACP Papers.

⁵⁵Levy G. Byrd to Thurgood Marshall, June 7, 1956, box 17, group V, series B, part 22, NAACP Papers.

⁵⁶McCray, “Council ‘Pressure’ Unites Elloree Squeeze Victims,” box A-279, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁵⁷“Forty-Seventh Annual NAACP Convention,” *The Crisis*, Aug.-Sept. 1956, 420.

⁵⁸Fultz, “The Displacement of Black Educators Post-*Brown*,” 16–19. Fultz argues that segregationists “clearly recognized a visceral connection” between teachers and the NAACP, 16.

The Anti-NAACP Oath

In South Carolina, the Council's inability to effectively thwart the Black community's desegregation efforts led the state legislature to take similar action. On March 17, 1956, it extended the Gressette Committee's existence and reach.⁵⁹ That year the Gressette Committee persuaded the General Assembly to pass fourteen new laws. These included permitting local school boards to sell or lease school property, the repeal of the compulsory education law, and—most importantly to this study—a series of anti-NAACP statutes designed to stymie the organization's progress.⁶⁰ The new legislation that most directly affected Black teachers was the anti-NAACP oath. Passed on March 17, 1956, this law made it illegal for local, county, or state government employees to be NAACP members and required them to disclose if their family members were in the organization.⁶¹

The legislators not only established that NAACP members would be dismissed from their jobs but also that anyone “refusing to submit a statement as provided herein, shall be summarily dismissed.”⁶² So even if someone were not an NAACP member, if they refused to make a statement one way or the other, they would lose their job.⁶³ In the event local White officials felt inclined to be sympathetic, repercussions could also fall on them. If they did not report these cases, they were subject to a \$100 fine for each violation.⁶⁴

Black leaders were certain that teachers were the anti-NAACP oath's intended targets.⁶⁵ According to Solomon, the South Carolina legislation was passed in order to “make sure no teachers join [the] NAACP.”⁶⁶ Roy Wilkins, NAACP executive secretary, and Hinton denounced the new law as an effort to “intimidate teachers as they are the only large group of public employees from which the

⁵⁹ Gressette Committee (statement of Sen. L. M. Gressette), May 2, 1956, box 32, Workman Papers.

⁶⁰ Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 113.

⁶¹ Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 208.

⁶² Act to Make Unlawful the Employment by the State, School District or Any County or Municipality Thereof of Any Members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and to Provide Penalties for Violation, March 17, 1956, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957) (Civ. A. 5792), at 2, Box 592.

⁶³ Act to Make Unlawful the Employment by the State, School District or Any County or Municipality Thereof of Any Members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and to Provide Penalties for Violation, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957) (Civ. A. 5792), Box 592.

⁶⁴ Solomon, “The Problem of Desegregation in South Carolina,” 321.

⁶⁵ “Negro Teachers Told to Choose,” *Asheville (NC) Citizen*, Aug. 2, 1955, 9.

⁶⁶ Solomon, “The Problem of Desegregation in South Carolina,” 321.

NAACP membership is recruited.”⁶⁷ The anti-NAACP oath was not just a vague swipe at the organization—it was meant to hit them hard. As one editorial noted, the new law was “simply another in a series of moves by the White South [sic] to break up the NAACP.”⁶⁸ Black Carolinians needed to “stand firm and fast.”⁶⁹

The opportunity to do just that soon presented itself. In May of 1956, Elloree school district superintendent M. G. Austin gave Principal Davis a set of applications to distribute to each teacher.⁷⁰ Their applications for the 1956-1957 school year were significantly different from past applications. This time, Superintendent Austin included the following questions:

Do you belong to the NAACP?

Do you support the NAACP in any way (money or attendance at meetings)?

Do you favor integration of races in schools?

Are you satisfied with your work and the schools as they are now maintained?

Do you feel that you would be happy in an integrated school system, knowing that parents and students do not favor this system?

Do you feel that an integrated school system would better fit the colored race for their life's work?

Do you think that you are qualified to teach an integrated class in a satisfactory manner?

Do you feel that parents of your school know that no public schools will be operated if they are integrated?

Do you believe in the aims of the NAACP?

If you should join the NAACP while employed in this school, please notify the Superintendent and Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Do you desire a position in the Elloree Training School for the 1956-1957 session?⁷¹

⁶⁷NAACP, “Wilkins, Hinton, Condemn Carolina Anti-NAACP Law,” press release, March 22, 1956, box A-279, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁶⁸NAACP, “Stand With the NAACP,” press release, March 22, 1956, box A-279, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁶⁹NAACP, “Wilkins, Hinton, Condemn Carolina Anti-NAACP Law,” press release, March 22, 1956, box A-279, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁷⁰Complaint, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957) (Civ. A. 5792).

⁷¹Complaint, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957) (Civ. A. 5792).

