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SOCI 4210.001

April 12, 2023

Texarkana is a city best known for being half Texas and half Arkansas. As a Texarkanian, when people ask which side I am from, I have the fun fact of telling them “I’m from both” due to my mom living on the Arkansas side and my dad on the Texas side. This is unfortunately the only exciting thing Texarkana has to offer any teenager. As soon as you graduate, and can afford it, you’re gone and likely won’t be back if you can help it. However, it was not always like that. Texarkana started as a flourishing town built from the growing railroad industry with a thriving community. Any members of older generations can tell you bountiful stories from going downtown shopping to playing outrageous pranks at school. What Texarkana does not shed light on is its history of racial violence. For example, very few residents know of or will tell you the story of the riot at Texarkana College made up of 300 protestors preventing two African American students from attending their first day of class. This event highlights a moment in history where discrimination was encouraged and federal laws were deliberately ignored to maintain control and keep segregation at the front of decisions and education. Nor will they discuss how racially violent moments and mindsets of the past shape the school districts and city makeup today. In this paper, I will examine a piece of Texarkana history that has been purposefully forgotten and how it affects communities today through controlling images and reinforcing racist ideologies into institutions.

In 1954, segregation in schools was outlawed as a part of Brown vs. Board of Education. Many schools and communities in Texas, however, did not adhere to this immediately. Texarkana College was established as a public junior college in 1927(history). It was not until 1956 that two

African American students tested into the school system and were allowed to attend classes. However, on their first day, a riot of people showed up to block the two young students from entering the school. Signs were made saying things like “No mixed classes” (Texarkana (Jr)) and an effigy was reported to have been hung in a tree. At the front entrance of the school was painted “The N who crosses this line will die”. Two Texas Rangers were in attendance per the Texas Governor and were instructed to keep order and not to assist in integration. The two students had no chance against the crowd, and left in a taxi, not returning to the campus. (Texas State).

When researching for this paper, I was surprised to find this story on the Texarkana College riot, something I had never heard of happening. I have lived in Texarkana my whole life as most of my family members have, but I have never heard about this incident. I was taught about the Little Rock Nine in school, and even went on a history club field trip to Little Rock to learn about the events occurring only one year after the riot in Texarkana. However, I was never taught the synonymous story that happened in my own hometown. In fact, when asked, my grandparents who were near middle school and high school age when it occurred knew nothing of the subject either. How does a racial issue of this extent just disappear from the timeline? Additionally, when researching the story through the Texas History Portal, I could find very few articles from the time in or around Texarkana. I do not think this was by accident either. One news script from the KXAS-NBC 5 News Collection even censored the phrase “mob of whites” to a more digestible “crowd of whites” when describing the people at the riot showing just one instance where details were sugarcoated to make them appear less violent and not cause more talk than needed (*WBAP-TV*). By using controlling images, issues become less important or make the controlling party less villainized. Even a controlling image as small as changing mob to

