

*A Brief Historical Sketch of the Joseph S. Clark Senior High School Class of 1959  
on the occasion of its 50th. and 55th Class Reunions by Raphael Cassimere, Jr., Professor-Emeritus of History*

### ***Introduction***

It was long after I graduated before I learned that our alma mater was named for Joseph S. Clark, president of Southern University, after its relocation from New Orleans to Scotlandville in 1914. I had heard Mr. Jesse O. Richards, Jr., Clark's founding principal, relate how the present school building was constructed as a Black elementary school during the early twenties, but because of pressure from white neighbors, shortly after its opening the school board converted it into a white school. Because there were so few black voters ( less than 600 in the entire state!) black citizens were helpless to prevent this outrage. Even the conservative *Times-Picayune* editorialized that white officials had done an injustice to colored citizens, and as a result the school board built a new school for Blacks and located it in Treme. The new black school was named for Joseph A. Craig, a black school board member during Reconstruction. The original school remained a white school until its closing in 1947. It was not that building however, where Clark began, but another white school, Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in the 2100 block of Dumaine, which the school board converted to a black school. About 325 students entered this new school in the fall of 1947. In 1949, Edward D. White, the school located at N. Derbigny and Bayou Road Streets was also converted back to black use and became Joseph S. Clark Annex. During its first five years enrollment grew rapidly and surpassed 2200, which made necessary a platoon system. The two campuses operated classes from 7 Am to 5 PM. Clark now had the largest public high school enrollment in the state, although the two school buildings combined were built to accommodate half its actual enrollment. Mr. Richards divided his time between the two buildings assisted by one Teacher-in-Charge in each building. In 1951 the Bayou Road campus became the Main Building and the Dumaine campus remained its annex until it was renamed and separated in 1954.

### ***The Beginnings***

The genesis for the Joseph S. Clark Sr. High School Class of 59 was during World War II. Most of the members were born in 1941-42 when there were only 48 stars in the flag. Many of their fathers fought for a nation which treated its darker citizens worse than captured German soldiers. Most were born in and around New Orleans and began their educational journey in 1946-47 all across the city of New Orleans. Some attended Couvent, Lockett, Macarty, and Nelson; others attended McDonogh Numbers, 40, 41, and 42, all schools restricted to Blacks. They lived through, even if unaware of, many social changes which would slowly transform New Orleans from a city rigidly divided by race and class to a society which at least began to recognize African Americans as members of its community. They were taught in older dilapidated, over crowded buildings, condemned for white attendance, but deemed acceptable for Blacks. But most of their teachers were dedicated and competent and instilled in them the need

to achieve even amidst adversity. In 1954, one year prior to 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public school segregation was unconstitutional, but no member of this class ever attended classes with members of other races throughout the remainder of their public school career. In 1955, after elementary school graduations, they looked forward eagerly to their high school years.

After elementary school, choices for public high school were limited. The all-white school board decreed that black students who lived on the down river side of Canal would attend Joseph S. Clark Senior High School, unless the restriction was waived by an out of district permit. Ironically, enroute to Clark most of us passed by at least one, if not two, public or private high schools, such as Warren Easton, Holy Cross, John McDonogh, F.T. Nicholls, or St Aloysius Schools, at that time, all restricted to non black students.

