Estudios Históricos

Cobertura periodística de la crisis de Central High (1957)

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Ciencia Nueva, revista de Historia y Política
Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Colombia
ISSN-e: 2539-2662
Periodicidad: Semestral
vol. 7, núm. 1, 2023
ciencianueva@utp.edu.co

Recepción: 18 Marzo 2022
Aprobación: 23 Mayo 2023

URL: http://portal.amelica.org/ameli/journal/619/6194709002/

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22517/25392662.25064

Resumen: El propósito de este artículo es analizar la experiencia periodística de la cobertura de la crisis de Central High de 1957 en la ciudad de Little Rock, capital del estado de Arkansas, Estados Unidos. Al contextualizar el evento, nos centraremos en la experiencia y memoria de una joven profesional del periódico *Arkansas Democrat*, Phyllis Brandon, quien cubrió los hechos de septiembre de 1957. Con este trabajo es posible comprender la diferencia de cobertura entre los dos principales medios de comunicación en el estado, destacando los efectos de dicha construcción y sus intereses.

Palabras clave: crisis de Central High, *Arkansas Gazette* y *Arkansas Democrat*, historia oral.

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to analyze the journalistic experience of the coverage of the Central High Crisis of 1957, in the city of Little Rock, capital of the state of Arkansas, in the United States. By contextualizing the event we will focus on the experience and memory of a young professional from the Arkansas Democrat newspaper, Phyllis Brandon, who covered the events of September 1957. With this work it is possible to understand the difference in coverage between the two main media outlets in the state, highlighting the effects of such construction and their interests.

Keywords: The Central High Crisis, Arkansas Gazette and Arkansas Democrat, Oral History.

Introduction

The Civil Rights movement is a dense period in the history of the United States, in the midst of the fight for equality there was a constant resistance. Integration was aimed at all social structures, but education was one of the most important fields in this fight. The year 1957 marked the beginning of an Integrated Teaching Practice in the Arkansas state capital, a region within the area known as the Deep South, in respect of the 1955 Brown v. Kansas Board of Education decision - which prevented racial segrega tion, in education[1]. Although some cities in the state had quickly adapted to this "new world", Little Rock had gone in the opposite direction, looking for ways to delay or prevent an Integration from taking place[2].

This context marked the lives of many people, both in favor and against these new policies and practices. Many of these voices were lost over time, in view

of the migration of protagonists from local history and the very effect of the event's temporal distance to our present. The absence of such narratives is what highlighted in this article. Some of the voices that were not included in the official history provide a way to comprehend the local reality of segregation and how the fight to end this practice unfolded.

In this article, we focus on some characters that were present at the events in Little Rock, specifically those that took place at Central High School, in 1957. We will have as a starting point the experience of Phyllis Brandon (1935 - 2020), when carrying out the journalistic coverage of the Crisis of Central High, for the *Arkansas Democrat.* The use of such a memory is not isolated, but integrated to a history that is in movement. As Susan Crane defines, rather than apart the remembrance connects the person to the historical world, allowing a deep meaning for historiography[3]. The use of memory as a historical resource grants the possibility of reflecting upon challenging problematics, such as racism. Also, a comparison is made between the coverage of the two main newspapers at the time; the *Arkansas Democrat and Arkansas Gazette*.

Phyllis Brandon's experience was reported and stored by *The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History*, through work based on oral and public history practices and methodologies, initially seeking to safeguard memories and, subsequently, seeking an approximation of these narratives with a public outside the academy[4 5]. From this point onwards, the text is divided into three stages: initially, a presentation of the Pryor Center archives and the way in which it was organized, as well as the way in which we will carry out our analysis. Next, a contextualization of the turmoil that occurred throughout the Integration period is presented, aiming to introduce the character Phyllis Brandon and her role as a journalist. Finally, the text will complement the coverage carried out by Phyllis Brandon, pointing out the form and difference of coverage – by the Arkansas press.

The Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History

The Pryor Center is the only Arkansas State agency to have an oral and visual history program. The mission of the Center is in collecting, preserving and sharing videos, images and audios relating to the history of Arkansas. The center's work has a statewide scope through its work in the 75 counties that make up Arkansas and sometimes also going beyond the borders of the state itself. The great mission of the center can be "summarized" as that of documenting and safeguarding the cultural and historical heritage of Arkansas, through the collection of interviews, audios and images from the past - with the great objective to serve as instruments for students, teachers, researchers and the general public know its past, its history.

Considering that it is a History Center built with a focus on the formation of an oral history program, the mission of the professionals at this center is to collect spoken memories. The construction of the collection is developed from the recording of interviews with the most varied social strata, all with a connection to the history of Arkansas. By building a collection of memories, the Pryor Center's goal is to preserve a multiple past in perpetuity. All recordings

and materials produced by the Pryor Center on Arkansas history and culture are organized, cataloged, and archived on the center's website, mentioned above.

