

J.R. CLIFFORD AND THE CARRIE WILLIAMS CASE

WRITTEN BY TOM RODD

ILLUSTRATED BY
CAROL JACKSON

**AN EXCITING
COURTROOM
DRAMA!**



**BRINGS THE
PAST TO
LIFE!**



AN INSPIRING STORY OF THE
AFRICAN AMERICAN STRUGGLE FOR
JUSTICE IN WEST VIRGINIA



**DORIS GREEN (1932-2018) OF
PIEDMONT, WEST VIRGINIA,
FORMER STUDENT AT THE
COKETON COLORED SCHOOL.**



**HISTORIAN DR. CONNIE RICE, J.R. CLIFFORD'S
BIOGRAPHER, AND ROSEMARY CLIFFORD
MCDANIEL, FAMILY HISTORIAN, POSE IN
HARPER'S FERRY, WEST VIRGINIA WITH A COPY
OF J.R. CLIFFORD'S PIONEER PRESS.**



**AFRICAN AMERICAN WORKERS AT
EARLY COKE OVENS, PROCESSING
COAL.**




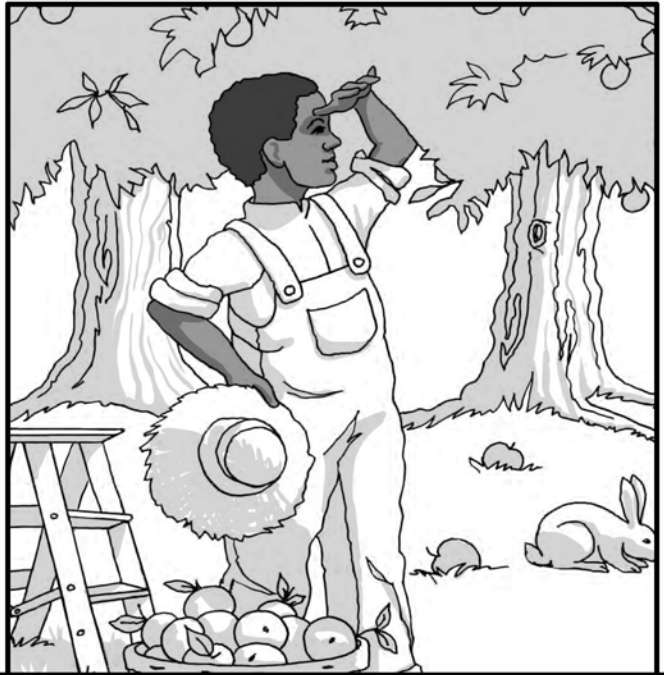
**CARRIE WILLIAM'S GRANDSON,
CURTIS SMITH, IS PICTURED WITH
FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER'S
BRANDAE MULLINS AT A
CELEBRATION OF THE
CLIFFORD/WILLIAMS CASE AT THE
WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF LAW IN
MORGANTOWN.**



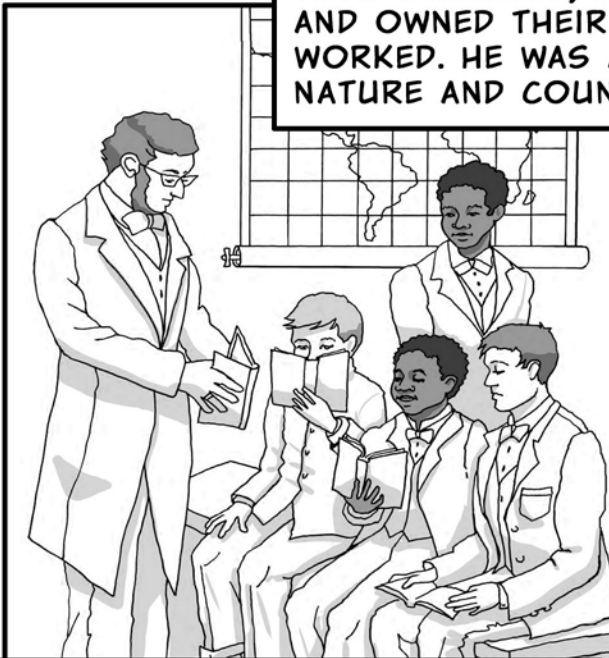
**PROFESSORS HENRY LOUIS GATES,
JR., DAWN BURKE, AND JOHN STEALEY
AT A WILLIAMS CASE RE-ENACTMENT
PROGRAM AT STORER COLLEGE IN
HARPER'S FERRY, WEST VIRGINIA.**



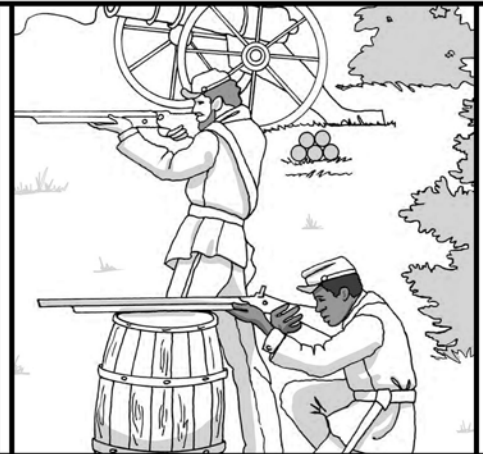
WHO WAS J.R. CLIFFORD?



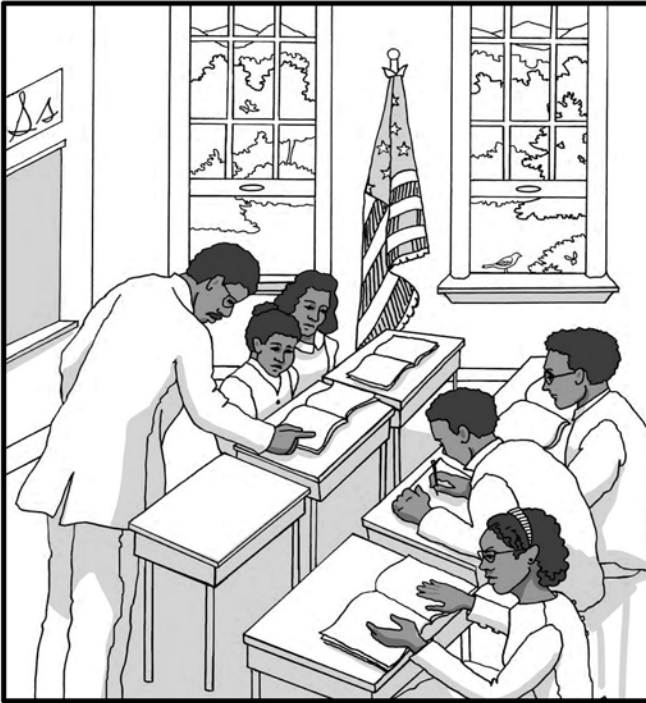
IN 1848 JOHN ROBERT "J.R." CLIFFORD WAS BORN NEAR MOOREFIELD, VIRGINIA (NOW A PART OF WEST VIRGINIA). MOST AFRICAN AMERICANS WERE ENSLAVED, BUT J.R.'S PARENTS WERE FREE AND OWNED THEIR OWN LAND, WHERE J.R. WORKED. HE WAS A GOOD WORKER AND LOVED NATURE AND COUNTRY LIFE.



BECAUSE OF THE UNITED STATES CIVIL WAR, J.R.'S FAMILY SENT HIM TO CHICAGO, WHERE HE WAS IN A CLASSROOM WITH CHILDREN OF ALL COLORS.

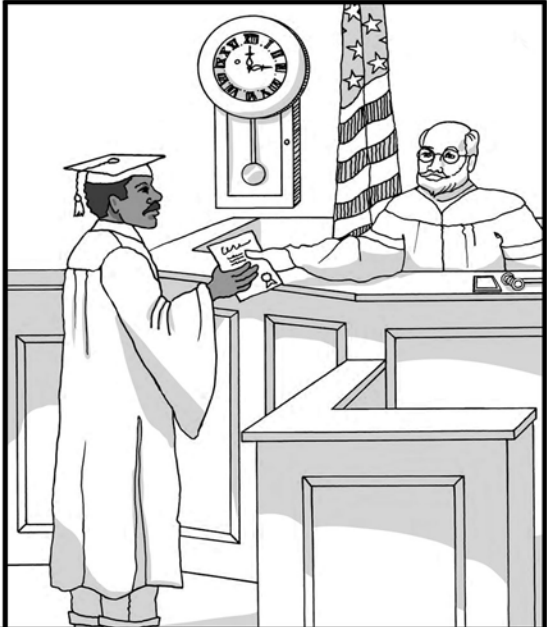
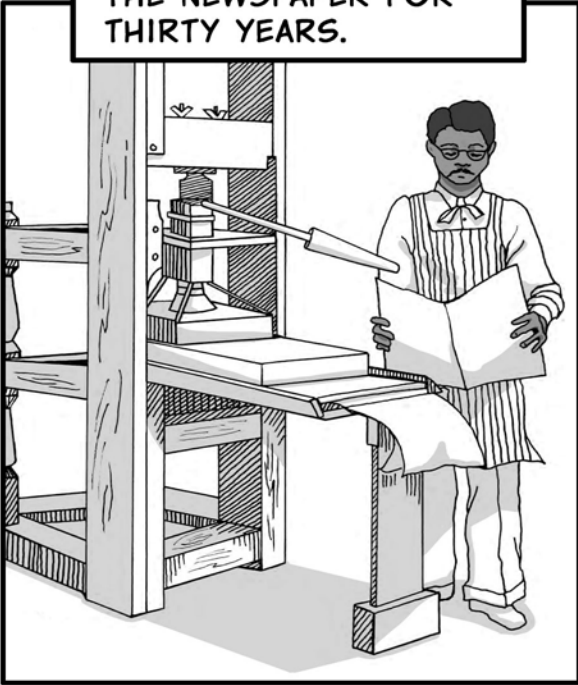


IN 1864, AT AGE 16, J.R. ENLISTED IN THE UNION ARMY AND SERVED IN THE UNITED STATES COLORED TROOPS.



