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BLACK, WHITE, AND BROWN
After 50 Years of School Desegregation, the Struggle Continues
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On the cover: This historical image, photographed in Dade County in 1937, serves to illustrate the school desegregation issue in Florida. It is from the Florida Photographic Collection of The Florida Archives.
HOW CAN HOPE TURN SO HOLLOW? When people talk about the legacy of the U.S. Supreme Court’s Brown v. Board of Education decision of 50 years ago, they express mixed feelings, often more negative than positive. “The great experiment in bringing the races together in education has mostly failed,” writes journalist Bill Maxwell. On the other hand, some people see in Brown a major victory in the long and ongoing struggle for racial justice.

In 1954, the question before the Court was simple: “Was segregated education unconstitutional?” The opinion, written by then-Chief Justice Earl Warren, while not commenting directly on that question, decreed that “separate is inherently unequal,” that segregation denied black children equal educational opportunity. It took many more years of deliberation to decide how to implement that far-reaching decision, and it’s still not over. But Brown helped launch the modern civil rights movement and led, over time, to other court decisions that struck down all forms of legalized racial discrimination.

The aftermath of Brown, however, is anything but simple. The dissonant chords of slow, painful struggle in race relations linger in education and in all walks of life. Segregation seems more firmly entrenched than ever in our social fabric, and the dream of an integrated society more elusive than ever. This is so in Florida, as elsewhere.

This issue of FORUM examines the ramifications of the Brown decision in Florida and recounts some of the events that led to and resulted from it. Ray Mohl’s article provides a look at the role of Jewish activists in the civil rights movement in 1950s Miami. Darryl Paulson describes the “long journey” to school integration in Florida, and Ray Arsenault tells the dramatic story of the Freedom Riders who traveled through parts of Florida in their efforts to desegregate interstate bus travel.

This issue also will introduce you to some of the courageous Floridians who integrated Florida schools. Their personal accounts put a face on what was gained and what was lost as the result of this historic ruling.

Writer David Halberstam wrote recently, “The Brown decision began the birth process...of a new America.” Perhaps the best way to commemorate Brown on its 50th anniversary, then, is to preserve that legacy of striving and struggle and to keep the dream alive.

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A Final Word:
This editorial will be my last for FORUM, as I retire from the Florida Humanities Council in early June. It seems fitting that the theme is civil rights. Prior to joining the NEH state councils in 1986, first in D.C., then in Florida, I taught women’s history in Toledo, reconstructed the story of black Nantucketers who had left no written records, did research at the National Archives for the Freedom History Project, and examined the (gruesome) NAACP anti-lynching campaign files at the Library of Congress. This issue of FORUM thus takes me full circle from my days as a historian, teaching and researching the social history of the American people, to my work in the public humanities. And that’s one of the things I have loved most about this work, that it makes the historians’ role more meaningful, because it brings scholarly work into the public domain in the form of grant projects, speakers bureau engagements, seminars for K-12 teachers, reading and discussion series, and publications such as FORUM. It makes history and other humanities disciplines accessible to a broader audience, beyond the academy.

You, dear readers, have been a wonderful audience; I have learned more from you than the other way around. I will continue to share your commitment as I move on to other adventures on this journey of discovery. It’s a journey that, happily, never ends.

[Signature]
**FHC Seeks Nominees for Board**

FHC is seeking nominations for three board positions to be filled in September. The FHC board, which meets quarterly, sets policy, evaluates grant proposals, participates in fundraising activities, and promotes the activities of the Council.

Letters of nomination should include biographical information on the nominee, a resume, an explanation of the special qualities the person would bring to the board, and an indication of the nominee’s willingness to serve.

Nominations should be sent to Janine Farver, Acting Director, FHC, 599 Second Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701. The deadline for applications is Aug. 1.

**Thanks to our Teacher Center Supporters**

The following corporations and organizations have made generous contributions enabling Florida teachers to attend FHC’s Florida Center for Teacher Seminars, this summer. Our thanks go out to them for helping us to reward and retain Florida’s best teachers:

- Bank of America
- St. Petersburg Times Fund
- New York Times Company
- Foundation/The Gainesville Sun
- The Tampa Bay History Center
- Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida Libraries
- The Daytona Beach News-Journal
- Alachua County Public Schools Foundation
- Baker County Education Foundation
- Brevard Schools Foundation
- Broward Education Foundation
- Columbia Public Schools Foundation
- DeSoto County Education Foundation
- Escambia County School District
- Highlands County Education Foundation
- Hillsborough Education Foundation
- Leon County Schools Foundation
- Madison County Foundation for Excellence in Education
- Public Education Foundation of Marion County
- Pasco Education Foundation
- Polk Education Foundation
- St. Johns County Education Foundation
- Walton Education Foundation
- South Walton Rotary Club

**DeBary Hall Presentation Wins Award**

A multimedia presentation of the DeBary Hall Historic Site was recently recognized with an Outstanding Achievement Award from the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation. The presentation, which was funded by FHC and Florida’s Division of Historical Resources, includes an interactive CD-ROM with a virtual tour of DeBary Hall and DeBary Estate, a historic site in the town of DeBary in Volusia County. The presentation explores the history of the house, the lives of its owners and workers, and its 19th-century neighborhood.

Tom Baskett, Jr., public historian for Volusia County, expressed gratitude to FHC and the Florida Bureau of Historic Research for their support of the project. “Both funders expect grant recipients to move beyond strictly local stories toward wider connections in Florida history and American studies. For public historians, this is a very helpful mandate.”

**‘Net Loss’ Book Published**

The monologue and paintings of an FHC-sponsored program, “Net Loss,” are now available as a full-color, coffee-table book. This dramatic performance and art exhibit explores the life of Fort Pierce commercial fisherman after the banning of certain types of net fishing in Florida. Miami writer Evelyn Wild Mayerson wrote the text, and the paintings were created by Fort Pierce architect and painter Philip S. Steel. The book is available from Long Wind Publishing, 108 N. Deport Drive, Fort Pierce, FL 34950 or www.LongWindPubl.com.
t was a typical winter day along Florida's east-central coast, and—just for a moment there—I felt as if I were inside a child's giant "snow dome," magical shards of one thing or the other raining down on me at random.

It happened this way: I was sitting on a soft lump of dried sea grass and sand at the edge of the sprawling Mosquito Lagoon. It was windy, and I was trying to decide if I wanted to fly fish or not. At my feet, the vast estuarine lagoon spread out before me like a giant reflection pond. It was rimmed with black mangroves, their air-seeking roots poking up from the mud like pencils.

Without warning, the gray dorsal fins of a pod of small bottlenose dolphins begin to rise and fall in deeper water a few yards away. They seemed to be stitching their aquatic world together with the one above. Overhead, a regiment of brown pelicans soars in a well-behaved single file, veering to dive-bomb small fish in the rich waters below.

The sky was the clear cerulean blue left after a cold front shreds the billowing white cumulus and blows it to smithereens. On the other side of the lagoon, the lee of the barrier island buttressing the Atlantic appeared as a long green serpent, freeze-framed in undulation, ancient Indian middens disguised as humps in its back.

I was in the most intact swatch of salt marsh and mangrove lagoon on Florida's Atlantic Coast. The historic geography held great sway, and time seemed to reach back into itself. The Indians who had gathered oysters to create the mounds—the Timucua to the north and the Ais to the south—might reappear at any moment.

But if I could taste the past, I could also nearly touch the future, I looked to the horizon and saw the vague outline of the Kennedy Space Center's Vehicular Assembly Building, flanked by its rocket-launching gantries.

Just then, a roseate spoonbill with its odd duck-like beak and its cartoonishly pink plumage soared above. Within seconds, it was followed by another. Backlit by the bright Florida sun, the lanky birds glowed as if incandescent. They flew over my spot on the sea-grass lump, over the timeless lagoon, and toward the spaceship launch pads beyond.

And the landscape around me—this giant metaphoric snow dome—seemed saturated with the disparate shards of all that is wondrous in this state, from rocketry to primeval lagoons with tropical birds just this side of a storybook. It seemed almost more than the senses could bear.

The story of how the Mosquito Lagoon kept its soul is a peculiarly Floridian one. In the 1950s, vast buffer lands were bought by NASA to protect its space-age tin-
Waterway. There, a series of “spoil islands,” created when the route was dredged a century ago, border the channel. Their natural kin, irregular shapes of mud, sand, and mangrove, clump along the inside of the barrier island almost four miles to the east.

Ponce Inlet to the north allows ocean tides to reach inside the lagoon, but not very far. Down here, the broad lagoon is more driven by wind and rain. Today, a prevailing northeasterly blow has pushed most of the water away from us. And the winter chill has kept algae blooms at bay. We scuttle like water bugs in our small boats. In the distance, a clammer drags for shellfish; a sport fisherman uses a pole to push onto the flats. Otherwise, we are alone.

Under us in the clear water, sea grasses anchor the food chain. It is beguilingly diverse, a stunted aquatic rain forest in which wildlife feed and hide and procreate. Blue crabs dance; stingrays glide; a sea squirt hangs onto a rhizome. We spook a school of tailing red drum, and the big fish explode around us in a spray of copper tails and fins. The bottlenose dolphins do so well here they no longer need to return to the sea. Downsized with smaller anatomy, they have been inextricably shaped by the lagoon.

As we near a spoil island, I see it rises like a shell-filled bluff, topped with sabal palm and red cedar, sea grape and mulberry. Its edges taper into flat, sandy peninsulas. One spit is occupied by a flock of white pelicans, here from the west just for the winter. They seem as big as swan boats, and they lift off as we approach. Still in her kayak, Lisa reaches down in the packed sand to feel for clams. She digs and digs and comes up with a half-dozen. I use my knife to open one at the hinge. It tastes sweet and salty.

A raucous splashing comes from deeper water, and we push off to investigate. As we approach, the water calms and then turns suspiciously flat. It seems as if something very large is preparing to surface.

Suddenly, my kayak rises up atop a plume of water and then, just as suddenly, drops back down again. Ancient manatee snouts push up around us and exhale, deeply and loudly.

“You had a ride on a manatee elevator,” says Lisa, excitedly. “You should see your face!”

I am unashamedly beaming, as guileless as a little boy again. The white pelicans settle back down on their sand spit. And time, caught here in an eddy of past and future, continues its inexorable spin.

BILL BELLEVILLE is an award-winning journalist, author, and documentary filmmaker.
Black and white students from Seffner Elementary School near Tampa board school buses at the end of day, heading home to their respective neighborhoods.

