

**Mapping Urban Fracture - Next Steps:
33 Prospective Research Projects**

By Dr. Jim Ross

The histories of Little Rock and the Little Rock School District are intimately tied together. As one developed, the other developed. While we know this to be true in general, we have a very strong historiography of the Central High Crisis of 1957, while the rest of the history of the schools and the city still needs to be revised and rewritten. Researchers must study many topics before fully understanding how race, class, and gender conflicts shaped the city and its schools.

The Little Rock School District is central to any story attempting to explain changes in Little Rock. The school district has suffered demographic shifts and political turmoil in the last century, perpetuating differences that have fractured the city. It is both a victim of change and an instigator of that change. To date, only one dissertation covers the history of the Little Rock School District and is based mainly on newspaper accounts. While newspaper accounts are essential sources, they can lead a scholar to a myopic view of their topic when used in isolation from archival sources.¹ What is needed are multiple theses and dissertations that will address specific topics in the history of the Little Rock School District and the fracturing of the city.

Early on, historians understood American education through two lenses. An earlier historiographical tradition, which saw schools as a medium of American democracy, was superseded by a newer tradition, which saw public education as a tool of more profound forms of social oppression.

¹ David Gene Vinzant, "Little Rock's Long Crisis: Schools and Race in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1863-2009" (PhD diss., ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2010).

The earliest histories of public education in the United States focused on the good in public schools and how it arose from and enhanced democracy. In the early 20th century, historians collected artifacts, documents, and oral interviews to write these standard institutional histories of the rise of free public schools in America. They produced works on how schools prepared young people for a better society; this historiography tended to be progressive in its vision. The problem for them was how to enhance democracy. They produced works that celebrated public schools as systems of liberation and hope.²

These early historians tended to write biographies of different educational leaders. They examined different philosophical ideas that schools used as they created their curriculums, looked at the rise of superintendence, told the history of a school administration, wrote about the history of school law from the colonial period to the present, examined court cases that had to do with early education, and looked at the history of textbooks.

These studies were central to understanding the basic structure of public education in the United States. Still, as the nation changed in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, these studies tended to be seen as inadequate because they did not deal with conflict. Specifically, they did not address conflicts around class, race, and gender issues. So, a new generation of historians began to look at how we understand the origins of American public education.

The recent historiography began with Bernard Baylin in 1960. His now famous *Education in the Forming of American Society* was a fresh look at how education arose in the colonial and revolutionary periods. Baylin showed that education was not simply passing on a few ideas but involved how a culture transmits itself. For Baylin, education affects all of society.

² Geraldine Joncich Clifford, "Education: Its History and Historiography," *Review of Research in Education* 4 (1976): 210-267; H. G. Good, "Current Historiography in Education," *Review of Educational Research* 9 (1939): 456-459; Douglas Sloan, "Historiography and the History of Education," *Review of Research in Education* 1 (1973): 239-269.

Education was more than just a classroom—instead, the whole society producing schools needed to be studied. Schools were far more complex than the older historiography allowed.³

This new historiography reaches its apex in Lawrence A. Cremin's 1970 volume on education in Colonial America. Cremin looks at the numerous agencies that were involved in colonial education and their impact on colonial society. For him, education was not a self-contained social system but reflected the whole society. Education became a carrier for the creation of culture. For these new historians, the tools of the social sciences were central. Historians asked, how did societal changes affect education? How did educational changes affect societal changes? What was the role of race, class, gender, religion, and politics in shaping education in America? Public schools did not just arise in a vacuum. They did not just develop to spread democracy. Public education was a reflection of the society in which it occurred. If pluralism existed in that society, there would be conflict in creating public schools. Gender, class, and race relationships and the role of religion reflected that conflict. Public schools were, by definition, political entities. They reflected tensions within the political classes.⁴

Michael Katz added another layer to understanding the development of public education in the United States. Where the old historiography saw the purpose of public schools as spreading democracy and humanitarian relief, Katz saw that, instead, certain groups in society used public schools as a way to control others. Whether it be African Americans, new immigrants, or young women, schools were seen as a method of social control.⁵ In 1976, Katz

³ Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012; original edition published in 1960).

⁴ Sloan, 239-40; Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

⁵ Sloan 245; Michael B. Katz, "The Origins of Public Education: A Reassessment," *History of Education Quarterly* 16 (Winter 1976): 381-407.

said that we must ask at least three questions about the history of education. First, why did people establish systems of public education? Second, how did they go about that task? And third, what results did their efforts have? He argued persuasively that the origins of public educational systems can only be understood by their context. He argues that public schools arose in four critical developments that reshaped North American society during the first 3/4 of the 19th century: industrialization and urbanization, the assumptions by the state of direct responsibility for some aspects of social welfare, the invention of institutionalization as a solution to social problems, and the redefinition of the family. In the end, Katz argued that public educational systems emerged to alleviate particular social issues that arose from these four social changes. In Katz's model, public schools were created for multiple reasons: providing a solid regulatory role for the state in social welfare and morality. Reading, writing, and arithmetic were not the sole purpose of schools in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In the new historiography, the role of public education shifted from being a way to expand democracy to a way in which the ruling class could control subordinate classes and spread its dominant ideas.

