Ravi K. Perry and D. LaRouth Perry

THE LITTLE ROCK CRISIS
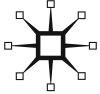
What Desegregation Politics Says About Us

The Little Rock Crisis

This page intentionally left blank

The Little Rock Crisis
What Desegregation Politics Says About Us

Ravi K. Perry and D. LaRouth Perry

To L. N., Marlene, Rudolph, and Kathryn for inspiring
our search for our selves

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

List of Figures

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

Much has been written about the Little Rock Nine.[1] Many of the Nine have written books and articles themselves that recount their experiences in the 1957 crisis as they sought to integrate Central High School in Arkansas's capital city.[2] Historians have emphasized various moments of the crisis as lenses through which they explored the impact of the Nine's courageous footsteps. Others have highlighted how the crisis had a major role to play in the development of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s throughout the United States. Still others have sought to use the crisis as a backdrop to their accounts of how American race relations—how we interact with people of different backgrounds and histories—progressed as a result of the series of incidents around the 1957–1958 crisis.

This book's angle on the crisis is different. While written in academic prose, the book is designed to speak in the voices of blacks in Little Rock whose lives were forever changed because of the courage of nine high-school teenagers who successfully integrated the state's largest high school. What happened in Little Rock—not just with the Nine, but also with the brave group who first sought to integrate the city's public school system in January of 1956—had a significant and lasting impact on the lives of many blacks who were witness to the crisis.

For us, the crisis is a political one—in both democratic and personal senses. While others have written about the political impact of the crisis, few have sought to explain how the politics of the moment in 1956–1958 has influenced individuals over time.[3] By examining the role the crisis has played in the lives of black Little Rockians post the 1950s, we seek to show how the crisis has positively impacted the sociopolitical awareness and engagement of residents throughout Little Rock even till today.

For us, the meeting of histories that was the 1957 crisis in Little Rock remains political. As the Fourteenth Amendment inscribed at the entrance to the newly constructed national museum across the street from Central High suggests, "[No State shall] deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," the story is really one of direct conflict between local, state, and national political cultures, values, and agendas. The meeting of those various strands led to bitter, violent, and unforgettable clashes that have been chronicled in dramatic images, films, and oral histories with varying approaches.

That the crisis was political is not a new idea, surely.[4] However, that its political origins and underpinnings have been understudied is of note. The result has been a myriad of rich approaches to the crisis that however do not allow us to imagine much of the crisis outside of the context of the times in which it occurred. We argue that such a perspective is a limitation and this book, in a way, is a lamentation of that fact. As the oral histories herein from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries attest, the crisis of 1956–1958 in Little Rock was far more than just a moment in time.[5]

Admittedly, our approach comes with its own limitations as we seek to describe what many consider to be a key historic event in American and global human relations and not only as a passing moment in history. We run the risk, also, of problematizing that which many may argue need not be problematized. For example, by discussing Little Rock in 1956–1958 and the impact the crisis has had on Little Rockians's future political behavior, engagement, and attitudes, we chose not to closely examine many aspects of the crisis that have long been heralded as monumental achievements for human relations, including the experiences of many of the Nine, personally, or of other directly involved figures.

However, this is deliberate. We assert that the influence and residuals of the Little Rock crisis extend far beyond the experiences of those intimately involved. And yet, we also pay close attention to the fact that, as many of our oral histories affirm (see Chapter 9), the crisis in the city of Little Rock, though national in stature, was local in impact—many African Americans and others in Little Rock recall the integration, and the drama it created throughout Little Rock's streets, as being limited to one section of town, close to Central High. Some Little Rockians who lived in other parts of the city at the time don't recall much of the disruption attested by the national media's violent images. How a momentous incident in one town can light a spark in a national movement for equal rights while also seeming to occur almost unbeknownst to some townspeople is a story not quite told. We hope to somewhat fill that gap. That many (though not all) of the images of the violent segregationists—who imperiled the walk of nine black children up the steps to the nation's largest high school at the time—were not even from Little Rock or nearby communities is a story that is also often underreported.

