

Preface

This is the story of Father Paul Washington and his twenty-five years as rector of the Episcopal Church of the Advocate in North Philadelphia. Many of Paul's friends have encouraged him to write about his role in the tempestuous times we have lived through together in Philadelphia, but I *required* him to do it. His story has personal significance for many Philadelphians, and historical significance for any who care about the future of our cities, and the role of the urban church in shaping that future.

During Paul's tenure, the Church of the Advocate became a gathering place and a place of shelter for the Black Power movement, the Black Panther Party, the Black Economic Development Conference, and numerous other groups that rose up in Philadelphia to challenge racial and social injustice. Paul saw himself—and to this day is regarded by many—as the shepherd of a very diverse flock of men and women who have struggled to convert themselves and our society from racism and sexism, taking action on the city streets, in the churches, and in the halls of government. Within the Episcopal Church, the Advocate gained both fame and notoriety as the site of the ordination of the first women priests in the United States; and it was from the Advocate congregation that an African American named Barbara Harris was called to become the first woman bishop in the history of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The autobiography begins in Charleston, South Carolina, with Paul Washington's mother marking him for the ministry before his birth. It culminates with his sermon in Boston, Massachusetts, at the consecration of Bishop Barbara Harris, an event that he regarded as a new birth of ministry for the whole church. But the heart of the action is in North Philadelphia, at the corner of 18th and Diamond Streets, where for a quarter of a century Paul Washington labored to create a new understanding of what it means to be a church that serves the people of our cities.

When the Philadelphia Divinity School conferred upon Paul Washington the degree of doctor of divinity in 1970, they hailed him "disturbing prophet and healing priest." Like many other citizens of Philadelphia and members of the Episcopal Church throughout the country, I have felt that disturbing and healing power. It has been my privilege to know and work with Paul and Christine Washington, his wife, in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania since 1967. I was convinced that their story and the story of the Church of the Advocate needed to be told, as a matter of pride for the City of Philadelphia, and for the health of the whole church.

I salute Father Paul for his honesty about himself and his personal struggles, and his willingness to tell it like it is about the rest of us. Paul once said to me that he didn't know whether he loved God most or feared him most but he knew that he felt both fear *and* love toward him. "So if I have to offend *you* to please *God*, I'll do it," he added. "That is what kept me open—wanting to be on good terms with God."

As you read this autobiography, if you feel offended in any way, remember that it has been written with God's judgment, not yours or mine, in view.

David McL. Gracie
Philadelphia

Introduction | David McL. Gracie

To understand Fr. Washington, it is important to know something about the city in which he has carried out most of his active ministry. I offer my own early impressions of Philadelphia to provide a background for the reader, who should be aware that for the most part they are subjective impressions, although they allow me to identify some objectively real people and events.

From words about our city, I proceed to offer my own thoughts about the motivations and inner drive of the man whose story this is. I conclude with two real-life parables, which perhaps capture the flavor of the priest and his ministry better than my ruminations, however well founded they may be in the long years of our collaboration on many causes and in the production of this book.

City of Brotherly Love

In August, 1967, when I came with my family to live in Philadelphia, the smell of burning was still in the air of my hometown, Detroit, Michigan. We did not leave Detroit because of the racial uprising of that summer, but it marked our passage indelibly. St. Joseph's Episcopal Church, where I had been the pastor, was very close to the area where the disturbances began, so our parishioners and my young family had lived through the fear of those days of rioting in the streets, police repression, and military

occupation. We went to bed at night choking on the smoke from the nearby neighborhoods that were aflame.