But in time, the new view was seen as reductionist as the more traditional narrative. At the same time that historians were demythologizing education in the 1960s, Cremins wrote that public schools could have a dual function. They can be restricting, and they can be liberating. They can perform both conserving and innovative functions depending on the balance between them and on the historical situation.⁶

Into the 1980s and 1990s, historians like Ronald Bertchart argued that historians must move beyond the older vision of education as an expression of American democracy and, instead, must find African American voices and inject those into our history as a way to

⁶Sloan, 248.

eliminate the reductionist idea that only white power brokers make history. This new historiography showed that power does not just happen to African Americans, but they are engaged in a dialectical relationship with white ruling elites. The history of public education is part of a broader history of African-American liberation in his view.⁷

Historians Rubin Donato and Marvin Lazarson added further complexity to our recent understanding of the history of public education by pointing out the rise of Latino education and the role of gender creating educational systems. They emphasized that by bringing other people's stories to the forefront of our history, we could transform our limited understanding by only looking at the white power structure or celebrating the democratic importance of education.⁸

In 2017, William W. Cutler III wrote an article on the role of urban education in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. He added another dimension to understanding the post-Brown educational historiography. He wanted to know why segregation of the schools continued after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, and he turned his attention to the historiography of school modernization. He examined how schools became more structured and began to rely more on science by hiring psychiatrists and psychologists. He suggests this move toward modernization stigmatized, controlled, and isolated African-American children and girls.⁹

The historiography of public education has moved from hagiography to examining the social function of schools in a given location. The best of the new historiography examines how school systems were created and shaped by historical concerns in the larger society. They also

⁷ Ronald E. Butchart, "'Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the World': A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 28 (August 1988): 333-366.

⁸ Rueben Donato and Marvin Lazerson, "New Directions in American Educational History: Problems and Prospects," *Educational Researcher* 29 (2000): 4-15.

⁹William W. Cutler III, "Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and the Historiography of Urban Public Education in Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 141 (2017): 221-243.

examine how schools become tools of the ruling class to control a given location and how that can make the schools the center of conflict for those who see themselves as oppressed.

This larger historiography must shape the future work of historians writing about the Little Rock School District. Below are some ideas for future research and masters' theses on the Little Rock School District.

Biography

"Every individual biography is an episode within the history of society." – Peter Berger, 1967¹⁰

Biography plays a significant role in helping us understand history by providing valuable insights into the lives and experiences of individuals who have shaped the course of events. We gain a deeper understanding of historical figures' motivations, perspectives, and actions through biographical accounts. Biographies bring history to life, allowing us to connect with the human aspects of the past and comprehend the complex interplay between individuals and larger historical forces. By exploring the personal stories of key figures, biographies illuminate the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they operated, shedding light on the broader historical processes and transformations. Through the lens of biography, we can appreciate the nuanced dynamics of power, ideology, and personal agency that have shaped history.

1. Jimmy Karam was a local businessman in Little Rock, Arkansas, from the 1940s to the 1990s. Karam is a complicated historical figure. He was purposefully vague later in life about his role in

¹⁰ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Press, 1967).

the Central High Crisis of 1957. Earlier in his life, he had been a union buster, a football coach, operated a men's clothing store on Main Street, a leader in the biracial Urban League, an active member of the progressive Arkansas Council for Human Relations, and saw himself as everyone's friend.

But during the 1957 Crisis at Little Rock Central High School, many in the community and the FBI saw him as the head instigator trying to stop the nine African American students from entering the school. Afterward, he was seen as the leading figure promoting resistance to integration. Karam makes appearances in many of the books we have about Central High School, but to date, we do not have a biography of his life or his work to stop integration.

Someone could write a social biography of Jimmy Karrem's life and activities from the 1950s to 1980s using the FBI files, the Elizabeth Jacoway collection, ancestry.com, and newspapers. It could help explain how people in business operated on both sides of the divide - as massive resisters and those working towards minimal compliance. This study can be framed by Numan Barley's work on massive resistance in the South and John Kirk's article on massive resistance and minimal compliance. Both authors provide an outline or overview of the processes that southern whites developed to resist the Brown v. Board decision. We now need to work on the personalities in Little Rock that were leaders of these resistance movements.¹¹

One of the things missing from our treatments of the Little Rock Central High Crisis is the real sense of trying to take seriously those actors who opposed integration. In his masterful historical works, Kirk restored African-American agency to the story. However, we still need to

¹¹ John A. Kirk, "Massive Resistance and Minimum Compliance: The Origins of the 1957 Little Rock School Crisis and the Failure of School Desegregation in the South," in Clive Webb (ed.), *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis (eds.), *The Moderate's Dilemma: Massive Resistance to School Desegregation in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

write a story that allows for the active agency of the segregationist. Instead, in many of our works, whites show up as shallow stereotypes.¹²

Jason Sokol, in his book, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975*, and Paul Hendrickson, in his book, *Sons of Mississippi*, provide anyone approaching Karam with a robust model of allowing the voices of segregationists to be heard in all their complexity and not just to be dismissed as irrelevant. Any biography of Karam must dig deep to try and understand his fears and beliefs and then tie those to his actions in Little Rock. This thesis aims to answer other complicated questions that take creative usage of the archives. Who was Karam? How did his early life prepare him to be a leader in the segregation crisis? What did he do in the Crisis? Today, historians have yet to draw firm conclusions about Karam's leadership role in the crisis. Still, the preponderance of the evidence suggests that if the FBI believed he was the leader of the segregationist. It's time to take a new look at Karam's role.