The teachers were required to complete and submit the applications in order to have their contracts renewed for the following school term. When they met with Superintendent Austin a few days later, most of the dissenting teachers informed him that they would not be completing the new application. Austin said they had to sign a resignation form. But four teachers—Bee A. Fogan, Essie M. David, Rutha Ingram, and Frazier Kitt—refused to sign the resignation forms. Two of the dissenting teachers, Leila M. Summers and Robert D. Carmichael, turned in incomplete applications. They answered questions regarding their qualifications, but refused to answer questions about integration or the NAACP. Eighteen teachers resigned and three refused to sign. Ultimately, only seven of the ETS's thirty-one teachers submitted applications.⁷²

The questionnaire set the small, rural town of Ellore apart from the rest of the state. All South Carolina school districts required Black teachers to reveal or terminate their NAACP membership, but only Superintendent Austin included what one Black commentator described as “none-of-their-business” questions that “no self-respecting, truthful, 100% American Negro” could answer.⁷³ With Ellore as a model, similar questionnaires were executed in Charleston and Jasper Counties, where active Council chapters operated.⁷⁴

The ETS teachers' stance may have looked like a staged protest, but there was no planned collective action in place.⁷⁵ Before Superintendent Austin returned to the school to pick up the completed applications, Principal Davis met with each teacher to review the new questionnaire.⁷⁶ With as much objectivity as he could muster, he told each teacher to “only do what you think you have to do. . . . You do what you feel that you want to do in your heart.”⁷⁷ That advice meant something different to each teacher. For some it meant not answering the questions at all, for others it meant resigning from

⁷² Complaint, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957) (Civ. A. 5792).

⁷³ “News in Review,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Aug. 18, 1956, A7.

⁷⁴ John H. McCray, “25 Fired S.C. Teachers to Test Anti-NAACP Law,” *Afro-American*, May 26, 1956, box C-177, part 26, NAACP Papers. (News clipping in NAACP papers).

⁷⁵ Richard Reid, “Ellore 21: Teachers ‘Changed the Course of History’ in South Carolina’s Civil Rights Movement,” *Times & Democrat* (Orangeburg, SC), Feb. 2, 2014, https://thetandd.com/lifestyles/elloree-21-teachers-changed-the-course-of-history-in-south-carolina-s-civil-rights-movement/article_5085c758-8acc-11e3-9b3d-001a4bcf887a.html.

⁷⁶ John McCray, “S.C. Teachers Sue To Kill NAACP Ban,” *Afro-American*, Sept. 22, 1956, box C-177, part 26, NAACP Papers. (News clipping in NAACP papers) The article says Austin arrived “on or about” May 1, 1956.

⁷⁷ Cleveland, interview.

their positions, and for certain teachers it meant answering the questions honestly and openly. To someone like Cleveland, it was simply a matter of standing up for herself. She said, "I felt like I had gone to school and felt I could teach any child."⁷⁸ Some of the ETS teachers answered the questionnaire in a satisfactory manner and their contracts were renewed for the next school year. Cleveland remembers being surprised that her roommate signed the application. But she also understood the reasons why others signed it: "The others, I knew—it was a mother and daughter—but they lived there and so I could understand why they weren't gonna leave, you know."⁷⁹ Cleveland's comments underscore the challenges African American teachers faced when they engaged in activism. Educated African Americans had severely limited professional opportunities. Job loss could permanently derail a teacher's future career prospects.⁸⁰

Despite expected repercussions, some Black teachers continued their affiliation with the NAACP. Orangeburg County's Dantzler School principal, Rev. E. E. Richburg, seemed ready for battle when he told a *New York Post* reporter, "I hope they fire me then. I'd like to meet them in court."⁸¹ Out of fourteen teachers at his school, he was the only one who admitted to being in the NAACP. Richburg's previous activism may account for some of his bravado.⁸² His life history serves as an excellent example of the far-reaching outcomes of one individual's activism. Before relocating to Orangeburg County, he and his family faced severe repercussions in Clarendon County, for his leadership in the *Briggs v. Elliott* suit. There, he was dismissed from a teaching job and kidnapped by the KKK, who threatened to "horse-whip" him.⁸³ Not only was he dismissed from his Clarendon County teaching position, but his daughter, son, and their spouses—all teachers—were also blacklisted.⁸⁴

Teachers all over the state lost their positions.⁸⁵ Among them were Charleston's Henry Hutchinson and Septima Clark, who were dismissed after supporting a desegregation petition. Hutchinson

⁷⁸Cleveland, interview.

⁷⁹Cleveland, interview.

⁸⁰Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 63.

⁸¹NAACP, "Teachers Reject Anti-NAACP Oath: Association Pledges Full Support," press release, May 17, 1956, box A-280, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁸²McCray, "25 Fired S.C. Teachers to Test Anti-NAACP Law," 7.

⁸³"S.C. Minister Forced to Use Shotgun: Militant Pastor Shoots Two After Whites Fire on Him," *Jet*, Oct. 27, 1955, 7.

⁸⁴Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 110.

⁸⁵Roy Wilkins to Lucille Black, memo, Aug. 3, 1956, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

taught at Burke Industrial School and Clark at Henry Archer School. Both refused to renounce their NAACP membership.⁸⁶ Clark remembers, “I refused to overlook my membership in the NAACP, as some of the teachers had done, and listed it.”⁸⁷ She tried to mobilize Black teachers in Charleston to fight the anti-NAACP oath. She mailed 726 letters to teachers but only received twenty-six responses. Eleven teachers agreed to go with her to talk to the superintendent, but only six showed up for the meeting. The superintendent did not say much to them, only that they were living far ahead of their time.⁸⁸

As teachers around the state continued to lose their jobs, any of these dismissals had the potential to culminate in a lawsuit.⁸⁹ Correspondence from the national NAACP office shows that it had a deep interest in the Ellore teachers. It was their “moral obligation” to offer whatever help they could.⁹⁰ Wilkins and Marshall exchanged memos about the case.⁹¹ The NAACP offered legal and financial assistance to make sure the teachers stayed the course. Wilkins wrote to Hinton that the national office was “very anxious” to offer the Ellore teachers as much support as it could muster.⁹² Even as Wilkins acknowledged that his organization’s “financial resources are not inexhaustible,” he pledged to help the teachers find other jobs and “to give assistance in these outstanding cases.”⁹³ The NAACP also endeavored to assist the teachers in their path toward financial recovery by helping them go to graduate school, find immediate employment, or take the New York City teachers exam.⁹⁴ They sent \$2,400 to the South Carolina NAACP Conference of Branches to assist the interested Ellore teachers with their graduate studies.⁹⁵

⁸⁶Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 113-14.