We think it is important to at least attempt to fill the gaps in these accounts and to tell some of the stories of other Little Rockians impacted by the crisis. We know some have done this in other forms, including films, archival documentaries, web projects, and memory projects in several fields—art, music, and so on. But, for us, none is complete (and neither is ours), as there are continuous perspectives of people who experienced the crisis intimately and through learned memory that they have yet to share. Many of these individuals went to high school and grade school with members of the Nine. For years, many shared with them Sunday morning choir lofts, pews, and fellowship hall seats in churches in Little Rock. They, too, are a critical part of the story of the crisis—this meeting of histories that was the first test of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1957 desegregation of Little Rock's Central High. Little Rock was their home in 1957.

And unlike most of the Nine, Little Rock is still their home today. Whereas most of the Nine left Little Rock after the crisis years, these Little Rockians stayed and, in doing so, watched the city adjust to life post the crisis. Their view of Little Rock is, thus, in many ways, even more valuable than that of many of the Nine, whose Little Rock recollections, while a strong and ever-powerful heartbeat in the pulse of American progress, are limited to their high school years and occasional trips home to visit family. We tell the stories of many who never left Little Rock (or left only for a short while) and for whom the impact of the crisis remains as powerful as ever. Through the examination of the lives of (mostly) black Little Rockians and the impact of the crisis on their political lives as residents in the community for years beyond the crisis, this book answers the question: What does living in the desegregation city of Little Rock post the climax of the meeting of histories say about us all?

Overview of the Chapters

The book is organized in two parts covering five themes—people, institutions, sociocultural mores, stories, and change. Part I, "Ideas, Institutions and Interests in the Little Rock Era of School Integration," surveys the firsthand accounts of the actors, political institutions and oppositional mores that defined the experience. We discuss key characters including Governor Faubus and Daisy Bates by recounting events from their youth that we argue motivated their actions and views throughout the crisis. Our analysis of the school board, its superintendent, and the Central High faculty/staff depicts subterfuge at work as retention of their folkways was their goal throughout their reluctant efforts to enforce *Brown* and the many confrontational episodes between school students, administrators and the courageous nine black teenagers. The segregationists' behavior that escalated at least twice to mob action is attributed to the dwindling of self-serving litigation and the absence of effective leadership that would nurture their ideology as they sought to enshrine their mores into the fabric of the city for decades to come. We also provide an overview of the media's coverage of the events. Part I begins, though, by framing the meeting of histories that produced the project, including the introduction of the community of Little Rock in the 1950s, and the nine teenagers whose actions, as Part II will show, sparked lifelong commitments to the fight for equality, civic engagement, and productive citizenry among many blacks.

Part II, "Contemporary Proceeds: Telling the Story," connects the crisis experience from three generations ago to the impact the events had and continue to have on black Little Rockians' political activism, engagement, and participation in the American polity. Through the examination of oral histories and a geographically appropriate sample, we can hear from stories and firsthand accounts that the crisis was the key event that led many to become engaged as citizens, lending support to the view that the crisis experience was the impetus for their subsequent engagement with the civil rights movement and the development of their ideological views over time. With rich survey data, we can finally confirm

that being a witness to the crisis, directly or indirectly, had the power to change the course of the lives of participants and onlookers from the Silent Generation, and to influence generations of people far removed—resulting in a general commitment to fairness, justice, and equality for all.

Ravi K. Perry, Starkville, Mississippi
D. LaRouth Perry, Tampa, Florida

Acknowledgments

Introduction: A Meeting of Histories

How do we know if the American civil rights movement of the twentieth century has had a measurable impact on our sociopolitical lives? This book seeks, in part, to answer that very question. We use a case study methodology approach to attempt to offer some insights. We chose the 1950s series of incidents, the first major test of *Brown v. Board of Education*, as our case study; many have recalled the "crisis" as one of the first major demonstrations that would help launch the aggressive minority protest politics of the 1960s—the American decade that changed the world.

