Chapter 6 1970-73 The Years of Reorganization in Search of a Solution

I was the only white kid in the first black history class at East High. I was constantly asked to explain to the class why white people did this or did that. It was an elective and I took it because I wanted to find out what they thought. I didn’t learn much, because I was busy answering questions. [EHS 71 WM]

High School Perceptions
Racial Relationships
The Racial Divide
Biracial Dating
1970 The Bridgeway Project
1970 Open Enrollment and Busing

1972 Occupation of the School Superintendent’s Office

“One of the largest peaceful demonstrations in the civil rights period Waterloo” began on Wednesday, May 24, 1972, when a group of about 30 black parents and Coalition for the Black Community members marched “into the startled (Alice Margaret Hayes’) classroom (at West Junior High School in Waterloo, IA)” and announcing they would not leave until she was fired for using “material in class which was offensive to everyone. . . .”

The material used by Mrs. Hayes was *Little Brown Koko and the Preacher’s Watermelon*. “(She) has been reading the story . . . to her speech and drama class (for the previous 10 years as part of the class unit on “dialect”). When black students began busing to the school three years ago, Mrs. Hayes was always careful to ask if any objected, recognizing the stereotype that the title implies. This year members of Waterloo’s black community were riled by the story, and expressed their feelings two weeks (with the classroom protest. . . .”

“One paragraph from the book termed typical of the rest of it by the group says, “Just then a great, big idea popped into Little Brown Koko’s black wooly head. What do you
think he did? Why, he took a knife out of his pocket – the one grandpap had given him for Christmas and it would really and truly cut things too.” (sic)

The group said it spend the entire day in the classroom return the next day and “fill the school.” They told principal Joseph Boyle that his name should be added to the list to be fired. Doyle explained that the matter had been brought to his attention the previous week, it was being looked into, and he and the system’s school-community relations coordinator had met with a group of concerned parents. Several black students had presented him with a petition which stated the material was offensive, recommended actions and stated they would take whatever action was needed if they weren’t. He also told the parents that he wouldn’t recommend Mrs. Hayes with 30 years of service based on one piece of material she used. Only her firing was acceptable to the group.⁸

““It’s too late for an apology on something like this. We understand she’s been using this for 10 years. We question how much more material like this is being used in Waterloo schools. We have taken over the class so she can’t teach the kids any longer and will continue to come to the school until she is fired. It ought to be clear that we’re going to stay here…”⁹

Superintendent George Diestelmeier delivered a letter to Doyle recommending that Hayes be suspended from her teaching duties for the rest of the year. The last day of classes was June 1, eight days after the occupation.¹⁰

**Occupation Timeline**

**Thursday morning, May 25.** The day after the intrusion by parents in Mrs. Haye’s classroom, West Junior students said they would walk out after the first hour to protest her suspension. They massed in the hallway front of Principal Joseph Doyle’s office for about 10 minutes chanting “We want Mrs. Hayes,” then went to the auditorium so he could talk to them. After 20 minutes of more chanting for Hayes during which Doyle couldn’t speak, he dismissed school at 10:15 a.m. Diestelmeier and community-school relations coordinator Ray Richardson went to West Junior “after the trouble began.” About 100 white students from West Junior met with Richardson at the school administration building shortly before noon.
Jet magazine cited the Waterloo Courier story as reporting “the students merely chanted, ‘We want Mrs. Hayes,’ during the protest. However, Black students and parents charged that the white students ‘put on a white power rally’ during which they shouted, ‘Down with niggers! Up with Mrs. Hayes.’”¹¹

That same Thursday morning, May 25, while the protest was occurring at West Junior, a group of “about 150 blacks, both adults and children, gathered at Sullivan Park on East 4th Street just north of the Illinois Central rail yard near the North End in a “strategy meeting” following Wednesday’s protest at West Junior. They then marched around 3 p.m. on the school administration building about two miles away on the West Side.

*Our first apartment when I was married after high school was right across the street from the school district office. I will never forget the heartache and the scariness when there was a riot circling the building because Mrs. Hayes, the teacher I had all through high school, told the “Little Black Sambo” story she always did. She told stories in class. She was very dramatic; it was a speech class. Somebody decided to be racial and decided she should be fired. Blacks were upset about it and my apartment was right beside where they were rioting. I was very scared and was like, “What on earth?” And then I was so hurt because I loved Mrs. Hayes, from church. I had her from 7th grade and was in all her classes. She impacted my life and loved her to no end. So, it hurt. I remember going to Sambo’s Restaurant in Waterloo. And nobody thought anything about it. We ate pancakes and stuff. [WHS 70 WF]*

**Thursday afternoon.** The group took over Superintendent George Diestelmeier’s office. When he tried to leave, “he was told he would have to walk on, or over, the people there to do it.” And that his office would remain occupied until their demands had been answered. These included a special board meeting to fire Hayes and Doyle, closing West Junior High for the remainder of the school year and immediately beginning in-service training for school personnel.

