

Clarendon County in Black & White

A VISIT TO THE HOME OF BRIGGS V. ELLIOTT, 50 YEARS AFTER BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

David J. Garrow

MANNING, South Carolina – Clarendon County treasurer Matt Evans sticks his head into the office of Beulah Roberts, the county clerk of court. A local television station is appealing for viewers to adopt needy families for Christmas-time gift-giving, and he asks if Roberts will join him and two other colleagues in taking four families. “I’m in,” Roberts immediately replies.

It’s an ordinary moment, but in an extraordinary place. More than fifty years ago, Clarendon County gave birth to *Briggs v. Elliott*,¹ the first of the four school desegregation cases that came together in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 to make up *Brown v. Board of Education*,² the landmark decision that held state-sponsored racial segregation unconstitutional.

Evans is white, and Roberts is black – Clarendon’s first county-wide African-American elected official. She graduated from one of Clarendon’s still all-black high schools in 1969, and became the courthouse’s third black employee in 1976. Appointed county clerk in 1995 to fill a vacancy, she was elected without opposition in 1996 and similarly re-elected in 2000. In 2002, Patricia Pringle, one of Evans’s other recruits, was elected county auditor, becoming Clarendon’s second county-wide black officer.³

As *Brown*’s fiftieth anniversary approaches on May 17, many eyes will turn towards Clarendon County to measure what has changed, and what has not changed, over the past five decades. Although Clarendon is still a largely rural, generally poor, majority-black

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1 98 F. Supp. 529 (E.D.S.C., 1951)

2 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

3 Garrow Interview with Beulah Roberts, 5 December 2003, Manning, SC.

county, Roberts's success exemplifies how local politics have changed dramatically since the end of legalized segregation.

But unequal schools and economic disadvantage continue to hold back many of Clarendon County's African-American school children. Indeed, just a few steps from Beulah Roberts's office, another court suit aimed at winning equal-quality education for students in three dozen poor and heavily black South Carolina school districts is now being tried before Circuit Judge Thomas W. Cooper, Jr. Filed more than ten years ago, in 1993, the lawsuit's proponents equate their case to *Briggs* and say that once again, judicial intervention is the only solution that can bring true educational opportunity to Clarendon County's students.



Brown v. Board of Education promised to revolutionize public education across the South. But *Brown's* implementation was notoriously slow and spotty, in part because the Supreme Court said that southern school districts could move "with all deliberate speed."⁴ In Clarendon County, token integration of a few black students into formerly all-white schools began in 1965,⁵ but only in 1970, when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit mandated complete desegregation,⁶ did most white students leave the public schools to enroll in private, all-white academies such as Clarendon Hall.

The present lawsuit, *Abbeville County School District v. State of South Carolina*, aims to have the state Supreme Court, using the state Constitution, order the South Carolina

legislature to provide poor rural school districts like Clarendon's with sufficient funds so that their students can enjoy the same educational opportunities that are available to schoolchildren in the state's wealthiest districts. Rural legislators both black and white avidly back the suit, but similar lawsuits in other states, even when successful, have resulted in little meaningful compliance, directly reminiscent of the disappointing early implementation of *Brown*. Remedying the effects of widespread poverty on South Carolina's public schools may prove decidedly more difficult than did ending racial segregation.



Clarendon's county seat, Manning, is today a vibrant town of 4,000. It boasts a Walmart, but the town's top lunch spot, McCabe's Bar-B-Q, is as down-home – and delicious – as it gets.⁷ The century-old county courthouse anchors a traditional downtown square, yet Manning's public schools are visibly modern and attractive.

On one side of the courthouse square, a beautifully renovated horse stable houses the law office of State Senator John Calhoun Land III. A Manning native, Land has represented Clarendon County in the South Carolina General Assembly's upper chamber since 1977. Land's father ran a service station and as a young man Land delivered kerosene to many rural black families.⁸

All twenty of the black plaintiffs in *Briggs* are now deceased, but their surviving children remember all too well the economic retaliation that was visited upon their parents by angry Clarendon County whites. In the case of the

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

5 *Brunson v. Board of Trustees of School District No. 1 of Clarendon County*, 244 F. Supp. 859 (D.S.C., 1965).

