

Perceived Factors that Hindered the Implementation of a *Freedom of Choice* Initiative in an Alabama School System

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Abstract

The United States Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, ruled that separate but equal was no longer an acceptable practice in education for students in *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka Kansas*. Across the country, school leaders grappled with the implementation of integration, and in more portions of the country, especially in the Deep South, integration would be a slow and often tumultuous process for African Americans fighting for their rights. This study investigates one school system's effort to develop a *Freedom of Choice* initiative to desegregate the schools and focuses on the perceived factors that hindered the process.

Keywords: Integration, segregation, freedom of choice, school choice, case study

May 17, 1954 would be an important historic day, influencing education in the lives of African American students in the United States. This was the day which ushered in the unanimous Supreme Court verdict in *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*, which ruled that “separate but equal” was no longer an acceptable practice in education for students in elementary and secondary schools across the country (Irons, 2002, p. 163; Kluger, 2004, p. 710). From that day forward, it was the law of the land that African American students should be afforded the opportunity to attend schools with their White counterparts regardless of the location of the schools.

The *Brown* decision was a step toward equal rights for African Americans during a time of Jim Crow and other laws that had legally segregated the two races across the country, but especially in the South. In the South, these were a series of rigid anti-Black laws that created a caste system in which Blacks were treated as second class citizens. This dual system was evident in the school systems in which each race had its own school, and the African American schools were always lacking in materials and support.

With the passage of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, schools were faced with many questions centered on the implementation of this new law. Unfortunately, the Court’s rhetoric did not bring about any immediate change, especially in the Jim Crow South, where deeply etched social realities were hard to erase. There was a slow response to desegregation by school systems following the passage of *Brown* in 1954, which many cited the lack of direction from the Supreme Court ruling. Within a year, the Supreme Court issued a second decision that further dictated requirements for school systems to follow. Specifically, in this decision, the court stated that schools should “make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance” in implementing its mandates aimed at ending de jure segregation (Russo, Harris & Sandidge, 1994, p. 298), and that school systems must begin integrating schools with “all deliberate speed” (Duke, 2009, p. 16; Klarman, 2007; Wise, 2001, p. 22). It was after this ruling that schools began creating voluntary measures of integration, which included Freedom of Choice plans.

Although the Supreme Court issued this decree, historians have noted that in many states, it would be almost 20 years before they would completely comply with the court’s decision. While the *Brown* decision declared state-promoted segregation unconstitutional and pronounced any such laws or policies null and void, it did not prescribe what school systems must do to desegregate (Armor, 1995). In many cases, states took a very methodical approach to keep the schools segregated while staying clear of the watchful ideas of the federal government. This includes *Freedom of Choice* and *Pupil Placement Laws* that gave southern states the appearance that they were taking steps to integrate schools.

Such laws, passed at the state level, gave local school boards great discretion in pupil assignment, enough to slow or stop implementation of school desegregation. This happened in Tuskegee, Alabama, with the Macon County Board of Education that closed the school when Black students tried to integrate the school (Norrell, 1998). In 1965, only 6% of the Black students in the South were in an integrated school. In 1967 this number rose to 22% in the 17 southern and border states, but this did not fulfill the letter of the law that all schools across the country would be integrated (Weeks, 1971).

Purpose of the Study

This is part two of a four-part study examining *Freedom of Choice* implementation in an Alabama school system following the passing of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. This part of the

study examined the perceived factors that hindered the implementation of the *Freedom of Choice* initiative by both African American students that actively participated in the initiative and those Caucasian students already at the segregated school. The stories told by the participants and captured in this study are of those who witnessed the integration of schools firsthand, gaining insight into what they learned through this process about their community, school, and most importantly themselves.

There have been limited studies completed that have explicitly focused on the *Freedom of Choice* movement in schools and the impact it had on students that were affected by the integration of schools. Because there has been very little research done, little is known about the actual people involved so this study provides insights not previously examined that could help us to understand issues of racial identity and cultural identity, more thoroughly providing a way to modify the conceptual framework of how students view themselves as individuals and within various subgroups. This study provides an understanding of the lived experiences of both African Americans and Caucasians that came together through a difficult time in American history that can be used to help current educators best understand how to work with students of varying backgrounds in today's classrooms.

