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The Light Within the Dark:
Lasting Successes of the New Orleans Public School Integration in 1960

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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the Upper Division Honors Program.

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Introduction

Failure to reach an intended goal does not translate to a complete lack of success. Because the overall aim was not met, does not mean positives did not arise, positives that would persist into the future. The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960 falls into this category. It centered around the integration of New Orleans' public schools. As black children entered each school, white parents pulled their children out and sent them to other schools that still remained segregated. Even in schools with remaining white children, parents encouraged the bullying and abuse of the newly-arrived black children. This continued mistreatment of people, and particularly children, because of their race can make it hard to argue that the process of integration did any good. But, failing to achieve a main goal does not mean the entire endeavor was a failure. In order to see this, we must look at the many parts of the whole. We have to look at pieces of the puzzle including the people involved, the impact it had on them, and if it encouraged them to pursue larger societal efforts based on their experiences. But it also requires that we look at society and see how the country viewed this event and what positive actions came out of it.

It may seem like tedious work to look at something like this and try to find any positives amidst the almost entirely negative situation. Yet there are good reasons for doing so. In the early stages of school integration in New Orleans, four six-year old girls were chosen to integrate the first grade. Gail Etienne, Tessie Prevost, Leona Tate, and Ruby Bridges all left the comfort of their homes and familiar schools and embarked on a journey that would leave a large footprint in history. They were taunted, threatened, attacked, and discriminated against. These actions may not seem completely unbearable or shocking for the time, but we must remember these girls were six years old. They still had missing teeth, wore pigtails, and thought the angry crowds were

people excited about Mardi Gras. Their innocence and fearlessness are what makes this search for success necessary. The girls were not alone in this endeavor, and the people involved with them are equally important. They were surrounded by family, they were escorted by U.S. Marshals, and they were taught by heroes unwilling to conform to the segregationist mindset. Their names deserve to be known, and their contributions to the civil rights of all people in this country will not be forgotten.

Along with the people directly involved, we must look to the country as a whole and see how this event impacted people across the nation. At the time, people were moved enough to send cards and letters of encouragement to the girls. As they grew up, books were written about them and movies were filmed to document their courageous walks up the school steps. And, into adulthood, the little girls who grew into strong women were given awards and have become philanthropists to help people just like them who face the same problems they did sixty years ago. Ultimately, this thesis works to make sure this moment in history is not recorded or remembered solely as a failure. It will explore how integration came to be an option in New Orleans by looking at court cases that preceded it, and will give details on the four girls and their experiences with the integration. It will show the popular culture reactions to the event through things like art, movies, and books, and finally, it will describe how these events shaped the lives of the individuals directly involved, and how much that involvement meant to them. Heroes deserve to have their stories told, especially when they do not see themselves as heroes at all.

I. How Did This Happen?

Setting into motion a historical movement as significant as school desegregation did not happen overnight. There were many factors, and many people involved. Years before the four girls walked into their schools in New Orleans, the fight had already begun across America. These fights are remembered in the courtroom for setting legal precedents, allowing the New Orleans school integration to happen. These court cases are not the only thing, however, that allowed this to take place. In order for those four little girls to set foot into the schools, they had to go through a process of testing. After the tests determined their abilities, their families had to agree whether or not to participate in this social movement. These decisions were not made easily, but they chose to participate, and as a result, the four little girls made history in 1960.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

A frequent argument in favor of segregated schools rested on the doctrine of “separate but equal.” This principle means that even if facilities such as schools, restrooms, transportation, and others, exist separately for whites and blacks, but are considered to be of equal quality, then they may continue being segregated. The *Plessy* case furthered this doctrine’s validity.

In 1890, Louisiana passed the Separate Car Act, requiring blacks and whites to have their own distinct railway cars. This act, unsurprisingly, did not sit well with all of Louisiana’s residents, especially the Comité des Citoyens, or the Committee of Citizens. This group was created in the late nineteenth century in an effort to resist the seemingly obvious degradation of the black race in the post-Reconstruction southern United States.¹ With the desire to protect black rights as their main concern, the Committee saw the Separate Car Act as a perfect

¹Paper Monuments, Rachel Cockrill, artist, and Lauren Lastrape, narrative, “Comité des Citoyens,” *New Orleans Historical*, accessed June 27, 2019. <https://neworleanshistorical.org/items/show/1405>.

opportunity to challenge prejudicial legislation. They created a scenario that would challenge the act, but they needed the perfect candidate.

A man named Homer Plessy served as the test subject. Plessy was seven-eighths Caucasian. But, because he had the one-eighth of black blood, he was considered a black citizen under the law of Louisiana. Prior to his role in the railroad incident, Plessy took part in other Civil Rights struggles, such as fighting to desegregate Orleans Parish public schools, as well as contributing to The Social Club, which was an effort to create a library and recruit strong teachers for the African American schools in the area. With this background, it is no surprise that he sprung to action when approached by the Committee of Citizens.

In 1892, Plessy purchased a first-class ticket on a train that ran from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana, and boarded his train. As the train departed, the conductor questioned Plessy on his race, and subsequently his choice of seat on the train. When Plessy admitted to being “colored,” the conductor told him to relocate out of the “whites only” train car. Of course, abiding by the plan of the Committee, Plessy refused to do any such thing. Upon being disobeyed, the conductor stopped the train, allowing a detective to board, resulting in the quick and forceful removal of Plessy from the train after which he was arrested.²

Moving to the courtroom, *Plessy v. Ferguson* argued that the experience Plessy endured violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, which abolished the institution of slavery and granted equal protection of the law to all citizens. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court ruled against Plessy in a seven to one majority decision. The findings claimed that the Thirteenth Amendment remained intact because having separate railroad cars did not explicitly categorize

²Duignan, Brian. “Plessy v. Ferguson,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 09, 2020.
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Plessy-v-Ferguson-1896>

someone as a slave or servant. As for the Fourteenth amendment, the argument stated that the “amendment was intended to secure only the legal equality of African Americans and whites, not their social equality.” The legality was upheld in the sense that the Separate Car Act required the cars, regardless of which race would inhabit them, to be constructed in an equal manner, which meant there was no implication of inferiority cast upon the blacks. Ultimately, the doctrine of separate but equal was legally established with this decision.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)

Moving forward nearly sixty years from the *Plessy* decision, the United States found itself in a much different political and social climate. Unrest ran rampant in the black communities and among people who saw the blatant mistreatment blacks faced simply due to the color of their skin. The inequality of schools was one of the main sources of anger. Black and white children attended different schools, the word different serving as a subtle adjective. The black schools were in poor condition, had less qualified teachers, were in less desirable locations, and had very little to offer the children forced to attend them. Not surprisingly, the white schools were of a much higher caliber, offering more opportunities to learn and grow into successful students and eventually adults.

Eventually, people grew impatient and frustrated with the obvious need to desegregate the schools and provide all children an equal opportunity to learn. Because of the doctrine determined by the *Plessy* case, separate but equal, the only real way to effect change would be to go to the courts and try to make a difference there. If the Supreme Court had previously chosen to argue that segregated schools were equal learning environments in terms of location, teacher quality, curriculum, and other key factors of getting a strong education, the only forward motion would come from changing the laws currently in place. The *Brown (1954)* case is comprised of

five smaller cases from around the country fighting to make a change in favor of the education of children, and is a key turning point in the New Orleans fight for school desegregation.

Briggs v. Elliott (1952)

This case was the first of the five cases under the *Brown* umbrella. *Briggs* began in 1949 and was the only case of the five that originated in the Deep South. Harry Briggs was one of many parents who decided to bring a lawsuit against R.W. Elliott, the school board president in Clarendon County, South Carolina. The case began when black parents made a simple request that the county provide school buses for their children, the same privilege white children enjoyed. Their requests were ignored, sparking a feud that led the parents to file a suit against segregation in general.³ The NAACP agreed to take on the case as their own, with Thurgood Marshall as the lead attorney. Interestingly, “Marshall would later become the first African American U.S. Supreme Court Justice.”

The case reached a U.S. District Court where, to the surprise of many, the judges ruled that the segregated schools in South Carolina were not equal, necessitating that changes be made. The state claimed there were steps being taken by the government to create newer schools for the black children, which would bring the segregated schools up to equal standards. Because of this information from the state, two of the three judges voted to continue segregation because they felt that measures were being taken to provide equal opportunities to the children, not fully grasping the fact that segregation as an institution is harmful, regardless of the condition of a building or a classroom.