Currently, there are 13 projects under development by the different professionals that make up the Pryor Center team, as well as by researchers who use the space and tools offered here. The focus of these thirteen projects is to offer an overview of the experience of the people who participated in the construction of Arkansas history, in its different moments and from their varied experiences. Of the 13 projects that permeate the center's work, we will use the Arkansas Memories Project as a central resource. This project, today, has a collection of 102 interviews, with the most diverse people and on the most diverse subjects (through the speeches it would be possible to work with the history of sport, genres, literature, civil rights, among many other possibilities). The intention behind the creation of this center was that the experiences from the past wouldn't be forgotten in the future, being shared with the communities of the state and beyond. In such a way, combining with the statement of the historian David Glassberg, this center of oral and visual history aims, by adding research and public seeks to

> understand the individual meanings found in the past and their artifacts. While professional historians are talking about having an interpretation of history, the audience is talking about having a sense of history, a perspective on the past as the core of who they are and the places that matter to them[6].

That is, the objective of oral and public history practices is guided by the understanding of what the past meant to people who lived it, as they remember it, allowing a further analysis of this memory, inserted in its historical time, as we propose here[7]. The limitations when using such methodology is the oblivion of the experience due the sands of time. Oral history is an impressive tool to connect the public with the making of history, but it is necessary to work with attention to avoid a complete acceptance and misuse of information. Here, the visual history is presented through the voice of people who, reflecting upon the past add commentary to the problem of racism in 1950s Arkansas.

Thomas Cauvin commented that public history has three main focuses: the communication of history beyond academia, public participation, and the application of the historical method to everyday themes[8]. These three guidelines are the ones used by the Pryor Center in the search for the development of a connection between academia and non-historians. The objective of the center, by storing such materials, is to: 1) propose debates and show the historiographical practice to the community and 2) enable a digital collection for the development of historical research[9].

Working with the methodology of oral history, the center enables us to focus on local history, a strategy that allows us to comprehend the role of *regular* people for the constructions of an official history. Furthermore, corroborating with Alessandro Portelli[10], we understand that memory and narrative are not just a repository of knowledge experienced and narrated through an interview. Based on this understanding, the value of oral history is understood as relating memory to the context, including the space occupied by the individual, their way of acting and the forces imposed on them. The construction of a research based on oral history is enriched by the perspective that even having a central fact there is no

equal perspective in relation to it, the narrative may be similar, the objective and the interest, however, the action will always be characteristic of the individual.

It has already been stated that the "oral history interview is undoubtedly contingent – a unique moment, with unique circumstances, that produces that unique result, as happens with many documents and sources in history"[11]. From this perspective, to enter the space of oral history and journalistic experience, there is a need to understand the context our character entered, in order to reflect on what the coverage of the event meant, as well as the perspective employed by the *Arkansas Democrat*.

The context of the Central High Crisis and the press coverage by Phyllis Brandon

Brown vs. Kansas Board of Education was the official end of segregation in the educational space, however this policy was not enforced without resistance. The Central High Crisis, for the United States, made the state of Arkansas become the great symbol of prejudice and racial intolerance that took part in the southern states and their communities during the civil movements, linked to education, throughout the 1950s. As Pierre Melandri states, the southerners initially reacted with moderation to the decision of the Supreme Court of Justice, but they could not "hide the extent of their anger when they discovered that, far from ignoring it, their own district judges bowed to the new text."[12] As stated, Governor Orval Faubus was opposed to allowing Little Rock City schools to become integrated. Melandri adds in his book that this influenced the decision of President Eisenhower who signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957[13].

Arkansas, like most southern states, reflected the existence and perpetuation of the Jim Crow Laws and the perpetuation of segregation. In this sense, taking advantage of some interpretative openings that the law allowed, state legislators, as well as many municipalities, chose to carry out a lengthy process in the search of Integration, as well as the construction of a series of obstacles for its effective realization[14]. Arkansas was one of the most widely covered and symbolic moments in the history of racism and segregation in the United States . By focusing in Arkansas's history it is possible to reflect upon the resistance to Integration, at the same time understanding how was the fight directed to general civil rights.

The great focus of this resistance was centered on the city of Little Rock in one of the main schools in the region: Central High School. As policies advanced and pressure for integration increased, anti-integration organizations such as the League of Mothers of Central High School began to emerge that sought to "mobilize local opposition against desegregation, condemning integration as a threat to public order and the well-being of whites and spreading rumors that armed students would turn the school into a battleground"[15]. As was stated:

> The desegregation plan, proposed by the State of Arkansas, would start in 1956 and would have, in its planning, the end of school segregation only sometime after 1963, as indicated by John Kirk, when analyzing the Blossom Plan (2007). The great problem of the Supreme Court decision in 1954 is that, by determining, with the

> weight of the law, the end of segregation in schools, it ignored the need to define a time, a deadline, for this to actually happen[16].