Background

School Integration and the *Freedom of Choice* Movement

In an effort to abide by *Brown v. Board of Education*, school systems began to implement *Freedom of Choice* plans in which parents could choose to send their students to either all Black or all White schools. “*Freedom of choice* allowed, in theory, any student to attend any school in the system, thereby allowing equal educational access for every student” (Duke, 2009, p. 18). While the law was initiated to thwart integration, these school-based plans were, for the most part, legitimate attempts to initiate the integration process. The underlying premise of these plans was that parents were given a choice of the educational setting and allowed to choose the environment they feel was most appropriate for their children — a segregated school or an integrated school. The guidelines for integration generally called for freedom of choice to be opened for four grades that were to be spread out, for example first grade, the first and last high school grade, and the first junior high grade. Susan Uchitelle (1993) summarized public school choice programs as:

These are programs that offer parents a variety of educational settings and allow them to choose the environment they feel is most appropriate for their children. They are schools that offer parents an alternative to neighborhood schools that they consider. They strive to overcome educational inequalities. (p. 15)

These plans were relatively non-controversial because too few schools across the country were using them to integrate the schools, so there was little movement of African Americans into White schools (Rossell, Armor, & Walberg., 2002). This would, however, give school systems the appearance they were integrating since there were only two options, but in many cases, parents kept their students in their neighborhood schools, which were racially segregated.

By 1968, *freedom of choice* plans was generally not approved by the federal courts because these plans did little to integrate large numbers of African Americans in schools across the country (Raffel, 1998). The Supreme Court rulings in *Green v. County* (1968) and *Alexander v. Holmes*

County Board of Education (1969) ended *de jure* dual school systems and ultimately enforced the *Brown* decisions once and for all for school systems across the country.

Methodology

This was a qualitative case study since the nature of the study dealt with the lives of those that participated in the *Freedom of Choice* movement during the integration of schools. Qualitative research investigates research questions of how, what, and why in situations calling for in-depth exploration to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2014). Qualitative research relies on the participants' views; asks a broad, general question; collects data that consists mainly of words; and describes and analyzes these words for themes (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2014).

Creswell (2005) defines a case study as “a variation of ethnography in that the researcher provides an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an event, a process, or an individual) based on extensive data collection” (p. 439). Case studies allow people to look at the world in a particular way and to communicate the situation to others to gain knowledge. This type of qualitative research becomes a road-map of knowledge to promote future study; providing an understanding of a specific situation and setting while evaluating people's lives, and what gives meaning to them (Patton, 2002).

Population and Sample

This study occurred in a school setting in a small Southern city with a population of 19,261 residents in the 1960s. The school system examined was Rose City Schools (RCS) (pseudonym). The city of Rose, nestled in the east-central part of the state, had access to a local university and is within an hour's drive of a major metropolitan city. The school system has a unique history in that it was formed as an independent district, later became part of a county system, and then once again became an independent system.

Rose City Schools (RCS) was established in 1961 after citizens favored becoming a separate entity from the county school district. Prior to 1961, the citizens of Rose had voted to tax themselves for local education at a higher rate than the citizens of the county, and felt that because they were paying a higher rate than these funds should be used exclusively for the children living in the city of Rose. Proponents also felt that Rose schools would not improve as long as they remained in the county system (local newspaper article, 1961). Table 1 summarizes the configuration of the school system as it developed as an independent school system from the county school district.