See also *Brunson v. Board of Trustees*, 271 F. Supp. 586 (D.S.C., 1967).

6 *Brunson v. Board of Trustees of School District No. 1 of Clarendon County*, 429 F.2d 820 (4th Circuit, 1970).

7 Garrow Personal Observation @ Consumption, 4 December 2003.

8 Garrow Interview with John Land, 4 December 2003, Manning, SC.

Reverend Joseph Armstrong DeLaine, the prime organizer of the lawsuit, the retaliation was more than economic; his family's home was burned down to its concrete foundation in a fire that local white firemen refused to fight.

DeLaine's oldest son and namesake, J.A. DeLaine, Jr., now a retired business executive living in Charlotte, remembers well the traumatic events of the early 1950s. He also recalls how John Land's father was one of the few white businessmen in the county who refused to abide by the economic boycott that whites had imposed on the black plaintiffs: "he would deliver."⁹ Indeed, Senator Land regularly delivered kerosene to black landowner Levi Pearson, who had initiated the first legal complaint, an unsuccessful effort to force school officials to provide bus transportation for black students, as they already did for whites.¹⁰

John Land readily admits that as a teenager in the mid-1950s his awareness of the *Briggs* case was "none at all." He vaguely realized that some blacks were "doing something that the white folks didn't want them to," but to J.A. DeLaine, Jr., the Lands' behavior was memorable: "a family that even in the 1950s recognized the inequities and attempted to do their part."

Senator Land is white, as is C. Alex Harvin III, who succeeded to Land's House seat in 1977 and, like Land, still represents Clarendon County twenty-seven years later. The anomaly seems stunning: two long-time white legislators still representing black-majority districts in a county where black officeholders can win some offices by public acclamation.

But there's less mystery than meets the eye. Land first unsuccessfully challenged a racially conservative state senator in 1972, and thus it is

unsurprising that "the black community supported me first." When the oldest of Land's three children first reached school age in the mid-1970s, Land and his wife Marie sent their son to a majority-black public school while most white children attended a private academy. Some Clarendon African-Americans credit the Lands for the substantial white presence – about one-third of the students – in Manning-area public schools.¹¹ Just this fall the Lands' oldest grandchild – all three of their children now practice law with their father – began school in Manning, and at least six more are ready to follow.¹²

Beulah Roberts sees no enigma whatsoever in Land and Harvin's biracial political success: "they've always been there for everybody," and "that one-on-one with constituents" of both races has allowed both men to win handily even on the few occasions when they have faced credible black challengers.

Manning, the county seat, is a significantly larger and more vibrant town than Summerton, ten miles to the south, where Reverend DeLaine's home was torched and the *Briggs* lawsuit began. In contrast to Manning's Walmart, in Summerton the greatest commercial excitement in the small and tattered downtown is the recent opening of an economy-priced Family Dollar store. The east side of town, where most whites live, boasts some grand houses, including Representative Harvin's. On the largely black west side, many homes are ramshackle and decrepit. But even in Summerton, where the six-member town council is evenly divided between blacks and whites, the recent narrow defeat of long-time mayor Charles Ridgeway by a younger white challenger, Beth Hinson Phillips, did not take place along racial lines.

9 Garrow Interview with J.A. DeLaine, Jr., 5 December 2003, Charlotte, NC.

10 Garrow Interview with John Land.

11 Garrow Interview with Roberts.

12 Garrow Interview with John Land; Garrow Interview with Marie Land, 4 December 2003, Manning, SC.

Efforts to revive Summerton, especially in anticipation of the *Briggs-Brown* anniversary this May, have featured a surprising number of organizations for a town of barely 1,100. One of the most visible, the Briggs DeLaine Pearson Foundation, named for the activists of a half-century ago and originally an offshoot of Clarendon's branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), has donated significant amounts of supplies to local schools.¹³ Another, the Summerton Revitalization Corporation (SRC), attracted the efforts of two of the town's most outspoken civic voices.

