

the J.R.  
**Clifford**  
project



# *Grade 11*

# *United States*

# *History*

The Writing Team  
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*Remembering the Past – To Inspire the Future.*

## **J.R. Clifford Lesson Plan**

**Title:** J. R. Clifford Bio Box

**Grade Level/Subject:** 11<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History

### **WV Content Standard(s) and Objectives:**

- SS.O.11.1.1 Demonstrate ways citizens can work cooperatively to resolve personal, local, regional, and world conflicts peacefully.
- SS.O.11.1.2 Analyze and evaluate the influence of citizen action on public policy and law making.
- SS.O.11.1.7 Research and explain the importance of the personal and political responsibilities, privileges and rights of citizens.

**Essential Question:** How did the actions taken by J. R. Clifford impact the Civil Rights movement in West Virginia as well as the rest of the country?

**Strategy to Activate Prior Knowledge:** Show several examples of Wheaties cereal boxes to the class. Discuss what type of person makes it on the box. (Heroes) What qualities make a hero?

**Vocabulary Development:** Teaching the Word: Students will create a list of 5-10 unknown words from the research materials. A class list of vocabulary words will be developed from students' lists. Assign (or let students choose) one word to teach to the class. Students should define the word, give the part of speech write a sentence using the word, and create a graphic that illustrates the definition. Post the following directions on the wall so students can read them from in front of the class.

1. Write the word on the board.
2. Say the word.
3. Show the graphic
4. Give the part of speech and the definition,
5. Read the sentence.
6. Explain the graphic.
7. Say the word again.

**Classroom Management/Organization:** Students may work individually or in pairs.

## **Instructional Strategies:**

1. Cover an empty box (cereal or similar in shape and size) with art paper. (solid color Christmas wrap works great) Draw or find an image of J.R. Clifford to place on the front of the box. Give your hero cereal a name.
2. Develop a short motto about Clifford and work the motto into the box design. (i.e., ribbon, garland, sheaf, etc.)
3. On the back side, list the “ingredients,” that is, the personal qualities that make Clifford memorable.
4. Include “nutritional information,” that is, basic biographical information (such as birth, death, position held, family, etc.).
5. A time line of key events in Clifford’s life represents the “vitamin list.”
6. Write a brief “press release” that explains why Clifford has been selected to appear on the hero cereal box. This should include a summary of the person’s accomplishments, his role in American history, his lasting impact, and a revealing quote by or about the person.

## **Exit Strategies (summarize and analyze new information; evaluate relevance):**

Evaluate relevance by discussing a few of the following questions with the class:

1. In what way was Clifford’s life remarkable?
2. In what ways was his life admirable?
3. What human qualities were most influential in shaping the way this person lived and influenced his times?
4. Which quality or trait proved most troubling and difficult?
5. Which quality or trait was most beneficial?
6. What are the two or three most important lessons you or any other young person might learn from the way this person lived?
7. Some people say you can judge the quality of a person’s life by the enemies and friends they make. Do you think this is true of J. R. Clifford? Explain why or why not.
8. Many people act out of a “code” or a set of beliefs which dictate choices. It may be religion or politics or a personal philosophy. To what extent did Clifford act by a code or act independently or any set of beliefs? Were there times when the code was challenged and impossible to follow?
9. What do you think it means to be a hero? Was Clifford a “hero?” Why? Why not? How is a hero different from a celebrity?

**Material List (books, maps, markers, chart paper, etc.):**

Markers, Construction paper, scissors, glue, empty cereal boxes

**Resources:**

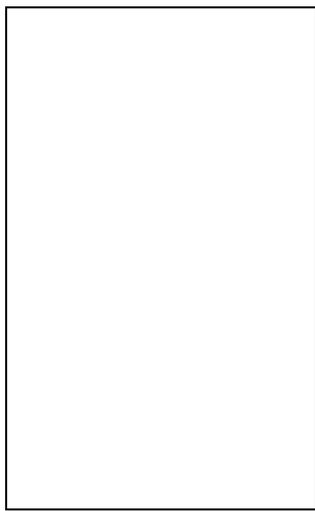
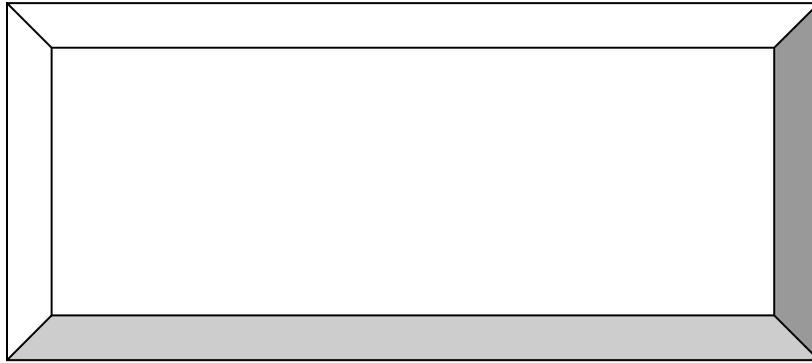
- West Virginia Trial Lawyers Association: Article *J.R. Clifford, Esq.*
- West Virginia Archives & History
- J. R. Clifford Timeline
- Various web sites

