

Mr. NAACP

*Levi G. Byrd and the Remaking of the NAACP
in State and Nation, 1917–1960*

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This essay is, in its broadest application, a history of the ways in which those on the margins of history and the periphery of power have fundamentally shaped the course of history in South Carolina, the United States, and the larger world. More specifically, it is a history of the ways in which the NAACP in South Carolina was transformed from a small, urban-based organization predominantly representing the interests of a small class of black professionals to a mass organization representing the needs and interests of a broad cross-section of black South Carolinians across lines of geography, gender, and economic status. It is, moreover, a history of the ways in which the NAACP in South Carolina shaped the larger African American struggle for civil rights and equality during the peak years of the NAACP's national influence. What I will argue is that it was precisely the ability of the NAACP to incorporate and champion the interests of a diverse African American population that allowed it to achieve an increasing amount of power and influence that it wielded between 1917 and 1960, most notably in the years between 1943 and 1957.

To make my case I want to highlight the life and activist career of Levi G. Byrd, a man known to many older NAACP activists, but someone who is seldom included in the pantheon of South Carolina's civil rights notables or other prominent figures in the history of the African American struggle for civil rights. In an important way Byrd's life and activism reflect the trajectory of the black civil rights struggle in South Carolina in the twentieth century. But in a more important sense, Byrd's life and activism profoundly shaped the course of the struggle's trajectory, demonstrating the power of individual will and the possibilities that flow from collective human action.

To begin let me set the stage for Byrd's involvement in the South Carolina civil rights struggle and the history of the NAACP in particular. The first branches of the NAACP in South Carolina were chartered in Charleston and Columbia in the early months of 1917. The creation of these two branches was

part of the effort of James Weldon Johnson, the NAACP's first black field secretary, to extend the reach of the somewhat stodgy, northern-based organization into communities across the South. By the end of World War I, in fact, the NAACP would transition from an organization funded and led by a predominantly white and board-dominated organization in the North to one funded, led by, and responsive to the needs of a black membership base, one increasingly based in the South. South Carolina was a leader in this transformation. And although the NAACP in South Carolina began in the state's two leading urban areas and, initially at least, drew its membership from these cities' black urban professional classes, the organization quickly expanded its reach, with six additional branches being formed in 1918 and 1919 in Aiken, Anderson, Darlington, Florence, Orangeburg, and Beaufort.

As the NAACP pursued access to better schools and jobs in military facilities (including the Charleston Navy Yard) and led efforts to register black voters, the organization captured the imaginations and loyalties of black South Carolinians from all walks of life. The NAACP's World War I-era success in South Carolina led to a period of rising expectations. Edwin "Teddy" Harleston of the Charleston NAACP even imagined the possibility of "holding over the heads of the white voters the possibility of a black primary." Allen University president Bishop W. D. Chappelle similarly envisioned the possibility that black voters could wield the balance of power in statewide political races, potentially dividing and splitting the all-white Democratic Party. In the 1920s black South Carolinians continued to form NAACP branches as a means of securing their rights and improving their lives, despite (or perhaps because of) increasingly trying circumstances. Between 1917 and 1929 twelve South Carolina communities chartered NAACP branches, and as many as nine others attempted to do likewise (the most dramatic example taking place in Calhoun County). By the opening years of the 1930s, and mimicking large regional and national trends, however, the NAACP had become a defunct organization in the Palmetto State. Violence, economic hardship, out-migration, natural disaster, and ineffective local leadership all played roles in the organization's demise. Officially only Charleston and Columbia maintained branches in 1930, but they largely collected membership dues and did little to advance the cause of black civil rights or equality.¹

Levi G. Byrd arrived in South Carolina at the precise moment that the NAACP in the state and nation entered into a period of troubling decline. Nationally the organization was virtually bankrupt by the opening years of the 1930s. By mid-decade the organization would become embroiled in internal debates, leading to the departure of W. E. B. Du Bois, its leading propagandist, and threatening the survival of the civil rights organization. Reflecting a larger organizational pattern, as the NAACP's membership base expanded, its responsiveness to grassroots concerns and its overall effectiveness improved. But as membership dwindled, the organization tended toward a more top-down and

autocratic approach to achieving civil rights for African Americans. This was the case in the early 1930s and was made manifest by the organization's public relations disaster surrounding its timid nonresponse to the wholly false accusation and prosecution of nine African American youths on charges of raping two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama, in 1931. To be sure, Byrd arrived in South Carolina with little apparent intent or desire to forge a career as an NAACP activist, or activist of any sort. He made the move to South Carolina, in large measure, to find work.

