

LITTLE ROCK 17 YEARS AFTER



Photos and taped interviews by James Peppier/Cover photo, 1957, from Wide World/Edited by James R. Robinson/Design by Jerrold Goldman



You may remember Little Rock in 1957. Led by Governor Faubus, jeering crowds barred nine lonely black boys and girls from Central High School until U.S. troops were mobilized to secure their rights. The Legal Defense Fund (LDF) had "opened" Central High to blacks through a protracted court effort. In the years that followed, LDF attorneys were back in court many times to secure full integration in Little Rock schools.

This booklet has been prepared by the "COMMITTEE OF 100" to report on Little Rock's high schools as they are today. Central High School, focus of the battle in 1957, is thoroughly integrated. Located in a black neighborhood in the center of town, Central buses its white students in. Parkview High School, a newer school at one edge of town, is located in an overwhelmingly white neighborhood, and most of its many black students reach it by school bus. What do the students and teachers of both races think about integration today—17 years after Faubus' resistance put Little Rock in headlines around the world?

The Little Rock experience shows that legal action by LDF is basic to the total effort to better the human condition — for blacks and whites. The Legal Defense Fund's case made the change possible. As the pattern shifts, LDF remains indispensable. Court action is required to move from token integration to meaningful numbers, to protect black principals and teachers from dismissal. But once integration begins, its success or failure rests upon the creative energies of many people —

students, teachers, parents, community leaders, as well as lawyers. The people who speak to you in these pages grew up under a system of "separate" schools that were not "equal." They are working to meld their separate traditions into a varied but unified whole, richer than either of its constituent parts.



In the fall of 1974, raucous crowds demonstrated against integration in Boston, almost beating one man to death. A year or so ago, there was anti-integration violence in Michigan. Almost certainly, the pattern will repeat itself elsewhere in the years to come. Listen as these students and teachers "speak truth to hate."





MORRIS HOLMES
Principal, Central High School

I have not escaped the pains that students and parents and fellow teachers have suffered: we have all been uprooted from a tradition. But the school system now reflects our multi-ethnic, biracial society. White students here have not suffered academically, and black students are doing much better than before. In an integrated situation, one is very much aware of the student, the teachers, and the community. We take precautions that would never have been taken in the past in either black or white schools, and we make every attempt to be equitable in dealing with each student.

It is ironic to make busing an issue. Busing has been the way to get to school for many years in this whole state. Way back when I went to school, I went on a bus. No one criticized busing until it was being used to bring about integration. I have three children, and all three have been bused. The bus is the safest way for them to get to school, and the school they get to now reflects the kind of world they must live in when they are grown.

STACIE HOLLENBERG

Student Council President, Central H.S.

I was elected president of Student Council last spring. I ran against a black girl and we had a rather large controversy. This year, working on student affairs, I have gotten to know so many black people. I was saying just the other day to the girl I ran against that I've just met people for the first time — people I have gone to school with for years but never knew. There's a part of me the black students have relaxed, opened up, and a part of me they have gotten rid of — the little bit of prejudice I've grown up with.

Busing didn't make any difference to me, but it upset a lot of my friends . . . I could hear their parents' voices coming through. The whites who don't like busing don't want to go to school with blacks.

My parents, still somewhat prejudiced, know how I feel and they are happy that I'm thinking on my own. What I'm learning in subject matter hasn't really changed with integration, but, people-wise, it is better. I have learned so much about myself and other people in a totally integrated school.



JEROME MULDREW

Chairman, Social Science Dept.,
Central H.S.

I was teaching at all-black Horace Mann High School when integration began in Little Rock. The violence was deplorable, but communication between black and white did not die in 1957; sane and sensible people here were willing to stick their necks out to make this thing work.

In the South we've been open with our feelings.

The first year I sought involvement of white students in Black History Week Assembly, I got a lot of flak. But this is America. We are both the cause and the effect of slavery, really, right here in this school. By last year, our Assembly was beautiful — black and white students together — and I think it destroyed a lot of myths and prejudices on both sides.

We learn from each other, and to me Central High is the Mecca of Little Rock. Of course, we're going to have conflicts — conflicts are normal, natural, and necessary in any inter-action of people. But we are taking positive steps. In social ways, in intellectual ways, we are moving ahead.





KATHLEEN TAYLOR

Chairman, English Department, Central H.S.

I came here to Central the year before the original integration in 1957. I have always felt that we are all God's creatures. We deserve equal treatment and, in many cases our black people were not receiving their just due. Some of us on the faculty favored integration, and we were put on a "purge" list because of it. I have rubbed shoulders here with some of the most dedicated human beings I've ever seen, and so I have a thing about Central High. I have waged a battle to keep it a quality school, to show people that integration can work. When we started, I felt we whites must make it work. But black people can be very prejudiced too. And so it must work both ways.

With an integrated faculty, the main thing still is that a teacher is a teacher. You don't have time to think whether his skin is pink or black or white. And this carries over into our relationships. I have been in black homes, and blacks have been in my home, and we still have our freedom of choice. We like some people better than others, and race has little to do with it.

TROY PRICE

Editor of Central H.S. Student Paper

That whole thing in Boston, Massachusetts, made me mad, made all the students here mad. Living in the South all my life, I know the North is not a mythical Heaven, Utopia for blacks, but I've read somewhere that Massachusetts schools were integrated in 1830 or thereabouts, and I didn't think it would be like that. When President Ford said he disagreed with busing, I wrote my editorial in 30 minutes. I don't think any one likes busing, but blacks equate busing with integration and so we always think of it in positive terms.

