

MOSIAC IN BLACK AND WHITE: BLACK TEACHERS REMEMBER
SCHOOL INTEGRATION IN WEST VIRGINIA

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Good afternoon. The purpose of the slides that were projected on the screen as you settled into your seats was to create an ambiance relevant to our discussion today of the education of black people in West Virginia. The images, many of them quite old, are of some of the students, teachers, and buildings of former black schools. The demise of the early system of black education is part of the story to be told this afternoon. [Insert Slide Show Here]

Some time ago, we began to collect oral histories – life stories if you will – from older, black women who were or still are public school teachers. Underlying the project is a commitment to West Virginia and Appalachian history and a belief that the history and life stories of black people in West Virginia, especially of black women, have been neglected. In fact, to our knowledge, the history of black women in West Virginia has never been collected systematically and therefore there is relatively little documentation of their lives. We chose oral history as a method because we are interested in hearing the personal perspectives of the participants. In other words, we wanted to give voice to the women themselves. This work is their story.

Today's discussion is based on the life stories of 25 women. We met twice with each of the participants, usually in their homes. The semi-structured interviews were audio taped and then transcribed into written reports. We are indebted to Gina Kates of the Oral History of Appalachia Program (here at Marshall University) and Julia Lewis, a sociology graduate student, for their hard work of transcription.

The information collected in the oral histories includes topics such as family background; childhood experiences; educational and professional experiences; motivation for teaching; marital history; and experiences and attitudes regarding race and gender. As you might expect, the life stories are rich in detail and often describe humorous, sad, stoic, courageous, angry, and loving incidents. Our focus this afternoon is limited to the participants' reported experiences in regard to school integration in West Virginia.

We would ask you to keep three points in mind as we proceed to summarize some of the findings. First, the participants were obtained through informal networking; that is, through individuals we knew or through professional organizations. Thus, the group is not a random sample. The second point is that summaries, by their very nature, tend to ignore individual variation, but we have tried to recognize the uniqueness of the life stories by using the women's own words. Third, we are still in the process of analyzing the life histories and so we consider today's presentation an initial report on the participants' perception of school integration.

With those points in mind, we will begin by describing the participants in a general way, and also provide some information about the education of black people in West Virginia. In this way, we hope to sketch a broad framework for thinking about the experiences of the women in the study.

Description of the Participants

The women ranged in age from 54 to 92 years at the time of the interviews. Twenty-three of the twenty-five participants were 67 or older. Thus, the oldest of the group was born in 1906 and most of the women were born by about 1930.

At the time of the interviews, the participants were living in 15 different towns in 9 different counties. The majority was located in middle or southern West Virginia, a few were in the eastern portion of the state, and two women lived in Bluefield, Virginia, just across the border from Bluefield, West Virginia. Although 9 of the women were born outside of West Virginia, most all have spent many years here and with little exception taught in West Virginia for many years, usually in the geographic areas in which they still live.

The participants worked in the educational system, primarily in West Virginia, for an average approaching 35 years. All taught in the public schools and three of the women became school principals. They earned the bachelor's degree in a variety of content areas, including science, social science, mathematics, physical education, home economics, music, special education, and elementary education. Many of the women earned additional college credits and 14 hold the master's degree or the master's degree plus other credits.

With regard to the personal lives of the participants, 3 never married, 6 were married to their first husbands when interviewed, 9 were widows, and 7 were single due to divorce or some combination of divorce and widowhood. Five of the women had no children, 3 women named step-, adopted-, or foster children, and 17 had biological children. As for most people, work and family occupied the central places in these women's lives, although several also had substantial commitments to community service.

The life stories collected in our project tell much about the participants' childhood families, which we believe is important in describing the women. There is, of course, variation in family background and functioning. For example, a few women had lost their mothers through death in their childhood, and one woman had been reared alone by her loving and supportive mother. However, many of the participants came from two-parent families and most all related heartfelt and sometimes humorous tales of the care and protection they received from their parents and other caregivers. Few of their parents had much formal education, and they made their living as miners, railroad workers, factory workers, domestic workers, postal employees, farmers, or small businessmen. Some parents were able to provide for their children more easily than others, but virtually all were reported as working hard and sometimes creatively to provide for their children. It was unusual for the parents not to encourage their offspring to get an education, and some made great sacrifices toward this end.