“Because of the recent events at West Junior High School; and because of all the humiliating incidents our children have been subjected to in the Waterloo School System; because of the insensitivity of the superintendent and the majority of the school
board to our needs at the other schools; because of your treatment of the 10 points presented by Dr. Robert Harvey; we come as concerned citizens to make (these) demands: . . .”

During the occupation, the “group of blacks played soul music on the piano, munched potato chips and watched another fight on television. . . .” Phone lines were torn out, including the phone in the superintendent’s office, receivers from phones in the reception area and the school board room were removed, a pay phone was tied up and not even newsmen were allowed to call out of the building.

**Thursday, 6:10 p.m.** The assistant county attorney spoke to the protestors with a bullhorn.

“We ask that you allow him (Diestelmeier) to go to the public meeting. We come in peace. We ask that you leave peaceably. If you don’t we will use the laws of Iowa to remove you.” A note was held up to the window stating that the people inside couldn’t hear what he was saying.

**Thursday, about 7:15 p.m.** Officers broke into the office and escorted Diestelmeier out “pale and visibly shaken.” Diestelmeier asked to talk to school board members and administrators who were meeting to decide whether schools would be open on Friday. He then asked to re-enter the building to talk to the parents “who had held him captive,” the number of people having gone from 35 to 15 when the police broke in. He was persuaded not to do so and was driven home by a police detective. The office was described in reports as a “shambles.”

The school board went into an emergency meeting. A “group of about 150 blacks” sat down in the reception area, said they wouldn’t leave, but wouldn’t resist arrest. The assistant police chief said no mace, night sticks or handcuffs would be used if the protestors submitted to arrest peaceably. One woman said that the building is a public place, “It’s our building. We don’t have to leave.”

**Thursday, 7:30 p.m.** The county attorney arrived, emerged from the emergency school board meeting at 8 and talked to the group, telling them that he was asking for an injunction against them and warning them about the “new Iowa criminal trespass law which (made) occupying a public building when asked to leave an indictable misdemeanor.” Noting that both sides were
Thursday, 9:55 p.m. The county attorney returned and waited about five minutes for the Joe Frazier-Ron Stander heavyweight fight people had been watching on a TV moved from the superintendent’s office to the waiting room to end before reading it. A person who violated the injunction would face six-month jail terms and some were already guilty of criminal trespass due to the damage. Protestors had a choice of being booked at the school administration building and being contacted later by authorities or being booked at the police station at city. Some of the protestors left, but about 65 chose to be arrested and taken to the police station. Two dozen helmeted officers entered the lobby and arrested the protestors without incident. They were booked, photographed and released on their own recognizance. One report said that 63 were led out of the school administration building, but only 32 were booked.

The black protestors were banned from all school buildings by temporary injunction which was requested by the Waterloo Board of Education while the superintendent “was being held captive in his office.”

“The Waterloo school board, composed of seven whites and one Black, subsequently voted 6 to 2 to reinstate Mrs. Hayes. But Mrs. Hayes, saying that she was ‘acting in the interest of all concerned,’ refused to return (for the rest of the school year).”

Friday, May 26. None of the black students enrolled at West Junior were in school on Friday. And about 100 white students walked out and called to others to join them from the other side of the 5th Street from the school.

**Sit-In Legal Timeline**

**June 30.** Innocent pleas were filed by all 23 adult defendants charged with criminal trespass for their participation in the occupation of the Waterloo school superintendent’s office on May 25.

**July 14.** Testimony continued Friday in municipal court about a change of venue for defendants charged with criminal trespass of the school superintendent’s office and picketing at the Logan
Plaza Shopping Center. The attorney representing the defendants subpoenaed records of Waterloo and Cedar Rapids radio and TV stations, their films and news scripts from May 26-June 13 to demonstrate that an impartial jury couldn’t be found in Waterloo. He suggested Cedar Rapids, Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Des Moines or Davenport as venue sites. (NOTE: All were cities larger than Waterloo, but with smaller percentages of blacks than Waterloo).16

**September 8.** Rev. Williams’ trial, the first of the 22 defendants to be tried for criminal trespass during the sit-in at the Waterloo superintendent’s office, was continued in Cedar Rapids municipal court for one week. Williams requested the continuance to attend the African Methodist Episcopal Church annual conference in Chicago. (He was the pastor of Payne AME Church). The county attorney agreed to the continuance. The judge also turned down motions to dismiss and consolidate all 22 cases.17

**September 18.** A continuance was granted to Rev. Williams requested by his defense attorney on the basis that an Iowa State Supreme Court Justice had ordered a stay of all proceedings in the case against another of the 22 Waterloo residents charged in the same occupation of the school superintendent’s office. A change of venue from Cedar Rapids filed by Williams was denied.18