2. R. G Hall was the longest-serving superintendent in the Little Rock School District. We need a biography of him. He was the architect of segregated schools in Little Rock. Hall was a native of Virginia, graduated from the University of Virginia, and became an educator in his home state before arriving in Arkansas in 1891. He was a well-known educator who taught English, math, science, French, and Latin and served as Principal of Peabody High School in Little Rock before being named LRSD Superintendent. During his tenure as Superintendent, LRSD built sixteen new schools: twelve elementary schools, two junior high schools, Little Rock [Central] High School (including Quigley Stadium), and Dunbar High School. Hall established the first football

¹²John A. Kirk, *Beyond Little Rock: The Origins and Legacies of the Central High Crisis* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007); John A. Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940–1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); John A. Kirk (ed.), *An Epitaph for Little Rock: A Fiftieth Anniversary Retrospective on the Central High Crisis* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008).

team in Little Rock and was known as the "Father of the School Board" by many people. In his letter of resignation as Superintendent, he confirmed that he had given 38 years of service to the district (six as Principal of the high school, one year as Principal of U.M. Rose Elementary School, and 31 years as Superintendent). He retired because of ill health.

While a general biography of Hall might have some local interest, a social biography of Hall as the architect of segregated schools in Little Rock would add much to the understanding of the social construction of systems of racial oppression in the United States. The Little Rock School District papers, boxes 79-92. These are full of news stories on him and his actions. Boxes 2-8 contain the Board of Directors' minutes detailing policy, programs, buildings, crises, and economic investments during his tenure. Box 61 contains school reports from the 1890s and may describe his time as a teacher and a principal. Boxes 45-47 include all of his superintendent's reports from his tenure as district leader. Using these resources, plus Ancestry.com, a creative historian could unravel his story and the construction of segregated schools in Little Rock.

Memory/Deconstructing Memory

The study of memory is essential to understanding and interpreting historical events, particularly those as transformative and impactful as the Civil Rights Movement. Memory encompasses the collective recollection, narratives, and interpretations that societies and individuals construct to make sense of the past. In the context of the Civil Rights Movement, memory has played a crucial role in shaping how we understand and commemorate this significant period of struggle for racial equality and social justice.

The Civil Rights Movement was a monumental struggle for African Americans and other marginalized groups to secure equal rights, end racial segregation in the United States, and rectify past economic, educational, and healthcare deprivations. The memories associated with this movement are multi-faceted, diverse, and often contested. They reflect the perspectives and experiences of various individuals, communities, and social groups who participated in or were affected by this period in American history.

Studying the memory of the Civil Rights Movement involves examining how different narratives have emerged, evolved, and intersected over time. It entails exploring personal accounts, oral histories, visual representations, written records, and other forms of documentation that have shaped our understanding of the movement. The memory of the Civil Rights Movement is not static; it is constantly being renegotiated, reinterpreted, and reimagined as new generations and scholarly perspectives emerge.

Studying memory gives us insights into how the Civil Rights Movement is remembered, commemorated, and memorialized. It helps us understand how collective memory can shape national identity, social justice movements, and ongoing struggles for equality. By critically analyzing memory, we can uncover previously marginalized voices, challenge dominant narratives, and gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and legacies of the Civil Rights Movement.

Ultimately, studying memory and the Civil Rights Movement enables us to engage in a broader conversation about historical consciousness, social change, and the ongoing quest for justice. It prompts us to question whose memories are preserved, whose stories are told, and whose experiences are honored. By examining memory, we can contribute to a more

comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the Civil Rights Movement and its enduring significance in shaping our societies today.

3. In 2009, Sondra Gordy published her book *Finding The Lost Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed Its Public Schools*. It is a history of what occurred in 1958 when Faubus ordered all the public high schools in Little Rock to close. This book tends to be overly romantic in its treatment of teachers and the closing of the schools. But in Gordy's collection in the UALR archives, she has many interviews with the teachers she studied from the 1950s that she recorded in the 1990s and early 2000s. We need more research on how people remember the Central High Crisis. How people remember the Central High crisis is central to how we have tried to address racial and class disparities in Little Rock. In 2009, Larry J. Griffin and Kenneth Bowling made this point in their article "What Do These Memories Do: Civil Rights Remembrance and Racial Attitudes?" They argued that underlying research on collective memory is the idea that the past is never really past.¹³ On top of the general historiography on memory and the civil rights movement, Cathy J. Collins has written a dissertation on memory and the Little Rock School District. Collins provides the best explanations for how social memory and social forgetting are constructed and will be a must-read for anyone working on memory studies. Karen Anderson's book *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* also deals with memory.

¹³Sondra Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed Its Public Schools* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2009); Larry J. Griffin and Kenneth A. Bollen, "What Do These Memories Do? Civil Rights Remembrance and Racial Attitudes," *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 4 (August 2009): 594-614; Cathy J. Collins, "Forgetting and Remembering: The Desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas: Race, Community Struggle, and Collective Memory" (PhD diss., Fielding Graduate Institute, 2004).

Using the interviews in the Sandra Gordy papers from the 1990s and 2000s and data found in the Jacoway collection, we need a thesis on memory that asks how we tell the story of how white and black students remember the crisis. How are they different, and how are they the same? Also, using interviews with teachers, how do they remember the Crisis? Why are these memories important, and how do they match what we know about the Crisis? This thesis could tell us a lot about what we have remembered about the crisis and provide answers to what actually happened in the city.