We also discuss Little Rock and the desegregation of Central High School by nine courageous black students for personal reasons. This book is a meeting of histories—a collaboration between mother, D. LaRouth Perry (a Little Rock native who still calls the city home and is a civil rights and American culture scholar, lifelong educator, and member of the Silent Generation), and son, Ravi K. Perry (a native Northerner and political scientist and member of the Millennial Generation). The two of us have collaborated on this project to shed light on our hypothesis that when blacks are exposed to the lived events of the civil rights era, they are likely to be actively engaged in politics as a result.

To accomplish this task, we rely heavily on the oral history method of data collection. Some of the research for this exposé was conducted in the 1990s as part of a dissertation that was one of the first projects that sought to chronologically detail the various events of the Little Rock crisis. Having been cited heavily by several researchers who wrote about the crisis since, that dissertation—completed in 1998—is reframed here to help us better understand what the crisis says about us today.

We take this approach because we hope to show that the events in Little Rock, which largely took place in 1957 and 1958, are not just moments in history that inform us about the politics of the period. Rather, we believe that for those directly and indirectly exposed to the crisis—black residents and natives of Little Rock from that era or those who continue to live in Little Rock since that time—the events have positively impacted their lives as productive citizens. Our chapters in Part II will show how those who lived in the shadow of the crisis believe they have been significantly changed—questioning if it was indeed just a crisis. We think it is so much more.

Admittedly, this collaboration is unique. To reflect the challenges the collaboration presents and the opportunities for unique reflections on an oft-recounted historic event, we framed the book in such a way as to capture the richness of the personal experience of D. LaRouth Perry from Little Rock. Though not a member of the Nine, she hails from one of the middle-class black families in Little Rock who were very active among the city's black community. However, we also bring to life the impact of the crisis on the lives of black Little Rockians as recorded by members of the community, many who still call the Arkansas capital city home. Unlike many of the Nine, these African Americans did not leave the city after the crisis years. Many witnessed firsthand how the city struggled to adjust in the postsegregation world in the South during the 1960s and beyond. Others are Millennials like Ravi K. Perry, who assert the profound influence that living in the shadow of the crisis has had on their lives and on their interest in community, politics, and civic participation.

A central premise of our approach is that the crisis in Little Rock affected many more blacks than the Nine. We share the stories of some of those African Americans (and others). In doing so, we hope to offer another look into the crisis—a personal yet more comprehensive view on the crisis from many of the black families who had to choose whether or not to sign up to integrate Central High: some of whom were screened for the process though not selected, others who never cared to participate, and still others whose parents and guardians and other influential family and community members convinced them not to change the world—at least not in that way.

Hence, this project is itself a meeting of histories, in that we have merged decades of research. To make sense of this meeting, we leave much of the personal reminiscences of LaRouth in untouched form so as not to disturb their integrity. We also reflect or respond to her personal witness with stories from other Little Rockians. Many of the oral histories were gathered through direct contact with Little Rock residents—black and white—in 2013 and 2014, in semistructured interviews, and as survey respondents shortly before, during, and after the 2014 Juneteenth Festival sponsored by Little Rock's museum of African American history, Mosaic Templars Cultural Center.

The result informs what "desegregation politics" says about us: about us as civic engagers or not, about us as direct participants in politics or not, about us as children of the movement, about us as Americans. The crisis lives on in these voices. And the secret's out! Its impact is not a crisis at all, but a motivating energetic force that connects with the very spirit of democracy that birthed this nation.

Scholarship on Little Rock

The Little Rock school crisis has indelibly marked the conscience of the nation in a way that is still unfolding through the vehicle of historiography. Many authors have contributed valuable insights to the lived experience of the actors and organizations involved. To summarize those texts, we offer a thematic statement of some of the contributions made toward our thinking about the Little Rock crisis

and how we are still trying to understand the totality of those events within the American experience.