**October 9.** The Iowa Supreme Court refused to review a ruling by a Cedar Rapids municipal court judge which denied the change of venue request by Rev. Williams and refused to consider a request by Williams’ attorney to rule on the constitutionality of Iowa’s criminal trespass law. The Black Hawk County attorney’s office said it expected the Williams’ case and those of other defendants to be on the Cedar Rapids municipal court calendar “shortly.”19

**December 11.** Jury selection began in Cedar Rapids municipal court in the criminal trespass trial of Rev. Williams. The judge asked most of the jurors if a “trial of three or four days would create any time problem for them,” indicating the expected length of the trial.20

**December 12.** Snow delayed the Rev. Williams trial due to a severe snowstorm which struck northeast Iowa overnight. The 12 jurors were in court in Cedar Rapids, but the witnesses from Waterloo couldn’t travel to Cedar Rapids. (In 1972, the highways were two-lane between the cities and covered about 65 miles.)21
December 13. The jury in Rev Williams’ trial saw a 10-minute videotape which “purported to show” the defendant in the building on the night of May 25 when the Waterloo school superintendent’s office was occupied. The superintendent’s secretary identified Williams as the leader of the group and said, when she offered them the larger board room rather than the office, “We’re not interested in comfort.”

December 14. The prosecution finished presenting its case in the trial of Rev. Williams. “The most dramatic testimony” was provided by the school superintendent, who described being trapped in his office for more than four hours and Rev. Williams’ participation.

December 15. Rev. Williams was found guilty of criminal trespass by a Cedar Rapids municipal court jury, was fined $100 and placed on four months’ probation. His attorney said he would file an appeal. The jury deliberated for about four hours before reaching a verdict. When asked about the verdict, the Black Hawk County assistant attorney prosecuting the case said, “The verdict speaks for itself.” Williams, who said he wasn’t a leader of the group and couldn’t be responsible for all the events during the sit-in, has been receiving threatening phone calls at home, according to Waterloo police.

February 15, 1973. Rev. Williams appeared as requested at the Black Hawk County attorney’s office to be told contempt of court proceedings would begin for his refusal to pay his $100 fine. That was dropped when Williams’ attorney filed a notice of intent to appeal the conviction to the Iowa Supreme Court to test the constitutionality of the state’s criminal trespass law.

February 19, 1973. The trial for Jimmie Porter, the second of 22 people to be tried for criminal trespass in the sit-in at Waterloo school superintendent’s office in May 1972, was scheduled to begin Monday, February 26, in Cedar Rapids municipal court. However, the judge informed the jury panel which called for the trial not to report. The two opposing attorneys in the case were scheduled to meet that afternoon with the judge. The prosecution was being conducted by an assistant Iowa attorney general.

February 21, 1973. “The remaining 21 defendants charged with criminal trespass in connection with a sit-in at the Waterloo school administration building last May were found guilty of a lesser charge and sentenced in Cedar Rapids (yesterday).” The Cedar Rapids municipal judge
hearing the case found the defendants guilty of trespassing misdemeanor, which was less serious than the original charge of criminal trespass. Each was fined $50 and ordered to serve 10 days in the Black Hawk County jail if (he or she) didn’t pay the fines by March 30. The ruling followed two days of negotiations between the judge and the opposing attorneys which resulted in a three-part agreement. The defendants’ attorney agreed to withdraw the request for 21 separate jury trials. Both attorneys agreed to a mass trial using the evidence submitted in the trial of Rev. Leonard Williams the previous month. The final stipulation was that the charges against all 21 would be reduced to a simple misdemeanor trespass. (The article includes a list of the 21.)

1972 Picketing of the Logan Plaza Shopping Center

The day after the occupation of the Waterloo school superintendent’s office on Thursday, May 25th, the black activists shifted to a picketing and boycott of the Logan Plaza Shopping Center on Logan Avenue and East Hanover Street. The picketers handed out a flyer which explained, “Because we feel that the white businessmen of Waterloo have constantly drained our community of all of its resources without ever taking a stand to aid us in our fight, we will boycott (these stores) until these businesses join us in getting equal educational opportunities for all children. It also encourages persons to patronize black businesses; “Working together will get the job done.”

