

# A Tale of Two High Schools

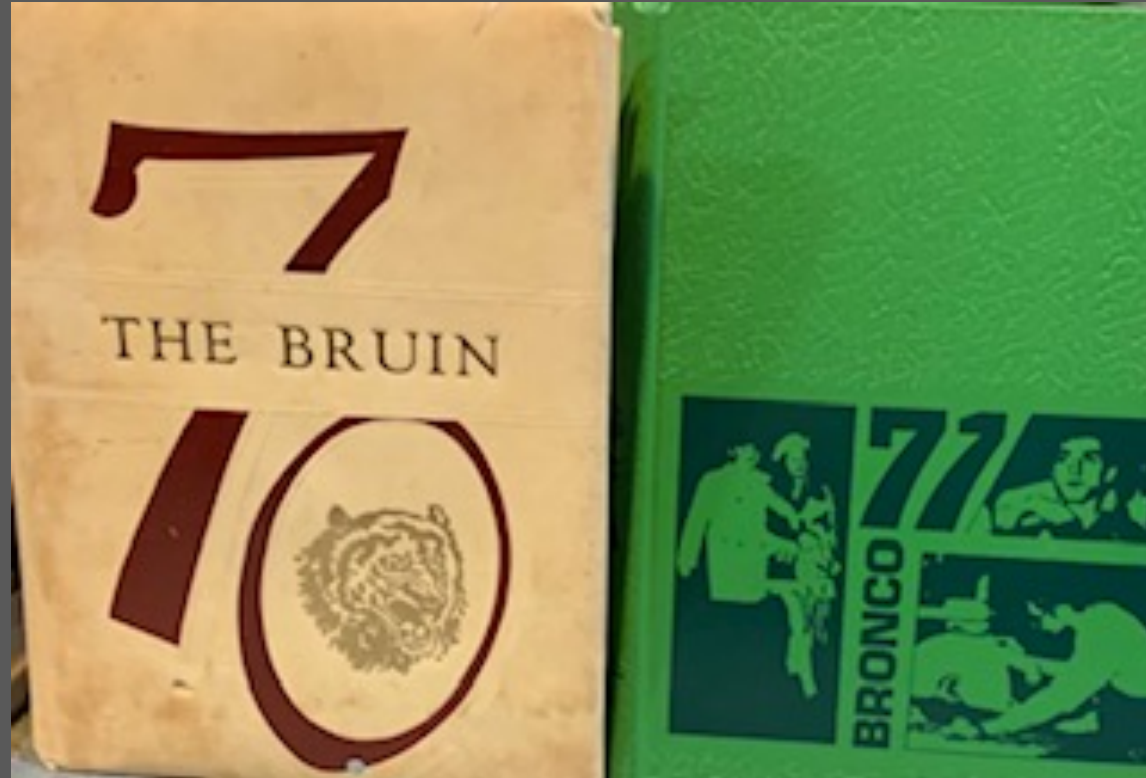
The Long Road to Desegregation

Bryan, Texas

By Pam Little  
July 2, 2021

E. A. Kemp High School

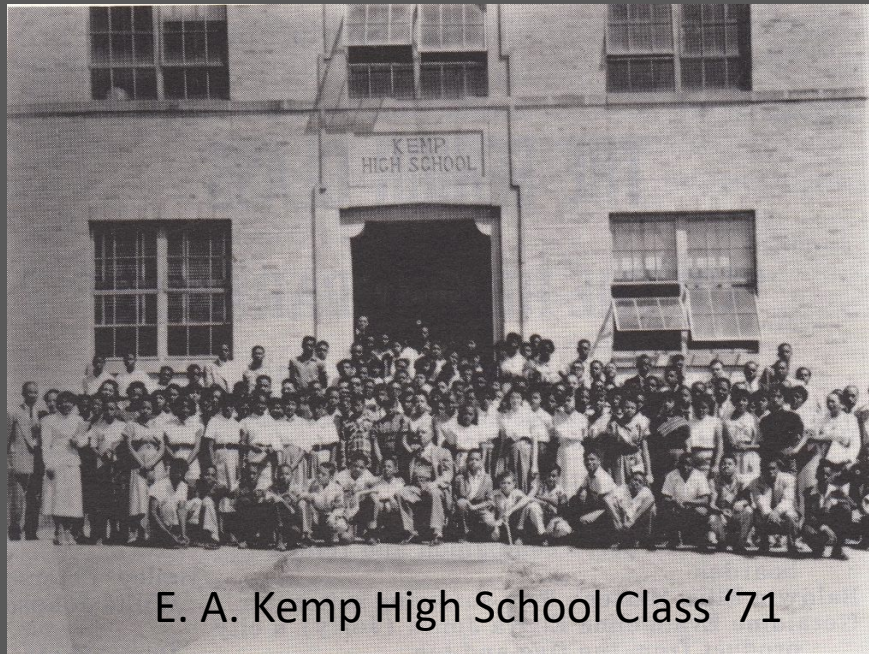
Stephen F. Austin High School



Bryan, Texas

The Black schools in Bryan were named after national and local Black educators  
The White schools were named after Texas founding fathers





E. A. Kemp High School Class '71



Kemp Bears  
Maroon & White  
A&M donated used football uniforms which determined school colors

*Pam Mitchell Little*



Stephen F. Austin High School Class '71

Bryan Broncos  
Green & White







Dr. Alton Bowen,  
Superintendent of Bryan ISD  
from 1960 until 1970 led the  
BISD School Board in deciding  
to build a new high school  
and reorganizing the district  
to meet the desegregation  
requirements.



STUDENT COUNCIL: Donald Allen, President; Donald Thompson, 1st Vice; Alma Wilson, 2nd Vice  
 en, Secretary, Opal Jackson, Assistant Secretary; Mr. James Rose and Mrs. Edna Tarrow, Sponsors