Purposive sampling was used to identify the population and sample. Purposive sampling is the qualitative research process in which the researcher selects individuals with an intentional purpose (Creswell, 2005). The criteria for selection included students who integrated the schools utilizing Freedom of Choice or those that were at the school when integration occurred during Freedom of Choice. After identifying potential participants, nine students chose to be included in the study, listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Race	Gender	Grade at Time of Integration	Graduation Year
Respondent 1 (R1)	W	Female	11 th	1967
Respondent 2 (R2)	AA	Male	10 th	1968
Respondent 3 (R3)	AA	Male	11 th	1969
Respondent 4 (R4)	W	Male	7 th	1971
Respondent 5 (R5)	AA	Female	9 th	1971
Respondent 6 (R6)	W	Male	7 th	1971
Respondent 7 (R7)	W	Male	7 th	1971
Respondent 8 (R8)	AA	Female	6 th	1974
Respondent 9 (R9)	AA	Female	6 th	1974

Data Analysis

“Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining evidence, to produce empirically based findings” (Yin, 2014, p. 132). Interviews were analyzed to determine common themes among the participants and those that were different. The researcher was looking to see what differences existed between the two racial groups during the time of integration to gain insight to their lived experiences.

Open coding was used to examine, compare, break down, conceptualize, and categorize the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process was used to breakdown or reduce data to manageable segments that can be used to generate themes and categories (Schwandt, 2007). Codes were developed from data collected from transcribed responses from the interviews with all data collected from the interviews that were used in the coding process.

Findings

Implementation Process

Rose City Schools, like many other school systems across the nation, did not initially adhere to the United States Supreme Court’s desegregation decision of 1954 when the school system broke away from the Tinnemeyer County School System in 1961. In compliance with the laws, city schools in Alabama sought ways to solve the problem of how to best integrate their schools.

In May of 1965, Rose City Schools implemented a “Freedom of Choice” plan requiring all school-aged children to indicate the school that they wanted to attend for the next school year. Results of this Freedom of Choice plan suggested that the majority of students, both Blacks, and Whites, chose to remain in the school they were already attending. In the first year of integration in 1965, fewer than five students decided to attend Rose High School, the predominately White school. No White students chose to attend Hafley High, a predominantly Black school. Over the next four years, the number of Black students attending the predominately White school gradually increased, but no White students ever chose to attend either of the predominantly Black schools.

Factors that Hindered the Freedom of Choice Initiative

Although the school system had made an effort to develop a plan on integration through Freedom of Choice prior to mandated integration that forced all dual systems of educating Black and White students dissolved in 1970, the fall of 1965 saw only a handful of students integrating the school system. All five of these students were African American, and in the coming years, there would not be a mass number of students integrating under the Freedom of Choice initiative. No Caucasian student would integrate the segregated African American schools in the city. The perceived factors that hindered integration through Freedom of Choice included teacher racism/bias, student racism/bias, and resistance from African Americans to integrate, which was evident in the low numbers that chose to attend the White schools.

Teacher Racism/Bias

Although there were community and teacher support for the integration of the school system through Freedom of Choice, unfortunately, there were some teachers that showed they were not fully supportive of the efforts to integrate the school. Both White and African American participants shared their stories of negative experiences they had with some of their teachers.

Respondent 1 vividly remembered not enjoying her time in the school system because of the teachers. She recalled one incident, in particular, involving her history teacher. She shared:

When President Kennedy died, and this is Rose City Schools, my civics teacher was called out of the room, came back in and said I have an important announcement. She said President Kennedy had been assassinated, and she said I've been waiting for someone to take care of that man. [Lines 123–136]

Although this incident would take place two years prior to the integration of this school system, it did speak volumes to R1 in how that particular teacher felt about the Civil Rights movement that was occurring at that time, which would have included the desegregation of schools across the country. R1 went on to say:

I always felt like the students did a much better job adapting than the teachers did. [Lines 38-39]

R1 also shared:

I have memories of being in trouble a great deal as a teenager. I think that is part of what led me into teaching, the cause that all kids need to be respected.... [Lines 76–77]

R2 had similar feelings of disrespect from the White teachers. He shared:

The transition there was not real smooth.... Then going to your classroom, my history teacher was named Ms. Edwards and she could never pronounce the word Negro because she would always say the “Nigrass” [Lines 66–70]

This showed that not all the teachers at the school were embracing the changes that were occurring at the school and were not showing respect to the other students.