The first theme of writers is to evaluate the crisis by trying to trace the cultural norms that were working within the body politic in Little Rock as a piece of the larger puzzle to understand the American South.[1] Four texts describe key developments within the body politic of the South. Numan V. Bartley's *The Rise of Massive Resistance* illuminates dominant ideological trends and the comparable behavior patterns surrounding the haunting display of white hostility to social change. Tracing the developments of American popular anthropological conceptions, and how those conceptions clashed with the dominant Southern conceptions holds explanatory power that unlocks what really was at stake in the crisis. Parry and Miller's "African Americans in the Arkansas General Assembly: 1971–1999" looks at the African American elected officials during this time period, and their voting practices, for evidence supporting the thesis that greater descriptive representation inevitably leads to substantial representation. The authors discover in their findings that that thesis does not fare well in light of the politics of the new South. In Bartley's book *The New South: 1945–1980*, he writes in "Interposition, Moderation, and the Federal Government" about the crisis through three major themes, illuminating the key political positions and strategies used in addressing the crisis and discussing how they contributed to Southern identity and culture. Elizabeth Jacoway's *Turn Away Thy Son* offers another key descriptive insight of miscegenation into the Southern character evaluation, attempting to reveal what the dominant ideological frames were in an effort to protect and to further explain the irrational displays witnessed during the crisis.

The second theme of writers is to look at history as it has evolved since the crisis.[2] Tony A. Freyer's "Objectivity and Involvement" contributes to our assessment of history by illuminating an irony surrounding scholarly presentations of the crisis. In an attempt to understand it, scholars have been seduced into popular categorizations of political phenomena and have failed to hear those voices that bring critical information into our understanding of the crisis. Mainly, Freyer shows how the voice of the African American community has been displaced from its centrality to the crisis. *Race, Memory, and Politics*, by C. M. Lewis and J. R. Lewis, illuminates the process of history-making and the inevitable tension between lived experience and the stories we create about those experiences in reflection. By compiling primary sources to the crisis, the authors provide a critical resource for evaluating the narrative implications of the history of the crisis. *Understanding the Little Rock Crisis*, by E. Jacoway and F. Williams, aims to connect the historical scholarship about the crisis with the ongoing perceived intention to reconcile those affected by the crisis. The text frames the tension between the national consciousness and the local consciousness concerning the historical events of the crisis and the ongoing perception of those events as a serious barrier hindering the communities' healing. With an accurate understanding of the social context surrounding the crisis, the text utilizes the education of the community in order to concretize a meaningful assessment of the community's past, acknowledge their errors, and realistically engage their

collective future. John A. Kirk's *An Epitaph for Little Rock* summarizes the crisis, and connects the material within the text to other historical resources examining the crisis. Kirk's *Beyond Little Rock* illuminates the events of the 1957 crisis within the context of the ongoing struggle for African American freedom and equality. Situating the Little Rock crisis within the larger political development in America reveals the biases still alive within the history-making processes and how those biases continue to obscure the reality of the crisis. *The Little Rock Crisis* analyzes the crisis and uses new sources (e.g., the Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], legal files) to situate the nature of the conflict within the intersection of local politics and judicial processes.

The third theme of writers is to use key voices from the community to illuminate the crisis.[3] "The Little Rock Crisis, 1957–1958" in *Voices of Freedom*, the classic companion to the acclaimed television series *Eyes on the Prize*, illuminates the lived experiences of many of those who were actually part of the crisis, and how they orally reflected on those experiences. *Central in Our Lives* examines the voices of those students in Central High School, showing how many of their voices have been marginalized and silenced, which handicaps the historical accuracy of the cultural assessments of the crisis and the people involved. Sondra Gordy's *Finding the Lost Year* captures details of the year following the crisis as an extension of the political conflicts. Through this investigation, she gives a voice to the students and teachers whose lives were altered by events beyond their control and how those consequences must be taken seriously as a part of the crisis. "Crisis in the South" is a compilation of articles from the *Arkansas Gazette,* whose voice critically shaped how the crisis was framed for the rest of the world through the medium of news. The thematic premise of the articles rests on the conviction that the law must prevail while working out the details of desegregation and the consequences that inevitably arise when disorder subverts order by subjecting law to human passion.