Top Row: Mr. Anding, Sponsor; David Lopez, Barry Nelson, Ricky Archer, William Gibson, Curtis Archer, Sandra Bailey, Steve Anderson, Anthony  
 Patterson, W. C. Pritchett; Second Row: Mr. Laskerick, Sponsor; Charles Moutch, Craig Goslin, Tommy Davis, Dick Clark; Third Row: Greta Faye,  
 Cindy LaMar, Herb Thom, Raymond Bradley, Mark Goslin, Stefan Tidlow, Larry Felt, Billy Lenn; Fourth Row: Melinda Almaraz, Darrell Varas,  
 Ronald Mitchell, Sharon Cagill, Jeff Clay, Niki Peltzer, Janet McKee, Christine Van Bavel, Jerry Chambers; Bottom Row: Lorena Pazinas, Kathy Wil  
 son, Jeanne Baker, Zana Zikes, Janet Goodwin, Wanda Pichall, Michelle Mitchell.

Student Councils from both schools met and selected 3 sets of color and mascot options to be voted on by student bodies from each school. No old themes were allowed so that all students both black and white would feel they had ownership of the colors and mascot. SFA had one Black student council member and he was elected as the Homecoming King.

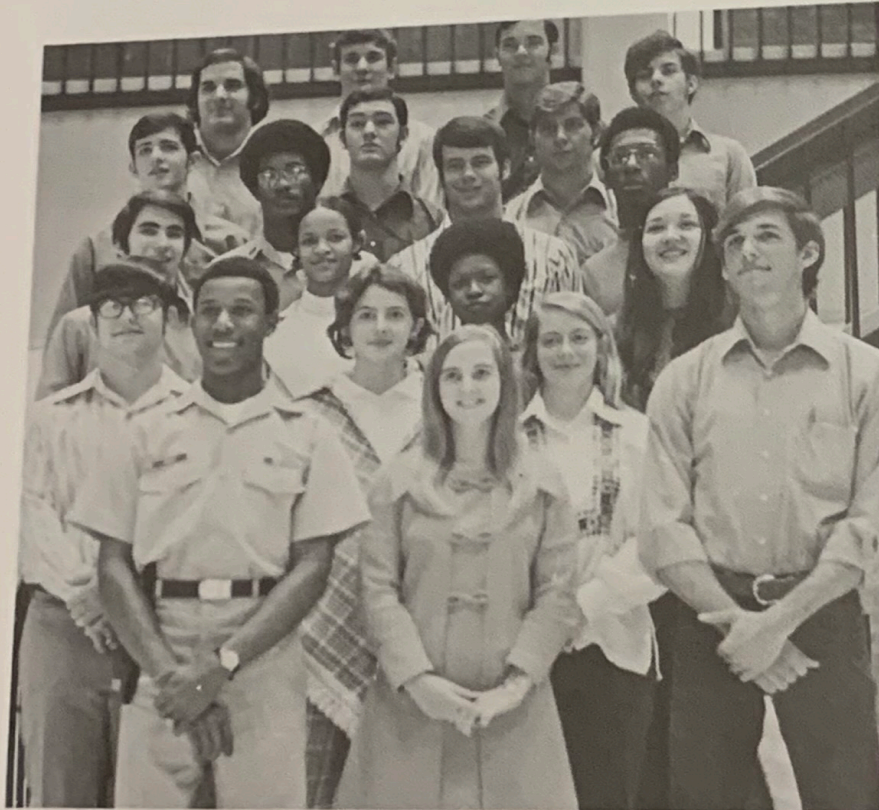


Bryan High School campus  
with students from E. A.  
Kemp and Stephen F. Austin  
High Schools opened in  
1971