UNFINISHED

AFTER 50 YEARS OF STRIVING, THE
Theoretically, the Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. What he needs is Education. What he must remember is that there is no magic, either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, with hostile public opinion, and no teaching of truth concerning black folk, is bad. A segregated school with ignorant placeholders, inadequate equipment, poor salaries, and wretched housing, is equally bad. Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. But all things are seldom equal.

—W.E.B. DuBois, 1935

Prior to the Civil War, most southern states, including Florida, passed laws prohibiting blacks from congregating except for two purposes—work and church. Education for blacks was illegal. Sen. James Vardaman (D-Miss.) expressed the prevailing sentiment of white southerners by saying, “Why squander money on his education when the only effect is to spoil a good field hand and make an insolent cook?”

After the Civil War, the Florida Legislature passed a law in 1873 that provided that “no citizen of this state shall, by reason of race, color or previous condition of servitude” be “excluded from the full and equal enjoyment of common schools and public institutions of learning.” Such noble sentiments ended with the passage of the 1885 Constitution that required that “white children and colored children shall not be taught in the same school, but equal provision shall be made for both.” Florida’s “separate but equal” policy predated the official establishment of the “separate but equal” doctrine by the U.S. Supreme Court in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision (1896) by more than a decade.

With Plessy firmly established as legal doctrine, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) pushed for the enforcement of that policy. It was clear that southern schools were “separate,” but were they “equal”?

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund first attacked the lack of “separate but equal” in higher education. In 1949, Virgil Hawkins applied for admission to the University of Florida Law School. The Florida Board of Control, the governing body for the state university system, rejected Hawkins’s application and told him he could either attend an out-of-state law school at state expense, or Hawkins could attend Florida A & M Law School. At the time, the FAMU law school existed only on paper.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court ordered Hawkins to be admitted, the Florida Supreme Court refused to comply. The state court interpreted Brown v. Board of Education (1954) as giving the state the authority to decide “the precise time in any given jurisdictions when members of the Negro race shall be admitted to white schools.” Florida Chief Justice William Terrell wrote:
"When God created man, he allotted each race to his own continent according to color, Europe to the yellow man, Africa to the black man, and America to the red man, but we are now advised that God's plan was in error and must be reversed." The St. Petersburg Times ran an editorial cartoon that showed an American Indian confronting Terrell and telling him to "Scram, paleface."

In 1958, Hawkins abandoned his nine-year odyssey and enrolled in the New England School of Law. Hawkins told the Pittsburgh Courier that he was tired, broke, and frustrated. "When I started this, I was 39 years old. After 10 years of delaying tactics, they talk about gradualism and patience! How gradual can we be?" In 2001, the University of Florida granted the first posthumous degree in its history, honoring Virgil Hawkins, the "South's most patient man."

The NAACP was ready in 1950 to launch a frontal assault in its effort to overturn Plessy. To head this off, Florida and the other southern states undertook a massive effort to improve the quality of black schools. New schools were built and teacher salaries were equalized. It would be too little and too late.

Brown was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in December of 1952. In June of 1953, the Court announced that it could not reach a decision. The inability to decide also reflected the fact that the Court was deadlocked in overturning Plessy. Justice Felix Frankfurter told a friend in the justice department, Philip Elman, that there were not five sure votes to overturn Plessy. Chief Justice Fred Vinson was one of the justices reluctant to overrule a precedent that stood for more than a half-century. When Vinson died suddenly in September of 1953, Frankfurter told Elman that Vinson's passing was "the first solid piece of evidence I've ever had that there really is a God." On May 17, 1954, in a unanimous decision written by new Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Court stuck down Plessy and wrote, "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

The Court asked the states operating dual schools to submit briefs on how to implement Brown. Florida filed the most extensive brief and asked for gradual implementation of Brown. Desegregation should not proceed until "community attitudes" supported it. The Sunshine State argued that its school segregation laws had been "rigidly" enforced for 69 years, and immediate desegregation might cause "a tornado which would devastate the entire school system." The Legislature appropriated $10,000 for a poll that showed three-quarters of "white opinion leaders" opposed Brown.

In Brown II (1955) the Court sided with the advocates of gradualism. The Court did not impose any timetable for desegregation, but urged states to "make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance" and to proceed "with all deliberate speed." To Florida policymakers, "all deliberate speed" meant delay. It would take five years after Brown before the first black student was admitted to a Dade County school. The pace of desegregation was so slow in the South that two political scientists estimated it would take 3,180 years to integrate the schools at that current rate.

From 1954 to 1960, Florida engaged in massive resistance to school desegregation. The Legislature repealed compulsory school attendance laws, passed an "interposition and nullification" law declaring Brown to be null and void, and passed a pupil-placement law giving school boards the authority to assign students to schools based on their academic
After nine years of fighting to be admitted to the University of Florida law school, Virgil Hawkins (far left) gave up and enrolled instead in the New England School of Law. Gov. Claude Kirk (above, left) engages in an impromptu debate with activist H. Rap Brown at a civil rights rally in Jacksonville in 1967. In 1972, Florida Sen. Chuck Weber, one of the co-sponsors of the state's “anti-busing” straw vote, engages in a mock phone call during which he invites President Nixon to join him in a used bus business (above, right).

preparation, psychological makeup, and the impact of the admission on the faculty, students, and general community. The state launched an attack on the NAACP and nearly put it out of business. Every member of the Florida Congressional delegation signed the Southern Manifesto, a document attacking Brown and arguing that outside agitators were destroying the good race relations of the South.

Massive resistance was replaced by “token compliance” from 1960 to 1968. Under token compliance, a handful of black students were admitted to white schools. For example, in August of 1962, the Pinellas County School Board admitted three of 11 black students requesting transfer to white schools. The following year, 73 blacks out of a student population of 62,131 attended nine “white” Pinellas schools. Eight years after Brown, less than two-tenths of 1 percent of Florida's black students attended integrated schools.

Fifteen years after Brown, the Supreme Court grew weary of the snail's pace of desegregation. Gradualism had failed. In Alexander v. Holmes County (1969), the Court declared that the “obligation of every school district is to terminate dual school systems at once and to operate now and hereafter only unitary schools.” The “all deliberate speed” standard of Brown was now replaced by the mandate to comply “at once.” School districts throughout the South were given about four months, until Feb. 1, 1970, to comply. The primary vehicle of desegregation was busing.

Anti-busing groups quickly mobilized. In Florida, they included the Freedom of Choice Committee in Manatee County and Parents Against Forced Busing in Pinellas County. In 1970, facing a tough reelection fight, Florida Gov. Claude Kirk intervened in the Manatee County desegregation case and ordered the school board not to comply with the busing ruling of Federal District Court Judge Ben Krentzman. To prevent busing, Kirk twice suspended Manatee's school board and its superintendent.

Krentzman ordered Kirk to appear before his Court, but Kirk refused, saying, “no federal judge...can order a sovereign head of a sovereign state to appear personally.” Krentzman fined Kirk $10,000 a day, and “King Claudius” relented and returned control to the Manatee school board. Kirk's anti-busing antics did not help his quest for reelection. As the patience of Florida voters evaporated, so did Kirk's political support. Democratic newcomer Reubin Askew won 57% of the vote.

Only 9.8 percent of blacks in Florida attended integrated schools in 1965–66. Just five years later, utilizing busing, the number of blacks enrolled in integrated schools jumped to 90.2 percent. Critics argued that the numbers were misleading. Although the schools may have integrated, “tracking” or other forms of placement segregated the students within the schools.

Busing was an effective tool for desegregating schools, but it lacked popu-
Plan Replaces Affirmative Action

In 1999, Ward Connerly, a black conservative from California, announced that Florida was the next battleground in his quest to end affirmative action. Connerly, with the support of Gov. Pete Wilson, succeeded in getting California voters to pass Proposition 209 outlawing affirmative action. Two years later, Connerly’s initiative was approved in Washington. If it passed in Florida, Connerly believed it would sweep the nation.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and Connerly discussed the proposal, and Bush called the initiative “divisive” and said he would not support it. Bush also realized that if the Connerly proposal reached the ballot, polls indicated that more than 60 percent of Florida voters would support the initiative.

On Nov. 9, 1999, Bush issued an executive order eliminating affirmative action and replaced it with a program called “One Florida.” Instead of using race as a criterion in university admissions, Bush substituted his “Talented 20” plan. Under this plan, the top 20 percent of every high school class would be guaranteed admission to one of the state universities. Adam Herbert, then university chancellor, praised the plan, saying it “acknowledges Florida’s past, but also connects us to Florida’s future.”

On Jan. 18, 2000, two black lawmakers, Anthony Hill and Kendrick Meek, both Democrats from Miami, conducted a well-publicized sit-in at Lt. Gov. Frank Brogan’s office. Bush was quoted as calling the lawmakers “childish.” Reporters streamed into Brogan’s office to cover the breaking news story. At one point, according to news reports, Bush said to a staffer, “Kick their asses out.” The reports made it appear that the governor’s comments were directed at Hill and Meek, although both the governor and his staff assistant maintained that Bush was referring to reporters. The 25-hour standoff ended when the governor agreed to hold a series of public hearings across the state concerning affirmative action and his One Florida plan.

On March 7, 2000, the opening day of the legislative session, some 10,000 protesters marched on Tallahassee to challenge the abandonment of affirmative action. Carrying placards that read “Jeb Crow,” “Pharaoh Bush, let my people go,” and “the first step to resegregation,” the demonstrators pledged to take their wrath out on Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush in November. They probably did, since black turnout was up 50 percent over that of the 1996 election.

But the One Florida plan took effect. In 2000, blacks constituted 14.8 percent of students in the state university system, a number very close to their percentage in the general population. Three years after One Florida was introduced, the number of minority students in the state university system has actually shown a small increase. Blacks now comprise 16.7 percent of freshmen enrolled statewide; and the overall minority enrollment is 37.3 percent of the freshman class.

Just as Hispanics have become Florida’s largest minority group, they also comprise the largest number of minority students in the state’s public universities. Black enrollment, which did fall 45 percent at the University of Florida in the year after One Florida was introduced, has now recovered; the percentage of blacks enrolled is now slightly higher than prior to One Florida.

—Darryl Paulson
would become more than 42 percent for promises from the school board that black through 2007. At that time the black school was often the centerpiece of the black community. Elijah Gosier, African-American columnist for the St. Petersburg Times, wrote that “the truth is that shipping children out of neighborhoods to go to schools in somebody else’s neighborhood “breaks the cycle of community formed by the family, church, and other institutions at a time when too much of that cycle is missing.”

This mandatory busing continued for more than 20 years. Then, during the 1990s, school districts across Florida sought release from federal supervision. To succeed, they had to prove that they operated unitary systems and had plans to maintain integrated schools in the future. Pinellas County developed a “controlled choice” plan whereby each school had to develop some unique curricula that would attract a diverse student body.