⁸⁷Septima Poinsette Clark, *Echo in My Soul* (New York: Dutton, 1962), 111-12.

⁸⁸Septima Clark, *Ready from Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990), 37-38. This occurred after Clark received her letter of dismissal in May 1956.

⁸⁹Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 113-14.

⁹⁰Roy Wilkins to James Hinton, July 19, 1956, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁹¹Roy Wilkins to Thurgood Marshall, memo, Aug. 21, 1956, box A-280, part 20, NAACP Papers; and Thurgood Marshall to Roy Wilkins, memo, Sept. 6, 1956, box A-280, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁹²Wilkins to Hinton, July 19, 1956, NAACP Papers.

⁹³Wilkins to Hinton, July 19, 1956, NAACP Papers.

⁹⁴W. E. Solomon to Roy Wilkins, Aug, 23, 1956, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁹⁵Roy Wilkins to Bookkeeping Department, memo, Sept. 25, 1956, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

As the NAACP and Black newspapers publicized the plight of Orangeburg County's Black teachers, other organizations lent financial and logistical support.⁹⁶ The Campaign for Courage, a citizen's organization in Minneapolis, invited Davis to receive a \$500 award on behalf of the Elloree teachers.⁹⁷ Similarly, when Marshall contacted Fred Fuges, the director of the Rights of Conscience Program of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Fuges said they had some money set aside to provide to "relief of conscience victims" and that the teachers could qualify for aid to help pay court costs and legal fees.⁹⁸ The AFSC also helped pay for Ms. Floyd and Robert Carmichael's graduate studies.⁹⁹

Taking the Elloree Case to Court

With growing funding, NAACP leaders believed that the Elloree case presented great possibilities for their legal efforts to undermine segregation and racial inequity. The release of twenty-one teachers by the same school board and the unique questionnaire made it blatantly clear that the teachers' dismissals and forced resignations had nothing to do with their performance and everything to do with their affiliation with the NAACP. By July 1956, the national NAACP office was in communication with Lincoln Jenkins, South Carolina's preeminent civil rights attorney, to establish the most effective legal strategy.¹⁰⁰

Jenkins and Marshall filed their complaint in *Bryan v. Austin* in the US District Court for the Eastern District of South Carolina on September 10, 1956. A three-judge panel heard the case: John J. Parker, George Bell Timmerman Sr., and Ashton Hilliard Williams. Parker and Williams had also heard the *Briggs* lawsuit and ruled decidedly against the NAACP. To make matters murkier, Judge Timmerman Sr. was Governor Timmerman Jr.'s father. The plaintiffs, all ETS teachers, were Ola L. Bryan, Essie M. David, Charles E. Davis, Rosa D. Davis, Vivian V. Floyd, Bee A. Fogan, Hattie M. Fulton, Rutha M. Ingram, Mary E. Jackson, Frazier

⁹⁶W. E. Solomon to Roy Wilkins, July 21, 1956, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁹⁷John McCray "New Citizens Group Cites S.C. Teachers, Gives NAACP \$500," *Afro-American*, Sept. 8, 1956, box C-177, part 26, NAACP Papers.

⁹⁸Fred Fuges to Thurgood Marshall, July 24, 1956, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

⁹⁹John A. Morsell to Alan Howe, Feb. 4, 1957, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers; John A. Morsell to Vivian Floyd, Feb. 4, 1957, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers; and Roy Wilkins to W.E. Solomon, July 24, 1956, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

¹⁰⁰Roy Wilkins to W.E. Solomon, July 24, 1956, NAACP Papers.

H. Keitt, Luther Lucas, James B. Mays, Laura Pickett, Howard W. Shefton, Betty Smith, Leila M. Summers, and Clarence V. Tobin.¹⁰¹ In their initial complaint, the plaintiffs repeatedly pointed out that they refused to answer the questions on the new application because they were unconstitutional and violated their rights as American citizens. The NAACP attorneys took on the anti-NAACP oath directly, asserting that it not only violated the Fourteenth Amendment but also their constitutional rights to freedom of speech, freedom of association, and the right to petition. Jenkins and Marshall asked the court to instruct the defense that it could not use personal beliefs or associations as a condition of employment or refuse to hire/rehire someone because they did not answer intrusive questions.¹⁰²

The defense argued that the federal court had no jurisdiction in the case—an argument segregationist attorneys had been making since the 1940s teacher salary equalization suits. The defendants also tried to argue that the plaintiffs had not completed their duties in a satisfactory manner, but this was easily disproved by the fact that the school district had rehired some of these teachers over and over again. They also noted that the teachers who refused to sign the new applications did not give a reason for their refusal. Moreover, they argued that none of the teachers, save Luther Lucas, expressed an interest in being rehired. But since Lucas did not fill out the application, they alleged that they could not hire him. While the NAACP's attorneys attacked the anti-NAACP legislation, the defense used it as evidence that they were within their rights to require the teachers to complete the new application. Their final defense—that *Briggs* did not outlaw racially segregated schools—revealed their true fears. After all, the plaintiffs were not making a desegregation argument. They had not even brought up the issue.¹⁰³

The attorney general's office also submitted a brief for the defense stating that the case was not really the court's prerogative because the plaintiffs failed to exhaust all the administrative remedies that the General Assembly laid out. Ignoring precisely why the ETS teachers lost their positions, the attorney general also argued that the case was null and void because the plaintiffs were no longer employed, had been replaced, and waited months to file the lawsuit. Although they claimed that the teachers had not been dismissed because they were NAACP members—after all, none of the teachers volunteered that

¹⁰¹ Complaint, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957) (Civ. A. 5792). Robert D. Carmichael was originally listed as a plaintiff but later withdrew from the case.

