

Gordon School



An Episode from Memphis

By Sophia Mason

Gordon School

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<http://www.rhodes.edu/academics/1114.asp>

Many thanks to Sharone Malone and Sheila Malone Conway for sharing their experiences and inspiring this piece.

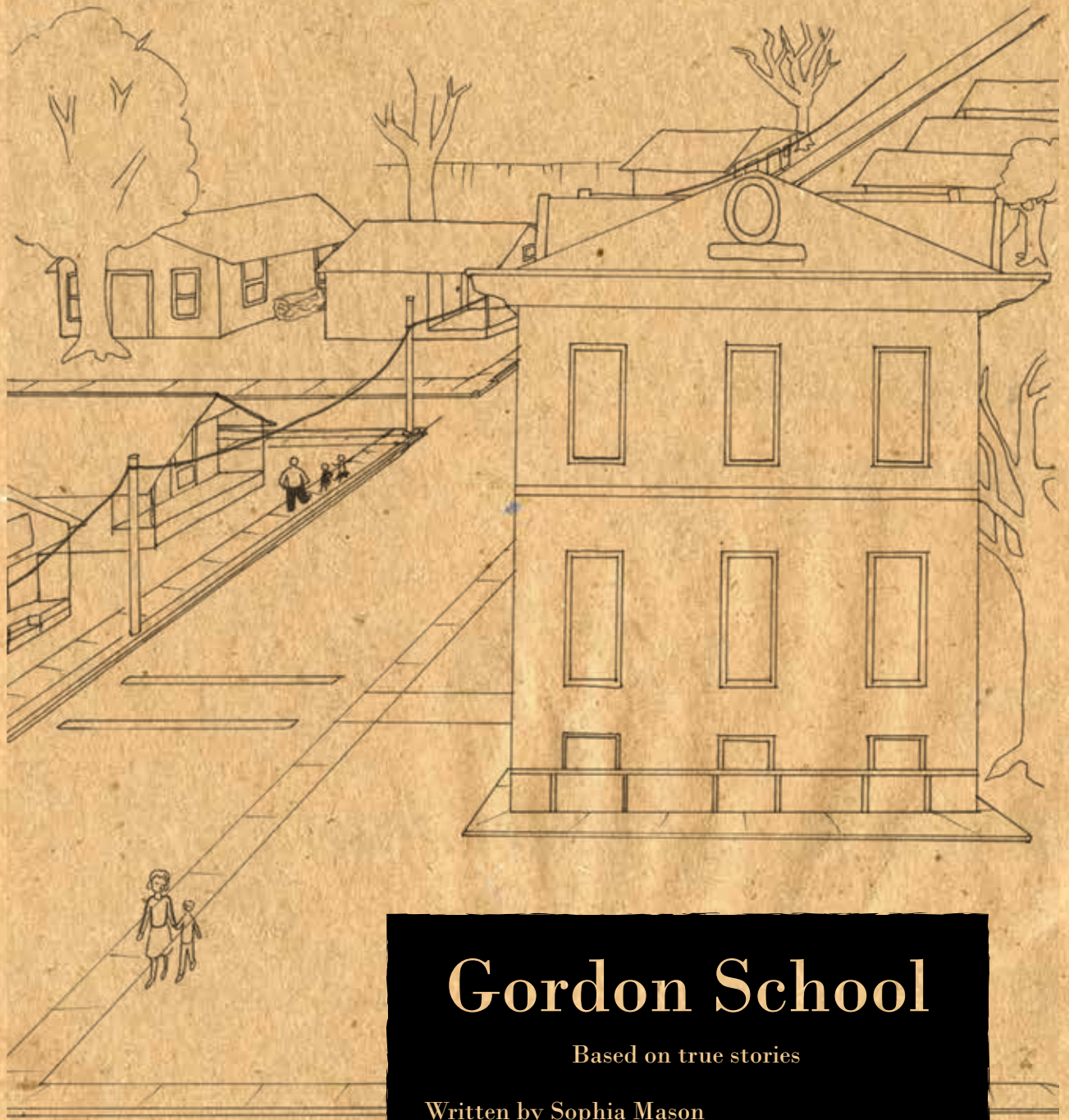
Thanks also to Rhodes College for fostering this project, Ms. Merryman for inspiring the effort, Professor McKinney for his advising, my fellows, Professor Hughes, Professor Daggett, Professor Parsons, and Professor Mason.

