

Reproducible 3.19

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Categorizing Decisions

Adults, both black and white, made decisions about the crisis in Little Rock. As you read about the various ways teachers, parents, and others in the community responded to events, use colored pencils to underline the choices they made and at least one consequence of that choice. Choose one color for the choice and a second color for the consequences or results of that choice. Then compare and contrast these choices with those you examined on Reproducible 3.17. What similarities do you notice? What differences do you consider most striking?

1. Daisy Bates, the president of the Arkansas NAACP, not only advised the Little Rock Nine but also served as their advocate. After Jefferson Thomas was physically beaten twice within a single week, she made a decision. She writes:

After talking with Mrs. Thomas, I checked my daily records. The boy who attacked Jeff had been repeatedly reported to school authorities for hazing the Negro students.

At nine o'clock that morning, when Superintendent Blossom arrived at his office, Clarence Laws and I were waiting to see him. We asked him what he intended to do about the continued brutal attacks on the children by the organized gang — attacks that had been reported many times. He said he was not aware of a large number of repeaters. We showed him the record of the pupils who had taken part in various attacks. As he looked at the long list of names and the repeated brutalities against the nine children, his expression lost some of its hardness and his face seemed to soften. Momentarily there was no sign of the defiant attitude I had observed in him whenever anyone dared criticize him or his desegregation plan. Then as he straightened his shoulders, I said, "If you are really interested in clearing up this trouble, you should expel some of these repeated troublemakers."

He looked at me and blurted, "You can't tell me how to run my school."

"No, I can't," I retorted, "but it's up to you — not the Army — to maintain discipline inside the school. By not doing so, you are subjecting the children to physical torture that you will have to live with the rest of your life." As we left his office, I realized that we would have to seek help from some other source.*

CONTINUED

* Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir*. David McKay Company, Inc., 1962, 126-127. Reprinted by permission of the University of Arkansas Press. Copyright 1987 by Daisy Bates.

"The Paper That's Published For Its Readers"



P. O. BOX 217

Little Rock, Arkansas

December 17, 1957

Mr. Roy Wilkins
20 West 40th Street
New York, N. Y.

30618 DEC 19 57

Dear Mr. Wilkins:

Conditions are yet pretty rough in the school for the children. Last week, Minnie Jean's mother, Mrs. W. B. Brown, asked me to go over to the school with her for a conference with the principal, and the two assistant principals. Subject of conference: "Firmer disciplinary measures, and the withdrawal of Minnie Jean from the glee club's Christmas program." The principal had informed Minnie Jean in withdrawing her from the program that "When it is definitely decided that Negroes will go to school here with the whites, and the troops are removed, then you will be able to participate in all activities." We strongly challenged this statement, which he denied making in that fashion.

We also pointed out that the treatment of the children had been getting steadily worse for the last two weeks in the form of kicking, spitting, and general abuse. As a result of our visit, stronger measures are being taken against the white students who are guilty of committing these offenses. For instance, a boy who had been suspended for two weeks, flunked both six-weeks tests, and on his return to school, the first day he knocked Gloria Bay into her locker. As a result of our visit, he was given an indefinite suspension.

The superintendent of schools also requested a conference the same afternoon. Clarence and I went down and spent about two hours. Here, again we pointed out that a three-day suspension given Hugh Williams for a sneak attack perpetrated on one of the Negro boys which knocked him out, and required a doctor's attention, was not sufficient punishment. We also informed him that our investigation revealed that there were many pupils willing to help if given the opportunity, and that President Eisenhower was very much concerned about the Little Rock crisis. He has stated his willingness to come down and address the student body if invited by student leaders of the school. This information was passed on to the principals of the school, but we have not been assured that leadership would be given to children in the school who are willing to organize for law and order. However, we have not abandoned the idea. Last Friday, the 13th, I was asked to call Washington and see if we could get FBI men placed in the school December 16-18.

2. WILKINS

Thanks for sending Clarence to help. I don't know how I would have made it without him. I am enclosing a financial statement, and as you can see, we are in pretty bad shape financially. On December 18, we will probably have to make bond for three of our officials from the North Little Rock Branch. December 18, midnight, is the deadline for filing names and addresses of members and contributors. I have talked with Mrs. Birdie Williams, and we are attempting to have them spend the night away from their homes, because we have been informed that they plan to arrest them after midnite.

I am suggesting that a revolving fund be set up here of \$1,000.00 to take care of emergencies, and an accounting could be given at the end of each month. We are having trouble getting cost bonds executed on the North Little Rock suit. We had to put up \$510.00 collateral plus three co-signers. We informed Bob Carter of our difficulty, and he asked Jack to see what could be done on that end. Please check with him.

I have not heard anything from the scholarship trust papers. We have deposited the money received for the scholarship. Mrs. A. L. Mothershead, 1313 Chester street, mother of one of the children, is serving as trustee.

I would appreciate hearing from you pertaining to the above mentioned matters at your earliest convenience.

I plan to attend the board meeting on January 6.

Sincerely,



LCB:j

cc: Mr. Current

672-200-9-134