As youngsters, most of the participants had lived in small cities and small towns, but also in coal camps and on farms. Racial segregation of various sorts characterized daily life, despite the fact that it probably was not as severe as in some other Appalachian areas. Movie houses, restaurants, libraries, swimming pools, stores, hospitals, bus

stations, and residential areas were among the settings in which segregation was played out.

With little exception, the participants attended black schools—whether they lived in Omar, Cannelton, Logan, Huntington, Harpers Ferry, Charleston, Bramwell, Charleston, Wolfe, Bluefield, or other towns. Moreover, the women graduated from black colleges, which most described in positive terms even though segregation and economic constraints often had played a significant role in where they would attend college. Most all of the participants had their first experience as students in an integrated classroom when they took college graduate courses.

Significant interactions between black and white people did occur, of course, and some of the participants had lived in mixed-race neighborhoods as children. The women's stories include descriptions of friendship and mutual help that crossed racial lines. For example, one participant said of her white childhood friends:

I was fortunate as far as having white friends when I grew up.... there were two white families that we were very friendly with. And the children actually would ... they spent the night with us. ...I could visit their home. And we could like eat at the table with them and everything....[but] we couldn't stay over because my parents wouldn't let me. My Dad...was very protective. He didn't believe in our staying away from home....I couldn't [stay with black friends either].

But this woman also told the following neighborhood incident:

And my mother put in a garden with one of the [white] ladies up there. And we had to go out and help her in the garden. It was hot. ... we were setting out cabbage plants. And the lady just, she forgot, I guess, who she was talking to. And she said, 'Whewwww, I'm sweating like a ----!'

The participant refused to say the final word, but confirmed that it was a racial word. She went on with her story:

We didn't say anything to her. We just went home, got thirsty and went home. [My mother] said, 'Well, you won't have to go back.'...That's how we dealt with it.

It is clear that interaction between blacks and whites was tricky business and could require keen sensibility, tact, patience, and measures to protect one's sense of dignity.

As we listened to the women's stories, they reiterated that black families and communities operated in the larger world of racism but simultaneously forged a more private world. Family, church, and school offered safety and lessons about life.

The participants also often noted that the segregation and prejudice they had experienced was to various degrees accepted as a way of life in their youth. As one woman put it:

At that time, it was a way of life. You know, you expected it. You didn't like it. But you know, you just went along and did the best you could with it.

This was to change dramatically for African Americans during the participants' adult years. Over time, they became more aware and less accepting of racism. Among the profound changes they personally experienced was, of course, change in the educational system.

Black Education in West Virginia

Formalized black education in the geographic area that became West Virginia predates the state's 1863 acceptance into the Union, for the first school for black children was formed in Parkersburg in 1862. According to local legend, a black man, Robert W. Simmons, rode horseback from Parkersburg to Washington D.C. to get permission from Abraham Lincoln to begin the school. Whether or not the story is true, a governing board did come together, draw up a constitution and by-laws, and open the school in the basement of a local church. Although a \$1.00 per month tuition was to be charged, provisions were also made to include those children who could not pay. As far as can be determined, this was the only organized effort to educate black children until after the Civil War ended.

Early in its history as a state, West Virginia did make provisions for public school education and specified that "free colored" children would be educated at public expense. However, that intent had little practical effect because the state devoted only sparse attention or resources to public education until after the Civil War ended.

The first post war effort to educate West Virginia blacks was undertaken in Harpers Ferry by the Freewill Baptists with the help of the Freedmen's Bureau. There, on former Union campgrounds, these combined agencies opened a school for the hundreds of newly freed blacks who flocked to the area; ultimately the school was named "Storer" in honor of John Storer of Sanford, Maine, who gave a challenge grant to help support it. Beginning with only elementary education, the school added secondary education, and eventually achieved collegiate ranking. It remained in service to the black population until 1956.

