

3/26/72

Dear Jerry,

You will remember that I once said I thought Georgie Pie was a friend of King's but didn't remember why this was in my mind.

There is no doubt he was sympathetic at least to the black movement in the South. This Morning's Washington Post has an editorial-page article by him titled, "Clinton 1956: The Dooming of 'Deliberate Speed'."

I think this may bear in part of his hangup. Here he is a friend of the victim of the crime and sympathetic to the black movement on the one hand and on the other hand contracted to do a book for a lot of money that will help preserve what he has to know is an entirely fictitious account of how King got killed.

This puts him in what he has to recognize as a Judas position.

Because I do not think he intends dishonesty I think it does trouble him. If he were by nature dishonest, crooked or without principle, it would not bother him in the slightest. He grab his loot and run.

Aside from anticipation of a literary disaster, I can't think of a good reason for his not having completed the book long before this.

Sincerely,

# Clinton, 1956: The Dooming of "Deliberate Speed"

Post 3/26/72  
By George McMillan

TALK about busing!

Every school morning during 1954 and 1955 a tiny group of black students from the small East Tennessee town of Clinton were bused 50 miles so that they could attend a segregated all-black high school in Knoxville. And thus not try, as the local school board hoped, to enter all-white Clinton High School which was smack at the foot of Foley

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Hill, the Clinton black ghetto, so that the bus had to pass the door of Clinton High, going and coming.

It was the humiliation and hardship, the absurdity, the dramatic unabashed racism of this busing that caused the black parents of Clinton to bring one of the first successful suits for integration of a public high school after the 1954 Supreme Court school decision.

The suit led to what can now be seen as a major turning point in the history of school integration. What happened at Clinton in 1956 proved that the Supreme Court's deliberate speed strategy was doomed. Tokenism, moderation, the assumption which men like President Eisenhower made that there must be "good" men in the South who could and would step in and handle the change responsibly and peacefully—Clinton proved that these concepts were innocent, futile and sometimes fatal.

IF CLINTON had gone well, there would have been no need for controversy over busing today, in 1972. And there was a chance that it might have done so; almost, one can now see, the last chance. In 1956, there had not yet been a major violent confrontation over school integration. There was then still a feeling in the white South that the Supreme Court would have to be obeyed, no matter what a few Southern politicians were saying about "massive resistance."

There were more subtle, deeper feelings, too, feelings that were not often openly talked about. Many Southerners were glad at the prospect of being relieved of the burden and the guilt of their racial history. In this sense, they welcomed change; if they feared change it was because they knew better than anyone else the role black people played in creating "The South," the regional culture. Black people are at the center of the regional identity, and for the role of the

black to be changed meant to the white Southerner a profound loss of identity and sense of self. Without the black man there was no "South," none at all. It was a moment, anyway, like the moment in 1800-1820, when the best side of the South had a chance to tell the worst side where it could go.

At Clinton the "good people" did their share: the mayor, the school principal, the faculty, the student body, particularly the football team, actively worked for integra-



John Kasper in 1956

tion. "The ruling is the law of the land, must be observed by all of us," the local Courier-News warned its readers. The Establishment of Clinton had created an atmosphere of compliance in the town before school opened in the third week of August.

BUT THE weekend before school opened a young man named John Kasper turned up in Clinton from Greenwich Village, where he had been nurturing fascist and bigoted fancies in a correspondence with Ezra Pound. Kasper went from door to door, challenging people with his hate talk. When the

school opened Monday, August 27, 1956, a few adults were there to spit on the black students, beat them with sticks, insult them. Roving bands of hoodlums began "chasing niggers" through the streets.

There was no one to stop them. Clinton's police force did what it could but it was made up of five men, not one of whom was under the age of 60.

Crowds began to gather on the courthouse lawn to listen to Kasper and to some of the South's seediest hatemongers who had rushed to Clinton from Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, to lend their vicious tongues. On Tuesday there were 200; by Saturday there were 2,000, many if not most of whom came from outside Clinton.

Governor Frank Clement finally sent the National Guard to Clinton, but it was too late. The hateful bigots had perceived the fatal flaw in racial gradualism, the vacuum of law enforcement. The biggest corporations, even states and cities, had to bend to Supreme Court decisions but not this malevolent minority. Clinton proved that Supreme Court decisions on race were not going to get effective federal law enforcement—as they are not getting even today, 16 years later.

Clinton fixed the perverse function of violence in racial integration: that lawlessness was, incredibly, to be an excuse to permit more lawlessness, that violence was to become a reason to seek "softer" laws, that the voices of hatred could be allowed to create so much dissension that the President who proclaimed himself an advocate of law and order could be seeking a way, even a constitutional amendment, to try to appease and please the worst of us and the worst in us.

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