The colors chosen were blue  
and silver

The Vikings were chosen as  
the mascot





*Top (left to right): Sam Morello, Jimmy Ramsey, Perry Arthur, John Kitchens. Second row: Dick Clark, George Jackson, Donald Lampe, Barry Nelson, Billy Lero, Joe Idlebird. Third row: Bobby Donaho, Rita Fields, Alma Wilson, Elaine Allen. Fourth row: Charles Ballew, Laurie Debidour, Barbara Aldred. Bottom: President/Willie Pruitt, Secretary/Jeanne Baker, Vice-President/Bill Thorton.*

## First Student Council of Bryan High School 1972

Black student Willie Pruitt  
was elected President of  
the Student Council

# *Long Road to Desegregation of High Schools*

1954 Brown vs Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas

Separate is not equal finding

1955 Bryan Superintendent Dr. Carmichael “explored” desegregation in Baltimore and Washington D. C. and found:



**White people do not like for their little children to be taught by Negroes, especially by Negro men. Many doubt that the Negro teachers are as competent as they should be. . . No tests were given to test whether the Negro pupils could compete with white pupils. School people seem to be reluctant to give these tests to find out. Desegregation is more than a law; it is an emotion and it is very prevalent even in Washington.<sup>7</sup>**



## April 1957 Reaction of Black Citizens

As described in  
Annette  
Gordon-Reed  
“On  
Juneteenth”  
not all Black  
families were  
in favor of  
desegregation

**In Bryan, not all black citizens saw the immediate educational future of their children in integration. A group of parents representing the black PTA presented a letter to the Bryan city commissioners in April 1957 requesting the construction of a black junior high school. The request was forwarded to the school board where it was filed for future reference.<sup>21</sup>**

# June & July 1957 Board Meetings – Texas House Bill 65

Texas  
Legislature  
tried to  
prohibit  
integration in  
Texas schools

The board discussed pending civil rights legislation at the June 1957 board meeting, though no conclusions were reached. One month later, the board gave considerable discussion to new laws passed by the state of Texas. House Bill 65 passed in May 1957 required the continuance of a dual system in each public school district in Texas until a local election of qualified voters in each district voted to abolish the segregated school system.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, an election could only be called if a majority of the district presented a petition to the board. As a result of the newly enacted legislation, the board concluded that integration of schools in Texas was both unwise and illegal.<sup>23</sup> Their assumption effectively stopped official school board discussions on integration in Bryan.

' The law was designed to force the question of integration back into the courts, hopefully on a district by district basis. In August 1957, the board reported that "no further information in regard to the matter of the study of integration" was needed "since, at the present time, laws passed by the legislature prohibit integration unless it is voted upon by the school district concerned."<sup>25</sup>

## October 11, 1960 ~ Response from Black Educators

# THE BRYAN DAILY EAGLE

Serving Bryan, College Station and the Brazos Valley Since 1876

and their patriotism.”<sup>33</sup> Not all comments were supportive. Mrs. Mills P. Walker responded by reminding readers that there was no federal law for or against integration, but simply a provision for equal rights for all. Claiming to know many of the ‘colored people’ including educators, Walker spoke on behalf of the black teachers saying they were more ably suited to function as educational “custodians of their own race.”<sup>34</sup> She concluded by asking the rhetorical question “Has the Supreme Court somehow made it wrong to build better buildings and install better equipment for Negro children, just as we do for white students?”<sup>35</sup>

In a letter to the Bryan Dailey Eagle Black Educators argued against integration



September 15, 1961 – Lawsuit Filed



## Integration Suit Filed Against Bryan Schools

'Lev' Thomas, having grown frustrated waiting for Bryan Independent School District to act, filed *Clarence Thomas, a minor, by J. L. Thomas, as next friend, v Alton O. Bowen, Superintendent of the Bryan Independent School District, et al.* in the U.S. District Court

No further integration discussions at board meetings. Board waited on court's decision.

