

TC Today

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Ruby Bridges, symbol
of the fight for school
integration, talks about
breaking barriers and

Building Bridges



Strangers don't always expect an icon of the civil

rights movement to have a playful sense of humor, so it's a bit

disarming when Ruby Bridges uses hers to charm an audience. ● "Most

of the time, kids expect me to be six years old, and grown-ups expect Rosa Parks,"

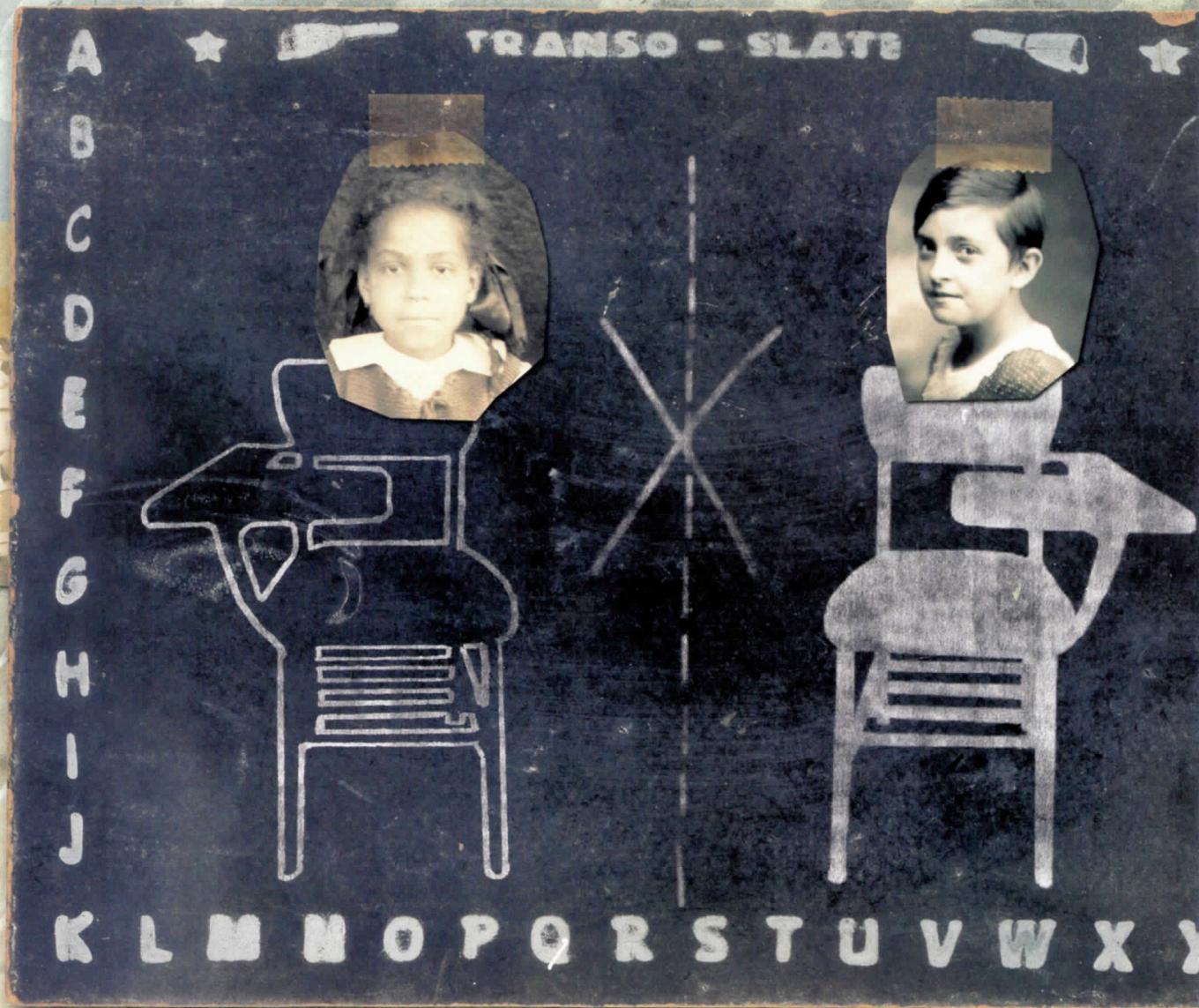
Bridges told a packed Horace Mann Auditorium, adding that she fell somewhere