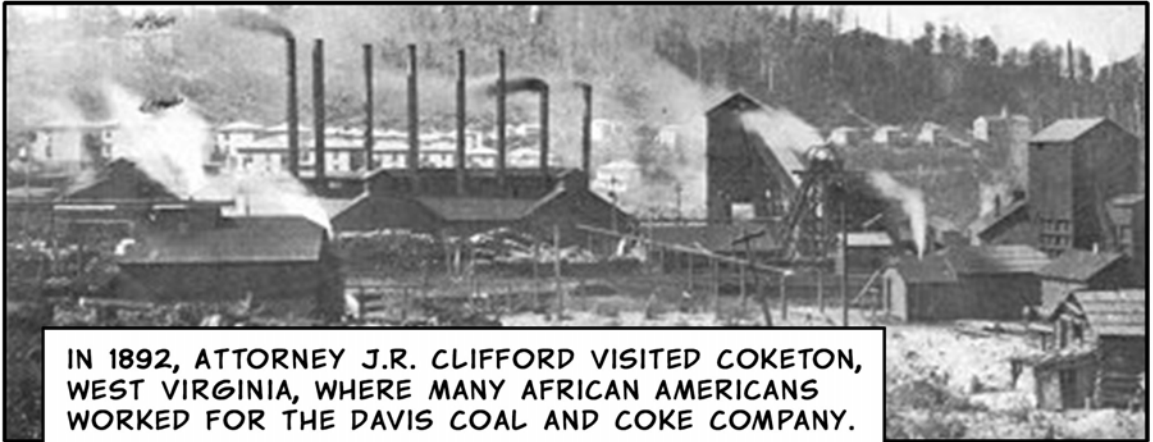
AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, J.R. ENROLLED AT THE STORER COLLEGE IN HARPERS FERRY, WHERE AFRICAN AMERICAN TEACHERS WERE TRAINED. AFTER GRADUATING HE BECAME THE PRINCIPAL AT THE SUMNER SCHOOL IN MARTINSBURG, WEST VIRGINIA. WEST VIRGINIA HAD A RACIALLY SEGREGATED SCHOOL SYSTEM AND J.R. TAUGHT AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN READING, WRITING, AND OTHER BASIC SUBJECTS.

IN 1882, J.R. STARTED A NEWSPAPER CALLED PIONEER PRESS. HE EDITED AND PUBLISHED THE NEWSPAPER FOR THIRTY YEARS.



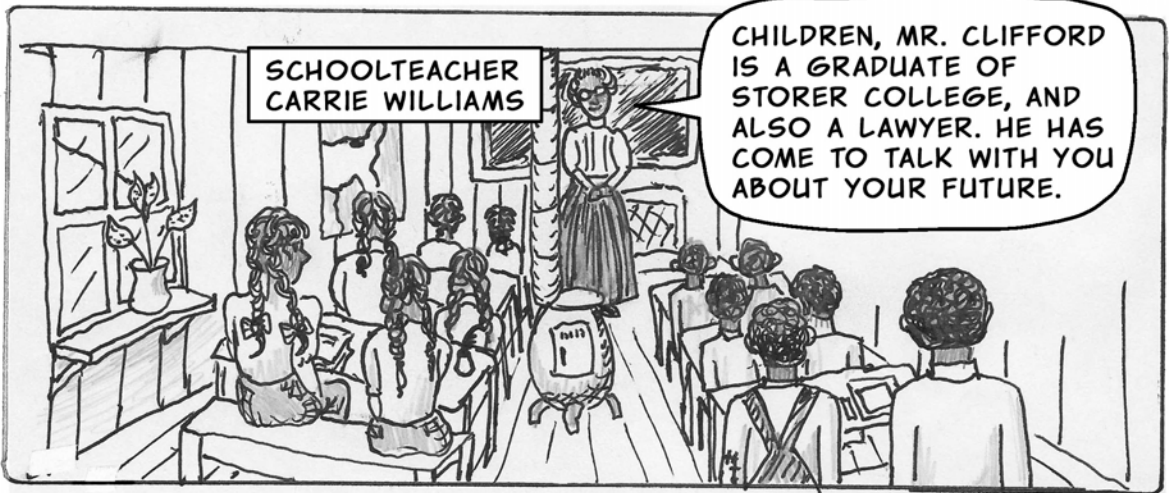
WHILE HE WORKED AS A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND PUBLISHER, J.R. STUDIED LAW IN THE EVENINGS. IN 1887, J.R. BECAME THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN LAWYER IN WEST VIRGINIA.

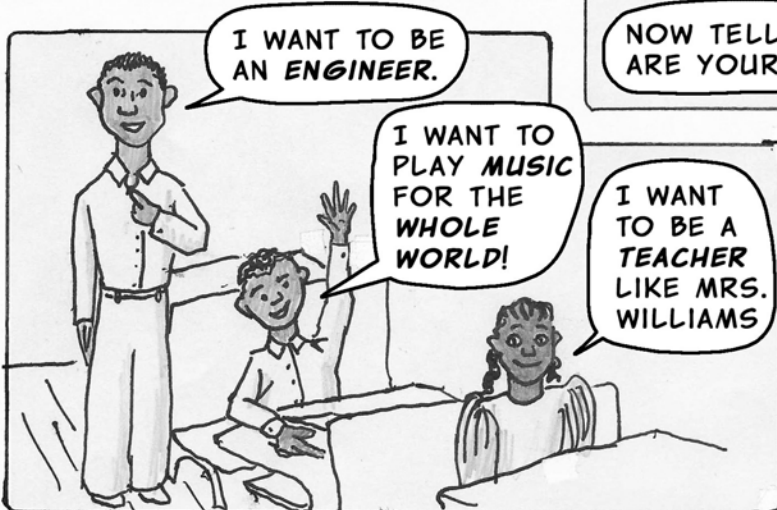
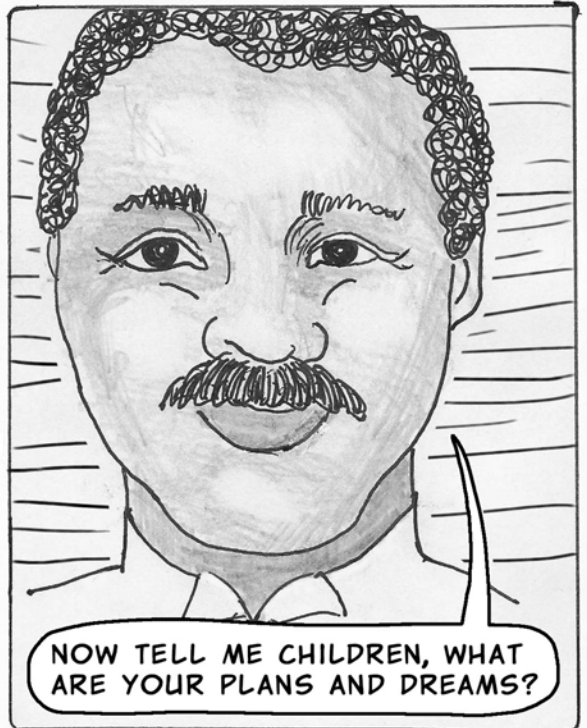
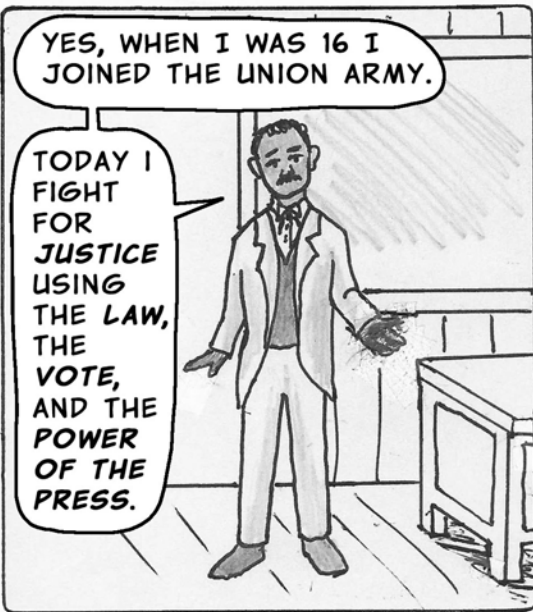
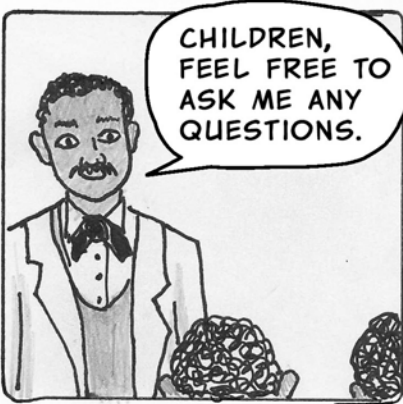
CHAPTER ONE: A FATEFUL MEETING IN COKETON, WEST VIRGINIA

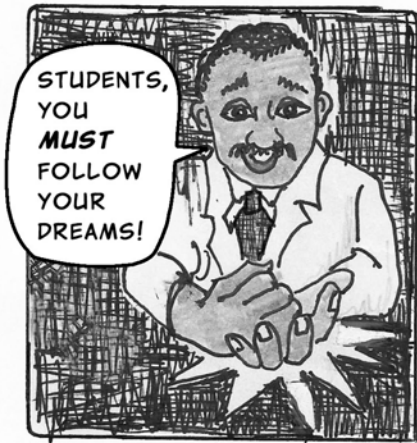


IN 1892, ATTORNEY J.R. CLIFFORD VISITED COKETON, WEST VIRGINIA, WHERE MANY AFRICAN AMERICANS WORKED FOR THE DAVIS COAL AND COKE COMPANY.