For those of us who thought in Biblical terms, the long, hot summers of the late 1960s spoke of God's judgment on us all for the years of racial discrimination and America's denial of hope to the poor. Coming to Philadelphia to work on the staff of Bishop Robert L. DeWitt, I believed the church had a role to play in interpreting these events and in mobilizing support for the civil rights movement, with its promise of a better day. I could not help but wonder in what form the judgment on Detroit might reappear, striking the city that was our new home. Would there be a similar shaking of the foundations here? The ingredients were all present, as I discovered in my first survey of civic life in Philadelphia. I found the familiar, unresolved tension between heightened demands for racial justice and "law and order" resistance to change: on the one side anger mixed with hope, on the other racism with fear. Yet this city would hold itself together as Detroit could not. What made the difference?

I had come too late to town to experience the period of governmental reform under Mayors Joseph Clark and Richardson Dilworth, a reform begun after World War II that had included passage of the Fair Employment Practices Ordinance, establishment of the Commission on Human Relations, the appointment of enlightened leaders in the police department, and forward strides in public health. I could see the physical transformation of the city that had taken place in those good government years. It was evident especially in downtown Philadelphia and in the renewed homes of Society Hill. This famed urban renewal had had its downside, however, in the displacement of many poor black families. No, all had not been golden in the golden era, which I was told had come to an end when Richardson Dilworth resigned as mayor to run unsuccessfully for governor of Pennsylvania in 1962.

I arrived only in time for the race for reelection of Mayor James H. J. Tate, Dilworth's successor and a politician in an older mold. Tate won the race by only 11,000 votes, against Republican candidate Arlen Specter (now U.S. senator from Pennsylvania). What made the difference for the incumbent mayor was the law and

order reputation of his commissioner of police, Frank Rizzo. White voters were led to believe by the mayor and by Walter Anenberg's *Philadelphia Inquirer* that it was the firm and sometimes brutal hand of Rizzo that was saving the City of Brotherly Love from the looting and burning they saw on their TV screens in places like Watts and Detroit. Rizzo's tough cop image won reelection for Tate and would eventually lead "the cop who would be king" (the perceptive title of a Rizzo biography by Peter Binzen) to the mayoralty himself for two successive terms.

The reforming zeal of the earlier years lived on in citizen campaigns on issues like raising the piteously low state welfare grants, and organizing a citizens' review board to curb the notorious police brutality. Efforts to improve race relations and wipe out discriminatory practices were made by strong leaders of the Human Relations Commission and private institutions like The Fellowship Commission and Fellowship House. But what most caught my attention was the crusade for educational reform in the city schools.

The Philadelphia Board of Education was chaired by former mayor Richardson Dilworth, who was one of the most impressive civic leaders I have ever met. "D'Artagnan in long pants and a double-breasted suit," Dilworth's old friend Joe Clark called him. He and Clark, then a U.S. Congressman from Philadelphia, represented a breed I had known little of before—patricians dedicated to the well-being of their city. Dilworth's school board meetings were a welcome surprise. Televised by the local public TV station, they were run in a way that allowed citizens of Philadelphia to make themselves heard. There was more democracy at these meetings than in any meeting of the Philadelphia City Council that I attended. Dilworth and his superintendent of schools, Mark Shedd, were trying to build broad public support for curriculum reform, better pay for teachers, and more adequate budgets for a school system that had been allowed to decay.

On November 17, 1967, the two tendencies in Philadelphia civic life that were becoming so clear to me—one toward reform, the other toward repression—collided when Police Commissioner Rizzo ordered a police billy club charge against black high school students demonstrating in front of the offices of the Board of Edu-

cation. This brutal attack sent out shock waves that would affect the politics of the city for years to come, adding greatly to racial polarization. And yet, the center held; the city did not erupt.

On April 4, 1968, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, Washington, D.C., and other urban centers experienced riot and rebellion. In Philadelphia, where Dr. King had visited only recently to mobilize support for the Poor People's March on Washington, the pain of his loss was felt as deeply as anywhere else in the nation. Thousands marched and gathered for prayer and speech making, but people did not lash out at each other or tear at the fabric of their own communities. Singing gospel hymns in the overflowing balcony of a historic black church, I marveled that my adopted city was not in flames. I wondered at the patience, the endurance, and the hope of my new neighbors and fellow citizens. "Will the anchor hold in the storm of life?" asks an old Baptist hymn; I knew where the anchor was holding on that day. It was not in the law and order reaction of Mayor Tate and Commissioner Rizzo, banning gatherings of twelve or more on the streets of the city. This move, which in fact appeared unconstitutional, was simply ludicrous when seen against the background of the discipline of black Philadelphians.