**Duration of the lesson:** Two 45min. periods or one 90min. block

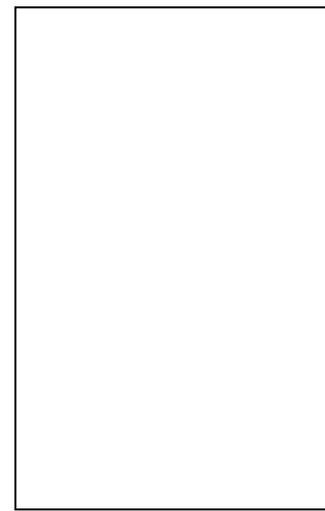
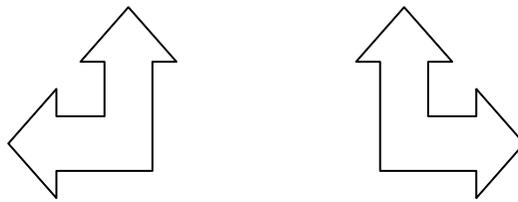
**File Attachments:**

- **Worksheets:** Vocabulary sheet.
- **Rubrics :** Hero box rubric
- **Resources:** Article *J.R. Clifford, Esq.*  
WV Archives & History  
J.R. Clifford Timeline  
J.R. Clifford Bio

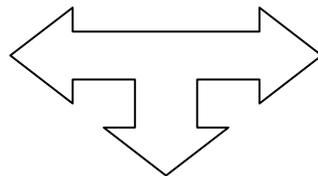
Word



Part of Speech



Definition



Sentence

On the back of this paper, create a graphic that illustrates the definition.

## HERO CEREAL BOX

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

|                               | <b>Criteria</b>   |  |  |   | <b>Value</b> |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--------------|
|                               | 4   | 3  | 2  | 1   |              |
| <b>Demonstrated Knowledge</b> | Shows complete understanding of the subject matter                      | Shows substantial understanding of the subject matter  | Response shows some understanding of the subject matter  | Response shows a complete lack of understanding of the subject matter | _____        |
| <b>Following Procedures</b>   | Is able to complete procedures independently.                           | Is able to complete procedures with little guidance and little assistance.                   | Is able to complete procedures with constant guidance and assistance.  | Is unable to follow the procedure of this experiment.                 | _____        |
| <b>Creativity</b>             | The student work demonstrates a unique level of originality.            | The student work demonstrates originality.   | The student's work lacked sincere originality.   | The piece shows little or no evidence of original thought.            | _____        |
| <b>Effort (Project)</b>       | The students gave an effort far beyond the requirements of the project. | The student completed the project in an above average manner, yet more could have been done. | The student finished the project, but it lacks finishing touches or can be improved upon with little effort. | The student did not finish the work in a satisfactory manner.         | _____        |
| <b>Neatness</b>               | All parts of the work can be easily read.                               | Most parts of the work can be easily read.   | Some parts of the work can be easily read.   | Few parts of the work can be easily read.                             | _____        |
|                               |   |  |  | <b>Total:-----</b>  | _____        |

### **TEACHER COMMENTS**

# J.R. Clifford, Esq.

## Heroic West Virginia Attorney and Civil Rights Pioneer

BY THOMAS W. RODD

Beginning about 500 years ago, largely in order to justify the institution of African slavery, Europeans (and later European Americans) constructed the concept of "race" as a purportedly fundamental distinguishing human characteristic. Today, of course, the generally accepted scientific view is that a person's so-called "race" or genetic lineage has little actual differentiating significance among humans.

But although America finally abandoned human slavery in 1863, race remains an important construct in American history, culture, law, and psychology – as Hamlet said, "thinking makes it so" – and oppressive differentiation and discrimination based on so-called "race" has persisted.