³“*Briggs v. Elliot*,” *National Park Service*, Accessed 01 February 2020.
<https://www.nps.gov/brvb/learn/historyculture/socarolina.htm>

Judge J. Waties Waring wrote the lone dissenting opinion in the case. He understood that the problem of segregation went beyond the surface level issue of having equal physical environments. In writing his twenty-page dissent, he came to the conclusion that “segregation is per se inequality.”⁴ His opinion on this matter was significant due to his own personal background. Born in Charleston, South Carolina, Waring grew up the son of a Confederate veteran. He “grew up in a family devoted to the ‘Lost Cause’ of the Confederacy,” making his progressive views on segregation even more perplexing. It seemed Waring simply saw segregation for what it was. It did not have to be about race or superiority or anything else that drove the arguments behind segregation. He simply understood that keeping people separate on the basis of race was fundamentally wrong. When asked years later to describe the support the black community provided during the *Briggs* case, he replied honestly that the black community had “never known before that anybody would stand up for them, and they came there because they believed the United States District Court was a free court. [...] It was like watching a breath of freedom.”⁵

Belton v. Gebhart (Bulah v. Gebhart) (1952)

These two cases were essentially identical, took place in communities very close together, and were argued by the same lawyer. Howard High School was the main source of conflict in the *Belton* case. The students living in Claymont, Delaware all lived near the beautiful facility of Claymont high school, but the black students in the area were forced to go to Howard

⁴“Bitter Resistance: Clarendon County, South Carolina,” *Smithsonian: National Museum of American History*, Accessed 01 February 2020. <https://americanhistory.si.edu/brown/history/4-five/clarendon-county-4.html>

⁵“How the Son of a Confederate Soldier Became a Civil Rights Hero,” *NPR*, 10 April 2014, Accessed 01 February 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/04/10/301432659/how-the-son-of-a-confederate-soldier-became-a-civil-rights-hero>

High School, ten miles away. This school was located in a less ideal part of town, but parents were also upset by the “class size, teacher qualifications in terms of advanced degrees, and the incomplete curriculum.” The parents sought council with attorney Louis Redding, who encouraged them to ask state officials to permit their children to attend Claymont, and upon being denied, Redding took the case. As for the *Bulah* case, Sarah Bulah wanted equal transportation rights for her daughter Shirley. A bus carrying white children passed the Bulah residence every morning, but Sarah had to drive her daughter two miles to the old one-room schoolhouse for black students. When she appealed to state officials, they simply denied her because the busses would not provide transportation to a colored child while also serving the white children. After this denial, Sarah Bulah sought help from Louis Redding.

The parents in both cases decided to proceed and directly charge the members of the State Board of Education, the first name on the list being Francis B. Gebhart. The judge in the case “ruled that the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine had been violated and that the plaintiffs were entitled to immediate admission to the white school in their communities.” The unfortunate thing about this ruling was that, despite being a huge victory for the community, it did not apply throughout Delaware. Nonetheless, this case provided yet another solid foundation which to would contribute to the *Brown* ruling in 1954.⁶

***Bolling v. Sharpe* (1954)**

Another situation presented itself to fight for school desegregation when a group of parents petitioned to integrate John Phillip Sousa Junior High School. The Washington D.C. Board of Education rejected this attempt, causing the parents to focus their request. The

⁶“Belton v. Gebhart (Bulah v. Gebhart) – Delaware,” *Brown Foundation*, Accessed 01 February 2020, <https://brownvboard.org/content/brown-case-belton-v-gebhart>

following year, the parents tried to gain admission to Sousa for eleven black students. After the denial of this second attempt, a Howard University law professor pressed charges and brought a lawsuit, only to have his case dismissed by the trial court. The case eventually made its way to the United States Supreme Court, where it posed the question whether the segregation of D.C. schools violated the Due Process Clause in the Fifth Amendment.

The Supreme Court reached a unanimous decision on this case. The Fifth Amendment guarantees “liberty,” which under due process extends to racial equality in public education. Because of this, the court had no choice but to determine that “racial discrimination in the public schools of Washington, D.C., denied blacks due process of law.” Because D.C. is a unique location, not being a state but rather a federal territory, this case created an important legacy. This legacy stated that anti-discrimination principles would from then on apply to state and federal governments alike.⁷

Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County (1954)

In 1951, Barbara Johns organized a strike in Farmville, Virginia, to draw attention to her school’s poor conditions. Moton High lacked important features of an average high school. There was “no gymnasium, cafeteria, infirmary, or teacher’s restrooms, and the overflow of students were housed in an old school bus and three buildings covered in tar paper.” Because of these unacceptable conditions, four hundred and fifty black students joined Johns in her two-week strike from school in protest. Eventually, two NAACP lawyers decided to file charges on behalf of the students. What they requested of the court was to strike down the Virginia state law that legalized segregated schools. The three judges at the U.S. District Court unanimously rejected this appeal, because they stated there was no proven harm in segregation.

⁷"Bolling v. Sharpe." *Oyez*, Accessed 27 Jun. 2019, www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/347us497

Once this ruling came back, there were plans set in motion to equalize Moton High School to more accurately depict the separate but equal doctrine. But, once this case reached the Supreme Court, it was successfully overturned. The white parents in Prince Edward County were displeased with this verdict and their anger was transferred to the Board of Supervisors for the county. The Board of Supervisors essentially refused to provide funds to the County School Board, which caused the schools to “effectively [close] rather than integrate.” This example of bigotry and racism displayed not only the need for desegregation, but the power that whites had in this fight against the numerous school boards. *Davis* was significant because it displayed the fight the students themselves had in them towards equalizing their schools. Previously the fights had been catalyzed by the parents of oppressed students, but with this new energy from the youth population, there was a whole new wave moving forward towards the ultimate desegregation of schools.⁸

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)

As mentioned before, this case ultimately enveloped the other cases previously discussed. But, its own details are still significant. Topeka, Kansas was the home to elementary school student Linda Brown. She and her family lived mere blocks away from the local white elementary school, but because of the color of her skin, Linda was forced to “walk across railroad tracks to catch a bus to an all-black school” that was located much further from her home than the white school. After having enough of this maltreatment, Linda’s father, Oliver Brown, teamed with other black parents experiencing the same discrimination to sue the Topeka Board of Education with the help of Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP. Marshall argued that

⁸“*Davis v. County School Board*,” *National Park Service*, Accessed 01 February 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/brvb/learn/historyculture/virginia.htm>

segregated schools were incapable of equality, and the Supreme Court unanimously agreed. The court relied on the “doll test” to justify their argument that segregation was internally harmful to the psyche of black children.⁹ The conclusion of the doll test performed by Drs. Kenneth and Mamie Clark stated that “to separate [African-American children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.”¹⁰

The four cases before *Brown* significantly contributed to the success on May 17, 1954, to overturn school segregation. The decision was made unanimously that public school segregation violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The heralded “separate but equal” doctrine was vacated thanks to *Brown* and its subsidiary cases. Chief Justice Earl Warren argued that there were certain intangible inequalities that went along with having a segregated school. The simple act of forcing a student to go to a different, clearly second-rate school based on skin color, created an inherent sense of inferiority in the minds of black students. Because of this, he declared that all schools needed to start the process of integrating public schools “with all deliberate speed.” Although what “all deliberate speed” meant was unclear, there was now a Supreme Court mandate that school desegregation was to be set in motion.¹¹

While one could empty hundreds of pens writing about the causes of school integration in New Orleans, *Brown v Board* is what ultimately set the plan into motion. With judicial backing,

⁹“Brown v. Board of Education: 1954,” *CSPAN*, Accessed 01 February 2020, <http://landmarkcases.c-span.org/Case/8/Brown-v-Board-of-Education>

¹⁰“The Significance of ‘The Doll Test,’” *LDF*, Accessed 01 February 2020, <https://www.naacpldf.org/ldf-celebrates-60th-anniversary-brown-v-board-education/significance-doll-test/>

¹¹Duignan, Brian. “Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 10 May 2019, Accessed 01 February 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Brown-v-Board-of-Education-of-Topeka>

political figures and white parents were helpless to stop public school desegregation. Now that the legality was determined, the decision had to be made about who would be chosen to take the famous steps in history and into the white schools.

Professor of sociology and education at the Teachers College of Columbia University Robert Crain discovered there were explicit guidelines formulated to decide which children would be selected for this endeavor. The guidelines followed along four steps. Step one consisted of verifying basic information, including birth certificates, proximity of the school to the child's home, classroom and teacher availability, and parental consent. The second step revolved around the child's intellect. In short, this was judged through their aptitude and ability as determined through achievement tests. The third step considered the impact on the potential student as well as the surrounding environment. This included consideration of topics like impacts on other students, effects on the academic rigor of the school, psychological impacts on the student, and the type of living situation the student had. The final step focused on the potential negative ramifications on the child in question. This included consideration of threats and tensions that could arise, as well as potential community uproar as a result of desegregation.¹² The unspoken requirement was that the students be female. There is a long and difficult history between race and sex in the US. Black men were seen as aggressors, and dangers to society. A historically racist Judge Leander Perez protested against any type of integration, especially involving males. He intimidated the public by asking if they would "wait until Congolese rape [their] daughters?"¹³ Although his views fell on the extreme end of the spectrum, Perez's fears were

¹²Wieder, Alan. "The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960: Causes and Consequences." *Phylon* (1960-), vol. 48, no. 2, 1987, pp. 122–131. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/274776. Accessed 2 Feb. 2020.

¹³Jeansonne, Glen. "Leander Perez," *64 Parishes*, accessed 17 March 2020. <https://64parishes.org/entry/leander-perez>

shared by many throughout New Orleans.

The children were not alone in this process, however. In order to move forward, their parents had to give consent. Following the assessment, five little girls were chosen to integrate the first grade. One of the five girls withdrew when her parents decided it was not the best or safest option for their daughter.¹⁴ This left the four girls known today for their actions in 1960. While looking back it may seem that these children were doing what they were doing solely for the sake of history, most of the decisions revolved around convenience and education. For example, Gail Etienne's father wanted her to attend McDonogh 19 because it was in walking distance from her house, as opposed to the lengthy trek necessary to attend the all black school. Her father also wanted her to get the best education possible. Black schools had insufficient funds and supplies compared to white schools so, for him, the switch simply made sense.¹⁵ The parents of Ruby Bridges shared a similar thought pattern. Despite Ruby's father being worried for her safety following her enrollment at William Frantz, Ruby's mother insisted on her remaining at Frantz so she could get the education that her parents were deprived of.¹⁶ Tessie Prevost's father was thrilled for the opportunity given to his daughter, but he did not realize how large of an ordeal it would turn out to be.¹⁷

Overall, these parents were really only fighting for their daughters to receive better

¹⁴Mary Lee Muller. "New Orleans Public School Desegregation." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1976, pp. 69–88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4231560. Accessed 2 Feb. 2020.

