

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR FEBRUARY 25, 2015 12:00 AM

Pagett: An accidental encounter with 1950s-era racism, sexism — and today’s SC General Assembly

HIGHLIGHTS

I was cleaning out a closet recently when I found two old newspapers in a box. I picked up an issue of *The State* dated April 8, 1960, and read about the death of former USC athletic director Rex Enright, saw a headline declaring “Arnold Palmer Leads in Masters” and then turned to the classified section.



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A real estate ad jumped out at me: “Washington Carver Village-Colored,” it screamed, and then elaborated: “West Beltline, \$39 Per Month or \$9 Per Week.” At first, I wondered what color paint the ad was boasting about. A split second later, I understood what I was looking at. Beneath it was another one, “For Colored, Roosevelt Village.”

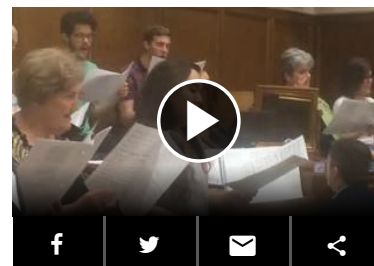
I moved on to the help-wanted section and read, “COLORED Car washers for week end work ... AUTOMATIC CAR WASH, 1950 GERVAIS ST.” I found this fascinating because all I had understood about segregation centered on physical separation: lunch counters, water fountains, movie theaters.

But this business was actually recruiting a specific race for its labor. What difference would it have made to the bottom line if a white guy wanted to wash automobiles for the same pay? I suspect it had less to do with profits and more with maintaining a class system that we now know was unsustainable.

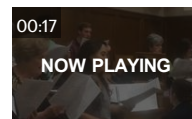
Discrimination in the ads was not limited to African-Americans. Women were singled out, as well. “Wanted at once — Secretary for national sales organization with office in 5 Points ... Under 45, no small children,” one solicitation read.

On the front page of the June 2, 1953, *Columbia Record*, in the bottom right corner, was “Today’s Chuckle.” It read, “Mrs. Newly-Rich went up to compliment the author after his

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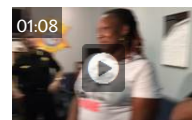
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Shandon choir rehearses for Piccolo Spoleto



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Deputy named Godmother after saving child's life

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talk about his new book. 'I feel we have such mutual interests,' she cooed. 'You have written a book and I have read one.'"

The Mad Men culture was alive and well in Columbia back then, but sexism has no place in our society in 2015. Ditto racism.

The 121st S.C. General Assembly is in full swing, and our legislators all have an opportunity to move our state forward by working together to pass and strengthen laws that, among other things, address poverty and health care in our African-American communities and domestic violence to better protect our women.

We can't change the past. But expanding Medicaid for our poorest citizens and keeping guns out of the hands of men who beat their wives is a good start.

JAMES R. PAGETT JR.

COLUMBIA

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