Central High Crisis

The Central High Crisis unfolded in Little Rock, Arkansas, when nine African American students attempted to desegregate a previously all-white Central High School in 1957. The resistance they faced from white segregationists, along with the subsequent involvement of federal authorities and the intervention of President Eisenhower, led to a significant escalation of the Civil Rights Struggle.

It is crucial to consider the historical context of the Central High Crisis to understand its importance. The Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. However, many Southern states, including Arkansas, resisted desegregation and implemented various tactics to maintain segregation. Against this backdrop, the Central High Crisis emerged as a powerful symbol of the struggle for racial equality.

The Crisis had profound legal and political implications. The actions of Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, who called out the National Guard to prevent the integration of Central

High School, challenged the authority of federal law and highlighted the resistance to racial equality in the South. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's subsequent decision to deploy federal troops to ensure the students' safety and enforce desegregation affirmed the federal government's commitment to upholding civil rights, setting a significant precedent. When the troops were gone, white businesspeople took over the district and continued to resist integration under the guise of moderation.

This event garnered extensive national and international attention. News coverage of the events in Little Rock exposed the harsh realities of racial discrimination to a broader audience, prompting widespread outrage and condemnation by some and calls for stronger resistance from others. The crisis became a focal point for the Civil Rights Movement, galvanizing support for equal rights and shedding light on the challenges faced by African Americans throughout the nation.

The Central High Crisis was crucial in accelerating desegregation across the United States. The event highlighted the resistance and violence faced by African-American students seeking equal educational opportunities and catalyzed subsequent legal battles. The crisis renewed momentum for the Civil Rights Movement, inspiring activists and policymakers to push for broader social change and dismantle segregationist practices. It also played a crucial role in creating a more moderate resistance to social change and expanding rights to minority groups.

The crisis left a lasting legacy on the Civil Rights Movement and American society. The courage and determination displayed by the Little Rock Nine symbolized the resilience of individuals in the face of adversity. The crisis exposed the deep-rooted racism and inequality that

persisted in the United States, fueling the demand for legislative action leading to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

4. John Kirk has shown in his work on black activism in Little Rock that African Americans struggled for equality and access to public spaces years before the Central High Crisis of 1957. The Central High Crisis did not come out of the blue. John Kirk and Karen Anderson both mention a 1952 study by a biracial group called The Little Rock Council on Schools. They approached the Little Rock School District with a proposal for a limited number of African-American students to enroll in courses and use the facilities at Central High School that were not available at Dunbar High School. Using the Little Rock School district papers, the NAACP papers, and any papers of group members, we need a study of this movement and the report written by Philander Smith professor Georg Iggers from 1952. This study can be found in Box 6 of the Gordy collection. Iggers has written a piece called "An Arkansas Professor: The NAACP and the Grassroots."¹⁴ This study will add to Kirk's work in showing how African Americans and white allies were working minimally to end segregation.

Historian Graeme Cope has written numerous articles utilizing data from the FBI collection on students, teachers, and the crowds around Central High School in 1957-1958. He has examined the class basis of the Mother's League, the crowds who tried to stop students from entering the school, student segregationists inside the school, whether or not the crowds were from Little Rock or outside the city, and the teachers inside the schools. His work is great, but

¹⁴Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Karen Anderson, "The Little Rock School Desegregation Crisis: Moderation and Social Conflict," *Journal of Southern History* 70 (August 2004): 603–636; John Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line*; Georg Iggers, "Arkansas Professor: The NAACP and the Grass Roots," in *Little Rock, USA*, edited by Wilson Record and Jane Cassels Record, 283-291 (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company).

needs more done with the data. The next seven projects either call for building on his work, adding to his work, or moving beyond his interpretations. These projects could draw on social history projects that analyze data and spaces that people live in.¹⁵

5. Sondra Gordy collected many important papers about Central High School and Hall High School students. Using the files on students at the two schools, we need a social profile on students at Central and Hall, 1957-1960. A researcher could create a database of the students and then add data about the families, their income, and where they lived to that database from the city directory and the census of 1950. The final project could be a written thesis, but more importantly, the student could create a series of maps and texts to explain who these students and their families were in 1957-1960.

6. Using the teacher lists in Box 2 of the Sondra Gordy papers, we also need a social profile on teachers at Central and Hall 1957-1960. This would be the same type of project as described in number 5. An enterprising student could go through the LRSD records and examine where the teacher had taught over the years. This, too, would be best as a series of maps and charts with text in a story format.

¹⁵ Graeme Cope, "'Dedicated People': Little Rock Central High School's Teachers during the Integration Crisis of 1957-1958," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 70 (Spring 2011): 16-44; Graeme Cope, "'Everybody Says All Those People... Were from out of Town, But They Weren't': A Note on Crowds during the Little Rock Crisis," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 67 (Autumn 2008): 245-267; Graeme Cope, "'Honest White People of the Middle and Lower Classes'? A Profile of the Capital Citizens' Council during the Little Rock Crisis of 1957," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 61 (Spring 2002): 37-58; Graeme Cope, "'A Thorn in the Side'? The Mothers' League of Central High School and the Little Rock Desegregation Crisis of 1957," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 57 (Summer 1998): 160-190.

7. Box 3 of the Sondra Gordy papers lists students who transferred from LRSD in 1958 when the high schools were closed. It would be interesting to see a social profile of these students. We need to understand where the students lived, so a series of maps would allow us to see what sectors of the city these kids came from. We also need a database showing what their parents did for work. A student could use the lists with the city directory to determine their parent's work. From this data, a class analysis of which kids could transfer would offer us a deeper understanding of who could transfer and where they went. Cope's work, alongside Fred Williams' article, affords us models for thinking about class and the crisis.