### *A Year at Andrew J. Bell*

Before becoming the **Clark Class of '59** the nucleus first came together in the fall of 1955 at Andrew J. Bell Junior High School, just months earlier renamed from Clark Annex. Like the senior high school, overcrowding forced Bell students to attend classes on platoon from 7AM to 5PM. At Bell, now restricted solely to 9<sup>th</sup> graders, they were pioneers and trailblazers. This class included members of Bell's first football team which went undefeated. Paul Robinson, from Lockett, was elected Student Council President, a feat he would repeat at Clark in 1958. Paul, a gifted speaker, won superior rating on several occasions at the local and state literary rallies over the next several years at Clark. This class included Gail Moore and Bobbie Rae Lucien who also distinguished themselves at Clark by winning superior ratings for serious and humorous speech. Classmates: Donald Batiste, Harold Bordenave, Charles Brickley, Lyndia Green, Clifford Hicks, Ferdinand Jones, Hewitt Lewis, Oliver Lloyd and Farrell Phipps got a preview of life as Clarkites. They were honored and privileged as freshmen to be participating members of the Joseph S. Clark Senior High School Band. They eagerly walked between Bell and Clark for band practice. Putting on that crimson and gray band uniform and marching on the field at halftime during football season, and proudly stepping on performance stages during the concert season, was a magical experience for these freshmen. Lifetime friendships were made during our one year stay at Bell and many continued at Clark beginning in the fall, 1956. Because of over-crowdiness only those Bell students who had passed all of the core courses could transfer to Clark. Subsequently, a number of gifted students became founding members of Clark's *Louise I. Kyser Honor Society* which was first organized in 1957.

### *Becoming Bulldogs*

Clark, during the fifties, was populated primarily by students from six neighborhoods: the lower Ninth Ward, whose students came from Macarty; the upper Ninth Ward, whose students came from Lockett; Gentilly, which sent students from McDonogh # 40; the upper 7<sup>th</sup> Ward; most of whose students came from Rivers Frederick; the back of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ward, whose students had attended Nelson; and the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Wards, whose students came from McDonogh

outstanding athletic teams, a great band and an outstanding choir, a debate team and a drama club. Generally Mr. Richards was fair and even handed in disciplining, but a loss of hearing sometimes caused him to misunderstand students, or even faculty, and the consequences were sometimes unfair.

There were some memorable characters in our class, two "bears": Andrew Johnson and Edward Hebert; a "frog," Sylvia Leufroy; one "buggy," Peter Duplessis; a "kite," Harold Bordenave; a "merlton," Robert Johnson; a "white boy," Rodney Landry; a "punkin," William Robinson; a "pig," Ronald Gant; two "pollies," Pauline Phillips and Pauline St. Cyr; a "moon," Lawrence Williams; a "brick" Clarence Brickley; and "Blindy," Gerald Mitchell.

### *This Cat Can Dance!*

Remember "Tucky?" (Edward Hebert) who was considered by many to be the best male dancer in school. Most of us loved to dance and we had fun. We danced during the third and fourth semesters. White tee shirts and tennis shoes were required. We did square dances, the waltz, (Remember: *Dance Ballerina Dance!*) The fox trot, and the tango, of course with a "black" accent. Sometimes I got a chance to dance with Mrs. Helena W. Burrell, who was very agile and light on her feet. She was probably the lightest dance partner I ever had! Social highlights included Homecoming. The football game was usually played in mid-October. Peter Duplessis was the quarterback in 1958. Everyone was expected to dress for homecoming, whether or not you were part of the official court or parade of attendants. In 1958, we let *Lyndia "Green be our (homecoming) Queen."* But in the Spring of 59 the Student Council sponsored the first Spring festival and Lola Taylor was the very first Spring queen. During our senior year we had a "Sadie Hawkins" dance. I was flattered when Sonja Bundy invited me!

Highlights of the Spring semesters always included the Musical, held in the Booker T. Washington Auditorium and, of course, the graduation which was held at Municipal Auditorium. I will never forget when we were juniors, the Class of 58 graduated on May 31, 1958, the first day that public buses and streetcars were desegregated. On my way to the auditorium that night I rode right behind the bus driver who was not very pleased, but he said nothing. Some of the black patrons were critical because I dared to use this new privilege. I learned to my shock that while most Blacks accepted the *principle* of desegregation, many were hesitant about using it. Later, in the fall of that same year a number of our senior Clark classmates enrolled at LSUNO, the first Louisiana state university to begin classes on a non-segregated basis. A large number of us subsequently enrolled at LSUNO the next fall.