Joseph C. Elliott is the grandson of Roderick M. Elliott, Sr., the named defendant in *Briggs* and chairman of the Summerton-area school board in the 1950s. Elliott readily acknowledges that "my grandfather had a racist attitude," but quickly adds that "he was a person of his times." Like John Land, Elliott too admits that "I had very little awareness of what was going on" during his teenage years, though he does know that his own father was "approached by the Ku Klux Klan to join and refused to do it." Elliott is uncertain who the local Klansmen were, but "maybe they had something to do with the burning of Reverend DeLaine's house." Yet he clearly remembers one dramatic scene a year or two after *Brown*: "I was in the yard. A whole convoy of convertibles came through town. A seemingly endless procession of Klansmen" from all over the southeast. "That was scary."

After attending college, Elliott, with his father's encouragement, accepted a teaching post at a historically black private high school two counties north of Clarendon. That job represented "the first time I really began thinking about things" concerning race, Elliott

says. In 1996, after a three-decade career as a teacher and administrator in diverse South Carolina schools, Elliott returned home to Clarendon for the first time since 1960.¹⁴

Elliott tells visiting journalists that nowadays "Summerton is not a nest of rabid racists." Many local whites, he says, do not like to talk about *Briggs*, but whites "need to accept the significance of this case and acknowledge that blacks were super-brave to persevere and see this case through." Sitting in the parlor of his striking family home that dates to earlier than 1821, R. M. Elliott's grandson has a succinct verdict on the case that put his family's name into countless history books: "this was a victory for America."¹⁵

Two years ago Joe Elliott took a leading role in the SRC. Leola Ragin Parks, an African American woman who serves as Executive Assistant to the Summerton-area school board and superintendent and who served as the SRC's co-chairman, calls it an "umbrella" organization that was aimed at bringing together all of the town's multiplicity of groups prior to the *Briggs* anniversary. Ms. Parks was among the first two handfuls of black students who began the token desegregation of Summerton High School in 1965 and 1966, and she has worked for the Summerton-area school district ever since her 1970 graduation.¹⁶

Parks says the SRC was "so well-planned and put together" that it unfortunately was "just too good to be true." In addition to Joe Elliott, top white participants, Parks notes, included "my buddy" Dr. Michael Connors, the headmaster of Summerton's almost all-white private academy, Clarendon Hall. But despite the biracial enthusiasm that both Elliott and Parks testify to, angry discord and

13 Garrow Interview with Beatrice Brown Rivers, 3 December 2003, Summerton, SC.

14 Garrow Interview with Joseph C. Elliott, 4 December 2003, Summerton, SC.

15 Id. See also Carolyn Click, "The Education of Joe Elliott," *The State*, 9 November 2003, A1.

16 Garrow Interview with Leola Ragin Parks, 5 December 2003, Summerton, SC.

contention left the SRC all but moribund within less than two years time.¹⁷

Perhaps surprisingly, the SRC's disabling strife was intraracial, not interracial. J.A. DeLaine, Jr., a leading voice in the Briggs DeLaine Pearson Foundation, readily volunteers that he called Ms. Parks "a god-damned liar" at one public meeting of Summerton civic leaders. Ms. Parks tactfully comments that "people not rooted in the community can sometimes cause problems."

"We're just too busy fighting each other, being crabs in a barrel," Ms. Parks says regretfully. Summerton has "such rich history," and "we've got to all get together and sell it." Joe Elliott adds that "our problems need to be solved within the community." At present, Ms. Parks laments, "everyone's kind of drifted away" from SRC's plan for an all-inclusive celebration of the Briggs anniversary. "After 2004, everyone's going to go away."



If Clarendon County's present-day politics and civic affairs belie any lingering stereotypes, Clarendon's public schools offer a similarly mixed but less encouraging picture. In the Manning-area Clarendon 2 School District, adults of both races express happiness at how many white families send their children to Manning's attractive and modern schools. "We're proud of our schools. They're not the best," John Land says, but no visible racial divide characterizes the Clarendon 2 district.