The fourth theme of writers is to observe individuals closely to show how their personal lives were impacted by the struggle and vice versa.[4] *The Power of One*, by J. B. Fradin and D. B. Fradin, paints a portrait of the courageous Daisy Bates and how she made the movement and how the movement made her. *Lessons from Little Rock* offers some reflective insights into the psychology of the author, Terrence Roberts, who lived in the midst of the crisis as a member of the Nine, by offering general lessons that were tried and tested through one of the most tumultuous moments in history. Kasey S. Pipes's *Ike's Final Battle* penetrates the slippery categories used by scholars to assess political realities within the depths of the human being whose personal convictions shaped his response to the crisis as well as his political orientation. *A Mighty Long Way* explores the journey of author Carlotta Walls as a member of the Nine by probing the dark recesses of her memory in search for healing and greater understanding of herself in relation to the crisis. David Margolick's *Elizabeth and Hazel* is a biography of two iconic women who in many ways became the face of the crisis through an infamous photo. The book also explores how the portrait still haunts the private lives of both of these women, who serve as a personalized view of a larger cultural impasse

and how mending the past is not as simple as we would sometimes hope. Philip Norton's *Eisenhower and Little Rock* serves as a case study examining the decision-making process of President Eisenhower during the Little Rock crisis, how that process can be used to help the body politic think about the nature of the presidency, and how that office is served by very real human beings. There are other sources that we have not cited here. This we include to frame the thematic directions of the scholarship on Little Rock in the years since the crisis. We think most of these other sources would largely fit in these categories.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

A Native American saying states, "It takes a thousand voices to tell a single story." Accounts of the 1957 desegregation crisis in Little Rock have taken many voices—all telling a unique story about experience with the crisis. From direct accounts of members of the Nine; of their leader Arkansas State Conference NAACP president Daisy Bates; of former segregationists who ridiculed members of the Nine; of Central High white students and teachers who were there; of parents, neighbors, photographers, journalists, and bystanders—all witnesses to the crisis—many stories have been told in the period of over 50 years since the infamous school year of integration and the subsequent school year that never happened for many of Little Rock's high school–age students. In addition to a host of firsthand accounts, many historians and legal scholars have since written at length, and in rich detail, of Little Rock's most famous incident. These accounts have discussed a myriad of perspectives—some have chronicled the social and historical mores and values and cultural norms that led to the crisis; others have discussed the rise in activism in the black community that resulted in the crisis; still others have emphasized the role of the state government under the control of Governor Orval Faubus or that of President Eisenhower; many have emphasized the relationship between the Little Rock crisis and the *Brown* decision. Others have shared personal stories of a rebirth of relationships—once dominated by fear and ignorance and now, decades later, blossoming with new understanding and shared appreciation. Each of these accounts—historical, personal, professional—has, from different angles, told and in some cases retold the perspective of some involved in the crisis.

Yet very few of the numerous accounts of the crisis sought to examine it as a living incident. Like how many view the Constitution, historians, legal scholars, and others have characterized the historic event as a monumental static episode in the life of the American South. Few social scientists have contributed to the varying accounts on the crisis, as few of any discipline have sought to explore its impact not just beyond Little Rock but also beyond the era of the 1950s and 1960s.[5] While a select few political scientists contributed to a symposium volume on the fortieth anniversary of the Little Rock crisis in *PS: Political Science and Politics*[6] none examined the impact of the crisis in Little Rock for residents. In one article, where a noted political scientist asked others to name their favorite books on the movement and/or the crisis, not one listed a book

by a social scientist. Other political scientists who have studied minority protests as a function of politics exclude a detailed accounting of Little Rock in their analyses.[7] Most social science research on the crisis in Little Rock is only reported in the aggregate of accounts regarding the civil rights movement, which for most social scientists largely references the 1960s.[8] Others discuss the civil rights movement in such amazing detail, offering numerous significant contributions and insights, and yet ignore Little Rock altogether.[9] While the vast majority of the politics involved in key events throughout the civil rights movement has been explored by sociologists and historians, those few political scientists who have ventured into the topic discuss the movement and events by way of the footsteps of black political participation, socialization, and mobilization.[10]