8. Karen Anderson, Phoebe Godfrey, Rebecca Bruckmann, and others have all written about gender and the Central High crisis, but we still need a deeper analysis of the segregationists involved in the revolt at Central High School in 1957. Using the FBI files, ancestry.com, and the city directory, we need the social and gender profiles of the participants. A creative scholar could use the interviews of the segregationists by the FBI, the Little Rock Police, and the Arkansas State Police to examine the social construction of masculinity and femininity as it relates to the Central High Crisis. The Jacoway collection also contains much material that would help in this. We need a database of the segregationists and a deep analysis of who they were and what they said.¹⁶

¹⁶ Anderson, *Little Rock*; Godfrey, Phoebe. "Bayonets, Brainwashing, and Bathrooms: The Discourse of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 62 (Spring 2003): 42–67; Bruckmann, Rebecca. *Massive Resistance and Southern Womanhood: White Women, Class, and Segregation*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2021.

9. Graeme Cope has written an analysis of the crowds around Central High School during the white revolts to stop the African-American Kids from entering the school. He concludes that they were lower middle-class people from Little Rock. We need a database and a collection of maps using FBI files to see where the segregationists lived. We also need a GIS project that will allow us to enter other data about the segregationists. Where did they live? What was their gender? Where did they work? This visual representation may let a creative historian see new patterns missed before the digital age.

10. In the Little Rock School District collection, boxes 62 and 63, there are some fantastic primary sources called Annual Reports of Secondary Schools for 1955-1958. These documents contain complex data on each school and monthly reports from principals on each school. When used with school board minutes and newspapers, a researcher could write a thesis that contains a thick description of schools on the eve of integration. One could pick a starting date and go up to the end of the 1956-57 school year. We must understand inequality in LRSD schools before 1957 to truly understand the Crisis.

11. In the Little Rock School District collection, boxes 63-72, there are annual reports on Hall, Mann, and Central High Schools. These documents contain yearly collections of data and monthly reports from principals and supervisors. A thesis could be written that does a deep comparison of these schools. Using the work of Fred Willis and Graeme Cope, the schools could be compared based on race and class to see what the schools were like from the period before desegregation to the period after.

12. One of the results of the Arkansas Gazette's stand on limited integration and keeping the schools open, while Faubus and other radical segregationists wanted them closed, was that the state's leading newspaper lost many subscribers. Two theses could come out of the Hugh Patterson Jr papers. Patterson was a stockholder in the paper and the publisher. Boxes 56, 97, 130, 131, 189, 197, and 203 tell the story of those unsubscribed from the Gazette. Patterson collected a list of the people who unsubscribed from the paper and composed many letters from people condemning his stance. Using a traditional thesis or a StoryMap, we need to tell the story of the loss of revenue. We need to map out where the unsubscribers were from. Using city directories, we need to analyze jobs and class. Who unsubscribed? Is there a pattern? The second thesis would tell the story of the Gazette's stand on the crisis. While this is mentioned in many places, a detailed history of the Gazette's position has not been written. The Patterson papers, the Jacoway Papers, and many other collections could tell this story.

Origin Stories

During the Reconstruction era in the United States, significant efforts were made to establish public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas. Following the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, there was a pressing need to provide educational opportunities to African Americans who had been denied access to education during the era of enslavement.

In 1868, the Little Rock School District was officially formed, marking a crucial step towards equal education for all citizens. This district aimed to address the educational disparities faced by African Americans and create a public school system that would cater to the needs of all students.

The founding of public schools in Little Rock during Reconstruction was part of a broader movement to build a more inclusive and equitable society. Efforts were made to secure school funding, hire teachers, and establish appropriate educational facilities. While challenges and obstacles persisted, the establishment of public schools signaled a commitment to breaking down barriers and providing educational opportunities to all students, regardless of their race or background.

These schools played a vital role in empowering African-American communities, enabling them to gain knowledge, skills, and a chance for upward mobility. The founding of public schools in Little Rock during Reconstruction laid the foundation for progress in education and set the stage for later milestones, such as the integration of schools in the mid-20th century.

Despite the challenges and setbacks faced during this period, the establishment of public schools in Little Rock during Reconstruction represented a significant step forward in pursuing equal education, setting the stage for future advancements in educational opportunities for all students in the city.

13. In the Registers of the Pulaski County Teachers' License collection, there are three boxes of data on who became teachers from 1918-1940. We need a social profile of teachers over time with statistical data by race and gender, a general history of licensure, and a description of the typical teacher in Little Rock (age, gender, education, test scores). We must understand who taught in our schools and how that profile changed. This could be a regular thesis, but it would also be interesting to map out who these people were and use the city directory and ancestry.com to attempt to tell their stories more deeply.

14. From W. E. B. Dubois' classic work *Black Reconstruction in America* to Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution*, it has been clear for decades that Reconstruction saw the expansion and, in some cases, the beginning of free public education in the South, specifically for African Americans, but also for the majority of whites. What needs to be added to our understanding of Arkansas and Little Rock is a history of the origins of the Little Rock School District. Using the Little Rock School District papers box 1, which contains the original minutes of the Little Rock School Board, and box 61, which includes the earliest superintendent reports, newspapers, and city records, we need a thesis that tells the story of the founding of public schools in Little Rock. We need to contextualize this in Reconstruction and examine how rules were made, funding, racial issues, and the business community's role. This needs to embrace the complex education historiography described at the beginning of this essay. We need to ask what forces in the city opposed public schools and what parties supported them?¹⁷

15. Historians have argued for decades that the Jim Crow system that prohibited African American public access, equal education, and voting rights expanded greatly in the 1890s.¹⁸ We

¹⁷James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1935; 1962).