Philadelphia has certainly known civil disturbances. Newspapers reported "race riots" during World War II, and as recently as the summer of 1964, \$3 million worth of damage was done in North Philadelphia, where one life was lost and several were injured in the rioting and looting of stores following an arrest incident blown wildly out of proportion by rumors. Nor has the city been free from other manifestations of violence and rage. Far from it. Yet in the time that I have lived here, there has been a capacity to recover from the brink, to maintain some level of communication between different segments of society, to regroup and try once again, that has kept alive the vision of a city existing for all its residents.

In September, 1970, when Commissioner Rizzo staged armed raids on the Black Panther offices in Philadelphia following the killing of a Philadelphia park policeman, there was reason to fear the worst. A national convention sponsored by the Black Panther Party was about to take place in Philadelphia, and local Panther

leaders, falsely accused and arrested, were being held in prison for extremely high bail. (News photos of young Black Panthers stripped of their clothes on the street at police gunpoint went around the world.) Yet black and white citizens of Philadelphia rallied to bail Panther leaders out of jail, to find adequate meeting space for the thousands who came to the convention, and to put legal restraints on further police raids.

In August, 1980, when a white policeman shot and killed a black Philadelphian named William Green, the conditions for riot once again heated up. In the tension on the city streets, fifteen people were injured in various incidents, but no one was killed and the peace was soon restored. Neal R. Peirce and Jerry Hagstrom, in *The Book of America*, found the reason to lie "in the strength and political importance of the black community and the mainstream black political leadership . . . who convinced young demonstrators not to turn the confrontation with the police into a riot."¹ The book notes that "the same week, racial tension in Miami resulted in 18 dead and 400 injured."

Citizenship is of the essence here. In my city of Detroit, which erupted in bloody rioting in 1943 and in 1967—the second time in ways from which the city will never fully recover—many of the inhabitants were people simply passing through. In Philadelphia, this "city of neighborhoods," many ethnic groups have long histories that bind them to a location. Neighborhood racial segregation is the rule, with poverty concentrated in large black sections like North Philadelphia and wealth in all-white Chestnut Hill and the white suburbs. But there are some lively exceptions, like the racially mixed Germantown and Mount Airy neighborhoods; and white flight to the suburbs was nothing like what I had known in Detroit—certainly nothing like the panicked exodus that followed the 1967 uprising.

Most important in such considerations is the long history and deep-rootedness of black neighborhoods and institutions in Philadelphia. Among those who have recounted the early history of black Philadelphia is W. E. B. Du Bois, who in 1899 gave us his classic sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro*. Du Bois ended his book with an appeal to white and black Philadelphians to act

so as to "realize what the great founder of the city meant when he named it the City of Brotherly Love."²

A new edition of Du Bois's book, published during my first year in Philadelphia, has remained one of my resources. Du Bois's account of earlier black religious institutions and self-help organizations prepares one to understand how a project like the Rev. Leon Sullivan's Opportunities Industrialization Council might be expected to flourish here. Alongside Rev. Sullivan, whose OIC became the best-known job training and placement program in the country in the 1960s, other black professionals were making their presence felt in civic life. The Rev. Henry Nichols was vice-chair of the activist school board, while Gratz High School principal Marcus Foster would win the Philadelphia Award in 1969 for his educational leadership in the inner city. Sadie Alexander was the dynamic leader of the Human Relations Commission. These and others in relatively high positions were using their status as a base from which to struggle for change and to keep the peace. Rev. Sullivan used his strong church base at Zion Baptist to organize black pastors to carry out effective consumer boycotts of companies that failed to hire or promote black workers. Attorney Raymond Pace Alexander applied his legal skills in winning the U.S. Supreme Court decision desegregating Girard College.