Pinellas schools agreed that no school would become more than 42 percent black through 2007. At that time the racial requirements will be dropped, and some schools will likely become primarily white or black. The NAACP agreed to the choice plan in exchange for promises from the school board that additional resources would be made available to diminish the achievement gap between white and black students.

As a result of this agreement, Pinellas schools were released from federal supervision in 2000.

During the 1998 gubernatorial race, Republican candidate Jeb Bush unveiled his A+ Plan for educational accountability. Under his plan, all schools would receive a letter grade ranging from A to F, based on their performance on statewide standardized tests. Schools earning an A or showing improvement in their scores would earn a cash bonus.

Students attending schools that failed twice in a four-year period were entitled to receive an “Opportunity Scholarship” or voucher that could be used in private schools. Critics contended that the Bush plan would result in the “rich getting richer,” since educational performance is related to socioeconomic background. They also contended that vouchers would drain scarce resources from public schools.

Since many of the private schools that wound up receiving vouchers were religious schools, opponents argued that vouchers violated a provision of the Florida Constitution that says no state funds may be used “directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.” Supporters argued that schools should be held accountable for their performance, especially since education expenditures command the largest share of the state budget.

Supporters also contended that most of the beneficiaries of the vouchers would be students from lower-class and minority backgrounds who disproportionately attend failing schools. On March 14, 2000, Circuit Judge Ralph Smith declared vouchers violated the Florida Constitution in Bush v. Holmes. In October 2000, the First District Court of Appeals reversed this decision. The case will likely reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1999, after the first year of testing under the A+ Plan, 202 schools statewide received an A, 313 a B, 1,230 a C, 601 a D, and 76 an F grade. Based on the first-year test results, it appeared that tens of thousands of students might qualify for vouchers. Test scores rose each year, and in 2003, 1,230 schools across the state received an A, 569 a B, 527 a C, 141 a D, and 35 an F. The number of “A” schools increased six-fold over the number in 1999. Based on the 2003 results, 13,700 students in nine failing schools qualified for vouchers.

As federal courts have relinquished control over Florida school districts, resegregation is on the rise. As in Pinellas County, many school districts are adopting “choice” plans that will create some all-white schools, some all-black schools, and some integrated schools.

Maybe, as W.E.B. DuBois wrote in 1935, mixed schools may provide the best environment to achieve both integration and quality schools. As Bruno Manno, a senior fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, argues, a shift away from racial busing will make schools better community institutions.

“Neighborhood schools create links between families and schools. Community involvement is an important ingredient to enhancing school performance and increasing family strength. If the community aspect is not there, it’s pointless to bus kids across the street to boost performance.”

DARRYL PAULSON is a professor of government at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.
Born in 1945, I am a survivor of Florida's Jim Crow school system, the intentionally cruel, separate-but-equal monster that permanently injured its white perpetrators and its black victims alike. No one—then or now—escaped the inhumanity of Jim Crow's reach. My classmates and I never had the opportunity to attend public school with white children, and I have no way of knowing the depth of what we missed or what white children missed by not getting to know us.

I vividly remember those bad old days, when school busing meant the opposite of what it means now, before Brown v. Board of Education shook the foundation of life in the South as we knew it 50 years ago. During my public school years, Negro and white children were bused away from each another. We were legally separated. Now, black and white schoolchildren are bused to be together.

Unfortunately, recent and current court actions, school board policies, and public opinion spell a return to the segregation of my childhood, now referred to as "resegregation."

One legal scholar laments that "resegregation" manifests Brown's "hollow hope." I agree. I had believed—as did Thurgood Marshall and the other attorneys and black leaders who argued valiantly for school integration—that Brown and the 1964 Civil Rights Act would change the racial composition and the very nature of our public schools forever, that America itself would come to resemble the image of togetherness that dominated Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. But during a 50-year span, the great experiment with bringing the races together in education has mostly failed.

The results of two recent reports are sobering reminders of Brown's hollowness. One study, by the Harvard Civil Rights Project (issued for this year's anniversary of King's assassination), shows that schools across the nation, not just in the South, are almost as segregated as they were at the time of King's death in 1969. Desegregation spiked in the late 1980s when courts decided that the goals of Brown had substantially been achieved. Now, the trend has gone in the opposite direction, with most white students having "little contact" with minority students in many parts of the United States.

The other study, by the National Center for Education Statistics, shows that, for the first time ever, minority groups are now the numerical majority in Florida schools. A yearly head count of the racial balance shows that 50.3 percent of the state's
2.6 million students are minorities. Pamela Peralta, principal of Tampa's Chamberlain High School, recently offered this laconic jolt of reality: "Schools are mini-societies. We represent what the world looks like."

Earnest observers are not surprised that minorities now outnumber whites in our public schools. Whites are fleeing our schools in droves. "White flight," then, is attitude and resentment transformed into action. White students are increasingly enrolling in private schools to get away from minorities. In 2000, almost one-in-six white students in Florida was enrolled in a private school, compared to one-in-11 Hispanics, and fewer than one-in-20 African Americans.

Regrettably, I watch our public schools become contemporary segregation academies, much as they did shortly after Brown and the 1964 Civil Rights Act. And I do not see how this trend will stop or turn around. Individuals and society at large will pay a heavy price for our collective myopia. The chasm between whites and minorities will continue to widen on every front.

In his brilliant book Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision, Peter Irons frames our loss of resolve to integrate our schools:

"The failure of school integration, largely a consequence of the broken promise of Brown, becomes an even more bitter pill to swallow in light of the clear evidence that integration works. More precisely, attending school with substantial numbers of white students improves the academic performance of black children. This reflects, of course, the advantages that majority-white schools have in terms of better-trained, more experienced, more highly paid teachers, with access to better laboratory and library resources, a wider range of courses, particularly the Advanced Placement courses that challenge students and prepare them for college-level work, and greater number and variety of extracurricular activities."

A new, groundbreaking report by Amy Stuart Wells, a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, contends that while racial integration has not lived up to the explicit promise of Brown in society as a whole, the experience has had a mostly positive effect on people's personal lives. Entitled How Desegregation
**A ‘Hollow Hope’**

Changed Us: Lessons From Six American High Schools and the Class of 1980, the report examines the high school class of 1980—whose graduates, now in their 40s, entered kindergarten in 1966 and 1967, at the very beginning of the integration experiment.

The report focused on schools in Austin, Texas; Inglewood, N.J.; Pasadena, Calif.; Shaker Heights, Ohio; Topeka, Kan.; and Charlotte, N.C. The research team tracked down and interviewed hundreds of these students over the years about the lasting impact of their experience with racial integration in school. During an interview broadcast on the National Public Radio program All Things Considered, Wells noted that nearly all of the interviewees, even those who had serious problems in their schools and had trouble meeting people of different backgrounds, said that interacting with other races and ethnicities was a valuable experience.

Wells told NPR that the 20 years after graduation gave the subjects ample time to appreciate completely what the desegregation experience had meant to them and how it had changed them in fundamental ways, especially when they compared themselves to spouses and friends of the same racial background who had not had desegregated experiences. Most of them believed that their experiences helped them to feel more comfortable with racial diversity in what they referred to as the “real world.” The irony, Wells said, was that the students found the real world to be far more segregated than their public schools had been.

Many of those who attended college said their campuses were extremely segregated, especially the student social groups, such as sororities and fraternities and other extracurricular organizations, Wells said in the broadcast interview. Similar groups had been integrated in their high schools. A sad discovery for Wells and the other researchers was that some students of different racial backgrounds from the same high school had gone to the same college and were unable to maintain their friendships because the campuses were so racially divided.

Wells found that after most of the students reached adulthood and settled into their careers and communities, the majority of the white graduates live in predominantly white neighborhoods, while about 56 percent of the blacks live in desegregated neighborhoods. But 20 percent of these African Americans say their neighborhoods are experiencing white flight.

What do these post-Brown trends mean and portend?

“I think our study speaks to...what is the role of schools in society, and how much burden can we put on the schools to change these color lines and the segregation that’s so much a part of our history, and lives on today in our housing markets,” Wells said in the interview. She further commented that the study reflects that school desegregation was important “because the students who lived through it fundamentally valued it and said it was one of the most important experiences of their lives. But clearly, it wasn’t enough. The rest of society had to be working towards these goals, as well. And that just didn’t happen.”

Indeed, Brown was a bold, social-engineering effort that never fully took root on or off campus. Many whites, bitter that their children have been forced into contact with black children, are permanently removing their children from the public schools. Many African-American parents, angry that their children—through forced busing—have carried most of the burden to desegregate the schools, are increasingly demanding neighborhood schools that, in all likelihood, will be all black.

In 1996, Kenneth W. Jenkins, head of the NAACP chapter in Yonkers, N.Y., was fired when he spoke candidly about the state of school integration in his city. A growing number of blacks now agree with Jenkins: “This thing is not working. I support integration, but I don’t think integration is the goal. The goal is quality education.”

NAACP attorney Ted Shaw, who has spent his entire career working for school integration, has come to a conclusion that I and most other blacks now agree with: “You’re beating your head up against the wall until it’s bloody. At some point, you have to ask, ‘Should I continue to beat [my head] up against this wall?’ To ask that question is not a terrible thing.”

The Brown decision changed the racial landscape, but it could not change the hearts of those in the majority who opposed bringing the races together. As a result, U.S. society is living out Brown’s “hollow hope.”

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The trailblazers remember the personal costs and public gains, the open doors and closed minds, the sacrifices and benefits of being the first to step across color lines in Florida schools.

Harold Knowles

In biology class at Tallahassee’s all-black Lincoln High School, “thirty kids were assigned to one microscope,” Harold Knowles recently recalled.

But when Knowles moved to the white Leon High School in 1963, he was surprised to see the difference in what was available to students. “When I got to Leon, every two kids had a microscope. Basically, that had a profound effect on me. The contrast was so enormous. You never had new books at Lincoln. You had used books, and they were marked up and busted up by the time you got them. The school systems would assign old books from Leon to the black high schools down the road. The contrast between the two civilizations was very obvious.”

Knowles, now managing shareholder in Tallahassee-based Knowles, Marks & Randolph, the oldest black law firm in North Florida, said he chose to be one of the first black students to integrate Leon because he wanted educational opportunity. “I wasn’t trying to be a pioneer,” he said. “I wasn’t handpicked by anybody. I assumed that anybody would, if given the opportunity, attend the best high school in the county.”