¹⁸John William Graves, *Town and Country: Race Relations in an Urban-Rural Context, Arkansas, 1865-1905* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1990); Michael Perman, *Struggle For Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); *Leon F. Litwack, Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

need a good study of how segregation grew in the Little Rock School District this decade. Using the Little Rock School District papers found in boxes 2 and 3, which contain board minutes from the 1890s, and box 61, which includes the earliest superintendent reports, we need a thesis that traces the history of segregation in Little Rock in the larger context of the economic danger the district was always in. This thesis should look at financial investments in white and black schools and ask questions about how segregation was funded and propagated in the period of the 1890s.

16. School boards comprised citizens who wanted to help the city as it was developing its schools. We know nothing about the 19th-century people who chose to run for school board. Using the Little Rock School District collection boxes 1-3, which contain the board minutes from 1868-1900, newspapers, and city directories, a thesis is needed, or a website is necessary that examines who school board members were, what they did for a living, where they lived and what they thought about schools, and what they did as board members. This thesis would help us understand the power structure of the late 19th century and what schools meant to them. The newest historiography that looks at schools as places of social contrast should guide this thesis.

17. Susie Morris was a teacher at the all African-American Dunbar High School in Little Rock. In the 1940s, she represented African-American teachers in a court case challenging the salaries paid to teachers. Susie Morris would eventually win her case; her story has been told before. We need a better history or understanding of what pay was like for teachers before this case over a more extended period. In the Little Rock School District records boxes 4-5, there are payroll documents for white and black teachers. These documents allow for a more extensive study on

pay disparities in the district, examining education and experience correlated to race between 1868 and 1920.¹⁹

18. Schools were built as they were needed for the growing population. We need to study how and where the Little Rock School District decided to build schools. Was the Little Rock School District leading that growth as the city grew, or was it responding to it? The Little Rock School District website has a list of all the schools that were built in Little Rock. This list can be found here <https://ar02203631.schoolwires.net/Page/5583>. Using the minutes from the Little Rock School Board, located in the Little Rock School Board collection, we need a building map that moves chronologically from 1868 to 2023. We need an analysis of the spaces schools were built in and the debate around those spaces. Were certain areas prioritized over others? Was there neglect? This study will help us understand how the city grew and developed.

19. The Great Depression devastated Arkansas and Little Rock.²⁰ Running a school district amid a depression was not easy. There was only a little work done on education in the 1930s. Two older studies might provide some insight into education in this period. Alexander Rippha wrote an intriguing article on the business community and public schools on the eve of the Great

¹⁹ John Kirk, "Sue Cowan Morris (1910–1994): An Educator and the Little Rock, Arkansas, Classroom Teachers' Salary Equalization Suit," in *Arkansas Women: Their Lives and Times*, edited by Cherisse Jones-Branch and Gary T. Edwards (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018); John A. Kirk, "The NAACP Campaign for Teachers' Salary Equalization: African American Women Educators and the Early Civil Rights Struggle," *The Journal of African American History* 94, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 529-552; William H. Martin, "The Education of Negroes in Arkansas," *The Journal of Negro Education* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1947): 317-324.

²⁰ Ben Johnson, *Arkansas in Modern America since 1930*, 2nd ed. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2019).

Depression. He showed that the business community was deeply concerned about training workers for jobs and started a concerted effort to demonize common schools and advocate for vocational schools.²¹ A decade after Rippa's work, Irving G. Hendrick wrote a detailed study on the impact of the Great Depression on education in California. He shows a more significant investment in education in the depression years and what he calls progress.²²

We do not have studies of Little Rock in the 1930s, and we need a thesis that tells this story. How did the Great Depression affect the Little Rock School District? Using the Little Rock School District collection boxes 7-8, which contain the board minutes from 1929-1940, newspapers, city records, and city directories, we need a thesis about running a school district in the Great Depression. This thesis should examine rising debt, the inability of the district to pay salaries for some months, and the cost of running two school systems in a segregated city. This thesis would allow us to tell the story of Little Rock from 1929-1940 with the schools at the center.

20. Little Rock began to grow after World War 2. We need a study of that growth that examines its strain on the Little Rock School District. Using the papers of the Little Rock School District papers, newspapers, and other collections, we need a thesis addressing how Little Rock responded to the post-World War 2 growth. In boxes 8, 9, 47, 48, 49, 50, 61, 74, 75, 76, 77, 94, 95, 96, and 97, a researcher will find school board minutes, appraisal books, pay books, superintendent reports, and reports from each school and department. A well-crafted narrative

²¹ Rippa, S. Alexander. "The Business Community and the Public Schools on the Eve of the Great Depression." *History of Education Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (March 1964): 33-43.

²² Hendrick, Irving G. "The Impact of The Great Depression On Public School Support In California." *Southern California Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 177-195.

could contextualize growth in Little Rock and explain how the changing economy helped and hindered education in Little Rock.²³

Legal

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and local police played complex and often controversial roles in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. While there were instances where these agencies actively supported civil rights activists and protected their rights, there were also instances of surveillance, harassment, and even collusion with segregationists.