### *The Faculty*

We were witnesses to several other historic events. During the fall of 1957, Central High School in Little Rock Arkansas was desegregated and we became familiar with names like Minnijean Brown and Ernest Green, who I later met in the NAACP. In 1958 Governor Faubus

closed all of the schools in Little Rock to prevent desegregation, and Mr. Richards had us watch a TV documentary called, "The Lost Class of '59," Unlike our class, most black seniors in Little Rock did not attend school for an entire year.

February 12, 1958 was another unforgettable date. For the first time in recent memory it *snowed!* Although I was sitting by the window in Miss Rosa Bias's English class, I didn't notice it until Elaine Hackett and Gail Glapion ran toward the window exclaiming, "*It's snowing!*" Very little learning took place the rest of that day.

During the fall, 1957 the Russians launched the first man made satellite, *Sputnik*, and it became a theme in the Spring musical written by Dr. Henry Williams, called, "Beep Peeps Earthly!" It was about an imaginary space visitor who came to earth and visited several major cities and land marks around the earth. Claudia Green, our class valedictorian, sang one of the hit songs, *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

A number of us were members of Clark's first baseball team in 1958: Harold Bordenave, Peter Duplessis, Jimmie Husband, Rodney Landry, Robert Nelson, Kermit "Fuzzy" Deribigny-Roberts, and yours truly. Several of us attended Bayou Boys State, where Paul Robertson lost a close race for the governorship. Our ladies did even better attending the first ever Bayou Girls State. Claudia Green was elected the first governor of Bayou Girls State

### *Working in the Office*

Many of us worked in the office along with Mrs. Ethel Darenbourg Barnes, (Miss "D") the secretary, and the assistant principals, first, Walter E. Morial and later James A. Gayle. I learned many organizational skills, especially from Mr. Morial, and later his younger brother, Dutch, who became New Orleans' first African American mayor. Both were always willing to share information. During the summers I worked with Hayward Henry, Gail Glapion, Maureen Fortier, Lyndia Green, Jeanette Knox, Joan Truehill, and other students, along with faculty like Mrs. Boucree, Mr. Flanagan, Mrs. Langie, and Ms Tervalon to work on class scheduling. These skills served me well later in life. Hayward and I also used to ring the school bell. In fact, I believe I was the first official bell ringer. One winter the electric bell froze and I had to ring the hand bell for a couple of days.. Mr. Richards cautioned me to ring it away from my ears, because that's how he had lost his hearing. I later learned that he could hear very little when his back was turned to you. I picked up many new skills and learn interesting facts by working in the office. Mr. Richards would always choose one of his favorites to bring his lunch, usually Ruby Gosserand, but sometimes Edna Williams, or Earline Taylor.

### *The Faculty*

We had an outstanding and dedicated faculty. Many of them had been forced into teaching because racism limited their career choices, but there were gifted mathematicians (Boucree,

Daniels, Grubbs, and Langie), and scientists, "molecule (Lamar) Smith, Hamilton Lee, "the mad scientist," Henry Williams who taught Physics as well as business math, along with Roosevelt Flanagan. We had outstanding musical artists (Yvonne Busch and Marjorie Dickerson and literary geniuses. Both of my Biology teachers, A.C. Tervalon and Joyce McKee Verrett later joined the faculty at Dillard. I observed and later adopted Mrs. D.T. Aaron's skills as general chairman of homecoming activities. I learned not only how to type, but also composition at the typewriter in Mrs Winifred Lowery's class. This saved me a lot of time during my later career.