Grass-roots activism found expression in organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality, led by Bill Mathis, with both black and white participation in its direct action campaigns. Best known and most broadly represented in black neighborhoods when the cry for justice was heard was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its charismatic leader, Cecil B. Moore. Moore led the protest marches against the exclusion of black children from Girard College, a school for orphaned white boys, situated in the heart of black North Philadelphia. The "CP" of NAACP was often translated "Cecil's People"—a sign of the esteem for this popular criminal lawyer, known for his white suits and big cigars, his profanity, and his neverending commitment to civil rights.

That some white Philadelphians shared William Penn's found-

ing vision is worth noting in any calculus of what makes for peace in this town. In 1967, Dilworth openly condemned the action of the Philadelphia police in attacking the demonstrating school children, white church leaders also spoke out, and new organizations were formed to combat racism. In 1968, the racially integrated American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the white antiracist group People for Human Rights challenged the "limited emergency proclamation" of Mayor Tate. In 1970, the Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends put up property bail for the release of imprisoned Black Panther leaders. Robert Landis, chairman of the Philadelphia Bar Association, helped obtain use of the gymnasium at Temple University to house the events of the Black Panther convention, and federal judge John Fullam enjoined the Philadelphia police from actions that would further inflame the city. The legal action had been organized at an emergency meeting held at the headquarters of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania.

In this company of citizens who could agitate for justice while holding to brotherly love were the white bishop I had come to town to serve and the black priest in whom he placed his trust. Bishop DeWitt's strategy for urban ministry centered on the Church of the Advocate, so he wasted little time in introducing me, his new urban missionary, to Fr. Paul Washington. Only a few years earlier, the bishop himself had come from Detroit, where I had known him. He, too, was seeking a city with foundations. He had the good sense to recognize that the rector of the Church of the Advocate, that great gothic stone pile in the midst of North Philadelphia, had been a major force for unity, as he would continue to be in those divisive days.

Pastor to the Other Sheep

One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.³

Just as W. E. B. Du Bois helps me understand Paul Washington's city, I find that these words from his *The Souls of Black Folk* provide a key to understanding Fr. Washington himself. My own sense of loss because of the tearing asunder of the fabric of my hometown makes me value very highly those lives that can endure tension without splitting apart, and those people who have the dogged spiritual strength that can hold a community together.

Paul Washington is very frank about the "warring ideals in [his] one dark body." Black priest in a predominantly white denomination, he has directly challenged the prejudices and power imbalances of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A. For twenty-five years (from 1962 to 1987), that religious body relied upon him to carry out its ministry and mission in a poor, inner-city neighborhood, to be a sign that the Episcopal Church was capable of overcoming its race and class biases in serving as a church for all people. Yet how many in the Episcopal Church understood the nature of the man to whom they assigned this noble role?

Was this black priest what most white churchmen wanted him to be—a reconciler, a moderating influence on a community that seemed on the verge of revolt, and a trusted interpreter of the meaning of the social turbulence to members of the white establishment? Or was he himself an agent of revolt, adept at using the established Episcopal Church as a cover and a shelter for movements of black liberation that otherwise might be isolated and stifled? The truth is that he was both; and these two roles at times caused stress not only within the Episcopal Church but also within Paul Washington himself. However, the issue that brought him into the most direct confrontation with his church, and that carried the greatest threat (as he perceived it) to his own position in the church, had to do with women's demands for equal treatment.

