

Education in the Role of African-Americans Ruby Bridges, Civil Rights Activist

By Sam Salomone

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” -Nelson Mandela. Education had a crucial role in the lives of African-Americans in the Civil Rights movement. An example of change occurred in 1960 from six year old Ruby Bridges.

Ruby Nell Bridges was born on September 8, 1954 in Tylertown Mississippi. She was the daughter of sharecroppers who moved to New Orleans in 1958 in search of better jobs. In kindergarten, she went to an all-black school many miles away. However, the federal government ordered that schools must be integrated. A test was given to see if she could go to an all-white school. She passed and started at the all-white William Frantz School. This made Ruby the first black child to integrate in the South.

On November 14, 1960, Ruby went to school with her family and Federal Marshals who escorted her safely. Yet, protesters lined the streets yelling slurs at her, throwing objects, and making death threats. She still proceeded and kept going. Later a guard said, “She just marches on like a soldier.” Parents took their children out of school, making Ruby the only child in her classroom. The school was “integrated” but Ruby was alone in her class, at lunch, and during recess.

Luckily, a white teacher named Barbara Henry agreed to teach her in first grade. Not only did Henry help academically, she helped her emotionally. They spent every day alone without the other first graders. They became closer and closer until Ruby considered her to be a friend.

As the year continued, some students began to come back to school and many protests stopped. However, Ruby began to experience stress. She had nightmares and couldn't eat. She saw a psychiatrist, Robert Coles, who was concerned about how she handled the pressure. He later wrote books about her.

When second grade started, Mrs. Henry didn't have her contract renewed, so she had a different teacher. More students returned, and now there were other students in the class. Along with Mrs. Henry, the Marshals weren't there either. Despite these changes, Ruby did well in school, and later graduated from Francis T. Nicholls High School.

After high school, she worked in the travel business, married Malcolm Hall and had four sons. In 1995, her former psychiatrist, Robert Coles, published a book called *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. It was during this same time she was reunited with Mrs. Henry on television. After more people learned her story, she started the Ruby Bridges Foundation in 1999. It promotes tolerance, respect of differences, and tries to end racism through education.

“The great aim of education isn’t knowledge but action.” -Herbert Spencer. Ruby Bridges is an incredible example of someone who took action to get an equal education and to now educates others. Her efforts helped African-Americans gain equal opportunities in education.

Bibliography

Biography.com. A&E Networks Television, n.d. Web. 22 Jan. 2017.

"Biography - For Kids." *Biographies for Kids: Inventors, World Leaders, Women, Civil Rights*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Jan. 2017.

/.latest_citation_text

National Women's History Museum. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Jan. 2017.

/.latest_citation_text