In Summerton, the three-school Clarendon 1 district is virtually all black. Asked how many white students there are among the 480 pupils who attend grades eight to twelve at

Scott's Branch High School, Principal Kenneth Mance responds with the name of one eleventh grader and then quickly adds that there also is a young lady in tenth grade.¹⁸ Summerton-area white pupils either attend Clarendon Hall, which was founded in 1965 when token desegregation began but now has a few African-American students, or travel out-of-town. Leola Parks remembers a "very tense situation" inside Summerton High School during the late 1960s, including some white teachers "who were not so pleasant" to the small number of black students. When the Fourth Circuit in 1970 mandated the complete abolition of Summerton's racially dual system, the white exodus from the Clarendon 1 schools to Clarendon Hall was immediate and all-but-complete.¹⁹

"That's pretty much how it's been ever since," Parks explains. Nowadays cordial institutional relations exist between Clarendon 1 and Clarendon Hall – "they just called to borrow our risers for a holiday program," comments Mance, the Scott's Branch High School principal. But Senator Land pinpoints the deeper problem: "it's a divide. You can't say it's not. It's not a serious social divide as adults are concerned, but for teens it no doubt is. It creates a divide." As his wife Marie puts it, "it keeps children from getting to know each other."

But for those who know the virtually all-black Summerton area public schools the best, students' lack of interracial contact is hardly the most pressing problem. Scott's Branch High School has lost five teaching lines, including the only art instructor, in just the past two years, principal Mance says.²⁰ State funding cutbacks are responsible, and the impact can be seen both in statistics and in the

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ Garrow Interview with Kenneth Mance, 5 December 2003, Summerton, SC.

¹⁹ Garrow Interview with Parks.

²⁰ Garrow Interview with Mance.

classroom. This year the high school reports a student/teacher ratio of 25.4, up tremendously from 10.8 a year earlier. Dollars spent per pupil have plummeted to \$6,613 from a previous figure of \$9,125.²¹ “When you have thirty students in a class rather than fifteen, that’s a major problem right there,” declares Diane D. Georgia, the high school’s guidance counselor.²²

Scott’s Branch also had to return to an old-fashioned schedule of seven daily, fifty-minute instructional periods, rather than the ninety-minute classes that a larger staff had allowed. Teachers “are not happy about that,” says Ms. Georgia, for there’s “not enough instructional time.” Students agree. A story in the school paper, the “Eagle’s Eye,” reported widespread disappointment with the shorter periods. “As soon as you start to think, it’s time to change classes,” Herbert Lee, a senior, told the paper.²³

Clarendon 1 district superintendent Clarence Willie, a retired Marine lieutenant colonel who has been in the job for eighteen months, says his goal is “getting us to the point where we have a respectable academic reputation.”²⁴ But Kenneth Mance, the high school principal, does not envision any restoration of the teaching cuts.²⁵ In their absence, says Ms. Georgia, the guidance counselor, “we don’t have the basic electives to offer our students.” That is especially damaging, Mance explains, because “our students are not exposed to very much from the outside here.” For most of them, he says, “going to Sumter” – a small city a half

hour’s drive north of Summerton – “is a big trip,” and he believes many of them have never traveled further from home than the state capital of Columbia, eighty miles away.

Principals and superintendents are understandably loathe to admit that their schools may be failing some or many of their pupils, but Clarendon 1’s student test scores are deeply disheartening. On South Carolina’s rigorous state exams, 47.5 percent of Clarendon 1 students scored “below basic” in mathematics, meaning they are unqualified for promotion to the next grade, and 46.6 percent scored “below basic” in English and Language Arts. On the SAT, which fewer than two dozen Scott’s Branch high school students take, Clarendon 1 students averaged 370 verbal and 391 math; Clarendon 2 students from Manning High School averaged 457 and 465. By comparison, South Carolina’s statewide averages are 493 and 496, and the national average is 507 and 519.²⁶

