

Desegregation Pioneers ^[1]

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Madge Hopkins

Madge Hopkins attended segregated schools in Charlotte, North Carolina. She remembers hearing about Dorothy Counts, a young woman she knew through church, becoming one of the first four students to desegregate Charlotte's schools. Counts struggled with verbal and physical harassment: Her brother's car windshield was broken when he picked her up from school, she was taunted on a daily basis, and her family received many threats of violence. The harassment continued for weeks, and Counts' parents decided to withdraw her from school to protect her safety.

Sheila Florence

Sheila Florence was one of the first students to desegregate schools in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. When she began attending Chapel Hill Junior High School in 1962, she endured hurtful treatment from her white classmates, who refused to sit by her, used racial slurs, and threw spitballs at her. Here, Ms. Florence remembers her first day of integration.

Daisy Bates

Daisy Bates was a civil rights activist and the head of the state chapter of the NAACP. She served as advisor to the Little Rock Nine, nine black students who enrolled at the all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Alabama in 1957. She helped the students cope with the harassment they suffered from white students by organizing daily after school meetings at her home where the students could talk about their frustrations and learn the non-violence strategies practiced by Martin Luther King, Jr. Here, Ms. Bates recalls Minnijean Brown, one of the nine, being expelled for fighting back against students who taunted her. After leaving Central, Minnie was enrolled in and graduated from an integrated school in New York.

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Everee McCauley Ward, Rosa Parks and Daisy Bates at the Kennedy Center Birthday tribute to Mrs. Parks, Washington, D.C., 1990

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Artifacts:

NAACP Pledges Continued Efforts For Mixed Schools In Tarheel State
Aug. 9, 1955 - Duke Herald

CHARLOTTE, Aug. 8—Kelly Alexander, state president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, tonight declared the NAACP "will continue to push forward for the removal of all racial segregation in public education."

Alexander made his remarks in commenting on Gov. Luther Hodges' long awaited "Report to the People" on integration in the state's public school system.

Following is Alexander's statement, in part:

"The NAACP did not recognize in the governor's address tonight any evidence of a plan or program acceptable to the majority of freedom-loving Negroes in North Carolina to desegregate the public schools.

"Our interpretation of the governor's address tonight was an appeal for the Negroes in North Carolina to compromise on fundamental constitutional rights to forget that they are citizens and their right as citizens—an appeal for them to delay in working for the enforcement of the constitutionally protected right in the field of public education.

"The first paragraph of the May 31 decision of this year notified all public school officials and all concerned with public education that the continued maintenance of segregation in public education is unlawful and in violation of the United States constitution. Anyone requiring such segregated public education is deliberately and with full knowledge operating contrary to the U. S. constitution. In doing so they are deliberately laying themselves open to the full impact of the civil and criminal statutes prohibiting state officials from denying Americans their rights guaranteed by the U. S. constitution.

"For high government officials to encourage the continuation of public schools as they now exist on a segregated basis is not acting in good faith but contrary to the law of the land. In our field, the field of civil rights, affirmative legislation is never resorted to unless there is no possibility of getting compliance from governmental agencies without lawsuits.

"In view of North Carolina's position in this matter, the NAACP will continue to push forward for the removal of all racial segregation in public education and reiterate our determination to achieve this goal without compromise of principle.

"It is our opinion the answer to solving the problem of desegregation in North Carolina is for school boards to get started by complying with the Supreme Court's decision with deliberate speed. The fullest resources of the NAACP including the legal staff, the research staff, and education specialists will be utilized to be sure there is no discrimination against teachers as a result of integration. We feel that teacher personnel should be assigned on a non-discriminatory basis and we know that Negro teachers in the state of North Carolina are qualified to teach school children irrespective of race, color or creed . . .

"It should be recognized that no minority in this country has ever been asked over and over again to forget that he is a citizen when basic constitutional rights are involved. Finally, statements made concerning the possibility of experiencing violent reaction to attempt the desegregation to our way of thinking is an effort to stop progress toward compliance with the Supreme Court's decision. It is our opinion that both races know the Supreme Court decisions are not only legally right but are morally right . . .

"The NAACP will continue its program to realize complete and absolute equality not only in the field of public education but in all areas in the community life in the State of North Carolina."

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