

SC Civil Rights History Timeline

Note: This timeline provides an overview of important events and dates relevant to the period of Civil Rights activism in which John Henry McCray, through his role as publisher of The Lighthouse and Informer, served as a prominent leader and spokesman. The newspaper was published between 1941 and 1954 and its first major foray into Civil Rights politics came in 1943 through McCray's support for the Palmetto State Teacher's Association lawsuit to equalize teacher pay. Many important events in SC Civil Rights history (lunch counter sit-ins, the 1961 march on the SC Statehouse, the Charleston hospital workers strike, the Orangeburg massacre, among many others) are therefore not included.

1943

June 24 – The NAACP files a discrimination suit to equalize teacher salaries with plaintiff Malissa T. Smith who was quoted as saying, “I am... happy about the effort which I understand to be the first among my people to remove from our state some of the unfortunate remnants of Reconstruction Days” (*The Times and Democrat*, 25 Jun 1943).

Aug 10 – In response to the discrimination suit filed by Smith, the Charleston city school board announces new method for establishing teacher salaries based “not only in respect to their certificates, but due consideration given to character, age, experience, teaching ability, and general fitness.”

Nov 10 – Viola Duvall, a teacher at Burke Industrial high school, files lawsuit with federal district court stating that white teachers with her qualifications and experience made \$1060 while she was paid \$645.

Dec 3 – Charleston School District No. 20 files their response, rejecting the suit on the basis that Duvall had signed a contract for the school year before filing and describing her lawsuit as “premature and ill-advised.”

1944

Feb 10 – Judge J. Waites Waring overrules the school board's efforts to dismiss the lawsuit.

Feb 14 – Judge Waring issues a decree ordering SC schools to equalize teacher pay by the 1946-47 school year.

June 16 – 14-year-old George Stinney, Jr. is executed for the murder of two white girls, a conviction that was overturned in 2014, 70 years after his death.

1946

Feb 12 – Sgt. Isaac Woodard, a WWII combat veteran, was riding a bus to his home in Winnsboro, S.C. following his honorable discharge at Fort Gordon outside of Augusta, GA; after getting into an argument with the driver about a bathroom stop, Woodard was taken into police custody in Batesburg, S.C. and beaten so severely he was blinded.

May 9 – Judge Waring tries *Thompson v. Gibbes* lawsuit to equalize teacher pay in Columbia, SC.

Aug 16 – A benefit concert for Woodard attended by an estimated 25,000 people was held in Harlem’s Lewisohn Stadium, featuring musicians Billie Holiday, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Woody Guthrie, and boxer Joe Louis.

Sept 19 – NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White met with President Truman to discuss the Woodard case; outraged that nothing had yet been done about the incident, Truman orders the opening of a federal investigation.

Nov 5 – Batesburg Police Chief Lynwood Shull and the other police officers involved in Woodard’s beating were acquitted in a US District Court of all charges in the Woodard beating.

Dec 5 – Outraged by the acquittal of the police officers involved in Woodard’s beating, Truman signs Executive Order 9808, establishing a President’s Committee on Civil Rights.

1947

June 3-4 – The *Elmore v. Rice* lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the white primary is tried in Judge Waring’s court.

June 5-6 – The *Wrighten v. Board of Trustees* lawsuit challenging the lack of a “separate but equal” law school for Black applicants in SC is tried in Judge Waring’s court.

June 12 – Waring issues his ruling for both cases, ordering SC State to build a law school by September and declaring the white primary unconstitutional. Waring’s ruling chides the state’s white supremacist leadership by saying that “it is time for South Carolina to rejoin the Union.”

June [?] – an NAACP meeting is held in Chappelle Auditorium in which SC branch president James Hinton challenges those in attendance to find a plaintiff willing to challenge the inequities in public schooling. J.A. DeLaine, an Allen University graduate who worked as a teacher and administrator in the Clarendon County school system is in attendance and returns to his community determined to find a plaintiff.

1948

March 16 – *Levi Pearson v. Clarendon County and School District No. 26* is filed by Levi Pearson after Black citizens’ request for a school bus for their district had been denied, though the lawsuit is eventually thrown out on a technicality.

July 16 – The *Brown v. Baskin* lawsuit attacking the Democratic party’s efforts to evade the *Elmore* ruling by making anyone who voted take an oath that they supported white supremacy was tried in Waring’s court.

July 26 – acting on the recommendations of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Truman signs Executive Orders 9980 and 9981, desegregating the federal government and the US armed services.

Nov 23 – In the final hearing for *Brown v. Baskin*, Waring orders an injunction against the party oath used to discourage black voters from participating in the democratic primary.

1949

May [?] – Rev. Joseph DeLaine and the NAACP begin the process of filing *Briggs v. Elliott* by getting Clarendon County to sign a petition, requesting a bus for their school district in accordance with the Supreme Court’s “separate but equal” ruling.