To assure that black children and white children would not be educated together, words prohibiting such racial mixing became law. In 1872, this stipulation was written into the constitution and, ineffective but still present, remained there until the 1990s when Lucile Meadows, black member of the House of Delegates from Fayette County, proposed that it be removed.

Aiding the initial effort for black public education was the work of the Freedmen's Bureau, the activism of some members of the black community, and the backing of

interested white citizens. With the demise of the Freedmen's Bureau, committed lay people and educational leaders continued the effort and garnered support from the state and local communities for what became a full, but often under funded, system of black education. Three colleges, all providing teacher education, developed: Joining Storer College in the 1890s was what are now West Virginia State College at Institute and Bluefield State College at Bluefield. In 1914, a state Supervisor of Negro Education and an Advisory Council were appointed; in 1932, the Advisory Council became the Negro Board of Education; after 1933, Negro Assistant Superintendents were appointed in counties having 50 or more black teachers.

Over the years the school law was changed, lowering the number of black children of school age needed to initiate a school. Beginning at 30, the count was finally reduced to 10. By 1922, there were 430 elementary schools, 23 junior high schools and 19 high schools; only 6 of the high schools were first class (Biennial Report, Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics, 1923-24).

The high schools for black students developed more slowly than the elementary schools and in some counties with small black populations were entirely absent. Of this matter, the State Supervisor of Negro Schools in his 1926 biennial report commented, "In a number of instances Negro parents are compelled to send their children as far as a hundred miles from home to high school." By 1951-52 there was improvement in this situation for there were 33 high schools for black children in West Virginia. (Biennial Report, Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics, 1951-52).

By the time the Brown Decision mandated integration in 1954, the state's black schools offered a full system of education from 1st grade through bachelor's degrees. Some counties, however, remained without high schools and there was no graduate or professional education at the black colleges. To complement the academics of the black public schools, there were strong extracurricular activities such as music, dramatics, and athletics, accompanied by statewide contests and exhibitions, sometimes held at the black colleges. Teachers in the public schools had training through the bachelor's level and some held master's degrees; 19,050 black students were in attendance. Moreover, since most of the state's black teachers were produced by the state's three black colleges, a symbiotic relationship had developed between the colleges and the black public schools, particularly between Bluefield State College and West Virginia State College and the schools. Participation in college alumni associations and in graduate chapters of fraternities and sororities, attendance at college football games, trips to college campuses with high school students, and continuing contact with former college professors strengthened the relationship between colleges and public school faculties. Indeed, this sense of community across the black educational system seems to be reflected in the memories of the public school teachers we interviewed.

The day after the Brown decision was announced, West Virginia's governor, William C. Marland, noted that it was now the law of the land and that West Virginia should abide by it. Not all West Virginians, however, accepted the governor's remarks calmly. W.W. Trent, the state superintendent of education, publicly endorsed the governor's stance; this brought some negative comments. Of this period Trent later wrote:

Ten citizens from McDowell County expressed their conviction thus: ‘We as white citizens of the United States and voters in West Virginia elections, feel that abolishing segregation in the public schools in West Virginia has the impact of the atomic bomb on all principle [sic] of democracy we believe in.’ (From: “State Superintendent William W. Trent’s Retrospective on Desegregation in the Schools,” in West Virginia: Documents in the History of a Rural-Industrial State by Ronald L. Lewis and John C. Hennen, Jr., p. 297)

In spite of the position of state officials, the process of integrating the schools, as reported elsewhere and by the women we interviewed, was as varied as the counties in which the schools were located. Some counties began the process quickly, integrating the black students into other schools with some rapidity and closing the black schools; in others, integration was still underway in the late 1960s.

Remembrances of School Integration

The majority of the participants in our study were classroom teachers in the segregated system when integration was carried out. Two were principals. One of these continued as a principal. The other, on leave when the integration of her school occurred, was shifted to the classroom for two years before being reassigned as principal of a school, which, although integrated by law, remained primarily black.