¹⁰² Complaint, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957) (Civ. A. 5792).

¹⁰³ Answer, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957) (Civ. A. 5792).

information—they positioned the NAACP as the source of the state's racial woes and defended the legislature's attack on the organization.¹⁰⁴

In its decision, the court largely chose to avoid the issue most central to the NAACP's case—whether or not the anti-NAACP statute was unconstitutional. Instead, they posited that a state court had to make a ruling before the US district court could render a decision. The case was not dismissed outright but remained pending until and if the plaintiffs had “a reasonable time for the exhaustion of state administrative and judicial remedies.”¹⁰⁵ On the surface (and perhaps in the judges' perspectives) this was a nonruling. But their assertion that the teachers should exhaust the administrative options was, in fact, a ruling in the defendants' favor.¹⁰⁶

It was Judge Parker, whose opinion in the *Briggs* case had been decidedly against the NAACP, who issued a dissenting opinion. He disagreed that the three-judge panel needed a lower court's ruling in order to make a decision. He did not believe the teachers needed to exhaust their administrative remedies, as those remedies did not address the issue of unconstitutionality. Most important to the NAACP's case, Judge Parker asserted that the association was not a subversive organization engaged with overthrowing the government. The NAACP was unpopular, but that was not a justifiable reason to deny its members their constitutional rights.¹⁰⁷ Judge Parker believed the court should declare the anti-NAACP oath unconstitutional and enjoin the defense from enforcing it.¹⁰⁸

The National Education Association (NEA) agreed with Judge Parker. They released a joint resolution with the PEA stating that although applications were an appropriate prerequisite to hiring teachers, if those applications asked questions that “can be answered only in a manner that prejudices the teacher's professional integrity and unjustly eliminated the teacher from further consideration for employment,” it was imperative for “professional organizations and individual citizens alike” to “oppose the use of the forms.”¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, the state's White teachers' association, the South Carolina Education Association (SCEA), refused to stand with the

¹⁰⁴ Amicus Curia, Attorney General of South Carolina, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957).

¹⁰⁵ *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563, at 567.

¹⁰⁶ *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563, at 564, 567, 573.

¹⁰⁷ *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563, at 569.

¹⁰⁸ *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563, at 574.

¹⁰⁹ “White Teachers Association Refused to Endorse Resolution (SCEA),” Jan. 11, 1957, box 5, Gressette Papers.

NEA and the PEA.¹¹⁰ South Carolina's Black teachers found that, once again, they could only depend on their own professional association and the NAACP.

The NAACP did not go to a lower court as the three-judge panel recommended. On February 20, 1957, they filed an appeal to the US Supreme Court.¹¹¹ Two months later, South Carolina, realizing that it was unlikely to win the case if it went to the Supreme Court, repealed the statute.¹¹² So the case was remanded back to the US district court, where it was dismissed.¹¹³

The Aftermath: New Anti-NAACP Laws and Tensions within NAACP Leadership

The anti-NAACP oath's repeal did not mean that the South Carolina General Assembly was abandoning its effort to dismantle the organization, or that it would stand idly by while schools were desegregated. In its stead were two new anti-NAACP laws. Governor Timmerman Jr. signed what was known as the barratry law, which was intended to prevent the NAACP from starting and filing school desegregation petitions.¹¹⁴ The second law required teachers to divulge all their organizational affiliations and gave state agencies the option not to hire someone based on these affiliations. This second law bore the appearance of being less overtly unconstitutional, but its supporters were not secretive about its intent to blunt the NAACP's progress.¹¹⁵

These new laws were in some ways worse than the anti-NAACP oath. Not only did they accomplish the same goal, but amid the Red Scare's oppressive atmosphere they bore the appearance of being legally defensible.¹¹⁶ Indeed, anticommunism not only shaped foreign and domestic policy, but increased the power of White southern

¹¹⁰“White Teachers Association Refused to Endorse Resolution (SCEA),” Jan. 11, 1957, Gressette Papers.

¹¹¹Notice of Appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States, *Bryan v. Austin*, 148 F. Supp. 563 (1957).

¹¹²Reid, “Ellore 21,” https://thetandd.com/lifestyles/elloree-21-teachers-changed-the-course-of-history-in-south-carolina-s-civil-rights-movement/article_5085c758-8acc-11e3-9b3d-001a4bcf887a.html.

¹¹³Reid, “Ellore 21,” https://thetandd.com/lifestyles/elloree-21-teachers-changed-the-course-of-history-in-south-carolina-s-civil-rights-movement/article_5085c758-8acc-11e3-9b3d-001a4bcf887a.html.

¹¹⁴James M. Hinton, untitled document, Feb. 9, 1957, box A-279, part 20, NAACP Papers.