Byrd was the eldest of nine children born to Alfred D. Byrd and Pinkie Hancock Byrd in January 1891. He was reared on a tobacco farm in Anson County, North Carolina, near the town of Lilesville. In 1911 Byrd married and spent two years farming before he and his wife moved to Hamlet, North Carolina, where he took a job as a freight handler for the Seaboard Air Line railroad company. Following the death of his wife seven years later, Byrd continued the strenuous lifting work required by his railroad job, until, as the story is told, he noticed some writing on the inside of a boxcar. "In 1918 I was trucking in Hamlet, N.C.," Byrd remembered. "I was carrying boxes into a boxcar and on one end it was written, 'What is your life?' And on the other end it said, 'Your life is what you make of it.'" Shortly thereafter, the story continues, Byrd resolved to do something with his life, to do something more than work all day and return home at night with little hope for a better future. After leaving behind the railroad work, he spent several years in a number of North Carolina towns before he made the decision to move to Cheraw—a Chesterfield County, South Carolina, town on the Pee Dee River, the birthplace of Dizzy Gillespie, some thirty miles from Byrd's place of birth in North Carolina. In Cheraw a cousin named Annie Hancock graciously provided him with a place to stay until he found work, which he did, as a plumber's assistant to an aging white man named C. F. Pendleton. Byrd would soon marry Mary Ann Love, a neighbor of his cousin, and become an active member of the Pee Dee Union Baptist Church.²

By 1931 Byrd and his wife had begun a family, and he soon became the only plumber in Cheraw. Had Jim Crow and white supremacy not maintained such a tight grip on life in South Carolina, the forty-year-old's newfound monopoly on the plumbing needs of the small Pee Dee River town might well have signaled a passage to middle-class security. But in the early part of 1933, less than a year after the birth of his second son, Alfred, Byrd became a victim of racial violence, an event that launched his activist career. From that point forward his struggle for economic security and human dignity would be waged in and through a battle for racial justice.

As the Great Depression swept South Carolina in the early 1930s, racial violence permeated Chesterfield County. In 1933 Bill McNeil, a trombone player in the future jazz great John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie's first makeshift band, vanished. Although the exact cause of this disappearance was not known, Gillespie and his

cohorts understood it as a clear signal to "get the hell out of Cheraw."³ On a Saturday afternoon in early June of the same year, as he attempted to investigate the mistreatment of black residents in Cheraw's small downtown business district, Byrd was severely beaten by a group of white men. For Byrd the event revealed, in no uncertain terms, the limits imposed on the life he had carved out for himself and his family. "When Daddy was hit," recalled his son Alfred D. Byrd Jr., "that was the turning, there."⁴

Byrd's beating was only one of a series of brutal beatings meted out to black residents of Cheraw in the early part of 1933. Thereafter, Byrd resolved to put an end to the ongoing violence and began efforts to organize a branch of the NAACP. Beginning in June 1933, in a series of roughly typed and handwritten letters reflecting his lack of formal schooling and poor typing skills, Byrd began what would become a virtually continuous correspondence with the NAACP national office that would last well into the 1950s. Rare among NAACP branch file correspondence for their regularity and detailed accountings of black life and organizing efforts in a small rural town, Byrd's letters began to crack the regional isolation of a black community that lacked legal protection and political representation and was regularly brutalized by white residents. "Thir has been so miny out rages cormited own our race hear in Cheraw latly," Byrd wrote Walter White. "We are wishing to form a branch of the N.A.A.C.P. hear to fight the Brutal way thay doin our Race hear for the last 6 are 8 Months we Had 5 are 6 Brutal Beaten hear in town bye the whites and there has not one of them bee eaven arrested for it we have no propten [*sic*] hear when it comes to law." Only two weeks later Byrd wrote the national office to inform them that "the Police Beat up A Woman of our Race hear in Cheraw Saturday June 24 and is Getting worse Each Day." "We are treated as Slaves hear in Cheraw," he explained; "they have no law hear to protect our race at all. So you see how we feel about it."⁵

