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Approximate age or date of birth: 9-20-44 52

Mother's name: MARY Lucille Acker Brown

Father's name: T. E. Caldwell

Places lived and when: Gadsden, AL - Doaz, AL - Niles, Mich. - Birmingham, AL - Centre, AL - New Orleans, La.

Education: BS - Tex State - Masters. UAB - Sec. Ed - English & History majors - Media specialist

Religion: Baptist - Minister's wife

Business, political and social memberships (past and present): \_\_\_\_\_

Present occupation: Teacher - Springs Garden School - English 9-12

Former occupation(s): Office worker Drama

Special skills: \_\_\_\_\_

Major Accomplishments: \_\_\_\_\_

Local events in which you have participated: Numerous

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

National events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

International events in which you have participated: \_\_\_\_\_

Natural born U.S. citizen?  Yes  No

Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Country from which you emigrated: \_\_\_\_\_

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in your possession: \_\_\_\_\_

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional information: \_\_\_\_\_

**ATTITUDES CONCERNING INTEGRATION AND THEIR  
EFFECTS ON PUBLIC EDUCATION**

**By  
AMY N. RUSSELL  
HISTORY OF ALABAMA  
DR. JACKSON**

For many years the public education system in Alabama has been in need of reform. Public education in Alabama has never been considered progressive. In fact, Alabama's educational system has consistently ranked lower than the majority of the nation's. One aspect that prevents Alabama from moving forward is the racial tension and inequality that exists among the classrooms. The social ramifications of school integration are still prevalent in the public education system today.

The issue of race cannot be ignored when dealing with public education. From the time period of integration until today, the attitudes of both whites and blacks perpetuate the situation. One problem is that desegregated schools are not compatible with a segregated society. The individual needs and cultural differences among students often contribute to tension in a classroom. With the factors of poor communication and preexisting hostilities it is likely that this problem may never be solved.

However, this is not a one-sided conflict. Both the blacks and the whites have opinions that hold certain validity. The period of integration set a standard of known aggression between the races, and that mindset has not been forgotten.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas that it's 1896 decision in Plessy v. Ferguson,

upholding “separate but equal”, was invalid. It was ruled that segregation inherently meant inequality.<sup>1</sup> This was a turning point in history, especially in the south. Although the south was not unique in having segregated schools, it was known to violently resist more than any other region in the nation.

When studying integration is important to reflect upon the attitudes that blacks and whites felt toward one another. In most circumstances, the segregated society did not interact with one another on a social level. In the state of Alabama there is a legacy of white supremacy in which the black race is labeled inferior. In her interview, Myra Smith of Centre, Alabama talks about the “typical Alabama attitude” concerning blacks. She defines it by saying, “It was the typical attitude of southerners in the days before integration. This was when blacks and whites lived in separate societies.” Smith also recalls other sentiments regarding social interaction. She says that it was accepted that one did not socialize with blacks, or go to church with them, but she was not raised to feel any hostility toward them either. Unfortunately, not everyone was raised to feel this way. Not many people in Alabama had a complacent attitude toward blacks and desegregation. Most were outraged and would fight it as hard as they could.

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<sup>1</sup> Academic American Encyclopedia, 1983 ed., s.v. “integration, racial.”

One must wonder how the legislators of Alabama felt about integration. Most southern governors adopted a “wait and see” attitude during the year between the May 17, 1954 Supreme Court decision, and the May 31, 1955 decree to implement it. Because the decree did not require immediate desegregation of the schools, it was widely regarded as a victory for the south. At that point, desegregation had not yet become reality. While Southern governors expressed differing views concerning compliance with the Brown decision, John M. Patterson of Alabama pledged that, “if any school in Alabama is to be integrated, it will be over my dead body.” He also referred to the Supreme Court as a “super legislature” which in its school decisions “did not interpret but amended the constitution.”<sup>1</sup>

Most governors felt that it was not a federal issue but a state issue, and therefore should be dealt with as a state’s decision. Governor George C. Wallace, also of Alabama, stated, “The best interest for the state is absolute and complete segregation...” He also assured the people of Alabama that he would “stand in the schoolhouse door, in person, if necessary” in order to resist a court order to desegregate schools.

So instead of complying with the Brown decision, legislators in Alabama began passing laws to preserve the maximum degree of race separation in public schools. The core of this legislative resistance is found in a series of basic laws: pupil placement acts, school closing laws, and laws providing for tuition grants and private school programs.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarrat, Reed. The Ordeal of Desegregation. (New York : Harper and Row, 1966), 27.