The integration of students took two forms. In some communities, on a voluntary basis, black students could transfer to previously all white schools and almost no immediate action was taken toward closing schools or toward full integration; in other communities, the voluntary attendance of black students at white schools began almost simultaneously with grade by grade integration which took several years to complete. In some counties, particularly on the elementary level, the process of full integration was accomplished within two or three years; in other counties, it stretched out over a longer period. Some of the black schools, therefore, remained in operation but often with reduced numbers of students; some of the black teaching force remained with them.

Of this situation, a Logan County participant said that the principal of the nearby white school wanted her black school closed and the students transferred to his school. When this did not happen, he took some of the black students into his school anyway and she and her principal were left with only 17 pupils for the rest of that school year. She also recalled an incident that developed when the first grade in her area was integrated and the other grades were not. She was doing substitute work in a black school when a black first grade girl came to her class.

... the little girl’s sisters and brothers were in the black school. They couldn’t go to the white school.... But every morning, she would have to leave her sisters and brothers and go down to the ... white school. And she would cry, she wouldn’t do her work. ... I didn’t have the heart to make her leave. ...She wanted to stay ... so I let her stay.

The child started reading, worked with my students, ate her lunch and her sister's lunch and she [hadn't been] eating at the other school. ... She said that some of the children would call her names. And she said the teacher a lot of times would ignore her, wouldn't let her do anything.

In regard to the placement of teachers, most participants reported that the integration of the teaching force was carried out by assigning black teachers to previously all white schools. In only a few instances were white teachers moved to black schools. There seems to have been some anxiety among the black teachers about what was happening; sometimes the anxiety was created by rumors and simple lack of knowledge of what was going on. With the exception of the principal who remained in position, the women interviewed do not indicate that they were brought into the planning. In recalling how the indecision and lack of knowledge affected teachers at the two all black high schools in Logan County, one participant recalled:

... they integrated the teachers at Buffalo High School. So some came to Aracoma High School because some teachers were leaving Aracoma High School finding other jobs, getting away from here....

There was also some concern about job loss. A teacher in one location, concerned about job security, commented:

...when they were going to...integrate the schools, word came out that we had to move. And... some of the older teachers cried and I said, 'I don't know what they're crying about. ... you might not have a job Look, you can get along somehow.'

A teacher in Jefferson County reported that when she got no direct information about what was to happen, she went to the superintendent and asked if the school was to be closed. Her plans were to seek employment elsewhere if she was to have no work in the new arrangement. An extremely well trained math teacher, she was persuaded to remain and during her first year teaching in the integrated situation was given a split assignment between two integrated schools. She objected to the assignment. Once more she planned to leave and was again persuaded to remain with the promise that her assignment would be changed. It soon was.

Of the integration in her county, one woman told us that although there were no teaching positions lost, some black principals were not re-appointed after integration occurred. When asked if the same situation obtained for white principals, she replied, "They took care of them."

In one reported instance in which both black and white teachers were re-assigned, a black principal was involved with planning the move. She and the principal of a white school sat together and made decisions about what teachers to exchange. She recalled that she sent teachers according to their personality and ability to cope. She called them in one by one and explained what was happening and promised to intercede with their new

principal if they ran into difficulty. One of the white teachers who was assigned to her school through this process could not adjust, she remembered. “She couldn’t stand the black kids.”

With the exception of that principal, the women interviewed do not indicate that they were brought into the planning. In fact, a teacher at all black Aracoma High School in Logan said that she found out about her reassignment when she read it in the paper. “They closed Aracoma amidst a lot of argument,” she said.

The teachers were transferred to the previously all white schools sometimes in only ones and twos and occasionally on an almost trial basis. The reception at the integrated schools varied. In some cases, the black teachers were warmly received and met only slight difficulties in adjusting to the new situation. In many instances, the principal seemed to be the key figure. If he was welcoming and supportive, the placement often went well. If he was not, the adjustment may have been more difficult. Sometimes the principal may have said something that seemed negative, but his actual on the job reactions were not. For example, a lone Bluefield black teacher transferred to an all white rural school reported that her new principal said to her, “Well, I guess if we have to receive one of you, I’m glad it’s you.” Yet, she felt that he and the teachers were helpful and supportive, and she encountered no racial problems at all. Another teacher said of her white principal:

He was very supportive of us ... because ... I’m not bragging, we were good teachers.... You would have to give us credit for it. We did a good job.

