

Postscript

*W*e are privileged and grateful to Dale MacAllister, the author of this important biography, to have this opportunity to offer a postscript. We find inspiration from the prefatory remarks of Dr. Edward Scott and Ms. Karen Thomas, who contribute their invaluable perspective to give even greater context and meaning to this book and its insights. We humbly thank them, too, for allowing us to join them in this way.

The initiative to bring Dale MacAllister's scholarship and narrative about Lucy Simms—and the related times and people of her life and since—came to fruition through the efforts of a team of individuals and institutions, including Bridgewater College and its Abbie Parkhurst, Roy Ferguson, and President David Bushman. Bridgewater College supported this project not only with the time and talent of its senior leadership but also through funding from the Green-Simms-Scott endowed fund that honors three individuals, Florence Johnson Green, Lucy Simms, and Edward Scott, whose lives have made a profound impact on generations of youth. Additionally, this undertaking found substantial support through a grant from the Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge's N. Carroll and Grace B. "Patsy" Gynn endowed fund, which has been generously supported also by Jack and Jimmy Gynn and their families. The Staunton-headquartered foundation's president,

Dan Layman, appreciated that the life of Lucy Simms was a powerful story that transcended Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, indeed a story for the entire regional community and Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond.

The publication of this biography would have been a greater challenge, perhaps daunting, if not for the exceptional devotion and talents of Nancy Sorrells, a noted historian and author in her own right. In close collaboration with Dale MacAllister, Nancy became, in effect, the champion, organizer, editor, publisher, and steward of this initiative. We cannot begin to thank her enough for all of these contributions—and for her patience.

No doubt, Lucy Simms's biography is formidable in its own right, as we remember her life's journey. Still, though, the ultimate force of her story—from being born into slavery to excelling in higher education and achieving revered public service—actually comes from what it symbolizes in the untold story of others who have endured the unspeakable scourge of slavery in the United States as well as the discrimination that is part of its inhumane legacy. We pause to acknowledge and remember others' lives and stories, too. It is a collective civic and moral responsibility to remember and to memorialize those memories, and Dale MacAllister has offered our generation and future generations that gift in this enduring story about Lucy Simms.

Although she did not live to experience desegregation, Miss Simms was part of a new generation of black citizens to define what freedom meant in post-Civil War America. As they sought to realize their emancipation, these newly freed people laid the foundation of a civil rights struggle that continues to this day. Despite the hindrances of first enslavement and then Jim Crow, Miss Simms persisted in her desire for education and success as a free person. While her entire teaching career may have been subjected to segregated and unequal

conditions, she resolved to use her talents to provide high-quality education to the students of her community for over a half century.

Miss Simms was laid to rest in 1934. The following year, a woman named Barbara Johns was born into a respected family from Prince Edward County, Virginia, that held similar views regarding the importance of education. Sixteen years later, Barbara Johns led her classmates at R.R. Moton High School to go on strike in protest of substandard educational facilities. Much like the Effinger Street School in Harrisonburg, R.R. Moton High School in Farmville was overcrowded, inadequate, and unequal. The student strike soon evolved into a community movement that resulted in a lawsuit filed by NAACP attorneys Oliver Hill and Spotswood Robinson. Three years later, this lawsuit was consolidated with four other school desegregation cases that went before the Supreme Court as *Brown v. Board of Education*. Had she lived to see these pivotal events unfold, Miss. Simms would have likely taken special pride in knowing that one of the first victories of the emerging civil rights movement started in a classroom of black students from her native state.

In larger context of Lucy Simms's tireless dedication to educating generations of children, it is constructive to offer a connection to United States and Virginia history as it impacted public education. Following the United States Supreme Court's initial *Brown v. Board of Education* (*Brown I*) decision in 1954¹, declaring unconstitutional the practice of "separate but equal" public education facilities, and its subsequent "all deliberate speed" *Brown* sequel (*Brown II*)², various Virginia state and local government officials

¹ *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954), available at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/347/483>

² *Brown v. Bd. of Educ.*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955), available at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/349/294>
See generally, Separate Is Not Equal: With All Deliberate Speed, <https://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/6-legacy/deliberate-speed>

resisted racial integration through so-called “massive resistance”³ and through other less explicit means. While Lucy Simms would not get to know this history and the experiences since, she could have found remarkable encouragement from witnessing the changes, however resistant and slow and lacking. She might even smile at watching what are today’s highly-engaged Rockingham County students leading the annual “Farmville Tour Guides Project”—an innovative independent study where students direct an interactive field experience on the actual grounds where the pivotal events of Virginia’s civil rights struggle unfolded.⁴ Lucy Simms, perhaps, would have been ultimately heartened by the events and history of that Virginia community: the student walkout led by Barbara Johns,⁵ the meetings in the basement of the First Baptist Church attended by daring and now-famed lawyers Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson⁶ and visited by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Following the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down the policy of “separate but equal” in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the legacy of racial resentment and exclusion sadly led to many nurturing teachers of color losing their jobs. Moreover, when students of color began attending the schools from which they had been formerly barred, the love and care from which their predecessors had profited in once segregated schools became remote and inaccessible. These latter day manifestations of racial upheaval were costly and exacted