LOGAN PLAZA PICKETING, BOYCOTT & LEGAL TIME-LINE

May 26. About 200 blacks began picketing the five entrances to the Logan Plaza Friday evening. The center had four stores -- Eagle’s Supermarket, Coast-to-Coast (hardware), May’s Drug Store and Ben Franklin (five & dime and arts and crafts store). A list of demands was presented to the store managers. A statement by 20 white Waterloo ministers was directed at “the insensitivity” of white Waterloo residents and asked for in-service training for school personnel, stating, “. . . we are a part of a widespread racist atmosphere in Waterloo. 29

May 27. Several “small incidents” occurred at the shopping center on the second full day of picketing, including one in which a man reported a picketer had “slugged him through the
window” during an argument. Police reported that he received more blows when he exited the car and that 25-30 people were involved.³⁰

**June 11.** A temporary injunction was issued prohibiting picketing on the shopping center property. The pickets moved to the five entrances and said, “The picketing is still quite effective.” A hearing was scheduled for June 21 to determine whether the injunction would be permanent.³¹

**June 13.** A group of clergymen temporarily named Ministers Concerned for Waterloo announced a plan to meet weekly to share “ideas for constructive action in the current city-wide crisis.” The formal meeting commitment grew out of informal meetings among random pastors discussing the situation. The intent was “to make the conversations more inclusive and widely representative” by scheduling a regular meeting time Wednesday evenings at the Calvary United Methodist Church on East 4th. The pastors invited participation by everyone who wanted to join in “constructive attempts toward resolution of the conflict” . . . ³²

**June 21.** The first person to be sentenced in connection with picketing at the Logan Plaza was given a 12-day jail term in the county jail on Wednesday after having been found guilty in a trial by judge. Before sentencing, the judge heard a report about the person’s five prior assault and battery charges extending back to 1964.³³

> I was very pregnant and drove out to Logan Plaza on the East Side to pick up a prescription at the grocery store. There was a huge demonstration going on. Lots of black people carrying signs. I think they were protesting something to do with employment at the store. I wasn’t sure what to do. I got out of my car and started to approach the entrance. This big black gentleman pushed through the crowd and held his arm out to me. Some of the black women began to raise objections, not the men. He put his arm around me and told me to stay with him. And he told the women, “I’m taking her through.” He took me into the store and waited with me until I got my prescription. And walked me back to the car. [EHS 68 WF]

**June 23.**³⁴ Thirty white members of the Concerned Citizens of Waterloo showed up at 8 a.m. Friday at city hall with picket signs demanding to see the mayor. They wanted to ask him to end
the “black picketing” at the Logan Plaza by untying “the hands of the Waterloo police department.” They criticized him for not allowing police to arrest protestors, claiming that several shoppers had been assaulted, and others had to “undergo other kinds of verbal and physical abuse from the blacks.” They further pointed out that the Logan Plaza pickets were in violation of a permanent injunction which limited the shopping center protest to six people. One person told the mayor the shopping center picketers were “showing hatred.” He replied that “they had displayed the same kind of hatred during their meeting with him.”

Representatives of the Logan Plaza protestors talked to the white group picketing city hall and explained the shopping center was being picketed “to get the support of businessmen in improving the school system and the community.” When asked why they didn’t go to the comparable Kimball Avenue Shopping Center on the West Side, a representative of the black pickets said they couldn’t get the support of the West Side if they couldn’t obtain support from the East Side.

**June 26.** Picketers presented a new list of demands to the four Logan Plaza merchants. These included a hiring quota system for blacks based on the amount of black business at the store, that 80% of employees at all levels be from the blacks or low-income whites from the East side, promotion of qualified blacks when openings are available, prices comparable to other Waterloo stores, and a change in personnel attitudes toward food stamp and black patrons.

One of the demands was that the merchants “immediately stop discrimination” toward the Waterloo Defender,” the local black newspaper, in their advertising and sign a contract that job openings for minority personnel would be advertised through The Defender. The publisher and five directors listed on the paper’s articles of incorporation were leaders of picketers at the Logan Plaza.

The picketers took a one-and-a-half-day break after the demands were submitted, but resumed when the merchants wouldn’t meet the demands to their satisfaction.

**June 29.** After three weeks, the black boycott had “caused a 70 to 80 percent loss of business to (the four stores) in the city’s Logan Plaza Shopping Center, where Blacks and their white supporters threw up picket lines.” The manager of the Ben Franklin Store in Logan Plaza
Shopping Center filed a complaint with Waterloo police on Sunday, May 28, charging that customers were bothered before being allowed to enter four stores in the center being picketed by blacks urging shoppers to boycott the stores.

"Tension surrounding the boycott in Waterloo has been increased by individual acts of violence at the picket lines. In one of the incidents, two Black girls – Lenore Williams, 14, and Belinda Creighton, 15 – allegedly were struck by a car deliberately driven into the picket line by a 52-year-old white woman. The two girls were hospitalized with leg and back injuries. Police filed no charges against Margaret Bruns, the driver who said the girls were pushed in front of her car. . . .

Noticeably absent from the ranks of pickets in Waterloo, for example, are members of the town’s chapter of the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and many of the town’s Black ministers. J. Russell Lowe, Waterloo’s NAACP president, implied that he had not involved the local chapter . . . because he “had not been requested to meet with the folks who are boycotting.” Lowe added that his policy towards the boycott is that “if I do not join you, I will not hurt what you are trying to do.”