It was at the Church of the Advocate in North Philadelphia that the first women were ordained priests, in a service opposed by the highest authorities in the Episcopal Church and watched by people around the world. The ordination took place on July 29, 1974—"that awful day," as Paul called it, "when we were disobedient to the church and obedient to God." Barbara Harris, a pa-

rishioner of the Advocate and protégé of Fr. Washington, carried the cross in leading the procession. She would later become the first woman bishop in the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Preaching at the service in Boston where Barbara Harris was consecrated as bishop, on February 11, 1989, before a congregation of 8,000, Fr. Washington said: "We cannot and we must not overlook the fact that this woman who is being consecrated today is not just an American woman. She is a black woman. Called at one time Negro. Called at one time colored." He held her "twoness" before the congregation at the very moment when—if I, a white, may be so bold as to make this judgment—he broke through the boundary of twoness himself and achieved the goal Du Bois described in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.⁴

When telling his own story, Paul Washington uses the "twoness" text from Du Bois to describe the warring ideals within his own body, not in the context of his ambivalent relationship with his church but in his relationship to the two tendencies within the black struggle for liberation, as represented by the lives and teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. In 1970, Paul Washington had to decide whether, as a Christian minister who had preached and practiced Martin Luther King's ethic of non-violence, he could invite the Black Panther Party into his church.

With their rhetoric of "Off the pig!" and their stated willingness to use guns in self-defense, were they not opposed to what he and King stood for? Typically—and in this regard he is very much an Anglican—Paul answered this question in a way that avoided an either/or.

"I felt in tune with Martin on the one hand, and with Malcolm and the Panthers on the other. For me it became not a matter of one or the other, but within my 'one dark body' the two represented what for me was wholeness."

Another dividing line of potentially warring ideals was class. Paul and Christine Washington, an educated, refined minister and his wife, had moved into North Philadelphia in 1962 to live next door to their church in a neighborhood that the then Philadelphia police commissioner called "the Jungle" because of its crime and gang activity. Paul lived and worked there but shuttled back and forth to the affluent suburbs of the Main Line and to Chestnut Hill, where he became a speaker much in demand, called upon to interpret inner-city conditions to suburban church members. He chastened them for their indifference, while accepting some as members of his own North Philadelphia flock, where well-to-do professional people from Bryn Mawr worshiped side by side with poor and middle-class blacks.

Related to the class divide, though not identical with it, was the line that separated the "establishment" from the "movement." Fr. Washington became a part of the establishment of the City of Philadelphia and of the Episcopal Church, serving on the Human Relations Commission of the city, as a member of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A., and taking part in political campaigns that would eventually yield black elected leaders, even in the office of mayor. He tried at all times to put his acceptability to "insiders" to work on behalf of the outsiders—the grass-roots movements for justice, to which he also belonged. "Father Washington was our legitimizer," said one community activist. Even so, on occasion he was regarded by both sides with suspicion.

And then the day came when Paul Washington, like all other

Philadelphians, could only watch helplessly the fatal clash between the members of the organization MOVE, who appeared to be the ultimate outsiders, and the City of Philadelphia, led for the first time by a mayor who was black and who had risen from poverty. When on May 13, 1985, the forces of law and order bombed and burned to death eleven men, women, and children in a residential neighborhood in West Philadelphia, even Fr. Washington, who is expected to bring the prophetic word to situations of community strife, could not find words. In the aftermath, reclaiming his role in bridging the political chasm between insider and outsider, he accepted Mayor Goode's appointment as a member of the commission to investigate the tragic events of May 13. At the same time, he became an advocate for the parole of Ramona Africa, the only adult survivor of the fire on Osage Avenue and (incredibly) the only person imprisoned as a result of the confrontation.

I believe that Paul Washington's life is an example of how from the "twoness" enforced upon black Americans there can come a creative drive toward unity that enriches us all. For the historic service of ordination of women to the priesthood at the Church of the Advocate, the women of the church prepared an altar frontal on which was sewn this paraphrase of St. Paul's words to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, black nor white, male nor female; we are one in Christ." The Episcopal Church and the City of Philadelphia have seen Father Paul and his ministry at the Advocate as a symbol of and a force for unity.