Interestingly, McClerking and Philpot (2008), both political scientists, have argued that the discipline's recognition of black scholarship largely coincided with society's increasing recognition of African Americans as a result of the civil rights movement: "The civil rights movement made Black political matters more important to the discipline."[11] The findings of political scientists vary regarding what factors motivate black action and protest activities (e.g., racial solidarity, group consciousness, religion, etc.); most focus on the goal of black incorporation and electoral politics, and each indicates that more political research regarding black civic participation is needed to ascertain the motivation of blacks to engage in the American polity. Meanwhile, active participants, historians, and legal scholars have gladly accepted the call to study this political history in detail. Most social scientists have lagged behind in studying singular events of the civil rights movement and their impact on black political participation, mobilization, and socialization.[12]

* * *

This book takes on the mammoth task of (1) sharing many voices that contributed to the prolongation of Little Rock's desegregation story and (2) connecting those voices to the present by seeking to explore how those voices of the crisis impacted the lives of Little Rockians in the contemporary era. Hence, in this book, we approach the crisis not just as a historic moment to be chronicled in amazing, significant detail; we argue that the concept of the moment of the crisis limits the impact of the crisis to a generation of people, and a time that is long gone. Instead, we find that conceptualizations of the crisis as a moment in history are insufficient, as they do little to help us understand how living through the crisis or in the shadow of it has generally impacted one's future social, civic, and political engagement, participation, and behavior. What becomes clear through analysis of many voices, personal witness, and a study of the impact of the crisis on residents today is that the warring was more so against symbols and traditionally held belief systems than against individuals. Such symbols are as old as the battle in the development of the country's values as expressed in the context of the views of the anti-Federalists and the Federalists in the formation of these United States. As our analysis demonstrates, many vestiges of those symbols are still very present in today's environment.

Since Little Rock in the 1950s severely lacked any conscientious leadership; since emotionalism, mob activity, and irrationality replaced rational conduct; since a comparatively small number of loud, aggressive anti-desegregationists were allowed to muzzle pro-desegregationist sentiments; and since segregationists were caught up in what James Baldwin described in *Nobody Knows My Name*, as "the national rhythm, the rhythm between complacency and panic,"[13] we are compelled to see Little Rock's desegregation crisis as more about white people than about African Americans. The responsibility, then, for the events surrounding the crisis at Central High School is perhaps properly placed in the lap of the white population who controlled the political institutions and whose decisions impacted and prolonged the crisis. One of the first conclusions we can make regarding what desegregation politics says about us as an American population is that for many whites, their (false) sense of self was at stake. If we are seeking whom to blame, we can only point to our leadership's failure to prevent the crisis in the first place. It's not pretty, but it's true that the crisis was made by white leaders of political institutions and their segregationist followers—not all whites—but many who claimed to speak for the entire white race in Little Rock. Many were too complacent to prevent it and others were too panicked to stop it.

Amazingly, few anticipated that Little Rock would gain notoriety through defiance of *Brown*. Depending on one's historical perspective, the murder of the African American teenager Emmett Till in Mississippi in August 1955, or the violence experienced in October 1955 by African Americans who risked their lives vying for school improvements in Mayflower, Texas, established precedents of the American South's unreadiness for racial parity.[14] Then again, the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955–1956 might have caught the attention of Southerners regarding the South's pace toward integration. Meanwhile, in 1956, Alabama admitted its first African American student to the University of Alabama, and in the same year, a federal court ruled that racial segregation on city buses violated the Constitution. Additionally, in August 1957, Congress passed the first civil rights legislation since 1875. President Eisenhower signed the act while desegregation resistors in Little Rock were revving up for interposition of a federal mandate. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 established a six-member Commission on Civil Rights and the Civil Rights Division in the US Department of Justice. That Act also gave additional powers to the office of the US Attorney General, who could now seek court injunctions against deprivation and obstruction of voting rights by state officials.[15]

