

WOMEN'S EMERGENCY COMMITTEE



Women's Emergency Committee

Introduction

In 1955, following *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Little Rock school board accepted a plan of gradual integration presented by superintendent Virgil Blossom. According to the plan, Little Rock schools were to begin the integration process in the fall of 1957. However, when nine African American students enrolled in Central High appeared in front of their new school on September 4, 1957, they were met by a white angry mob and the Arkansas National Guard. Governor of Arkansas Orval Faubus called the latter not to protect the black students' constitutional right to equal education but to block them from entering the school building. In response to this violation of federal laws, President Dwight Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard and ordered them to support the integration and protect the African American students. The students are known today as the Little Rock Nine.

Although after Eisenhower's intervention the Little Rock Nine could enter the school, the crisis was far from over. One outcome of the events was Governor Faubus's decision to close high schools in Little Rock in order to prevent further integration. During the 1958-59 school year, known as the Lost Year, four Little Rock high schools were closed and over 3600 Little Rock students, both black and white, were unable to attend free public schools. On September 12, 1958, the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC) was formed to advocate for the reopening of the Little Rock schools. WEC was a segregated organization that accepted only white members. Initially, some of its members suggested inviting black women to join their cause but the majority opposed the idea. Although WEC members were commonly called "integrationists" and encountered hostility from the supporters of segregation, the organization was divided on the issue of integration and wanted to appear neutral. They officially claimed that they were "neither for integration, nor for segregation, but for education." In this activity, you will examine a memo that WEC issued to advise how to engage in the cause of reopening Little Rock schools.

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CENTER FOR ARKANSAS
HISTORY AND CULTURE
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

THE WOMEN'S EMERGENCY COMMITTEE TO OPEN OUR SCHOOLS at the last meeting Tuesday, October 7, decided that the members individually write:

(a) Letters commending ministers, public officials and citizens who have stated publicly they stand for law and order and public school education (see commendation list attached),

and

(b) Letters to public officials asking them to use their influence to open our schools. (see public officials list)

To insure the success of this project and to facilitate the writing of as many letters as possible we offer the following suggestions:

- (a) Use of first person is most effective.
- (b) Avoid interjecting personalities.
- (c) Omit reference to any organization including our own.
- (d) Be brief.
- (e) Write now.

The attached is only a partial list. Please add any name you feel should be on the list and announce it at the next regular meeting.

A memo of the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, October 1957, p. 1 (Little Rock School Crisis Collection, 1957-1965)

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PUBLIC STAND FOR LAW AND ORDER, PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION

Ministers

- Dr. T. B. Hay, Pastor, Pulaski Heights Presbyterian Church, 4401 Woodlawn. (for TV appearance and public stand for law and order, public schools.)
- Dr. Dale Cowling, Pastor, 2nd Baptist Church, 222 East 6th Street. (Two TV appearances for public schools and law and order.)
- Dr. J. Kenneth Shamblin, Pastor, Pulaski Heights Methodist Church, Woodlawn and Monroe Streets. (Public stand -- outspoken sermons)
- The Rev. Richard B. Hardie, Pastor, Westover Hills Presbyterian Church, Kavanaugh at McKinley. (Early stand for law and order, public education.)
- The Rev. Charles W. Richards, Pastor, St. Paul's Methodist Church, 2223 Durwood Road. (Urging opening of schools)
- The Rt. Rev. Robert R. Brown, Bishop, Arkansas Diocese Episcopal Church, 300 West 17th Street. (Articles, TV appearance, his book, public stand.)
- Bishop Paul E. Martin, Arkansas-Louisiana Area, The Methodist Church, 723 Center Street. (TV appearance, public stand.)
- The Rev. Dunbar H. Ogden, Jr., Pastor, Central Presbyterian Church, 20th & Arch Street. (stand from his pulpit and in the community.)
- Dr. Marion A. Boggs, Pastor, 2nd Presbyterian Church, 3rd & Gaines. (public stand)
- Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr., Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, 1000 Bishop. (strong public stand law & order, public school education.)
- The Rev. Elbert B. Jean, Pastor, St. Luke's Methodist Church, 32nd & Irving Drive. (Strong public stand for law and order, public school education.)
- The Rev. Colbert C. Cartwright, Pastor, Pulaski Heights Christain Church, 4724 Hillcrest. (Articles, outspoken sermons, leadership.)
- The Very Rev. Charles A. Higgins, Dean, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, 310 West 17th Street. (Public stand)
- The Rev. William A. Willcox, Jr., Pastor, St. Mark's Episcopal Church. (Public stand.)