One of the difficult placements occurred in Charleston. The teacher said:

I was the only black school teacher there. [The principal] was very upset. I don’t know why they didn’t prepare him for it, but he was very upset. He didn’t want me. Consequently, he said, ... ‘you people are good with young children,’ meaning black. ‘I’ll give you the 1st grade.’ I never taught the 1st grade. I always had the 5th grade.... he gave me 42 first graders. It was a bedlam, and that was what he intended. He intended to prove that I was not equipped to teach that... grade or in his school. He was trying to get me out of the school.

Through the intercession of a helpful white parent, the teacher was successful in getting the number of students reduced with half going to her and half going to a new teacher.

...he was determined to get rid of me, so he went through all those cards and stacked them according to their ability. And he gave all of the high rated children to the new teacher and gave me all these children that couldn’t – some of them couldn’t even hold a pencil.

At the end of the term when the participant's students out scored the other half of the class, the principal came in to check them himself. When his testing verified the results, he changed toward her.

He just couldn't believe it. And I said, 'Now you believe the scores.'
... and that cooked him. He was from that on, that time on, he was entirely different to me.

Some times, there were problems with parents in an integrated school. One teacher who was hired by the Board of Education in her county as a substitute at an all white school said:

...and the parents went to the Board. They didn't want me up there
...I was there maybe a few days. I was there at the teacher's meetings and then maybe just 3 or 4 days with the children, not more than 4.

She was changed to another school where her reception was less contentious. Another participant said:

At first they really didn't accept [us], but later they found out that we did just as good of a job as any body else, or better. You could tell [parents' non-acceptance], you could easily tell.

And in the words of still another of the teachers:

...when we had nights where you come and talk to the teachers, I was ignored quite a bit. And I just didn't have any dealings with the parents.

Although this teacher has been retired for some years, she says, "I think I'm still a little bitter."

One dramatic integration story involving parents occurred in Harpers Ferry. A participant from that area commented on her first day of teaching at a previously all white school:

I don't think the parents really wanted to accept it at that time – some of the white parents. And of course, I was nervous – it was a scary situation for me.... they lined the hallways. I mean, the white parents came in and just [stood] up and down the hallways.... I opened my door to my room and let them see what was going on.

She indicated, however, that she had a very supportive principal and was able to overcome the initial wariness of most parents. In fact, at a later date when confronted

with name calling among students, she turned the verbal abuse into a lesson by listing on the blackboard numerous racial epithets used to denigrate many ethnic groups and explaining to students that they should call people by their names rather than by derogatory terms.

Sometimes the parents joked in a good-natured way with the black teachers about their appointments to white schools. After the principal who had lost her appointment because of integration was reassigned as principal, she was later given the responsibility for two schools. This meant that she had to travel between them. She and one of the parents in the predominantly white school to which she had been recently assigned had the following conversation:

‘Has anyone told you that we don’t want you?’ ...
 ‘...No, they haven’t,’ [she replied].
 ‘Well, we don’t.’
 ... I started to say [she told us], ‘Well what you see is what you get.’
 But anyway, he said, ‘Aren’t you gonna ask me why?’
 And I said, ‘Well I think I know why.’
 He said, ‘I’m not sure you do. We don’t want half of you. We want all of you.’

Another of the participants, a special education teacher, entered the system after integration had occurred. “There were some problems with some parents,” she recalled. “But I didn’t let it become a problem.” She remembered consoling a parent who came into her room in tears. “And all of a sudden she thought about who I was. ... I just stepped back, and let her go.” She later said, “I think parents [now] have accepted the fact that there are black teachers.”

The relationships with white teachers were as varied as were those with parents and administrators. Some of the newly transferred black teachers found their white colleagues to be very helpful and supportive and formed friendships that continued into retirement. One who became a principal after integration reported that she was treated nicely by her white colleagues. “We got along real well with them. We grew to be real good friends. And even when I was principal ... I had all white teachers and we got along real well.”