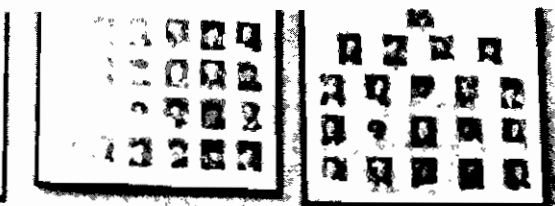
In the first grade, the school I went to was all-white except for me. By sixth grade, there were about 30 of us blacks in that school. I think integration helps. You mingle with different types. Academically, I've been up against more competition. It seems to me there's greater competition in schools with a high percentage of white students. I'm proud to be black and like to be accepted as being just that, and then I recognize that whites are proud of being white. They need their heritage and culture to be recognized, and I have the same needs. We come across as just outright open and honest.

Whenever we have to come together, we can function together. Like we come together on the football team and are tight just like that. Unless it is something that's organized that you have to be with them, we aren't together that much. I don't see that as a barrier or wall between us.

My parents — I don't think they have ever had a one-to-one relationship with whites

in their lives. They tend to view all whites as rich white people. My view, and my brothers', is different. We pretty much judge people as individuals, and my parents are pleased with our attitude. They're not racists. I wonder if attitudes are changing or is it just that whites are pulling out to suburbs, or that the city is different from the country. So I worry about Little Rock sometimes.

But Central High is something else. I think integration here is better than in most parts of the nation. What's happening in Boston makes me proud of Little Rock in 1974.





LEONARD SPITZER

Principal, Parkview High School

I've been a principal for 20 years in Little Rock, and my job is far more difficult — but far more interesting — than before integration. I think we neglected lower-level youngsters in our all-white schools before, and it took integration to show the need for an expanded curriculum. Our students, black and white, are pretty well settled on integration now. They settle on it or their parents move out of town.

The quality of education has not been affected by busing either. I have a son 12 years old — not an "A" student by any means — and he's bused over to the east end of town and will be bused for the next three years. Maybe he has matured somewhat, but when he was in Fourth Grade, I had to drag him to school right across the street from where we live, and now, with the long bus trip, he hates missing a single day in school.

GREGG LEWIS

Editor of Parkview H.S. Student Paper

I think Parkview is more desegregated than integrated; blacks and whites here are still very separated. But after four years of mixed classes, people are getting along better. You know, we think we're right, and the blacks think they're right. But one of our teachers says school is a place where you learn to live, not just learn math or English, and to an extent I agree with him. We're being forced to relate to blacks and blacks are being forced to relate to us. It's so much harder to get along than it is to fight. And it just takes a little bit to turn a lot of people into opposition to each other. It would be easier, and a lot less strain on everybody, to be separated. But a segregated school system is eventually going to poison itself. Integration is the harder of the two roads, but some things have to be forced on you.



VIDA DAY

Assistant Principal, Parkview H.S.

I have been teaching in Little Rock since 1951, long before desegregation. So I've gone through it. Students get out of school what they put into it, and a lot depends upon the home environment. We have always had — and we still have — students that are graduating at top level and others going out not prepared. The biggest step as far as improving quality education came when we integrated the faculty. This helped because so much of the time you teach as you were taught and you had been through a separate pattern. With the majority of our students, I think we are making progress educationally.

The Boston problem is probably more serious than ours. The larger the place, the more people involved. A small percent causes trouble, but in a larger place, the same percent is many more people. So I sympathize. Working their problem out is not going to be short-term just as ours hasn't been.

It will take time to regain the old closeness of the neighborhood school, and integrated neighborhoods and housing would answer some of the school problems we have now.





KENNETH REYNOLDS
12th Grade, Parkview H.S.

I used to go to Dunbar (a black school), but the change to an integrated school I liked. People in Boston ought to give it a try. When we had the film strip with Martin Luther King's speech at the Lincoln Memorial, some whites said, "Why do we have to listen to this?" So I think black history should be combined, mixed in. History is history, and black people in this country are part of it.

I was thrown out of Advanced English here — only 3 blacks in it — but there was no such course at Dunbar, just at Henderson (the white school), so they were way ahead of us. Now, with integration, there will be a chance to be equal.



EVA DAVIS

11th Grade, Parkview H.S.

Some people might call me an "Uncle Tom," but we have to live together. When I went to Booker, there were only a few whites and I didn't get to know them. Now, white students and black students here at Parkview are more friendly.

DAVID YOUNG

Parkview H.S.

I think that back in '57 when they started integrating the schools, nobody liked it. But when you go to school together, you get to know each other and you relate even though the cultures are quite different.

PAM STORAY

Parkview H.S.

When I was first going to school on the bus, white parents would get on TV and talk about busing. They just didn't want their children to be around us. But we don't run into any big problems with integration. I get to know more students than before, whites and blacks, and even a few Indians and Chinese. Those Boston students should try it.

JOHN WALKER, Arkansas Attorney for the Legal Defense Fund (LDF), suggested that we tell the Little Rock story to "show other parts of the Nation that integration can be made to work." After LDF's initial court victory — which led to the Faubus affair at Central High School in 1957 — John Walker's interracial law firm was in and out of court for years seeking to translate the law of the land into a reality for the black and white students of Little Rock. This report shows the results.

As the people in this booklet tell you about Little Rock schools, they refer to their hopes for expanding job opportunities and integrated housing. Across America, THE NAACP LEGAL DEFENSE FUND is the principal agency working in the courts to gain equality for *all* Americans — in schools, in job opportunities, in open access to housing . . . in short, the right to equal standing in every phase of living.

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