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In 1954, in a case called *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that separating the races in schools deprives Negro children of equal educational opportunities. "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," Chief Justice Warren wrote. In addition, he said, school segregation creates in minority children "a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone." The Court declared school segregation laws unconstitutional.

The decision stunned and enraged southern segregationists. In March 1956 a group of U.S. Senators and Representatives from the eleven states of the Old Confederacy signed a statement called the "Southern Manifesto." In it, they declared their opposition to the Supreme Court decision and urged that schools fight any at-

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tempts to integrate. As a result of resistance by segregationists, which was sometimes violent, most southern schools were not integrated until ten to twenty years after the Supreme Court decision in the *Brown* case.

Black children's experiences in segregated schools differed widely. In some classrooms, teachers were hesitant to talk about civil rights for fear of antagonizing the white establishment. In others, teachers instilled in their students a pride in black achievement. As in all schools, segregated or integrated, some teachers repeated past lessons so that few were inspired and most were bored. Others challenged their students to think, to stretch. As Claudette Colvin said of her teachers, they were "pricking our minds." The young people who tell their stories in the section on segregated schools reflect the full range of this experience.

In every black school, the students knew that their facilities and materials were inferior to those in white schools. "You really felt the second-class citizenship in the educational system," says James Roberson, himself a former school principal. "Never receiving a new textbook was quite revealing to me. Our books were from white schools, and used. You always got books with marks in them."

But despite the limited resources, black children in segregated schools were at least in a safe environment. Their first experiences of integration were startling by contrast. Although none of them anticipated warm welcomes, neither did they expect the depth and extent of the hostility they encountered from white students and often teachers. Yet they persisted, and in that persistence exhibited an extraordinary strength and single-mindedness of purpose.

MYRNA CARTER

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