But Clarendon student performance cannot be transformed in one year or even one decade. More than forty percent of Clarendon adults are not high school graduates, and of Clarendon households with children under the age of eighteen, 35.7 percent are single-parent families, 79 percent of whom are living below the federal poverty level.²⁷ Senator Land says bluntly that “a lot of it is the homes these kids grow up in,” and Leola Parks sorrowfully agrees. “We need to help our single parents.” Ideally, she says, schools should “get the kids in here as early in the morning as possible, and

21 Scotts Branch High School 2003 Report Card (available at www.myscschools.com/reportcard/2003/high/h1401001.pdf).

22 Garrow Interview with Diane Georgia, 5 December 2003, Summerton, SC.

23 *Eagle’s Eye*, Fall 2003, p. 2.

24 Garrow Interview with Clarence Willie, 4 December 2003, Summerton, SC.

25 Garrow Interview with Mance.

26 Clarendon 1 School District 2003 Report Card (available at www.myscschools.com/reportcard/2003/districts/D1401999.pdf); Clarendon 2 School District 2003 Report Card (available at www.myscschools.com/reportcard/2003/districts/D1402999.pdf).

27 Clarendon County Profile (available at www.clarendon1.k12.sc.us/coprof.htm).

keep them as late in the afternoon as you can. We need to get our kids up to par. We've got to lift ourselves up."

At Scott's Branch High School, "the lack of community resources and the lack of financial resources come together," Kenneth Mance admits. "We don't have the community resources – none of the small town districts do." The recent deep state budget cuts, he says, shows how "the state legislature doesn't have education as a priority right now. They know what's wrong but they just don't want to fix it."



State Senator John W. Matthews, Jr., of Orangeburg, the county just south of Clarendon, is South Carolina's senior black officeholder. Elected first to the state House in 1974, and then to the Senate in 1984, Matthews is approaching his thirtieth anniversary in the General Assembly. His clearest memory of his own education in Orangeburg County's segregated public schools in the 1950s was receiving outdated textbooks stamped "For Colored Use Only."²⁸

For four days late last summer, Senator Matthews sat on the witness stand in Manning's Clarendon County Courthouse as one of the plaintiffs' star witnesses in a case titled *Abbeville County School District v. State of South Carolina*. Carl B. Epps, now a senior partner in the Columbia law firm of Nelson Mullins Riley and Scarborough, first filed the lawsuit in 1993 on behalf of Abbeville and what are now thirty-five other poor, rural, and largely black school districts, including Clarendon 1 and Clarendon 2. The suit's goal, simply put, is to get the South Carolina

Supreme Court to instruct the state legislature to appropriate all the monies necessary to offer students in districts like Clarendon 1 educational opportunities that are truly equal to those of students in the state's wealthiest districts, like Greenville County in the upcountry Piedmont.

Epps won a partial and preliminary victory in the state Supreme Court in 1999. Writing on behalf of four of his court's five members, Chief Justice Ernest Finney ruled that the Education Clause of the South Carolina Constitution required the state legislature "to provide the opportunity for each child to receive a minimally adequate education" in South Carolina's public schools. "We define this minimally adequate education ... to include providing students adequate and safe facilities in which they have the opportunity to acquire: (1) the ability to read, write, and speak the English language, and knowledge of mathematics and physical science; (2) a fundamental knowledge of economic, social, and political systems, and of history and governmental processes; and (3) academic and vocational skills."²⁹

The Supreme Court's ruling sent the case to Judge Cooper, in Manning, for a full trial as to whether the "minimally adequate" standard is or is not being met. Only in 2003 did the trial finally begin, with attorney Stephen Morrison, Epps's co-counsel, telling Cooper that in the plaintiff districts "the dream of *Briggs v. Elliott* is still unrealized."³⁰

On the witness stand, Senator Matthew had a blunt answer when Morrison asked him if the "minimally adequate" standard is being met: "Absolutely not." Are students in the rural districts even receiving an "opportunity" for such an education: "Not the same opportunity

²⁸ Garrow Interview with John W. Matthews, Jr., 3 December 2003, Orangeburg, SC.