Fortunately our faculty was not selfish but used their gifts to teach and instill pride into their students. Clark students were almost cocky because they knew that they were good. Today I often cringe when I hear young black students and parents complain about taking "tests." We knew that we not only had to take tests, but had to be twice as good and we relished the challenge. Probably a majority of our faculty were master teachers, several later earned doctorates: Olympia E. Boucree, Herbert McCollum and Henry Williams; another (Elliot Willard) was awarded an honorary doctorate for outstanding service. Several later became principals and/or public administrators: Delores T. Aaron, Juanita Boniface James A. Gayle, Walter E. Morial, Marie E. Samborne and Elliot Willard. My American history teacher, Andrew Douglas combined teaching with another career in the ministry. Several were outstanding athletic coaches: Jesse Blakeley, Alfred J. Collins, Andrew Douglas, Turner Thomas and J. Victor Vavasseur.

### *Saying Goodbye!*

Before our senior class year began, our original class was divided as a result of the opening of George W. Carver in the fall, 1958. Friends who had begun school together 12 years earlier were split up. St. Bernard Avenue became the dividing line between Clark and Carver. About half of the faculty and nearly half of the class became founding members of George W. Carver, Sr. High School, the first brand new high school constructed for African Americans since Booker T. Washington had opened in 1942. Many seniors who lived in Carver's district remained at Clark, however, especially athletes, band and choir members and others Mr. Richards considered "highly desirable." Thus beginning in the fall of 1958 for the first time in nearly a decade, Clark would operate on a normal school schedule, i.e. 8:30AM -3:20PM.

During our senior year Claude Smith was elected Class President; no surprise - he had been Sophomore and Junior Class President. As we prepared for graduation, we broke precedent and selected a different style of class rings, the same as had been worn by Booker T. Washington's Class of 1958. Mine cost \$29.72. I still wear it every June 4. I thought I had lost it as a result of Hurricane Katrina, but found it two years later. During our senior year Clyde Smith suggested that senior dress up on Tuesdays. Mrs. Eagan was not impressed and remarked, "the seniors are so bad they have to dress up to distinguish them from underclassmen." However, this became a tradition that lasted for many years at Clark.

Competition for top honors was a close race among Claudia Green, Maureen Fortier, and Joan Truchill. Claudia became Valedictorian and Maureen, Salutatorian, Joan was only a fraction

of a percentage point behind both of them. Many of us chose to go to college. As stated earlier, more than 40 of us applied for admission to LSUNO, probably because of the low tuition of \$25 per semester which was a bargain for my parents because two of my older sisters completed college in 1959.

### *After Graduation*

Several of our classmates enrolled in Dillard's new pre-freshman program during the summer after graduation and distinguished themselves as members of Dillard's class of 1963. Both the valedictorian, Claudia Green and Salutatorian, Maureen Fortier matriculated at Xavier and were members of Xavier's class of 1963. A number of classmates such as Harold "Kite" Bordenave, Joseph Avery and Lawrence Williams went upriver to Southern and became involved in the state's first sit-ins during the spring of 1960. Joan Truehill and I became actively involved with the NAACP Youth Council during the summer of 1960. I became president, Joan was treasurer and Pauline Phillips was our Financial Secretary. Many Clarkites became active participants of the Civil Rights Movements, including Jerome Smith (Class of 57) and Aretha Class of 56) and Doris Castle (Class of 60. Hayward Henry participated with us in the first sit-in protest in 1960. There's a picture of him on the front page of *The Louisiana Weekly* in September 1960. Hayward (Mtangulizi) became actively involved in the Civil Rights and Peace movements of the sixties. Gail Moore Glapion was elected to the Orleans Parish School Board and served as its President. Many classmates enjoyed successful careers in education, healthcare, building trades, public service, hospitality, armed services, etc. Thais Harris Clark Practically all of us were blessed to become contributing members of our respective communities all across the nation. The majority of us stayed near New Orleans until Hurricane Katrina scattered us to many distant places we would never have considered. Some of us returned stronger than ever, (those who couldn't do without Patton's hot sausage, Hubig's pies, and crunchy French bread for real po boys) but many remain in their new home outside Louisiana today, where they have exported genuine Louisiana soul creole food and culture.

The ravage of time continues to take its toll on us, some have gone on to the great beyond. However, as the rest of us approach the biblical age of "three score and ten," we can thank God that we are still ALIVE.