AFTER THE U.S. CIVIL WAR, WEST VIRGINIA'S CONSTITUTION REQUIRED RACIALLY SEGREGATED SCHOOLS. THE TUCKER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION ESTABLISHED A ONE-ROOM "COLORED SCHOOL" IN COKETON FOR THE CHILDREN OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WORKERS.

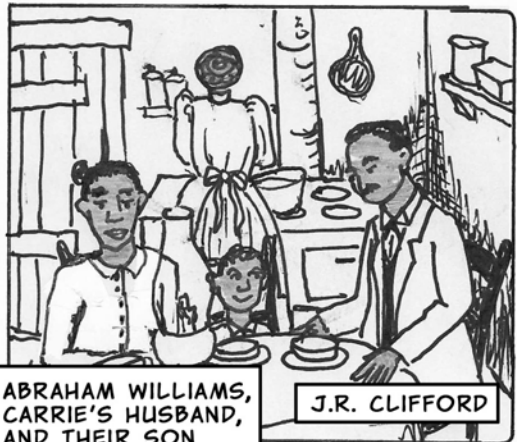






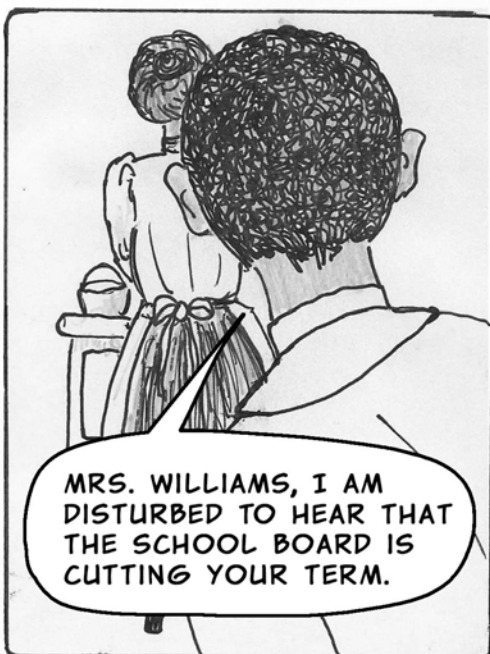
STUDENTS,
YOU
MUST
FOLLOW
YOUR
DREAMS!

**LATER
THAT
DAY
AT
LUNCH
TIME**

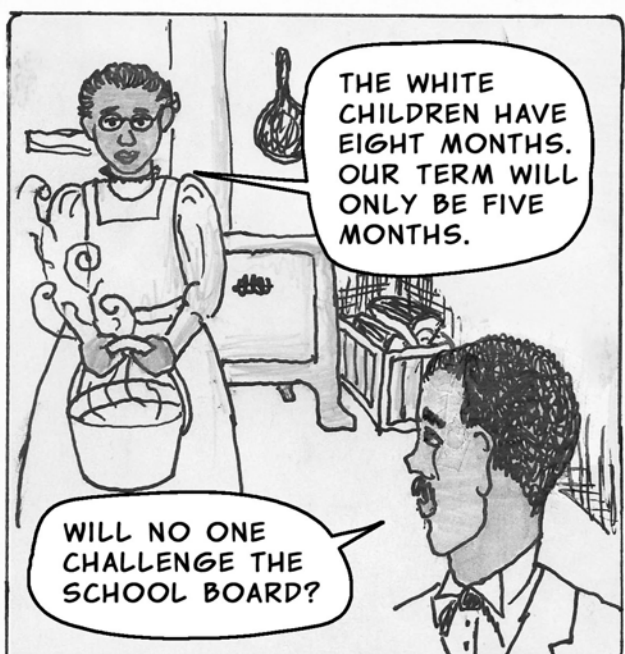


ABRAHAM WILLIAMS,
CARRIE'S HUSBAND,
AND THEIR SON

J.R. CLIFFORD



MRS. WILLIAMS, I AM
DISTURBED TO HEAR THAT
THE SCHOOL BOARD IS
CUTTING YOUR TERM.



THE WHITE
CHILDREN HAVE
EIGHT MONTHS.
OUR TERM WILL
ONLY BE FIVE
MONTHS.

WILL NO ONE
CHALLENGE THE
SCHOOL BOARD?



THE PARENTS WOULD
LOSE THEIR JOBS IF
THEY COMPLAINED.
BUT I **REFUSED** TO
SIGN A FIVE MONTHS
CONTRACT.

I KNEW
IT WAS
WRONG.



CAN YOU KEEP TEACHING IF THE SCHOOL BOARD DOESN'T PAY YOU?

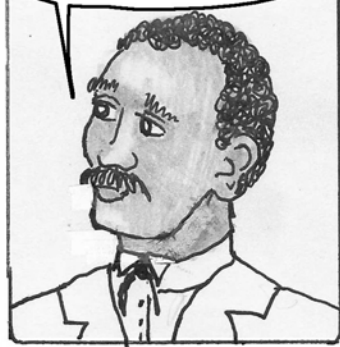
YES. WE HAVE A NEST EGG.

THEN YOU SHOULD KEEP TEACHING AFTER FIVE MONTHS. WE MAY BE ABLE TO BEAT THE BOARD AT THEIR OWN GAME.

CHILDREN, I MUST GO NOW. DO AS MRS. WILLIAMS SAYS AND MAKE YOUR PARENTS PROUD.

CAN WE SING THE SONG MR. CLIFFORD SANG IN THE CIVIL WAR? YOU KNOW, "GLORY, GLORY, HALLELUJAH?"

THAT'S A GOOD CHOICE, MARY. LET'S SING THE "BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC".



THE CHILDREN SING MR. CLIFFORD OFF ON HIS JOURNEY.