Whites in Waterloo speak of the long-range effect of the boycott. “This type of thing generates the kind of publicity which makes families and businesses afraid to locate here,” said Robert Buckmaster, former mayor of Waterloo. [NOTE: Buckmaster was mayor for about nine months in 1947, appointed when the elected mayor died. He was a community leader throughout his adult life.] He said he and other whites have worked with “responsible Black leaders” to bring about viable interracial relationships in Waterloo. “But now, they’ve (boycotters) yanked the rug out from under me,” Buckmaster said. “I’ve lost credibility in the white community. Now, the whites are coming to me and saying, ‘See . . . (sic) I told you that you couldn’t trust them.’”

July 1. The picketing ended after almost six weeks following a meeting between the pickets and representatives of the four stores at which a proposed agreement was reached. It was approved by the black community at a 1 p.m. meeting. The official announcement said, “a working agreement was reached relative to the demands which were presented to the store managers Monday, May 26.” One of the protest leaders said that, while the Logan Plaza
picketing was over, “some type of future action might be taken against other businesses in the city.”

During the six weeks, the school board adopted policies “closely congruent with black demands while the (Logan Plaza) shopping center stores agreed to hire more blacks. ‘When we look at the cost of the demands,’ (Waterloo Human Rights Director Willie) Mosley said, ‘we got a negative response. We polarized the community more than it has been polarized before.’”

**July 6.** A change of venue was ordered for the trial of one of the picketers on assault and battery for allegedly kicking a Logan Plaza customer crossing the picket line (on June 5).\(^{38}\) Because of that ruling, the Black Hawk county attorney asked the judge following day to transfer all 33 (sic) remaining cases to the Cedar Rapids municipal court. The judge said he didn’t know if the defendants in those cases wanted changes of venue or whether any would be given.\(^{39}\)

**August 23.** A hearing for a change in venue for two cases in which white defendants were charged with assault during picketing at the Logan Plaza Shopping Center in June was set in Waterloo municipal court for September 14. The venue change petition was filed by two black complaining witnesses in the case who also requested that the Black Hawk County attorney and his deputies be disqualified as prosecutors and that the witnesses’ attorney be appointed as special prosecutor. The witnesses contend that the facts in the cases are the same as earlier cases in which a venue change was requested, except that “the defendant(s) in this matter is white and the complainant is black.” One of the defendants is the wife of the Logan Plaza owner. The county attorney had contended it couldn’t receive a fair trial Waterloo in the other cases. They also contended that the county attorney and his deputies “cannot divorce themselves from the racism, prejudice and excitement in the city of Waterloo, Iowa, and the pattern of deep and bitter prejudice present throughout the community as said prejudice, racism and excitement relates to the black community of Waterloo.”\(^{40}\)

**September 14.** A municipal court judge rejected a request by two black witnesses in an assault case against two white picketers in an incident at the Logan Plaza Shopping Center that a special prosecutor be appointed. Their attorney said, “I don’t believe there’s any possibility that
black defendants or black complaining witnesses can in any many obtain adequate representation by any individual in this county (specifically the county attorney’s office.) He also requested that he be appointed. He represents “22 defendants whose cases (involve) charges based on a (Waterloo) school (administration) building sit-in and incidents on the Logan Plaza picket line.41

**September 29.** A request by the Black Hawk County Attorney’s office for a change of venue in the assault and battery case against the wife of the owner of the Logan Plaza Shopping Center was denied by the municipal court judge assigned to the case. No new date has been set for the trial.

**NOTE:** An extensive 10-month search of the *Waterloo Daily Courier* archives from October 1, 1972, to July 31, 1973, a full year after the picketing ended at the Logan Plaza Shopping Center located any further action against the center’s wife or another individual charged with a similar assault.

**The Public Speaks**42

Discussions between blacks and whites continued in the *Courier’s* “The Public Speaks” for weeks.43 It’s important to note two things when reading. First, the editorial staff selects how many and which letters to publish, has publishing criteria, and retains the right to shorten and edit them.44 Second, this selection isn’t a complete survey of “The Public Speaks” letters published about the West Junior High sit-in or the subsequent picketing. It’s a collection intended to provide a hopefully balanced sample of what people with opposing views expressed from the days following the West Junior protest and sit-in at the superintendent’s office to the end of July, four weeks after the picketing was withdrawn. After July 10th, The Public Speaks had no more letters about the incidents; the focus of readers’ comments was primarily shifted by the editorial staff to the 1972 state and national election campaigns. The letters which follow were shortened or edited when appropriate.
May 28, 1972