It was taking advantage of this failure that those involved with the new Arkansas education plan proposed to build a desegregation policy that would only start in 1957 and from a single school: Central High School. In this context, the governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, summoned the state National Guard to be present at the protests. His aim was the protection and safeguard of those protesting desegregation and not the nine young children who would join the school. Faubus stated that there would be an imminent wave of violence, given the existence of both opponents of Integration and those who were pro Integration. As Karen Anderson points out, "their claims shifted the responsibility for the possibility of violence to blacks and young whites, when, in fact, the real threats came from white adults"[17]. Also, the historian adds that "Faubus, however, claimed that white adults who organized to protest integration operated in the realm of legitimate and peaceful protest"[18]. If protests did occur, it would not be the fault of the white crowd, but of the few African Americans who accompanied the entrance of the "Little Rock nine" into Central High. The perspective of one of the nine first black students at Central in in comparison with the "official" narrative, as intended by Governor Faubus provides a powerful contrast at this point. As then-student Elizabeth Eckford, recalls, the protesters.

> they were moving closer and closer [to us] ... Someone started screaming... I was trying to find a friendly face somewhere in the crowd – someone who could help me. I looked at a lady and she looked friendly, but when I looked at her again, she spat at me[19].

At this point, it is necessary to highlight the aggressions suffered by the first ones who tried to overcome the system. The fight wasn't easy, and we can state with absolute certainty that it wasn't a fast change. The assault against Integration were physical and psychological, aiming to the young people who were having a new opportunity. In this scenario, the comprehension of how the media cover this moment is fundamental. It was into this context that Phyllis Brandon inserted herself. She was a young professional from the Arkansas Democrat and a journalism student at Arkansas University, when covering the events that were happening in Little Rock. The life summary, on the Pryor Center website, referring to her informs that:

> Phyllis Louise Dillaha Brandon was born on July 31, 1935, in Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas. Brandon earned a degree in journalism from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, where she was associate editor of the student newspaper, the Arkansas Traveler. Upon graduation she worked for the Arkansas Democrat and the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission. In 1974 Brandon, who was then president of the Little Rock PTA Council, formed a school lunch committee that uncovered a price-fixing scheme among the dairies providing milk for local school lunches. Her discovery of her and subsequent actions of her led to state and federal litigation, which resulted in an antitrust settlement that made Arkansas history. Brandon passed away on January 11, 2020[20].

From this short description, it is possible to see how Phyllis Brandon had a life marked by the great effervescence of the 20th century, having been born in

the midst of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal policies and having grown up during World War II and the Cold War. But, more than these large-scale events, her young life and professional training coincide with the period of civil movements and the struggle for greater equality between people, regardless of their ethnicity or gender.

The first encouragement to her training as a journalist came in her High School, from a dynamic practice in his English class, as she narrates in her interview on November 20, 2009, conducted by Scott Lunsford, professional from the Pryor Center. In this context, she began to develop a practice of journalistic writing, since then working with the school newspaper (Central High), having won an award for such practice in the late 1940s. As Phyllis herself indicates, that was the early encouragement to bring news and information that led her to journalism.

Phyllis Brandon grew up and was educated during the period when the segregation policies started to be more attacked and diminished, from the action of the NAACP. As she reports in her interview:

> PB: Mh-hmm. I loved Little Rock High School because it was the only high school for white students only. So, I knew every white person in town, you know. But yes.
>
> SL: So, it seemed common, you know, that African Americans would be on the porch and whites would be down there, in movie theaters? Was there a - have you ever - were you ever aware of any inequalities that were growing?
>
> PB: Well, yes, and I remember the black and white drinking from the drinking fountains at Pfeiffer's department store. I was aware of that, but, I guess, I didn't think it was something I could do anything about. But, you know, I've always been nice to African American people. I remember taking a class with a black person at university, and he was smarter than me, which was very embarrassing for me. Do you know[21].

With this speech, we understand better what the educational environment of our character was. Racism was something intrinsic and, for many people, it was something so "natural" that it was little noticed. As Phyllis indicates throughout her narrative, it was a period when children and young people were encouraged to avoid mixing, however superficial, with "different" people. An interesting point in her narrative is that after her schooling, she had the opportunity to enter the University of Arkansas (in 1953) and that, even in this context of segregation, the university structure was beginning to break with this horizon of "separate, but equals".

Phyllis Brandon graduated in late 1956, returning to Little Rock and joining the *Arkansas Democrat* as a reporter. It is important to clarify that the state of Arkansas had, at the time, two statewide newspapers: the *Arkansas Democrat* and the Arkansas Gazette. The first had and currently still maintains a more conservative perspective of society, while the second, which went bankrupt and was merged with the *Arkansas Democrat* in 1991, had a progressive liberal strand, which brought a differentiated view on issues, both from the state and at the national and international level.

The construction of the *Arkansas Democrat* editorial can be seen, from the analysis of historian Paula Alonso, as a loaded vehicle and booster of values of a certain elite. In such a context, this newspaper "was more than an instrument for making politics, it had as its main objective the construction of 'the political', where the ideologies with which they intended to articulate the social,

economic and political world were created and edited". In other words, from this perspective, in the 1950s, the *Arkansas Democrat* represented a sociopolitical spectrum that, in line with the policies and intentions of Governor Orval Faubus, did not look favorably upon Integration, understanding it as a major and serious rupture with the values of society at that time.