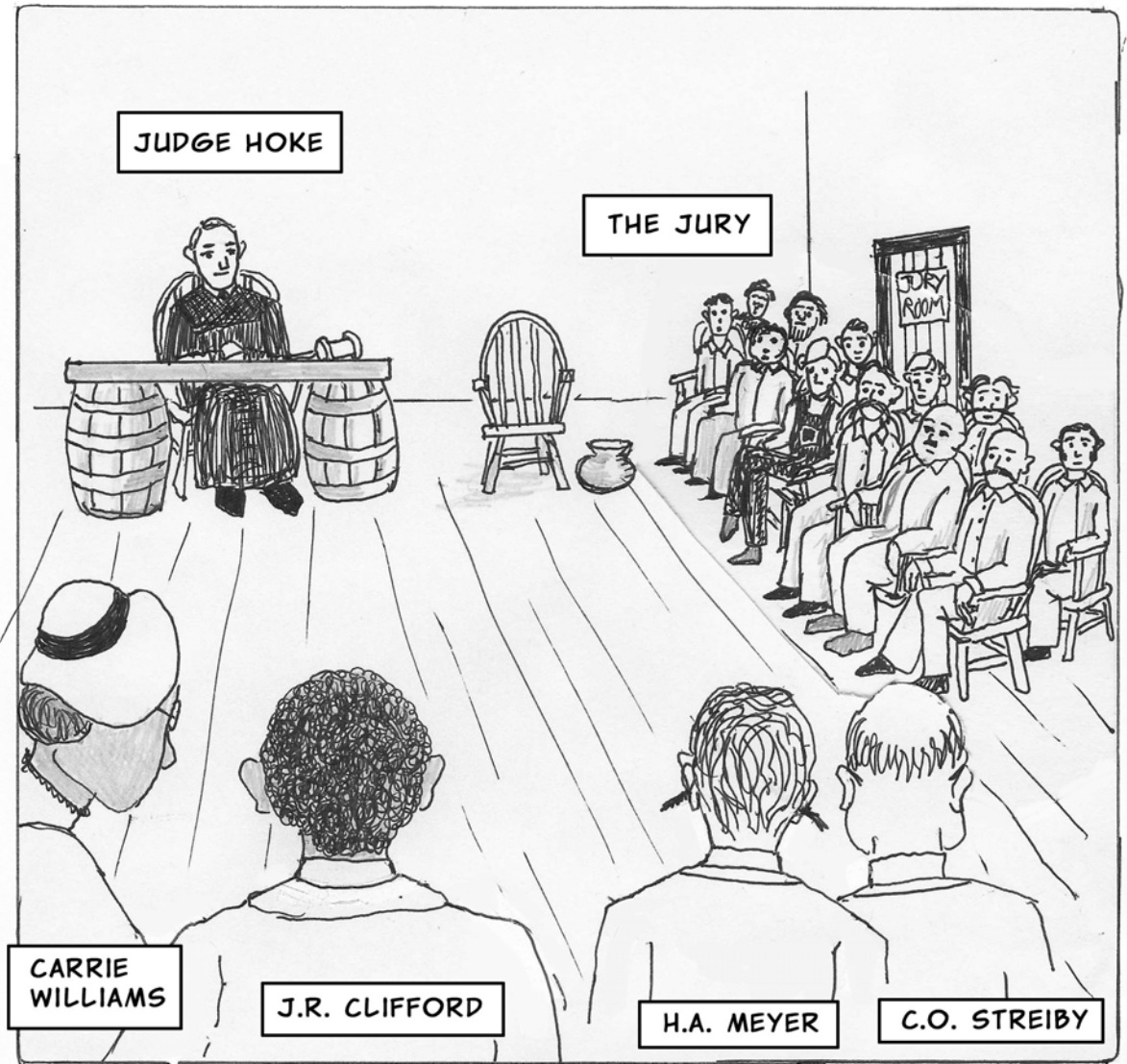


CHAPTER TWO: THE TRIAL

THE YEAR WAS 1895. IN A MAKESHIFT COURTROOM IN PARSONS, WEST VIRGINIA, CARRIE WILLIAMS SITS WITH HER LAWYER, J.R. CLIFFORD.

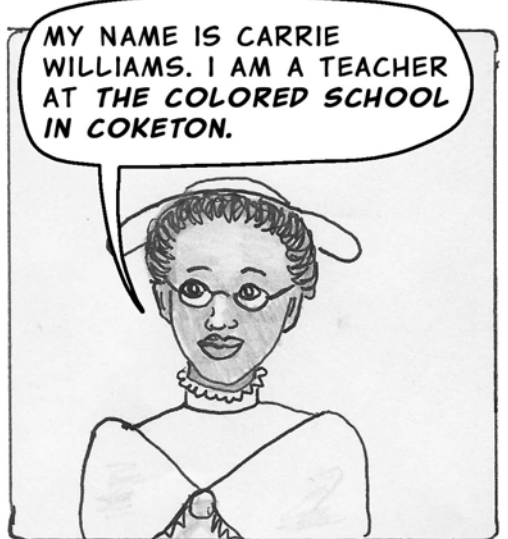
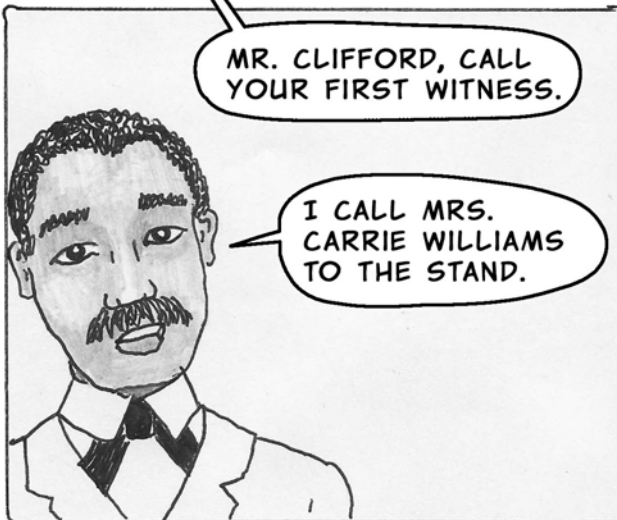
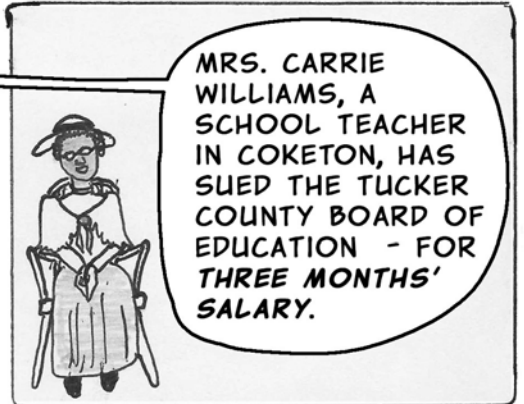
AT ANOTHER TABLE SITS C.O. STREIBY, LAWYER FOR THE TUCKER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION - AND H.A. MEYER, THE SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT.

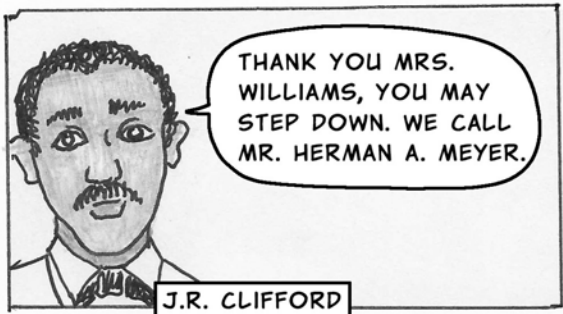
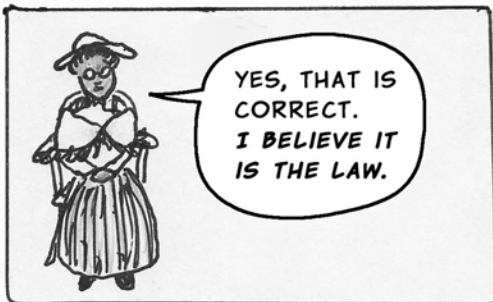
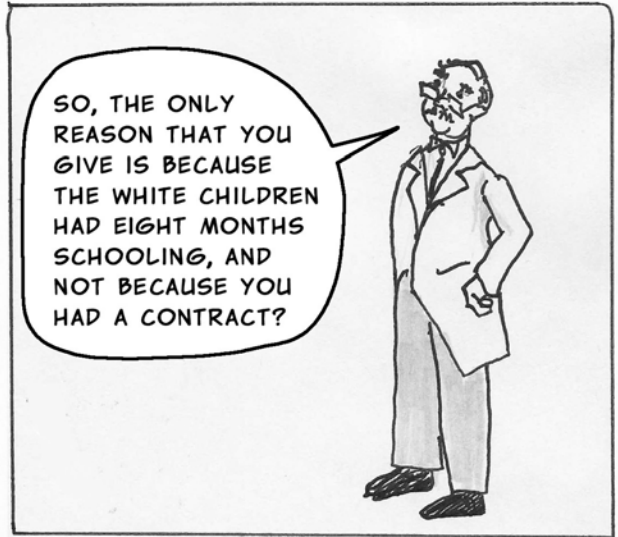
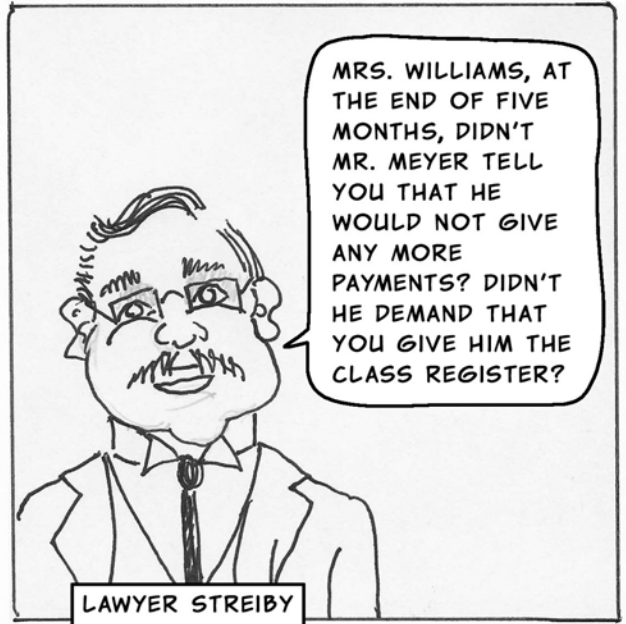
CIRCUIT JUDGE JOSEPH T. HOKE IS SEATED BEHIND HIS BENCH, NEXT TO A JURY OF TWELVE TUCKER COUNTY CITIZENS.