In the Alabama act, which was more widely copied, the criteria for assignment include available room and teaching capacity, available transportation, adequacy of a student's scholastic aptitude, ect. These procedures were designed to discourage a Negro's attempting to go to a white school.<sup>1</sup>

In the event the placement acts failed, which they ultimately did in state after state, the extreme segregationists were prepared to close the public schools. Senator Englehardt of Alabama stated, "The National Association for the Agitation of Colored People forgets that there are more ways than one to kill a snake... We will have segregation in the public schools or there will be no public schools."<sup>2</sup> This statement alone conveys the bitter sentiment that the politicians of Alabama felt. Most were willing to fight desegregation every way they could.

If the powerful influence that the legislators held was not enough to intimidate the blacks, public opinion of the angry whites was just as strong, if not stronger. In the eleven southern states, the white people were in control. The organizations that the whites formed fell into three categories. One group upheld segregation and fought against any weakening of it. Another opposed segregation and directed its efforts towards removing racial barriers. The third was concerned primarily with preserving public education and public order.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sarrat, Reed. The Ordeal of Desegregation. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Sarrat, Reed. The Ordeal of Desegregation. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 34.

<sup>3</sup> Sarrat, Reed. The Ordeal of Desegregation. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 298.

Among the organizations favoring segregation, the Citizens' Councils took firmest root and had the most rapid and widespread growth. In Alabama, State Senator Sam Englehardt was chief Council organizer. Striving for respectability, the Citizens' Councils sought to distinguish themselves from the Ku Klux Klan. In their appeal to business and professional men, the Councils shunned lower-status whites. The once powerful Klan welcomed those whom the Councils rejected. The Brown decision sparked a Klan revival, and they rallied new recruits under the banner of white supremacy.<sup>1</sup> Wherever the Klan was active, it opposed desegregation of the schools. Klansmen were accused of many acts of intimidation and violence. The traditional burning of the cross was itself a warning to whites and Negroes who violated the Klan's code. Klansmen also were charged with bombings, beatings, and other criminal acts. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the many activities during that summer gave the Klansmen new reasons to react.

The Brown decision sparked a wide array of organizations dedicated to the cause of preserving racial segregation in the South. Most of them were local groups. Some of these were: American Society for the Preservation of State Government and Racial Integrity, the Knight's of the White Christians, the Southerners, the Southern Gentleman, White America, Inc., and many more.

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<sup>1</sup> Sarrat, Reed. The Ordeal of Desegregation. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 303.



Knowing how most of the legislators, politicians, and white people felt, how did the blacks feel about the Brown decision? At first, the Negroes acclaimed the decision as a second Emancipation Proclamation. The Supreme Court ruling had only applied to schools, but it held the promise of an end to "second-class citizenship".<sup>1</sup> As the excitement of the anticipated promise began to fade, Negro disillusion and disappointment replaced hope, and militancy took the place of patience. The Negroes became restless and ready for change. They developed organizations to advance their cause just as the whites had done.

One of the major organizations through which the Negroes were able to voice their protests was the NAACP . This stands for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It was first founded in 1909 by white liberals rallying for "first-class citizenship for all". The NAACP won victories in the federal courts applying the Brown decision to areas of public affairs. But even in the slow progress these organizations were making, some black people fought this injustice individually. For example, in Montgomery on December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks boarded a local transit bus. She refused to move all the way to the back, which was custom for the blacks to do when there was not enough room for the whites. She was arrested and booked on the charge of violating the bus segregation laws. After a bus boycott and many protests, on

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<sup>1</sup> Harlan, Louis R. Separate and Unequal. ( Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 319.

November 13, 1956 the court ruled that the ordinances segregating city buses were unconstitutional.<sup>1</sup>

The Montgomery bus boycott had been a milestone in the civil rights movement, but it was important just the same. Spontaneously it joined the total Negro population of a city in a common cause. It was also important because it introduced the technique for a nonviolent protest. It also gave the Negroes a new spiritual and symbolic leader, Martin Luther King, Jr. King, who later became known for his nonviolent resistance movement, was given an opportunity during the bus boycott to test his theory.<sup>2</sup>

However, it was not long before violent situations began to occur. On May 4, seven Negro and six white "freedom riders" boarded a bus in Washington and headed south. In Atlanta, the riders split into two groups. One group took a Greyhound bus and started toward Alabama. A white mob met the bus in Anniston and would not allow the passengers to get off. They had slashed the tires, and six miles outside of town, the tires went flat. Someone in a car that was chasing the bus, threw a incendiary bomb into the bus. Some of the passengers were taken to the hospital to be treated. This basically ended the first "freedom ride".