Cultural histories collided in Little Rock in 1957 without regard to national or neighboring histories. It must be that Little Rock was destined to make its unique, permanent, and, eventually, regrettable mark on history by denying nine African American students entrance into the all-white Central High School.

*   *   *

A theme of this book is to examine how acquired cultural habits determine present behavior and how exposure to the crisis has impacted people's political

behavior. The desegregation crisis dramatized for the world how problematic it is for conflicting belief systems to coexist. The probe into what happens when cultural histories meet will perhaps explain why the memory of the crisis won't fade for many, and why the learning of the crisis has changed the lives of many who weren't even alive when it occurred.

This book offers several contributions. We have taken on the task of telling, while analyzing some of the first key texts on the crisis, the story of Little Rock's desegregation crisis and how that story has lived itself over time, in the lives of many. The invaluable sources we've used focus on the crisis through the lens of the moment—a single component of the crisis; for example, *Crisis at Central High* concentrates on the 1957–1958 school year events within the school.[16] *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* reveals Daisy Bates's involvement with the community, the school board, and the Little Rock Nine during the same year.[17] Books by Superintendent Blossom, Dale Alford, Sara Murphy, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls LaNier, and Melba Pattillo Beals present details of their participation. Reed's *Faubus* is a detailed biography.

Variously recalled as the crisis that didn't have to happen, the crisis that Faubus made, a twentieth-century version of a battle for states' rights, and the Second Reconstruction, the desegregation crisis of Little Rock, Arkansas, spawned by the 1954 Supreme Court decision on *Brown v. Board of Education* began in September of 1957 and lasted for three years. The crisis began in 1957; the efforts to desegregate, however, began much earlier.

Some explanation for the crisis has been provided by a former history professor, Elizabeth Jacoway. Having written many accounts on the crisis while at the Little Rock branch of the University of Arkansas, she attempted to explain the mores of the past at a history symposium, "Remembrance and Reconciliation: Understanding the Little Rock Crisis of 1957," on September 26, 1997:

> It is the most natural thing in the world to be intolerant of the past. Without careful study and thought, it is very difficult to comprehend the behaviors and thought patterns of another time . . . How can we in fairness expect people who lived with a set of laws, customs and expectations that are different from ours to behave in ways that are pleasing to our modem-day sensibilities?[18]

Defining a Desegregation City

Methodology

Little Rock is a desegregation city. Such a city is a community of memory in that it was home to at least one significant historic battle for integration throughout America's segregation years. While most Southern cities might share that distinction, we also consider Little Rock a desegregation city because it has, since the crisis, erected numerous permanent fixtures in the community to honor those years of turmoil. Desegregation cities also have significant and enduring evidence of the city's memorable involvement in attempts at integration.

Finally, given that Little Rock is also, naturally, an urban city, we assume that the term "city" references cities with populations of at least 100,000 residents. Given these characteristics, other desegregation cities include Nashville, Atlanta, Jackson, Greensboro, for example. Smaller towns with noted events, such as Albany, Georgia, we would not classify as desegregation cities. We make this distinction as cities of 100,000 people or more tend to have established community networks, associations, and other features of civic life for residents that contribute heavily to the city's majority and minority groups' social capital development.[19]

We use several methodological approaches—a mixed methods approach—in an effort to examine the impact of the Little Rock crisis on blacks' sociopolitical lives after the crisis. While our sampling frame invited nonblacks, we were unsuccessful in obtaining a significant nonblack population. However, those nonblack voices are shared in oral histories and are critical to understanding the differing views on the crisis in the twenty-first century, and how at least a few nonblacks connect the crisis to their political behavior. More details on the sample and research design are in the chapters in Part II.