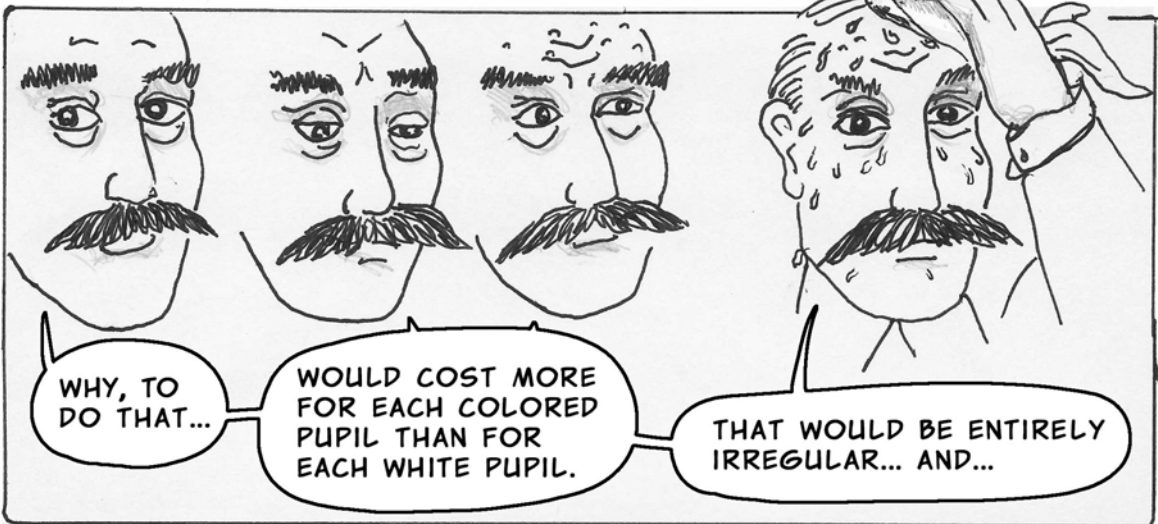
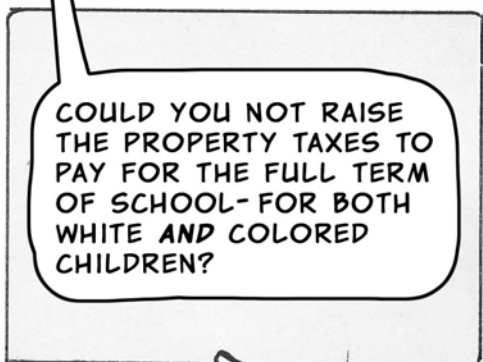
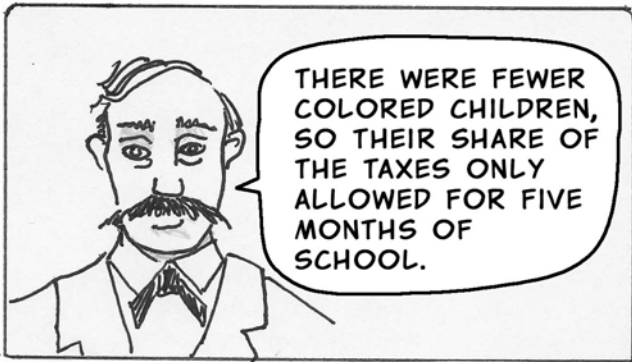
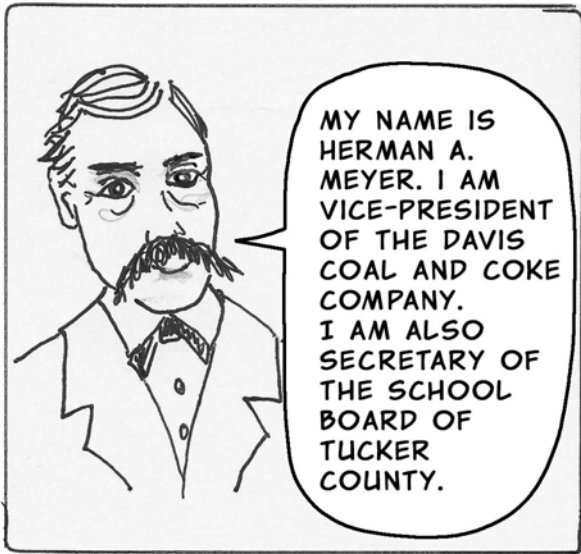


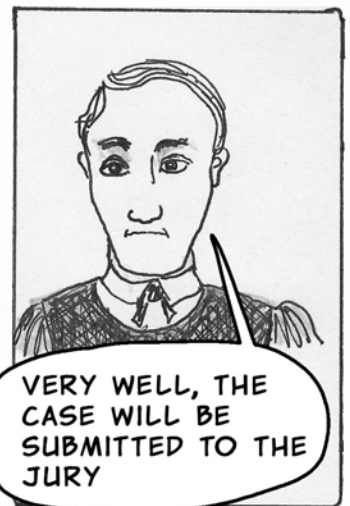
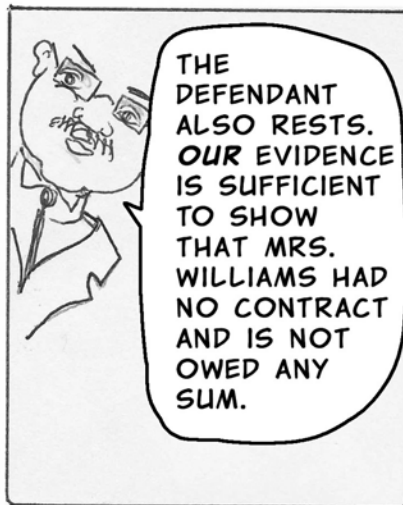
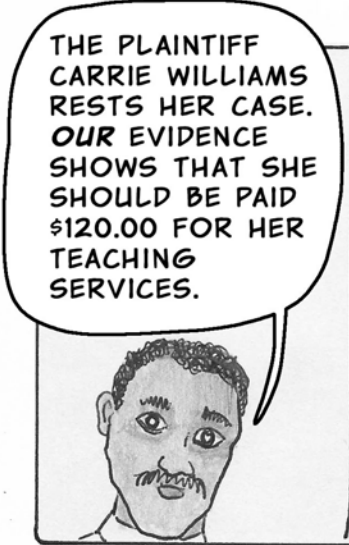
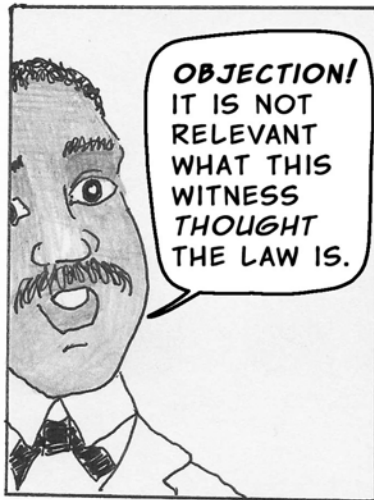
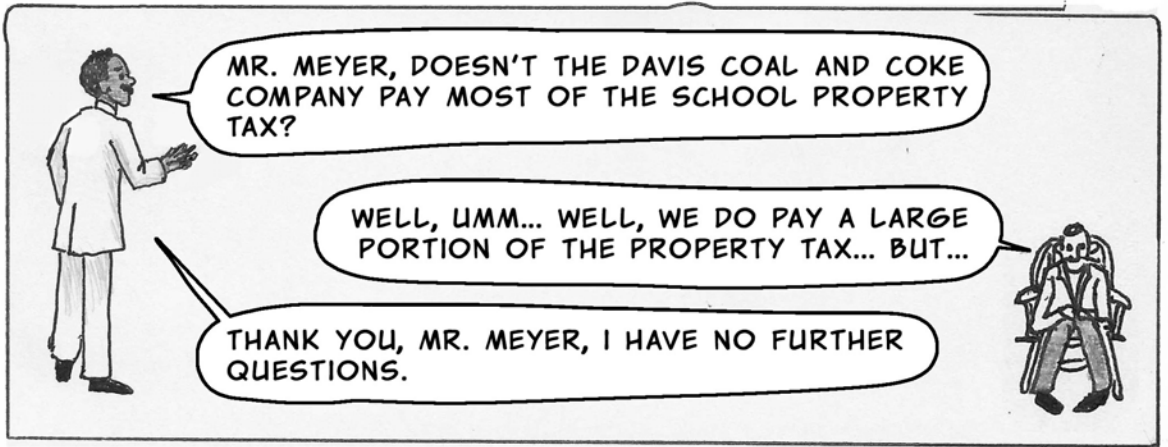


THE CIRCUIT COURT OF
TUCKER COUNTY IS NOW IN
SESSION, THE HONORABLE
JOSEPH T. HOKE PRESIDING.





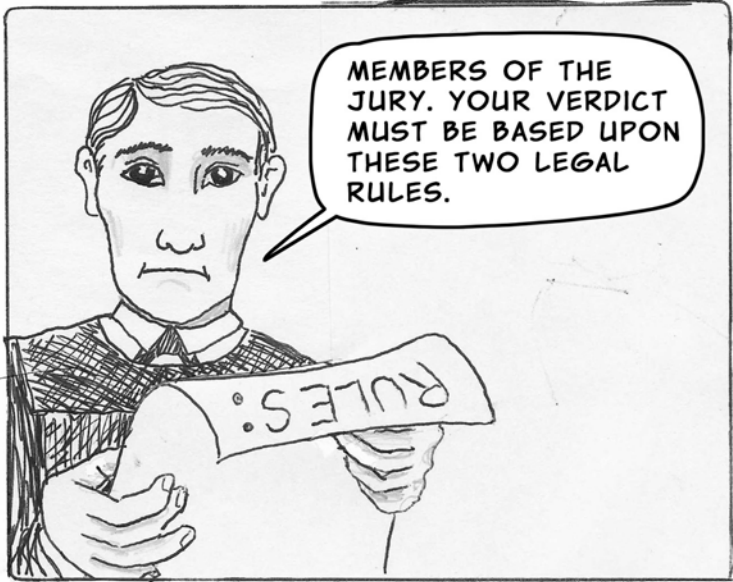




J.R. CLIFFORD

LAWYER STREIBY

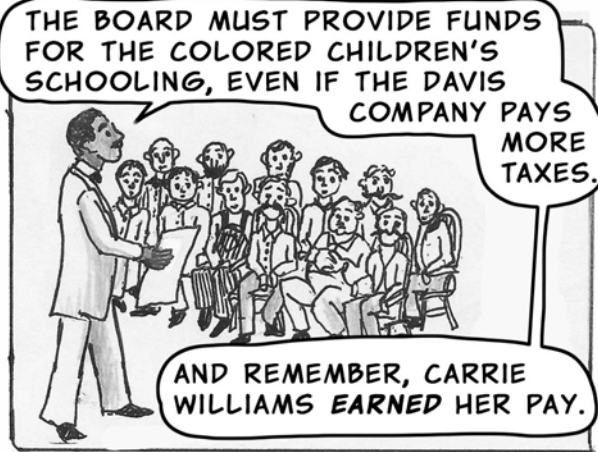
JUDGE HOKE



MEMBERS OF THE JURY. YOUR VERDICT MUST BE BASED UPON THESE TWO LEGAL RULES.

