

Source 1: Organized Resistance to and Organized Support for Desegregation

When school officials evaluated community attitudes towards desegregation in August 1955, they discovered that many white leaders supported massive resistance. The White Citizens Council of Pinellas presented appeals from white parents who called for continued segregation.

A county political leader pledged to establish a private tutoring system for students who did not want to attend integrated schools. The Board of Control, which supervised Florida's state universities, published an alarming report which included surveys of white and black high school seniors. Nearly two-thirds of Pinellas County's white respondents believed the state should use legal means to deny blacks admission to state universities. By comparison, over ninety percent of the African Americans replied that the state should integrate these institutions. In line with white resistance, Pinellas County School Board members rejected a plan by a University of Florida political scientist to desegregate the first two grades. . .



After Brown vs. Board of Education, many southern communities resisted the ruling. This is a famous demonstration in Little Rock, Arkansas that required the national guard to assist in allowing African American students to lawfully attend school.

. . . Given the resistance of white officials, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and religious organizations initiated the struggle to abolish dual schools in Pinellas County. Under the leadership of Dr. Ralph Wimbish, the local branch of the NAACP joined with the United Churches of St. Petersburg and the St. Petersburg Ministerial Association to dismantle Jim Crow legislation. Twelve White supremacists responded by carrying wooden replicas of rifles and threatening integrationists. One minister found a message attached to a rifle which proclaimed: "Death to all race mixers! Keep your public schools white by massive armed force – Be a Paul Revere! Rally your neighbors to arms. Shoot the race-mixing invaders."¹³ Such threats strengthened the NAACP's resolve. In the fall of 1959, an NAACP attorney accompanied eleven blacks who sought admission to the first classes offered at Dixie Hollins High School.

Schnur, J. A. (1991) "Desegregation of public schools in Pinellas County, Florida," *Tampa Bay History*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Source 2: Pinellas Communities Clash

Immediately, white opposition to busing intensified. The United Residents of Pinellas (URP) and Parents Against Forced Busing (PAFB) never successfully merged, but their members shared a common goal: They hoped to nullify the court decision and restore the concept of neighborhood schools. While the URP usually restricted its activities to court litigation, PAFB advocated outright defiance. PAFB Chairman Sam Buice, and members Gwen McCook and Grace Tilka, dominated the organization. They prepared suits against the “funky five” board members who had approved the plan, distributed school officials’ home telephone numbers, and called for parents to seek exemptions to the compulsory [required] attendance law by claiming they could not properly clothe their children. When Superintendent Mangin invalidated most of the petitions, PAFB leaders promised that over 20,000 pupils would boycott the opening day of school.

In October 1971, a student biracial committee suggested that Dixie Hollins drop the Confederate flag as its unofficial symbol. With PAFB support, a group known as Parents and Students for Dixie organized motorcades to “restore equal rights to whites” by brandishing the Rebel flag and harassing black “interlopers.” Black nationalist Joe Waller’s Junta of Militant Organizations (JOMO) responded by organizing a boycott by black students. Segregationists soon revived the Pinellas chapter of the White Citizens Council. Chairman Ron Fisher reacted to the violence that seized Boca Ciega a month later by claiming, “The whites aren’t going to take any more of what they've been taking.” Fortunately, racial tensions at Dixie Hollins and Boca Ciega subsided by the end of the first semester.

With the exception of a brief period of rioting at seven junior and senior high schools in February 1973, the racial strife anticipated by anti-busing groups never materialized. PAFB and the White Citizens Council disappeared by late 1973. The National Socialist White People’s Party, formerly the American Nazi Party, protested at a few school board meetings but never garnered support in the white community.

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Source 3: Bussing vs. Neighborhood Schools

Jerry Castellanos, the newest and youngest member on the school board, proposed that his colleagues vote to abolish the plan because it victimized children who “had nothing to do with bringing about slavery, segregation, or race problems.” Similar to Ron Fisher, Castellanos befriended anti-busing activists. The Resident Organization for Academic Research (ROAR) formed in 1981 to call for an end to all busing and to restore the concept of neighborhood schools.



Black students were bused to Madeira Beach Middle School in the 1970s as part of the county’s desegregation plan.

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Many white parents expressed their outrage at court-ordered busing. Their anger rested in a belief that students should attend the closest school, or their “neighborhood” school. While, on surface, that argument seemed to make sense, it also denied the reality that school districts throughout the United States—even in states outside of the South—had regularly used buses in the past to transport students beyond the closest school as a means of perpetuating racial segregation. During the 1950s and 1960s, white students in Childs Park who lived closer to all-black Gibbs High School rode buses to St. Petersburg High or Boca Ciega High instead. Black students in northern Pinellas often experienced long bus rides to Union Academy in Tarpon Springs or Pinellas High School in Clearwater as a way of keeping them out of the all-white schools they passed along the way.

Schnur, J. A., "Sixty years of pirate pride : A history of Boca Ciega High School, 1953-2013" (2013). *COQEBS Background Materials*. 15.