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List (cont'd.) -2-

Citizens

- Mr. Harry Ashmore, Editor, THE ARKANSAS GAZETTE, 112 West 3rd St.
(Early public stand.)
- Mr. Bill Hadley, Jr., The Hadley Co., 309 Center. (TV appearance,
courage.)
- Mr. Nat R. Griswold, Executive Director, Arkansas Council on Human
Relations, 1220 West Capitol. (public stand.)
- Mr. Edward Lester, Attorney, Pyramid Life Bldg. (public stand, TV)
- Mr. Robert Shults, Attorney, Pyramid Life Bldg. (public stand.)
- Mr. Herbert L. Thomas, Pyramid Life Bldg. (Founder of Thomas Plan)
- Rep. Brooks Hays, House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.
(mediation)
- Mr. Ray Smith, Attorney and Representative from Garland County,
Hot Springs. (lone voter against package bills at
emergency session of legislature.)

School Board

- Mr. Wayne Upton, President, Pyramid Life Building, Little Rock.
- Dr. William Cooper, 739 Donaghey Building.
- Mr. Harold J. Engrstrom, Jr., 1423 East 6th Street.
- Mr. R. A. Lile, Pyramid Life Building.
- Mr. Frank Lambright, 1711 North Palm. (new appointee to school board)

Public Officials

U.S. Senators The Honorable John L. McClellan
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

Form of My Dear Senator McClellan
Address

Sincerely yours,

The Honorable J. William Fulbright
United States Senate
Washington, D. C.

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List (cont'd.) -3-

Public Officials (cont'd.)

U.S. Representative: The Honorable Brooks Hays
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C.

Form of address: My Dear Mr. Hays:
Sincerely yours,

State Senators: Max Howell
Rector Building
Ellis Fagan
901 Spring Street
Artie Gregory
P. O. Box 1108

State Representatives: Mrs. Gordon Oates
5001 Country Club
J. Gayle Windsor, Jr.
Commercial National Bank Bldg.
Glenn F. Walther
Boyle Building
J. H. Cottrell, Jr.
111 East 7th St.
Joel Y. Ledbetter
Boyle Building
Sterling R. Cockrill, Jr.
Hall Building
T. E. Tyler
105 West 12th Street
Ben Allen
20 Pine Manor

(Form of address for State Senators & Representatives:

The Honorable
My Dear Mr. or Mrs.

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List (cont'd.) -4-

City Directors and City Manager

City Manager Dean Dauley
City Hall

Mayor Werner C. Knoop
#6 Ozark Point

Mrs. Edgar F. Dixon
615 East 21st Street

Mr. Hardy Winburn
501 N. Elm Street

Mr. Warren Baldwin
2424 Louisiana Street

Mr. Leo Griffin *Mo 6-1096*
38 Edgehill

Mr. G. W. Blankenship *Mo 6-0665*
4201 West 13th Street

Mr. Letcher Langford *Mo 5-6282*
920 West 2nd Street

Form of address: Mr. Dean Dauley
City Manager of Little Rock

Dear Mr. Dauley:

Mr. Hardy Winburn
Member, Board of Directors
City of Little Rock

If writing entire Board:

Board of Directors
City of Little Rock

Gentlemen and Mrs. Dixon:

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Questions:

1. What decision did the members of the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC) make during their October 7 meeting?
2. Whom did the letter-writing campaign target and why?
3. What advice did the WEC offer to their members?
4. What do you think about the WEC advice? Do you find it useful in case you wanted to write a letter in support of a cause?
5. Examine the list of names attached to the memo. Who are these individuals (focus on their positions and jobs; their names are not that important)? Why do you think they are the target of the letter-writing campaign?
6. Writing letters and emails to public figures as well as local and national legislators remains one of the most powerful and effective strategies to enforce social change. Think of one social justice cause that you care about and write a letter or an email to a member of a state or national legislature in support of that cause.