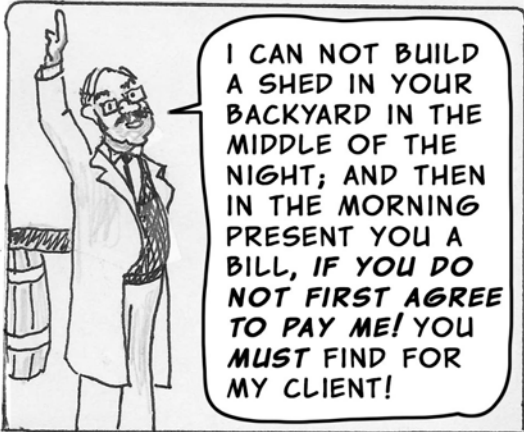
FIRST, THE BOARD OF EDUCATION MUST ESTABLISH SCHOOLS FOR THE EQUIVALENT EDUCATION OF WHITE AND COLORED CHILDREN IN THE DISTRICT.

AND SECOND, EVERY CONTRACT MUST COMPLY WITH THE LAW.

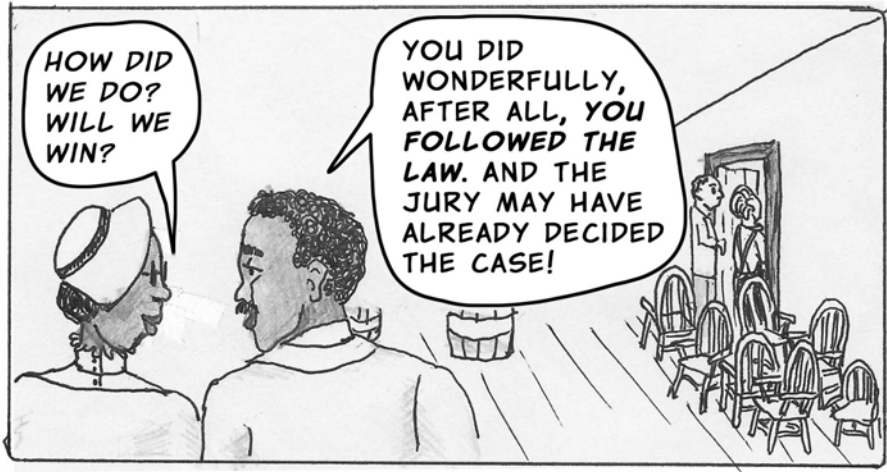


THE BOARD MUST PROVIDE FUNDS FOR THE COLORED CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING, EVEN IF THE DAVIS COMPANY PAYS MORE TAXES.

AND REMEMBER, CARRIE WILLIAMS EARNED HER PAY.



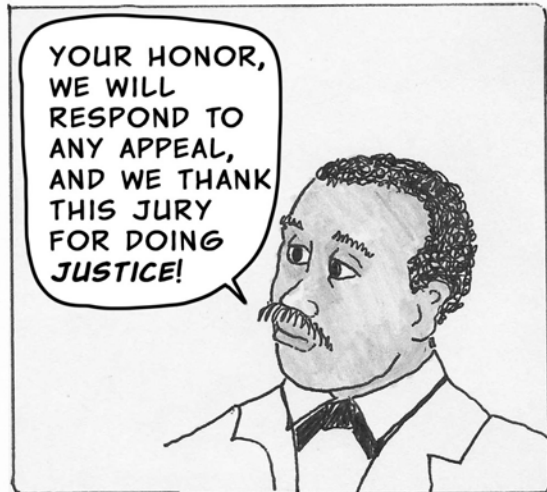
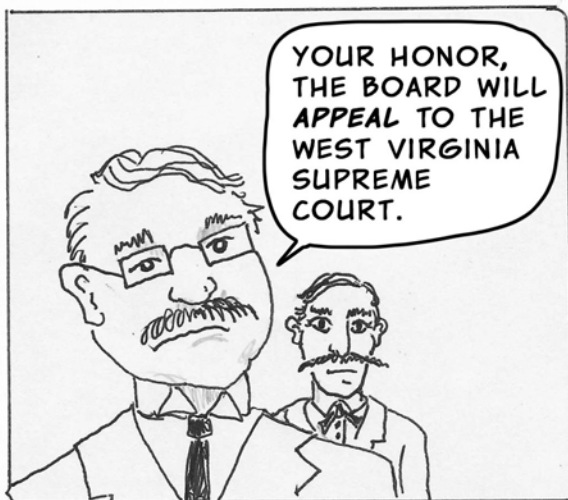
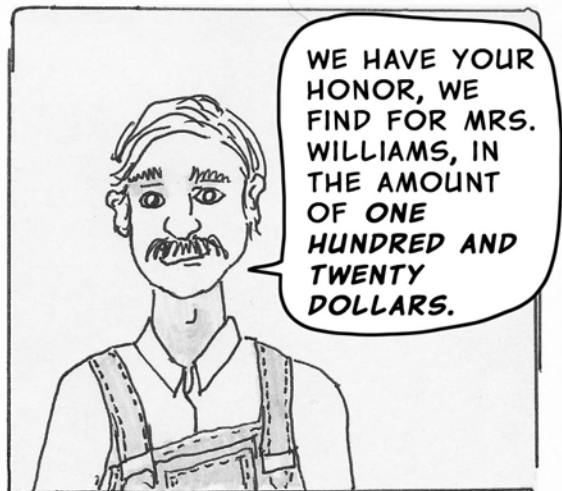
I CAN NOT BUILD A SHED IN YOUR BACKYARD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT; AND THEN IN THE MORNING PRESENT YOU A BILL, IF YOU DO NOT FIRST AGREE TO PAY ME! YOU MUST FIND FOR MY CLIENT!



HOW DID WE DO? WILL WE WIN?

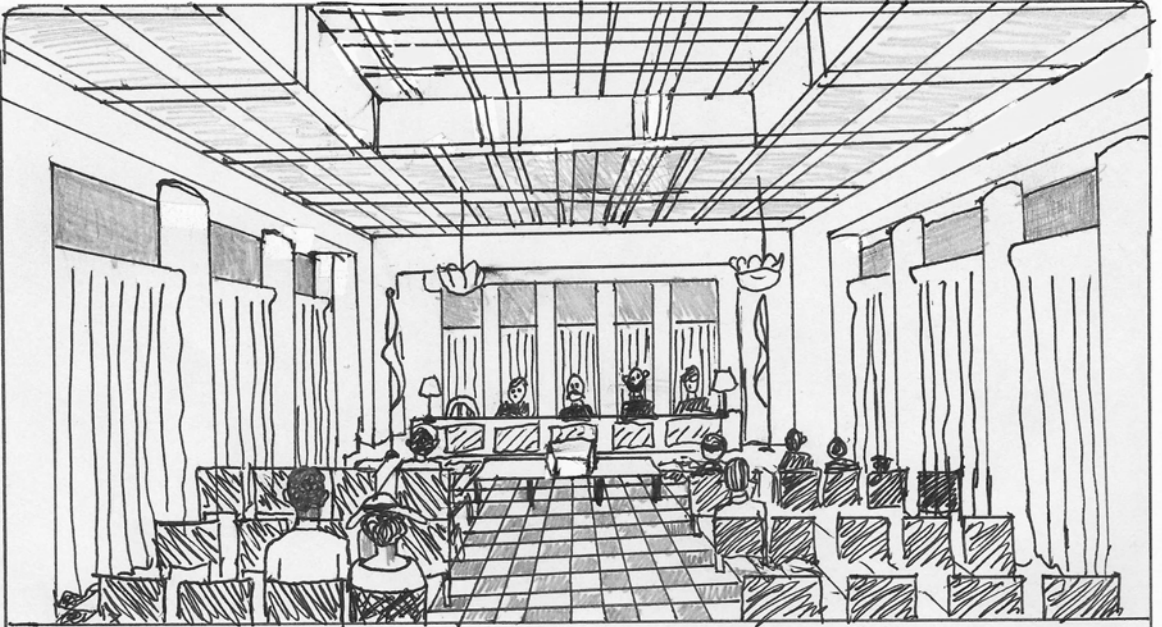
YOU DID WONDERFULLY, AFTER ALL, YOU FOLLOWED THE LAW. AND THE JURY MAY HAVE ALREADY DECIDED THE CASE!