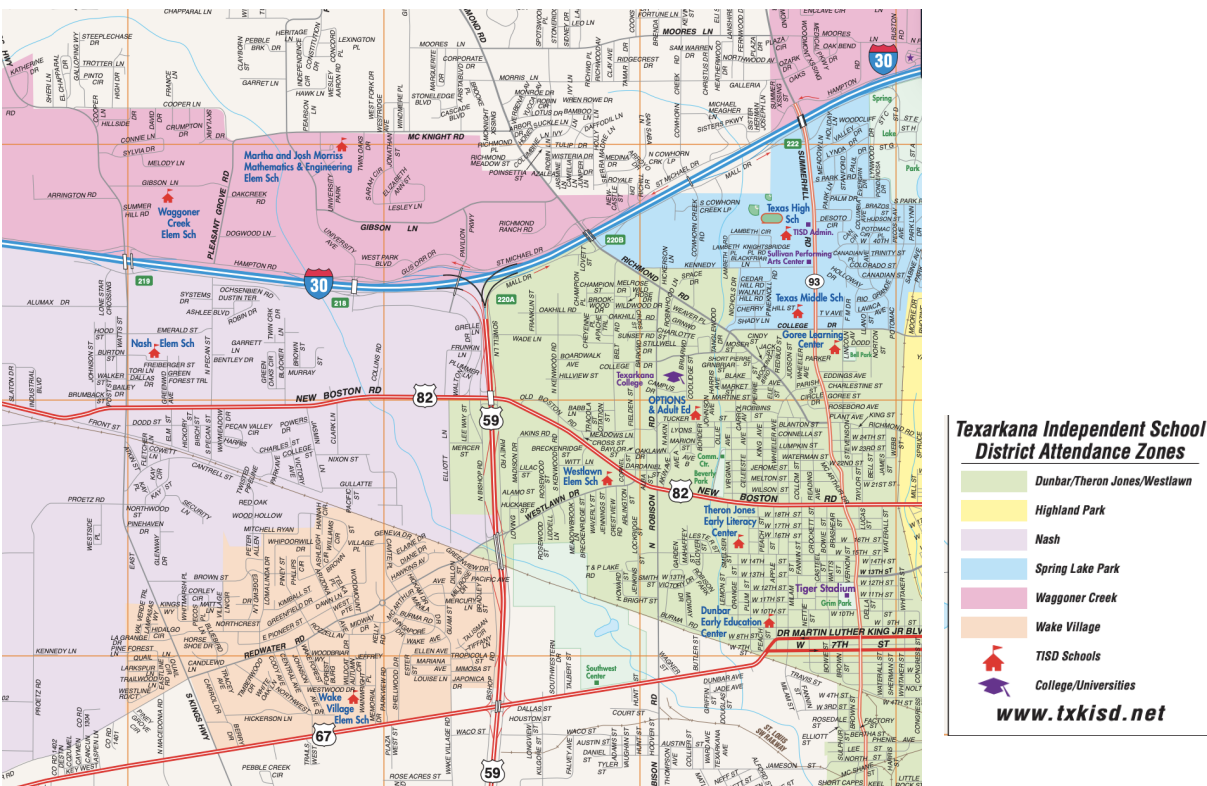
crowd adds to the eventual dissolution of the issue altogether and stagnant action to improve the circumstances. If this piece of Texarkana history was discussed more, maybe it would help break patterns of the past instead of allowing them free reign. By keeping instances of racial violence like this in the shadows, very little change gets made.

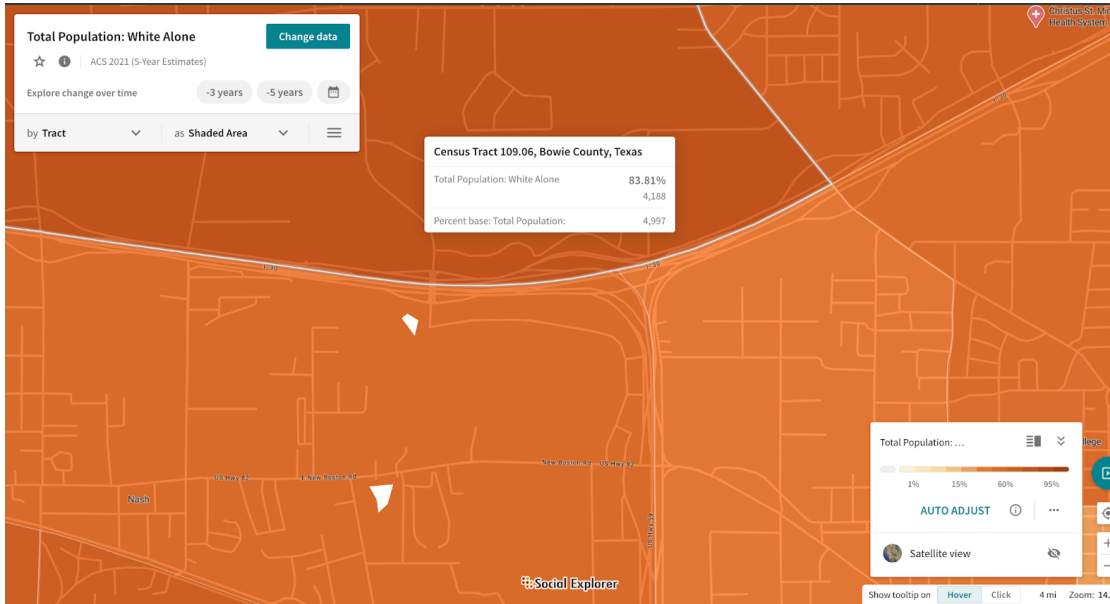
This issue among many others shape the makeup of Texarkana today. We can see clear racial divides between districts that affect which schools children attend. Many people speculate that when Texarkana's first high school was integrated, a white flight took place forming a separate high school, Pleasant Grove High School. "White flight" is defined as the process of White households leaving racially diverse neighborhoods (Boustan 419). We can even see divisions in districts' elementary schools. Even though schools began to segregate, White parents found ways to cheat the system. There are inherent effects of white flight and the schools created through it. Not only are minority populations disproportioned across schools, but the content taught at each school varies heavily. This can create unequal opportunities for children of color who must go to less-advantaged schools in their living district. There are continual, lasting effects of racial violence and disparities that formed the foundation of the Texarkana communities and school districts.