³ See generally, Douglas L. Guynn, “Constitutional Roots and Shadow: The School Board’s Manifest Power Under Article VIII, Section 7,” *Journal of Local Government Law* (Vol. XXIV, No. 2, Fall 2013). (highlighting some of the Virginia history of racial integration in the Virginia public schools and the litigation in the Virginia-based courts in the larger context of the unique Article VIII, Section 7 state constitutional legal power and role of local Virginia school boards), available at <http://www.botkinrose.com/news/detail/65th-anniversary-of-brown-ii-supreme-court-decision>

⁴ <http://farmvilletourguides.rockingham.k12.va.us/>

⁵ See generally, <http://www.motonmuseum.org/>.

⁶ <http://civilrightstour.motonmuseum.org/places/first-baptist-church.html>

painful recompense for the slow grind toward racial equality. The hope of racial harmony and social equity was yet a distant dream in their and others' lives.⁷

Lucy Simms's story is truly about not only her life but also about the lives of others who were born into slavery or who experienced its odious vestiges. In today's times, all of these stories—told and untold—take on a stirring poignancy when we consider, for example, the scenes of shocking cruelty depicted in the movie *Harriet*⁸ and in the wrenching slave ship images displayed in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.,⁹ as well as the anguish in the movie *The Green Book*.¹⁰ Somehow, though, Lucy Simms and others did not surrender their human spirit. As Rhiannon Giddens hauntingly sings of late in her work entitled “At the Purchaser's Option”:

*You can take my body
You can take my bones
You can take my blood
But not my soul.*¹¹

Our hope is that Dale MacAllister's laudable work on Lucy Simms, in its own way, helps to foster more change to hearts and minds as generations seek to understand and to fulfill the promise

⁷ A highly respected federal judge has shared his personal views and concerns about what he regards as more recent challenges specifically in education and more broadly in other areas of life for America, stating that: “Forty years after Brown, the resegregation of public schools is a real and troubling development.” J. Harvie Wilkinson, *One Nation Indivisible—How Ethnic Separation Threatens America* 80 (1997). He concludes his book by saying that “[o]ur choices now will determine whether we become the diverse but unified nation that both Lincoln and our grandchildren deserve to see.” *Id.* at 205.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqoEs4cG6Uw>

⁹ <https://nmaahc.si.edu/>

¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkZxoko_HC0

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nj7rzm5QI4>

that “all men are created equal” and ensure “the equal protection of the laws.” We are reminded of the history in the music, too, of recording artist Sam Cooke, who lived during the racial tensions and discrimination of the 1960s. His rendition of part of our shared history gave hope, just as does the life and example of Lucy Simms:

*Then I go to my brother, and I say,
Brother, help me please.
But he winds up knockin' me back down
on my knees.
Lord, there have been times that I thought
I couldn't last for very long
But now I think I'm able to carry on
It's been a long, a long time coming.
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will.¹²*

May the spirit of Lucy Simms endure, as we all learn more about her story and the stories of others who were “able to carry on”—and still persevere—in the struggle for change that brings us closer to the shared aspiration for a “more perfect Union.”¹³ Ken Woodley of Prince Edward County captured this same spirit of determination and perseverance when his community rededicated the public library in honor of Barbara Johns—a student it once tried to segregate into anonymity—now rightly transformed into a hopeful symbol of unity and pride for everyone:

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPr3yvkHYsE>

¹³ Preamble, U.S. Constitution (“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”). See generally, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/continental-congress-and-constitutional-convention-from-1774-to-1789/articles-and-essays/to-form-a-more-perfect-union/>

*May God bless us all as our national journey together,
as children of God, continues. Founding Brothers and
Founding Sisters. One family. Under God Indivisible.
With liberty and justice for all.*¹⁴

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¹⁴ Ken Woodley (former editor of the *Farmville Herald*), *In The Footsteps of a Dream, Barbara Rose Johns Farmville-Prince Edward Community Library Rededication* (Dec. 15, 2017), <https://farmvilleva.com/footsteps-dream-ken-woodley/>. See generally, Ken Woodley, *The Road to Healing: A Civil Rights Reparations Story in Prince Edward County, Virginia, 2019*.

¹⁵ <http://www.rockingham.k12.va.us/instruction.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.botkinrose.com/>