Asks: Can ‘Vigilantes’ Dictate to Our Schools. Can vigilantes dictate to our school system? The apparent answer to this question is yes. . . . Is it democratic when a group of 30 can come into a public classroom and threaten not to leave unless a teacher (Mrs. Alice Hayes), who has been teaching for 30 years, is immediately suspended? The answer to this is obviously no. However, the morning of May 24 it happened at West Junior High. . . . why go through proper channels by taking your complaints to the principal or superintendent. . . . when you can’t take your vigilante committee and barge directly into a classroom and threaten the school administration and know you can get away with it? Undoubtedly some of you will immediately say I am prejudiced. However, are you saying this because you really believe I am, or because you’re afraid of the simple truth? VAN G. MILLER [ADDRESS]

Questions Right of 45 Students to Upset 1,200. After seeing the action that took place at West Junior High over a simple little story, I think it’s time the majority spoke up. . . . what right do 45 students have to disrupt the schedule of 1,200 students? This “Civil Rights” bandwagon has been ridden too far, and unnecessarily. . . . It seems that this certain group of people holler, burn, demonstrate, and protest against segregation, but they do, in fact, segregate themselves. For instance, there is a club here in Waterloo that was set up by and for black women. . . . a group of black businessmen (set) up their own little organization. . . . (there’s the) “Miss Black Waterloo” contest. . . . the big, fancy explanation . . . (is) “helping them better understand their ethnic background,” but let a white person try this and his accused of being a segregationist, a racist. I can’t even imagine the hollering that would go on if there were a “Miss White Waterloo” contest. All I can say . . . is that these people are the best campaigners that George Wallace ever had. [NAME WITHHELD]

May 30

‘Children See Things So Much Differently.’ When I was a child, one of my favorite stories was “Little Black Sambo.” I thought he was really a clever little boy for outsmarting the tigers the way he did. Children see things so much differently than we do as adults. Why
can’t we all love one another as people should? Oh, how wonderful that would be. But, no, that’s not nearly as exciting as our fighting. Our poor beautiful (sic) innocent children. Forgive us all! Too bad we don’t have some of the children’s brains. Maybe then we would have a lovely country to live in. My skin is white, but my heart is all colors, and very sad. [NAME WITHHELD]

June 7

He sees Scopes Trial Similarities. Back in 1924, the witty H.L. Mencken of the Baltimore Sun reported the events surrounding the dismissal of John Scopes, a high school biology teacher. . . . (who exposed students) to Charles Darwin’s “Origin of the Species” describing evolution. Scopes was dismissed because his subject matter was regarded as derogatory to human beings. . . . If Mencken were alive to report parallel events in the Waterloo school system, he would need to make a few revisions in his . . . reports . . . (about) an English and speech teacher who “honestly exposed her classes to Blanche Hunt’s “Little Brown Koko and the Preacher’s Watermelon,” a children’s short story illustrating and author’s abundant and repetitious used of adjectives. . . . two school board members who do not with this kind of intellectual pursuit. . . . (would perhaps) be content if our children merely learned by rote selections from Bunyan’s “A Pilgrim’s Progress” or “Bay Psalm Book” and nothing else. SCOTT HUGHES [ADDRESS]

‘Must Look at the Child.’ My daughter was suspended for walking out (during the protest at West Junior). I feel the schools are using our children. This is a protest against prejudice in any form. The school’s personnel is (sic) guilty of pitting children against each other. When you administer any form of discipline, it is the child you must look at, not his or her color or economic status. . . . I have five children who have gone through the schools of Waterloo. Four daughters have graduated from high school. The one I have in school now will be the fifth. As a mother, I will say they learned the three R’s well, but they learned very little about the persecution of minority groups. They will live well in the middle-class society, but they will not understand the heartaches of minorities. . . . (which isn’t) entirely the school’s fault. I must also take part of the blame because I also believed only in the material things of life, and not the human aspects. . . .
We can all learn a valuable lesson from this protest. I never once heard the word “love” mentioned from either side. Is that word so hard to say and practice? Accept people for what they are, not for what their color or status in the community is. LEULLA MORELOCK

June 8

** Calls Story ‘Black Literature.’ ** After all the demands for black literature in the schools, why all the protest about the story of “Little Brown Koko and the Preacher’s Watermelon?” That’s black literature. Regarding Koko’s thick, wooly hair, that shouldn’t be so degrading what with all the Afro hairdo’s (sic) so prominent today. About cutting up the watermelon with a sharp knife, we always use a sharp knife to cut our watermelons/ Is there another or a better way? I’d like to know it. So, what’s the gripe? [NAME WITHHELD]