in between. ● "People are surprised to learn I have a sense of humor," Bridges

said earlier. "When people talk about racism, everybody is very tense. Anyone

that makes it more lighthearted eases people up a bit." ● At 50, the youthful

By Andy Smith





Building Bridges

Bridges also projects the virtues one might expect—the same calm, quiet dignity that helped break down racial barriers in the segregated south of the 1960s.

Today, she continues to follow her calling, devoting her life to promoting racial harmony among America's schoolchildren.

A TRAILBLAZER'S STORY

Bridges is remembered as the model for the African-American girl in the starched white dress, beginning her first day of school escorted by federal marshals, in Norman Rockwell's 1964 painting "The Problem We All Live With."

In 1960, at age 6, the child who inspired that painting endured the daunting experience of being the first black student to integrate the all-white William Frantz Elementary School in urban New Orleans.

For all of that school year, Bridges was almost the only child in attendance, white parents having pulled their children from the school. Each day for many months, she walked through a mob of angry protesters to spend her day alone in a classroom with Barbara Henry, a Boston transplant and the only teacher willing to instruct her.

Bridges handled this onslaught with amazing poise, even stopping to pray for the protesters as she entered the school.

Naïveté helped shield her as well. The six-year-old initially mistook the barricades, hateful signs, police officers patrolling the streets, and angry protesters throwing objects as part of a New Orleans tradition: "Mardi Gras."

"I felt as though I were in the midst of a parade," she remembers. "Later on, the [true] situation came together for me when I came in contact with a few of the other kids. The principal would separate us."

After her difficult first year, the mobs disbanded and the white students returned to William Frantz. While racial tensions continued through her high school years, as New Orleans' schools integrated grade-by-grade, the focus on Ruby subsided.

A PUBLIC FIGURE AGAIN

For many years, Bridges lived quietly. After high school, she studied travel and tourism and spent many years as a travel agent, using the opportunities her profession offered to see much of the world, from Europe to Singapore. She also married and began raising four children,

Each day for many months, she walked through a mob of angry protesters to spend her day alone with Barbara Henry, the only teacher willing to instruct her.





THE DAY AFTER At left: Despite a court order to begin integration on April 2, 1956 at their Hillsboro, Oregon, school, on April 3 these children were turned away, as they had been everyday for the previous two years.

VISUAL HISTORY

Clockwise from top: Norman Rockwell's 1964 painting entitled "The Problem We All Live With" depicts Ruby Bridges being escorted to school; Protesters at a march for school desegregation in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963; A police escort outside William Frantz Elementary School, 1960.



the youngest of whom is now 12.

In 1995, Bridges returned to the spotlight, as the subject of a groundbreaking children's book, *The Ruby Bridges Story*. Written by Robert Coles—a psychiatrist who studied the young Bridges as she faced the challenges of her first grade ordeal—the illustrated book told the story of Ruby's first year at William Frantz.

"It was the first book of its kind to try to explain racism to a five- or six-year-old," she said. "I spent six months promoting it."

Bridges also worked with

Disney to develop 1998's *Ruby Bridges*, a well-received movie for television. "I'm very proud of that film," she says, explaining that the creators—who included Euzhan Palcy, one of Hollywood's few black female filmmakers—worked hard to accurately recreate her experiences as a young girl in the racially divided New Orleans of the early 1960s.

"The writers met with a number of people, including

PHOTOGRAPHS BY (ABOVE RIGHT) FLIP SCHULKE/CORBIS,
(BELOW) BETTMANN/CORBIS

TC Celebrates Brown

TC IS CELEBRATING the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* with lectures, conferences and many other events throughout 2004.

