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Sept. 23 - 29, '57REPORT ON LITTLE ROCK

Arkansas is somewhere in between a borderland and a deep South state in racial reactions. There is a good deal of integration in the state, some in schools. The buses in Little Rock have been integrated for almost a year, and were integrated without incident. Relations between the races have been above the average as far as the South is concerned.

Little Rock itself is approximately 100,000 in population, with about 25% of the population being Negro. It has at least one white college, Little Rock University, small and relatively unimportant but growing, and three Negro schools, the most important of which seems to be Philander-Smith, a Methodist college of about 600 students. Little Rock is the capital of the state and is a growing industrial center.

CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL Central High School is one of four high schools in Little Rock, and up until the beginning of this school year was of course all-white. There are 2700 white high school students and 800 Negro students in Little Rock. There are approximately 2000 students in Central High school under ordinary circumstances.

BACKGROUND OF THE DESEGREGATION STRUGGLE. Following the Supreme Court decision in 1954, there was talk of integrating the schools which eventuated in a board-proposed city- and court-approved plan known as the Blossom plan. (Mr. Blossom is the superintendent of schools.) This plan called for gradual integration beginning with a few students in Central High school in the fall of 1957, complete desegregation of high schools in 1958, desegregation of Junior High schools in 1959 and gradual integration of grade schools thereafter.

However, at the beginning of school when the 9 very carefully chosen Negro students appeared at Central High school under the care of four white ministers of the city, they were turned away by the national guard that had been called out by Gov. Faubus. A mob was present on this and succeeding days.

Following this, the president federalized the national guard and it was called away from the school. On Monday, Sept. 23, the Negro students came back to school as Mayor Mann had intimated that he was able to take care of the situation with local police. There is plenty of indication that the police took a very meek and mild attitude on the morning of the 23rd, which led to the severe beating by the mob of four Negro newspaper men and photographers. The nine Negro children were taken into the school by a side door, but the frenzy of the mob, plus a lackadaisical attitude on the part of the police in failing to disperse the mob, made the mayor feel it necessary to remove the nine Negro children from school under police escort shortly after noon. On Monday, the 23rd, the President issued his order of "cease and desist" and on Tuesday morning there was no attempt on the part of the Negro children to come to school. Notwithstanding the President's order, the mob gathered.

Beginning at 3:15 p.m. on the 23rd, airborne troops of the 101st Airborne Division began landing at the local airport at what was known as TONE strength, or approximately 1000 men. This is a famous division, is equipped ordinarily to use atomic weapons of the Honest John and Little John variety. The word the public relations colonel used in describing the group, was Pentomic, the five line groups. The troops were billeted at Fort Joseph D. Robinson and on Tuesday evening, the school was taken over by troops and they were given orders not to discuss matters with anyone, and when I talked with them, they all referred me to the general and said they were not allowed to make comments.

TROOP POLICE FORCE On Wednesday morning, Sept. 25, I arrived at the high school at approximately 7:30. Already a sizeable crowd of people, estimated to be 200 - 300 had gathered at different corners around Central High School. There were 350 soldiers on duty, 24 of them being within the corridors of the school. There were no Negro troops in this 350, although Negro troops were in the 1000 men brought up. Around the school soldiers with bayonets set, were stationed about every 10 feet, and directly in front of the school 33 soldiers were lined up on the grass at the main entrance. In addition to these static troops, there were groups running at break-neck speed hither and yon around the school and up and down the streets within a block of the school building itself.

Mobile sound units were set up at strategic places within a center directly in front of the main entrance. A loud speaker was in operation in this unit, and the code that was used was "Defiance 68" and operations for the whole school area were carried on from here, and each platoon was equipped with walkie-talkie radio, enabling groups to keep in touch with the main center from which running troops could be dispersed at will.

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Occasionally there would be an arrest by the military and this person would be marched off behind the school building and held for local police in some instances, and in other instances seemed to be taken home to get them off the grounds. This was called "selective arresting" in the terminology of the public relations man, and usually was on the basis of identification as an agitator or previous participation in the mobs. Others who did not move when commanded by the troops were arrested and taken away.