In his 1993 book *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer 1844 – 1944*, Howard University professor J. Clay Smith Jr. documented the critical role that lawyers of African ancestry had in the forefront of efforts to combat and dismantle racism in the United States. One of the earliest African-American lawyer activist/advocates was John Robert "J.R." Clifford, who was born in 1849 near Moorefield, West Virginia and practiced law in Martinsburg from 1887 until his death in 1933, at age 85.

An early account of Clifford's life before he became a lawyer was included in William J. Simmons' 1887 book, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive, and Rising*, which featured short biographies of prominent black American intellectuals of the late nineteenth century. Simmons wrote:

"J.R. Clifford is a progressive, independent and ambitious. He is a native of West Virginia, born at Williamsport, Grant County on September 13, 1849. When quite a lad he was taken to Chicago, by the Hon. J.J. Healy, and given a rudimentary education. In Zeno, Ohio he

attended a writing school taught by Professor D.A. White, from which he took a diploma in that art. In 1870 he went to Wheeling, West Virginia, and conducted a large writing school with nearly one hundred attendants. Not yet satisfied with his attainments, he attended Storer College, at Harpers Ferry, graduating in 1878. He was called to the principalship of the public school at Martinsburg, West Virginia, which he held for ten consecutive years, and only resigned to give attention to the *Pioneer Press*, a vigorous, influential journal which he so ably, fearlessly and consistently edits."

Another early remembrance of J.R. Clifford appears in an article by John W. Cromwell published in the *Journal of Negro History* in 1923. The article reflects the fact that Clifford joined the Union Army in 1864 at age 15, and fought with the United States Colored Troops:

"I attended a Teacher's Institute held at Harpers Ferry, in 1877. There I first saw a gathering of young teachers, vigorous and alert, none more chivalric in bearing than the central figure in the person of John R. Clifford, at that time Principal of the Grammar School at Martinsburg. He helped to shoot off the shackles from four million slaves and cement this Union on the bloody battlefields during the war of the sixties and holds an honorable discharge in proof of it."

In 1988, the late Paul Clifford, a



J. R. Clifford at the Niagara Conference at Harpers Ferry in 1906. The conference was held at Storer College and attendees discussed how to secure civil rights for African Americans. It was later described by W.E. B. DeBois as "one of the greatest meetings that American Negroes ever held."

professor at Emory University, wrote this description of his grandfather J.R.'s life and admission to the state Bar:

"The year after Clifford graduated from Storer and after he had settled into his teaching job in Martinsburg, he asked for the hand of a young woman. Mary Elizabeth Franklin and J.R. Clifford were married in Harpers Ferry on December 28, 1876 when she was 17 and he was 28. There were at least ten children born of this union. On September 13, 1887 in Charles Town, Jefferson County, West Virginia, three examiners, Okey Johnson, T.C. Green and O.C. Synder examined J.R. Clifford for admission to the bar of the State of West Virginia. Clifford

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 18)

## Clifford

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17)

passed the examination. Upon taking the oath, he was granted leave to practice law. This event marked a milestone in the history of West Virginia and in the history of Blacks in America. J.R. Clifford became the first Black to be admitted to the bar of the State of West Virginia."

"J.R. Clifford's most significant legal victory came in 1898 in the case of *Williams v. Board of Education*, 31 S.E. 985, 45 W.Va. 199 (1898), "one of the few civil rights victories in a southern state's highest court before the turn of the century, [where] the West Virginia Supreme Court declared that "discrimination against the colored people, because of color alone, as to privileges, immunities, and equal legal protection, is contrary to public policy and the law of the land."

In the *Williams* case, Clifford advised Tucker County African-American schoolteacher Carrie Williams to continue teaching without pay after school officials shortened the term at her one-room "colored school" at the head of the Blackwater Canyon from eight months to five months. Clifford then sued the school board for Williams' unpaid salary. The Tucker County Circuit Court and the West Virginia Supreme Court ruled in Williams' favor, making *Williams* the first case in U.S. history to hold that racial discrimination in school terms and teacher pay is against the law.

The *Williams* opinion, authored by Justice Marmaduke Dent, reads, "We conclude that discrimination against the colored people, because of color alone, is contrary to public policy and the law of the land. If any discrimination as to education should be made, it should be favorable to, and not against, the colored people."

As a direct result of the *Williams* decision—which was reinforced by the power of West Virginia's African Americans at the polls and coal company support for black schools in southern West Virginia—West Virginia's segregated school system in

the first half of the twentieth century was far superior to that of other southern and border states.

As noted by Ronald L. Lewis in *Black Coal Miners in America*: "Dual school systems were expensive to operate, but blacks did not suffer from underfunding in West Virginia as they

did in southern and border states. Because all teachers were paid on the basis of qualifications rather than race and because teaching was one of the few professions open to a significant number of Afro-Americans, a higher percentage of talented youths were channeled into that career.

