

Racism in Public Education

This week we are pleased to be joined by Ann Williams Wedaman and Linda Ferdig-Riley. Ms. Wedaman was a member of the student body at Central High School, Little Rock Arkansas when it was desegregated with the aid of federal troops in 1957. She was recognized in 2016 as an “unsung hero” by the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes for befriending Elizabeth Eckford, one of the Black students who came to be known as the Little Rock Nine. Linda Ferdig-Riley is a retired educator and administrator who worked for over 30 years in the San Jose Unified School District, where minority enrollment is 76% of the student body. Beginning in the 1970’s the school district faced a desegregation suit that ultimately was appealed to the Supreme Court. Ms. Ferdig-Riley was recognized with the Martin Luther King Award for her advocacy of Black students.

Class Assignment

Both assignments relate to specific school districts, but with broad-ranging implications for all districts:

- **“Through a Lens Darkly.”** David Margolick. Vanity Fair, September 24, 2007. <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2007/09/littlerock200709>
- **“Asleep at the School-Bus Wheel: The Success and Failure of School Desegregation in San Jose Unified School District and How to Save It.”** Richard Miyasaki. Golden Gate University Law Review, May 2015. <https://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/ggulrev/vol45/iss2/5/>

In addition, if you have time, please read the following reference to gain vital information about how “racial inequity is baked into the nation’s education system:

- **“To understand structural racism, look to our schools.”** Hannah Furfaro. Education Lab, Seattle Times, June 28, 2020. <https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/to-understand-structural-racism-look-to-our-schools/>

Goal for Class

The goal for the class is to learn about the history of racism in the public education system as well as desegregate efforts following the Supreme Court ruling in the 1954 Brown v Board of Education.

Action Items

- Please read this short piece and go to “Be Part of the Solution” and sign the petition or start a conversation or consider one of the other suggestions here. “How Systemic Racism Infiltrates Education.” <https://www.benjerry.com/whats-new/2017/11/systemic-racism-education>
- This article contains ways in which we can advocate for policy changes to fight systemic racism. “Fighting Systemic Racism in K-12 Education: Helping Allies Move from the Keyboard to the School Board.” Roby Chatterji. Center for American Progress. July 8, 2020. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2020/07/08/487386/fighting-systemic-racism-k-12-education-helping-allies-move-keyboard-school-board/>
- At our class on October 9th, Elise Packard mentioned tutoring in our local school. She indicated that we could volunteer by contacting saroybl@sfps.k12.nm.us or lgheffron@gmail.com.

Additional Resources

- **“The Troubled History of American Education after the Brown Decision.”** Sonya Ramsey. The American Historian, January 16, 2020. <https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2017/february/the-troubled-history-of-american-education-after-the-brown-decision/>
- **“The banality of racism in education.”** Jon Valant. Brookings, June 4, 2020. <https://brook.gs/2AFesJX>
- **“NEA activists launch series of video ‘primers’ for anti-racist white educators.”** NEA edjustice, January 19, 2018. <https://neaedjustice.org/2018/01/19/nea-activists-launch-series-video-primers-anti-racist-white-educators/>
- **“A Battle for the Souls of Black Girls.”** Erica L. Green, Mark Walker and Eliza Shapiro. NYTimes, October 1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/01/us/politics/black-girls-school-discipline.html?smid=tw-share>
- **“Little Rock Nine.”** [history.com](http://www.history.com) editors. February 10, 2020. <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/central-high-school-integration>
- **“Simple action in the civil rights era makes Overland Park woman an ‘unsung hero’.”** Donald Bradley. Kansas City Star, May 27, 2016. <https://www.kansascity.com/news/state/kansas/article80350577.html>
- **“Flight Club.”** Vrinda Normand. Metro, Silicon Valley’s Weekly Newspaper, September 14-20, 2005. <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.14.05/segregation-0537.html>

- **“School Desegregation Suit in San Jose: L.A. Case May Be a Parallel.”** David G. Savage. L.A. Times, December 1, 1985. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-12-01-me-5598-story.html>
- **“Systemic racism in higher education.”** Paul H. Barber, et al. Science. 18 Sep 2020. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/369/6510/1440.2>

Books about the Little Rock Crisis

- ***Remember Little Rock: The Time, the People, the Stories.*** Paul Robert Walker. National Geographic. 2009. *Good overview.*
- ***A Life is More than a Moment - the Desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High.*** Text and Photos by Will Counts, with Essays by Will Campbell, Ernest Dumas and Robert S. McCord. Indiana University Press. 1999. *Will Counts took an iconic photograph often associated with the Crisis.*
- ***Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock Central High.*** Washington Square Press. 1994. *Author is one of the Little Rock Nine.*
- ***A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School.*** Carlotta Walls Lanier with Lisa Frazier Page. One World Books. 2009. *Author is one of the Little Rock Nine.*
- ***The Worst First Day: Bullied while Desegregating Central High.*** Elizabeth Eckford and Dr. Eurydice Stanley. Lamp Press Pensacola. 2017. *Author is one of the Little Rock Nine.*
- ***Central in our Lives: Voices from Little Rock Central High School 1957-1958.*** Ralph Brodie and Marvin Schwartz. The Butler Center of Arkansas Studies. 2007. *Author was student body president in 1957-1958.*
- ***Crisis at Central High: Little Rock 1957-58.*** Elizabeth Huckaby. Louisiana State University Press. 1980. *Author was assistant principal at LRCHS during the Crisis.*
- ***My Father Said Yes: A White Pastor in Little Rock School Integration.*** Dunbar H. Ogden. Vanderbilt University Press. 2008. *Author’s father was a Presbyterian minister in Little Rock during the Crisis.*
- ***Breaking the Silence: Little Rock’s Women’s Emergency Committee to Open our Schools. 1958-1963.*** Sara Alderman Murphy. University of Arkansas Press. 1997. *Author was a member of the WEC, an organization formed to reopen the four Little Rock high schools after their closures in 1958.*