**CHAPTER
THREE:**

THE APPEAL



WEST VIRGINIA SUPREME COURT OF APPEALS

LAWYER STREIBY, PLEASE
MAKE YOUR ARGUMENT.

MAY IT PLEASE THE COURT,
MRS. WILLIAMS NEVER HAD
A CONTRACT WITH THE
BOARD TO TEACH FOR
EIGHT MONTHS.



STREIBY

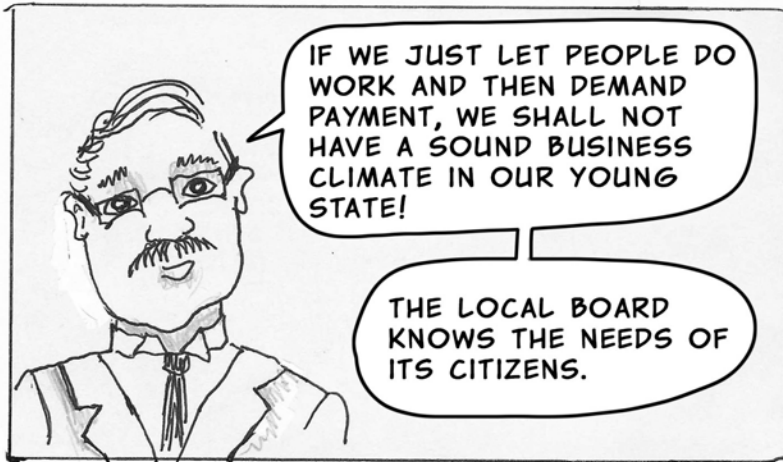


JUDGE DENT

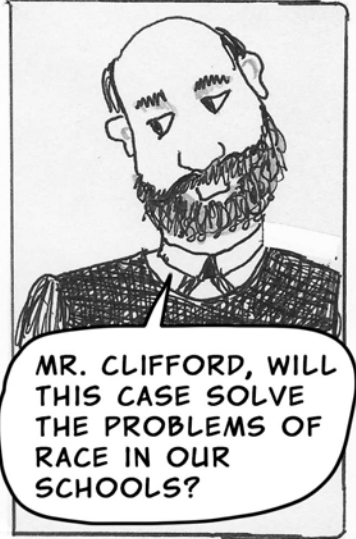
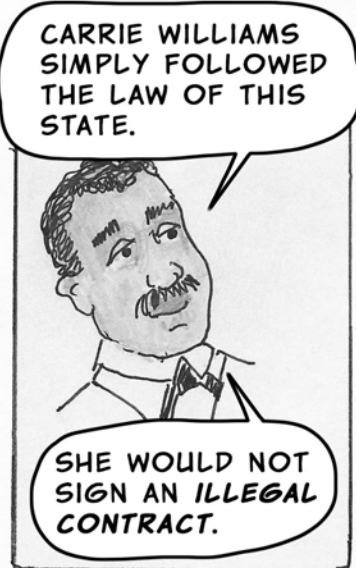
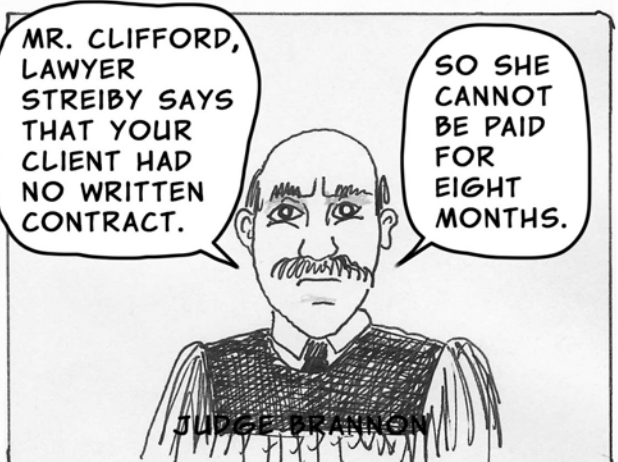
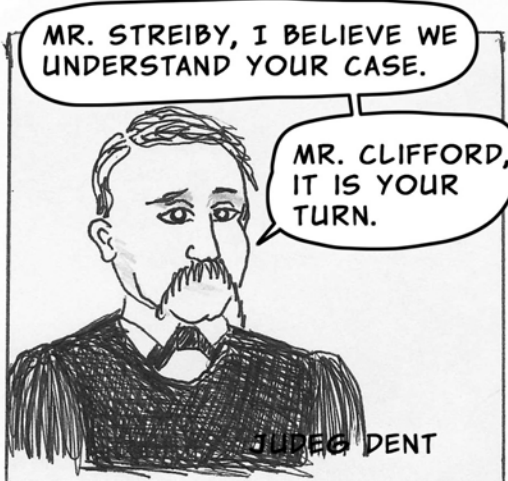
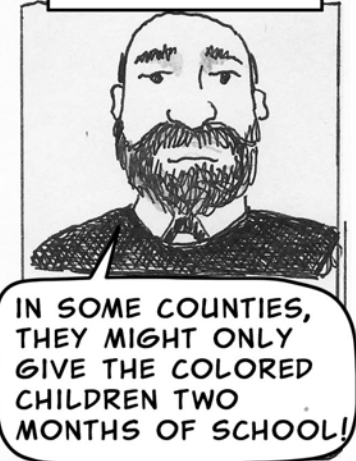
JUDGE BRANNON

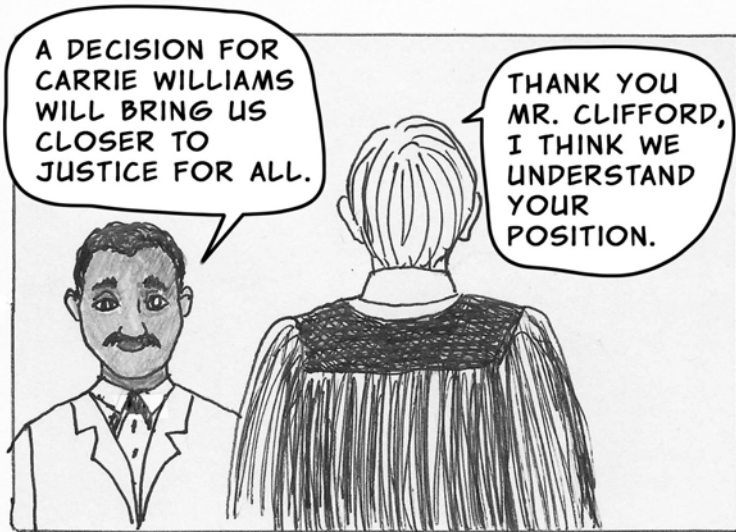


WHAT'S THE
DIFFERENCE?
SHE DID THE
WORK.



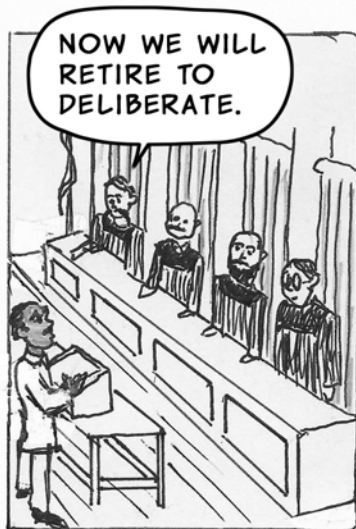
JUDGE ENGLISH





A DECISION FOR CARRIE WILLIAMS WILL BRING US CLOSER TO JUSTICE FOR ALL.

THANK YOU MR. CLIFFORD, I THINK WE UNDERSTAND YOUR POSITION.

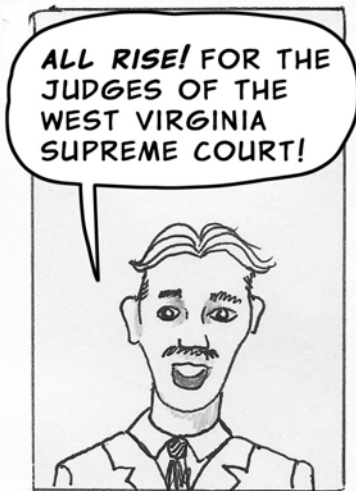


NOW WE WILL RETIRE TO DELIBERATE.

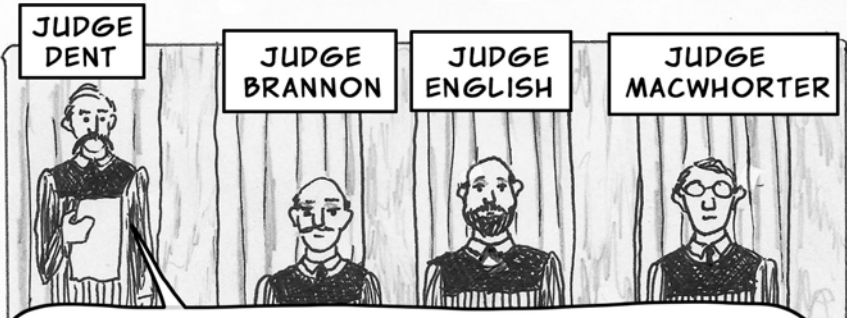


MR. CLIFFORD, YOUR ARGUMENTS WERE WONDERFUL!

YOU AND ABRAHAM TOOK A GREAT RISK WHEN YOU CONTINUED TO TEACH WITHOUT PAY.



