

Freedom of Choice Students
Gretna High School



Barbour, Wallace

James, Cynthia

Kelly, Tyrone

Miller, Gloria Jean

Robertson, Brenda

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

GRETNA HIGH SCHOOL - FEBRUARY 3, 2024 - 9:30 AM

SELECTION	SOUTHSIDE REGION CELEBRATION
WELCOME	REV. RAYMOND RAMSEY GREATER MT. PARISH BAPTIST CHRCH
PRAYER	REV. LARRY PATTERSON PASTOR, MT. AIRY BAPTIST CHURCH
GREETINGS	DR. MARK JONES, SUPERINTENDENT PITTSYLVANIA CO. SCHOOLS
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	MR. MICHAEL BROWN
MOMENT OF REFLECTIONS	MR. AUBREY MYERS MR. RALIEGH JAMES
SELECTION	SOUTHSIDE REGION CELEBRATION
SPEAKERS	MS. RICHETTA AKERS MRS. GLORIA JEAN BURKE MS. BRENDA ROBERTSON FULLER
SELECTION	SOUTHSIDE REGION CELEBRATION

UNVEILING OF PLAQUE - LOBBY

FUNDING PROVIDED BY: DANVILLE REGIONAL FOUNDATION

FREEDOM OF CHOICE STUDENTS OF FREEDOM OF CHOICE
GRETNA HIGH SCHOOL - FEBRUARY 3, 2024 - 9:30 AM

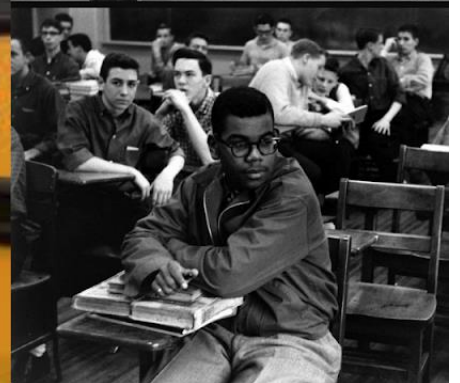
BARBOUR, WALLACE

JAMES, CYNTHIA

KELLY, TYRONE

MILLER, GLORIA JEAN

ROBERTSON, BRENDA



Gloria Jean (Miller) Burke

What is your name and age? Gloria Jean (Miller) Burke
Where did you grow up? Town of Gretna, VA
Which school did you attend? Gretna High School
When? 1967-68 through 1969-70

What was your experience with the integration in the schools?

The first two months were hell. When walking the hall to the cafeteria, you heard a student say, "I smell a gar". Another student responded, "You mean cigar". The first student responded, "No I mean a Nigar". This was not heard by a teacher or an administrator. You wanted to fight but a Black friend, Brenda Robertson, stopped you. Another time in an English Class during a discussion in the class, a white male student made a statement that infuriated you. You slapped him. After some scuffling, the teacher stopped the fight. She made the male student apologize later. The boys harassed her more than the girls and the teachers weren't much better, especially her Algebra II Teacher. This teacher gave Jean a 0 on every assignment. Her parents eventually confronted the school system with the problem. Jean was receiving tutoring from Mrs. Hagwood, a math teacher at Northside. Jean had to go to summer school after her first year at Gretna high to get her math caught up. After her first year, she had no major problem with teachers. Student behavior improved after the first two months. The History teacher addressed black students as Niggra. It was very close to the "N" Word.

If you were a part of "Freedom of Choice", why did you choose to attend a white school? During the 1966-67 school year, Mr. Spellman informed Jean, some of her friends and their parents about Freedom of Choice. So, she and Brenda Roberson went to Gretna in the fall of 1967. One black student, Wallace Barbour was already enrolled at Gretna. All things considered, Jean believes that it was to her benefit to have gone to Gretna under Freedom of Choice. She studied more because she had competition. She was always an Honor Roll Student at Northside and about half of the time at Gretna.

Reginald Rice

Name and Age: Reginald Rice-56

Where did you grow up? Gretna

Which school did you attend? Gretna

When? Gretna 69-69 during Freedom of Choice.
69-73 during total integration. Graduated in 73.

Experiences/ Situations: Another Black student with Reginald was Tyrone Kelly. Both made the Baseball Team at Gretna during the 68-69 season which was still during Freedom of Choice. During a game with Tunstall, a white player from Gretna made racial statements to a Tunstall player. None of the coaches didn't do or say anything. Reggie started to do something but changed his mind. He quit the team shortly after that. Reggie's father, who taught at Northside, dropped Reggie at the Crossroads Restaurant and Reggie walked the remaining distance to school which was approximately half a mile. Sometimes, when walking back to the Crossroads in the afternoon, White students on the bus would throw cans at him. After integration, there was a fight in the boy's bathroom almost every day. There were no serious injuries. Things settled down considerably after a month in school.

Why did you attend a white school? Reggie's father told him that he was going to Gretna High. Reggie was given a very short notice by his father. Reggie did not like that he was being sent to Gretna High because he had to leave most of his friends that he had been with at Mt. Airy Elementary School. Reggie was mad and didn't want to discuss it because he knew that there was nothing to say.

Reflections by Marian S. Keys

I, Marian S. Keys, was born and reared in Pittsylvania County. My educational journey began at Lipford Primary School as a first grader. This was an all black two-room school with students from first to seventh grade. There was no transportation for black students who walked to and from school each day.

At twelve years old, I entered the Pittsylvania County Training School, later becoming Northside High School. I graduated at age 16 in 1948 and entered St. Paul's College graduating at age 20. In 1952, I began teaching at Stoney Mill Elementary School and was transferred to Northside High School in 1954. I remained a teacher there until 1969 when full school integration began. At that time, I was transferred to Gretna High School where I remained until 1990 at which time I retired.

In the transition to fully integrated schools, I do not recall the encounter of any major conflicts amount teachers and/or students. I had a sister and a brother who attended Chatham High School in 1968-1969 during the Freedom of Choice period. At that time, they chose to go for the experience and to become a part of the total education experience in Pittsylvania County. The school bus that transported only white students was a convenience to them because it picked up white students who lived on the adjoining farm to my parents. They were able to ride that bus to Chatham High at that time; otherwise, they would not have been able to attend except by their own transportation. In the meantime, my husband and I decided that our son who was going into the third grade in 1967 during the Freedom of Choice period would be transferred from Northside Elementary School to Chatham Elementary School so that he could become adjusted to the integrated system at an early age. During his first year in this system, there were a few problems – one being having to ride on the same bus as the high school students. He was taken advantage of at times, but his dad and I put an end to that by going to the school authorities in every situation and stopping every situation that he was encountering. He adjusted well after that and became a part of the total programs and total integration system.

Before total integration of public schools, nothing was equal in equipment, supplies, facilities, books, etc. in the segregated school. In the black schools a good job was done with what we had and the situations that we encountered.

As a teacher in an integrated school beginning in 1969, I saw and made no difference in teaching black and/or white students. I saw them all as students; it made no difference to me whether they were black or white. I believe in individual help for each student, black or white.

In the 1960's those students who chose to attend a white only school had to provide their own transportation or go to a nearby neighborhood to catch a bus, as I emphasized earlier in my reflections. Even after integration, there were no black high school principals until 1985. As I remember, Walter Keys was the first one. Until integration, there were separate black and white county wide teachers' meetings and conferences.

There were only two black high schools in Pittsylvania County before integration, Northside and Southside High Schools. In 1969, they were changed to junior and/or middle schools. When total integration began, I felt that all students and teachers would be receiving the same educational opportunities regardless of race.