²⁹ *Abbeville County School District v. State*, 335 S.C. 58, 68, 515 S.E. 2d 535, 540 (1999).

³⁰ Bill Robinson & John C. Drake, "School Funding Trial Opens in Manning; Districts' Lawyer Accuses State of 'Continuing Neglect,'" *The State*, 29 July 2003, p. 1.

as children in other districts, no,” Matthews answered.³¹

Forty years ago, state funds paid 70 percent of the cost of a child’s education; today the state provides only 42 percent, and throughout most of the last two decades the state legislature has failed to appropriate even the full per-child contribution that state law says it should provide. This year, for example, districts are receiving only \$1,771 per pupil, rather than the authorized sum of \$2,201.³² Senator Matthews emphasizes that “the gap between wealthy districts and poor districts is greater today” than it was a quarter-century ago.³³

Much of the evidence that Epps and Morrison continue to present to Judge Cooper as the trial slowly proceeds involves statistics showing the inadequate educational resources and calamitous student performance that their plaintiff districts experience because of the lack of greater state funding. “We don’t like to see our state embarrassed,” Epps explains, “but we’re going to shake the tree.”³⁴

Epps hoped to make Clarendon 1 one of the districts whose track record he would detail. But Clarence Willie, the new superintendent who had assumed his post in the wake of an embarrassing, highly-publicized financial crisis that precipitated his predecessor’s departure, begged off, telling Epps that more experienced superintendents would be preferable.³⁵

J.A. DeLaine, Jr., for one, was disappointed, for the suit “would carry more weight” if *Briggs’s* own school district was in the lead. But to Senator Matthews, that absence makes little difference, for the *Abbeville* case is still “the extension of the original suit. It’s about making

Briggs v. Elliott really work. It’s to make their vision work: the elimination of ‘separate but equal.’”

South Carolina still has dual schools, Matthews explains, only “where you live is now the key part,” rather than race. His Senate colleague John Land puts it similarly: “South Carolina is two states: the rich state of South Carolina and the poor state of South Carolina,” and firm majorities in the Republican-controlled state House and state Senate have no interest in eliminating the disparity.

Alex Harvin, the white Clarendon state representative, fully agrees. The suit’s goal, he says, is to guarantee that “you are not punished for being born to a single mother in Summerton” or any other poor rural school district. Harvin muses that “I wish in a way it could be done through the federal courts, the way integration was.”³⁶

Senators Matthews and Land concur. What’s more, both men exude the same strong faith in the current suit that Thurgood Marshall, the lead attorney for the Summerton plaintiffs, expressed throughout *Briggs* and *Brown*. Matthews says that the South has seen “no progressive leaps without court orders,” and Land assents: “the equitable funding of our schools will have to come through the courts.” Land professes considerable optimism that both Judge Cooper and the state Supreme Court will rule in favor of the plaintiff districts. “Then they will mandate the funding and the General Assembly will act,” notwithstanding its prior refusals. “The court would come out with a formula, or several steps, and will tell us what to do,” Land says. It of course will take “a

31 Tom Truitt, “Law, Justice, and the Constitution: South Carolina’s Unfulfilled Promise. Day Fourteen – August 15, 2003,” pp. 3, 5 (available at www.scasa.org/Trial_Day_14.doc).

32 See James T. Hammond, “Poor Schools Renew Battle for Funding,” *Greenville News*, 28 July 2003, p. 8; James T. Hammond, “Poor Schools Allege Neglect,” *Greenville News*, 29 July 2003, p. 9.

33 Garrow Interview with Matthews.

34 Garrow Interview with Carl Epps, 2 December 2003, Columbia, SC.

35 Garrow Interviews with Epps and Willie.

36 Garrow Interview with C. Alex Harvin III, 4 December 2003, Summerton, SC.

period of years," he adds, but "it'll be no different than *Brown*."