¹¹⁵“Segregation Lines Held in '57; No Changes Likely in New Year,” Columbia (SC) Record, 3. (no author info)

¹¹⁶Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 114.

segregationists, who consistently and deliberately conflated Black political activism with a looming communist threat.¹¹⁷

The Citizens' Councils, which had already grown to nearly sixty chapters in South Carolina, launched a new membership drive in 1957.¹¹⁸ Their methods had been so effective that Senator Sam Engelhardt of Birmingham, Alabama, made a pilgrimage to the state so that he could "swap ideas" with the state's Council leaders. He heard how well organized the South Carolina Councils were and believed that his campaign, which he said was "based on white supremacy," could learn from South Carolina's Councils.¹¹⁹

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Septima Clark had such a difficult time rallying Charleston's Black teachers. For the majority of the ETS teachers, their audacity to pose a direct challenge to the anti-NAACP oath earned them a place on the state's blacklist. The ETS teachers simultaneously risked their livelihoods and their community status. Principal Davis relocated to Greensboro, North Carolina, where he continued to engage with the movement through the AFSC, NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.¹²⁰ Cleveland, whose husband was in the military, soon left for Atlanta, Georgia.¹²¹ But as Williams recalls, "Many of them, when they did that, they were ostracized by the rest of the educational community. Not many of them were able to find jobs in the state. Many of them traveled out of state. . . . But many of them never regained gainful employment and lived a life of poverty for the rest of their lives."¹²² They did, however, receive widespread support from the local community. Some of the parents released a statement that characterized the teachers as "sympathetic, admirable, and respected" community members.¹²³ In local Black citizens' eyes, the teachers' activism only heightened their status in the community.¹²⁴

Yet economic reprisals also contributed to rising tensions between local and national NAACP leadership. Local residents did

¹¹⁷ Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 414-20.

¹¹⁸ Report, untitled, Jan. 17, 1957, box 5, Gressette Papers.

¹¹⁹ Report, "Segregation Leaders Visit Sumter," Jan. 18, 1957, box 5, Gressette Papers.

¹²⁰ Charles E. Davis, interview by Eugene E. Pfaff Jr., Jan. 13, 1983, Greensboro Voices: Voicing Observations in Civil Rights and Equality Struggles, University of North Carolina at Greensboro University Libraries.

¹²¹ Cleveland, interview.

¹²² Williams, interview.

¹²³ Solomon, "The Problem of Desegregation in South Carolina," 322.

¹²⁴ Solomon, "The Problem of Desegregation in South Carolina," 322.

not feel the national office offered sufficient support. When L. A. Blackman, head of the Elloree NAACP branch, wrote Hinton in February 1957 asking for additional support for Elloree's Black farmers, Hinton told him that they did not have any funds available that year and that the NAACP "cannot become a relief agency."¹²⁵ Executive Secretary Wilkins assured Blackman and Modjeska Simkins—the firebrand human rights activists best-known at this time for her role as the secretary for the SC NAACP Conference of Branches—that they would try to help with specific cases immediately connected to NAACP activism. He understood that Elloree had become a "punishment area."¹²⁶ But he also repeated the assertion that they were not a "general relief agency."¹²⁷ Simkins remained one of Blackman's most ardent supporters. In February 1958, she wrote him, seemingly heartbroken, about the continued hardships he and Elloree's Black citizens were facing. She asked him to stay in the small, rural town and maintain his leadership role:

Now, I do not want you to leave Elloree. You have been the patriarch there, the leaven that has held the lump together. I know that more attention could have been given to you in your struggle there, and God knows I have tried to walk with you every step of the way—as well as it was possible without being there constantly as you are. Now, I want you to stick a little longer. Where would the people be without you. What semblance of branch activity would there be without you. You have gone on a thankless job, apparently. But your influence is there—your immortality is there. You will never die as long as there are Negroes who have lived in Elloree and in South Carolina.¹²⁸

Enclosed in the letter was "a little cash for you to use personally and to show you that I care and to inspire and hearten you."¹²⁹ Simkins later sent Blackman's letters to Wilkins in the hopes that Wilkins could find additional assistance.¹³⁰ The NAACP did continue to offer some aid, but Elloree's Black citizens remained financially devastated.¹³¹

¹²⁵James Hinton to L. A. Blackman, Feb. 8, 1957, box A-279, part 20, NAACP Papers.

¹²⁶Roy Wilkins to Mrs. Andrew W. Simkins [Modjeska Simkins], March 31, 1958, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

¹²⁷Wilkins to Simkins, March 31, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹²⁸Modjeska Simkins to L. A. Blackman, Feb. 14, 1958, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

¹²⁹Simkins to Blackman, Feb. 14, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹³⁰Modjeska Simkins to Roy Wilkins, Feb. 24, 1958, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers.