June 12

** Criticizes White Race For Certain Attitudes. ** In reply to recent letters about the indictment at West Jr. High, IO can now see that we do have people who refuse to recognize their own brothers; problems concerning an old and terribly mistaken stereotype. . . . These people will insist that they are not discriminatory in their views, but little do they know how their lack of understanding shows. The question (about) whether blacks had the right to protest is not the issue. The fact remains that he speech teacher used very poor judgment in selecting a story that offends and classifies a minority. . . . the black students had voiced their offense to the material through petition and had contacted the vice-principal using the proper channels. The white students who walked out of classes demanding the reinstatement of Mrs. Alice Hayes caused the dismissal of the school. . . . this walkout (should) be considered a disruption of classes just as much or even more than he sit-in conducted by concerned blacks. . . . White people have always considered themselves better. I’m very tired of hearing from and seeing nothing but my race putting itself above others. Think about how you feel about your race, whites. Are you thinking of yourself as more important? Well, then you’d better take another look. What do you see? [NAME WITHHELD]
**White Lists 3 Demands.** After reading the list of demands the blacks want, I feel that I, as a white and a taxpayer, have a few demands that I want met. 1. If any one of these demands by the blacks is met, the Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, Waterloo School Board, Waterloo City Council, and the mayor should also be taken to task. . . . (If) the white people of Waterloo . . . stand by and let these demands be fulfilled. . . . we had better put our property up for sale and move out fast. 2. The blacks who damaged the School Administration Building should be made to pay for the damages, with no exceptions. 3. Those who barged into Mrs. Alice Hayes’ classroom should be charged with trespassing. A white group would have been arrested on the spot. Once the demands are met, there will be no end to what will take place next. The average black man who is working and raising a family is not involved in this fracas. The trouble is caused by the ones who have always had everything given to them and still want more but do not want to work to get it. The black students were not asked to come to West Jr. High. The black parents wanted this. . . . (based on) the few who attended West Jr. High. . . . the time has come for the mayor to unshackle the police department so that police can handle these matters in their own way. I am sure that Chief Robert Beener can do a much better job of handling these situations than our bridge-building mayor. White people of Waterloo, you had better take a stand for your rights. . . . You cannot depend on the mayor, county attorney, or one judge to be of any help to you or your property if it is damaged. [NAME WITHHELD]

**June 13**

‘Appalled ‘ by West High Classes in ‘Witchcraft.’ I was appalled when I heard there were to be classes conducted at Waterloo West High School voodoo, witchcraft, paranormal psychology, phenomenon, extra sensory perception, hypnotism, etc. . . . I am requesting an equal amount of time to convey information to the students on a voluntary basis, about the phenomenon of the birth, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ, the salvation story, divine healing, baptism of the holy ghost (sic), and Jesus Christ our coming king, as recorded in God’s word. It is time to end the double standard of religion in our schools, that of allowing anti-God religion and excluding any religions based on the almighty
God. Let’s have no religion or all religion taught in our schools. CARLYLE A. BIXBY

[ADDRESS]

EDITOR’S NOTE: (The West High School principal) explains that the course, “Religions of the Far East and Biblical History,” was taught as history only. He says instructors demonstrated how some people did practice these phases of spiritual phenomenon.

June 14

**Woman Pities White Attitudes.** A hundred years ago Mrs. O’Leary’s cow kicked over a lantern that started a conflagration which destroyed most of Chicago. Recently a story was read in a school that gave rise to a chain reaction of a different nature, that has engulfed the entire city of Waterloo and has endangered peaceful relations. . . . The story itself was just the match that lit the pile of grievances which have building up for a long time -- . . . The pity . . . is that white people see nothing wrong with the presentation of the story or anything offensive about it, and do not understand why the blacks should be so worked up. (They’re) content with the stereotype presented, while the distortion is painful to the blacks. There are some whites . . . who do understand . . . (and) stoically endure the taunts and ostracism (and being called) “nigger lovers” . . . . Outward conditions are not going to change until the inner heats a purged. The branches of inequality will fall off only when the roots of insensitivity are removed. Grace B. Potter

[Address]

**Sees Pickets Destroying Plaza Jobs.** I was employed at Logan Plaza . . . until lay-off recently due to picketing there. It’s pretty bad when blacks destroy the jobs of those willing to work. . . . My employer is in trouble. He’s lost a lot of business from the harassment of customers. . . . Even after all the picketing is over I probably will not be called back because of all the business that has permanently been destroyed. It wouldn’t be so bad if only the police would stop the blacks from harassing the people, black and white, who wish to use the stores. . . , It seems when an incident occurs the police have their backs turned. Then they rush over to escort the shopper away. [NAME WITHHELD]
June 21

**Says Whites Should Have Civil Rights.** If there are any sane, rational and fair-minded leaders in the black and white communities in the present Waterloo school crisis, it is time that they rise to the occasion. . . . the taxpayers of this community, all the students and personnel associated with the Waterloo school system deserve fairer treatment. It should not be forgotten that everyone has the right to be heard, but no one has the right to demand to be obeyed. . . . Also, white people should have some civil rights in regard to fair hiring practices and placement of personnel. (The current demands by blacks are simply) reverse racism directed against those white people who have a right to expect fair hiring and replacement practices. Justice, not overreaction or appeasement, is what is needed and respected. So let’s stop picketing innocent store operators, and stop the sit-ins, the walk-ins, the stand-ins, the walk-outs, the destruction of property and the absurd demands. . . . (and) get down to some serious, common sense, rational discussions. . . . It is long overdue. [NAME WITHHELD.]