¹⁵Etiénne-Stripling, Gail. "Oral History Interview with Gail Etiénne-Stripling." Interview by Mark Cave. *The Historic New Orleans Collection*. 18 November 2017.

¹⁶Michals, Debra. "Ruby Bridges." National Women's History Museum. National Women's History Museum, 2015. 01 February 2020.

¹⁷Cave, Mark, Holtz, Sarah, "The Desegregation of McDonogh 19: An Oral History," *New Orleans Public Radio*. 16 November 2017. <https://www.wwno.org/post/desegregation-mcdonogh-19-oral-history>. 02 February 2020.

educations that would set them up for successful futures. With the legal rights for segregation from *Plessy*, *Brown*, and its smaller cases, along with successful testing, these four little girls found themselves in the center of some serious national attention. Unfortunately, the girls would soon discover, even through six-year-old first grader eyes, that being the center of attention is not always a positive experience.

II. Who Were the Girls?

At the heart of the story of desegregation in New Orleans, the most significant participants are the children who integrated first. Although in the case of New Orleans the four little girls who first integrated were only six years old, they still faced the wrath of racists and bullies. These girls are perhaps the most important because of the innocence they possessed. They did not fully comprehend why they were allowed at certain schools, but banned from others. The recollections from these women display just how naïve and unaware children can be of the harmful environment around them, and in this case, for their own good. The stories of Ruby Bridges, Leona Tate, Tessie Prevost, and Gail Etienne live on as a reminder of the plight of the black child in twentieth century New Orleans. A child deserves none of what these four girls received, but they proceeded with grace and courage, and meanwhile contributed greatly to the history of their country.

Gail Etienne

In an hour-long interview with Mark Cave at the Historic New Orleans Collection, Gail Etienne-Stripling, now married, reflected on her experience integrating a public school in 1960. Gail was one of the three girls to attend McDonogh 19, alongside Tessie Prevost and Leona Tate. She remembers driving up to the school the first day and seeing large crowds of people. Their expressions were particularly menacing through the eyes of a six-year-old, because Gail recalls the people “looking like they wanted to kill us.” Once inside the school, the descriptions she gives were anything but ordinary for a regular day of elementary school. The girls were told to stay away from windows, because the mere sight of them would make them vulnerable to attacks by the irate mob outside. The girls were also instructed to bring their own food and water bottles because they would not be allowed to use the cafeteria. This put them at risk for potential

tampering with the food and water supply by an angry parent or faculty member. Gail recalls other teachers being present at the school despite the eventual removal of all white students from McDonogh 19, but those teachers did not make any attempts to interact with the three students. The three little girls were not allowed to go outside for any sort of physical education or recess periods, instead having to go from classroom to classroom as their play time. This, again, was possible because the entire school was empty, so the three little girls had free reign.

The potential for violence did not end at school. Angry citizens, whether neighbors of the Etienne family or people so enraged that they would drive to their house to make a scene, posed a threat to their overall safety. Because of this, officers patrolled at her house overnight. They would keep lights shining on the home to always have a visual. These precautions may seem overwhelming, but necessary. One night, patrol officers pulled over a driver who was circling the block the Etienne house was located on. They discovered a large gun in the trunk. These officers and marshals played a significant role in the extensive protection of these girls and their families. One of the sweetest moments of the interview was when Gail described walking into school each day hand-in-hand with one of the marshals. Because of the time she spent with this marshal, Gail believed he was her boyfriend. The innocence of this memory displays just how young and unaware these girls were at this momentous time in history.

Gail also gives a brief account of her second and third grade elementary years as well. With the white students still boycotting the segregated school, she recalled that in her second year at McDonogh, about twenty additional black students joined the three girls in the classroom. There was still anger surrounding integration, but with all black children in the school, the learning environment was better-suited for children because now there were more students for them to play with. The next year, however, changed. Gail transferred to T. J. Semmes

Elementary, ironically named after a Confederate-era judge.¹⁸ Only this time when she got to school, the white students did not leave. This may seem like some sort of victory, but what it really meant was further harassment and being bullied. She reflects on the treatment she received from the white children. Awful actions such as being spit on, having her dress ripped, and being hit in the stomach with a baseball bat, are all examples Gail could remember from her time at T.J. Semmes. The white students were acting out their white supremacist beliefs, and the teachers were letting it happen. Gail's memory of her elementary school experiences show the innocence that an elementary school student had when confronting the world, but also displayed the hatred and disrespect that can exist in people who believe in an institution as evil as segregation.¹⁹

Leona Tate

Leona remembers waking up on her first day of classes at McDonogh 19 and feeling like it was Christmas morning. The house was full of family and friends, and it felt like a big gathering for a holiday. Unbeknownst to her, these loved ones had all gathered together for moral support and to assist her mom in getting her daughter ready for the big day. When a black car pulled up out in front of the house, everyone stopped talking and the house grew eerily quiet. The US marshals came to the door and Leona's mother told her she needed to get into the back seat of the car and refrain from putting her head up against or outside of the window.²⁰ As they pulled up to the school, Leona recalls seeing a crowd of people "cursing, screaming, yelling,

¹⁸"Judge T. J. Semmes Recalls Old Days. The Revival of Interest in Confederate History Leads." *Times-Picayune*, 23 Jan. 1898, p. 10. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*, Accessed 3 Feb. 2020.

¹⁹Etiénne-Stripling, Gail. "Oral History Interview with Gail Etiénne-Stripling." Interview by Mark Cave. *The Historic New Orleans Collection*. 18 November 2017.

²⁰Morris, Tim. "The Little Girls Who Desegregated New Orleans Schools," *Nola.com*, 17 May 2019. https://www.nola.com/opinions/article_b082d384-0e9d-52a9-ba82-cdf2c242f117.html

[and] being held back by police.” She noticed this but thought the police were holding them back so they would not get hit by cars. She never considered people’s rage focused on her. She recalls meeting Tessie and Gail, and the three of them spending a long time sitting on the bench outside of the front office. Eventually, the girls were taken to a classroom. As they walked, Leona noticed all of the other kids, feeling that it was just a normal day of class. Unfortunately, as soon as the girls got to the classroom, the white students immediately began to exit. Being an outgoing child, Leona remembers trying to talk to some of the other kids but being obviously ignored and feeling “totally invisible.”

Despite this bumpy first day of school, Leona did not really remember thinking too much about the lack of other students or teachers. She loved school, and had no problems with her teacher, Mrs. Meyers. She had the same recollection as Gail about the schoolyard being off limits for recess and the water fountains being shut off, forcing them to bring their own from home. But the auditorium had a stage, so their recesses were spent doing performances, not really minding being inside instead of out in the sun. The windows in all of their classrooms were covered in brown paper, but that did not specifically mean anything in the mind of six-year-old Leona. She, in her mind, was just a kid attending school.²¹

Just like Gail, Leona remembers third grade being a difficult time. Two years after their historic steps into McDonogh 19, the girls no longer had marshals or the New Orleans Police Department with them for protection. She distinctly remembers the other “kids were so hostile, so angry,” and upon further adult reflection, she realizes this animosity could only have been fostered in their homes by their parents. The kids would taunt the little black girls saying that if

²¹Tate, Leona. “Gliding Past Mobs, Towards an Education,” *The Times-Picayune Publishing Corporation*, 2004.

they bumped into each other, the blackness of their skin would rub off onto them. Even then Leona remembers knowing this to be untrue and thinking that this type of ignorance was strange. As for transportation now that they did not have US marshal escorts, Leona recalls walking only a few times, but for the most part always being driven, even enlisting the help of a taxi company when her parents' work schedule did not allow them to make it to the school on time. One incident stuck out in Leona's mind, however. Her mother decided to let her ride the school bus one day, and the word Leona used to describe it was "horrific." The kids kicked the back of her seat, they even broke the seat and tried to tell the driver it was Leona's fault. One little boy spit in her hair as he was getting off the bus. Knowing Leona was an outgoing and talkative kid, her interviewer asked how she was able to hold her tongue and not let these bullies really have it. She referred to her explanation as "brainwashing," a fear that stuck with her for a long time. Their teachers told them that if they got "three black dots" in their record for breaking rules or causing trouble, they would never be able to go to school again. This scare tactic worked, and Leona and the girls went through this relentless bullying and trauma, all because they wanted to be at school and truly wanted to learn.²²

Tessie Prevost

The final member of the McDonogh Three is Tessie Prevost. Her first day of school at McDonogh 19 started out normally enough, waking to find that her mother had her clothes washed and laid out for her. Much like Gail and Leona, when she was ready to head to school, a group of US marshals pulled up in a black car in front of her house to bring her to school.²³

²²Morris, Tim. "The Little Girls Who Desegregated New Orleans Schools," *Nola.com*, 17 May 2019. https://www.nola.com/opinions/article_b082d384-0e9d-52a9-ba82-cdf2c242f117.html

²³Cave Mark, Holtz, Sarah, "The Desegregation of McDonogh 19: An Oral History," 16 November 2017, *New Orleans Public Radio*, Accessed 03 February 2020, <https://www.wvno.org/post/desegregation-mcdonogh-19-oral-history>