Respondent 2 remembered how compassionate his teachers were at the segregated Black schools. He stated:

In the elementary school, the teachers seemed to be more compassionate and caring for you and there was concern about you really learning. [Lines 50–51]

He went on to say:

She seemed to be more caring about you as you learned things that would help you in life. [Lines 54–55]

At the White school, this feeling of compassion and caring was no longer there. R2 shared:

The teachers were kind of like nobody verbally mistreated you, it was kind of like hands-off. I will only talk to you if I had to talk to you. [Lines 117–118]

This was not the same atmosphere that had been fostered at the segregated school. This same type of behavior was experienced by Respondent 9. She remembered how a teacher would not call on her in class. In fact, she went on to say:

I spent an entire year in that class raising my hand and my teacher never called on me. [Line 29]

Respondent 5 had a similar experience and shared:

...and I just remember being in that room and not really being noticed or recognized by the teacher necessarily, but the remarks and the things that came from the students more than anything else. I do remember in that classroom at the point that I began to get comfortable; there were questions asked. I remember raising my hand so many times and not being called on. The very time that I didn't raise my hand is when I would be called on. So I finally figured out the trick to this and I am not ever going to raise my hand, so whenever she calls on me if I know the answer I know it and if I don't, then I am lost. [Lines 202–209]

Being ignored by the one person that is supposed to be your advocate is not what students had in mind when they chose to integrate the school system. Respondent 8 shared a similar story:

The teachers weren't very friendly. You can tell by body language and tone. They really did not want you there. They were forced to teach you and you were there and they just lived with it, but they were not going to make any extra effort. [Lines 349–352]

R8 went on to say:

So the difficult part was you knew that you had to live with it and you knew that you could not complain about it, because you made that choice. And so because we had made that choice at home and we talked about it at home, there were things that I know I did not tell my parents that had happened at school and I am sure that my sister didn't either because they would probably want to have pulled us out of school. [Lines 398–403]

This showed how much she wanted to be at the school, but also how difficult that first year was on her as she transitioned from the segregated Black school. Going back in her interview, R8 reminisced about her teachers at the segregated Black school:

They had a passion for teaching and wanting to make a difference in the perception of education for everybody in our classroom. The ones that wanted to learn as well as the ones that didn't. But it is really good and I guess to sum it all up I can genuinely say that they cared and you knew they cared. They really wanted you to do well. They really wanted you to do well so that you could become a teacher or someone in the community to help others, but it was really apparent the caring. [Lines 77–84]

This passion and caring attitude is what many of the students did not get from some of their teachers at the integrated schools. These teachers had been trained as educators of their subject matter, but more importantly, they were the role models that would shape the lives of their students. Unfortunately, there were those that did not want to be a role model to all students, and in fact, did what they could not to interact with the African American students. This was seen in another response by R8:

It was not evident that my teachers cared about everybody in that classroom. African American students like me that were in predominantly Black schools they gave up a teacher that genuinely cared about them. I think that is where the motivation and the desire and

the passion for learning has been lost with a lot of our African Americans because it is not there. [Lines 892–896]

It should be noted that there was one incident reported that showed that at least one of the African American teachers had her own doubts about one particular student integrating the schools. Respondent 2, as mentioned earlier, was one of the first students to integrate the school system under Freedom of Choice. He remembers a conversation with one of his African American teachers concerning him integrating the schools that fall. R2 recalled:

I think the biggest problem that I remember were the teachers at Hafley, the adult teachers. I remember one lady [teacher] telling me that I should not be going over there because I was not clean enough to deal with them White folks. The folks are too clean. [Lines 271–274]

This quote showed the bias and thoughts that the African American teacher had concerning this particular student. What other preconceived ideas did she have about the segregated White schools that she was sharing with her students at the segregated Black schools? Although this teacher exhibited bias, it did not stop this particular student from integrating the school system, but her negativity could have swayed the thoughts of others. Respondent 5 remembered having African American teachers at the integrated high school, and it was not a pleasant memory for her. She shared:

I had a couple of African American teachers at Rose High who treated me worse than some of the other teachers did and they had come from Hafley. I know that they were probably angry. They had their own things going on I am sure. But why take it out on me. I always felt there was some carryover from the way the students were treating me through this one particular teacher also. [Lines 324–328]

What changed in these teachers from their time at Bass Elementary or Hafley High (pseudonyms) where the students so fondly remember their other teachers being caring and compassionate? As R5 stated, maybe these teachers were angry that they were transferred to Rose High. For the students, they chose to be there, but for this particular teacher, it would appear that they had no choice.