¹³¹Roy Wilkins to L. A. Blackman, March 31, 1958, box A-289, part 20, NAACP Papers; and Roy Wilkins to Mr. McClain, May 28, 1958, box A-289, part 20, NAACP

In truth, the state and Citizens' Council's laser-focused efforts to diminish the NAACP may not have been completely successful, but they certainly made an impact. The South Carolina NAACP did experience a decline.¹³² The number of state branches dropped drastically between 1954 and 1957 from eighty-five to thirty-seven. State membership dropped from 7,889 to 2,202.¹³³ Yet while the state legislature and the Council were primarily to blame for this decline, people on the local level and in the national office believed that it was also "indicative of the weak organization which has resulted from absentee leadership and incidentally about programs and activities to be effected."¹³⁴ After all, the Ellore branch—which suffered a loss of membership but continued to have active participants—proved that repercussions alone were not enough to completely destroy a local movement. Internal discord created a true leadership problem.¹³⁵ It was "imperative that something be done."¹³⁶

Hinton and Simkins were at the center of these leadership issues. During Hinton's last year as South Carolina NAACP president, the organization remained in a state of disarray as, by all accounts, he mostly abandoned his presidential duties.¹³⁷ One NAACP member, clearly irate about his most recent interaction with Hinton, wrote Ruby Hurley, director of the Southeast Region, in February 1958. Hinton, who the author referred to as "His Highness," had already spent most of his time out of the state when he arrived a half hour late to their meeting.¹³⁸ The group wanted to speak to Hinton about Allen University's student activists. The author and his delegation believed that the NAACP should offer the students legal assistance. Hinton provided what most likely seemed like a series of excuses

Papers. Blackman was sent a \$100 check in March 1958 and \$300 in May 1958 to assist various locals.

¹³²Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 211.

¹³³Mr. [Gloster B.] Current to Mr. [Robert L.] Carter, memo, May 9, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers.

¹³⁴Mr. Current to Mr. Carter, memo, May 9, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹³⁵Ruby Hurley to Gloster B. Current, May 23, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers. Hurley noted that the Ellore branch lost a comparatively low number of members—fifty-five, and that Savannah Grove surpassed its membership goal.

¹³⁶Mr. Current to Mr. Carter, memo, May 9, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹³⁷Gloster B. Current to Mr. Carter, memo, May 13, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers; Gloster B. Current to J. M. Hinton, May 13, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers; and Gloster B. Current to Mrs. Ruby Hurley, May 20, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers. In communications with other NAACP staff, Current consistently referred to the state's leadership and membership problem as the "South Carolina situation."

¹³⁸Joe [last name not provided] to Ruby Hurley, Feb. 4, 1958, box A-105, series D, part 3, NAACP Papers.

about why he and the NAACP could not offer their support: (1) the students' academic standing was unknown, (2) their moral character was unknown, and (3) none of the students had attempted to meet with him beforehand. But the author and his delegation felt that if the NAACP did not offer the students legal assistance, they would lose their standing throughout the Black community. Hinton ultimately agreed to support the students, but his hesitancy revealed a man who may have grown out of touch with the ever-changing Black civil rights movement.¹³⁹

It was becoming more and more apparent that Hinton's time as president was coming to a close. Members in Greer, Oconee County, Rock Hill, Spartanburg, Sumter, and Union voiced their complaints to Hurley during her round of visits. She admitted that the situation caused her to avoid visiting the state more than absolutely necessary.¹⁴⁰ Things got so bad that people began to wonder why he would not simply "retire gracefully."¹⁴¹ Hinton was not fulfilling his leadership responsibilities, which made it difficult for other leaders around the state to move the NAACP's agenda forward. On March 28, 1958, a meeting was called in Columbia, wherein some thirty-five to forty branch leaders met to discuss the issue. Hinton, in a move that seemed to demonstrate growing disinterest in the NAACP, did not attend.¹⁴²

As the South Carolina NAACP approached its annual Conference of Branches, Hinton expressed that he was ready to formally retire from the position he had held since 1940.¹⁴³ The NAACP gave the outgoing president a proper banquet in his honor, where he was praised as a "tough, courageous, resourceful and brilliant" state president.¹⁴⁴ During his farewell speech Hinton reviewed the state NAACP's major accomplishments of the previous nineteen years. He acknowledged that reprisals/repercussions impacted membership numbers, but encouraged attendees to actively campaign for increased membership. He dismissed the organization's internal problems and instead argued that the "fight and the organization are greater than

¹³⁹Joe to Hurley, Feb. 4, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹⁴⁰Ruby Hurley to Gloster B. Current, May 23, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers.

¹⁴¹Hurley to Current, May 23, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹⁴²Hurley to Current, May 23, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹⁴³James M. Hinton to Dear President [no name provided], Sept. 12, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers.

¹⁴⁴NAACP, "Hinton Praised for 18 Years Service to NAACP," press release, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers.

any of us.”¹⁴⁵ The state NAACP “must not become divided, but must move ahead in unison.”¹⁴⁶ He, like so many others, maintained the belief that they were “ON GOD’S SIDE, and HE cannot fail, so we cannot fail [emphasis in original].”¹⁴⁷

Yet it was the ouster of one of its most stalwart and dedicated leaders that perhaps best exemplified the NAACP’s decline. Simkins ruffled feathers when she served as the South Carolina delegate at the Conference on Voting Restrictions in Southern States, and several newspapers identified her as an NAACP representative.¹⁴⁸ The NAACP had not sent her, and the assertion that it had upset Hinton and Wilkins.¹⁴⁹ Wilkins was further upset that an *Amsterdam News* article on Black leadership criticized him and the NAACP board for its “alleged failure to carry on a vigorous fight for students” who wanted to desegregate the University of South Carolina.¹⁵⁰ He was convinced the information came from Simkins.¹⁵¹

By the time the NAACP field secretary, Edwin G. Washington Jr., wrote the South Carolina NAACP in July 1958 to inquire about Simkins and her role in the NAACP, she was no longer serving as its secretary.¹⁵² Hinton informed Washington that Simkins was “very efficient and militant.”¹⁵³ He noted that although he did not know of her participation in any subversive organizations, she was currently under investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Regarding her leadership Hinton said, “I do not care to state any portion[sic].”¹⁵⁴

That year, Simkins found out via a newspaper article that she had allegedly declined reelection as secretary. She wrote an open letter assuring officers and local branch members that she had not “turned

¹⁴⁵“Backward Glance of Past (19) Years,” Oct. 17, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers.