ALL RISE! FOR THE JUDGES OF THE WEST VIRGINIA SUPREME COURT!



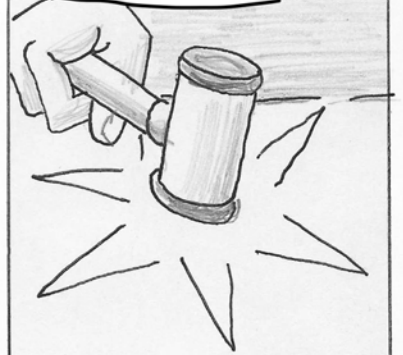
"WE CONCLUDE THAT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE COLORED PEOPLE IS CONTRARY TO PUBLIC POLICY AND THE LAW OF THE LAND. IF ANY DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION SHOULD BE MADE, IT SHOULD BE FAVORABLE TO, NOT AGAINST, COLORED PEOPLE."

FROM THE COURT'S OPINION:

"THE BOARD OF EDUCATION SAYS IN THIS CASE THAT SCHOOL TERMS OF EQUAL LENGTH WOULD HAVE COST MORE MONEY FOR THE COLORED CHILDREN. **BUT THE LAW GUARANTEED COLORED PUPILS EIGHT MONTHS OF SCHOOL, AND EVEN THOUGH IT COST MANY TIMES IN PROPORTION TO WHAT THE WHITE SCHOOLS COST, THEY SHOULD HAVE HAD IT.**

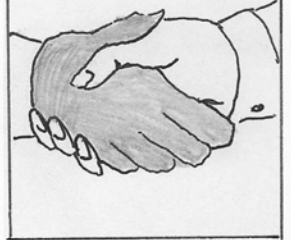
WE CONCLUDE, THAT THE JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT OF TUCKER COUNTY IN FAVOR OF CARRIE WILLIAMS, SHOULD BE AFFIRMED."

THERE BEING NOTHING FURTHER IN THIS CASE, THIS COURT IS ADJOURNED!



WE WON!

MR. CLIFFORD, YOU PRESENTED A FINE ARGUMENT.



EXCUSE ME MR. STREIBY. WHAT ABOUT MY THREE MONTHS' PAY?

MRS. WILLIAMS, WE WILL MAKE PAYMENT WITHIN THE WEEK.



DON'T FORGET THE INTEREST!

THE END

Excerpt from the West Virginia Supreme Court's Opinion

**Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia.
WILLIAMS v. BOARD OF EDUCATION OF FAIRFAX
DISTRICT.**

Nov. 16, 1898 31 S.E. 985, 45 W.Va. 199

DENT, J.:

“Discrimination against the colored people, because of color alone, as to privileges, immunities, and equal legal protection, is contrary to public policy and the law of the land. If any discrimination as to education should be made, it should be favorable to, and not against, the colored people. ... Counsel insist that the colored pupils, having been allotted their pro rata share of the school funds, have no right to complain. The law guaranteed them eight months of school, and, though it cost many times in proportion what the white schools cost, they should have had it. Money values should not be set off against moral and intellectual improvement. A nation that depends on its wealth is a depraved nation, while moral purity and intellectual progress alone can preserve the integrity of free institutions, and the love of true liberty, under the protection of equal laws, in the hearts of the people. The judgment is affirmed.”

Acknowledgments

J.R. Clifford, Carrie Williams, and the Blackwater Canyon

Each year, thousands of people visit the magnificent Blackwater Canyon in Tucker County, West Virginia. The Canyon is where the courtroom drama, “J.R. Clifford and the Carrie Williams Case” arose, more than 125 years ago, in a one-room wooden school building on the banks of the North Fork of the Blackwater River. This is where Carrie Williams taught the children of African Americans who worked in the region’s booming coal and coke industry, and this is where she and J.R. Clifford began their successful battle for equal treatment under West Virginia law.

The organization Friends of Blackwater (“FOB”) works to protect the Blackwater Canyon region. Friends of Blackwater works to strengthen the connection between social justice and community and environmental protection. The J.R. Clifford Project takes its name and inspiration from the “Blackwater Heroes,” Carrie Williams and J.R. Clifford.

In 2002, at an FOB-sponsored historical program, Dr. Connie Lewis, a West Virginia University historian and Clifford biographer, told the Clifford/Williams story to a rapt audience. FOB Board member Thomas Rodd, then a West Virginia Supreme Court law clerk, was inspired to research and then create a historical re-enactment program from the original records.

Beginning in 2004, Rodd, Supreme Court Justice Larry Starcher, and attorney Katherine L. “Kitty” Dooley led a multi-year series of dramatic re-enactments of the Clifford/Williams case, a project that eventually involved several thousand people and brought a message of courage, progress, and hope. Thanks! to everyone who was part of this effort.

This dramatic distillation of the Clifford/Williams story was created by Thomas Rodd, with assistance from Priscilla Rodd. Graphic art and design are by Carol Jackson, Sharon Harms, and Cheyenne Elswick.

Special thanks to the Southern Partners Fund for supporting this publication. Thanks also to the Appalachian Community Fund; West Virginia University; West Virginia State University; Marshall University; Potomac State College; Shepherd University; Bluefield State College; the West Virginia Bar Foundation; the Mountain State Bar; the West Virginia Legislature; the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture, and History; the West Virginia Humanities Council; the National Park Service; the Tucker County Foundation; and the Kent-Clifford Family Reunion.

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info@saveblackwater.org <https://jrclifford.org/> <https://saveblackwater.org>



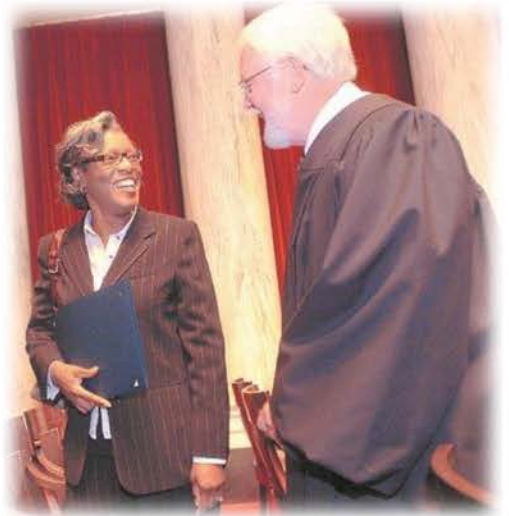
ACTORS ILENE EVANS AND JOSEPH BUNDY PORTRAYING CARRIE WILLIAMS AND J.R. CLIFFORD.



HEADSTONES AT ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY OF J.R. CLIFFORD AND HIS WIFE MARY FRANKLIN CLIFFORD.



ENTHUSIASTIC RE-ENACTORS PREPARE FOR THEIR ROLES AS CARRIE WILLIAMS' PUPILS.



KATHERINE L. "KITTY" DOOLEY, ESQ., AND JUSTICE LARRY STARCHER, LEADERS OF THE J.R. CLIFFORD PROJECT.



MARMADUKE DENT (1849-1909), CIVIL WAR VETERAN, THE FIRST GRADUATE OF WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY, AND AUTHOR OF THE STATE SUPREME COURT OPINION IN THE CARRIE WILLIAMS CASE.



A PACKED HOUSE AT THE TUCKER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA COURTHOUSE PREPARE TO SEE A WILLIAMS CASE RE-ENACTMENT.



THE TENSION IS HIGH AT THIS WILLIAMS CASE RE-ENACTMENT IN MORGANTOWN!



KIM ROLLS, TOM RODD, BILLY CLIFFORD, AND KAREN ROLLS (1940-2020) AT A KENT-CLIFFORD FAMILY REUNION. KIM AND KAREN ARE DAUGHTERS OF J.R. CLIFFORD'S NIECE, THE LATE FREDA B. ROLLS (1925-2014).



COKE OVENS AND A LOADING TIPPLE IN COKETON, WEST VIRGINIA IN THE 1890S.



JOSEPH T. HOKE, TRIAL JUDGE IN THE CARRIE WILLIAMS CASE.



THE CAST OF A WILLIAMS CASE RE-ENACTMENT IN CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA SINGING "WE SHALL OVERCOME."



AFTER SHE WON HER CASE, CARRIE WILLIAMS, WHO WAS BORN IN OHIO IN 1889, TAUGHT FOR SEVERAL MORE YEARS AT THE COKETON COLORED SCHOOL, WHICH REMAINED OPEN UNTIL THE 1940S. WHEN HER HUSBAND ABRAHAM WILLIAMS, A COAL MINER, DIED IN 1913, SHE MOVED TO CHICAGO, WHERE THE PICTURE ABOVE WAS TAKEN.



J.R. CLIFFORD (1848-1933), HONORED ON A U.S. POSTAGE STAMP WITH THE EARLY NAACP LEADER JOEL SPINGARN.



DOUGLAS FALLS ON THE NORTH FORK OF THE BLACKWATER RIVER IN TUCKER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA, JUST DOWNSTREAM FROM THE SITE OF THE COKETON COLORED SCHOOL.



J.R. CLIFFORD AND W.E.B. DUBOIS IN 1906 AT THE FIRST U.S. MEETING OF THE NIAGARA MOVEMENT IN HARPERS FERRY, WEST VIRGINIA, THE BEGINNING OF THE MODERN CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE.