Tessie and her father got into the car for her first day of school, and she remembers him telling her “once we get out this car, give me your hand and look straight ahead.”²⁴ Like most six-year-olds, Tessie did not follow her father’s instructions. She immediately noticed the chaos and felt a pang of anger towards her mother. As she looked around, she saw large crowds, people screaming, police on horseback, so surely it was Mardi Gras. Why did her mom make her go to school during Mardi Gras?²⁵ Tessie’s naiveté testifies to her innocence as she walked up the stairs to her new school. When Tessie and her father got inside the school, the administrators told them they were not sure what to do with them, leaving the pair to sit outside of the principal’s office until further notice. Tessie noticed there were other students roaming the halls just like any other school, but once the three girls reached the classroom, there were no other students accompanying them. A very astute six-year old, Tessie asked her teacher where all of the other kids were going. Unable to think of any other excuse, her teacher simply responded, “just don’t worry about it.”²⁶

A social scientist named Robert Coles took an interest in what was happening in New Orleans and interviewed young Tessie Prevost to see how a child perceived the events happening around her. Her descriptions of her experiences were simple. She told him that she got to spend a lot of one-on-one time with her teachers. The white students and most teachers had left the school, making the teacher to student ratio six to one. Nonetheless, Tessie liked the attention. She also loved the media because she got to see images of herself like a celebrity on the

²⁴Williams, Tessie Prevost. “Integrating McDonogh 19 – Oral Histories.” Interview by Mark Cave. *The Historic New Orleans Collection*. Accessed 03 February 2020.

²⁵Wieder, Alan. “Chapter 9: The New Orleans School Crisis of 1960: The Blacks Who Integrated.” *Counterpoints*, vol. 47, 1997, pp. 111–121. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/42975188. Accessed 3 Feb. 2020.

²⁶Williams, *Historic New Orleans*.

television and in different newspaper articles. She thoroughly enjoyed getting mail. Tessie received encouraging letters from people around the country telling her how brave she was, and to keep pushing forward. Of course, the hate mail had already been sorted by the time Tessie got her hands on it, and she did not know about the negative things people were writing to her and her family.²⁷ Besides the hate mail, there were other unfair ramifications going on at this time for the Prevost family as well. At the time of the integration, the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, where the Prevost's lived, was a mixed neighborhood. Unfortunately, because of Tessie's attendance at McDonogh 19, white people in the area who usually would not think twice about speaking to and interacting with the family, began to completely ignore them. For example, Tessie's father used to get a ride to work with a man in the neighborhood because he did not have a car of his own. After the first day of school for Tessie, the man no longer offered rides.

One of the most positive recollections from Tessie's primary school days came in eleventh grade. Her history teacher was assigning the class research paper topics. Knowing who Tessie was and what she had done in 1960, her teacher made her topic about *Brown v. Board*. She had to research the court case and all of its history, and then figure out how the verdict was relevant to the current time. As Tessie did her research and spent hours in the library, she came upon articles, newspaper clippings, and more about her, Gail, and Leona. This was the first time she ever thought to herself that perhaps what she went through as a child was actually of importance. With this newfound discovery, Tessie approach her teacher to ask if he knew about this. He told her of course he did, but he figured she did not because she never brought it up in class. He told her that he assigned her this project because he felt that it was important for her to start realizing how significant a role she had played in the Civil Rights movement, and that she

²⁷Wieder, *Counterpoints*.

should be proud of what she had done. In the memories of Tessie, Leona, and Gail about their years in school, this instance stood alone in praising the girls for what they had done for black people throughout the United States.²⁸

Ruby Bridges

Perhaps more well known, but of equal importance to the McDonogh Three, Ruby Bridges was the fourth and final student to integrate New Orleans public schools in 1960. Ruby is often remembered separately from the other three girls because she integrated William Frantz Elementary, and she integrated alone. On the evening of November 13th, the night before Ruby's first day of school, her mother tried to prepare her for the coming day, knowing there would be an overwhelming crowd at the school. All Ruby really remembers, though, is knowing she would not be going to school with her friends. The next morning Ruby's mother carefully dressed her in a beautiful white dress, taking her time to make sure she looked perfect. As with the McDonogh Three, there was a knock at the door that morning. On the porch stood "four serious-looking white men, dressed in suits and wearing armbands." The marshals had arrived to bring Ruby and her mother to Frantz. Once in the car, the marshals spoke to Ruby and her mother to let them know how the arrival would go. They were told to wait in the car until the marshals got out, then they would get out of the car and be surrounded by the marshals and would walk forward and up the stairs into the school. As they approached the school, Ruby noticed things like "barricades, people shouting and policeman everywhere." Like the other girls, Ruby thought it was Mardi Gras.

Once inside, Ruby and her mom were brought up some stairs to the wait in the principal's office. Because of the office's windows, everyone who walked by could be seen, and Ruby

²⁸Cave, Holtz, *New Orleans Public Radio*.

remembers “noticing everyone was white.” As they sat in the office, white parents came in and out of the school, anger written all over their faces. The entire first day of school, Ruby and her mother sat in the office and did not talk to anyone. When the school day officially ended, they were allowed to go home. As if things could be worse than seeing angry white people and being ignored all day, leaving school for Ruby was even worse than arriving. She remembers the crowd being even bigger, now with media there. The worst thing Ruby remembers seeing was a “black doll in a coffin.” The evil that can lie in man’s heart is truly astonishing. Luckily, they finally made it to the car and were driven home. The police had set up a security perimeter around the Bridges household, so Ruby got to have a regular afternoon playing outside with a neighborhood friend. The following morning was not much better, unfortunately. The crowd was still there, shouting obscenities. Ruby even remembered one lady who for days on end shouted that she would find a way to poison her. Once inside, Ruby met her first teacher at Frantz, Barbara Henry.

Mrs. Henry was white, which made Ruby hesitant, not having spent much time around white people. They walked to the classroom, and being the only student in the room, Ruby was surprised when Mrs. Henry began to teach. Ruby had to stay in the classroom for lunch, and when she needed to use the restroom, she was escorted by a marshal. This was the last day her mother came to school, and Ruby was fearful to go back without the protection of a parent. Mrs. Henry was the only white teacher who would willingly teach Ruby. As the school year progressed, the two of them became very close. Being from Boston, Mrs. Henry even had an accent that Ruby ended up adopting. While the focus was on Ruby, Mrs. Henry was also treated poorly because of her willingness to teach a black child. The principal and other teachers were rude and unhelpful, often making distasteful comments about Ruby. One day, Mrs. Henry

happened upon a classroom in Frantz with three white students in it. She was shocked to find out there were other students in the school, students who were being kept apart from Ruby.

By the end of the year some white students had returned to the school, and Ruby was sometimes allowed to play with them. This mixed-race interaction is actually the first time Ruby remembers experiencing something as a result of being black. A little white boy told her his mother instructed him not to play with Ruby because of her skin color. Ruby was not mad at him, but she finally began to understand what the white people were angry about. Nonetheless, the spring semester carried on, and the marshals eventually stopped escorting Ruby to school. Then second grade rolled around and Ruby walked into an integrated classroom of about twenty students. Her new teacher was grouchy and not nearly as nice as Mrs. Henry, but she was with other students at long last.²⁹ Despite setbacks like her dad being fired, her mom being ignored in grocery stores and her share-cropping grandparents being evicted from their land, Ruby had successfully integrated William Frantz.³⁰

These four girls went through more than most people will go through in an entire lifetime. They were spit on, called names, ignored, and every other negative treatment one can think of. They look back on these times, now grown women, and think about the reality of what they did. The fact that they were only six years old and were standing up, though unbeknownst to them, for the entire black community of the United States, displaying courage and bravery well beyond their years. Although this valiant effort to integrate schools did not succeed in the long term, what they did should never be thought of as anything less than heroic. Tessie, Leona, Gail,

²⁹Bridges, Ruby, and Margo Lundell. *Through My Eyes*: Scholastic Press, pp. 14-53, 2009.

³⁰Michals, Debra. "Ruby Bridges." National Women's History Museum. National Women's History Museum, 2015. Accessed 03 February 2020.

and Ruby are incredible Civil Rights icons, and will always be remembered as such. It is important to take this moment in history and see the good that came from it. Even if its main goal of ending segregation in schools did not completely work, they inspired success in many other ways.

III. Who Saw What Happened?

With New Orleans public schools in the 1960s officially declared integrated under the law, but not in actuality, it can become daunting to consider whether or not the pain and mistreatment these four little girls suffered was worth it. If a majority of black children still attended black schools, and white children still attended white schools, did the courage of Ruby, Leona, Tessie, and Gail serve a purpose? The answer to that question is a resounding yes. The easiest way to see the successes this moment in history had is to look in the years following the event. Popular culture, community outreach, and many artists reflected the deep appreciation the public had for these four brave girls. The recognition was nationwide, as seen in the naming of a school in Alameda, California, after Ruby Bridges. It was also local. There were events honoring the girls, museum exhibits school functions, and countless other signs of recognition. This public acknowledgment centered mainly around Ruby. This can be for many reasons. She integrated her school alone, and therefore her vulnerability was even more obvious as she walked to school each day in between several grown male US Marshals. She has also been more outspoken and has made a quasi-career centering around her experiences at Frantz. Nonetheless, community dedication, books, movies, and artwork reflect on the bravery of all four girls and display how much people around the country appreciated their strength in 1960.