We have conducted interviews of elite, active participants in the crisis. We administered, coded, and analyzed survey responses from mostly black Little Rockians. We have conducted, recorded, transcribed, and coded oral histories of active participants in the crisis, other blacks who lived in the Little Rock at the time, and others—black and white—who have lived in Little Rock in the immediate and not-so-immediate aftermath of the crisis. These oral histories are deposited in the Oral History Collection at the Mitchell Memorial Library on the campus of Mississippi State University. We also have taken copious notes on our personal experiences throughout the field research of our (in LaRouth's case) direct experience in the crisis as a close member of the impacted community of African Americans in Little Rock in the 1950s.

The varying approaches and the results are shared throughout the chapters, and the raw data is available in the book's appendix. We find that the rich amount of variety in the data and approach allows for a unique lens into the crisis. Despite dozens of analyses on the crisis—including theses, books, articles, book chapters, films, plays, and many other projects—this collaboration has a unique approach based on lived experience and, significantly, includes detailed attention to the crisis's impact on individual political behavior and social engagement.

The methodology for our analysis of the Little Rock desegregation crisis and its impact on our lives today demanded several semiotic approaches. Despite the mélange of such approaches, the overriding methodology extends out of the seminal *The Interpretation of Cultures* by Clifford Geertz, wherein several instructions and examples are recorded regarding "construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical."[20] Geertz advises a "semiotic approach"[21] of showing rather than a telling process of social action through "thick description"[22] of human conduct because from "small, but very densely textured facts," large conclusions can be drawn.[23]

Such an approach places limits on theorizing. This is also by design. There are numerous studies that examine the civil rights movement and that have sought to link the macrodynamics of black political participation in the post–civil rights era to the energizing and difficult experiences of the civil rights movement. The various findings all use large-scale survey data sets to test the link. Some authors employed the use of oral histories. Neither approach—at least from social scientists—has utilized a thick description of the Little Rock crisis. In either case, authors have sought to analyze more than to describe. While Part II accomplishes significant analysis, the goal of Part I is to describe the context of the crisis as told through personal witness and many of the key texts written about the crisis before the advent of the twenty-first century.

Geertz avers that in "sorting out the structures of signification . . . , [t]he thing to ask is what their import is, what it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said."[24] This semiotic approach is an interpretative one. If fallacies are found in the interpretation of signifying behavior, the description of the behavior remains for a reader's personal interpretation.

*   *   *

Gathering information on Little Rock's "culturescape"[25] during and since the crisis was made possible as a result of the daily accounts in the nation's newspapers of the desegregation ordeal as it developed, and subsequent coverage in many forms. Throughout our field research, many problems that have since relaxed with time were experienced. In the 1990s, for example, employees of the Arkansas Historical Commission, located on the capitol grounds of Little Rock were reluctant to permit perusal of files on one of the segregationists, Jim Johnson. Kettering College, a private undergraduate college in southern Ohio refused to allow viewing of *The Nine from Little Rock*, produced by Guggenheim for the United States Information Agency and featuring Jefferson Thomas, one of the Nine, after he had been drafted for military service in the Vietnam War. The film is now readily available on public streaming devices such as Hulu.com. A weekend of research at the Friends' headquarters in Philadelphia was informative about Quaker quietness and secrecy, but not about the pertinent and specific data sought.

Despite occasional difficulties in field research, we sought to show how the crisis in Little Rock involved more than the Little Rock Nine and other active participants. African Americans of Little Rock are anxious to explain their community and personal participation, and we share many such stories in this book. While some of the African Americans whose stories we share were active, others were not. The active voices are especially enlightening; however, the voices of the not-so-active are equally significant. These voices share how a crisis changed their lives. We find through oral histories and survey data that African Americans in Little Rock do not at all feel detached from the reccurring hullabaloo over the desegregation crisis of 1957.