The FBI, under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, had a mandate to investigate federal crimes and maintain internal security. During the Civil Rights Movement, the FBI's involvement varied. On one hand, the agency played a positive role by investigating and prosecuting crimes committed against civil rights activists, such as acts of violence or intimidation. The FBI's investigations and pursuit of justice helped bring attention to and address civil rights violations.

However, there were also instances of questionable FBI practices. The agency conducted surveillance and intelligence gathering on civil rights activists, including Martin Luther King Jr., under the pretext of national security concerns. This led to the infamous COINTELPRO (Counterintelligence Program) operations, which aimed to disrupt and discredit various civil rights organizations. Such actions were driven by the FBI's perceived threat from activists and their potential to disrupt social order.

Local police departments had a significant impact on the Civil Rights Movement as well. While some police officers protected the rights of peaceful demonstrators and worked to maintain order

²³S. Charles Bolton, "Turning Point: World War II and the Economic Development of Arkansas," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 123-151; Calvin Smith, *War and Wartime Changes: The Transformation of Arkansas 1940-1945* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1986).

during protests, there were numerous instances of excessive force, brutality, and biased policing against African Americans and civil rights activists. Police often employed violent tactics, such as using dogs, fire hoses, and physical aggression, to suppress peaceful protests and maintain segregationist policies.

Events like the Birmingham Campaign in 1963, where peaceful protesters faced brutal police responses, and the Selma to Montgomery marches in 1965, where protesters were met with fierce resistance, highlighted the tensions between civil rights activists and local police forces. These confrontations exposed the deeply ingrained racial biases within some police departments and brought national attention to the need for police reform and equal treatment under the law.

It is important to note that not all FBI agents or local police officers were complicit in discriminatory practices. Some individuals within these agencies sympathized with the civil rights cause and worked to protect the rights of activists. However, the overall actions and attitudes of the FBI and local police during the Civil Rights Movement were mired in controversy, with instances of both support and opposition to the goals of the movement.²⁴

21. While we have some military histories of the Central High Crisis, we do not have a story of the role of the local and state police. Using records in Sondra Gordy Collection, Boxes 3 and 7, the FBI Files, and the Faubus papers, we need an entire, detailed history of the crisis from the view of police forces. What did they do during the Crisis? How did they operate? Maybe, most

²⁴ David J. Garrow, "FBI Political Harassment and FBI Historiography: Analyzing Informants and Measuring the Effects," *The Public Historian* 10, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 5-18; Kenneth O'Reilly, "The FBI and the Civil Rights Movement during the Kennedy Years--from the Freedom Rides to Albany," *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 2 (May 1988): 201-232; David Cunningham, "Understanding State Responses to Left-versus Right-Wing Threats: The FBI's Repression of the New Left and the Ku Klux Klan," *Social Science History* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 327-370; Will Brantley, "The Surveillance of Georgia Writer and Civil Rights Activist Lillian Smith: Another Story from the Federal Bureau of Investigation," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 59-82.

importantly, what they did not do? Who did they investigate? What types of questions did they ask differing participants?²⁵

22. Using the FBI papers, we need an organizational thesis on the FBI in Little Rock. What were they used for? What were they doing? What did they report? Did the FBI work to promote or impede integration? We need a deeper examination of the FBI agents assigned to Little Rock in 1957-1960, their work, what happened to them after the crisis, and their general opinions on their work in the city. These records have not been used to the full extent of their potential. Other than the works described above, the most critical work on the bureaucracy of the FBI and the Justice Department is John T. Elliff's early work.²⁶

23. Using the FBI papers, we need an analysis of how the FBI tracked segregation groups, communists, NAACP, and school boards. Were they neutral? Did they pick a side? How did they pursue these actors? What questions did they ask? What recommendations did they make? A strong researcher could craft a nuanced narrative from internal memos to explain the FBI's behavior towards different groups.

24. From 1957 to 2023, the history of discipline in schools in the American South was significantly impacted by race and class, with enduring challenges related to racial disparities and social inequalities. Following the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, which declared racial segregation in schools unconstitutional, the South began the process of

²⁵Shawn Fisher, "The Battle of Little Rock" (PhD diss., The University of Memphis, 2013); Robert W. Coakley, *Operation Arkansas* (Foreword by John M. Garland) (Little Rock, Arkansas: The Center for Arkansas Studies, 2010).

²⁶Elliff, John T. *The United States Department of Justice and Individual Rights, 1937-1962*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1987.

desegregation. However, resistance from white communities was widespread, leading to tense confrontations and violence. African American students who enrolled in previously all-white schools faced hostility and discrimination, often leading to harsher disciplinary measures against them. Using The Little Rock School District records, specifically boxes 45-78, which contain detailed discipline reports by school, The Office of Desegregation records, and the Phillip Kaplan papers, we need a comprehensive history of discipline reports and student handbooks after desegregation from 1957-2000. We need to examine how the use of disciplinary tools increased as more African-American students went to school with white students.²⁷

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism in schools refers to educational institutions' systemic and structural practices that perpetuate racial inequalities and discrimination. These practices are deeply embedded in policies, procedures, curriculum, and the overall culture of schools, resulting in differential treatment and outcomes for students based on their racial or ethnic background.