### *Coming Down the Home Stretch*

Over the last five years the ageless twins, "Father Time" and "Old Age" have closed the distance between us and life's end. All of us still living have surpassed "three score and ten." We keep fighting the unending battle to live, but those twins are still undefeated. We lost a number of close friends, The timeless **Dolores T. Aaron** left us in 2012. I'll never forget her. Mrs. Aaron served as director of NORD and gave my 15 year old son his first job. Not only did he earn his first pay check, but he also learned personal responsibility and important leadership skills. Following her home-going, many of our classmates gathered to reminisce about her, as well as

fond memories at our alma mater. **Dr. Elliott Willard** followed Mrs. Aaron not long afterwards that year. Several of his children continue to carry on his example of public service. "**Miss D,**" **Ethel Darensbourg Barnes**, Clark's longtime secretary, also left us. The many fond memories appended to her obituary notice by former students who honed their skills in the office, attest both to her effective clerical skills, as well as her endearing personality. Earlier this year **Miss Yvonne Busch**, the popular band director for most of Clark's first decade, transitioned from this world to the next. Although she spent more years at our sister school, George W. Carver, many Clarkities attended and participated in her home-going services.

Since our last reunion smaller groups of us have gotten together; several times as guests of "**Sister**" **Sonja Bundy Salvant**, a fearless "Street preacher" and true servant of Christ. Her gatherings at Dooky Chase provided an opportunity for a number of Bulldogs to interact with favorite teachers: **Dr. Olympia E. Boucree**, **Mrs. Helena W. Burrell**, and **Ms Adrienne C. Tervalon**. I often run into Ms Tervalon at Rouse's. I also see Dr. Henry Williams there as well. Before I retired from UNO, I sometime saw Dr. Williams in UNO's cafeteria. I pointed him out to some of my own students, as one of the great faculty members we had at Clark. These teachers continue to serve as a link to our past as well as the future.

On separate occasions some of us have had "mini reunions" to host visiting classmates, **Sylvia Leufroy Zanders** and **Regina Hayes Quillens**. By chance when in Atlanta, I met Regina's pastor from North Carolina. When he realized that I was from New Orleans, he spoke glowingly about this beautiful sister from New Orleans who had relocated after Katrina, and had become such a blessing to his congregation. It didn't take too long for me to realize that he was speaking about Regina. A few months ago, a number of Clarkites attended the memorial service and repast of our dear classmate, **Dr. Guilarrne Bazzle Leary**. Guillarne had been a fixture in the Psychology Department at SUNO for more than 30 years.

Last year when I was honored by the local chapter of the ACLU, I was greatly thrilled and humbled by the presence of classmates **Lyndia Green Faust** and **Sigmund Joshua**. Sigmund's younger sister, **Bernette Joshua Johnson**, is our state supreme court Chief Justice. Bernette is a Cohen alumna, but she really represents all of us well! Our fellow alumni, **Gwendolyn Suarez Carriere**, (Class of 1957), keeps the different classes abreast of the whereabouts and well-being of Clarkities around the globes. It was no surprise that several of us including Lyndia and **Ann Raymond Parfaite** attended the dedication of the home of the late civil rights lawyer **A.P. Tureaud**. His home on Pauger Street was added to the national registry of historic sites. His son, **A.P. Tureaud, Jr.**, a member of Clark's Class of 1953, recalled in his father's biography which he co-authored, sad details of his personal abuse and mistreatment as the first black undergraduate to attend LSU in 1953.