### *From the Pen of J. R. Clifford*

For almost forty years, J.R. Clifford shared his tough, realistic views on justice and public affairs in the pages of his newspaper, the *Pioneer Press*. Here are just a few excerpts from his writing:

♦♦♦

*A mystery to be solved. Why is it, the colored citizens are never missed by the assessors, and are always found by the Sheriffs, to pay taxes, and are never found to act as jurors?*

♦♦♦

*The Negro In His Place*

*On the battlefield, his place has always been in the front; at the roughest work, he has the preference; on election days, early voting is praised;— in processions, behind is his place; on the jury he is not allowed and to apply for the most trivial position is laughable, and indeed entirely out of his place.*

♦♦♦

*Thurman in making a speech in Michigan said "The Negro is a prolific animal." Yes, Judge, you are right. He, like you, is an animal of the highest order. He is indeed "prolific" in brain culture, the acquisition of property, moral and religious proficiency, and also in the sense that you used it. It is wise that he should be in that respect also, for in course of time, if he fails to get justice by force of reason, he will be enabled to get it numerically. The most forcible effect of his prolificacy will be against you on the 6th of next November.*

♦♦♦

*If a person could and would kill the Son of God, who died that mankind might live forever, and in the face of the act, make great pretensions and bold declarations of his love for his Father, what would and should a sane man think of him? On the same hypothesis, how can the white men of the South who have raped, and disgraced millions of colored women boast of loving their own women to that extent, they must and will kill in and out of court on allegations of wrongs to them? It's the hottest lie out of the infernal regions, and the poor Northerners have listened to its cunning seduction until they have believed these infamous lies, gone back on the Negroes whom they boasted they freed, and whose wives, mothers and sisters, "went down South," taught them, lived with them, and associated with them for years and not one was ever insulted, as was true of the South's women who were protected and cared for by their slaves. One who lies can have no love for truth. The Southern white man has made the Southern white woman his pinnacle on which to preach the gospel of purity in order to make the world condone their lynching - when in reality deep rooted prejudice is the cause. ♪*

Consequently, black teachers tended to possess higher qualifications as a group and, therefore, to receive higher average salaries than whites. West Virginia also spent more per pupil for black students (\$111.47) than for white students (\$100.63). In 1913-1914 the two black colleges were being operated for only 5.3 percent of the state's population, but they received 18 percent of total state appropriations for higher education. The children of black miners took advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. In 1910 nearly 80 percent of the black children between ages six and fourteen in McDowell County attended school, as compared with 75 percent of native-white children in the same age bracket. By 1930 a larger percentage of black youths attended high school than in any other southern or border state. Similarly, in 1933-1934 ninety-four of every thousand blacks between ages eighteen and twenty-one were enrolled in public colleges, whereas the ratio for whites was only fifty-three per thousand. In the seventeen southern and border states which maintained dual systems of education, the enrollment for blacks in public colleges was twelve per thousand. The children of miners were highly represented in West Virginia's black college population. For example, over 50 percent of the 1932-33 freshman class at West Virginia State were the sons and daughters of coal miners and other unskilled workers. At Bluefield State 93.9 percent of the 232 students were the children of coal miners."

Clifford practiced law and was a leader in African-American efforts for justice until his death in 1933. In 1906, Clifford and W.E.B. DuBois organized the first American meeting of the Niagara Movement at Harpers Ferry, an event recognized as the birth of the modern civil rights movement. Although Clifford did not live to see the great legal victory of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the efforts of his generation of activist lawyers laid the groundwork for the end of legal segregation and Jim Crow.

Morgantown historian Connie Rice is completing a biography of Clifford that will be a great addition to the literature of civil rights history in the

Mountain State. She recently wrote about a visit by Clifford to Morgantown in 1895, after his trial victory in the *Williams* case but before the 1898 appellate decision in his client's favor:

"Clifford and the Hon. John M. Langston were guest speakers at an Emancipation Day Celebration held in Morgantown. Clifford, impressed by Morgantown's welcome, wrote that there was 'genuine Christian feeling and broad and manly recognition of the American Negro' shown by whites. Indeed, no color lines were drawn at the event. Clifford and Langston stayed at Madame Roland's Peabody Hotel where they sat down to eat dinner at the same table with Morgantown's Mayor Posten and the Hon. George C. Sturgiss, circuit judge. The following morning, members of the Chamber of Commerce and other "distinguished citizens" joined Clifford and Langston in the parlor of the Peabody where, according to Clifford, they were treated 'as full-fledged American citizens.' This joyful celebration of the emancipation of 4,000,000 slaves occurred south of the Mason-Dixon line on the threshold of segregation. Regardless of the time or place, Clifford's description of the celebration revealed his hope for the future. Did he feel the opportunity for real equality within his grasp, only to have it fade away in the aftermath of *Plessey v. Ferguson*? By reflecting on Clifford's life during those pivotal years between that Emancipation Celebration in 1895 and the West Virginia Supreme Court decision of *Williams v. Board of Education* in 1898—and understanding his hopes, his despair, and the struggle for equality—the significance of the *Williams* case becomes clear. Amidst a growing tide of discrimination, bigotry, and intolerance, there was a victory that gave him the will to carry on."

J. R. Clifford was a noble human

being who transcended the archaic and misguided concept of race. He was unyielding in his struggle for justice for all. He is a role model for all who seek to build a better world.

On August 16-20, 2006, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park commemorated the 100th Anniversary of the Niagara Movement with a number of historical programs. The programs included the Clifford-Niagara Project's re-enactment based on Clifford's famous civil rights in education case, *Williams v. Board of Education*. The reenactments were held in the historic Curtis Freewill Baptist Church at Storer College. The Clifford-Niagara Project is building on a program of community education and outreach conducted under the leadership of Justice Larry Starcher of the West Virginia Supreme Court during 2004-2005.

For more information on the Clifford-Niagara Project, go to [www.clifford-niagara.org](http://www.clifford-niagara.org) or call (304)345-7663.

For additional reading:

*Men of Mark* <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/simmons/simmons.html>.

Paul Finkelman, "Not Only the Judge's Robes Were Black: African-American Lawyers as Social Engineers," 47 *Stanford Law Review* 193 (1994).

♦♦♦

Tom Rodd graduated from Fairmont State College in 1978 and the West Virginia University College of Law in 1982.† He has served as an assistant prosecuting attorney, a Legal Aid staff lawyer, and as director of the West Virginia Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division.† He also was in private practice in Morgantown for ten years, specializing in environmental law.† Since 1996, Rodd has worked as a senior law clerk for Justice Larry V. Starcher of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals.† Rodd is the author of the dramatic program, "J. R. Clifford and the Carrie Williams Case," which he and Justice Starcher have presented throughout West Virginia. ♂

The logo for the West Virginia Division of Culture and History features the text "WEST VIRGINIA DIVISION OF CULTURE AND HISTORY" in white, uppercase letters on a dark blue background. The text is centered and has a slight shadow effect.The logo for West Virginia Archives & History features the letters "WV" above "A&H" in a large, white, sans-serif font on a blue background.

West Virginia Archives & History

## J. R. Clifford

J. R. Clifford was a trailblazer in many aspects of West Virginia's black history. He broke ground in education, journalism, law, and civil rights. Clifford was born in Williamsport, Hardy County (present-day Grant County) in 1848. In the later years of the Civil War, he served in the 13th U.S. Heavy Artillery. After the war, Clifford attended a writing school in Wheeling and then began teaching other African Americans to write. After graduating from the Storer College normal department in 1875, he accepted a teaching position at the Sumner School in Martinsburg and was eventually promoted to principal.

In 1882, while teaching at Sumner, Clifford established the *Pioneer Press*, the state's first black newspaper. He advocated for the rights of African Americans locally and nationally. Clifford even criticized the all-white management of Storer College. The *Pioneer Press* remained one of the most respected black newspapers in the nation until it was closed by the federal government in 1917, due to Clifford's editorial criticisms of the United States' involvement in World War I. At the time of its demise, the *Pioneer Press* was the longest running black newspaper in the country.

Some of Clifford's most important contributions to black history were in the field of law. He studied with a white lawyer in Martinsburg, J. Nelson Wysner, and in 1887 became the first African American to pass the West Virginia bar examination. He argued two landmark cases before the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals.

In 1896, Clifford brought the first legal challenge of the state's segregated school system to the court. Thomas Martin, a black parent in Morgan County, wanted his children to have the opportunity to attend a local white school. Since the Martins were the only African-American family in the area, there was no separate school for the children. In the case of *Martin v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ruled the Martin children were not allowed to attend the white school even though the alternative meant not receiving an education. The *Martin* decision upheld the state's segregation policy, which was not overturned until the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954.