August 8 – Alleged rape of 16-year-old Martha Beasley by 24-year-old Willie Tolbert, Jr. in the presence of her boyfriend, 17-year-old Sam Cassels, in Greenwood, South Carolina.

August 9-11 – Unsuccessful manhunt for Tolbert involving more than 1000 white citizens of Greenwood.

August 11 – Tolbert turns himself in and is taken to prison in Columbia.

September 11 – On the eve of Tolbert’s trial, his attorney Harold Boulware, Jr. is abducted by a group of white men and driven to the countryside where he is “struck lightly one or two times” and told that “This is just a sample of what you’ll get” if he wins the case, according to an account published by McCray in *The Charleston Chronicle* 30 years after the trial.

September 12 – Tolbert’s trial, all-white jury deliberates for less than 10-minutes before delivering a guilty verdict.

Sept 24 – Morehouse president Benjamin Mays publishes an editorial in the *Pittsburgh Courier* arguing that he did not believe Tolbert was guilty of the crime.

October [?] – McCray publishes an article presenting Tolbert’s claim that he was not guilty of sexual assault.

October 28 – Tolbert’s execution.

Nov 11 – DeLaine receives the paperwork from the NAACP to start a second petition for “equal everything” in the Clarendon county case.

1950

Jan 2 – McCray’s indicted for criminal libel for “imputing [alleged victim Martha Beasley] to be unchaste to her great damage and humiliation.” AP journalist Del Booth was also indicted for an article published in the *Anderson Independent*.

July 8 – Political ad by Strom Thurmond in *Greenwood Index-Journal* calling McCray a “Negro Criminal Libelist.”

Dec 18 – Clarendon County School parents file the second petition with the school board.

1950

May 16 – SC NAACP attorney Harold Boulware files a class action suit against Clarendon County school officials.

Nov 17 – Pretrial hearing for the first *Briggs v. Elliott* lawsuit begins; dismissed without prejudice in order to resubmit as a suit directly challenging *Plessy*.

Dec 22 – NAACP files *Briggs v. Elliott* lawsuit to end segregation.

1951

April – Rimini, SC resident James McKnight was beaten to death by a white man who accosted White while he was stopping to urinate on the side of the road.

May 28 – *Briggs v. Elliott* trial challenging segregation begins.

June 23 – a panel of three South Carolina U.S. District Court judges rules in favor of upholding segregation in the *Briggs v. Elliott* case, but Judge J. Waites Waring's dissenting opinion opposing segregation as unconstitutional lays the groundwork for a successful appeal when the case is folded into the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board* ruling.

Aug 8 – McCray arrested for violating parole after attending speaking engagements in Chicago and North Carolina.

Aug 13 – McCray appeals 60-day sentence.

Oct [?] – Rev. DeLaine's home in Summerton is burned to the ground.

1952

Nov 11 – McCray's appeal denied by SC Supreme Court, McCray begins serving a 60-day sentence on a Newberry chaingang.

Dec 9 – Supreme Court hears *Briggs v. Elliott*.

Dec 17 – McCray released after 37 days, his sentence having been reduced for good behavior.

1953

Dec 7 – Supreme Court hears reargument of *Briggs*.

1954

May 17 – following the argument in Waring's dissenting opinion in *Briggs v. Elliott*, the Supreme Court rules that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

June 22 – Sarah Mae Flemming is assaulted by a bus driver when she attempts to sit in the "Whites Only" section of the bus in downtown Columbia.

July 24 – Assisted by NAACP secretary Modjeska Simkins, Flemming sues SCE&G, the company that owned the buses, for \$25,000 in damages. Judge George Bell Timmerman dismisses the case.

1955

Oct 6 – St. James Church, where Rev. DeLaine serves as pastor, burns down in an apparent act of arson.

Oct 10 – Klansmen fire shots into the DeLaine's house and DeLaine shoots back at their car.

Oct 11 – DeLaine is forced to flee the state when SC authorities issue a warrant for his arrest, charging him with attempted murder for shooting at the car full of men shooting at his house.

1956

June 13 – Flemming's case is tried for the second time and again dismissed by George Bell Timmerman. The appellate court later decides in Flemming's favor on the issue of her Constitutional rights being violated. The case is again sent back down to Timmerman's court for a decision on the damages. SCE&G is found "not guilty," but the appellate court's ruling served as an important precedent in the U.S. Supreme Court's decision on the Rosa Parks case.

1966

June – Rita May McDonald becomes the first black student to graduate from Summerton High School.

1974

Aug 3 – Rev. DeLaine dies while living in North Carolina, his request to return to South Carolina having been denied by the Governor's refusal to pardon DeLaine for his alleged crime.

2003

Nov 18 – Congress passes a bill to issue Congressional Gold Medals to honor Rev. DeLaine, Levi Pearson, and Harry and Eliza Briggs.