Based on Paula Alonso's reflections on the press, we noted that the Democrats perceived themselves as indispensable for the narration of events, aiming to "guides, mold and educate", in light of society's main values[22]. However, the problem of such a posture is to generate a unifocal view of situations that present multiple characters and values, the barrier between "us" and "them", such practice is something that undermines the very understanding of events and social changes.

The newspaper's conservatism was found in its own staff, as our character Phyllis Brandon indicates, when asked about how many women reporters there were in the newspaper: she confirms that there was just one other young woman and herself. It was in this context that, from the movement that would generate the integration at Central High, the Democrat editors decided to send Phyllis to cover the movement at the school, in late September 1957, since "they weren't letting reporters [to be around] the school, [...] as I looked so young, I took some books and went there, [...]"[23]. In other words, the newspaper saw the possibility presented by sending its reporter disguised as a student, to bring a vision of what was happening within the school environment, but "the newspaper editors did not think that blacks would show up that day and they took them there late"[24]. The perception of the journal is important, since it marks the memory of Phyllis Brandon while covering the Crisis. According to Brandon, when she got there.

> T]hey had guards at every door, and the students who had left couldn't come back. And so I went and said, 'I can't... You know... I can't go to my locker?' And they said, 'Nobody can come in.' So I stayed and covered the crowd, which was awesome. They were, you know, screaming and going on. And then I walked into that gas station, right around the corner from Central High. And I got in line to tell my story. And the people in the queue said, "Who are you with?" And I said, "I'm with the Democrat." And they said, "Well, it's a good thing. If you were with the Gazette, we wouldn't allow you to use the phone." you know, this was happening[25].

The crowd that Phyllis refers to was made up of those people who opposed segregation and who went to Central High to prevent the first young African-American students from entering the school. The coverage of this crowd, we suppose, was richer than the perception of the internal reality of this school space, since it was possible to see people who were opposed to this new policy and its practice. But, more than that, from the Phyllis interview we noticed a popular censorship of the media that were covering the event at Central High. The Gazette's progressive character would have prevented Phyllis Brandon from using the telephone, while the Democrat's conservatism generated a certain security for the young woman, when entering the telephone booth to report on the day's events.

The day the Arkansas National Guard was removed and the Little Rock police began protecting the school's area, on September 20, 1957, led to the following event, as Phyllis recounts:

> the people guarding the school that day were Little Rock cops. And these people in the crowd would say, you know, to the cops, "You're one of us. Throw your badge on the ground and come here." And one of them did. One of them did. And then the crowd was so rebellious that day that they pulled out the blacks. And then that's when Eisenhower sent in the troops and escorted the blacks to their classes and made sure everything was semi-normal[26].

Thus, we can see how a large portion of the population had aversion to Integration. The social imaginary constructed for the period prevented the understanding of the possibility of ethnic-racial mixtures. Shockingly, but not far from the reality of the context, it is possible to see that the forms of security themselves were not a guarantee of protection for those first nine African-American students who would join Central High School in its integration process. President Eisenhower's action to nationalize the Arkansas National Guard and ensure the protection and entry of these young people is what allowed this policy to be put into practice in the state. Central High coverage denotes this challenging environment towards a political change in the segregated South. The Arkansas Democrat posture demonstrates that what mattered was not the possibility of Integration; or even the opposing crowd that almost attacked the first nine African-American students. The coverage of the Arkansas Democrat tried to indicate the imposition of the Federal government over a State legislation. The newspaper was connecting the 1950s with the Reconstruction past, where the South was regulated by the North[27]. Eisenhower, by enforcing integration – allegedly – was acting against Southern interests. The Arkansas Democrat decided for this history, instead of the positive impact of Integration.

The violence that took place and its coverage by the young Phyllis Brandon happened on a Friday. In this context of confrontation and struggle against change, the two state newspapers (the following week, in which Eisenhower sent national troops to confirm Integration) sought to either reinforce the importance of Integration or point out "a brutality" on the part of the government central. From two different perspectives, both newspapers sought to convey what Phyllis Brandon experienced and only one of the two supported a change in social structures.

Coverage by the *Arkansas Gazette and the Arkansas Democrat*

Throughout the narrative it became clear that, within the state scenario, there were two newspapers with the greatest circulation, which could spread opinions and perspectives on a larger scale. The oldest of these newspapers was the Gazette, founded by William Woodruff in 1819 "in the Arkansas Post, a settlement near the convergence of the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers. Two years later, the Gazette's printing and office were transferred to Arkansas' capital. The Gazette was published in Little Rock from 1821 until 1991"[28]. As Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff point out in their book The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Right Struggle and the Awakening of a Nation[29], the paper's then owner and editor-in-chief (since 1902) John Netherland Heiskell (1872-1872), placed the newspaper in a position of questioning the segregationist measures, pointing out the character of police violence and the restriction of life for African-Americans. I t is important to note that the *Arkansas Gazette* can be viewed

as an active participant in the political system. The newspaper was perceived as an "actor of the political system," meaning that "it [was] considered to be a social actor placed in conflicting relationships with other actors and specialized in the production and public communication of stories and comments," exploring "existing conflicts between actors from that and other political systems"[30]. The *Arkansas Gazette* had its own agency and with that tried to diffuse its values and practices among the readers.