# Summer of 1963

Judgement in favor of Mr. Thomas created Freedom of Choice Plan

The judgment restrained the city commissioners, the school board, and the superintendent from requiring segregation of the races. Moreover, the ruling ordered the implementation of a desegregation plan beginning with the first graders entering school in September 1963. The plan allowed that students entering the first grade “may at his option attend the formerly all-white or the formerly all-Negro school within the geographical boundaries of which such student may reside.”<sup>46</sup> As each year passed, another grade level was to be opened for integration so that by 1974, all twelve grades were to be integrated.

This plan was referred to as the “Freedom of Choice Plan.”

**Bowen recalled, “Our guilt was self-evident.”**

## July 2, 1964 – Passage of Civil Rights Act

The passage on July 2, 1964 of the Civil Rights Act reshaped the integration argument. The act provided for the termination of federal funding for segregated schools and enabled the Department of Justice to bring suit in the federal courts against schools who failed to integrate. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare's (HEW) education office was charged with formulating and enforcing desegregation guidelines.

Suspension of Federal funding for segregated schools got the attention of the school board



## Early 1965 – Freedom of Choice

1967 for all the nation's school systems that had not already done so.<sup>10</sup> Sometime in early 1965, United States Assistant Attorney General John Doar informed the board that the one-grade-per-year desegregation plan no longer met revised federal standards.

## September 1965 – Freedom of Choice Extended to All Grades

September 1965 marked the beginning of the first school year in which the “freedom of choice plan” was extended to all grade levels. No problems were reported in the process.<sup>17</sup> Seventy-eight black students enrolled in the traditionally all white schools. No white students chose to attend school at one of the still all black schools.



## 1967~1968

The district began planning a new high school to alleviate crowding in the existing facilities. Some of the board members looked at this as an opportunity. Trustee Johnny Lampo commented that upon completion of this facility, “the last four grades in our system will be completely integrated” explaining that this “is one of the biggest steps toward total integration.”<sup>28</sup> Though never detailed in the minutes, the board had been considering what effect the new high school would have on the integration of Bryan schools. Beginning in the 1967-1968 school year the board had been looking at the 6-2-2-2 plan of organization.

The 6~2~2~2 plan meant white children would go to Black schools and Black children would go to white schools.



# Fall of 1970 – Fires in Black Schools



3 Black schools burned – faulty wiring was the cause of Washington Elementary fire and the other two causes were never determined.

## More Arson Attempts Expected

By ED HORN  
Eagle Managing Editor

Police Chief Joe Ellisor told The Daily Eagle this morning he looks for attempts at burning Bryan schools to continue until an arrest is made.

The latest of four school fires in three months did minor damage Sunday to a third grade classroom at Carver Elementary. Officials said the blaze was deliberately set.

A special meeting of the Bryan School Board was called for 2:30 p.m. today to discuss the situation.

Ellisor surmised the public was looking to the police to do something, but "we can't stop them from setting fires."

He likened trying to stop the arson attempts to putting a policeman on every corner downtown, saying that wouldn't stop shoplifting in the stores.

"Big and slow as I am," the

chief said, "you could put me in a school and a policeman would never see me." He pointed out as an example of the difficulties involved the enormity of Stephen F. Austin High School.

Ellisor and Capt. Charles Phelps said they also are hampered by lack of a motive, and noted proving anything would be difficult even if they knew who was responsible.

The Carver fire was

discovered by Principal Otha Byrd. He told The Eagle he checked the building on the way home from church and discovered the fire, about 1 p.m. Sunday.

Byrd said the checks were ordered by school Supt. Alton O. Bowen.

The principal said the room, on the southeast end of the building, was filled with smoke. He reported he did not attack

the fire for fear it might explode.

Firemen responding to Byrd's call quickly extinguished the blaze. They chopped a hole in the ceiling above the fire area in the corner of the room to make sure the blaze had not spread into the attic.

They dragged outside the teacher's desk, which was burned from the underside, indicating the fire might have been started there.

A soft drink bottle with paper jammed in its neck was discovered in a chalk tray about a foot from the charred corner where the wall and the chalk board meet.