For Byrd the organization of an NAACP branch represented an important first step toward the amelioration of what he described as the slavlike conditions under which black people lived in Chesterfield County. But organizing a branch of the NAACP in a small town such as Cheraw and a rural county such as Chesterfield was anything but an easy task. Cheraw was a town where everybody knew everybody and where leading white residents prided themselves on what they perceived as their close, even familial, ties to the town's black residents. Any violation of these real and imagined ties could, to be sure, provoke a violent response.⁶

Just as significantly, black residents of Cheraw were anything but a monolithic group. "It's very interesting," Dizzy Gillespie later recalled, "how the blacks became divided over religion in Cheraw." At the top of the social pyramid were those who attended the Second Presbyterian Church, also home to the Coulter Memorial Academy. At the bottom were those members of the Sanctified

Church, where, Gillespie remembered, "everyone knew that the whole congregation shouted."⁷

Organizing in such a context was hard work, but Byrd's in-between social status in black Cheraw made him ideally placed to organize the community. As the town's only plumber, he occupied a position of relative economic privilege in black Cheraw and represented the values of hard work and thrift required for middle-class respectability. He was a member of the Pee Dee Union Baptist Church and a man with little formal education, making him neither a member of Cheraw's black elite nor a member of its lowest-ranking social classes. His work as a regional agent for a number of black newspapers had also made Byrd a well-known figure among black residents of Cheraw and Chesterfield County by the early 1930s. Every Saturday morning Byrd, who never learned to drive a car, toted a small red wagon through Cheraw's black neighborhoods and hand-delivered copies of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, and the *Baltimore Afro-American* to subscribers. On those same afternoons, as black people from the surrounding countryside made their way into town to shop and socialize, Byrd stood near McBride's Market and sold papers to all those interested, allowing him to become a visible presence in the town and acquainted with people from across the county.⁸

Through hard work and strategic insight, Byrd managed to recruit members to the branch from across Chesterfield County's diverse African American community. In the late 1930s, when the organization and its membership, by necessity, remained underground, Byrd took to wearing an NAACP button in public, becoming the only recognizable member of the organization in Cheraw.⁹ For a time black people avoided Byrd on the streets of Cheraw, crossing the street when he approached and bypassing the corner where he sold newspapers on Saturdays. But his public demonstration of fearlessness and his assertion of independence made a powerful case for joining the organization. If Byrd could "step out" and risk his own economic well-being and personal safety in the interest of racial justice, perhaps others could do the same.¹⁰

Finally after years of organizing, on May 19, 1939, seventy men and women met and chartered the Cheraw and Chesterfield County NAACP branch. Its membership included teachers from Coulter Memorial Academy and the pastors of the Wesley ME Church, Pee Dee Union Baptist Church, AME Zion Church, and the Sanctified Church. Four domestic workers added their names to the charter, as did two barbers, a hairdresser, a midwife, four brick masons, five farmers, an undertaker, two merchants, and fifteen men who listed their occupations as common laborers. Four of its members were also members of the Addie H. Pickens Club, which was an affiliate of the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Teachers occupied the positions of president, vice president, and secretary, while Byrd held the formal title of treasurer and the informal position of

corresponding secretary. "Because," he explained, "I have worked this part in the past and understand more about that part." As would remain his practice in the years ahead, Byrd pushed members of the more "articulate" classes to assume the organization's formal leadership roles even as he remained the key leader in the day-to-day operations of the organization.¹¹

Byrd did not, however, cease his organizational efforts with the creation of an NAACP branch in Cheraw. Increasingly he viewed the dearth of NAACP activity elsewhere in the state as an impediment to the success of his own locally rooted organizing efforts, and he began to search for ways to energize the NAACP across the state. "We went to Farm A State Conference so as to try to Keep all Branches alive and Keep Them are Get Them to Work," he wrote the national office. "Will you Send me the Names of Each Branch President and his Address," he asked, "so that we May get in Turch With of them so we mayget to gether own that. Would you not think that a good way to living those Dead Branche up?"¹²

With a list of officers of the state's nominally active branches in hand, Byrd began a letter-writing campaign to urge the formation of an NAACP State Conference. By September he had secured positive responses from branch leaders in Florence, Georgetown, Greenville, Sumter, and Charleston. But the recently elected president of the Columbia branch, the Reverend James M. Hinton (also a new resident of the capital city), refused to lend the support of the Columbia organization. "It is our responsibility," Hinton explained in 1940, "to supply the material and money" to the national office while "the folks up North have got to stick their necks out for us." "Our branch was not entirely sold on the State Conference," he wrote the national office that same year, "for we felt that it would be just another drain on our funds, which you know are limited."¹³