Thanks also to Professor Kiel for his research and the Memphis and Shelby County Room for inviting more research.





We were late this morning.

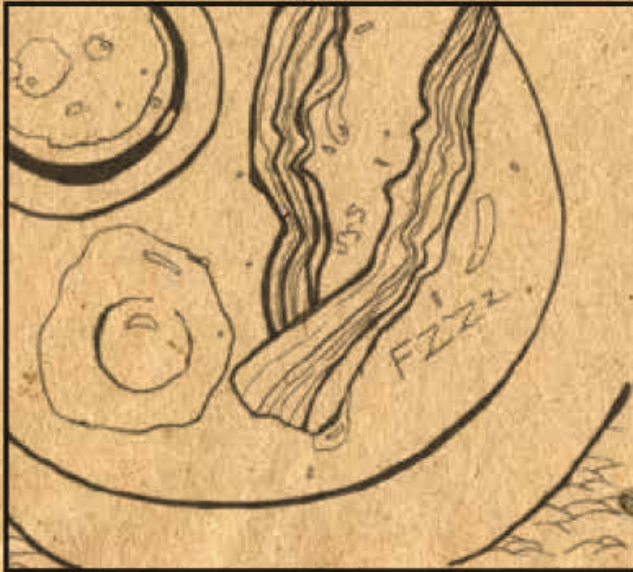


Gordon School

Based on true stories

Written by Sophia Mason
Pencilling by Sophia Mason
Inking by Sophia Mason

With Sheila Conway, Sharon Malone, and
Frankie Walton

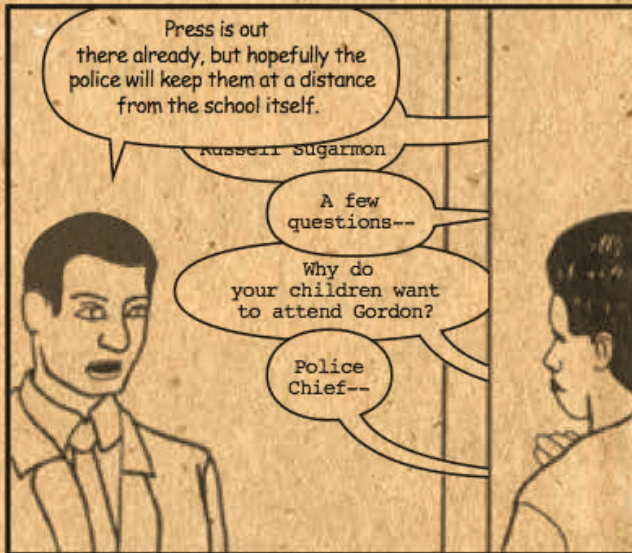


Mrs. Malone. It's Russell Sugarmon. The police have been briefed again and everything is in place. I'll be there in ten minutes.





Stay away from the windows, Sheila.



Press is out there already, but hopefully the police will keep them at a distance from the school itself.

Russell Sugarman

A few questions--

Why do your children want to attend Gordon?

Police Chief--



Are you ready to go to school?



Mrs. Malone, Where is your husband?

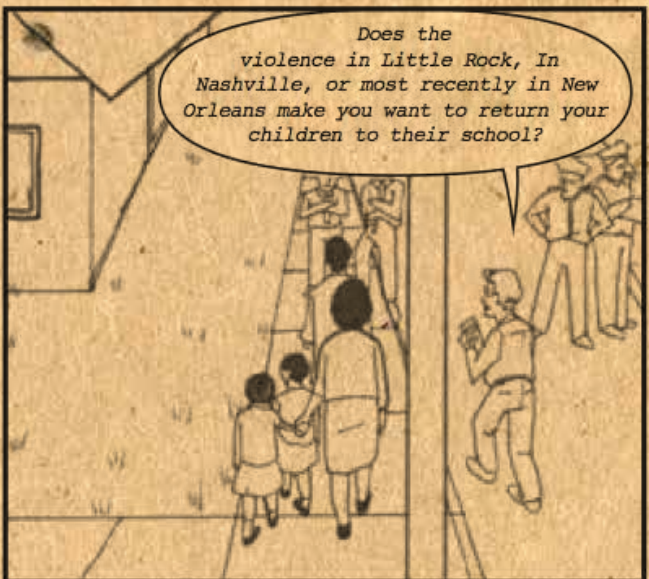
What's your name?