The bottle was broken in two. Ellisor and Phelps theorized the arsonist carried the bottle into the room, poured out a flammable liquid, and put the paper back in the bottle. They guessed that the bottle was

See CHIEF, Page 6

Everyone had an opinion as to the cause of the fires. Some members of the white community felt the fires were set by blacks eager to speed the process of integration. The black community held whites responsible. Black citizens reasoned that whites, expecting the Justice Department to step in and order integration by racial balancing, had set black schools ablaze to keep their children from attending schools in the predominately black parts of town. Moreover, the black school facilities had always been inferior to their white counterparts. By destroying them, whites could rest assured that their children would not have to attend substandard schools.<sup>42</sup>

# Fall of 1971 Bryan High School Opened





# Spring of 1982 Follow Up in the Eagle Display at BVAA

## Comparison of 1971 All White SFA Class to 1982 Bryan High School Integrated Class

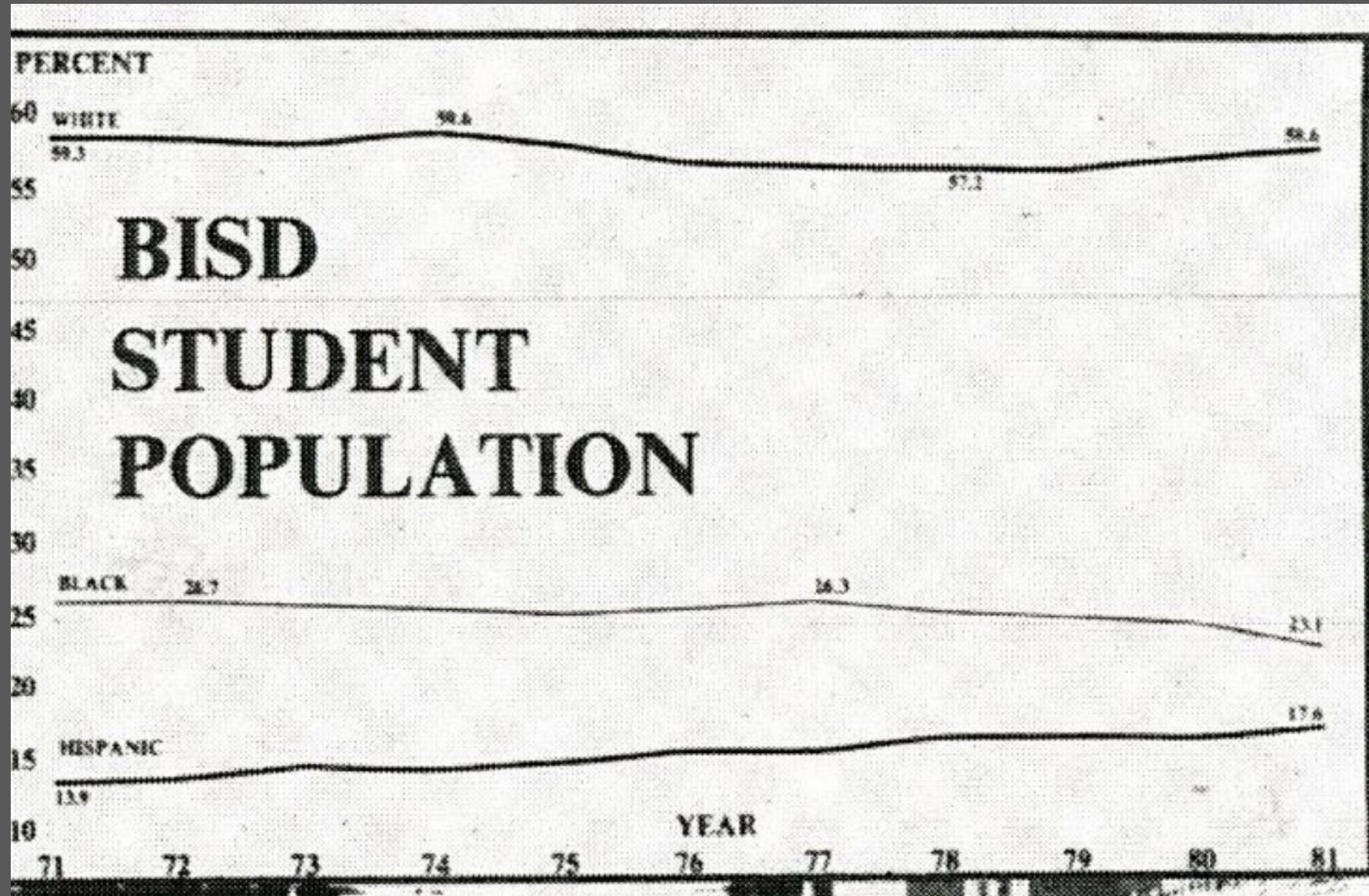
The Eagle provided incorrect information. Due to the Freedom of Choice Plan Black students attended Stephen F. Austin High School. This picture from the 1971 Bronco Annual shows Pam Mitchell at the bottom of the page. The reporter had to go all the way to the M's to find a page that did not have a picture of a Black student.