Source 4: James Oral History Excerpt

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES

James: As a junior in high school we had one of the biggest racial fights in Pinellas County. We had the SWAT team on top of the schools, we had the ABC news, CBS News. A group of adults came from Palm Harbor to fight against a group of high school guys before a football game.

Interviewer: What school is this?

James: Tarpon Springs Senior High School. This was in 1980. And we literally we had guys that had chains, axes, rakes, pitchforks, bats, knives, and we literally fought-- and not in the parking lot but throughout the school—because they were in the classrooms. And we would literally be fighting against an adult guy that got on campus and I remember, and this was a strange thing: when it was all over, us guys that played football, we were suspended for the fight. Except we got to come back and play that game Friday night. We got to come back and play the game. So our parents said “our kids are not going to get suspended for fighting adults.” So they sorta dropped the suspensions and we played the football game the Friday night. That was us in a nutshell, that’s what this place is. That’s how we were viewed . . .

Interviewer: I wanted to a little bit of clarification [about the school riot], you said they had rakes?

James: What actually happened, I know the one kids name who initiated this incident. He was a well known kid from Palm Harbor whose family were well known racists. And he called members of his family and members of his family also called other members up to the school. And they had a confrontation with one black kid out in the parking lot. That black kid ran back in the cafeteria and said “hey there’s a whole bunch a white folks coming!”

Interviewer: Do you know what time this was? Like was it during school?

James: Oh it was during school!

Interviewer: It was literally during school?!

James: Yes this was during school and I remember the SWAT team running on top of the roof of the building and we were all dropping down and then jump and we would run into a classroom and the SWAT team—they were everywhere. But the people that were fighting were everywhere too.

Interviewer: They called SWAT so I mean how many people were there?

James: The people from Palm Harbor? I would say the people from Palm Harbor [the rioters] were about 30 deep. And the people in the school were doing most of the fighting were the football players. And they were black they were mostly black football players. So the football

players are fighting against these adults that came to the school but it also spilled over because from that fight in the cafeteria to the parking lot, it spread to the classrooms.

Interviewer: Where's the staff?! [the school personnel]

James: Well, hiding. Most of the people hid.

Source 5: Ashley Oral History Excerpt

INTERVIEW WITH Ashley

Interviewer: So at Tarpon Springs High you said you experienced prejudice?

Ashley: Yes, and the big one. . . I ran track, believe it or not. But my asthma was really bad. And my mom told me you can't do this Madison your asthma is too bad. And one day I had a real bad asthma attack—it was bad. And I went to the office, to the nurse. And I was breathing really bad. And she told me to get up on the table and he propped up just a little bit and she told me to just sit there, just wait there. And she turned the lights out and she walked out of the room. She left! She left. My asthma got worse. And I was able to get myself off of that table and I went to the phone that was by the cafeteria and I called my mom. I said “mom, I can't breathe, my asthma is really bad.” And I made my way back to that room where that nurse had left me. My mom called the assistant principal to answer the phone and my mom said “how's my daughter?” And he went on about “oh she's a good student” and my mom [interrupted him] and said “I'm not talking about that, she's having an asthma attack.” He didn't know. And so my mom had to get Ms. Hunny, the lady up the street from us and she had to come out and they had to get me. I just barely made it in the car. Just barely made it to the doctor's office and he had to give me a shot immediately or I would have been dead. That was a very bad experience for me. Very bad. She left me. She knew I was in distress.

Interviewer: What happened to that nurse?

Ashley: Nothing. They wh—Nothing! Nothing.

Interviewer: When was this? About what year?

Ashley: Uhh, I went to Tarpon High. I graduated '67. This happened in the 10th grade.

Interviewer: Do you believe this would have happened in a black school?

Ashley: No! I would have gotten help immediately. . . I had a cousin; she was just like me. They had to drive us all the way to Morton Plant Hospital. They had to drive me—speed—all the way to Clearwater to Morton Plant Hospital. We had to be very careful going through Palm Harbor because Palm Harbor was very prejudiced against black people. They had a big sign with the N word on it right by a red brick schoolhouse. There was a big stone thing out front that said _____ not welcome. Everybody even during my daddy's time you had to be careful when going through there. . . Many times, they had to rush me to the doctor in Clearwater. He was a Greek doctor and asthma was his specialty. . . he said I was a challenge to him because everything he tried didn't work. My momma had beautiful flowers and plants and she had to eventually remove all of them because I was so allergic. I would get pollen from them trees and I would still have to go get shots from [the doctor]. It would get really bad. They didn't have rescue inhalers at that time. So when it got bad I would go get shots and it would leave me

drained. Even in the wintertime it would be real cold I would be sitting outside inside of my slip and I would be pouring sweat because I couldn't breathe. I would be sitting there waiting for my aunt to take me all the way to Clearwater to be treated.

Interviewer: Even though there was a hospital closer?

Ashley: Even though there was a hospital inside Tarpon Springs. They didn't treat nobody in Tarpon Springs, not no blacks, at all. During that time.

Interviewer: Was that a Greek hospital or a white hospital?

Ashley: No it was a white hospital.