Overall, teachers have a lasting impact on the students that they teach, and during this pivotal time in the history of this school system, you have teachers that seemed to not evoke the characteristics that you would want to see in a role model. If others heard or saw these examples occurring, then they would not be likely to want to be a part of the school during integration.

Student Racism/Bias

Integrating the schools would bring both African Americans and Caucasians together in a school setting, but not all students were open to those of a different race. It would be these negative experiences or thoughts that would cause some not to want to choose to integrate the schools.

From the African American perspective, Respondent 3 felt that there was prejudice in the school, which made his time there difficult. R3 went on to say:

The Whites perceived us as local nonworking people, so we pride ourselves on Hafley being a good school... [Line 283]

R3 continued with:

We were walking down the hallway and you hear guys calling you names and cursing and all that kind of stuff. [Line 67] They called you niggers and that kind of stuff and it mostly came from the guys. [Line 236]

Sharing these negative experiences with other students that were not at the integrated school could cause other African Americans not to want to leave their segregated Black school to be put in this situation at the integrated school. It is important to note that although R3 had these negative experiences, his views of the opposite race could have been seen as a hindrance for Whites to want to attend the segregated Black school. R3 shared that his viewpoint was that:

They were crap [Whites]. They were racists and didn't want to have anything to do with us. We were watching TV and seeing all the marches on TV. You watched all of the historical stuff that was going on during that time frame in the Birmingham area and all of those places. I was like I don't need this and until there was a decision made to go over there, I was like okay we are going over here, but I still understand and knew that White people did not like Black people. So you had to prove yourself and prove what you are capable of doing and then let the ball fall where it may. [Lines 402–409]

Respondent 2 was one of the first students to integrate the high school, and he remembered that more incidences that are negative began to occur as more African American students began to attend the integrated high school. R2 shared:

My first year by myself I never heard the word 'nigger' and I never heard anything derogatory, but then the other Black kids came. Well once that happened then you started hearing things like 'nigger' and you start having folks writing things on the wall and saying things. We had fights and stuff like that. [Lines 325–329]

This racist view was also seen by Respondent 9. When discussing one of her White classmates, she recalled:

She was so racist and you can imagine a person being that young and that little and so racist. [Lines 335–336]

For R9, racism was something that she felt was taught at home. She stated:

.....you know one thing about most Black families don't teach racism. We don't. We don't think about it, you know. [Lines 205–206].

She continued with:

You don't know it unless you are taught about racism and those kids were taught it. It was during a very turbulent time in our country. Little kids don't know anything about what color you are. [Lines 207–210]

Because of these experiences, many African Americans wanted to stay in their own community where they knew people, for the most part, felt as they did. This was evidenced in the following statement by R9:

You know how people they always think that they are important, White people were not important to me. They existed Jason. My world was with all the little girls and boys that I played with and my cousins. At Thanksgiving, we would always go to Montgomery to Alabama State to their football games against Tuskegee. So we had our life. [Lines 400–404]

Apprehension and Resistance from African Americans to Integrate

In the first year of integration through Freedom of Choice, there were only three African Americans that chose to attend the all-White high school in 1965. This was nine years after the Brown decision from the Supreme Court and two years after the integration of schools in Tuskegee and Mobile. Some would have thought that more students would have wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to attend the all-White high school.

After talking with the participants, they all shared similar stories in fear of the unknown and the fear of losing the culture and traditions from the Black high school. Some of the stories revolved around the school system not being ready for integration those first two years. Respondent 3 stated:

I just do not think that they were ready for it. We probably were not ready for it, but we did it anyway. [Line 497]

R3 went on to say:

Now that was some real prejudice stuff going on, but I guess it was because there were not that many students trying to go to Rose. Hafley High School students wanted to stay at Hafley, and they said you can go to Rose High School if y'all want too, but we are not trying to go over there, so it was not a massive move. [Lines 560–564]

These two statements showed how the African American community was not ready to leave their segregated Black school for the segregated White high school. The notion that prejudices were already present in the community could have been another reason why more African Americans chose not to integrate the schools.