One who unifies must first see and feel the divisions within society. Paul has seen them and has felt their pain, entering easily into alliance with many of the groups of people who were separated from the mainstream. At an award night in 1985, at which it seemed the whole city had turned out to pay tribute to his love and pastoral care, Paul rather surprisingly spoke of the anger within himself, and of how—regarding this anger as a moral failing—he had asked God to take it away. God had told him, said Paul, that instead of removing it, he would show Paul how to use it for others by making him sensitive to the injustices they suffered.

From the time he arrived at the Advocate, Paul Washington reached the "other sheep," those outside the church and its assumed respectability, and those outside the political mainstream. Why was he so able to receive them, to "call them each by name"—as St. John wrote about Jesus the Good Shepherd. It was because he as a black American was always one of the outsiders himself, and he knew that; but the anger occasioned by his own experiences of exclusion and rejection on the basis of race was transmuted—he would say, "by the grace of God"—into an ability to include many.

Tales from Two Cities

Fr. Paul Washington remains active in church and community to this day. There are more stories that could be told than appear in this book, but two certainly deserve the telling, because they are parables of the life and ministry about which I have tried to provide some hints. The first was told to me by Thomas Paine Cronin, president of AFSCME District Council 47, a union of Philadelphia municipal employees. Tom Cronin was a participant along with Paul in the demonstration for the homeless in the spring of 1990, which led to their arrest, as Cronin describes.

"Arrested for disorderly conduct, after sitting down on the pavement together at City Hall, we were piled into a police wagon to be taken to the 'Roundhouse' [police headquarters at 8th and Race] to be booked. It was a very hot day, and the first thing we noticed was that the ventilator on top of the wagon was not working. They kept piling people in until we were simply jammed up against each other. Some of us pounded on the side of the van. We gesticulated to the police through a plexiglass window. They were laughing at us. For half an hour we sat there and couldn't help the panic coming on. We worried most about one of our number who was ill—a person with AIDS. Father Washington looked frail, too; he was obviously struggling to breathe.

"Then the van started up with a great lurch. At every stop, the

police driver slammed on the brakes, forcing us to bang against each other. We knew our destination and understood the arrest process, so when we arrived we expected to be let out immediately. That was not to be. It was another fifteen minutes in the van (about an hour, all told) before anyone opened the back doors. When they did, our friend with AIDS, who was jammed up against those doors, simply dropped out. A policeman stuck his head in the opening and said: 'We understand Father Paul Washington is in there. He can come out.' 'Not until everybody comes out,' said Paul. Then we were all released."⁵

The second story takes us from Philadelphia to Jerusalem—the key city in God's urban strategy. Jane Power, a participant with Paul in an interfaith peace demonstration in 1989, captures the essence of the man and his special ministry in a locale far from 18th and Diamond Streets. Inside the Old City of Jerusalem, she writes, tension mounted when the military authorities blocked passage through the Old City's gates.

"For the first time, I saw the Damascus Gate closed. Or nearly closed. A passage wide enough for one person remained, and in that passage stood a soldier, keeping most Palestinians in, letting some others leave, one by one. An old woman wanted to leave with her groceries. No. A father with small children hanging on to them. No.

"From our group, Rev. Paul Washington of Philadelphia stepped forward and with consummate dignity and a formidable baritone voice requested that his group be allowed to pass. The soldier gave way, allowing Rev. Washington to stand in the gateway like a shepherd, summoning his flock. Four among us were Palestinians; those who were not held hands, linked arms with them, and all of us came through."⁶

1. Offered to God

The key decision was made for me before I was born. My mother had made a bargain with God. She prayed, "If you will just give me a son, I will dedicate him to your service." My sister had been born in 1918, and while my mother and father were happy to have a healthy, beautiful daughter, they wanted a son, too. Six months went by in 1920, and my mother had still not conceived. It was then that she made her prayer.