But he found out he was one of only three Lincoln students to move to Leon. “It was a real surprise to me. People kept thinking this was a real courageous thing to do. I thought all of my buddies would be over at Leon. Why didn’t more come? It was a mixed bag. Some people stayed, I’m sure, because of fear of the unknown. It was certainly something new and different. There were others proud of their tradition at Lincoln.”

After graduation, Knowles headed to DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind., before returning to Florida to receive his bachelor’s and law degrees from Florida State University. He currently serves on FSU’s Board of Trustees.

“I wanted to get the hell out of the South, only to find that the North was probably worse [regarding racism]. I spent two miserable years up there before I returned to Florida and went to Florida State.”

Knowles said he believes the educational hurdles for black children today include the large size of schools and the lack of personal support systems. “It’s not purely race, but certainly black children have not fared as well. Missing is that underlying support system that was, believe it or not, there in days of segregation,” he said. “Teachers lived in your community, knew your parents, attended church or other social organizations. That subculture was there.”

—Pamela Griner Leavy
In 1970, Doby Flowers stood on the 50-yard line of Florida State University's Doak Campbell Stadium and celebrated a breakthrough. She had just been elected FSU’s first black homecoming queen.

It was not a personal victory for her, she said, recently reflecting about the event. It was a victory for all black students. They had blazed a trail into the university's top social institution.

"My running for homecoming queen as the candidate of the black student union was not a process of, 'Oh, we want a beauty queen," she said. "We wanted to change institutions and the way they saw African Americans as a whole. We wanted access. We wanted every institution to be open to anybody."

The university had already desegregated its academic and athletic programs, she noted. The last frontier was its social programs.

"There was one institution that was social. We thought that homecoming queen was the ultimate symbol of the social." To win, Flowers and her supporters planned a strategy that included operating what she called a campaign-headquarters "war room."

Their victory reinforced the choice she made to attend FSU instead of predominantly black Florida A&M, where her parents, cousins, and some siblings had attended. One of her brothers, Fred Flowers, who had also opted to attend FSU, was one of the first 10 black students to enroll at the university, and was its first black athlete.

"In the effort of desegregation, we went to Florida State," Doby Flowers said. "It was the closest to going away from home, in terms of not knowing the environment, not knowing the people, all of that. Even though things were highly segregated, there was a movement afoot, a wave of change sweeping this country, student protests. With this change, through the eyes of students, the country, the city, the university started to change."

At FSU, she earned a bachelor's degree in social welfare in 1971 and a master's in urban and regional planning in 1973. In 1980, she began a decade of work in New York City for Mayor Ed Koch. In 1990, as New York’s commissioner of human resources administration, she oversaw child welfare and a $5-billion budget. She now is manager at the Tallahassee law firm of Flowers & White.

In looking at the legacy of Brown v. Board of Education, she said, "Brown got rid of the laws that separated people. It gave access." But she emphasized that in actuality, segregation still exists in schools. Some public schools today are virtually all black, as are the academic tracts within many schools, Flowers said. "But the legacy of Brown v. Board of Education is great in spite of this. In spite of how far we have to go, we've come a very long way."

---Pamela Griner Leavy
Goliath Davis, deputy mayor of St. Petersburg, attributes his success in life to the mentoring and education he received in the segregated schools of an all-black enclave known as Methodist Town. "I am not who I am in spite of Methodist Town," he said of the neighborhood area near downtown St. Petersburg. "I am not who I am in spite of the fact that I started out in a segregated school system. I am who I am because of Methodist Town, because of the teachers and nurturing that I got in a segregated system," he said.

The teachers in these segregated schools motivated students to excel, he said. "Our teachers would tell us that when we got into the world, we were going to have to compete with whites. They made us think that whites were getting everything and... were going to be prepared. They really got us pumped up to do our best." They also held their students to high academic standards. "The last thing you wanted to do when you went to the chalk board was not to be prepared," he said. "Education was seen as the way out, and those teachers would drill you."

In the 1960s, when St. Petersburg began token integration of its public schools, Davis was in the second class of black students admitted into the formerly all-white St. Petersburg High. "When I left 16th Street Junior High and went to St. Pete High, I learned that our teachers had prepared us very well," he said. "I learned that, despite what other folks said, intelligence was randomly distributed. Our teachers had understood what the competition was. They always told us, 'You've got to be better than, better than, better than.' They understood that if you were African American, you didn't just walk in competing for a position with a white, and you were as good as a white. You had to be better than a white."

Upon graduation from St. Petersburg High, Davis attended private Rollins College on an academic scholarship. Later, he earned a master's degree from the University of South Florida and a Ph.D. from Florida State University.

A self-proclaimed agitator for social justice, Davis decided to pursue a career in police work after a mentor challenged him "to stop talking, and do something." He joined the St. Petersburg police department, rising up through the ranks to become the chief of police in 1997.

Four years later, he advanced to the position of deputy mayor of the city. He oversees the economic development of Midtown, a historically black area south of downtown. The boundaries of Midtown encompass portions of Methodist Town, the beloved neighborhood of Davis's youth.

Davis said he sympathizes with parents who want their children to attend neighborhood schools. But he added that he is leery of current trends toward resegregation. "I am not optimistic that once schools become resegregated, that the people in charge will be any more giving and equitable than they were under the old system," he said. "I feel like people are going to take care of what is close to them."

A lack of open and honest dialogue about race feeds into this trend, he said. "American culture likes closure. We like to start something and say, 'Okay, we've done that.' But when it comes to issues of integration, race, gender, and ethnicity, I don't think most people realize that it is not necessarily some destination that we are going to reach. It is a journey that is life long, and it is going to be constantly evolving."

—Monica Rowland
LaVon Bracy

Racial slurs and painful abuse mar high school memories for LaVon Wright Bracy, the first black student to integrate the Alachua County Public School System in 1964. She was the only black graduate in the Gainesville High School class of 1965.

"That was...40 years ago, and it's still very vivid in my mind, the hatred and abuse I had taken from white folk," Bracy said.

That year, her father, the Rev. Thomas Wright Sr., served as president of Gainesville's chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which won a school-desegregation lawsuit in 1964. Bracy volunteered to spend her senior year at Gainesville High after no other black students came forward.

"It was horrible," she recalled. "I was abused, misused, every day. It was not unusual to be called 'nigger' at least 10 times a day, to be shoved 10 times a day. My classmates acted as if I had the plague if I was to sit down. The library would empty. Four or five tables in the lunchroom would get up.

"They took a pact to make sure life was as horrible as possible for me. One day, I was jumped by a white male student and his friend. [After being repeatedly punched and stomped,] I was bleeding. The principal saw I was bleeding profusely. I told him I needed to call my dad and get to a hospital. He said, how did he know that I didn't come from home that way?"

After this experience, Bracy wanted nothing to do with attending a predominantly white university. Her father urged her to attend the University of Florida, but she chose instead to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn.

"I needed to go where I was a majority," she said. "Fisk was wonderful. I think every [black] kid ought to have the opportunity of going to a predominantly black school for a sense of commitment, a sense of knowing who you are, a sense of sacrifice and history you don't get when you go to a white-majority school. Our history is not appreciated by the masses. It took me four years to heal, and I don't know if I'm healed yet."

Bracy earned her bachelor's degree at Fisk, a master's in education from the University of Miami, and a doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Florida. Now she is co-founder and administrator of New Covenant Baptist Church of Orlando.

In assessing the situation today, Bracy said that despite Brown v. Board of Education, she still feels the races are divided. "I think the economy has a lot to do with it. Our leadership is more concerned about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. There's no prescription to help those genuinely in need, and no one cares. No one cares if African-American kids can't read."

—Pamela Griner Leavy
Michael Haygood

Black students who integrated white schools “paid a price,” said Michael Haygood, one of 30 students to transfer in 1966 from Leesburg’s all-black Carver High School to white Leesburg High.

“You have to be very strong. People tend to somewhat isolate you. You make a sacrifice,” he said. “I wasn’t willing to do it after high school.” Though his high school guidance counselors and teachers encouraged him to go on to predominantly white University of Florida or Stetson or Rollins colleges, “I didn’t want to do that. I chose a predominantly black college.”

That’s not to say that the decision wasn’t necessary. Haygood described it as “necessary,” but said that black students who integrated white schools “paid a price,” and that the right to fair and equal education is a fundamental constitutional right, and by any attempt to avoid this principle, a person would have to be responsible to the federal courts.

Haygood earned a bachelor’s degree in political science at Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, in Virginia. “I still wasn’t universally loved by everyone, but I knew at least no one hated me because I was black,” he said.

“My philosophy about life is such that all things happen for a reason, whether or not the experience was a good one. I don’t judge good or bad, because they all make you what you are. By the time I finished, which was two years, I wanted nothing more to do with an integrated school. I chose a predominantly black college.”

Haygood, a lawyer in Florida for some 30 years, now practices real estate transaction law in West Palm Beach. During the past several years, he and another Leesburg native, Bill McBride, traveled around the state presenting public forums about their early years during the period of racial segregation. McBride was a colleague of Haygood’s at law firm Holland & Knight and was a candidate for governor in 2002. The two men described their experiences in a program titled “Same Town, Different Lives” sponsored by the Florida Humanities Council.

In discussing the Brown v. Board of Education decision, Haygood described it as “necessary,” but said that black students have lost the benefits they had in segregated schools, where they were in the mainstream and held leadership positions in school.

“There were simply some benefits to the old system as far as the development of black students was concerned. That’s not to say that the decision wasn’t necessary. Our society wouldn’t continue to exist being separate as it was.”

—Pamela Griner Leavy

Reubin Askew

Calling school segregation a form of “apartheid,” Reubin Askew, Florida’s governor for most of the 1970s, supported busing as an effective way to bring about needed change.

“We weren’t saying this was necessarily the ultimate answer to anything,” Askew said in a recent interview. “It was, ‘How do you break the back of the system that was so cruel and inhumane?’ If you had black schools by choice, that would have been different; had they been equal, it might have been different.”

Askew won election in 1970 against incumbent Claude Kirk, whose anti-busing actions included ordering the Manatee County school board to defy a federal court order and twice suspending the board and superintendent. After Askew was elected, he made his first official speech advocating busing at the 1971 summer graduation ceremonies of his alma mater, the University of Florida law school.

“Some at the graduation and some at the university couldn’t understand why I made the speech. It was important to me to make it strong and, in effect, say [that] while none of us liked busing, black children had been bused all over town. It wasn’t until we started busing white children that it became a real big issue. While I personally didn’t like it, I felt it was imperative that we obeyed the courts, and it was the right thing to do.”