### *Post Retirement*

With the exception of our venerable **Lyndia**, all of us are now retired, at least from our

first career. And even Lyndia had an earlier career as a practicing attorney. Those of us who are retired educators are only retired from our paid assignments, as we continue to teach, and volunteer our services in a myriad of community organizations. **Thais Harris Clark** continues to thrill audiences all over the world with her vocal rendition of authentic New Orleans music. Our deceased classmate, **Patrick Joseph** lives on through the voice of his son, **Lebron (LBJ)**, who can be seen daily as a co-host of *WGNO's New With A Twist*. At least three classmates have gone into the ministry: Sonja, Joan Truehill Smith and Mtangulizi Sanyika (Hayward Henry). I'm sure many of us serve our churches as lay leaders, or in choirs, or as religious education teachers and ushers. I have been actively involved with the NAACP since 1960 and attended every national convention since 1961.

### *Joseph S. Clark High School*

Our school survives - the building that is. It has undergone several renovations after a major fire and Hurricane Katrina. The building looks as good as ever, but it's not the same school we attended. It is no longer a *senior* high school, but includes junior high students. Clark is now a charter school with a racially mixed faculty. There are a few Latino students sprinkled among the largely African American population. Several years ago, while attending an alumni meeting, we learned that more than a hundred students were homeless; some slept in different places each night. School officials had to arrange for some students to wash their uniforms on campus. They also appealed for shoes and clothing for the neediest, especially those who were going to job interviews. This past March, Lyndia and I were among more than a dozen Clark alumni who attended "Career Day". Shockingly, one administrator informed us that most students did not know how to sing the Alma Mater. I tried to give these students a sense of the school history, how we had thrived amidst a sea of racial adversity and discrimination. Actually, I spent less time telling them how to prepare for college or technical school, but how to survive. "Stay safe," I admonished, "by staying away from unsafe places and people." I urged them to make wise decisions and challenged them to stay alive for their 10th anniversary reunion in 2024 and related how someone interrupted our 50th class reunion in 2009 while we were celebrating the reunion as a part of the Class of 2009's graduation at Franklin Avenue Baptist Church. One disgruntled rejected suitor fired several shots at a rival who dared to attend the graduation with his would-be lover. The police held everyone in place for nearly an half-hour, and by the grace of God no one was hurt and we were able to continue our reunion without further incident.

### *Friends Forever: Living and Dead*

Sadly, however, since our 50th reunion some classmates have crossed over into eternity; some unknown, but these we know: **Joseph Lionel Avery, Larry Caesar, John Curtis, Betty Filer Gaynor, Gerald Houston, Guillarne Bazzle Leary and Jimmy Raymond DeBose**. God willing, perhaps we will all meet again with smiles upon our faces and eternal joy in our hearts.

*"Now the time has drawn near for the ending of the year when to Clark High we must*

*sadly say goodbye*" was the opening line of our class song. Who knew or could predict that 55 years later about half of our class members would still be alive. Let us welcome every opportunity to meet and embrace any classmate. Forget petty quarrels about even smaller long-forgotten incidents and cherish any time we can spend with each other. Whose knows the next time could be the last time we meet! We've come so far, but we still have farther to go, with so little time to complete our journeys. In 1959 could any of us have predicted that a black man would become president during our lifetime, or that members of our race would sit in the highest corporate and civic offices in the land? What would Principal Richards think about the progress made in and outside of New Orleans? Wouldn't he be pleased that the Lafitte and St. Bernard Projects have been rebuilt and upgraded? The reopening of the Carver Theater where Clark held its first graduation ceremonies would be a source of rejoicing. He'd certainly embrace the progress, but he would greatly lament the physical and spiritual decay in the neighborhoods that once housed Clark's students. Hundreds of sturdy, but empty houses in the 7th, 8th, and 9th Wards stand as stark reminders of a greater past. While Katrina was a major culprit, much of the deterioration occurred before that calamity, and those once safe and happy neighborhoods have become havens for criminals. Therefore, let us commit our remaining days, not simply to physically remake our old school, or old neighborhoods, but to help reclaim that old Bulldog spirit which helped us to withstand and overcome great challenges of racism, poverty, ignorance and intolerance. That is a rich legacy we can pass on, not only to our own children, but their children's children for many generations to come.