In 1898, Clifford was more successful in the case of *Williams v. Board of Education of Tucker County*. The Tucker County Board of Education had reduced the school term of African-American schools from eight to five months to save money. A black teacher, Carrie Williams, consulted Clifford for advice. He suggested she continue teaching for the entire eight months, despite the fact she would not be paid. When the board refused to pay Williams for the additional three months, Clifford took the case to court. The West Virginia Supreme Court found in favor of Williams, the first ruling in U.S. history to determine that racial discrimination was illegal.

In the area of civil rights, Clifford worked with his friend, W. E. B. Du Bois, to found the Niagara Movement in 1905. The Niagara Movement developed to counter Booker T. Washington's philosophy of working within the existing system to achieve gradual civil rights advancement. For his conservative ideas, Washington had become popular with white politicians of the time and had been invited to the White House by President Theodore Roosevelt. Unlike Washington's followers, participants in the Niagara Movement wanted immediate change. Clifford arranged the organization's second annual meeting in August 1906, held on the grounds of Storer College in Harpers Ferry. Participants walked barefoot to John Brown's Fort in a morning vigil honoring Brown's attempt to evoke a slave uprising in 1859. Clifford broke with the Niagara Movement

when it formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. Among other disagreements, he objected to the use of the word "colored" in the organization's title.

Clifford died in Martinsburg in 1933, at the age of eighty-five and was buried in the city's Mount Hope Cemetery. In 1954, his body was reinterred in Arlington National Cemetery in recognition of his service during the Civil War.

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[Biographies of Prominent African Americans in West Virginia](#)



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|----------------|------|--|
|                | 1848 | John Robert Clifford is born in Grant County near what is now, Moorefield, West Virginia to free, black parents, Isaac and Mary Kent Clifford, when most people of African ancestry in Virginia were slaves. Isaac Clifford was a farmer and laborer.  |
|                | 1858 | At the age of 10, Clifford's parents send him to Chicago for schooling.  |
|                | 1863 | West Virginia is declared a state within Northern Territory at the height of the Civil War.  |
| Camp Nelson    | 1864 | Clifford returns home from Chicago at age 15 to enlist as a private in the United States Colored Troops of the Union Army during the Civil War. Clifford served in the 13 <sup>th</sup> Regiment U.S. Heavy Artillery, Company F, organized on June 23, 1864 at Camp Nelson, Kentucky. African American War Memorial, Plaque B-28 shows Clifford honorably discharged. |
|                | 1873 | Clifford enters Storer Normal College in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.  |
| Storer College | 1874 | Clifford graduates from Storer Normal College in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia.  |
|                | 1875 | Clifford moves to Martinsburg, West Virginia, where he begins teaching at Sumner School.   |
|                | 1885 | Clifford retires as principal of Sumner School in Martinsburg, West Virginia.  |
| Pioneer Press  | 1882 | Clifford publishes his first "Pioneer Press." The national, weekly newspaper was the longest running weekly publication for African-Americans of the era, spanning over 35 years of news coverage.   |
|                | 1882 | Clifford attends Knights of the Wise Men Convention in Atlanta, GA. Gives address.   |
|                | 1887 | Clifford becomes the first African-American in West Virginia to pass the bar exam after <i>studying with J. Nelson Wisner</i> . Practices for 46 years.  |
| Martin Case    | 1896 | State Supreme Court of Appeals – Martin vs. Board of Education, Morgan County.   |
|                | 1897 | Charter member of the American Negro Academy.  |

|               |      |  |
|---------------|------|--|
| Williams Case | 1898 | State Supreme Court of Appeals – Williams vs. Board of Education, Tucker County  |
| Niagara       | 1906 | Clifford works with W.E.B. Dubois to organize the first American meeting of the Niagara Movement at Storer College in Harper's Ferry. This meeting led to the formation of the NAACP. Clifford withdrew participation in the Association, because of his adamant opinion that the National Association should not include "Colored People" in its formal name. |
|               | 1911 | Clifford is appointed President of the National Independent Political League organized by William Monroe Trotter. Clifford served until 1913.  |
|               | 1917 | <i>Pioneer Press</i> closes.   |
| Obituary      | 1933 | Clifford dies on October 6, 1933 in City Hospital in Martinsburg, West Virginia at the age of 85 after falling down a flight of stairs at home. Buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery in Martinsburg.  |
|               | 1954 | Clifford is reburied at Arlington National Cemetery.   |
|               |      |  |

HOME

## Who was J.R. Clifford?

[Arlington Link](#)
[Clifford Timeline](#)

John Robert Clifford was West Virginia's first African-American attorney, a newspaper publisher, editor and writer, a schoolteacher and principal, a civil rights pioneer, a founding member of the Niagara Movement (forerunner to the NAACP), a Civil War veteran, and a graduate of Storer College.