Respondent 2 remembered the various activities that would occur during the school day or just how students could easily get involved while they were at the segregated high school. R2 explained:

We used to have basketball games in the middle of the day and our cheerleaders used to dance and sing, but then when there was integration you came into where our White brothers and sisters, their cheerleaders were different, so they had to go. [Lines 171–174]

R2 went on to say:

Some of the changes affected us as a Black race. I had one interview one time and I told this guy from this standpoint that I am a minister, a pastor and I think that is why you did not see a mad rush to integrate the church like it was the school. Because we lost so much of our culture with integration because if you come over you are going to do it our way, but your way is gone. [Lines 167–171]

R2 ended with:

So we lost a lot of our identity and our culture through integration. In Hafley, if you wanted to be in the band, then your parents would buy you an instrument and then you could be in the band, but when it was integrated, then if you got in the band it was based on a performance test to be able to get in. So a lot of those things really affected our culture and our race that I saw happened with integration. [Lines 176–181]

Seeing these changes occur over one or two school years could have kept others from wanting to attend the all-White high school because things as they knew them were not that same or done in the same manner. Respondent 5 remembered losing the spirit that was at Hafley as compared to Rose. R5 said:

We have to adopt this way of doing it as opposed to Hafley. The spirit was definitely was there [at Hafley]. I enjoyed the spirit that was there. The spirit was different [at Rose]. Here [Rose] there was a method to it. I am not saying one is better than the other, and I am just saying it was different and kids were expected to conform. So, therefore, we ended up with not as many [African American] cheerleaders and when I was in the band, there were two African Americans in the band and that was me and a guy who played drums. That was it my whole four years in high school. [Lines 287–293]

Respondent 9 discussed some an important events at the segregated Black schools. R9 shared:

May Day at the Black segregated school. Because you put so much effort and there was so much ... because people had to actually make uniforms and outfits and that was mommy. Every year you knew that the 5th grade was going to do the Scottish dance and you had to have your little plaid skirt and the little sash and the little hat. My cousin made a lot of them. The 4th grade was the Indian dance and it was a real big deal. We lost a lot of things that were important to us. We had to learn how to acclimatize. They didn't take on any of our stuff, we took on all of theirs and we had to leave our things behind. [Lines 111–119]

This conformity could be seen as a loss of the African American traditions and culture from the segregated Black school that African Americans did not want to lose at this point in their lives. This could be summed up with the reply from Respondent 9:

... we gave up everything. They did not embrace any of our culture and it is not just in Rose, it was everywhere else. They embraced our athletes as they always do. [Lines 659–660]

The notion that by attending the White schools would mean that you would lose your identity was an important factor that affected why more African Americans did not want to leave their schools. During this time of integration, it was Freedom of Choice, and it was that choice that many African Americans made in not wanting to leave their segregated high school to integrate the White high school.

Respondent 4 was on the opposite side of the spectrum in that he was a White student already at the segregated White high school. When asked how he would have felt if he were the one to attend the segregated Black high school, R4 stated:

How would I have fit in at Hafley if I had been to Rose High School up until the 11th grade and then they told me that I was going to graduate at Hafley? So that was probably much tougher on them than it was on anybody else. [Lines 353–356]

R4 recognized the sacrifices that the African American students made to leave what they had known for so many years to attend the White high school. The fact that this was a hard decision to make would make likely explain why so few African Americans chose to integrate the school system. Respondent 6 had a similar viewpoint. R6 shared:

It wasn't until long afterward, looking back on it, to how much that you think golly that had to be tough. That had to be hard and not knowing uncertainties [of integration]. [Lines 387–388]

Discussion

The study sought to examine the experience of being involved in a Freedom of Choice initiative from the perspective of the students involved over six years. A historical case study approach was utilized for this research. Evidence was collected from a variety of sources, including semi-structured interviews with nine participants, a review of primary source documents, and a review of related literature.