Examples of institutional racism in schools can include racially biased disciplinary practices,

²⁷Jeffrey R. Henig, Richard C. Hula, Marion Orr, and Desiree S. Pedescleaux, *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).2. Tracy E. K'Meyer, *From Brown to Meredith: The Long Struggle for School Desegregation in Louisville, Kentucky, 1954-2004* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Nancy A. Heitzeg, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Education, Discipline, and Racialized Double Standards* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016); Carla Shedd, *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2015); Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Marie Gottschalk, *Caught: The Prison State and the Lockdown of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

tracking systems disproportionately place students of color in lower-level classes, inadequate allocation of resources to schools serving predominantly minority populations, and the underrepresentation of diverse perspectives and histories in the curriculum. Such practices hinder the academic progress and overall well-being of marginalized students and perpetuate societal inequities. Addressing institutional racism in schools requires a comprehensive and sustained effort, including examining and reformulating policies, promoting inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices, and fostering a supportive and equitable school climate for all students.

25. In the Sondra Gordy papers, there is a study on enrolment from 1997 in box 8. It is clear that today, the racial composition of the Little Rock School district does not match the city's racial composition. The schools are overwhelmingly African-American and Latino, while the city continues to have a population of about 50 percent white. To understand the growth of racial inequality in the Little Rock School District, we need a more extensive study that shows the loss of students in the Little Rock School District from 1957 to 2015 by race. The collection of these numbers in the Gordy papers is a good beginning. Still, thousands of records would allow the creation of a database from the LRSD papers, the Phillip Kaplan papers, and the Office of Desegregation collection. This database could include composite data from 1957 to 2015 and individual school data. This project would take some work to organize and collect the data, but once the data was collected, maps and charts that show change over time could be created. A traditional thesis could present this, combined with a story map with embedded charts, maps, and data. This study would add a new understanding of how whites fled the school district almost immediately after integration began in the 1950s. It would help to unravel the mythologies that the Little Rock School crisis ended by the 1960s. It will also be up to us to understand how

racial attitudes expressed themselves in the concrete actions of white citizens of the city. Laws and words can create racial hierarchies, but most often, the activities of individuals and racial groups codify them.

In the Little Rock School District papers, boxes 45-78 contain some of the wealthiest unused primary sources for understanding schools in Little Rock. They are the annual reports on all the schools created by principals, the division heads, and the superintendents from 1872 to the 1970s. These documents collect data on the conditions in the schools, the race of students, and the gender of students. There are reports on medical issues, test scores, IQ scores, and many other rich documents that would allow historians to write a detailed social history of the Little Rock School District that details the processes of segregation and desegregation over time. Several theses could come from these meticulous records, and an undergraduate or graduate seminar could be developed based on these files.

26. We need a thesis on the physical condition of schools over time by race and geographic location. The annual report documents contain numerous data on the schools' conditions and any improvements the district made. One of the assertions that has been made about Little Rock Schools is that African-American Schools were underfunded, understaffed, and not well maintained. This collection would allow the collection of massive amounts of data that could either affirm, deny, or nuance that claim.

27. These documents also have numerous health reports on schools by race and geographic location. These same reports traced sickness and vaccinations in each school. A creative project

could be created around this data that looked at the spread of disease by race and geography in Little Rock.

28. We could do a year-by-year study of attendance rates by race and class from these documents

29. We could do a year-by-year study of grade distributions by race and class.

30. These documents would allow scholars to study how schools operated over a specific time frame. We can examine the distribution of resources and correlate that to race and class.

31. Finally, a scholar could trace which school had art, music, and foreign language using these records and correlate these to race and class issues.

A deep and nuanced view of segregation and desegregation could be developed for the above topics if they were tied to discussions in the Little Rock Board minutes, newspapers, and legal filings.

32. In the Little Rock School District collections, boxes 74-78 have school appraisal books from 1945-1961. These are fascinating reports on each school's funding and the buildings' value.

These files can be used to look at class and race investments in Little Rock Schools during a critical period when the city was changing because of increased population, tax revenue, and the coming of the civil rights struggle in the post-Brown v. Board of Education world. A detailed thesis could examine this data to show how white schools continued to be more heavily invested

while black schools were ignored and allowed to flounder. Using the Little Rock School board minutes and newspapers, a promising thesis could contextualize this raw data around the political battles about desegregation. A good series of digital maps would complement this study. Billy Walker wrote a study of the use of property taxes to fund public schools, and this might provide some needed historical context for battles over money and how neighborhoods developed and were taxed.²⁸

33. Using the Little Rock School District papers LRSd and the MetroPlan papers, specifically box 9, we need a thesis on LRSD building projects between 1960-2000. One of the most critical developments in the history of Little Rock was the flight of white people to the western part of the city between 1960-1980. An important research question is: Was the Little Rock School District driving or responding to growth in the West? Documents indicate that the Little Rock School Board was controlled by realtors in this period, building schools to attract white citizens to new neighborhoods in the West. This is a form of segregation and needs further study. Jess Porter and John Kirk have done some exciting work on the move of the city west, but we need more studies to understand this historical phenomenon.²⁹

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²⁸ Walker, Billy D. "The Local Property Tax for Public Schools: Some Historical Perspectives." *Journal of Education Finance* 9, no. 3 (Winter 1984): 265-288.

²⁹ John Kirk, "The Roots of Little Rock's Segregated Neighborhoods," *Arkansas Times*, July 10, 2014, accessed: July 27, 2023, URL: <https://arktimes.com/news/cover-stories/2014/07/10/the-roots-of-little-rocks-segregated-neighborhoods>.

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