Clifford was born in 1848, near what is now Moorefield, West Virginia. At 15, he enlisted in the United States Colored Troops and fought for the Union Army in the Civil War. After the war, he attended Storer College in Harper's Ferry and went on to become a schoolteacher and principal at the Sumner School in Martinsburg. In 1882, he started publishing the State's first minority-owned, minority-focused newspaper: *The Pioneer Press*. Clifford stopped publishing *The Pioneer Press* in 1917.

In 1887, Clifford was admitted to the bar by the West Virginia Supreme Court. In 1898, Clifford won a landmark civil-rights-in-education case before the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals: *Williams v. Board of Education*. The Tucker County School Board of Education tried to cut the public school year for African-American students from nine months to five months, while the students in the "white school" continued to receive the full nine-month school year. Clifford encouraged the teacher, Carrie Williams, to continue teaching for the entire nine months and, together, they filed a lawsuit against the school board for her back pay. In the end, the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the decision to provide equal educational rights to African-American students in West Virginia. All this occurred well over 50 years before the landmark "*Brown v. Board of Education*" decision and was one of the few civil rights victories in a southern state's highest court before the turn of the century.

After his legal triumph, Clifford went on to help found the "Niagara Movement" in 1906. The Niagara Movement was a cornerstone of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century civil rights movement and a forerunner to the modern NAACP. Clifford helped organize the first American Niagara meeting at his alma mater, Storer College, with the help of Niagara member W.E.B. DuBois.



COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. John W. Cromwell has addressed the Editor the following letter which may interest persons directing their attention to the record of the Negro in West Virginia:

Dear Sir:

While reading your *Negro Education in West Virginia* I was reminded of my acquaintances in that State, and I thought of the striking contrast between the West Virginia of 1877 and that of 1923.

On invitation of Prof. Brackett, President of Storer College, I attended a Teachers' Institute and Educational Convention, held at Harper's Ferry, in 1877. There I first saw a gathering of young teachers, vigorous and alert, none more chivalric in bearing than the central figure in the person of John R. Clifford, at that time Principal of the Grammar School at Martinsburg. To me it was quite a contrast from dealing with the civil service of the Treasury Department at Washington on the one hand, and my experience with the young men there a few years before as I had beheld them in central Pennsylvania.

The bearing of the men was more than matched by the excellence of the women. Outstanding at the time was a young woman whom I could not at first determine whether I should rate her as a young pupil in one of the classes or one of the faculty. I soon found that she was a student teacher, also an elocutionist of grace, skill and power. So impressed was I that Storer College thenceforth was a regular place of visit during commencement season, and I soon found myself on its trustee board.

During one of these commencements, Frederick Douglass was booked to speak on John Brown; but Andrew Hunter, the prosecuting attorney who convicted John Brown, came to Harper's Ferry, and declared that Frederick Douglass should not speak in Jefferson county, where Brown was convicted and hung. He also said: "If Douglass dares to come here, I'll meet him, denounce him, and crush him!" Douglass came; so did Hunter. At the proper time, Douglass was escorted to the rostrum, and without invitation

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Hunter followed and took a seat close to Douglass, the master of American orators, who spoke as I never heard him before; and when through started to his seat. Hunter interrupted him, arose, and advanced toward Douglass with outstretched hand and exclaimed: "Let us shake hands," and while so doing, said: "Were Robert E. Lee here, he would shake the other," and pausing a few seconds, with all the power of his nature he said: "Let us go on!" to which Douglass replied: "IN UNION TOGETHER!" And everybody on the campus shouted—making the occasion one of dramatic as well as historic interest.

As editor of *The People's Advocate*, of Washington, D. C., the incident was sketched in bold and striking outlines for the country, and was read eagerly. It also forms an incident of one of the chapters of *The "Life and Times" of Frederick Douglass*.

In 1882, the Knights of Wise Men, with headquarters at Nashville, Tennessee, held their convention at Atlanta, Georgia. Thither went such representatives of the day as William J. Simmons, of Kentucky; Frances L. Cardozo, of Washington, D. C.; Bishop Henry M. Turner, of Georgia; Richard Gleaves, of South Carolina; John R. Lynch, of Mississippi; Robert Peel Brooks, of Virginia; Prof. J. C. Corbin, of Arkansas, and many other distinguished men interested in the order.