Community Recognition

There are different ways someone can be honored. Ruby Bridges is lucky enough to have experienced these different ways in her hometown. In 1998, an exhibit named “The Shoes We Use,” found its way to the Louisiana Children’s Museum. The exhibit “consists of eight components, all of which incorporate hands-on activities with lessons in language arts, math, science, social studies, and the arts.” Children can measure feet, play house, and learn about

shoes in many cultures. There is also a shoe case that holds the shoes of celebrities from the state. The representative shoes from Louisiana are the “sneakers of O’Neal and Peyton Manning, black dress shoes belonging to Lindy Boggs, patent leather loafers donated by Harry Connick Jr., [and] the plaid tennis shoes of Ruby Bridges.” An NBA champion, a Superbowl MVP, the first woman voted into Congress from Louisiana, and a musician holding multiple Grammy and Emmy awards. Her company in the exhibit displays the respect the people of Louisiana have for Ruby Bridges and what she contributed to the community. As compared with the others in the exhibit, she is a champion, an award winner, a history maker, and much more. Her contribution to the furthering of Civil Rights in New Orleans does not go unnoticed by its citizens.³¹

The public perceived Ruby in even more simple ways. For example, she is highly celebrated for Black History Month. In March of 1998, Sherwood Forest Elementary students were asked to choose a famous black person in history, dress up like their historical figure. and then give a “brief historical account of his or her character.” Some of the figures included Civil Rights activist Rosa Parks, poet and author Langston Hughes, and pioneer of the Underground Railroad Harriet Tubman. Much like with the shoe exhibit, Ruby Bridges is surrounded by these exquisite names and people who have contributed greatly to the betterment of our country. The little girl who chose to talk about Ruby Bridges dressed in a white dress like Ruby did on her first day of school, had two boys pretend to be her marshals, and carried a copy of Ruby Bridges’ book *Through My Eyes*, written about her experiences in her elementary years. Even almost forty years later, people had not forgotten the courage of the four little girls who integrated New Orleans public schools.³²

³¹“Feet: First step in collaboration involving 10 children’s museums,” *America’s Historical Newspapers*, from The Times-Picayune, 05 October, 1998.

³²Ross, Lisa. “Students portray famous figures in black history,” *America’s Historical*

In 1995, the city of New Orleans celebrated the thirty-five-year anniversary of school desegregation. The article covering this event recounts a white woman named Katherine Senter, who had been at Frantz in 1960 as a pro-integration activist, being very excited to meet Ruby. This moment of meeting, followed by an embrace, inspired Ruby to make a statement that included the line: “we need to learn to appreciate our differences and enjoy the mix.” At this anniversary celebration, Ruby walked up and down the front stairs at Frantz, reenacting the long walk she took thirty-five years before. The article informs its reader that Ruby has actually been very active at Frantz for a long time, encouraging parental involvement in the lives of their children at school and at home. One of the more touching activities at the celebration involved “Linda Fortenberry, an associate superintendent of the Orleans Parish public school system.” She found an old copy of Ruby’s academic record and gave it to her as a gift. It displayed the excellence displayed by Ruby as a student. This was only a copy of the record, because the original is housed as part of the archives of the Orleans Parish school system due to its historical importance to the area.³³ The recognition of the fearless steps taken by the four little girls shows that their actions did not, and will not go unnoticed in the eyes of the public, and will be continually celebrated.

Books

Along with commemoration of the event in the form of personal recognition and anniversary gatherings, several books and articles appeared that described the events in New Orleans in 1960. Although they include multiple scholarly articles, history books, and biographies, the most interesting books are those written for children. Possibly the most well

Newspapers, from The Times-Picayune, 08 March 1998.

³³Treadway, Joan. “N.O. woman looks back, goes forward,” *America’s Historical Newspapers*, from The Times-Picayune, 15 November 1995.

known is *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges, published in 1999. This book was a chance for Ruby to explain her experiences for herself. She was alone at Frantz, so she is the only one who can honestly testify to the experience. The book opens with a foreword from Harry Belafonte, a Civil Rights activist and close confidant of Martin Luther King Jr., who gives Ruby high praise. He reminds the reader that “nothing can be more moving than watching a small black child climbing the steps to her elementary school that historically and legally did not welcome her presence.” Ruby goes on to tell her story from the very beginning, from her Mississippi roots, to the first day of school, to her teacher Mrs. Henry, to her remainder of school after that first year. Bridges’ book received many awards.³⁴ These include the Jane Addams Children’s Book Award for Older Children in 2000, a nomination for the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children’s Book Award in 2001, the NCTE Orbis Pictus Award in 2000, a nomination for the Judy Lopez Memorial Award for Children’s Literature in 2000, and the Flora Stieglitz Straus Award in 2000.³⁵ Her book had real life photographs told her story as she remembered it, and taught a valuable lesson about just how young she was, and how brave she had to be.

Another interesting book is *Ruby Bridges Goes to School*. This book was published by Scholastic in 2009, and was written by Ruby Bridges as well. It differs from *Through My Eyes* because it is less an autobiography, and more written as an actual children’s books with fewer personal anecdotes. The interesting thing about *Ruby Bridges Goes to School* is that it is actually used as a tool to help teachers educate young students about Civil Rights and school integration. The Scholastic website gives teachers resources to put together entire lesson plans on how to tackle this difficult issue. For example, it guides the teacher through a potential slide show. The

³⁴Bridges, Ruby, and Margo Lundell. *Through My Eyes*: Scholastic Press, pp. 14-53, 2009.

³⁵ “Through My Eyes,” *GoodReads*, Accessed 16 February 2020.
https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/58382.Through_My_Eyes

lesson plan starts with a background biography, telling the kids about Ruby's background and introduces the idea of segregation. Segregation can be a hard topic for kindergarten to second grade students, so in order to avoid the violent past and atrocities that go with segregation, it sticks with the basic definition of "separating people based on the color of their skin." It introduces *Brown v. Board*, legal precedent and other topics, finally getting to Ruby's role in it all. The role that Ruby played was so clear that even elementary curriculums find it important to include a lesson on her. Students who use the book are shown their worth through another six-year-old girl who wound up making history simply by going to school.³⁶

The final book examined for the sake of this paper is *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. This winner of the 1998 South Carolina Book Award for Children's Book is written by Robert Coles. Dr. Robert Coles is a "child psychiatrist, professor at Harvard University, and author of more than fifty books." He believed in letting the children speak for themselves, and in doing this, their stories would thus have "force and moral significance."³⁷ Coles took a personal interest in the crisis going on in New Orleans in 1960. He visited Ruby Bridges and Tessie Prevost while they were going through their transition into new schools. He wrote endless pages about the girls and their resilience despite harsh circumstances, filling multiple volumes of his *Children of Crisis*. After spending hours and hours together, Coles had gotten to know Ruby fairly well. His time spent with her during the process, rather than hearing memories after gives him credibility to write this book with accuracy and an informed mind. In a later interview, Coles comments that "Ruby is an authentic American hero."³⁸ He was surprised by her strength, and inspired that such

³⁶ "Ruby Bridges and the Civil Rights Movement Slide Show Teaching Guide, Kindergarten to Grade 2," *Scholastic*, Accessed 16 February 2020.

³⁷ London, Scott. "A Way of Seeing: The Work of Robert Coles," Accessed 16 February 2020. <http://scott.london/articles/coles.html>

³⁸ Kolhepp, Peg. "One Small Step," *America's Historical Newspapers*, from the Times-Picayune,

a young girl could still find it in her to day after day pray for the monsters her threatened her as she walked into her school. His perspective of having been there while she was still the innocent six-year-old gives him a unique perspective to analyze her behaviors and document them whether in long academic volumes, or in a short children's picture book.

Movie

The idea of having images put with words like in the many picture books written about the integration of New Orleans schools quickly turned into pictures on a movie screen. On January 18, 1998, the movie *Ruby Bridges* was released to the public. Director Euzhan Palcy made sure to include the main characters known from the history books like her parents, her teacher Mrs. Henry, Dr. Coles, and the U.S. Marshals. The front cover of the movie shows Ruby in her iconic white dress, mid-stride as she walks up to Frantz. The summary takes a wide approach and tells the future viewer that when “Ruby is chosen to be the first African-American student to integrate her local New Orleans elementary school, she is subjected to the true ugliness of racism for the first time.” This wording is significant because it does not say she was the only one to integrate, but the first to integrate her local school, meaning Frantz. Sometimes it seems because Ruby was alone at Frantz versus the trio of girls who integrated McDonogh Three, people tend to neglect the fact that Tessie, Gail and Leona went through the exact same thing as Ruby, they just did not do it alone. But, in terms of cinematography, having one main character as opposed to three was most likely easier drama-wise, and money-wise.³⁹

This movie was a large success. One *Los Angeles Times* review gives it high accolades. The article tells the reader to see Ruby Bridges “is to look unblinkingly into that face – and to

12 February 1995.

³⁹ “Ruby Bridges,” *Disney*, Accessed 17 February 2020. <https://movies.disney.com/ruby-bridges>

weep.” The movie “is an exhilarating tale of strength, perseverance, love and faith.” The movie portrays situations that can be hard to watch, but can also be hard to look away from, knowing these events actually happened, and to someone so young and innocent as Ruby.⁴⁰ When the movie actually came out, it received extremely special treatment. President Bill Clinton and past Disney CEO Michael Eisner taped an introduction to the movie to play before it aired. In this, Clinton discusses “his own experiences with segregation growing up in Little Rock, Arkansas.” The movie was so important that even the President knew he needed to acknowledge it, and encourage people to watch it with the knowledge that this brave little girl endured and survived much more than the public perhaps thought previously.⁴¹ Along with accolades from Clinton, this movie received many awards on its own. In 1998, it won the Humanitas Award. In 1999, it won the Christopher Award, the National Education Media Network Gold Apple Award, and the Young Artist Award/Best Performance by a young artist under ten. In 1999 it was also a nominee for the NAACP’s Image Awards, the American Cinema Editors, and the Young Star Awards.⁴² Despite her lack of popularity among the white public in 1960, Ruby’s story was becoming an important part of history less than four decades later.