While the sit-ins and other protests occurred, many people were growing furious. Birmingham was getting the reputation across the nation as dangerous and violent. The Alabama Chamber of Commerce organized a committee to help Alabama get a new image. John A. Williamson was chairman of this

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<sup>1</sup> Sarrat, Reed. The Ordeal of Desegregation. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 325.

committee. He said that his goal was an “all-out drive to change what the nation thinks of us.” This was during a time when the news media was rising, and many American families were sitting down at night to see the protestors to be beat and have police dogs turned on them. This picture of Alabama was embarrassing, but these was the actual reactions taken against one another.<sup>1</sup>

The attitude of the Negroes partially accounted for the gradualness with which desegregation spread. While some Negroes fought militantly for integration in schools, most took no active part in the struggle. However, the resentment, the aggression, and the hostile treatment of the blacks will never be forgotten. In many cases, the black students were content in their schools. In an integrated school, they would have been considered inferior. Although their “separate but equal” schools were usually in bad shape, and school supplies were obscure, the black students did not have to feel the pressure of not being wanted.

After integration began, it seems as though the angry resentment on both parties inhibited a learning environment. A lot of white children enrolled in private schools, or some just simply dropped out. The black students were brought into a classroom where the teachers did not always have the experience to meet their educational need. It is true that all students have individual needs, but what happens when a teacher is from a different environment? How does he or she approach his or her students’ cultural differences? One author suggests that the teacher must provide a multi-purpose curriculum that included Afro-

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<sup>2</sup> Sarrat, Reed. The Ordeal of Desegregation. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 326.

American studies.<sup>1</sup> However this is part of modern day standards, and even at best this method has barely passed through the early stages of development. The fact is, that the teachers during the time of integration did not know how to deal with this delicate matter - actually no one knew how. Today, teachers are still trying to meet the needs of their classrooms-for all of their students.

Although school segregation barriers fell quietly and quickly in some places, that was not the story with Alabama. The Court's decision had changed the law, but it did not change the feelings of vast numbers of white people. For everyone, men, women, and children, white and black, desegregation affected them. Negroes in the South suffered the frustration of being denied the right that the Supreme Court said was theirs. Southern whites who cherished the tradition of a segregation tried desperately to protect it. Ten years after the Brown decision was made, fewer than one in fifty Negro pupils attended a desegregated school in the eleven states of the Cofederacy.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion to the crisis of public education in Alabama, one cannot view the whites or blacks as right or wrong. The only wrong is how each race has been treated and continues to be treated. Everyone deserves an opportunity to make something of their lives , and the best way to achieve is through one's education. There is an undeniable need to reform the educational system in Alabama, in both rural and city schools. Once the racial conflict is dealt with, many advantages could be open to Alabama. Instead of

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<sup>1</sup> Sarrat, Reed. The Ordeal of Desegregation. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 336.

<sup>1</sup> Davis, Arthur Jr. Racial Crisis in Public Education. (New York: Vantage Press,1975), 149.

embarrassing statistics proving how far behind it's students are, Alabama could be with the top of the nation. Education is the future.

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<sup>3</sup> Smith , Gerald L. A Black Educator in the Segregated South. ( Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 155.

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Smith, Gerald L. A Black Educator in the Segregated South. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1994.

## HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY

- **September 20, 1944** ; Speaker's birth date. World War II in progress.
- **April 12, 1945** ; President Roosevelt dies. Vice President Harry Truman succeeded him. By the end of the year, World War II is over.
- **1946** ; United Nations established. The Cold War begins.
- **1947** ; James E. Folsom is Governor of Alabama.
- **1948** ; Truman defeated the Republican Governor Dewey in the Presidential election. State's Rights Party or the "Dixiecrats" meet in Birmingham.
- **1949** ; North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created.
- **1951** ; Gordon Person is Governor of Alabama.
- **1952** ; General Eisenhower was elected President over the Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson.
- **1954** ; Supreme Court ruled the desegregation of public schools. Brown v. the Board of Education ruling in Topeka, Kansas.
- **1955** ; James E. Folsom is Governor of Alabama.
- **1956** ; Eisenhower is reelected over Adlai Stevenson.
- **1957** ; A bill is passed in which the government could seek court orders to guarantee the individual's right to vote in any state.
- **1958** ; Nineteen states had enacted "right-to-work" laws. Alaska admitted as forty-ninth state. Explorer 1 sent into orbit by the United States.
- **1959** ; John Patterson is the Governor of Alabama. Hawaii is admitted into the United States as the fiftieth state.
- **1960** ; United States breaks off diplomatic relations with Cuba. John F. Kennedy is elected President. United States forced first Negro's admission to the University of Mississippi.
- **1962** ; United States sending troops to war in Vietnam.
- **1963** ; President Kennedy is assassinated. George C. Wallace is Governor of Alabama. George C. Wallace's famous "stand in the schoolhouse door" incident at the University of Alabama. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama.
- **1964** ; Over 200,000 white and Negro citizens marched on Washington at the greatest non-violent demonstration. Under the Lyndon B. Johnson administration the Vietnam War escalates. The Twenty-fourth amendment abolishing poll taxes was ratified. Johnson won a landslide victory for a full term defeating Barry Goldwater. Race riots taking place in the south and the north.
- **1965** ; Famous march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama.
- **1967** ; Lurleen B. Wallace is Governor of Alabama.
- **1968** ; Republican Richard M. Nixon elected in Presidential election. Albert P. Brewer is Governor of Alabama.
- **1971** ; George C. Wallace is Governor of Alabama.
- **1972** ; Watergate Affair. Jere Beasley is acting Governor of Alabama.
- **1973** ; A cease-fire was signed for the Vietnam War.

- **1974** ; President Nixon resigns. Gerald R. Ford becomes the thirty-eighth President.
- **1979** ; Forrest "Fob" James Jr. is Governor of Alabama.
- **1983** ; George C. Wallace is Governor of Alabama.
- **1987** ; Guy Hunt is Governor of Alabama.
- **1993** ; James E. Folsom Jr. is Governor of Alabama.
- **1995** ; Fob James is Governor of Alabama.



## CHRONOLOGY OF THE SPEAKER'S LIFE

- **September 20, 1944** ; Born in Gadsden, Alabama.
- **1945** ; Speaker's parents divorce.
- **1949** ; Speaker's and family move to Niles, Michigan.
- **1958** ; Speaker moves back to Alabama.
- **1962** ; Speaker graduates high school in Boaz, Alabama.
- **1962** ; Speaker marries and moves to Birmingham, Alabama while husband finishes college.
- **1964** ; Speaker moves to Centre, Alabama.
- **1964** ; Speaker attends Jacksonville State University to acquire a teaching degree.
- **1968** ; Speaker begins her practice teaching.
- **April 1969**; Speaker has first child.
- **April 1970**; Speaker graduates from Jacksonville State University.
- **1970** ; Speaker begins to teach TMR class.
- **August 1970** ; Speaker moves to New Orleans while husband attends seminary.
- Speaker teaches in two different schools while living in Louisiana.
- **March 1973** ; Speaker moves to Birmingham, Alabama .
- **April 1974** ; Speaker has second daughter.
- **September 1974** ; Speaker gets job at Hayes High School teaching all black students.
- **September 1976** ; Speaker transfers to West End High School.
- **1980** ; Speaker moves back to Centre, Alabama to teach at Spring Garden School where she is currently teaching now.

## QUESTIONS

1. Where were you born?
2. Where did you attend school?
3. What were race relations like when you were younger?
4. Did you grow up in a prejudice environment?
5. Did you have a deep religious background?
6. What denomination of religion were you?
7. Would you define the typical "Alabama attitude"?
8. Where did you graduate from high school?
9. Where did you attend college?
10. When did you decide that you wanted to be a teacher?
11. Where did you acquire your first teaching position?
12. Where have you lived?
13. How many schools have you taught in?
14. Was the administration that you worked under supportive?
15. What experiences can you tell me about that you encountered during integration?
16. Do you feel like your experience in the all black school was positive?
17. Were you fearful during this time living in Birmingham?
18. Did you find it difficult to relate to your black students?
19. Were your black students defensive in dealing with you?
20. Were there any significant altercations between your white and black students?

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