VIOLENCE BY TROOPS There were only two instances of violence by the troops that I saw. One was when a man being asked to go back, reached down and pushed the bayonet away from his stomach. The moment he touched the soldier's gun, another soldier standing by him brought the butt of his rifle down on the man's head, felling him like a poled ox. The second incident was Paul Gowan, who although moving away with the mob at the point of the bayonet, turned to argue with a trooper and his right arm was punctured by the bayonet. This man was a poultry salesman from Springfield, Ark., and told me that he had quit his job two weeks before in order to come into town to participate in the demonstrations at the school. He had been a soldier, felt that the Negro students were just looking for trouble, and said that all he asked was for the troops to use discretion in dealing with the crowds, and "a bayonet is damn bad". This man said "If I have to get a gun, I will do so. They are not going to push around our women and they are not going to push around our students." At this interview, there was also present a young girl who said that on the previous day, two Negroes had caught her and had cut her left hand on the back with a broken beer bottle. I examined the cuts and they were all extremely minor and looked to be more like the scratches of a cat's claw, and in no way resembled the cut that I would imagine a beer bottle would inflict. Since so little was made of this incident, I am inclined to believe that the girl was seeking notoriety.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS SURROUNDING ENTRANCE OF STUDENTS The crowd was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the nine Negro students, Sept. 25th. At 9:22 a siren was heard which was the sign for all of the soldiers surrounding the school to come to attention and to step forward some six paces to within about three feet of the curb on which the crowd stood. Bayonets were held at readiness, the barrier was lowered, and into the street in front of the school came a jeep followed by a station wagon with the 9 Negro students, and this in turn followed by another jeep. The jeeps were filled with armed men with automatic rifles and possibly other equipment. The nine students were escorted into the school by 22 soldiers, and soon after the soldiers entered the building they re-emerged.

In the meantime, General Walker had addressed the students inside the assembly. It was estimated that some 800 - 900 students were in the assembly at the time. His remarks are as follows:

"You have nothing to fear from my soldiers, and no one will interfere with your coming, going, or your peaceful pursuit of your studies.

"However, I would be less than honest if I failed to tell you that I intend to carry out my orders. Those who interfere or disrupt the proper administration of the school will be removed by the soldiers on duty and turned over to the local police for disposition in accordance with the laws of your community." . . . Walker told the group that he was requested by Superintendent Blossom to make the address. The general said that there can be no exceptions to enforcement of the law, "if it were otherwise, we would not be a strong nation but a mere unruly mob." Walker reminded the students that his troops were on duty at the school because they were ordered there, and added: "As I have stated above, the law abiding people have nothing to fear from them. They have been carefully instructed to not to molest any law abiding citizen in his person or property."

This address was made at 9:00 on Sept. 25, 1957

9:28 Six white students left the building.

9:30 General Walker left the building.

9:31 another white student left the building.

9:32, another

9:36 two more, escorted by soldiers off the school grounds and allowed to go home.

9:40, one more left.

9:42, still another.

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9:46, still another. (I heard afterwards that from all entrances approximately 28 white students left the building in protest against the Negro students.)

11:30 There was a fire drill which seemed to have been held on information that a bomb had been planted in the high school. All of the students within the school came out the front entrance, and I estimate that some 700 - 800 lined up in front of the school on the sidewalk to participate in the festivities surrounding the presence of the troops. These students included the 9 Negro students. They did some heckling of the soldiers, in good nature, and spent most of the time giving high school yells, something about the fact that they were going to defeat the "Indians" from Baton Rouge that they were to play football on Friday night. (Incidentally, great numbers of the troops attended the game on Friday night and roared vociferously for "their" high school, which was good for public relations.)

When the students came out of the high school, there was a great roar of approval from the mob that had assembled, but when the students heard this roar of approval and realized that the mob thought they were leaving the school in protest, they turned around and started back into the school, which was a very effective rebuke to the parents themselves.

WHITE STUDENTS APPEAL In approximately 45 minutes the students returned to the school, no bomb having been found as far as anyone knew, and immediately following this, a very attractive, 16 year old white girl, came out of the school and asked to make a statement to the radio. She said that she did not want to go to school with "them", but "I will because it is the law. I may not be in school tomorrow because of what I am saying now. . . If parents would leave us alone, we would work this thing out. . . There might be some bloody noses, but it would work out and we are not afraid of 9 Negro students in the school, but we are afraid of parents and what they will do." She pleaded very dramatically and effectively with parents to leave them alone and let them work it out in their own way. "It is the law, and we are only doing our duty", she said. Later on, she said that she was not a "hood" (hoodlum) but that she attended church and sang in a church choir. She would not give her name and kept her face turned away from the television all of the time. I could not get her identified in any way. She had the approval of some high school students that were still out of school, because they seemed to be very friendly and to support what she had said.

Attendance the first day at school under the guard of the troops was approximately 1250. On Thursday this number had increased to about 1350 and on Friday there were 1435 students in school. The radio reported almost full attendance by Oct. 3.

SUBSEQUENT EVENTS At 8:34 on Thursday morning, the Negro students arrived at the school with the same escort, but this time only 6 soldiers entered the building with them. A great number of high school students had gathered at the front of the school to witness the coming of the Negro students, and there was some cat-calling and some remarks, but many of these were directed toward the troops more than to the Negro students. On Friday morning, the young people were accompanied into the school by only two soldiers.

Thursday morning, an airforce officer from Lackland field, Texas, was apprehended across the street from the school and it was discovered that he was armed with a pistol, had a rifle inside his car, and there seemed to be no adequate explanation for his presence at the school.