Byrd realized, though, that the support of black Columbians would be critical to the power and success of a state organization. So he searched for a way around Hinton. The key person in his efforts would prove to be the Reverend Arthur Jerome Wright, the father of the future civil rights attorney and Children's Defense Fund founder, Marian Wright Edelman. Wright lived in the town of Bennettsville, located just across the Pee Dee River from Cheraw in neighboring Marlboro County. Wright had become the full-time pastor of Bennettsville's Shiloh Baptist Church in 1930 when the Reverend J. J. Starks, who at the time was the president of Morris College in Sumter, relinquished his responsibilities there to become the first African American president of Columbia's Benedict College. Starks was Wright's mentor and a close friend of the family, and, as the president of Benedict, was Byrd's entrée to Columbia. By mid-October 1939 Byrd had managed to convince Starks to lend his support to the state conference. Generally regarded as a racial moderate, even an "accommodationist," Starks offered Byrd a way to circumvent Hinton's leadership. Starks also allowed the organization to hold its founding meeting on the Benedict campus, providing

the fledgling state conference with an air of legitimacy at a critical juncture in its history.¹⁴

On the weekend of November 10, 1939, twenty-nine representatives from branches in Florence, Georgetown, Sumter, Cheraw, Greenville, Charleston, and Columbia attended the founding meeting of the South Carolina NAACP State Conference of Branches in the library of Benedict College. For the first time since Edwin Harleston imagined the creation of a "black primary" and W. D. Chappelle imagined an organized statewide challenge to the political exclusion of black South Carolinians, the makings of an institutional challenge to Jim Crow and legalized disfranchisement were in the works on a statewide scale. In this case, however, the call for a collective challenge to Jim Crow and political exclusion emanated from a small town, in a rural county, stretching the organization well beyond the urban confines of Columbia and Charleston and setting it on a new, more inclusive trajectory. Indeed, it is unclear whether or not Hinton even attended the founding meeting of the state conference, and it appears from the documentary record that the participation of the Columbia branch remained in doubt until the last minute. What can be known for certain is that the Cheraw delegation took the lead at the November 10 meeting, helping to elect the pastor of Cheraw's Wesley ME Church, the Reverend Alonzo W. Wright, to the position of president and the head of the Robert Small School's Adult Education program, Maggie B. Robinson, to the position of secretary.¹⁵

Indeed, the virtually moribund Columbia branch continued to withhold its support from the state conference for more than a year.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Byrd continued to press Hinton and the Columbia branch to support the state organization. After much prodding and negotiation, Hinton agreed to take an active role in the state conference, but not without exacting a price for his participation: "I'll go along with you," Hinton told Byrd, "but if I can't run it, I'll tear it up." For Byrd this was a price worth paying. In June 1941 Hinton was elected president of the state conference, effectively transferring the formal reins of power from Cheraw to Columbia. Robinson would stay on for an additional year as secretary, until Modjeska Monteith Simkins agreed to serve as her replacement.¹⁷

In the ensuing years Hinton would prove his mettle as state conference president, and the irascible Modjeska Simkins would prove an untiring champion of black civil rights and equality across the state. Between 1943 and 1946 the NAACP expanded from fifteen to forty-nine branches. Membership topped the ten thousand mark in 1945. And the number of branches continued to increase, peaking at better than eighty-four branches in 1955. By the late 1940s, with the hiring of Eugene Montgomery as the state organization's first full-time and paid executive secretary, the state conference had quite literally achieved a presence in the backwoods, cotton fields, and rural churches across South Carolina. During the 1940s the organization provided the crucial infrastructure for

an assault on the all-white Democratic primary. It issued the first challenges to the gross disparities of the doctrine of "separate, but equal." And when the organization stretched into rural Clarendon County, it took the legal and cultural moorings of Jim Crow segregation head on. As was so often the case, when those on the edges of power took the initiative and the NAACP accepted their challenge, the organization achieved its most profound successes.