In February "From Topeka to Harlem: The Spirit of *Brown* Lives on in New York City" featured Congressman Charles Rangel, Region 10 Superintendent Lucille Swarns and a conversation with actor, comedian and educator Bill Cosby. They spoke to 500 ninth-grade students from 17 high schools in Harlem's Region 10 at Riverside Church. Cosby exhorted students to appreciate the opportunity for an education and to make the best of it, "*Brown* is about people of all colors arguing about your future so you could have the opportunity to sit, study and move forward."

ON MARCH 30, Amy Stuart Wells, Professor of Sociology and Education, and scholars at UCLA released results of the first-ever study on the significance of school desegregation from the perspective of the students who lived it. "How Desegregation Changed Us: The Effects of Racially Mixed Schools on Students and Society," shows while students greatly benefited from interaction with members of other races, desegregation was limited to within integrated schools, and students tended to return to segregated neighborhoods after school.

A GRADUATE STUDENT conference exploring the impact of *Brown* on



Building Bridges

Dr. Coles, my mother and Barbara Henry," she said. "The cast and crew came together to do a piece of work we were proud of."

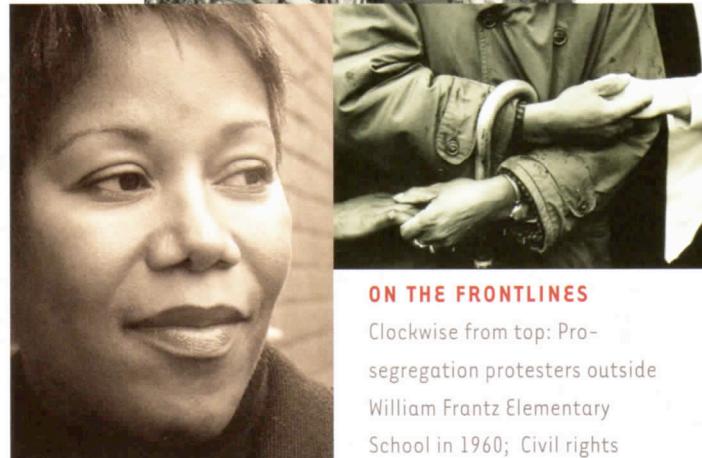
In 1999, Bridges wrote "Through My Eyes," a personal account of her unusual first grade experience. Asked if she'd consider writing a longer memoir, Bridges confessed she'd given the idea some thought, but added, "I feel there's still so much to be done. If I wrote them now I would need to write another one (later)."

A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO INTEGRATION

In the early 1990s, Bridges began refocusing her time and energy on the subjects of children, racism and integration, when she returned to William Frantz as a volunteer.

In 1999, her concern led to the creation of Ruby's Bridges, a foundation now working to have her first school designated a national monument, a move which would help bring much-needed funding to this inner-city school.

Today, William Frantz is segregated again, but now its entire student body is African-American. Bridges' goal, she explains, is to convert this under-funded and physically decaying institution into a model school, one children of all races would want to attend.



ON THE FRONTLINES

Clockwise from top: Pro-segregation protesters outside William Frantz Elementary School in 1960; Civil rights activists at a rally in Selma, Alabama; Desegregation pioneer Ruby Bridges in 2000.

Ruby's Bridges also is partnering with the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which has helped the foundation launch eight school partnerships in Los Angeles. This program links inner-city and suburban schools, offering children from different backgrounds a chance to spend time on each others' campuses, collaborate on volunteer projects and build greater understanding. Bridges is gradually expanding this program nationwide.

A VOICE FOR HARMONY

Bridges spends many of her weekdays traveling, speaking to school groups—especially young children—about her experience and the topic of racism. "Getting past racial

differences will come through our children. The majority of my time now is spent going to schools and sharing my story with kids. I try to help them understand that racism doesn't have any place in our hearts or in our minds."