Askew closely monitored school openings in the fall of 1971. Despite reports of bomb threats in three Florida counties, he told school superintendents to implement federal court orders and be a “positive part of trying to end segregation in our public schools.”

“We had the quietest and most successful opening. I’m told by those closest to the education process, [it was] the best [of the state] had since we got into accelerated desegregation.”

Now a senior fellow at the John Scott Dailey Florida Institute of government at Florida State University, Askew said, “Florida was as segregated as any state in the nation. I think Brown was a reassurance of the worth of an individual and that the right to fair and equal education is a fundamental constitutional right, and by any attempt to avoid this principle, a person would have to be responsible to the federal courts.”

—Pamela Griner Leavy
The Porters

Graduation photographs and diplomas cover the walls of the Porter home. Scrapbooks packed with newspaper clippings and pictures chronicle the family's accomplishments—and some of the changes brought by Brown v. Board of Education.

Parents Alvin and Daphne Porter have bachelor's degrees in education from Bethune-Cookman College and master's degrees from Florida A&M University. Both are retired educators with more than 40 years' tenure in segregated, and desegregated, Pinellas County schools.

Their son, Alvin Jr., was one of the first black students to integrate a white school—and he suffered from the experience. "In the first and second grade at the black school here, he was thriving, a leader, outgoing and extroverted," Daphne Porter said. "When the teacher had a play, he had a lead part. Once he started at another school, his personality changed, and [this] affected him throughout his years."

Their daughters, Joy Porter Wright and Jennifer Porter-Smith, graduated from integrated Lakewood High School in St. Petersburg and pursued different paths to college.

Wright chose to attend predominantly black Florida A&M and graduated in 1987 with a degree in broadcast journalism. "It was a lot different from high school. Even though Lakewood was integrated, black students were still in the minority. Then you attend college, and all you see are beautiful black faces from all over the country—New York and Washington—and you are exposed to their cultures as well. I learned a lot from them, being a native Floridian. It was a real exciting experience. She now lives near Orlando and serves as program coordinator for the Orange County Parks and Recreation Department.

Wright decided to attend the University of Florida, where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and master's and doctorate degrees in physiological psychology. She also spent five postgraduate years studying pharmacology at the University of Pittsburgh. She currently works as a consultant to the Orange County school system.

She chose to attend UF, she said, "because I felt they had the program that interested me most at the time, premed." But she found it necessary to form relationships with other African-American students in her program so they could study together, and she looked to Florida A&M for her social life.

The Porter parents have different perspectives when looking at the impact of school desegregation. Alvin Porter noted that segregated black community schools had the advantage of strict discipline. "There were certain things that were just taboo, that you couldn't do, because if you did, your parents found out and you were punished when you got home." Such close ties and disciplinary consequences were eliminated when black students were bused to distant schools, he said. "A lot of black students didn't succeed, and the culture is suffering."

Daphne Porter said school problems today are a result of "environmental influences" throughout the culture, not just busing. She remembers saying in college that putting black and white students together in classrooms wouldn't create "magic."

But now she believes, "Maybe there was something 'magic' that happened when children of different races sat, listened, played, worked, and ate together in school. I see the long-term legacy of Brown v. Education as a positive one."

—Pamela Griner Leavy
Rocks and fists, name-calling, shoving, slashing, vandalizing. A Confederate flag unfurls. Tear gas scents the schoolyard. The scene is black and white, tinged with blood, and clouded over by fear and rage. It is Gainesville in 1970. The U.S. Supreme Court, after waiting 16 years for southern schools to desegregate, has finally ordered action. In Alachua County, that means thousands of students must crisscross the community in buses, until blacks and whites are evenly mixed in the schools.

As some protest this move and others try to accept it—a voice of reason sorts through the chaos, analyzes how things got this way, chastises, reassures, offers facts and solutions, and generally provides a logical, compelling, and forceful argument for doing the right thing. This voice, which appears on the editorial page of the Gainesville Sun, is that of H. O. "Buddy" Davis, Jr., a moonlighting journalism professor from the University of Florida.

Davis took on the "hoodlums," the governor and other "political scavengers," and the foot-dragging school bureaucrats. His editorials put events in perspective and called for calm when the community seemed to be cracking. He wrote to regular folks in his own straight-from-the-shoulder, colorful, and sometimes even invented, vernacular. The way he went about this reflected much about him. It also won him a Pulitzer Prize.

"We can react with hysteria and jerk our kids out of school and make threats and throw up quickie segregation academies," he wrote shortly after the Court made its ruling. "We can encourage the kids to make trouble and the teachers to balk or quit. And we can tell the School Board to go to jail rather than obey the law of the land. None of these things are likely to happen in Alachua County for a very simple reason. We are not that kind of folk."

Two months later, after the "incomprehensible" did happen, he wrote: "A dream we cherished, shattered, ashes on our tongue, shame and disappointment, and revulsion too, spirit shriveled, self-blame that racial equality we helped inspire should abort into bloodshed, head averted to hide our tears."

Davis wrote as a southerner directly addressing other southerners, which gave him some standing. "I always felt like, in writing those editorials and catching the flak like we did, that they couldn't accuse me of being a Yankee coming in and telling them what to do," he said in a recent interview at his Gainesville home. "I considered it a big asset to come from this culture, in writing in that way, a really big asset."

Davis, now 80 and retired, was an unlikely looking gladiator: short and a bit rounded, a dimpled smile, a pin-point glint in the eye, and a Cracker twang revealing his rural South Georgia-North Florida upbringing. Upon first meeting him, the uninitiated might accept his claim to be just a boy from the boondocks, "a fellow from Starke." But, readers of his editorials and students in his journalism classes learned otherwise. In a three-decade career, this philosopher, humorist, muckraker, educator, and craftsman trained and inspired many who went on to be top Florida journalists—and he took on Jim Crow.

However, Davis is not cited in the history books for his role as one of the southern newspaper editorialists who, at the risk of being shot or run out of town, argued for civil rights. Perhaps this is because Florida is not con-
sidered part of the Deep South, where most of the headlined civil-rights confrontations occurred. Maybe it's because Davis—who began writing editorials in 1962—didn't receive the Pulitzer until 1971, after the key years of the civil-rights era. Maybe it's because Davis wrote for a 24,000-circulation newspaper not well known outside of the community it served. The late Ralph McGill, editor of the Atlanta Constitution and arguably the most famous on this honored list, was known as "the conscience of the South." By contrast, somebody once called Davis "the conscience of North Central Florida."

But those who know Davis and Florida don't hesitate to place him in the pantheon of journalists who transcended the belief system of their southern culture and attempted to use their platforms to advance racial tolerance.

"Buddy's from that same gene pool, although he denies it in his blessedly ornery way," said Robert Pierce, retired UF journalism professor and longtime Davis colleague and friend. "I've studied the subject considerably. He's right in there with Ralph McGill, Hodding Carter, Jr. (of the Delta Democrat-Times in Greenville, Miss.), and Harry Ashmore (of the Arkansas Gazette in Little Rock). His very Pulitzer puts him in their company."

How did this "gene pool" happen to spring up in various parts of the South? Some take the long view, seeing it in terms of the southern progressive movement that began after the Civil War. Others attribute it to formative influences in the lives of some southern journalists who lived through the Depression and World War II. A look at Davis's background reveals a hardscrabble childhood that left scars and empathy for the downtrodden; early-life experience living in close proximity with African Americans and getting to know them as individuals; and exposure to different ideas and other cultures through military duty overseas, voracious reading, and
formal studies in college. (See accompanying article.)

"These editors, and all others in these years, faced daily decisions on covering and commenting on the most important running news story since slavery," David R. Davies wrote in The Press and Race, which focused on Mississippi journalists. "Some parted with their neighbors, advertisers and readers to defend some element of black rights. Others mirrored their white readership with even greater resolve. All of the editors responded to the civil rights movement according to the particular circumstances of their communities and the contours of their own individual personalities."

Buddy Davis used typical humor in describing his intellectual metamorphosis to Ann Wayne Mikell, who wrote In Righteous Dissent: A Profile of Southern Reformer H.O. "Buddy" Davis: "Had it not been for World War II, the GI Bill, and college, he probably would have been fated, he said, to pump gas, night-ride with the Ku Klux Klan, and sell moonshine on the side."

It was through endless hard work that Davis built a legacy not only as a renowned teacher, but also as a formidable editorialist who crafted an anecdotal—-at times almost poetic—-style reflecting his roots in the rural South, while offering searing insight. His editorials were hard-hitting, pomposity-piercing, witty, and philosophical. He named names, dealt in specifics, and especially held politicians accountable.

"Buddy is one of the last of the original voices," Ed Johnson, editor of the Sun during much of Davis's tenure there, told Mikell.

Davis's moonlighting work as an editorial writer began in 1962, shortly after Cowles Communications bought the Gainesville Sun. At that time, according to Davis, the Sun was a laissez-faire, conservative publication running innocuous editorials and nothing on race. The new Sun management hosted a luncheon with UF's journalism faculty and invited editorial contributions. Davis took them up on this, and he was pleased to see that the Sun ran his editorials without altering the copy or limiting the topics. He was paid $7.50 for each.

Thus began a 25-year "second career" writing editorials, which Davis did during late nights, early mornings, and weekends, while continuing to work as a full-time journalism professor at UF and raising a family. By 1967, he was writing virtually all of the Sun's editorials on a daily basis, while still carrying a full teaching load. Davis found that the work meshed well; his editorial writing kept him current in the profession, providing real-world experiences that he, in turn, could use to illustrate journalistic principles in his classes.

Johnson, a Navy veteran who'd been Davis's student in the 1950s, became editor of the Sun in 1963, moving there from an editing post at the Tampa Tribune. He and Davis drew up a liberal, activist editorial policy devoted to social reform. In a 1964 editorial, Davis articulated this in describing the Sun "as a believer in equal rights, as a defender of the poor and ignorant, as an enemy of corruption, and as a tool for public dialogue."

With few exceptions, Johnson maintained a hands-off policy that allowed Davis the freedom to carry out this charge as he saw fit. The Cowles ownership, which granted its newspapers local autonomy in their editorial content, did the same—even keeping from Davis the fact...
that some advertisers dropped their patronage and some angry rural residents canceled their subscriptions. It was years later, Davis said, when he learned “that in the north end of the country, subscriptions fell like leaves.” Johnson and the Cowles management “demonstrated the courage of my convictions,” Davis is fond of saying. This backing, he said, was key to his success. He once described Johnson, a Florida native, as an editor “willing to assume the role of a 500-pound marshmallow with hair, absorbing all the complaints and blows and cheese nibbling which resulted from my belaboring public issues.”