¹⁴⁶“Backward Glance of Past (19) Years.” Oct. 17, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹⁴⁷“Backward Glance of Past (19) Years.” Oct. 17, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹⁴⁸“NAACP Sends Mrs. Simkins to D.C. Parley,” *Columbia Record*, April 26, 1958, 5.

¹⁴⁹J. M. Hinton to Roy Wilkins, April 28, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers; and Roy Wilkins to J. M. Hinton, May 23, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers.

¹⁵⁰Wilkins to Hinton, May 23, 1958, NAACP Papers; James L. Hicks, “Leadership,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 10, 1958.

¹⁵¹Wilkins to Hinton, May 23, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹⁵²J. M. Hinton to Edwin G. Washington Jr., July 23, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers.

¹⁵³Hinton to Washington Jr., July 23, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹⁵⁴Hinton to Washington Jr., July 23, 1958, NAACP Papers.

my back on my people and our cause in this needy time.”¹⁵⁵ She expressed confidence that her fellow South Carolinians knew her well enough to know that she would never “be bought and that I WILL NOT be sold [emphasis in original].”¹⁵⁶ She argued that the NAACP still had much work to do and that it was important for the organization to not look backwards and “bask in reflected glory.”¹⁵⁷ Adding to her inability to serve as a leader in the organization was the death of her mother and a recent bout with influenza that had left her debilitated.¹⁵⁸ Longtime member Isaiah DeQuincey Newman replaced Simkins and grew into one of the state’s single most important Black activists-intellectuals of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁹

The Ongoing Plight of Black Teachers

Bryan v. Austin was an important civil liberties case, but in the long term it did not address the challenges Black teachers faced as desegregation became a reality. In 1955, Howard University professors Hurley Doddy and G. Franklin Edwards published a study on 150 Black South Carolina schoolteachers.¹⁶⁰ The professors found that one-fourth of their respondents expressed “some apprehension” about desegregation.¹⁶¹ Teachers’ chief concerns centered on job displacement, unequal pay, and increased demands for professional preparation.¹⁶²

By 1970, it was clear that those teachers were right to fear desegregation’s implications. Rumors about widespread job loss among Black teachers reached the ears of federal agencies.¹⁶³ In response, the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare commissioned the Race Relations Information Center (RRIC) to

¹⁵⁵ Mrs. Andrew W. Simkins to Officers and Members of Local Branches of NAACP, 1958, box C-143, series A, part 27, NAACP Papers.

¹⁵⁶ Simkins to Officers and Members, undated [1958], NAACP Papers. A handwritten note states, “1958.”

¹⁵⁷ Simkins to Officers and Members, undated [1958], NAACP Papers.

¹⁵⁸ Simkins to Wilkins, Feb. 24, 1958, NAACP Papers.

¹⁵⁹ Mr. [Gloster B.] Current to Mr. [Robert L.] Carter, memo, May 21, 1958, box C-143, Series A, Part 27, NAACP Papers.

¹⁶⁰ Hurley H. Doddy and G. Franklin Edwards, “Apprehensions of Negro Teachers Concerning Desegregation in South Carolina,” *Journal of Negro Education* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1955), 26–43.

¹⁶¹ Doddy and Edwards, “Apprehensions of Negro Teachers,” 28.

¹⁶² Doddy and Edwards, “Apprehensions of Negro Teachers,” 30.

¹⁶³ US Office of Education, *Displacement of Black Educators in Desegregating Public Schools* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), 1.

collect information on the phenomenon. The RRIC study found that Black teacher displacement corresponded with court desegregation orders. Some teachers were fired outright. Other teachers' contracts were not renewed. The overwhelming majority were demoted, which was often a precursor to dismissal or resignation. School officials then replaced Black teachers with White teachers, some of whom had less experience and education than the teachers they replaced.¹⁶⁴ School officials also dismissed Black teachers for allegedly being "incompetent" or having "inadequate training."¹⁶⁵

To alleviate these issues the US Office of Education created the Training Coordination Center for Displaced Teachers (TCCDT). The TCCDT calculated that more than two thousand Black teachers lost their jobs due to southern desegregation in the 1968-1971 school years alone.¹⁶⁶ They also found that Black teacher displacement was carried out not only through outright dismissal but through demotion, unwanted transfers, assigning teachers to subjects/grades outside their area of expertise, pay cuts, and "less satisfying positions."¹⁶⁷ The TCCDT in North and South Carolina reached out to the NAACP, teachers associations, and school districts to locate and assist displaced teachers.¹⁶⁸ Yet the simple reality was that, although it was clear Black teachers were losing their jobs, little quantitative data on the topic existed and Black teachers were reluctant to step forward.¹⁶⁹

The PEA's Solomon reported to the TCCDT that fewer Black teachers were being hired. For instance, between 1968 and 1970 a school district in Lexington County hired at least a hundred White teachers but fewer than ten Black teachers. Greenwood County had twenty Black teachers before 1968, but only five in 1970. The AFSC reported that school officials did not renew fifty to sixty teachers' contracts and dismissed six principals in 1969.¹⁷⁰ The North and South Carolina TCCDT tried to reach out to displaced personnel, but their progress was slow and ineffective. As of September 1971, they had located only twenty-one displaced personnel. They helped fourteen of these individuals get into graduate school in the hopes that it

¹⁶⁴Robert W. Hooker, *Displacement of Black Teachers in the Eleven Southern States, Special Report* (Nashville, TN: Race Relations Information Center, 1970), 1-6.