Much like the book *Ruby Bridges goes to School*, this film was used in schools as a teaching tool. One of the first disclaimers seen on a website for teachers is that “the film is appropriate for students of all ages.” This is important because this movie can be difficult to watch at some points. Despite that concern, teachers have recognized that this is a true story

⁴⁰ Miller, Daryl H., “‘Ruby Bridges’ Looks at a Hateful World,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 January 1998.

⁴¹ Hontz, Jenny. “Clinton, Eisner intro ‘Ruby,’: Integration film gets presidential treatment,” *Variety*, 15 January 1998.

⁴² Ruby Bridges: Feature Film 1998,” Accessed 16 February 2020, <https://www.euzhanpalcy.net/rubybridges>

about fighting for rights and education, and as a result, if Ruby could endure this at six, then their students could as well. The site encourages teachers to play the movie, and then ask their students critical questions following the movie for a class discussion. Some of these questions are “What do we learn about the classroom environment Bridges is in? How does this make you feel,” or “Of all the events shown in this film, which surprised you the most? Why do you think this scene stood out to you?” These questions encourage students to think using comparative skills, from their classroom to Ruby’s, but also the question encourages them to use their emotions to guide their answers. The teachers let their students know it is okay to be upset by this movie, and to feel as though an injustice was being done, because it was. This movie was successful in many ways, screen awards being one way, but teaching kids of the future about the past so they can stand firm in the support of Civil Rights for all.⁴³

Art

A final piece of the evidence proving that the integration of schools mattered more than just to the New Orleans public school system can be seen through in iconic piece of art. Norman Rockwell was born in New York City in 1894. He always knew he wanted to be an artist, and actually had great success even from a young age. He was often inspired by “civil rights, America’s war on poverty, and the exploration of space.” Because of these interests, his paintings often featured everyday people, specifically every day Americans. One of his famous quotes was “without thinking too much about it in specific terms, I was showing the America I

⁴³ Pisano, Grace. “Ruby Bridges Movie Discussion Questions,” *Study.com*, Accessed 17 February 2020, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/ruby-bridges-movie-discussion-questions.html>

knew and observed to others who might not have noticed.” This wholly encompasses what Rockwell did when he painted *The Problem We All Live With*.⁴⁴

This Rockwell painting was first published in *Look Magazine* on January 14, 1964. The main focus of the painting is a Ruby Bridges-inspired child. She wears a white dress, white socks, and white sneakers. Her hair is pulled back into pig tails with a white bow, and she is clutching some school supplies. There are four men surrounding her, two in the front and two in the back. The men are white and are all wearing suits with a badge pinned to their breast. On the upper arm of each man there is a yellow band that reads “Deputy U.S. Marshal.” The five subjects of the painting are walking along a sidewalk next to a concrete wall. The wall has red splatter on it, the remnants of a tomato that had been thrown recently. There are also two noticeable graffiti marks on the wall. One reads “K.K.K.,” and the other reads a nasty expletive generally used to describe black people. Rockwell paints at an angle that the viewer cannot see the faces of the marshal, only from their feet up to their shoulders. This focus on Ruby is to stress “both Bridges’ small size and young age – and, in turn, her innocence.”⁴⁵

The painting had such power that “President Barack Obama had *The Problem We All Live With* temporarily installed in the White House in 2011.”⁴⁶ Overall, the painting represents the unthinkable cruelty children like Ruby had to endure due to the ignorance of many whites. Despite the beauty depicted in Ruby’s innocence, the painting is difficult to look at or focus on for too long. Reading about these young girls and the terrible treatment they and their families went through is stomach turning enough, but to see the words painted on the wall above her

⁴⁴ “Norman Rockwell: A Brief Biography,” *Norman Rockwell Museum*, Accessed 17 February 2020. <https://www.nrm.org/about/about-2/about-norman-rockwell/>

⁴⁵ Richman-Abdou, Kelly. “Norman Rockwell’s “The Problem We All Live With,” a Groundbreaking Civil Rights Painting,” *My Modern Met*, 27 March 2019.

⁴⁶ Richman-Abdou, *My Modern Met*, 2019.

small six-year-old body really brings to light the hatred so many people in the South held in their hearts. Thanks to Rockwell, Ruby's courageous walk, as well as the memory of the McDonogh Three, will remain alive in this painting.

Popular culture has the potential to create false narratives and spread hate throughout the world. As American journalist and author Carl Bernstein described it, "the lowest form of popular culture – lack of information, misinformation, disinformation, and a contempt for the truth or the reality of most people's lives – has overrun real journalism. Today, ordinary Americans are being stuffed with garbage." This is the truth from a man who works in the business of informing the public. But, when the truth does come out in the form of books, movies, art, and more, popular culture is a great avenue to share history and tell people an accurate story. The story of integration of New Orleans public schools is no different. The community was very involved in different ways. At the time of the event, people were either for it or against it, as symbolized by the tomato splattered above Ruby's head in Rockwell's painting. But, as time moved forward, people began to recognize the importance of what these little girls were doing for the betterment of the country. We see this in the inclusion of Ruby Bridges' shoes in the children's museum exhibit. Although it would have been ideal for this recognition to have been immediate, knowing that people have evolved is success on its own. Then looking to the books and movie, it became more important to educate children on this part of history as well. In the words of a great American leader Frederick Douglass, "it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."⁴⁷ As a result, teaching children about respect, about civil rights, and about loving each other regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic

⁴⁷ Blow, Charles M., "Fathers' Sons and Brothers' Keepers," *The New York Times*, 28 February 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/01/opinion/blow-fathers-sons-and-brothers-keepers.html>

status is very important, and it starts in the lessons they are taught at a young age. Ruby Bridges and the McDonogh Three taught important lessons in 1960, and they continue to teach them now. Their portrayal as heroes in modern day America is nothing short of absolute accuracy, and honoring them through means of popular culture is the least we as a country can do to thank them for their contribution to history.

IV. What is the Legacy?

With an understanding of how the event in 1960 impacted the public, it is important not to cast aside the people who lived through the event. Yes, it is important to study them during the moment in history to see how it all unfolded, but it is equally important to know what happened to them in the years to come, and how the event impacted their lives. It is important to emphasize that the recognition took place much later. Even though the integration was legal, many people struggled to see it as a positive progress. Because of this, the praise for the courage of the girls and the others involved was delayed. The good news about the four girls who integrated the New Orleans schools is that they continued their lives and became successful women, some mothers, all hard workers, and none who ever forgot what happened to them. The importance of owning an experience and turning it into a great memory as well as a learning opportunity for others is something these four women excelled at. Although they are rightfully the centerpiece of the memory for the 1960 school crisis, the people around them, like their marshals and teachers must also be remembered for their courage during this time. This final section of the paper addresses the many reunions the girls got to have as they grew up, the in depth experiences and lifelong impacts these events had on the marshals who escorted them, different awards and recognitions they have received as a result of their participation, and finally the philanthropic efforts through foundation work the women have graciously contributed to the communities around them.

Reunions

In order for the future reunions to take place with teachers, marshals, and others who participated in the 1960 school desegregation process, the McDonogh Three had to be reunited with each other first. As close as these women are today, it may be surprising they were not connected at the hip from first grade on. As they went through primary school, the girls

eventually began attending different schools and around high school, because of this separation, they drifted apart.

Luckily, not too many years later, the girls got the reunion they needed. Ernest “Dutch” Morial was the first black mayor of New Orleans, serving from 1978-1986.⁴⁸ In 1982, he decided to have an event dedicated to Leona, Tessie, Gail, and Ruby. Leona and Gail had gone to school with Ruby, but Tessie had not, so this gave her an opportunity to meet Ruby, as she recalls, for the first time. Nonetheless, this event put on by Mayor Morial gave the girls the opportunity to reacquaint themselves and their “automatic” connection has lasted to this day.⁴⁹ The bonds of their youth have kept them together, through even more reunions than just their own.

On November 14th, 2010, the fiftieth anniversary of the integration of schools in New Orleans, the McDonogh Three had the chance to reunite with the marshals who protected them in 1960. The three men who came were Herschel Garner, Al Butler, and Charlie Burks. The group had a nice weekend together, starting with a meal at Dooky Chase’s. Even though this was the first time Leona, Tessie, and Gail had seen the marshals since 1960, the girls recognized the face of Al Butler right away, and even admitted to having crushes on him. His wife, Pat, joined in the fun and told the girls they could “have [their] crush tonight.”⁵⁰ The next day, this group, along with other supporters, went to the reveal of a historic marker that commemorates the three girls’ bravery with the words “Civil Rights Pioneers” at the top followed by a description of the events that followed. The marker is located on St. Claude Avenue, right across from McDonogh 19.