From the beginning, Davis editorialized in support of civil rights. Just as he taught his students in editorial-writing classes, he built his arguments on facts and logic, which he believed were more persuasive than emotion. He used this tactic in the early 1960s when arguing in favor of a bond issue to fund a sewer system in Gainesville’s black section, where there was poor drainage in the outhouses and contamination of water wells. By law, the only people allowed to vote on the issue were specially registered property owners, i.e., the city’s white “crème de la crème,” as he put it in his memoir. So he pointed out in his editorial that the people who lived in the black section were the city’s “maids and food handlers.” The sewer issue passed.

Davis used such logic again in discussing the death of a black man who’d been shot in the back by police after he’d broken a Jacksonville store window, grabbed a TV, and started running away. “That was not a death offense,” Davis wrote.

He used his credibility as a southerner, himself, to appeal to the better nature of people when the darker, segregationist side of the South reared up. He did this when Robert Scott, a black man who was elected to the city council in the North Florida town of Lawtey, woke up to find a 12-foot flaming cross in his front yard. Scott decided to quit, saying, “It ain’t worth it.” Davis wrote an editorial saying that the good people of Lawtey “know violent intimidation has no color barriers…see the flaming cross as a grotesque perversion of Christ’s martyrdom on Golgotha…” and concluded: “No Yankee lawyer here to intercede. No NAACP agent in the cornfields. No pickets in the streets. No National Guardsmen vigilant. No one here but the people of Lawtey—including Robert Scott.” Prevailed upon to remain in office, Scott was reelected to that position for some 20 years. For that editorial and others written in 1963, Davis won national awards from the Society of Professional Journalists and the Sidney Hillman Foundation.

In addition to civil rights, Davis also took early and forceful stands on other major issues of the day, for example, opposing the Vietnam War in 1967. By 1970, when the U.S. Supreme Court ordered immediate school desegregation, Davis had been writing Sun editorials for eight years and had established a reputation in the community.
for liberal, progressive stands. (He'd also worked his way up to a rate of $17.50 per editorial.) The series of desegregation editorials that won him a Pulitzer articulated the community's confusion and set out logical courses of action. They also took on Florida Gov. Claude Kirk, who had pounded on courthouse doors, suspended a school board to prevent busing, and confronted U.S. marshals. Davis wrote that Kirk was "braying like a donkey fresh out of oats," and was a "hypocrite" who previously had appeared to take the high road on racial issues, but now was posturing for re-election.

In one editorial, Davis wrote: "That one-of-a-kind white supremacist George Wallace has a monkey caged in his backyard up in Alabama, and newsmen Nick Thimesch asked Wallace about the monkey's name. 'Claude Kirk,' said Wallace. We came close to tossing that item into the trash basket, figuring that our Governor Kirk would never do anything to deserve retelling such a story. But something stayed our hand, and now we are glad."

In another editorial, he described Kirk and some other anti-desegregation politicians as "magnolia eaters," a made-up term he derived from "opium eaters," addicts (starting in 17th-century India and Persia) who ate opium and had hallucinations and grotesque ideas. Davis wrote: "Somebody wrote a play about Governor Lester Maddox of Georgia which expressed Maddox's high regard for 'my white friends, regardless of race, color or creed.' Such magnolia eaters have been crawling out of the Florida woodwork in droves...led by the master gobbler Claude Kirk." (Davis was known for creating his own vernacular at times; he was credited in national publications for creating the term, "Joe Sixpack.")

Davis laughed heartily when asked recently if he'd enjoyed writing such critiques. "Oh, definitely, yes, yes, yes," he said. "It's always been fun, even when they were powerful figures." But he emphasized that his underlying reason for writing this way was serious: He felt such broadsides were more effective in promoting change than were polite, abstract discussions of issues. By personally naming and provoking powerful figures, he could push them to think about his positions, he said. He recounted a proud moment in the early 1970s, when he learned that U.S. Sen. Ed Gurney, of Florida, was carrying around dog-eared, folded-and-refolded, clippings of critical editorials Davis had written about him. In a meeting with Davis's boss, press baron Gardner Cowles, Gurney had pulled these out of his pocket and complained. Davis said, "He'd been carrying these things around with him. They'd been eating at him, which is exactly what I wanted to do."

What drove Davis was a desire to shape society, to bring about reform. Over the years, readers slammed his editorials for being too liberal—and for not being liberal enough. He also received hate letters and threats of violence. But he continued, he said, because he wanted "to deal with things that mattered."

"Being a little controversial never has bothered me, and I'm still a little controversial with letters to the editor and stuff like that," he said. "War experience may have a little something to do with this. When you feel like you survive something like that, why, you want to make life worthwhile. That's more or less what it boils down to."

BARGA O'REILLY, editor of FORUM, is adjunct instructor of journalism and coordinator of the Neighborhood News Bureau at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.
“We lived with them. We didn’t hate them,” he said.

Davis was uprooted from small-town life when he joined the war effort in 1943. He shipped out to the Pacific as a bombardier and flew eight missions. While in the Army, he met people from all over America, with backgrounds and worldviews quite different from his own. After the war, he used the G.I. Bill to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees at UF. In addition to journalism, he took many courses in the religion department. For a time, he considered going into the ministry, “but quickly realized that consoling people and preaching homilies was not my bag. I needed an outlet with meat,” he wrote in a letter quoted in Ann Wayne Mikell’s In Righteous Dissent: A Profile of Southern Reformer H.G. “Buddy” Davis. He settled on journalism, a career in which he hoped to do some good.

After a few years as a reporter, covering rural North Florida and then the state capital for the Jacksonville Times-Union, he accepted a teaching job in the UF journalism department. This was the beginning of a 31-year teaching career that made him virtually an icon to many who went on to be top journalists in Florida and elsewhere. His courses in reporting, editorial writing, photography, and other subjects were described by survivors as journalistic boot camps in which he used his military training to establish high standards and insist on hard work. He spiced his class discussions with insights into philosophy, history, political science, and literature, threw in a lot of personal stories, and brought in a touch of street theater.

As a young man, he wrote “An Educator’s Prayer” in a column for the UF student newspaper, the Alligator: “Give me the foresight to train my students in critical thought and values of life. Let me realize that ideas are as potent as bullets—that words are merely the shells for the thought behind them.” After he’d been teaching for many years and won the Pulitzer for editorial writing, UF promoted Davis to its highest faculty rank, Distinguished Service Professor. In 1983, the Associated Press Managing Editors named him one of 10 top journalism educators in the country.

Davis is credited as one of a small group of individuals who helped bring about the 1967 enactment of the portion of Florida’s Sunshine Law directing that the public’s business must be conducted in public. Early in his career, Buddy Davis (right, at typewriter) works as a reporter in the Tallahassee bureau of the Jacksonville Times Union. He is shown with bureau colleagues.

Davis is credited as one of a small group of individuals who helped bring about the 1967 enactment of the portion of Florida’s Sunshine Law directing that the public’s business must be conducted in public. In the early 1960s, Davis supplied then-Rep. J. Emory “Red” Cross with a model open-meetings law drawn up by the Society for Professional Journalists, according to Davis’s memoir. At that time, it was common knowledge that secret meetings were the norm for many public bodies; and Davis editorialized against this practice. Cross then introduced an open-meetings bill in every session of the Legislature until, after reapportionment reduced the power of the North Florida conservative “Pork Chop” gang, the bill was passed.

—Barbara O’Reilley
In 1961 the Freedom Riders traveled throughout the South to test compliance of a U.S. Supreme Court decision that mandated desegregation of interstate bus travel. In Montgomery, Ala., (below) the Riders are guarded upon arrival by police and National Guard.
During the summer of 1961, a group of activists willing to risk injury and even death waged a campaign to topple one of the segregated South's most gratuitous forms of discrimination. By merely sitting in the front section of a bus or by ordering a cup of coffee at a racially segregated lunch counter, these Freedom Riders, as they came to be known, provoked a storm of controversy that forced the newly elected Kennedy administration to address the deeply rooted vestiges of Jim Crow segregation.

Sponsored primarily by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a 40-year-old civil rights organization dedicated to nonviolent direct action, the Freedom Riders set out in May 1961 to test compliance with two U.S. Supreme Court decisions that mandated desegregation of interstate bus travel. The Riders, including both blacks and whites, got on buses and headed south.

Within weeks, they encountered violent resistance by angry mobs of white supremacists and arrests by the police. By early June, more than 100 Freedom Riders languished in Mississippi jails. Many expected the movement to collapse in the face of such spirited opposition. Others, however, suspected the movement was quietly gaining force in spite of massive resistance and predicted that the struggle would soon spread to other parts of the segregated South, perhaps even as far south as Florida. They were right.

CORE sent political shock waves down the southeastern seaboard at a news conference held on June 12. CORE field secretary Genevieve Hughes announced the departure of two Freedom Rides, both culminating in Florida. The first group, consisting of clergy members, agreed to undertake an “Interfaith Freedom Ride” from Washington to Tallahassee. The second group of 15 mapped a more easterly route through North Carolina, South Carolina, on to Jacksonville, and ending in St. Petersburg.

Both groups reached their first-night stopovers in North Carolina without any major problems. The Interfaith group spent the night in Raleigh, while the second group stayed in Wilmington, where a surly crowd of 150 white protesters awaited them outside the local bus station. But a strong police presence kept the crowd at bay. The next morning, the Wilmington Riders split into two groups, planning to reunite in Charleston, where, as elsewhere in South Carolina, the Riders received what one reporter called “a cool but orderly reception.”

Meanwhile, the Interfaith Riders made their way to Sumter, S.C., where they were greeted by several local CORE stalwarts, including the...
veteran Freedom Rider Herman Harris. The Riders had been warned that the town was fraught with tension stemming from Harris's claim that he had been abducted and assaulted by four Klansmen. Harris said he was blindfolded and taken to an isolated clearing in the woods where he was subjected to a night of terror: After forcing him to strip, his assailants carved crosses and the letters "KKK" into his legs and chest and threatened to castrate him for challenging white supremacist orthodoxy. Even though his abductors vowed to kill him if he reported what had happened, Harris eventually asked the Justice Department to conduct an investigation.

In this atmosphere, some form of confrontation was virtually inevitable. A few miles north of town, when stopping for lunch at the Evans Motor Court, the Riders encountered "twenty or thirty toughs" and an angry proprietor who blocked their path. The motel proprietor informed them that he had "no contract with Greyhound" and that he was "not subject" to any Supreme Court decisions. Then he drawled: "We been segregated, and that's the way we gonna stay." Moments later, the local sheriff stepped forward to back him up, literally shouting, "You heard the man. Now move along. I'm ready to die before I let you cross this door." As the stunned Riders quickly considered their options, another local man bragged: "I got a snake in my truck over there I'm just dyin' to let loose among them nigger lovin' Northerners." Even this threat failed to cow some members of the Interfaith group, but the majority prevailed and all 18 Riders re-boarded the bus. Later, the Riders had no trouble desegregating the bus terminal, and their spirits were further renewed at an extended mass meeting at a local black church.