¹⁶⁵Hooker, *Displacement of Black Teachers*, 14.

¹⁶⁶Floyd A. Davis to S. K. Dean, Dec. 20, 1971, Revised Items from Proposal to the Office of Economic Opportunity, Walker E. Solomon Papers, Manning Library, Claflin University (hereafter cited as Solomon Papers).

¹⁶⁷S. K. Dean to Floyd A. Davis, Dec. 20, 1971, Solomon Papers.

¹⁶⁸S. K. Dean to Floyd A. Davis, Dec. 20, 1971, Solomon Papers.

¹⁶⁹Office of Education, *Displacement of Black Educators in Desegregating Public Schools*, 1.

¹⁷⁰Office of Education, *Displacement of Black Educators in Desegregating Public Schools*, 32-34.

would improve their chances of finding a position afterward.¹⁷¹ However, in the face of job displacement far less overtly racist than what the Elloree teachers experienced, an effective remedy seemed evasive.

The erasure of the Black teachers' association exacerbated both Black teacher job displacement and the TCCDT's inability to create effective remedies. In South Carolina, Black teachers had come to rely on the PEA, which had worked so seamlessly with the NAACP to assist the Elloree teachers. At the NEA's behest, in 1967 the PEA merged into the SCEA—the previously all-White teachers' association.¹⁷² Solomon expressed concerns about whether or not the SCEA would continue to employ PEA staff and protect its members. He wanted the newly merged teachers' association to maintain the Defense Welfare Fund and continue making contributions to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Instead, PEA leaders found themselves demoted after the merger, and the SCEA was clearly unprepared to address Black teachers' plight during desegregation.¹⁷³ By the time the RRIC contacted Solomon in 1970, the former PEA executive secretary had not only been deprived of that position but pushed out as assistant executive secretary in the SCEA.¹⁷⁴ As the RRIC study noted, when Black and White teachers' associations merged, Black teachers "lost an ally."¹⁷⁵ They no longer had an organization that would serve as a liaison to the NAACP and be proactive about collecting information on what was happening to Black teachers.

A small cohort of teachers in the 1955 Doddy-Edwards study expressed concerns that public schools would be abandoned if they were forced to desegregate.¹⁷⁶ Although South Carolina officials did not close public schools in the wake of desegregation, they did turn to school privatization. A prominent example was the Wade Hampton School, which boasted a \$350,000 plant and ten-acre campus. Located in Orangeburg, the school attracted students from all over the state. At least 40 percent of its students were bused in. Like the other White private schools founded in the post-*Brown* era, the Wade Hampton School was created to avoid integration because its founders believed that African American children were incapable of

¹⁷¹ Progress Report for Displaced Teachers, Sept. 1971, Solomon Papers.

¹⁷² Potts, *History of the Palmetto Education Association*, 131–34.

¹⁷³ Potts, *History of the Palmetto Education Association*, 126–36.

¹⁷⁴ SCEA Merger Evaluation, April 1974, Solomon Papers.

¹⁷⁵ Hooker, *Displacement of Black Teachers*, 16.

¹⁷⁶ Doddy and Edwards, "Apprehensions of Negro Teachers," 31–32.

attaining high intellectual standards.¹⁷⁷ As the school president, T. E. Wannamaker, stated, “I believe it is heredity first and environment second. Many (black students) are little more than field hands.”¹⁷⁸

Conclusion: Foreshadowing the 1960s

These events in the immediate post-*Brown* years foreshadowed and laid the groundwork for the 1960s civil rights movement. As segregationists strove to harden the lines of separation between the races, it left African Americans feeling that they had no other choice but to engage in the direct-action strategies that became increasingly common throughout the 1960s. Orangeburg, the home of two Black colleges—Claflin University and South Carolina State College (now South Carolina State University)—became a hotbed of 1960s student activism. Like South Carolina’s older activists, the student protesters used the media to draw attention to their cause and built on the tradition of organizational cooperation.

The events in Ellore and Orangeburg illustrate how deeply committed African Americans were to ending inequities in public schools and how southern Whites struggled to retain power by defiantly defending racial segregation. In the minds of both Blacks and Whites, equal education meant racial equality. That inspired activism among Blacks and bitter resistance among Whites.

By refusing to complete applications that they viewed as unjust and demeaning, the Ellore teachers found both notoriety and enmity. On the one hand, they sparked the wrath of White segregationists who were determined to wage a long and often pernicious battle to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, the group of teachers who posed before a lone photographer on a spring morning in 1956 sparked pride and support among activists and community members alike as they stood “firm and fast” defending their jobs, their community, and their fundamental rights as citizens.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷Bruce Galphin, “School Battle in South Not Yet Won: White Private ‘Academies’ Harm Public System,” Jan. 2, 1970, *Washington Post*, A1; and Bruce Galphin, “Private, White Schools Rise in South,” Sept. 14, 1969, *Washington Post*, A1, A8.

¹⁷⁸Galphin, “Private, White Schools Rise in South,” A8.

¹⁷⁹NAACP, “Wilkins, Hinton, Condemn Carolina Anti-NAACP Law,” press release, March 22, 1956, box A-279, part 20, NAACP Papers.