When I was born in Charleston, South Carolina, on May 26, 1921, my course had already been carefully set for me by my mother. As I grew into awareness, I learned that I was to be a minister. I was expected to join the church and to be working at a part-time job by the age of ten. Then when I grew up, I was to go to college. My mother named me Paul because she so admired the courage and the eloquence of the Apostle Paul. She had dedicated me to God's service.

Even before I was ten years old, my mother got me a job with a friend of hers named Saxton Wilson, a printer. At about the same time, she took me to Memorial Baptist Church to the revival meeting and sat me down on the mourners' bench. There I found myself deeply moved, emotionally shaken by the preaching of an evangelist called Rev. Rickenbacker. I cried almost hysterically, and I remember people crowding around me and saying, "He's got the Spirit. He's been converted." When I regained my compo-

sure, I stood before the congregation and said, "Reverend White and members of Memorial Baptist Church, I feel that I am converted and I would like to be baptized and become a member of Memorial Baptist Church." That was my decision for Jesus.

For all my early experience in the Baptist Church, I could never see myself as a fiery preacher like Rev. Rickenbacker. It would not be until my college days at Lincoln University that I would enter the Episcopal Church, the church in which I felt that I could fulfill my mother's vow. I knew vaguely of the Episcopal Church in my growing up, but it did not seem to be a place for people like us, who lived "up d' road." Our family had class, but not the right kind to fit the image of Negro Episcopalians in Charleston.

An incident that illustrates the very real class structure among Charleston Negroes occurred in my high school years. The public high school taught classes only through the eleventh grade, so college-bound Negroes enrolled in either the Roman Catholic high school or Avery Institute (a combined high school and teacher's college). I enrolled at Avery, where I found that Mr. Cox, the principal, looked down upon me. One day when I was with Robert Morrison, a classmate and friend of mine, Mr. Cox approached us and said, "Morrison, you should not be playing with Washington. He is not our kind." To Robert's credit, he told the principal that he liked me and we were friends. At this, Mr. Cox turned to me and said, "Washington, you do not belong here at Avery. I don't want you in my school."

When I told my aunts, with whom I was then living, about the incident, they said I did not have to go to Avery and promptly enrolled me at Immaculate Conception High School. But a week later, Mr. Cox came by, telling my aunts that I had misunderstood him and that he wanted me back. I returned to Avery, which was by far the superior school. My aunts were schoolteachers themselves, and my mother a school librarian, but we were judged not to have the right family background, nor did we live in the right section of the Negro community.

The neighborhood where I grew up was, in fact, something of an anomaly. It was racially mixed—poor whites living alongside

black working people. We got along well with our neighbors. Black and white youngsters played together. Our white playmates ate in our homes, and, although we were never invited to eat with them, we knew they did not eat as well as we did. Yet, in spite of these daily interactions, every Sunday evening on our block there would be a "race war."

The white boys at one end of First Street would gather bricks and stones, and at the other end of our little unpaved block, the colored boys would do the same—all in full view of each other. Then as the darkness descended, we would begin saturating the air above us with missiles directed toward each other. One evening one of their bricks landed squarely on the left side of my head, smashing into my skull and knocking me unconscious for about fifteen minutes. When I regained consciousness, my "soldiers" helped me to my feet to lead me home. Leon said, "Paul, your daddy is going to beat you when he comes home from church. Your head broke."

Part of my skull was visibly fractured, yet I felt no pain. We sat in the house waiting for Daddy to come home. He would be angry because I had been in a street fight. When he walked in, I showed him my skull. To my shock and to the relief of us all, he simply said, "Son, I'm going to have to take you to the hospital." We went there on the trolley, and I had neurosurgery the next morning. I will carry the stigma of that experience to the grave. But all these people were a part of the extended family to which I belonged. In Charleston, I knew whites as family just as I knew them as foe.