Just before midnight the Riders pressed on to Savannah, where they found the local bus terminals fully integrated, at least for the moment. In Jacksonville, the Riders shared a breakfast with an interracial group of NAACP activists. These self-styled "fact-finders" were essentially local Freedom Riders who traveled around the state testing various facilities. The unexpectedly cordial reception they and the Interfaith Riders received in Jacksonville reflected days of behind-the-scenes maneuvering by Florida Gov. Farris Bryant. Earlier in the week U.S. Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy called Bryant to urge him to avoid any unnecessary confrontations with the Riders, and Bryant took the advice to heart. Accordingly, he dispatched representatives to each of the major communities along the route the Riders were taking. In Florida, unlike Alabama, the official policy was polite indifference, a strategy calculated by a governor who did not want his state to end up in the national headlines. Bryant decided that the best way to preserve segregation was to make sure that the Freedom Riders traversed the state without provoking open hostility or violence.

This goal seemed well in reach as the Interfaith Riders headed west toward Tallahassee on the final leg of their journey. Along the way they ran into a bit of trouble in the town of Lake City, where waitresses refused to serve a racially mixed group. They encountered less hostility than was expected at the Tallahassee Trailways terminal, but later at the Greyhound terminal they sidestepped a crowd of angry protesters, two of whom attacked an interracial testing team trying to desegregate a white restroom. Fortunately, with the grudging assistance of the Tallahassee police, a second attempt to desegregate the restroom proved successful.

In the terminal restaurant, the...
This goal seemed well in reach as the Interfaith Riders headed west toward Tallahassee on the final leg of their journey. Along the way they ran into a bit of trouble in the town of Lake City, where waitresses refused to serve a racially mixed group.

Management saw to it that black Freedom Riders were served by black waiters and white Riders by white waiters. But the fact that all of the Riders were served in the same room took at least some of the sting out of what was clearly a half-hearted effort at compliance with federal law. Satisfied that they had established an integrationist beachhead in Florida’s capital, the Interfaith Riders decided to fly home that afternoon.

Accompanied by several local black activists, the Riders arrived at the Tallahassee airport in time to conduct a test at the airport’s white restaurant. Constructed with the help of federal funds, but managed by a private company, the restaurant had never served black patrons. That segregated dining was still the rule on June 15 became abundantly clear when local authorities stymied the proposed test by simply closing the restaurant as soon as the Riders arrived at the airport. Tired and disgusted, eight of the Riders flew home as planned. The other 10, however, decided to remain at the airport until the restaurant reopened. Among the 10 were a theologian, four ministers, and three rabbis.

While initially reported as a hunger strike, the goal was to break the local color bar by eating together at the airport restaurant. A Justice Department official conceded that enforcing desegregation at aviation facilities was a “knotty problem.” But such legalisms were of little concern to these stubborn protesters who, faced by an angry crowd of whites, refused to budge until the airport closed at midnight.

The next morning, they returned to the airport to resume the vigil outside the terminal restaurant. Joined by several local activists and surrounded by police and a bevy of reporters, they remained there for nearly five hours. After nervously monitoring the situation throughout the morning, Governor Bryant called Attorney General Kennedy to ask for help. “You’ve got to get these people out of here,” Bryant pleaded, “I’ve done all I can do.” Concerned about the safety of the Riders and fearful that he had another white supremacist siege on his hands, Kennedy asked Bryant to hold things together for an hour or two while he tried to persuade the Riders to suspend their protest.

Minutes later, a state department official was on the phone with John Collier, one of the Freedom Riders, but their brief conversation ended abruptly when Tallahassee City Atty. James Messer ordered the Riders to leave the airport within 15 seconds. When they stood their ground, the police moved in and arrested them for unlawful assembly. The police also arrested three local civil rights leaders: CORE veteran Priscilla Stephens; the Rev. Stephen Hunter; and Jeff Poland, a student sit-in organizer at Florida State University. Stephens—who along with Poland had only recently been released from jail—objected to the arrests. As a result, the police charged her with interfering with an officer and resisting arrest.

By mid-afternoon, all 13 defendants were ensconced in the city jail, a run-down and overcrowded facility. “The conditions in the jail were foreboding,” Ralph Roy, one of the defendants, wrote later. “Our black colleagues were separated from us, of course, though we could communicate by yelling through a wall dividing us by race. They were received as heroes among their fellow prisoners. In contrast, inmates with us were initially hostile. We were, to most of them, interlopers from the north, even damnable traitors to the white race... We were crowded into an area designed to house twenty-four and there were, altogether, fifty-seven. There was one sink, one toilet, and one shower... The food was slop."

While Stephens, Hunter, Poland, and the “Tallahassee Ten,” as they came to call themselves, were dealing with the miserable conditions in jail, other Freedom Riders were running into trouble in Ocala, Governor Bryant’s hometown. When seven black Riders tried to enter a cafeteria at the Greyhound station there, two
The police immediately intervened, ordering the Riders to return to the bus. But three of the Riders refused to comply with the order. Charged with unlawful assembly and failure to obey a police officer, they were released on bond later in the day. By that time their fellow Riders had successfully desegregated the Ocala terminal's white restrooms, and were heading southward to Tampa and St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg was a community that recently had been rocked by a controversy over the proposed desegregation of housing accommodations for major league ballplayers involved in spring training. As the Riders arrived at the downtown Greyhound station, one white man was arrested for harassing a local black minister who was part of a welcoming committee. But otherwise the city took the arrival of the Riders in stride, thanks in part to the prodding of the St. Petersburg Times, the state's most liberal daily newspaper. After eating lunch at the Greyhound station without incident, four of the Riders participated in an afternoon workshop at a local black Baptist Church. During the workshop, Ralph Diamond, a black labor leader from New York City, urged local activists to build upon the positive experience of the Freedom Riders in St. Petersburg. "We will lose what we've gained if this is not followed up locally," Diamond declared. "It must get to the point where it will become a natural thing for the two races to sit together at counters."

That evening, the Rev. William Smith, president of the biracial St. Petersburg Council on Human Relations, repeated Diamond's warning to an integrated audience at a mass meeting: "Unless we continue the work of these courageous people by using all the facilities of our bus stations," the black minister exhorted, "I'm afraid the Freedom Riders's trip may have been in vain." Two days later, after the Riders flew back to New York, the St. Petersburg Times offered a congratulatory editorial. "We did not expect any trouble here," the editors insisted, "We didn't get it. And had it come, law enforcement was ready. This is a healthy situation of which we can all be proud... We can't afford, for our own good, to permit unconstitutional practices, head-turning law enforcement, discrimination, and violence anywhere in this country."

The conclusion of the Florida Freedom Rides was less satisfying for the Tallahassee Ten. During their trial, the three local defendants—Stephens, Poland, and Hunter—were acquitted. But Judge John Rudd was unmoved by the defense of the out-of-towners who attempted to desegregate the airport restaurant. Offering the Riders a choice between 30 days in jail or a $500 fine, Rudd scolded them for coming to Tallahassee "for the whole purpose of forcing your views on the community. If I thought for one minute that you came here on a noble, Christian purpose and acted accordingly," Rudd continued, "you would not be here now. Stop and think when you go back home, and check the records of crime, prostitution and racial strife there compared to Tallahassee. Then clean up your own parishes, and you'll find you have more than you can take care of."

Stephens received an even harsher punishment. Though acquitted on the unlawful assembly charge, she was convicted of resisting arrest and sentenced to five days in jail, plus 30 more for violating probation related to a 1960 sit-in conviction. Stephens appealed her conviction, as did the Tallahassee Ten, and the legal wrangling over the airport arrests continued for three years.
Although a state circuit court overturned Stephens's conviction, the Freedom Riders case dragged on until 1964, when the same circuit court judge denied their appeal. At that point most of the 10 defendants chose to pay their fines, but some returned to Tallahassee to serve brief jail terms.

The Florida Freedom Rides represent a brief-but-telling episode in the long struggle for civil rights in the state. In conjunction with similar efforts in other southern states, the Florida Freedom Rides dramatized the injustices of Jim Crow transit, prompting federal officials to reexamine the political and moral viability of continued discrimination. Forced to confront the issue, the Justice Department belatedly pressured the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue a sweeping transit desegregation order in September 1961. By November 1, the effective date of the order, the “Whites Only” and “Colored Only” signs that had adorned bus station walls since the early-20th century were gone; and in the days and weeks that followed, teams of “testers” in Florida and elsewhere encountered surprisingly little resistance to desegregation among interstate passengers.

Travel on public transportation within the state, however, remained rigidly segregated until after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as did most other public accommodations. Desegregation in interstate travel, though, soon became a fact of life. And with this limited-but-significant victory, the civil rights movement gained strength and momentum as it refocused on the many remaining challenges posed by both law and custom. By challenging the status quo through direct action, the Freedom Rides not only accelerated the pace of change but they also expanded the realm of the possible.

RAYMOND ARSENAULT is the John Hope Franklin Professor of Southern History at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.
The picture-postcard Miami of 1950 was a lush, sun-drenched paradise, the nation’s top tourist destination and, presumably, a free-wheeling place of leisure and fun. But the real Miami shared most of the political, cultural, and racial attributes of the Deep South. Embedded traditions of racial segregation and discrimination shaped the city’s housing patterns, its job market, its political system, and every other aspect of life. White supremacists easily resorted to violence to maintain the color line.

As the decade got underway, however, postwar migration from the North became a potent force for change. Jewish migration, especially, began to alter the city’s population patterns and social dynamics. The Jewish newcomers brought traditions of social justice and progressive politics. When they encountered racial segregation and anti-Semitism in Miami, some were spurred to join African Americans in civil-rights activism.

The stage was set for a political clash that would make Miami central to the civil rights struggle in Florida. After the momentous 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in schools, racial issues heated up quickly in this southern city.

Building on the intensity of the school issue, the white citizens’ council movement flourished in Miami, claiming more than 15,000 members. Something of a new Ku Klux Klan in disguise, these councils distributed segregationist and anti-Semitic literature, resisted school integration, and generally stirred race hatred throughout the 1950s and after.