Success in South Carolina was not, however, easily accomplished, and the forward march of racial progress never moved in a straight line. The white backlash to *Brown* and the NAACP, in the mid-1950s, in particular, proved devastating. By 1957 the NAACP had lost more than fifty branches across the state, and total membership plummeted. But black South Carolinians did not halt their struggle for civil rights or equality. James T. McCain, a founding member and president of the Sumter NAACP, used his NAACP connections in the late 1950s to organize for CORE in South Carolina, continuing the struggle for black voting rights and empowerment. The Reverend C. A. Ivory in Rock Hill, the Reverend I. DeQuincy Newman, the attorney Matthew Perry, Bernice Robinson, and Septima Clark, all members of the NAACP, would find ways to push the struggle forward.

Despite this period of upheaval for the state organization, Levi Byrd's activism continued, and he remained active in the NAACP, battling into the 1970s to achieve the integration of public schools in Cheraw.

Notes

1. On the history of the NAACP in these years, see Peter F. Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality since 1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006). Harleston quotation on page 47. Perhaps the best example of the hope inspired by the NAACP in the 1920s and the difficulties facing the organization were demonstrated in Calhoun County. In this rural, cotton-producing county, bordered by the Congaree and Santee rivers to the north and east, Orangeburg County to the south, and the state's Sandhills region to the west, black residents chartered an NAACP branch in 1925. Forty-four farmers, a clerk, four merchants, one teacher, four students, and a minister signed their names to the charter. Half of the members were women. The Calhoun branch was a demonstration of the extent to which the NAACP had reached into the backwoods and rural counties of South Carolina and begun providing a means for ordinary men and women to participate in a larger fight for civil rights and liberation. But revolutionary change was not to come in the 1920s. In September 1928 a major hurricane hit the coast of South Carolina and destroyed Calhoun County's cotton crop. "We are very sorry that [the] Calhoun County Branch has not been able to pay her full quota," wrote the branch's secretary to the national office of the NAACP. "We very much desired to pay out quota but as the September hurricane and floods destroyed all the crops raised in the community it could not be done. . . . Just give us a little time. We are deeply interested in the great work you are doing. . . ." By the following year many of the branch's members had migrated out of Calhoun County in search of better economic opportunity. The branch, like so many others, disappeared from the scene. *Democracy Rising*, 66–67.

2. Byrd quoted in the *Cheraw Chronicle*, December 23, 1971. His biography is drawn from the *Cheraw Chronicle*, September 28, 1972, in Black History File, Cheraw Town Hall, Cheraw, South Carolina; *Cheraw Chronicle*, September 12, 1985; *Cheraw Chronicle*, January 23, 1986; funeral services for Levi G. Byrd, September 12, 1985, from the personal files of Alfred D. Byrd, Hampton, Va.; Alfred D. Byrd, interview with the author, Hampton, Virginia, March 1, 2000; Bernice S. Robinson, interview with the author, Cheraw, S.C., August 3, 1999.

3. Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *To Be, or Not . . . to BOP: Memoirs* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979), 30.

4. Lucille Black to Levi G. Byrd, June 14, 1933, Cheraw Branch File, I-G-196, NAACP Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Cheraw Branch File); Alfred D. Byrd, interview.

5. Levi G. Byrd to Walter White, June 16, 1933, Cheraw Branch File; Levi G. Byrd to National Office, June 27, 1933, Cheraw Branch File. Byrd's writings (typed and handwritten) reflect his lack of formal schooling and the immediacy with which he wrote the national office. I do my best to quote him verbatim.

6. On Gillespie, see *Democracy Rising*, 67–70.

7. Gillespie, *To Be, or not . . . to BOP*, 30–31.

8. *Cheraw Chronicle*, September 28, 1972; Levi G. Byrd to National Office, June 16, 1933, Cheraw Branch File; Alfred D. Byrd, interview; Robinson, interview.

9. Alfred D. Byrd, interview; Robinson, interview. The button was likely from the NAACP's 1937 antilynching campaign. See Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909–1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 139–65.

10. Alfred D. Byrd, interview; Robinson, interview.

11. Application for Charter, Cheraw and Chesterfield County, South Carolina, May 19, 1939, Cheraw Branch File; Fortieth Anniversary Program Guide, S.C. Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, part 1, reel 22, Records of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, microfilm; Levi G. Byrd to National Office, May 23, 1939, Cheraw Branch File; Hoffman, "Genesis of the Modern Movement," 367.