John R. Clifford, of Martinsburg, West Virginia, was one of the party and a most distinguished orator was he, whose masterly oration delivered in the State Capital of Georgia, with Governor Colquitt, and other state officials, was a fitting setting for the presentation of a beautiful gold-headed cane, with the convention's and his initials carved on it. Robert Peel Brooks was chosen by the delegates to present the gift.

The career of Mr. Clifford for twenty years' work as a teacher, brought him to the forefront, and he was appointed by three different W. Va. State Superintendents to hold and conduct Teachers' Institutes. Mr. Clifford holds a life-time teacher's certificate in honor of this distinguished service. He was the first colored man in West Virginia to be admitted to the bar in the early eighties. He became editor of the *Pioneer Press* in 1882 at Martinsburg, and ran it regularly for thirty-six years, being honored with the deanship of Negro journalism a short time before the *Pioneer Press* ceased to exist.

Mr. Clifford, single-handed and alone, filed charges against Prof. N. C. Brackett, head of Storer College, killed and wiped out

Brackett's drawn color line, that barred colored people from going there as had been their privilege. He was the only colored editor in West Virginia who was a member of the State Editorial Association for twenty years, and was chosen the last year as its historian.

While defending a client sometime ago, a United States Commissioner and Mr. Clifford got into a controversy over some witnesses he wanted summoned, and it was kept up until the Commissioner demanded that he stop and go on, or he would put Clifford in jail. Undaunted he continued and gave the Commissioner to understand that just as long as he refused to summon the witnesses, he would contend for it; whereupon the Commissioner had him put in jail, where he remained for an hour and twenty-two minutes. Getting out he asked for his client, who had been tried and jailed. He was brought back. Clifford went his bond, sent him home, preferred charges against T. T. Lemen, United States Commissioner, and W. D. Brown, United States Marshal. Clifford went to the Department of Justice in Washington, D. C., proved his charges and had both put out of office and his client was set free.

He was appointed, by Senator B. K. Bruce and Frederick Douglass, Commissioner for the state of West Virginia to the New Orleans Exposition. He was elected three times President of the National Independent Political League, was chosen Principal of the Manassas Industrial School, where he and Frederick Douglass spoke on the occasion of his inauguration. He resigned because of his contention for better water.

He was the first man to impanel a colored jury in the state of West Virginia, and for so doing, was knocked down in the court room three times with deadly weights, causing the blood to run down into his shoes. When knocked down the third time, U. S. G. Pitzer, a Republican (?) prosecuting attorney, sprang on him, but with apparent superhuman skill and force, Clifford turned him at a time when there was not a soul in the court room (everybody having run out) but Pitzer & Clifford, with the latter on top, and had not Stephen Elam rushed in and pulled Clifford off of Pitzer and carried him out, death might have been the result,—Elam is still living. Later Pitzer was nominated for the Legislature, and Clifford canvassed Berkeley County on his bicycle exhibiting his bloody shirt (which he still has) and the day before the election Clifford spoke in the band-stand in the Public Square for an hour

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and thirty minutes, waving his bloody shirt and the following day Pitzer was defeated by 1336 votes.

He is a 33° Mason and a Past Grand Master of W. Va.; member of the American Negro Academy, and helped to shoot off the shackles from four million slaves and cement this Union on the bloody battle fields during the war of the sixties and holds an honorable discharge in proof of it.

He gives credit to the late Hon. John J. Healy of Chicago, Ill., for his early education thru the public schools of Chicago. He attended and graduated from Storer College 1875, and holds an honorary diploma from Shaw University.

JOHN W. CROMWELL.

Mr. Monroe N. Work, who has spent some time establishing the official roster of Negroes who served in State conventions and legislatures, has turned over for publication the following letters giving the record of Peter G. Morgan, a prominent citizen of Virginia:

MR. MONROE N. WORK,  
Editor *Negro Year Book*,  
Tuskegee Institute, Ala.

*My dear Mr. Work:*

I am extremely sorry that many pressing duties have prevented me from letting you have the information asked for in your letter under date of September 1st, bearing upon the late Peter George Morgan of Petersburg, Virginia.

I gathered from the information in possession of his sons, that he, (Peter G. Morgan) was in his day one of the most prominent colored men in the city of Petersburg. He was a carpenter by trade and followed said trade for a number of years. Later he acquired the knowledge of shoe making and became a first class shoemaker, which trade he also followed for a number of years before the Civil War. He was twice sold as a slave, and he purchased himself at \$1,500 and completed the payment on the fourth of July, 1854 at the White Sulphur Springs, his master being part owner of the Springs at that time. Later on he purchased his wife, paying \$1,500 for her and two small children in 1858, thereby himself becoming a slave holder. He removed to Petersburg in