As the councils began organizing grassroots opposition to school desegregation, the Florida Legislature launched a McCarthyite witch-hunting campaign, looking especially for communists in the Miami NAACP. Established in 1956, the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (FLIC) targeted the Miami NAACP because its legal challenge to continued school segregation in Dade County threatened to unravel Florida’s deliberate efforts to keep blacks and whites out of the same schools and classrooms.

Ruth W. Perry, vice president of the Miami NAACP, explained the issue in a 1958 letter to Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the national NAACP: The FLIC investigators “centered their activity mostly in the Miami area because of our school suit, and later our bus and golf suits,” Perry wrote. “Again there is no doubt in my mind that this committee was set up for the express purpose of putting the NAACP out of business in Florida, and to try to seriously cripple the Miami branch because we have an integrated membership.” The Miami NAACP fought back in the courts, frustrating the legislative red-hunters who sought its membership lists. But the organization remained a consistent target of Florida’s white supremacists. Segregationists and integrationists both assumed the centrality of Miami to Florida’s resistance to civil rights.

In 1954, the same year as the school-desegregation decision, a Dade County anticommunist grand jury investigation headed by state’s attorney George Brautigam subpoenaed...
The picture-postcard vision of Miami as a freewheeling place of leisure and fun (left) belied its dark side of anti-Black and anti-Jewish hate crimes in the 1950s (below).

138 witnesses, all but three Jewish. As Deborah Dash Moore noted in her study of Jews in Miami and Los Angeles, To the Golden Cities (1994), "Jews increasingly recognized that, in Miami, anticommunist investigations were designed to thwart desegregation." The red-hunters targeted left-wing Jews who always seemed to be at the forefront of the tiny minority of white Miamians pushing for racial change. For example, a small number of Miami-area Jews involved in progressive groups such as the American...
Veterans Committee and the American Civil Liberties Union, along with a few local rabbis, publicly supported school integration. In 1960, local businessman Jack D. Gordon, one of those Jewish activists, ran for election to the Dade County School Board.

The 1960 school board campaign polarized Miami. Gordon's opponent, Republican businessman Arthur A. Atkinson, conducted a "Christian Crusade" supporting the continuation of Bible-reading in the Dade County schools. This issue had come to a head because the Florida ACLU, of which Gordon was a founding member, had just filed a lawsuit on behalf of several Jewish parents (including Gordon's sister-in-law, Thalia Stern) challenging the constitutionality of prayer and Bible-reading in schools. The American Jewish Congress in Miami had joined the litigation as well, a decision that divided the Miami Jewish community.

The political fallout from the Bible-reading litigation came quickly. Gordon, who advocated school integration, was accused by opponents of "paving the way for atheism and then Communist teachings by first destroying all vestige of faith in the Almighty." One of the Christian crusaders later admitted to a Miami rabbi that they really didn't think that Gordon was a communist, but that they did not "want another Jew on the School Board."

However, most Miamians recognized the interlocking nature of the Christian crusade and the battle over school integration. That Gordon was an active member of the local branch of the Congress of Racial Equality, which had been conducting lunch-counter sit-ins for more than a year, also played into the calculations of the conservative anti-integrationists supporting Atkinson.

Gordon fought back effectively, keeping the focus on integration and even urging local rabbis to discuss school issues in their synagogues before the election. Despite the vicious McCarthyite smear campaign unleashed by Gordon's opponents, voters sent him to a four-year term on the Dade County School Board and then elected him again in 1964.

During the '50s and '60s, Gordon put a public face on Miami's Jewish activism, but he also absorbed a considerable degree of right-wing anger and hostility, including bomb threats.

Many of Miami's progressive Jews also worked in the political campaigns of a young Democratic state legislator from Dade County, John B. "Jack" Orr, the only state-level politician who spoke out forcefully in favor of school integration in the mid-1950s. Orr was triply damned by Miami right-wingers: He was a member of the Miami NAACP, the Florida ACLU, and the Florida Council on Human Relations, an affiliate of the racially progressive Southern Regional Council. As an attorney, and at some risk to his legal career in the city, Orr had challenged Miami's anticommunist ordinance on behalf of a Miami Beach Jewish activist, Al Rosenberg. Subsequently, Orr represented local Jewish communists jailed in the Brautigam investigation.

Throughout the '50s, Orr provided legal representation to such left-liberal groups as the Civil Rights Congress and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Orr was white, Christian, and a member of a well-connected Miami family. His father had been mayor of Miami and he, himself, would later win election as mayor of Dade County. His stand on school integration drew vicious attacks in legislative campaigns in 1956 and 1958. In an openly political letter to all Dade County rabbis in September 1958, Jack Gordon reported on the right-wing vilification of Orr: "John Orr placards have been defaced with the Jewish star scrawled on his face."

John B. "Jack" Orr (above) was a crusader for school integration the '50s. The Methodist White Temple in Miami (below), now torn down, was once associated with KKK rallies.

One of the Christian crusaders later admitted to a Miami rabbi that they really didn't think that Gordon was a communist, but that they did not "want another Jew on the School Board."
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Hate Letters Target Blacks and Jews

After the Miami and Mims bombings of 1951, Gov. Fuller Warren received dozens of letters attacking the NAACP as a dangerous communist, anti-American organization. Race-haters also targeted Jewish groups such as the Anti-Defamation League. The ADL, one correspondent charged in a 1951 letter to Warren, was “a trouble maker, a race and hate breeder of the first rank, pro-communist and anti-Christian.”

As for the Carver Village and synagogue bombings in Miami, “A Lover of the South” wrote: “Dear Governor don’t let that annoy you, whoever was behind that, had some reason. It keeps unruly niggers and scheeneys in place.”

The Miami bombings prompted similar expression from a third correspondent: “The Jew has already ruined the northern cities and wishes to invade the South... They are teaching Communism to the colored people, and inciting rioting through them... They think if the colored riot and get the upper hand in the South they can move in.” Typically, the bigotry expressed in these letters linked white racism, anti-Semitism, and anticommunism—a powerful combination in the South and in the United States generally in the 1950s.

These attitudes persisted even at the end of the 1950s. Gov. LeRoy Collins had been twice elected as a moderate segregationist in the mid-1950s, but in a televised speech in 1960 he came out in support of lunch-counter integration—a political turnabout that unleashed a torrent of racial hatred. One Miamian bitterly complained, “The South is now on the cross, being crucified by the northern political mobs, by the NAACP, by the subversive Supreme Court and Eisenhower administration, and by the Red sponsored and financed sit-downs at lunch counters.”

Florida, this writer disapprovingly predicted, would soon “become the haven of equality for all peoples.”

A Miami woman charged: “The Communists, NAACP, and the Jews” were promoting “the mongrelization of the White race.” Still another Miami woman, who claimed to be a “former moderate” on race relations, wrote, “K.K.K. has begun to develop a strange appeal.” Jews were attacked with particular relish: They created and financed the NAACP, sympathized with the Soviet Union, participated in a communist plot for “stirring up the Negro,” and promoted “race-mixing.” Moreover, everyone knew that “every Jew organization in the country is behind the integration of the races.”

Others who wrote Governor Collins blasted the NAACP as a communist agency and called Thurgood Marshall and Martin Luther King, Jr., “disciples of the Kremlin.” The “left-wingers,” “one-worlders,” and “Zionist-Jews” sought to “destroy America...and the white race everywhere.” Another wrote: “In my opinion Florida is on the way out as a pleasure resort due to the heavy influx of Jews, Niggers, Cubans, and Porto Ricans [sic].”

—Raymond A. Mohl
beneath their home in the central Florida town of Mims.

In March 1958, a powerful dynamite blast damaged the religious school at Miami's Temple Beth-El, revealing once again the links between white supremacy and anti-Semitism. Moments after the 2:30 a.m. bomb explosion, the rabbi of another Miami synagogue was awakened by a phone call and warned that his temple would suffer the same fate if he did not stop preaching integration. The Miami police department also received a telephone message, promising more bombings if Miami's school integration plans were implemented. According to a police report on the bombing, the caller threatened: "If this integration doesn't stop, we will kill all the Jews." Police agencies suspected "activist extremists in the segregation movement," but no arrests were ever made.

Similar bombings and attempted bombings occurred in 1958 in Atlanta, Jacksonville, Nashville, Birmingham, and Charlotte, suggesting that throughout the South violent segregationists identified Jews with school integration. A "Confederate Underground," later linked by investigators to the Florida Ku Klux Klan, claimed responsibility for some of these attacks; its leaflets promised "Regular bombings...Negroes and Jews our Specialty."

In a 1958 Commentary article on the Miami bombing, Nathan Perlmutter of the Florida Anti-Defamation League interpreted the incident within the larger context of southern "massive resistance" to desegregation. The school integration issue had energized the Klan and the anti-Semites, who held large rallies throughout Florida, supported segregationist political candidates, and distributed masses of hate literature attacking "Jewish Kommunist Kremlin Kikes."

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Perlmutter suggested, this hate campaign emphasized, "that it is the Jew and not the Negro who threatens Southern ways."

The Miami News charged that the temple bombings in Miami and elsewhere were not coincidental, but part of an organized "reign of terror planned for the South by the White Citizens Councils." Journalists had already demonstrated that the leadership of the Florida Klan and the white citizens' councils were one and the same. Telephoned bomb threats against Dade County synagogues continued into 1959. Massive resistance to civil rights and school integration in the 1950s underlay the intensification of anti-Semitism and racial conflict in Miami and elsewhere.

The Miami bombings of 1951 and 1958 represented the work of dangerous extremists who jointly targeted blacks and Jews. However, the mid-century racist and anti-Semitic thinking that underlay the bombings extended deeply into Florida's still heavily white, Protestant, southern, and segregationist culture. These attitudes can be traced in extensive files of letters from ordinary citizens in the archived papers of Florida's governors during the 1950s. (See accompanying story.)

In retrospect, the degree of racial hatred and religious bigotry in Miami as late as 1960 seems shocking. Miami was supposed-ly more northern and less southern, more progressive in its politics and social relations.

In retrospect, the degree of racial hatred and religious bigotry in Miami as late as 1960 seems shocking. Miami was supposedly more northern and less southern, more progressive in its politics and social relations. On matters of inter-group relations, however, the reality rarely matched the image. Indeed, as Bella Fisher, a Jewish civil rights activist, noted with careful understatement as early as 1948, "Though on the surface Miami seems to have a more cosmopolitan population than most of the South...progressives here are more prudent about activities which are accepted in other areas." A decade later, the NAACP's Ruth Perry, a white integrationist, offered a similar and succinct analysis in a newspaper column: Miami had "an appearance of more liberality and freedom than actually exists." Miami, Perry wrote to the NAACP's Roy Wilkins in 1958, "isn't as liberal as we thought."

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