12. Levi G. Byrd to William Pickens, July 9, 1939, Cheraw Branch File.

13. William Pickens to Levi G. Byrd, July 10, 1939, Cheraw Branch File; Levi G. Byrd to Pickens, July 26, 1939, Cheraw Branch File; Levi G. Byrd to Pickens, September 18, 1939, Cheraw Branch File; Levi G. Byrd to National Office, October 16, 1939, Cheraw Branch File; Hinton quoted in Wilhelmina Jackson, Columbia Memorandum, 1940, box 36, folder 2, Ralph J. Bunche Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York; James M. Hinton to William Pickens, June 13, 1940, Columbia Branch File, II-C-177, NAACP Papers (hereafter Columbia Branch File). On the Columbia branch's reluctance to join because of financial concerns, also see William Pickens to R. W. Jackson, November 20, 1939, part 12, series G, reel 18, NAACP Papers.

14. Levi G. Byrd to William Pickens, September 18, 1939, Cheraw Branch File; Levi G. Byrd to National Office, October 16, 1939, Cheraw Branch File. On Reverend Arthur Jerome Wright, see Marian Wright Edelman, *Lanterns: A Memoir of Mentors* (Boston: Beacon, 1999), 1–9, 175. On Reverend J. J. Starks, see I. A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1865 to 1968* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 230.

15. Drawing on oral history interviews with Modjeska Simkins and historical sketches from South Carolina State Conference of NAACP Branches annual convention program guides, Barbara Woods has concluded that the founding meeting of the state conference was held on October 10, 1939, and that both Reverend Hinton and Modjeska Simkins

were present. See Barbara Woods Aba-Mecha, "Black Woman Activist in Twentieth Century South Carolina: Modjeska Montith Simkins" (Ph.D. thesis, Emory University, 1978), 166–67; Barbara A. Woods, "Modjeska Simkins and the South Carolina Conference of the NAACP, 1939–1957," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941–1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Woods (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 106. Documentary evidence from the NAACP Papers not cited by Woods contradicts this version of the story, as does Byrd's own rendering of the history in an oral history interview conducted in 1956. See Levi G. Byrd to William Pickens, November 10, 1939, S.C. State Conference File, I-G-196, NAACP Papers, which also can be found in part 12, series G, reel 18, NAACP Papers; Report of Election, South Carolina Branch, November 10, 1939, Cheraw Branch File; Lucille Black, Memorandum to the *Crisis*, November 14, 1939; J. A. Johnson to William Pickens, October 21, 1939; Pickens to Johnson, October 26, 1939; A. W. Wright to Pickens, November 12, 1939; Pickens to Levi G. Byrd, November 14, 1939—all part 12, series G, reel 18, NAACP Papers. Byrd's version is recounted in Hoffman's "Genesis of the Modern Movement," 368. Although members of the Columbia branch ultimately came to play a central role in the state conference, it was not until after 1941 that they did so. Their prominence in the organization from that point forward and their power within the organization to record its history is likely the cause of the hazy rendering of the organization's founding.

16. R. W. Jackson to William Pickens, February 8, 1940, Columbia Branch File; Wilhelmina Jackson, Columbia Memorandum, 1940, box 36, folder 2, Bunche Papers.

17. Aba-Mecha, "Black Woman Activist," 167–69. Byrd quoted in note 36. See also Reverend James M. Hinton to Levi G. Byrd, May 31, 1962, from personal files of Levi G. Byrd in possession of his son, Alfred D. Byrd, Hampton, Virginia; Levi G. Byrd to Walter White, December 22, 1941, State Conference File, II-C-181, NAACP Papers; Official Program of the First Annual Conference of the South Carolina Conference of Branches N.A.A.C.P., May 17, 1940, State Conference File; Program guide from the Second Annual Conference, South Carolina Branches, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, June 15 and 16, 1941, State Conference File; Program, Third Annual Conference of South Carolina Branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, June 14 and June 15, 1942, State Conference File. Reverend Wright stepped down for health reasons and time constraints. Robinson, who ran the National Youth Administration Center for Negro Girls in Cheraw, was convicted of illegally soliciting funds from NYA participants to make repairs to the NYA Center in 1942 and sentenced to sixty days in the state penitentiary in Lexington County. According to Byrd, after learning about Robinson's involvement with the state conference and the local NAACP, the trial judge denounced the NAACP in court and sentenced Robinson to a jail term rather than ordering her to pay a fine. Levi G. Byrd to Walter White, April 29, 1942, Cheraw Branch File; Levi G. Byrd to Thurgood Marshall, June 6, 1942, Cheraw Branch File; Memorandum to Mr. Marshall from Mr. White, June 10, 1942, Cheraw Branch File.