⁴⁸ Finley, Keith. “Dutch Morial,” *64 Parishes*, Accessed 28 February 2020.
<https://64parishes.org/entry/dutch-morial>

⁴⁹ Williams, Tessie Prevost. “Tessie Prevost Williams Oral History.” Interview by Mark Cave. *The Historic New Orleans Collection*. 03 August 2017.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Following this ceremony, the three girls and the three marshals in attendance went to an event at Tulane University where they served as panelists for a discussion about their experiences.

Their panel began with an introduction of the six extraordinary people sitting before the crowd, along with a brief description of the events leading up to and after the integration from the director of the U.S. Marshals at that time, John Clark.⁵¹ Although Charlie Burks was one of the panelists with the McDonogh Three, he was on the detail for William Frantz Elementary. He commented about Ruby and her bravery, knowing he did not have room for fear, he only needed to protect her. Ruby and Charlie had a brief reunion in 1995, and again in 2013. The Children's Museum in Indianapolis, not far from where Charlie lived, had an exhibit featuring Ruby. When she went to visit the museum, she called Charlie and asked if he would like to accompany her. They got to visit and sit down for an interview where Charlie recalled that the more important thing was "making sure nothing happened to Ruby."⁵² The statement's simplicity can be felt and believed all these years later, knowing that the protection of an innocent child was all these men were there to do, and luckily, they succeeded.

Ruby got to experience one more momentous reunion with her first grade teacher whom she adored, Mrs. Barbara Henry. Even after years upon years of not seeing each other, they still had a "bond that united [them] and has become indomitable all these many years later." Mrs. Henry had no idea about a chance of meeting with Ruby again until one day in 1996, her phone rang. Someone on the other end of the line said her name, and she knew right away it was Ruby

⁵¹ Tulane University, "Through a Crowd, Bravely Part I – 50th Anniversary of Public School Desegregation in New Orleans," *Youtube*, 29 March 2011.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TT9hxyGYAlc>

⁵² Rodriguez, Annalisa. "Civil Rights Icon Ruby Bridges, Protector Reunite," *USA Today*, 06 September 2013. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/09/06/civil-rights-ruby-bridges-marshall/2777463/>

from her “soft, satiny, mellifluous voice.” Ruby had called to tell her that she had been invited to appear on the Oprah Winfrey show and wanted to ask if Mrs. Henry would like to join her. This came as a shock to Mrs. Henry, as she did not feel important enough to be a guest on Oprah, but like clockwork, she received a call from the show to set everything up. That phone call and talk show appearance set off a fun ride for the two of them. They went on a nationwide tour giving seminars and speaking to educators and others about their experiences and how to create a better future for the children of America. Even after these tours ended, Mrs. Henry received invitations to speak at schools, which she considers to be the “most wonderful” opportunities. She knows in order to better the future, the only place to start is with the children. They are easily influenced and still see the possibilities the world has to offer, with no ideas of corruption or discrimination. These are the same children who continue to write letters to Mrs. Henry thanking her for being kind to Ruby and for being willing to teach her when no one else would. This reunion opened many doors for the two of them, and the ongoing education of children is one of the many benefits of Ruby continuing to stand up and tell her story.⁵³

Marshals

The unsung heroes, and they prefer it that way, of the entire school desegregation narrative in New Orleans are the marshals who escorted the girls into their schools. They went into this experience having no idea what to expect. For example, the Little Rock integration was anything but peaceful. Three years before the New Orleans integration, a woman named Daisy Bates, president of the Arkansas branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), gathered a group of nine children who would be the first to integrate

⁵³ Henry, Barbara. “Teaching Ruby Bridges,” *Boston Globe*, 11 July 2014. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/06/27/teaching-ruby-bridges-reflecting-classroom-that-made-civil-rights-history/r0ozyM4GQWzD25g5mzhtqN/story.html>

an all-white school. In the weeks following the formation of the group, Bates helped counsel the kids and prepare them for the upcoming events in their lives. After weeks of preparation, the nine children headed to Central High School on September 4, 1957. With little surprise, their attempt to enter the school was thwarted. Prior to their arrival, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the nine prospective students from entering the school. After over two weeks of being physically halted from integrating, federal Judge Ronald Davies ordered the removal of the National Guard on the 20th of September. Despite the barrier being gone, the nine were still at risk from rioting parents, citizens, students, and any other racists who felt the need to attend. As a result, President Eisenhower ordered the Army's 101st Airborne Division to aid the students on their first official day. From the 25th of September on, the Little Rock Nine survived the remainder of the school year.⁵⁴ There is much more to the story of those brave children, but the point is that there were physical barriers to getting into the school, and the New Orleans marshals did not know what to expect. Fear subsided once they arrived and saw the numbers of police who had shown up. One of the marshals from the Tulane panel, Herschel Garner, noted that he was surprised to have the assistance of the New Orleans police, because that meant they would not have to fight through crowds while also keeping the girls safe.⁵⁵

Besides Herschel, the two most prominent marshals in the lives of the girls were Al Butler and Charlie Burks. Charlie was Ruby's marshal, and looking back on what he did for her, he comments that it "was one of the highlights of [his] life." He was never afraid because he knew he had a job to do. Not only was he not afraid, but he gave Ruby the credit he felt she

⁵⁴ "Little Rock Nine," *History*, 29 January 2010.

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/central-high-school-integration>

⁵⁵ Tulane University, "Through a Crowd, Bravely Part II – 50th Anniversary of Public School Desegregation in New Orleans," 29 March 2011.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kw923QfjR_w

deserved too. Looking back, he comments that “she never cried. She just marched along like a little soldier. Even though she was going to a strange school with strangers walking alongside her, she was strong.”⁵⁶ Charlie had photos of Ruby being escorted into the school hanging in his home, and he said that every time he sees the photos, it makes him feel “so glad [he] was able to do what he did.”⁵⁷ Since their meeting in 2013, Charlie and Ruby remained friends until he passed away in 2017. Charlie’s wife, Betty, now lives in an apartment where she proudly displays a copy of Rockwell’s painting on her wall. She recalls with fondness Ruby’s attendance at Charlie’s wake, talking with many people about his legacy. Charlie Burks was a hero in more ways than one, but he was never anything less than proud of what he did for Ruby in New Orleans in 1960.

Al Butler, like Charlie, was also deeply touched by his experiences in New Orleans that year. In remembering what he did for the girls, he told an interviewer that he has been “involved in an awful lot of things during [his] career, but nothing was as heartwarming or satisfying as putting those little girls in school.” He knew that this was an act of law, which is why he was called down to New Orleans to protect the girls, but he also knew what was happening was right and just. Part of Al’s determination came from his own role as a father. He knew there was no way he would ever allow someone to tell his kids they could not go to a certain school, regardless of the reason. Because of this, he knew he would potentially set civil rights back years if he did not do his part to help integrate schools. His paternal instincts were apparently very noticeable. Gail refers to Al as her “other daddy” because “he watched out for me like a father.”

⁵⁶ “The Children’s Museum Remembers Former U.S. Marshal Charles Burks, Who Protected 6-Year-Old Ruby Bridges,” *Children’s Museum Indianapolis*, 21 June 2017.

<https://www.childrensmuseum.org/content/children’s-museum-remembers-former-us-marshal-charles-burks-who-protected-6-year-old-ruby>

⁵⁷ Rodriguez, *USA Today*.

Oddly enough, in the days that the parents of these children were entrusting them to the marshals, Tessie's mother told them "I'm giving you my baby," to which they responded "I'm going to take care of this baby, you don't have to worry about that."⁵⁸ Al died in 2012, but he had a unique request. His wife Pat said Al would just "glow talking about his time in the Marshal's service," and this is seen even more through his request for his ashes to be scattered on the grounds of McDonogh 19. Al received a full service at the Abundant Life Tabernacle Full Gospel Baptist Church from Reverend Tyrone Jefferson, a service that made his wife very proud. Unfortunately, due to medical issues, Gail could not be in attendance, but after the service Leona and Tessie, along with Al's wife and others, the girls scattered his ashes at the school, leaving a legacy that will never be forgotten or underappreciated.⁵⁹

Awards & Recognitions

While there are many awards bestowed upon these women for their bravery, which will be discussed in the paragraphs to follow, the recognition of their bravery was almost immediate, and it was nationwide. The girls received countless letters in the mail, and hundreds of Christmas cards arrived during the 1960 holidays. One woman wrote from Colorado and told Leona to "fight for your Constitutional rights" because their courage is impacting the entire country (Delores Black). There were even children writing to them from as far away as Massachusetts. One little girl told the four girls in a letter that she hopes they "can stay in school and learn." (Nancy) Another woman wrote and told Leona that she had heard her name on the television and

⁵⁸ Reckdahl, Katy. "Ashes of Federal Marshal Who Helped Integrate New Orleans Schools Returning to City," *The Times Picayune*, 30 September 2012.

https://www.nola.com/news/education/article_dc22224e-1f52-5fa7-b218-8dd44b8a41e7.html

⁵⁹ Wulff, Rachel. "U.S. Marshal Honored for Role in Civil Rights Movement," *WDSU News*, 04 October 2012. <https://www.wdsu.com/article/u-s-marshall-honored-for-role-in-civil-rights-movement/3359185>

wanted to write and applaud her for her bravery. She said that the people against integration had “forgotten that Jesus taught that we are all God’s children,” but that she should nevertheless persist in order to pave the way “for other little girls, who come after [her], to have a good education and equal opportunity to lead a happy life.” (Dorothy Rose) These people recognized the forward motion being enacted by these four little girls and were so inspired they felt compelled to send them love and good wishes.⁶⁰

As the lives of these women continued, they never left their past behind. Ruby is arguably the most outspoken of the four pioneers and has been an activist for education and equal rights for most of her adult life. As a result of this, she has received many honors recognizing this dedication to civil rights. On top of the many accolades given to her book, Ruby has received two honorary degrees, one from Connecticut College, and the other from Tulane. She also received The Presidential Citizens Medal in 2001 from President Bill Clinton.⁶¹ In 2000, Ruby went to a ceremony at the Corcoran, which is located in Washington D.C., the city’s “largest non-federal art museum.” This museum pays tribute specifically to Norman Rockwell, including *The Problem We All Live With*. At this event, Ruby was sworn in “as an honorary deputy marshal” for her courage and tenacity as a six-year-old, as well as for all of the work she has done since.⁶² Not only has she received these awards, but she has been honored in two other ways as well. First, William Frantz Elementary erected a statue commemorating Ruby and her walk into the previously all white school. Second, she was invited to visit the White House by President Obama. As she headed towards the Oval Office, she saw the famous Rockwell painting

⁶⁰ Williams, *Historic New Orleans*.