In other words, the newspaper is an integral part of the political world – an influencing factor, whether for its local, state or national interests. The exposure of conflicts tends to lead to a classic dichotomy between "good" and "bad", "right" and "wrong." However, more than that, there is a reflexive charge on the current context, this movement would be in direction of a social change or immutability. Thus, "as an interest group, [newspapers] can be direct participants in internal conflicts, in conflicts with their peers and with other mass media, and in conflicts with any other social actor"[31].

In this regard, when reflecting on the context of the first six decades of the US 20th century, we realize that the *Arkansas Gazette* has positioned itself against the segregation policies, marked by the value of "separate but equal". By covering events and pointing to the reality of the facts, whether by indicating excessive police violence or the carrying out of demonstrations and confrontations of aggression against the African-American population, the newspaper had a discourse of political-social engagement, albeit in a context in which polarization had not yet reached its peak. This climactic point was reached in the issue of school integration, from the decision of Brown Vs Kansas Board of Education, in 1955.

As Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff commented, if "the Gazette insisted on riding the wave of desegregation, it would ride alone, probably at a high cost"[32]. From this perspective, it is important to emphasize that this was not an isolated problem for this Arkansas newspaper, but widespread throughout the country, with regard to opposition and exclusion from the media that confronted the status quo. In an interview conducted by the Pryor Center, with the *Arkansas Gazette Project*, with reporter Roy Redd (1930-2017), there was an indication that throughout the Central High Crisis the Gazette imposed the idea and perception of an opposition newspaper, a liar and who attacked those who didn't want change. As Redd indicated, Governor Orval Faubus himself instilled in the newspaper a perspective of being the bearer of lies:

> We were in a field on the outskirts of town, far from homes and businesses. Just an isolated spot out there. Faubus made a point of denouncing the Arkansas Gazette as he did in every speech, [calling] Ashmore by name, and then he said, "There's a Gazette reporter here in the crowd!" --- The implication is that he was there to tell more lies. He didn't put it that way, but I could see people turning around and looking at me. It was a very threatening situation. Frankly, I didn't want to be there with a bunch of that crowd. I did not know what to do. I stayed until everyone else was gone. It was just me, Faubus and his "supporters" - half a dozen boys[33].

With this, we perceive the climate of oppression that was created against the *Gazette* by instilling a sense of importance regarding the Integration of Education, as determined by the Supreme Court. The person cited by Faubus, Harry Ashmore, was the executive editor of the *Gazette* who, because of his

engagement in civil movements, was then indicated as the worst thing there could be on the political spectrum of the 1950s: communist. In such a way, the political aggression suffered by the newspaper ranged from the way the news was placed to the perspective of diminishing and attacking the people behind the information and its form of exposure. In September 1957, it is possible to affirm that a large number of journalists from Little Rock and the state of Arkansas were looking for information and different ways to cover the issue of Integration and actions in favor and against segregation policies.

In the 1950s local newspapers in the South had one order of the day: constant coverage of events connected with desegregation actions. The goal was to cover the new policies, but also how people were reacting to changes. It was in this respect that the two great Arkansas newspapers began to be associated with two distinct publics and policies. From this perspective, as stated previously by Héctor Borrat, the newspaper cannot be understood as "just a narrator, but also a commentator; and placed in conflict situations, it can sometimes have a much more intense involvement than that of others: it can be the main party in the conflict"[34]. That is, even though in the case of the Gazette and the Democrat they were communicators of the conflict, both became a model of popular aspirations, whether in opposition or in favor of the practice of school integration. Newspaper intend role was to sell, in order to create profit, they need to be close to their readers' interests. In order to achieve such a goal, journalists would issue value judgments, pondering the successes and mistakes of Orval Faubus' actions. Through Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff it is possible to realize that:

> the editorial pages of both newspapers were consumed by the issue. The Gazette, which added space for letters and printed up to twenty-five [letters] in a few days, explained to its readers that the bias of its published letters was against Faubus because those were the letters it received. The Democrat mostly published pro-Faubus letters because that was the general bias in their mailbox. Both had supported Brown's decision in 1954. Before school opening day, both had supported the desegregation plan; the Democrat called it "exceptional favourable". But the Gazette and the Democrat were quickly perceived as representing two distinct and opposing camps[35].

In other words, here we see a question of the audience that formatted the content and engagement that was perceived in the newspaper. If *Gazette* readers sent opinions against the Faubus government and its defense of segregation, those in the *Democrat* seemed to be going in the opposite direction. Such a move would then have generated a greater framing of the latter as pro-Faubus and his policies, while the former would be linked to a fierce opposition. It was in this context that, as Rex Nelson of the Mississippi Delta Regional Authority, pointed out, with regard to coverage of the Central Crisis, there was a reversal in the preference for newspapers at the state level. In that regard, Nelson stated that "even as an evening paper, the Democrat briefly surpassed the morning Gazette in circulation after the 1957 desegregation of Little Rock Central High School" – which provides a hint of the conservative character of most of its consumers[36].

