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# Review of "Race, Politics, and Memory: A Documentary History of the Little Rock School Crisis," edited by C. Lewis and R. Lewis

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gan Cultural Center. The Lowell NHP's social history interpretation of the mill girls and their living quarters ends in the mid-nineteenth century at the beginning of the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission's immigrant section. It celebrates the successes, but not the working experiences, of some fifty ethnic groups that settled in Lowell, from the Irish in the 1840s to the Southeast Asians in the 1980s, and includes a small case on Franco-American writer Jack Kerouac. Stanton then applies cultural performance theory (Victor Turner, 1982; and Kirk Fuoss, 1998) to the 2002 foodways program at the revived Mogan Center, which showed some mutual accommodation among the outside folklorists, the established locals, and the newer Cambodians and Laotians.

In her epilogue, Stanton applauds the planned renovated exhibit at the Lowell NHP's Boott Cotton Mills Museum for making larger connections about economic globalization and about American consumers and minimally paid foreign workers. She also learned from an interview that the Greater Lowell Central Labor Council had withdrawn from a redevelopment project in 1988 because of personality conflicts, money issues, and the hiring of nonunion masons. Two new housing projects in Lowell also send different messages. One offers only five affordable housing units in the Acre, while the other proposes 170 upscale condominiums in the Lawrence Mills. Stanton concludes that public historians should play a more active, even radical role in debating housing and other issues. However, Lowell's future is challenged by the high rate of mortgage foreclosures affecting 270 homes in 2007, triple the 2006 number. Rallying behind their city, bankers, community activists, and city leaders formed the Lowell Foreclosure Prevention Task Force to provide free counseling and mortgage refinancing options.<sup>2</sup>

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*Race, Politics, and Memory: A Documentary History of the Little Rock School Crisis* edited by CATHERINE LEWIS and RICHARD LEWIS. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007; paperbound, \$19.95.

In the fall of 2007, the fifty-year anniversary of the Little Rock, Arkansas, school desegregation crisis set off a series of events and publications, including conferences, a speech by former President Bill Clinton, and the unveiling of a heroic bronze statue of the Little Rock Nine. These African American teenagers risked life and limb to "desegregate" Central High School in 1957, and their battle for equal rights has moved into the mainstream of the tourism industry and become inscribed in the public memory as a triumph of brave young people fighting the forces of hatred and bigotry.

2. Brenda J. Buote, "Lending a hand in loan crunch, Group tries to aid local homeowners," *Boston Globe*, February 7, 2008.

This is a positive development, acknowledging how these young people did indeed stir the nation, and particularly African-American youth, to fight back against school segregation. Legions of Ku Klux Klansmen and violent segregationist mobs roamed the streets and threatened black students as they tried to enter Central High, as the once-progressive Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, mobilized otherwise quiescent white folks to maintain a lily-white school system. President Eisenhower, although opposed to desegregation and the historic 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that set the wheels of school integration in motion, found himself forced to send in troops to restore order and the sovereignty of the federal court system. Governor Faubus ultimately shut down city schools for over a year rather than desegregate them. Whites moved into private, often religious, academies, leaving blacks, the vast majority of whom could not afford private schools, stranded. The privatization of segregated education began, and it has continued ever since.

As this capsule summary suggests, the story is not all about heroism and success, but about racism, venality, political opportunism, and failure. Elizabeth Jacoway's astute and comprehensive *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007), shows in nauseating detail how whites at all levels organized and conspired to rob school desegregation of its triumph. Her book and several recent films document just how little we have gained in terms of true integration and educational equality for African-American students. It is a safe bet that none of this will be celebrated in the public memory.

Catherine Lewis and Richard Lewis, in *Race, Politics, and Memory: A Documentary History of the Little Rock School Crisis*, suggest the complexity of this story and help us to frame events in a way particularly useful to public historians. Rather than deal in generalities, speeches, letters, photographs, memoirs, editorials, oral histories, and photographs bring to life many of the contradictions of the Little Rock story as it evolved. I found the over-arching rhetoric of anti-communism, which framed both opposition to and support for desegregation, of special interest. Documents show how the red-baiting of that era confused, distorted, and diverted Americans from dealing with the historic problem of racism. "The Communists of America have been trying since 1936 [the second New Deal of Franklin D. Roosevelt] to destroy the South. The bait which attracts them is the Negro population." So wrote Mississippi Court Circuit Judge Tom P. Brady, who helped to form the White Citizens Council to resist *Brown*, a decision reached on what the Council described as "Black Monday." The absurdities of this line of rhetoric appear throughout the documents.

Jacoway contends that sexual mixing of white and black students constituted the most fundamental fear motivating the Citizen's Council and other segregationist groups. That may be true, but there is little in this collection (and not a great deal in her book) to document it. These documents, some of them never before published, offer additional perspectives, helping us see

“the complexity of implementing *Brown v. Board of Education*, but also to understand the context of the growing international concern over race and foreign policy” (xxi). The introduction is well written and insightful and sets up the documents that follow. This volume can provide an extremely useful source for people teaching the history of the Little Rock story, for people working in museums, and for those concerned with the meaning of this story for the present. Yet the collection does not fully document and expose the ultimate failure of desegregation in Little Rock. That is too bad, because fifty years provide enough time for us to reevaluate why schools, private and public, still short-change so many African American children. Little Rock provides the most dramatic example of the great promise and the continuing failure of the United States to overcome segregation, to adequately fund schools in disadvantaged communities, and to fully educate all of its children.

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*Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* by J. R. KERR-RITCHIE. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007; xix + 272 pp., clothbound, \$45.00.

*Rites of August First* is an absorbing and meticulous study that documents the impact of British Caribbean emancipation in 1834 on the drive to abolish slavery in the United States. It is part of a growing body of scholarship that enhances our understanding of four centuries of slavery and the slave trade by linking the whole of the African diaspora and the Black Atlantic world, from Africa and the Azores to the West Indies, North America, Guiana, and Brazil. It also converges with contemporary efforts to come to terms with horrific and tragic legacies by means of commemorative ritual. Such ritual observances are now unparalleled in intensity. For example, while the 1907 centenary of the abolition of the African slave trade went scarcely noted in Britain, the 2007 bicentenary saturated media, museum displays, and public ceremonies with effusive official apologies and penitential processions in yokes and chains.

August 1, 1834, was the day that 800,000 British West Indian slaves were nominally released from bondage, though most had to serve as indentured laborers for four more years. In what was trumpeted as an act of unique generosity—the British government gave the slaves their freedom and paid their former owners twenty million pounds compensation for loss of property—emancipation took place without violence or civic unrest. Millions of American slaves, free blacks, and white abolitionist supporters immediately seized on this eventful transition as a harbinger of freedom in the American South. West Indian Emancipation Day was celebrated with speeches, sermons, parades, demonstrations, and festive events as much north of the Mason-Dixon line in America as in the Caribbean. Kerr-Ritchie shows how anniversary celebrations gathered force after the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 forced thousands