Freedom of Choice was an initiative used by many school systems across the country to allows students choice in the school they wanted to attend. They could stay at the school where they had been assigned based on race or they could choose to attend the other school in the district. In this initiative, it would be the African American students that would choose to attend the all-White schools in the district as very few, if any, Whites chose to attend the all-Black schools.

Research Question: What perceived factors hindered the implementation of the *Freedom of Choice* initiative?

From the findings, the significant factors that hindered students from participating in the Freedom of Choice centered on racism from students and teachers within the schools. Kendall (2013) defined racism as “any attitude, action, or institutional structure which subordinates a person or group because of his or their color” (p. 21). This was seen at the school level and was representative of what was going on throughout the country. The African American students were subjected to racism from Caucasian students and the Caucasian teachers at the high school. The negative experiences experienced by the five African American students interviewed for the study were indicative of the experiences of other African Americans around the country. Such experiences included images of the nine African American students that were trying to integrate Little Rock Central High School, where there were crowds of community members yelling racial slurs and posting signs against the African American students that were simply wanting the same opportunities that had been afforded to the Caucasian students. There were also images from the Civil Rights movement that were being shown on the news reports, in local newspapers, and national newspapers. These sometimes violent images would be what many students would see, and would cause many not to want to participate in integrating the schools.

The notion that one is being treated negatively just because of the color of their skin is what the African American students had to endure during this time of integration. Given the opportunity to stay at a segregated school would prevent this from happening, and therefore, would help to explain why more African Americans did not want to integrate the schools. The culture of the South had been developed around the ideas of Jim Crow, and it would be these segregated rules that were so embedded in so many Caucasians that they would still hold onto wanting separate facilities for African Americans and Caucasians. It would be this continued culture that would prevent many across the South from wanting to integrate the schools.

Walking into classrooms where you were not wanted by both the students and the teachers would contribute to why so few African Americans would want to participate in the Freedom of Choice initiative. From the evidence, the African American students each described incidents with White teachers and White students in which they were treated unfairly simply because of the color of their skin. In one incident, even a White student recognized the prejudices that a teacher had against the African American students. It would be these types of occurrences that would give others concern and not want to be a part of the integration efforts.

Another factor that was discovered from the evidence was the fact that African Americans did not want to lose their culture and identity from their Black high school experiences to become a part of the White high school. Many noted that as the African Americans transferred to the White school, none of their traditions were integrated into the schools. Although they were integrating as students, none of the culture from the Black schools was brought over to the White schools. The same traditions and norms that were in place before integration would remain in place for years to come. African American students and parents did not want to lose their identity and sense of culture by having to assimilate to the culture and norms of the White school. African American students did not feel like they were a part of the White school in the beginning, and most found it hard to find their place in the integrated school. The numbers were not on the side of the African Americans because there were so few of them, so at any time there was a popularity vote, it would be impossible for an African American to win.

Schools are a place for students to grow and develop into the leaders of tomorrow. Unfortunately, during the time of integration, not all educators wanted to work with all students. Although the school system leaders wanted to have integration to take place, it would be the racist

acts and the loss of the African American culture that would hinder the number of African Americans from wanting to leave their home to move to integrate the White schools.

Concluding Thoughts

The voices from the nine participants give just a glimpse of the untold stories many other students have during this critical time in the history of education in Alabama and the United States. It is the hope of the researcher that their voices represent the countless others that were not allowed to share their experiences as our country moved toward racial equality. This study only touches the surface of what was occurring throughout the South. Still, the intention is that the lived experiences of these nine participants will open the door for more dialogue among the races and capture their lived experiences as a result of this endeavor. So much has changed in our country, but with the change, it is also said that some things remain the same. It is important that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. Our schools are instrumental in producing the next generation of leaders, and it is important that these future leaders understand the history from which they come. The stories from this integration effort of these nine participants showed pride, perseverance, and a determination to succeed in spite of the obstacles that may have been before them.

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