Nelson adds in his narrative that despite the fact that the *Arkansas Gazette* won two Pulitzer Prizes in 1958, "many Arkansas residents were outraged by opposition to Governor Orval Faubus and his policies, switching to the

Democrat"[37]. As Donna Stephens commented, with the Gazette's stance of putting itself in opposition to Faubus' actions, it was very costly. The newspaper's circulation plummeted from 100,000 units to 80,000, a loss of 20%, while many "local businesses abandoned advertising, and the *Gazette* was subject to threats and intimidation[38]. A local segregationist group, the Capital Citizens Council, organized a boycott against these companies, sending an anonymous letter to 1,500 local traders"[39]. In other words, the *Gazette* became the tool of an opposition, being attacked by those who did not believe in the need for an end to segregationist policies. In this scenario the *Arkansas Democrat* rose as the "government" newspaper, by an alignment that dismissed the prior support of Integration, until September 1957.

The *Democrat* was constituted from the post-Civil War period, being made official in 1878, but it gained a new look and became competitive with the *Gazette* only in 1926. The *Democrat's* evening character was a point that for a long time relegated it to a secondary role as an Arkansas news agency, as Donna Stephens (2012) pointed out, the major turnaround and rise of this newspaper came from its coverage of events in Little Rock in 1957. As Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff points out, the *Democrat* went in a completely opposite direction to the Gazette, from the trigger of the crisis in early September 1957. This direction follow desegregation plan, when:

> The Democrat modified its earlier thinking. While the Gazette found opportunity to criticize Faubus, the Democrat drifted, after a period in which it briefly sounded as if lost, to the field of states' rights in the face of federal imposition. On its news pages, the Democrat was more inclined to publish rumors of hysteria, violence and the potential for both, stories sometimes planted by Faubus forces to justify the deployment of the National Guard [preventing and guarding Central's entry High]. But the Democrat has not shied away from history entirely[40].

Thus, we notice the alternation of the newspaper's internal publication policy. There was no abandonment of the subject, but rather an alignment with Faubus' policies and practices was assumed. By adapting and accepting the publication of "rumors of hysteria and violence", the newspaper was more open to a perception of possible social chaos, arising from desegregation, than for the importance of Integration and its social benefits. In this way, this situation is in line with Héctor Borrat's statement that "the newspaper carries out its routine practices and unfolds its specific strategies in the channels defined by its global profit and influence strategy"[41]. In other words, to expand its influence, the *Democrat* found itself inclined to support and get closer to the political character of Faubus, in order to become a reference, making it possible to increase its profit. Roberts and Klibanoff corroborate this perspective of alignment by complementing their narrative indicating that:

> through the newspaper's longtime political writer, George Douthit, the Democrat had access to Faubus. When the crisis began, Douthit wrote a story portraying Faubus as a heroic figure working under enormous stress. On the first Sunday after classes opened, the Democrat published the first of three exclusive interviews with Faubus. Another Democrat exclusive during the first week showed Faubus inside the Governor's Mansion running the government with calm and great self-confidence. The *Democrat* also wrote an article about a young Dutch girl who was going to school in Arkansas and who wanted to meet Faubus. She had heard a lot of negative things

> about him in the European press, the article said, and she wanted to see for herself if he was as bad as he was portrayed. The story then provided a remarkable little detail: the Dutch girl was staying at the home of a Little Rock family: that of *Democrat* political writer George Douthit. Ashmore felt that the *Democrat* was captivating the governor and popular opinion, capitalizing on the Gazette's decision to go down the unpopular path and getting fat on the *Gazette's blood*. *Gazette* and Ashmore paid a price for their aggressive coverage and editorials. They became as much a target as the nine black students, and certainly a more accessible one[42].

Through this analysis of the way the *Democrat* exposed it's news, we can understand what Phyllis Brandon meant by a certain delay in covering certain events. The rush for being in the moment of action, of confrontation, did not exist, because from the perspective that "the rumors of violence and hysteria" were true, the newspaper could indicate that it was protecting its employees. Alignment with Faubus' policies not only portrays a socio-political stance, but also denotes an economic alignment – based on what would be the best way to ensure the success of the serials and its ascension vis-à-vis its direct competitor.

The excerpt above portrays the way in which the *Democrat* sought to build its rise: through praising the state leader. The newspaper would not need to issue a value judgment on the issue of Integration, but by issuing a perspective so favorable to Orval Faubus it generated an alignment by association, something that fostered greater acceptance than the constant attack coming from the Gazette. As Phyllis Brandon mentioned, simply being associated with this vehicle could be synonymous with assaults and attacks. For the segregationist crowds, this was the story that instigated and supported an ethnic racial mixture that was impossible from the racist perspective of the White Supremacists that surrounded Central High.

The perspective of aggression portrayed by Brandon is corroborated in this quote by Roberts and Klibanoff, since there is a reinforcement of the notion of restriction and isolation that was imposed on the *Gazette*. As the authors pointed out, the newspaper and its professionals were attacked with as much force as the crowd who attacked the first nine young African-Americans who would join Central High. The nine from Little High were exposed when they arrived at school, but a security system was built to protect them – but from the newspaper's perspective, their exposure did not guarantee a minimum margin of safety.