Two young reporters attempted to slip into Central High school as students, in order to question students. They were apprehended and ejected from the school.

Thursday morning, Sept. 26, the mob had been decreased to 3 people, and on the lawn where a good sized mob had congregated the day before, a man was patiently watering his lawn, attempting to undo the damage of the many feet of the day before. I questioned him and he said he did not expect any more trouble until the army left.

I questioned great numbers of high school students who were participating in the mob, students who had talked who were part of the mob in front of the school, and found most of them were from out of town, although some were from Central High. Those that were from Central high were uncertain as to when they would go back to school and some said they would never go back as long as Negroes were inside. Others said, quite sincerely, that they were making a last ditch stand to prevent desegregation of the schools.

CONCLUSIONS: I found the following significant facts: That the NAACP is strong and has taken the lead in the integration matter. The head of the NAACP is Mrs. Daisy Bates, wife of the publisher of the local Negro paper press.

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Conclusions: (continued)

II. The second significant fact is that being out of the deep South, there is a substantial number of white people who are taking part in the integrationist fight. Leaders among these include Nat Griswold, an FCR member and head of the Arkansas Council on Human Relations; Robert Wixom, FCR member and professor in the University Medical School; Rev. Dunbar Ogden, minister of the Presbyterian church; and Rev. Cartwright, minister of the Pulaski Heights Christian Church.

III. The spirit of nonviolence is more of an expediency than a philosophy of life in Little Rock; more so than in the majority of the tension areas of the South.

IV. The situation, already made extremely serious by inactivity over long periods of time by the President, the illegal use of the national guard by Gov. Faubus, the timidity of the local police, has been made even more serious by the introduction of federal troops into the situation. Most people who believe in law and order, in Little Rock, would agree that the president's action was inevitable. This includes both newspapers. But there is a deep heartsickness on the part of most of the community that this action had to be taken to force integration, as it in itself indicates the low level to which human relations had sunk in the last two or three weeks.

V. Therefore, from now on, it seems that the problem is a dual one, and much political hay can be made by southern politicians by what they call the "invasion of the South." It is my humble opinion that from now on the two problems are almost inseparable, and the quicker the troops can be withdrawn the better. There seems to be solutions forthcoming, flowing out of political talks at high level.

VI. It seems that the legal integration of the school has been made more difficult by the continued incendiary statements of Gov. Faubus, in that it would appear that everything he says is calculated to keep alive the spirit of resistance in the heart of the few southerners who really intend to hold out.

VII. The problem is also made more difficult due to the fact that there has been a slowness on the part of local authorities and people to assume unlimited responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and for the peaceful integration of schools. In this respect, the churches of Little Rock have been better than in other deep south cities, but have not fully taken advantage of the power that lies in their position of moral leadership in the community. There are indications that this is being corrected and that a start is being made toward resumption of responsibility on the part of local citizenry.

VIII. It does not appear that the total Negro population is as well united as, for example Montgomery, but the total impact of the Negro community seems to be directed toward the elimination of segregation.

IX. The behavior of the 9 Negro students entering Central High has been nothing short of magnificent, and they are to be congratulated, as well as are those who have participated in the month's preparation leading up to this historic event.

X. There is every reason to believe that the mobs were carefully organized, and some newspapers have pointed to sources close to the governor as being in charge of the strategy of the mob.

XI. Great numbers of local citizens are opposed not only to violence, but to the questionable methods of Faubus and many are also quite openly interested in the desegregation of the schools enough to express themselves publicly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. The best thing that would happen in Little Rock at the present time, from our standpoint, is already in the works, and that is the holding of a workshop on nonviolence in the near future. A request has come from local ministers for a workshop on nonviolence, in the hope that Martin Luther King and I could come for an all-day session. We are now in the process of attempting to arrange such a date and it is hoped that by the time you receive this, dates will be set.

II. There must now be a long period of rebuilding the wounds opened by the present mob action and the governor's and others' mistakes. This will require everything from a carefully worked out educational program to more radical and revolutionary action on the part of the community. Some of the suggestions that seem to appeal to local leaders included concerts by singers who could spoof the racial differences; teams of white and Negro athletes coming into the school to talk about sports; study courses within the school on Negro history, and the adding of Negro heroes to the ordinary list that high schools in the south would be apt to study; work camps of high school young people, probably under the direction of the AFSC.

III. A renewed emphasis on prayer, repentance and commitment within the church, which might eventuate in the holding very soon of an all-day meeting for prayer; a prayer vigil which might last until the situation improved, with prayers every hour around the clock.

IV. Increase of visitation on the part of white people to Negro churches to express concern and a feeling of brotherhood.

V. An increase in activity of the Arkansas Council on Human Relations to activate leaders within the power structure of the city to assume responsibility.

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