

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

On School Integration

The 1954 Supreme Court decision that ordered integration of public schools met with resistance in many places across the nation. In the North, school segregation paralleled residential segregation. In the Deep South, officials blocked the entrances to public schools and universities.

Read the following viewpoints on school integration. Then answer the questions that follow.

FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION

Boston NAACP statement to the Boston School Committee, June 11, 1963

All immigrants to the American shores have suffered from discrimination, but in most cases, as soon as they lost their identifying accents, they were able to blend into the American culture and enjoy the fruits of our democratic system. The Negro, brought here in chains, bears visible identification of his race and we have spent our lives tearing down wall after wall of resistance raised in our path, because of our color. . . .

There is segregation in fact in our Boston Public School System. To be sure, the May 17, 1954 Supreme Court decision dealt with deliberate segregation, but there can be no misinterpretation of the language used in that decision which stated that the “separation of children solely on the basis of race generates a feeling of inferiority that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.” The steady migration of Negroes to Boston has intensified this problem. The 1960 census showed a total Negro population of 112,000. 63,000 of that total live in Boston and 57,000 live in the Roxbury-Dorchester section of Boston. Our school population as of last Spring was 93,000 and of that approximately 14,000 are Negroes.

The NAACP’s position on Northern School segregation is clear . . . we must work to reduce and eliminate school segregation wherever it exists. In the discussion of segregation in fact in our public schools, we do not accept residential segregation as an excuse for countenancing this situation. We feel that it is the responsibility of school officials to take an affirmative and positive

stand on the side of the best possible education for all children. This “best possible education” is not possible where segregation exists. Inadequate educational standards, unequal facilities, and discriminatory educational practices exist wherever there is school segregation.

FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION

President John F. Kennedy’s speech, September 30, 1962, on the integration of the University of Mississippi

Our nation is founded on the principle that observance of the law is the eternal safeguard of liberty. . . . Even among law-abiding men, few laws are universally loved, but they are uniformly respected and not resisted. Americans are free to disagree with the law, but not to disobey it. . . . My obligation . . . is to implement the orders of the court with whatever means are necessary, and with as little force and civil disorder as the circumstances permit.

FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION

President Kennedy’s message to Congress, February 28, 1963

Nearly nine years have elapsed since the Supreme Court ruled that state laws requiring or permitting segregated schools violate the Constitution. That decision represented both good law and good judgment—it was both legally and morally right. Since that time it has become increasingly clear that neither violence nor legalistic measures will be tolerated as a means of thwarting court-ordered desegregation.