⁶¹ “5 Major Accomplishments of Ruby Bridges,” *Health Research Funding*.
<https://healthresearchfunding.org/5-major-accomplishments-of-ruby-bridges/>

⁶² “History – Ruby Bridges: Honorary Deputy,” *U.S. Marshals*
<https://www.usmarshals.gov/history/bridges/index.html>

in the hallway. When she and the President discussed its significance and its depiction of Ruby, President Obama told her “I think it’s fair to say that if it wasn’t for you guys, I wouldn’t be here today.”⁶³

The McDonogh Three have been much more local in terms of their community outreach, and perhaps less publicized than Ruby. Because of this, their list of awards is scarce, but they know the importance of what they did. When they got the opportunity to do the panel interview at Tulane, they were surprised with being named honorary marshals just like Ruby. Not only were the girls honored, but the schools were as well. The two schools these four girls integrated became a sort of sacred ground for civil rights. Both schools were placed on the National Register of Historic Places, Frantz in 2005 and McDonogh 19 in 2016.⁶⁴ Although physical awards are unnecessary to prove the importance of what began on November 14, 1960, it is a nice gesture from every corner of the nation to show that what they did was seen, appreciated, and not forgotten.

Foundations

As these girls grew into women, they realized they desperately wanted to help people in any way they could. The natural step for them was to turn to philanthropy and create foundations to turn these dreams into reality. Ruby and Leona have both created foundations with similar missions: to help young children with all things, but with an emphasis on education. The Ruby Bridges Foundation was created with inspiration from a tragedy in Ruby’s life. In 1993, her little brother Malcolm was murdered. After this tragedy, Ruby looked after his children who were

⁶³ Allman, William. “President Obama Meets Civil Rights Icon Ruby Bridges,” *The White House*, 15 July 2011. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/07/15/president-obama-meets-civil-rights-icon-ruby-bridges>

⁶⁴ “National Register Database and Research,” *National Park Service*, 27 February 2020. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm>

students at Frantz. In an attempt to be connected with the kids and give them stability during this difficult time, she began to volunteer there three days a week. After doing this for a period of time, she became the parent-community liaison. She realized that parents need to be more present in their child's education in order for there to be success. In response, she launched her foundation in 1999 to "promote the values of tolerance, respect and appreciation of differences." The motto and the mission of the foundation go hand in hand, the former being "racism is a grown-up disease, and we must stop using out children to spread it" and the latter "empower children to advance social justice and racial harmony."⁶⁵

The Leona Tate Foundation for Change (LTFC) was launched in 2009. She was inspired by the election of President Obama to go on this journey. Her goals are local, with hopes of improving the educational and cultural atmosphere of New Orleans. She believes "every person should be afforded comparable opportunities and exposures" which can only be achieved by "providing access to equal educational opportunities for the greater New Orleans area youth." The mission statement of the LTFC is to "empower and enrich our communities from a spiritual, multicultural, economical, historical, and social perspective." She wants to educate all people, but wants to focus on the young. She gets invited to speak at local schools and encourages everyone to get involved in the fight for equality. The main project of the LTFC, however, centers around the school Leona made history at in 1960.

The LTFC wants to turn McDonogh 19 into a "memorial museum and multi-purpose center." There are four main goals that go along with the renovation of this building. First, with attention to the building itself, it will preserve the place where she, Tessie, and Gail forever

⁶⁵ "Ruby Bridges Biography," *Biography*, 02 April 2014.
<https://www.biography.com/activist/ruby-bridges#escorted-by-federal-marshals>

changed history. Second, they will be able to create a civil rights exhibition for local, national, and international visitors. Third, they will develop programs to help the community. One of these programs is the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond (PISAB), which would partake in teaching the "community the dynamics of racism and humanistic organizing through classes that range from early childhood to higher education." Finally, it would help stimulate the Lower Ninth Ward economy and serve as a "community anchor." This could be done through creating jobs for the renovation, as well as new positions involved in maintaining a museum that would give opportunities to people without them having to travel far from their homes. It will also be partially used as affordable housing for the elderly in the community.⁶⁶ Fortunately, the purchase of McDonogh 19 by the LTFC has been successful, and they broke ground on March 9, 2020.⁶⁷

Finally, along with all of its other success, the LTFC supports many programs that allow the community to get involved. They have sponsored a trip for kids and young adults to the Lower Ninth Ward Museum where they can learn about the Lower Nine history and talk with Leona. She emphasizes the importance of knowing their history and being proud of where they came from. With the help of a group called Youth Ventures, they also participate in an event called Business U, where the kids can learn about entrepreneurship and business. There is also a need for helping adults, and the LTFC knows that. They use a program called G. R. O. W. Adult Literacy Program, which teaches adults English, Reading, Writing, and Math, as well as

⁶⁶ "The Leona Tate Foundation Purchases McDonogh 19 School," *The New Orleans Tribune*, Accessed 28 February 2020. http://theneworleanstribune.com/the-leona-tate-foundation-purchases-mcdonogh-19-school/?fbclid=IwAR0DU8kS8qZssy0fZ-JwCNWDemI05IQ_3mmrMMbO-zwcldnksLbk4IO9q94

⁶⁷ Becherer, Max. "Photos: 'The McDonogh Three' Break Ground on Transforming Former School to Anti-racism Center," *NOLA*, 09 March 2020. https://www.nola.com/multimedia/photos/collection_8d2ad69c-624f-11ea-874c-9b1a797be3ef.html#5

providing GED preparation courses. This foundation has seen great success in its decade of existence, and will no doubt continue making a difference in the community and in the lives of those who take advantage of it.⁶⁸

The people discussed in this section are as humble as humanly possible. Their role in history, if they could write the narrative, was by happenstance, but they did what they knew was right. Some were simply going to school to see what first grade had to offer, some were teaching children regardless of their race because all children deserved to be educated, and some were simply following commands from their superiors to head to New Orleans and protect a handful of six-year-old girls. The history they all created together paved the way for the emotional reunions and lifetimes of dedication to the betterment of society. The awards are only to show people unfamiliar with their contributions what they have done for the United States. They do not need awards to tell them about courage or bravery, because they embody those two qualities wholly. Leona Tate, Gail Etienne, Tessie Prevost, Ruby Bridges, Mrs. Henry, the marshals, and others marched nobly into the face of adversity and came out the other side with a story to tell, and a mission to fight for, and that is why they are remembered today.

⁶⁸ “Leona Tate Foundation for Change, Inc.,” Accessed 28 February 2020.
<https://www.leonatatefoundation.org>

Conclusion

The failures of the integration of New Orleans public schools are obvious in that schools did not remain desegregated for long. Even to this day, though no laws demand it, the public schools are still heavily divided by race. That does not have to mean nothing good came of the event. The true success of this story can be seen by anyone. To look at the photographs of the little black girls surrounded by grown white men, and then to watch the Tulane panel of the men hugging and kissing these now grown women shows the compassion this event generated in people. To the individuals involved, whether they were going to work or going to school, race meant nothing to them. It was about doing what was right, trying to get an education, and trying to eradicate ignorance.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is important for the names of all involved to be known. From Homer Plessy in 1896, to Leona Tate breaking ground on her McDonogh 19 museum in 2020, everyone in between has played a role in the ongoing struggle for civil rights. Perhaps the most touching recollection of this entire event came from Al Butler. Al was a big, strong man. He admits to having a cocky attitude and being a very strong-willed male. For him, a white man, to have a funeral service done at a church in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans is a true testament to what happened that school year in 1960. Throughout his entire career, with his many achievements, his final wish to have his ashes spread on the ground where he protected the three McDonogh girls, proves to be just about the most heartwarming and inspiring story to ever exist.

This research was draining and disheartening. It showed the worst mankind has to offer, from displaying black dolls in coffins to sending death threats in the mail. But these heartless and misguided individuals were so strongly juxtaposed by the brave people on the right side of the

battle, that it made the successes easy to spot. In order to do this though, we must be willing to see the light within the dark. Trusting that good will come out of evil is a difficult thing to do, but it is necessary in order to propel the fight for civil rights as far forward as we possibly can. This is no easy endeavor, but looking to people like Leona, Tessie, Ruby, and Gail, the weight lifts slightly and we are able to continue the fight for justice every day, just like they began to do on November 14, 1960.