# Spring of 1971 to Spring of 1982 Student Population

In 2020 Student Population looked very different

African Am. 18%  
White 26%  
Hispanic 52%  
Other 4%





Educators, students and parents, both Black and White, agree desegregation worked smoothly in Bryan ISD

Concerns for Black Students after ten years  
Academic — no Black honor students  
Role Models — not enough Black school personnel for students to emulate  
Fewer college bound students than before 1971  
Less involvement in clubs, FFA, FHA, and choir, and other extracurricular activities

## THE DAILY EAGLE

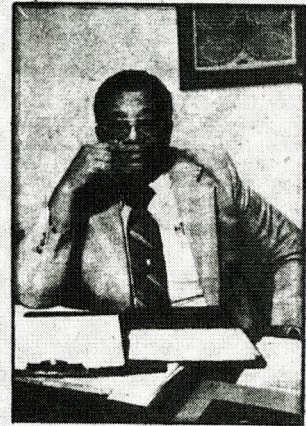
March 27, 1982

### Blacks still worry about their children

**I**ntegration: the word seems to promise so much. It's been an entire decade since schools were desegregated in Bryan. Has it worked? Has integration lived up to the promises it seemed to hold?

The reviews are mixed. Many of the people who were involved in integration in Bryan, past and present, black and white, agree that desegregation worked smoothly here and that educational opportunities are certainly better now for all students.

Yet, among blacks, there is widespread belief that



**"Blacks don't have cars of their own like most white students. It's very difficult for them to get over there."**

Otho Byrd

black students have lost ground in several critical areas since integration.

Blacks wonder if students have lost pride in their schools. Whites don't express similar concerns.

"It's been the black kids who've had to integrate," says Carey Caulley, president of the local NAACP branch and a former Bryan teacher. "He's had to accept another culture and that causes a strain," he says.

Blacks say they certainly aren't ready to go back to segregated schools, but they worry about their children.

They wonder if black students are as motivated now as they were when they attended all-black schools.

They wonder if as large a percentage of blacks are excelling academically now as did when there were segregated schools.

They wonder if as many black students are going to college.

They wonder if their children are as involved now in as many extracurricular activities as there were students then involved in band, choir, drill team, French club, FFA and FHA.

They wonder if their children are an integral part of their schools' life or whether they simply exist on the its periphery.

They wonder if there are enough black role models — teachers, counselors, assistant principals, principals and district administrators — for black students to emulate in Bryan schools.

"I think it's been all right for our B and above student who excels in spite of (circumstances)," Lamar School Counselor Mell Pruitt, a former teacher and counselor at Kemp High, says.

"For our C and below students, many of them don't receive the kind of challenge they would have received at Kemp or at the black schools where they were made to do their best," she says.

One Bryan High senior sees the same trend from a peer's perspective.

"I can count the number (of black students) I know on one hand who try," she says. "They don't put out a good effort."

"There are plenty of whites that don't," she says, "but the percentage isn't as high."

Black teachers and even black students agree. And their opinion is supported by the lack of black students among the top academic graduates of Bryan High.

"Before integration, we had straight A students who were honored at commencement," says Pruitt, who had one son graduate from Kemp

and one from Bryan High.

"They are not making straight A's now or they'd be honored," she says.

Honor graduates at Bryan High are named each year at commencement. These students have maintained straight A's or have been in the top 2 percent of the graduating class.

Eleven members of the last graduating class of Kemp High — the 81-member Class of '71 — were honor students.

According to yearbooks and other records, there has never been a black honor graduate at Bryan High School.



**"Over half the students who finished Kemp High School went to college."**

Irene Lane

# References:

- Interview with Mr. Wayne Sadberry, Curator, Brazos Valley African American Museum
- The Bryan Daily Eagle
- The Daily Eagle
- Stephen F. Austin Annual, 1959 & 1971
- E. A. Kemp Annual, 1970
- Bryan High School Annual 1972
- Dissertation: Desegregation in Brazos County, Texas, 1946-1971, Hill, Scott, December 1998
- Interview with Dr. Thomas Davis, SFA Student Leader