In this sense, the *Arkansas Democrat* took advantage of this context to then build its own editorial, in which, while not denying the events that were taking place, it looked for a narrative that would make it the number one choice for the community. As Borrat indicated: "the analysis of the journalistic trajectory and the political languages that are articulated in it allow us to trace in the texts important indications of the newspaper's decisions in terms of excluding, inculcating and prioritizing the actors and sources of information policy"[43]. With that in mind, added to Phyllis Brandon's narrative, we indicate the degree of interest behind the *Democrat's* actions – not an interest in the dissemination of information as a whole, but an interest that was in the popular interest and which, by linking- if, in the image and policy of Faubus, it became a widely accepted voice, as if representing "the central government". Going in the opposite direction, the *Gazette* committed itself to a political narrative of opposition to the state governor and his policies for maintaining segregation, but it was this

action that undermined its representativeness and wide access in the turbulent context of civil movements.

Final Considerations

The analysis carried out here originated from a collection of oral and visual histories that, by seeking the connection of practical history with individuals, allows for an understanding of events through the actions of "small" individuals, within macro events. It was from the understanding of the Pryor Center's goals, added to the historical context of the chaotic year of 1957, that the experience of Phyllis Brandon as a reporter for the *Arkansas Democrat* was understood.

It should be noted that, even though she, as a person, had her perceptions, she should remain in line with the perceptions and editorial guidelines of her serials. It is based on Brandon's experience that an attempt was made to understand the dispute over narratives between the *Arkansas Gazette* and *Democrat*, who took opposing positions, with similar intentions: to expand their diffusion and be the main vehicle of communication in the state. As pointed out by Maurice Mouillaud:

> putting it into visibility was not just a being or a doing; it is not simply infinitive, it contains modalities of power and duty. It indicates a possible, double sense of capacity and authorization. Information is what is possible and what is legitimate to show, but also what we should know, what is marked to be perceived[44].

In other words, the newspaper and its editorial board choose the guide that best attracted the reader, covering it in a way that meets their interests. Information never loses its value but is tailored in a way that reinforces what the public should know and what aspects should be perceived. The dispute between *Gazette* and *Democrat* demonstrates and illustrates this dispute of narratives, something that, added to the popular heat, ended up affecting the profession itself, as indicated in the interview by Phyllis Brandon.

Here we point out the problematic of the way in which it was chosen to narrate the events of Central High, involved in the context of civil movements. According to an official story, few of the local personalities who are fighting for integration have been overshadowed. At the same time, for commercial interests, one newspaper supplanted the other, not for wide coverage, but for one that served certain interests. As such, there is a constant need to review our history, the interests that underlie them and, above all, to get to know the voices that played active roles, regardless of how small, in order to broaden our perceptions.

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Notas

1 The region defined as South, according to the geography of the United States, and is composed of the following states - which during the Civil War chose to separate from the union: Alabama, Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia. The deep south (Deep South) would be considered as the southern region of the interior of the states of Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana and Tennessee

2 This case was a sum of actions aimed at the issue of overcoming school segregation, it would have been added to experiences in North Carolina, Virginia, Delaware and

Washington D.C. The name of the case refers to the events in the city of Topeka, Kansas, in 1951, where a struggle continued that would name the series of movements that sought equal access to education, as well as the end of segregation, in general, but with a main focus on education systems, the case of Brown v. Kansas Educational System. In 1952, when the Supreme Court sought to hear and unite all cases of segregation in the education system, in the case of Brown v. Kansas Educational System, a great expectation was created, due to the duality of the situation: either the court would break with a policy that allowed segregation or it would be lenient and allow the continuity of such practice. The national judiciary spent a year discussing the issue, generating uncertainty regarding the issue - in October 1953 the then Chief Justice Fred Vinson died, and then sworn in as Chief Justice, the former governor of California, Earl Warren who, in 1954, reached a unanimous verdict. The Supreme Court decision was delivered on May 17, 1954, by Earl Warren who sought a unanimous vote against the perpetuation of segregationist practices in the education system. In his decision, it is possible to note the opposition to policies that reaffirmed the values of "separate but equal": [...] The segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a harmful effect on colored children. The impact is even greater when such a practice is sanctioned by law, as the policy of separate races is normally interpreted as denoting the inferiority of Black communities... [...] Any view contrary to this perspective is rejected[...] We conclude that in the sphere of public education the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. An education in separate institutions is inherently unequal". (Supreme Court of the United States, Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)). This speech was taken from the Supreme Court decision, available at: http://objectofhistory.org/objects/show/lunchcounter/90, accessed on: September 08, 2021

3 Susan Crane, "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory", *The American Historical Review* 102, n.o 5 (1997), 49.