Senator Land's invocation of *Brown* reflects an optimism that most historians of *Brown* would not share. But the *Abbeville* case faces other, more immediate hurdles. First, as the state Supreme Court noted in 1999, the plaintiff districts are not seeking simply "equal" state funding since they already receive more than wealthier districts.³⁷ The "adequacy" concept that the court then embraced, and that Epps and Morrison are now advocating at trial, contends that underprivileged and disadvantaged children must receive greater investment and attention in order to obtain truly equal education. "It takes more time and resources to provide these children an opportunity for an adequate education," Epps told Judge Cooper.³⁸ Emphasizing the phrase "each child" from the 1999 ruling, Stephen Morrison argued similarly: "Some children require more than others."³⁹

A second obstacle is the state's robust defense of its current education funding practices. Robert E. "Bobby" Stepp, the state's lead attorney, argues that "minimally adequate" means no more than "the least that will do." The evidence that some students in poor districts do perform well, Stepp adds, proves that the "opportunity" for a good education is indeed present. "This case is not about the broader social imperative of how to address poverty," he states. Students' "socio-economic characteristics have a greater influence on test scores than any other thing, including anything within the school," Stepp says, and "there's not much you can do within the schools, at least in the short term, to improve

student achievement." He emphasizes that "this isn't *Briggs II*, and it's not about race."⁴⁰



Over thirty years ago, in the 1970 court ruling that ordered the full desegregation of the Summerton-area schools, U.S. Circuit Judge Braxton Craven voiced a wish: "Perhaps my hope is too idealistic: that there can be achieved, even in Clarendon County, some degree of mutual respect, trust, confidence, and even friendship between black and white children. It won't occur without their knowing each other."⁴¹

Stephen Morrison, the plaintiffs' attorney, asserts that if Thurgood Marshall, fifty years ago the lead lawyer in *Brown* and *Briggs*, could look today at the Clarendon 1 schools, "he would think that *Briggs v. Elliott* has been reversed by the Supreme Court."⁴² Visitors to today's modern and spacious Scott's Branch High School might find Morrison's claim vastly overstated, notwithstanding the school's almost all-black student body. Racial differences in present-day Clarendon County remain inescapably stark, but poverty and deprivation represent far greater hurdles for Clarendon's public school students than the segregationist heritage of the pre-1970 era.

But some Clarendon citizens are hopeful about their historic county's future. Beulah Roberts and other civically-active Clarendon County African-Americans note with pride how many of their contemporaries who left Clarendon as young adults in search of brighter opportunities elsewhere three or four decades ago are now moving back home. When they do, Roberts recounts, they express

37 *Abbeville County School District v. State*, 335 S.C. at 64, 515 S.E.2d at 538.

38 Robinson & Drake, "School Funding Trial Opens," *The State*, 29 July 2003, p. 1.

39 Hammond, "Poor Schools Allege Neglect," *Greenville News*, 29 July 2003, p. 9.

40 Garrow Telephone Interview with Robert E. Stepp, 10 December 2003, Columbia, SC.

41 *Brunson v. Board of Trustees*, 429 F.2d at 823.

42 Garrow Interview with Stephen Morrison, 2 December 2003, Columbia, SC.

amazement at how visibly Clarendon's politics have changed. "You're clerk?" they ask with astonishment. Smiling gently, she says she replies by telling them that in addition her brother, Johnny Gordon, is an elected member of Manning's City Council.⁴³

But Clarendon's successfully-integrated political arena cannot obscure the painful educational realities that are being documented in the courtroom just outside Roberts's office. Like her husband, Marie Land optimistically believes that the Abbeville

lawsuit eventually will increase educational equality for the children of Clarendon County just as did *Briggs*: "right now people don't realize that history is going to be made." Fifty years after *Briggs* and *Brown*, she sees Clarendon County midway through a very lengthy journey: "we have come a long way, but we have a long way to go." Yet Clarendon shows all too well how *Briggs* and *Brown* were limited triumphs as well as landmark ones, and to believe that *Abbeville* will become their equal requires quite a leap of faith indeed. *GB*

⁴³ Garrow Interview with Roberts.