Certain lessons of class and race were taught early in life. In the South, Negro children had to learn early about white people. We learned that they had a need to believe they were superior to colored people. Regardless of what they said or did, we were always supposed to cause them to feel "white is right." When my friends Milton, Louise, and Johnnie stopped coming to our house and we could no longer go to theirs, I questioned my mother about this change. She answered matter of factly, "They are white, and white people think that they are better than colored people, and they are

afraid that if they associate with us they will no longer be seen as being better." She did not elaborate any further.

What I find so interesting as I look back upon those years is that my mother never felt the need to assure me that, in spite of how much the white man tried to make us feel inferior, we had worth. But everything about her said that we were somebody. One day she made this very clear to a white insurance agent who regularly came to our home to collect the fifteen-cent premium. While sitting on the sofa in our living room, he made the mistake of putting his feet up on the coffee table.

My mother exploded: "Get your feet off my table, get out of my house, and never come here again!" I was petrified. But he quickly got up, closed his book, and left, without collecting the money. Mother said nothing to me about the incident, but I learned a few things from that dramatic event. I had seen a white man put in his place by a Negro woman. But I also learned that "freedom ain't free." From that day on, I had to go downtown to the insurance office to pay that fifteen-cent premium. And even as young as I was, I somehow knew that my father, a Negro man, would have paid dearly for insulting a white man.

Later in my younger years, I had experiences that would reveal a totally different attitude about race. My mother's oldest sister, Claudia, a schoolteacher, was part of a group of about a dozen who formed an ad hoc welfare agency to help people who were poor. This group was racially mixed. It included well-to-do whites and a Negro concert pianist, Mr. Johnnie Moore, who was the most sought-after piano teacher in Charleston. At this time, I was living with my two aunts and would occasionally have to visit some of the whites to pick up the donations they were providing. I remember helping the group at Christmas as they fed two or three hundred people at the Charleston Boys Club.

In this group, whites and colored met together periodically. I was somewhat disoriented to hear rich white people call colored men and women Miss or Mister. There in the Deep South, where racism had directly or indirectly infected us all, some people seemed to have matured and risen above race, color, and class, to that image wherein we are created. They related to others as living souls.

I never knew a grandmother, but right next door to us on First Street lived "Na," a woman in her sixties, who took the part of a grandmother for us and connected us to "the country," from which she had moved. Na always wore ankle-length dresses; she chewed tobacco, used snuff, and smoked a corncob pipe. She papered her walls every spring with the colorful "funny papers," and every fall she restuffed her mattress with dried "corn shucks."

Na had lived in an isolated, secluded area where people were still in touch with the beliefs, customs, and traditions of their African forebears. She was a gripping storyteller, telling me and my sister tales about the "root doctor," who could concoct medicines from various roots that were far more effective than anything the city doctors could prescribe. But he could do even more. With a single strand of hair from a person, he could make that person love you or he could cause that person to suffer harm.

Na's people could find out truths by "turning the Bible." A person would balance the Bible on a large brass key to find out who had stolen money, for instance. Everyone's name in the community would be called out, until the calling of the thief's name would cause the Bible to flip from the key. But one of the most tragic customs of the people from the country was that of "putting bad mouth" on a person who had maliciously done someone wrong. The custom was usually carried out by an elderly man or woman, who would say, "For the rest of your life, you will always be cursed." I knew a man who had been "badmouthed." He lived under that curse, and his life was indeed wretched.

Working as a domestic and a washerwoman, Na would do a week's wash for a family for seventy-five cents. I often went with her to deliver the laundry, holding one handle of the large, oval wicker basket while she held the other. When Na cooked for the "bukrah" (white folks), she always spat in "the bukrah widdis" (the white folks' victuals). (This memory came back to me when I saw Kizzi in the TV serial "Roots" spit into the dipper of water she brought to the white girl from whose grace she had fallen although they had been childhood playmates.)

Even though Na was older than my parents, she always addressed them as Mr. Tom and Miss Mayme. We loved her dearly