Bridges remains optimistic and strong in her belief that school diversity is one key to wiping out racism. And she does see change. "It bothers me when I hear that integration failed," she said. "As far as I'm concerned, my efforts didn't fail." ♦

Celebrating Brown (continued)

American education and society was held on April 2. Coordinated by V.P. Franklin, Professor of History and Education, the conference presented various aspects of segregation that were affected by the decision. Papers presented at the conference will be considered

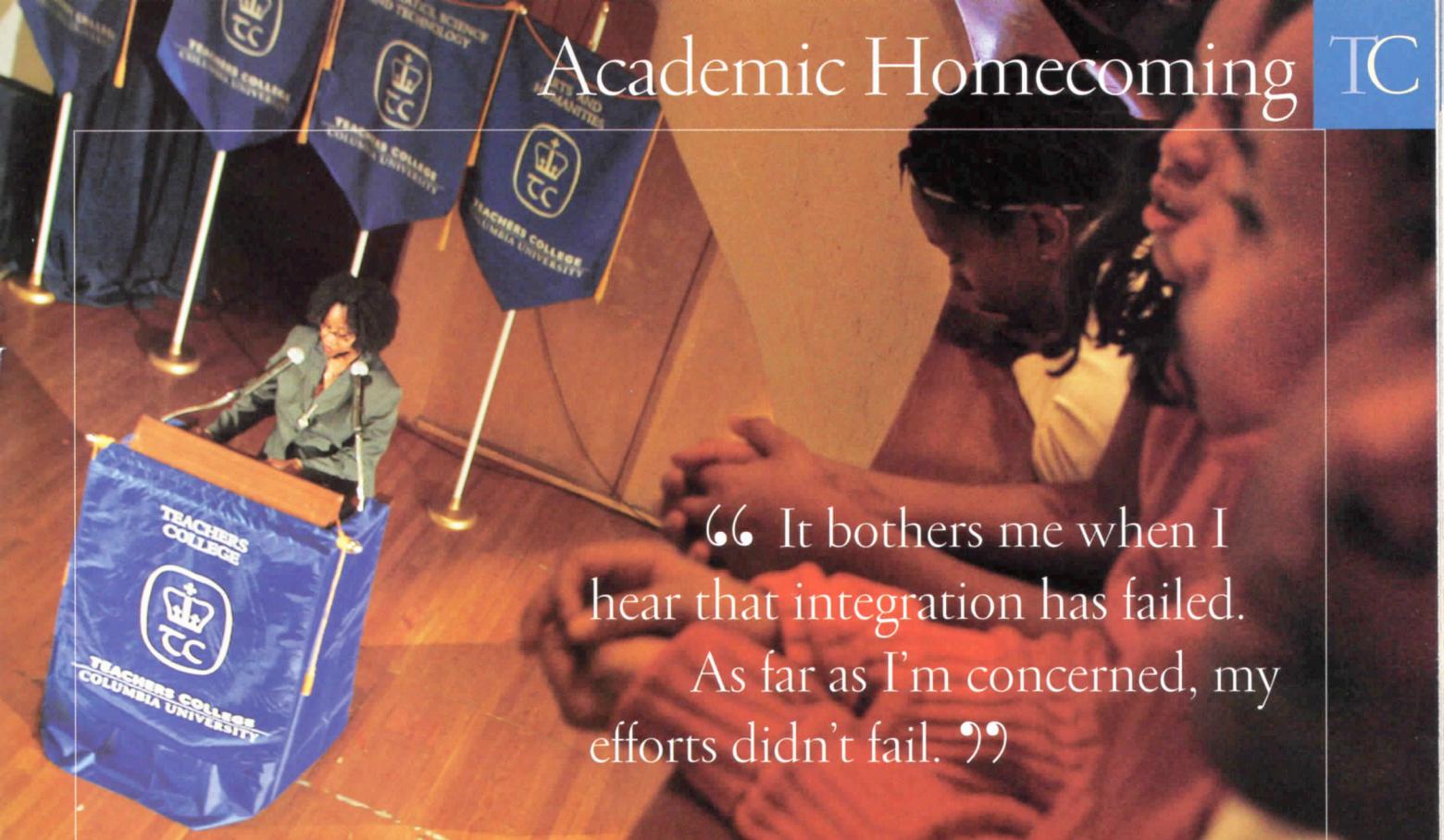
for a special issue of *The Journal of African American History* entitled "Brown v. Board of Education, 1954-2004: Fifty Years of Social and Educational Change in the United States."