However, isolation was sometimes a pervasive ingredient of the teacher’s experiences in the integrated school. One remembered that white teachers at the school to which she was assigned excluded her:

Well, instead of them asking me if I wanted to be on the bowling team and give me the right to refuse or whatever, they didn’t. They would, like – sneak off in the evenings like they weren’t going anywhere. And I never heard anything about it until I heard from one of the patrons [of the bowling alley] ... wanted to know why I wasn’t on the bowling team.... And then another thing, ... they would have birthday parties for themselves and they wouldn’t tell me anything about it. And I just happened to go down to the cafeteria and there

they were after school ...having a party. After that, I just didn't try to make friends with any of the teachers....

Another of the participants noted that when she was employed at a junior high school after integration, she was the only black teacher; at no time period during her subsequent twenty years at the school was there ever more than two black teachers. The strangeness and aloneness of such a situation was captured in the words of yet another teacher:

It was different...when you've been used to your own people and their ways and everything, and then you move to another school or to any situation. The social part of it wasn't what it was when you know everybody and you understand ... the way of life and you're used to communicating differently.

Nevertheless, on occasion white teachers rejected what they perceived to be unacceptable behavior among their own ranks. A Logan County teacher reported that when she got up from a chair in the integrated school, a white substitute teacher wiped it off before sitting in it. "But one of the white teachers didn't like it and reported it to the principal," the study participant said. "She never came back. He never hired her anymore."

Experiences with students followed the same general pattern – occasionally there was initial rejection followed by acceptance. One teacher said:

As a black teacher, I got along very well with those children.
...sometimes when I'm out and I meet the children that I've taught ...
their eyes light up ...so they'll hug me or I'll hug them or something
like that. And that makes me feel good.

Yet another participant noted, "... I didn't have any problem at all with the kids in the school, the white kids, because for some reason, they took me right in and put me into everything." On one occasion, the students at this teacher's school nominated her for teacher of the year and at another time dedicated the school yearbook to her. Another study participant, the special education teacher from the eastern panhandle commented that, "... believe it or not, [white] children don't perceive you as being black, because you 're nice".

As we look at what the participants told of their experiences with integration, we are struck by the picture of these women leaving the school setting so familiar to them – schools in familiar black communities, with familiar black students, parents, colleagues – and taking up their work elsewhere. It appears that things went relatively well for most of them, but that considerable versatility and acceptance were required to meet the drastic changes brought to their lives.

We should also mention that during the early years of integration, a few of the teachers encountered difficulties as they sought new placements in the newly integrated

schools. At least two of them described confronting the men that they felt were responsible for the delay in their hiring. One said:

... he told me they didn't have any openings ... this must have been the 3rd or 4th year after integration ... I said, 'Are you sure you don't have any openings?' ... I said, 'I'm gonna tell you one thing. The only reason you're not giving me the job is because I'm black. ... all my recommendations have been excellent'....So he said,... 'I believe we do have an opening'

After several visits to a principal who did not seem to be willing to hire her another teacher said:

...[he] started that same old thing.... I looked at him for a few minutes and I got up and I said, 'I will expect your call this evening.' I walked out. That evening, I got [the] call, calling me for the job.

These stories, as well as several others, suggest that getting along in the integrated situation sometimes was the result of standing up and speaking out.

Thus far our discussion has primarily focused on how the study's participants remembered the process of integration and how it affected them personally. However, their oral histories also give their opinions on what they now perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of integration for black students.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Integration

The participants recognized some benefits. Many of the women believe that better supplies and equipment, as well as a broader curriculum, were made available to black students through integrated schools. One remembered that in the segregated school in her area:

... we got old books,...I should say used books. And [the white schools] mostly got new books and things of that sort. And then ... they were taught Latin and we weren't taught Latin. I don't know if they didn't have a black teacher what could teach Latin or whatever, but ... we weren't taught Latin.

Integrated schools were also viewed as providing black children greater opportunity to interact with white children, thereby better preparing them for the work environment they would encounter upon graduation. It is noteworthy that a few of the women commented on the benefits that white children received from integration; namely, the chance to learn more about black people and to work with black children who, as a group, acted more respectfully toward adults.