**Blacks: Have ‘Gone Too Far’ At Logan Plaza.** I think the black people have gone too far this time with the picketing at Logan Plaza. Why are they trying to ruin all of the business places on the East Side? . . . It won’t be there long and there won’t be anything left on the east side. Then they will start complaining that they need more new buildings put up for them. I’ve been shopping at the Logan Plaza for years, and I don’t want any black or white telling me not to shop there. I call that plain dictatorship. The pickets have called me some pretty raw names, but like the saying goes, “Sticks and stones. . . .” I say grow up and stop acting like a bunch of kids. [NAME WITHHELD]

**Labels People Making Demands ‘Unreasonable.’** As a concerned resident of Waterloo, I’ve had it with this Logan Plaza incident. . . . (which) is hurting both the blacks and whites of this community. I have read the 14 demands and all I can say is these people are unreasonable. You can’t fire a white principal and replace him with a black (one). If a vacancy occurred and a black is qualified for the job, then put him in that position. But I don’t agree with kicking someone out just because his skin happens to be white . . . . (Blacks complain) their kids aren’t getting the same education as the whites. I disagree. .
If a child is black, yellow or red, he can learn something just as long as he has the will to learn. . . . What our city needs more than bridges across the river are bridges between blacks and whites. . . . [NAME WITHHELD]

June 23

Suggests Whites Need to be Freed. Well, Lincoln freed the slaves. Now let’s get a new mayor to free the white people in Waterloo. Other towns around are laughing at us. [NAME WITHHELD]

July 7

Tells Blacks: ‘Wake Up See You’re Being Used.’ From the outset of . . . the West Jr. sit-in, to the take-over of the School Administration Building and the month-long picketing, I have been one of the most outraged citizens of Waterloo. Being involved in a minor incident at Logan Plaza did not help matters any. As usual, most people are heaping the lion’s share of the blame upon the blacks, which seems only logical since it was they who were doing most of the protesting. . . . (Why is little or nothing said about) the whites who picketed and demonstrated at the school and Plaza along with the blacks (are as much, if not more, to blame than the blacks)? The peaceniks, disenchanted college students, etc., always seem to find a black cause upon which to attach themselves. Yet, when the man on the street sees things like Logan Plaza he cries that the blacks are taking over America. Blacks, when are you going to wake up and see that you are only being used by people who are trying to further their own causes? . . . (sic) It is my opinion that the best thing that can come out of this is for the community to realize that some whites and not all blacks went along with these demonstrations. [NAME WITHHELD]
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Reflections on the Theme/Reflections from the Bridge

Endnotes


5 Numerous *Little Brown Koko* stories by Blanche Seale Hunt, illustrated by Dorothy Wagstaff, appeared in *The Household Magazine* for a number of years beginning in 1935 when Seale began writing for publication. Six *Little Brown Koko* books sold 600,000 copies. Her stories, by the same title, appeared for 20 years as a monthly feature in the magazine. “The stereotypes of Negroes presented in (this and other writings) for children are not there, I think, to advocate this view of black people. They are merely a reflection of the authors’ unquestioning acceptance of a prevailing societal ideology: these stereotypes were a stock way of conceiving black people to which both authors and readers subscribed, and to which they were accustomed. The 1930s were not far off from the heyday of the black-face minstrel shows and were imbued with the popular image of black people promulgated there. The assumptions regarding black people which the white majority found appropriate and comfortable (reassuring?) were continually reinforced depictions of black people in the mass media: in radio, by Rochester, Jack Benny’s servant, and Amos ‘n Andy; in films, by Hattie McDaniel in servant roles (complete with handkerchief-cap) and other menials and benign “slaves” (e.g.,
Gone With the Wind, by Buckwheat in The Little Rascals,” by Stepin Fetchit and Birmingham Brown, Charlie Chan’s black chauffeur, who bugged and rolled his great, big, round eyes when frightened. The three illustrations of children’s writing I’ve just cited are not saying “This is how black people ought to be conceived” (advocacy); they are simply presenting (and perpetuating) a familiar consensus view of what black people were thought to be. . . . Nor are black people in these illustrations (or black people generally) being attacked. “Hidden Persuaders: Political Ideologies in Literature for Children. (1985). Sutherland, R.D. Agathon Press. Published in Children’s Literature in Education, Vol. 16 (3), pp. 143-157.


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