To further examine the divide between schools, we're going to focus on the largest school district, the Texarkana Independent School District (TISD) exclusively. TISD is comprised of eight elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. For elementary schools, the student populations range from 338 to 677. At the top of the "educational food chain" is Morris Elementary, formally known as Martha and Josh Morriss Mathematics and Engineering Elementary. For a student to be admitted into Morriss, they must go through a selection process as early as Kindergarten. This includes a scoring rubric affected by past test scores, attendance

records, behavior, resident status, and most interestingly, relation to anyone in the school. This means that students will get extra points on their rubric if they have a sibling currently in Morris or if they are children of any Morriss Elementary School full-time staff. This might not seem like an issue on the surface, but when kids move up to the middle school and then high school level, what elementary school you go to makes a difference. To show, Nash Elementary, another school in TISD, has a math proficiency score of 49% and a reading proficiency score of 47% (Nash). Morriss on the other hand has a math proficiency score of 92% and a reading proficiency score of 82% (Martha). Grasping math and reading foundations early on can be crucial to a successful education in middle and high school. The elementary school a child attends matters. Starting a division this early through selection processes only enhances the inequality students will face later down the road by hindering students from a more advanced education.

The maps below show the division of districts in TISD.





On the top, we can see how the TISD district attendance zones are split. On the bottom, we have a map showing the population percentage of Whites in Texarkana districts. Morriss Elementary falls in the “Waggoner Creek” attendance zone (also a more prestigious, and fairly new elementary school for TISD) and just so falls in an area made up of an 83.81% majority White population. For 2021, Morriss Elementary had a minority enrollment of 31.3% (Martha). In contrast, 2.8 miles away, Nash Elementary has a minority population of 68.5 % falling in an area and a White population of 49.12% (Nash). We can see by comparing the two maps that there is a clear divide between one side of the Interstate and the other. This could stem back to themes of white flight early in the '70s. Establishing new schools in predominantly White neighborhoods has lingering effects of unequal opportunities for children who live on the other side of town and aren't able to go to a school like Morriss. The additional points added to a child's score if they live in the distinct can hinder a child outside of the district from getting into higher-level schools such as Morriss. This can relate back to what Bell says in Racial Symbols about keeping “blacks pacified” (Bell). If there are elementary schools in districts with majority

Black populations for their children to attend, they have no need to be upset. If their child doesn't get into Morriss, it's not because the school is racist, they just did not score high enough. This is an easy out for the school system to maintain its White majority in places it wants. To address or attempt to correct an issue like this, making Morriss more accessible to attend could open doors for more students. Additionally, calling attention to the facts of lower test scores and majority populations in schools may open more conversations about what can be done to improve the trajectory of TISD elementary schools. School boards could set up improvement plans to improve proficiency scores helping kids across Texarkana.

In cities across the United States, there are enduring effects of racial inequalities dating back even further than the desegregation of schools in the 1950s. For Texarkana, the riot at Texarkana College highlights one instance of racial violence that can give us an inside look at how the Black communities were viewed and treated. The racist mindsets of the people protesting the two students from attending their first day of school have contributed to the split of demographics in Texarkana. We can see neighborhoods and districts that have a majority White population having better schools and opportunities for children as early as elementary school. Through controlling images, the riot was erased from the timeline, and the Texarkana record remains clean. However, the issue is far from over as we still see its effects through educational segregation that creates divisions in opportunities for equal, high-quality education.

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