Nevertheless, many of the participants spoke of what black children lost through integration and noted several negative outcomes. These can be summarized as follows:

- ◆ poorer academic performance, at least for some children;
- ◆ decreased opportunity to engage in and become leaders in school activities such as drama, cheerleading, and even sports;
- ◆ weakening of a personal relationship between teachers and students and their families;
- ◆ loss of the rich cultural life of the black schools, which included exposure to visiting artists and dignitaries;
- ◆ decline in the quality of student behavior, sometimes due to black children's adoption of the inappropriate behaviors displayed by white students;
- ◆ unfair assignment of grades, the minimizing of black students' abilities, and failure to recognize black students' achievements;
- ◆ loss of the actual school buildings and their history. In this regard, one woman remarked that integration "...was a one way situation. [Our] high school should have been integrated. It never was. They closed it and made a school for low achievers."

The participants in the study emphasized the loss of the black school as an institution with certain values that were embedded in the black community. They identified themselves and other black teachers as caring and as individually dedicated to children's academic learning and personal growth. They believed that black teachers in black schools maintained academic and behavioral standards, taught students how to get along in the world, and went the extra mile to provide help as necessary. This was contrasted with what happened in some integrated schools. One woman put it this way:

...many of the white teachers didn't want [black students] there in the beginning. So, if [the black children] sat in a corner and didn't do their work, [the teachers] didn't care, as long as they sat in the classroom and were quiet. As long as they didn't disrupt the class. [The teachers] didn't care if they learned or not...even today, they're integrated, but they're still segregated when it comes to taking part in say, being a "miss" of a school, or being a cheerleader or a majorette.

This woman also felt that counselors at integrated schools did not encourage black students and tried to put them in general classes. "They will not put them in advanced classes unless you raise [a fuss] or request it. They don't do it for blacks ... they don't care whether they succeed or not."

Such a description was not applied to all white teachers by all participants, of course. It was recognized that some white colleagues were caring and dedicated. However, it was also noted that some white teachers, even when dedicated, were afraid to telephone parents when children were not progressing and were afraid to discipline the unruly. In the words of one of the black principals, "...the [black children] got left out because the white teachers were afraid of the black parents."

Disappointment in school integration was voiced in various ways.

...integration was all right. But I still feel like our children got more in their own schools, segregated schools, than integration could afford them.

...we thought that integration was going to really, really improve or help our people. But... integration hasn't done too much for our blacks...we have to push sometimes. You have to go beyond and maybe the white teacher didn't understand that black child at all...Integration has not done all that I expected it to do toward our people.

We lost something that I can't put my fingers on.... It was such a lasting kind of thing, relationship, and vision....

...the things that we valued, doing a good job, being good at what you do, knowing this, being on time and stuff like we taught them; [those things] didn't matter. ...I'm not just blaming the teachers. I think parents, as a whole, we let up and we didn't emphasize those things. But we lost a lot of the things that we valued in the black schools and a lot of things that [were] emphasized in the black schools.

Given these disappointments, do the women want to return to segregated schools? Our data on this issue are limited. A few teachers came close to expressing this desire. Said one:

If I could turn the clock back and we could erase all that's happened,... I would stay in segregated schools. But I think because of the things that we've had, we can't really turn the clock back...

But another, despite major disappointments, succinctly stated: "I believe in integrated schools. I don't believe in segregation."

What is more definitive is that many of the participants, while expressing concern about a decline in motivation and behavior in both black and white students, are especially concerned about black children who they still believe have a tougher row to hoe than white children.

The concerns and implied criticisms voiced by the women appear to be directed toward what they perceive as the injustices of the integrated school system, not toward all white people. In fact, some of the women live in integrated neighborhoods, have white

friends, and interact routinely with white people in a variety of situations. Several have white ancestors and a few have white daughters-in-law and mixed race grandchildren.

From our point of view, then, the concerns of these older black teachers raise hard questions about what is happening to black children in West Virginia's schools and how problems can be rectified. This is an especially poignant issue because the black community historically viewed education as not merely a means to material well being but also as a means to greater knowledge of the world, equality, and dignity. The women who shared their life stories with us continue to place this value on education.

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