4 Don Harrell, *A Pryor Commitment: The Autobiography of David Pryor* (Little Rock: Butler Center Books, 2008)

5 David Pryor was born in 1934, in Camden, Arkansas - the son of a family involved in commerce, on the father's side, and political and social movements, on the mother's side. While studying law at the University of Arkansas, he lived with the period of Governor Orval Faubus (1910 - 1994) and his tense government in the mid-1950s, a time when movements against segregation policies were taking place. that in the 1960s, in his first state legislature (for the Democratic party) he lived with Faubus' attempt to ignore the measures that led to the end of segregation as a social policy. In 1966 he was elected to the US House of Representatives, and in 1975 he became the 39th governor of Arkansas. that he distanced himself from Washington followed as a strong role within the Democratic party until 2008.

6 David Glassberg. "A sense of History", *The Public Historian* 19, n.o 2 (1997), 70.

7 Augusto Rocha, "The 1957 Central High crisis: civil rights and education in the United States as a public history experience through the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History", *Ciencia Nueva, Revista de Historia y Política* 5, nº1 (2021), 182

8 Thomas Cauvin. "A ascensão da História Pública: uma perspectiva internacional", *Revista* NUPEM 11, n.º 23 (2019), 5.

9 Augusto Rocha, "The 1957 Central High crisis: civil rights and education in the United States as a public history experience through the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History", 182.

10 Alessandro Portelli, "O que faz a história oral diferente", *Revista Projeto História* 14 (2007), 33.

11 Verena Alberti, "De 'versão' a 'narrativa' no Manual de História Oral", *Revista de História Oral* 15, nº 2 (2012), 165

12 Pierre Melandri, *História dos Estados Unidos desde 1865* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2000), 188.

13 Melandri, *História dos Estados Unidos desde 1865*, 189.

14 Rocha, "The 1957 Central High crisis: civil rights and education in the United States as a public history experience through the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History", 183-184.

15 Karen Anderson, *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 57

16 Rocha, "The 1957 Central High crisis: civil rights and education in the United States as a public history experience through the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History", 185.

17 Anderson, *Little Rock*..., 64.

18 Anderson, *Little Rock*..., 64.

19 Herb Boyd, "Little Rock Nine paved the way", *New York Amsterdam News* 98, n.º 40 (2007), 28.

20 hyllis Brandon, interviewed by Scott Lunsford. The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History, University of Arkansas, Arkansas Memories Project, Phyllis D. Brandon Interview, November 20, 2009, page 54.

21 Brandon, interview.

22 Paula Alonso, "La historia política y la historia de la prensa: los desafíos de un enlace", in *Recorridos de la prensa moderna a la prensa actual*, ed. por Adriana Pineda Soto (Morelia-Michoacán: Red de Historiadores de la Prensa y el periodismo em Iberoamérica; Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro; Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 2015), 11-34

23 Brandon, interview.

24 Brandon, interview.

25 Brandon, interview.

26 Brandon, interview.

27 Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage, 2005); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction Updated Edition: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2014); W.E.B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

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30 Héctor Borrat, "El periódico: actor del sistema político", Anàlisi: *Quaderns de comunicació i cultura*, nº 12, (1989), 69

31 Borrat, "El periódico: actor del sistema político", 69

32 Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*..., 190.

33 Roy Redd, interviewd by Scott Lunsford, March 15, 2000. The David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History, University of Arkansas, *Gazette Project*, Roy Redd Interview, page 20.

34 Borrat, "El periódico: actor del sistema político", 71

35 Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*..., 211

36 "Arkansas Democrat-Gazette", Rex Nelson, Encyclopedia of Arkansas, accessed Mayo 17, 2021, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/arkansas-democrat-gazette-2343/. Our mark.

37 One of the awards referred to meritorious information service regarding the Little Rock Crisis and the defense of Integration, while the second referred to the editorial writing of executive editor Harry Ashmore.

38 It is important to keep in mind that almost as important as the sale of units was the value received through the advertising space to the profitability of the newspaper company. This perspective corroborates what Héctor Borrat stated: "For the analysis of journalistic discourse, the conception of the newspaper as a political actor requires considering the global agenda: the writing area and the advertising area. Both surfaces are occupied by stories and comments. The advertisements combine their effects with newspaper texts: although only for the public by giving a vision of the world, a set of ideas, beliefs and myths capable of persuading by seduction as much or more than a journalistic text". With this we must consider that while the Gazette lost part of its readers, added to its advertising spaces for companies, by going against the Arkansas government, attacking Faubus' policies and practices, while defining Integration, the Democrat took advantage of this fall, this new possibility of investment and action,

aligning the governor's practices and speeches, becoming a newspaper that gradually began to surpass and replace the reading and search for the Arkansas Gazette.

39 Donna Stephens. If It Ain't Broke, Break It": How Corporate Journalism Killed the "Arkansas Gazette" (Arkansas: Little Rock, University of Arkansas Press, 2015), 212.

40 Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*..., 214

41 Borrat, "El periódico: actor del sistema político", 71

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43 Borrat, "El periódico: actor del sistema político", 74

44 Maurice Mouillaud, "Da forma ao sentido; A informação ou a parte da sombra", in *O Jornal Da Forma ao Sentido*, 3ª ed., orgs. by Maurice Mouillaud and Sérgio Dayrell Porto (Brasília: Ed. unb, 2012), 56

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