ON MAY 1, *Teachers College Record* (TCR) published an online special issue commemorating *Brown*, which includes 30 articles written by activists, researchers and lawyers capturing the history of *Brown* as a social move-

ment and its legacy for those who still struggle to provide equal educational opportunities. TCR collaborated with New York University's Metro Center, which has been tracking the progress of *Brown* since 1974 and hosted a "Brown Plus 50" conference in New York in May.

For more information visit
www.tc.edu/tctoday

PHOTOGRAPHS (ABOVE) BETTMANN/CORBIS; (LEFT) SUZANNE PLUNKETT/AP WIDE WORLD PHOTOS; (RIGHT) FLIP SCHULKE/CORBIS



“It bothers me when I hear that integration has failed. As far as I’m concerned, my efforts didn’t fail.”

A Symbol of Change

*TC Homecoming contemplates 50 years of *Brown v. Board of Education**

Record crowds filled Horace Mann Auditorium on April 1 for the highlight of this year's highly successful homecoming celebration—a moving ceremony honoring civil rights pioneer Ruby Bridges Hall.

President Arthur Levine and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean Darlyne Bailey were on hand to introduce the honoree. Responding to a standing ovation, Bridges expressed appreciation to TC for its faith in her mission. “Thank you so much for helping me with my work across the country,” said the

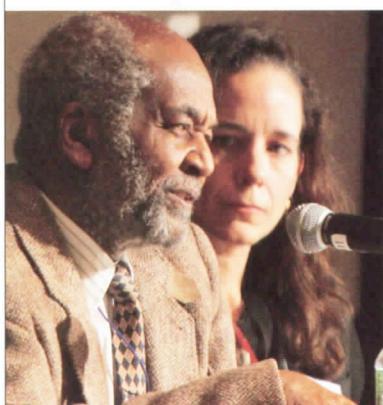
honoree, who continues to fight racism through her foundation, Ruby’s Bridges.

Attended by nearly 500 alumni, friends, trustees, faculty and elementary school children, Homecoming “really exceeded our expectations,” said Andre McKenzie, President-elect of TC’s alumni council.



After Bridges accepted her medal, John Merrow, Peabody Award-winning commentator and TC Trustee, moderated a discussion on the aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Panelists included Sybil Hampton, President of the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, who was the only African-American student to enter the 10th grade at Little Rock High School in 1959; Amy Stuart Wells, Professor of Educational Policy, who recently completed a study of adults who attended integrated schools in the 1970s; and Edmund Gordon, Director of the Institute of Urban and Minority Education at TC, who offered a reflective overview of the past 50 years.

Homecoming kicked off with a well-attended showcase featuring research, projects and initiatives from teachers and students, a popular venue introduced at the 2002 homecoming. ♦



HONORING BRIDGES

From top: Ruby Bridges Hall addresses Homecoming. Lisa Wright, Director of the Hollingsworth Center for the Study and Education of the Gifted, at the showcase. Panelists Edmund Gordon and Amy Stuart Wells.

Julia Sloan

With a globe-trotting schedule that takes her from Japan to Afghanistan, Julia Sloan gets a lot of work done on her way to somewhere else.

- ◆ "I spend considerably more time in airports and airplanes than at home," says Sloan, president of New York-based Sloan International, an executive development firm specializing in emerging and existing markets.
- ◆ Dividing her professional efforts between Fortune 100 companies and non-profit organizations (including the United Nations), she brings the same tenacious attitude to both. "My role is to ask questions that encourage executives to stretch their thinking to the point of aggravation, appreciation and eventually action." Her willingness to dig has earned Sloan the nickname "E," short for "The Excavator." ◆ This holder of a doctorate from TC in Organizational Leadership and Development also is channeling her global executive training expertise into two book projects—one of which offers insights into "developing strong managers in the world's least developed countries."

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PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN EMERSON