Girls, are you afraid?

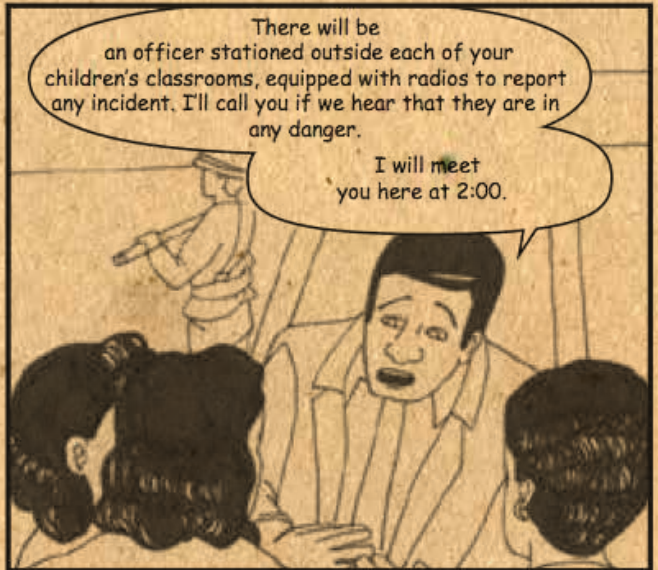
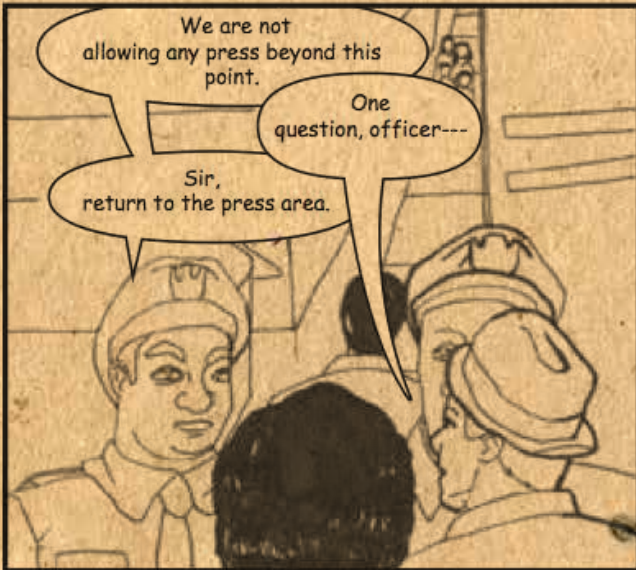
Are you married?

Are you afraid to go to a school you are not welcome at?

Do you trust the police?



Does the violence in Little Rock, In Nashville, or most recently in New Orleans make you want to return your children to their school?





Yes-terday the family had enough cake left over for each member to---

Let go of me!



Isaiah, look at me, Michael---

Mrs. King, excuse us for interrupting, but may we please have a minute?

Mrs. King! Can I PLEASSEE go to the restroom?



We have a visiting student for you.

Don't dilly-dally.



No one notified me before now that I'd have a student visiting, or one this late in the day.

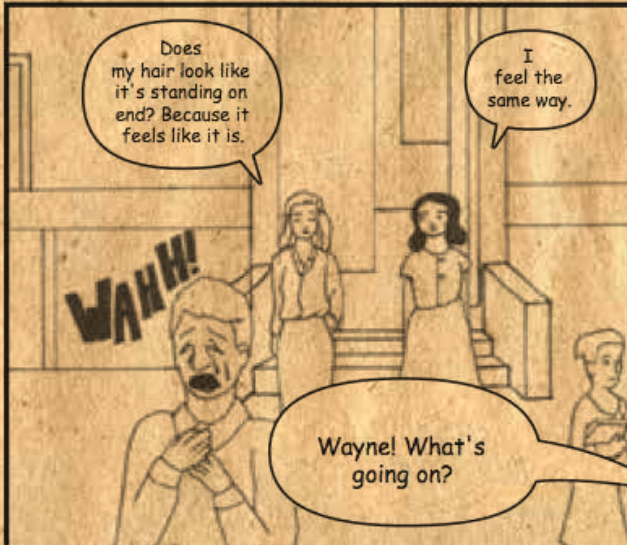
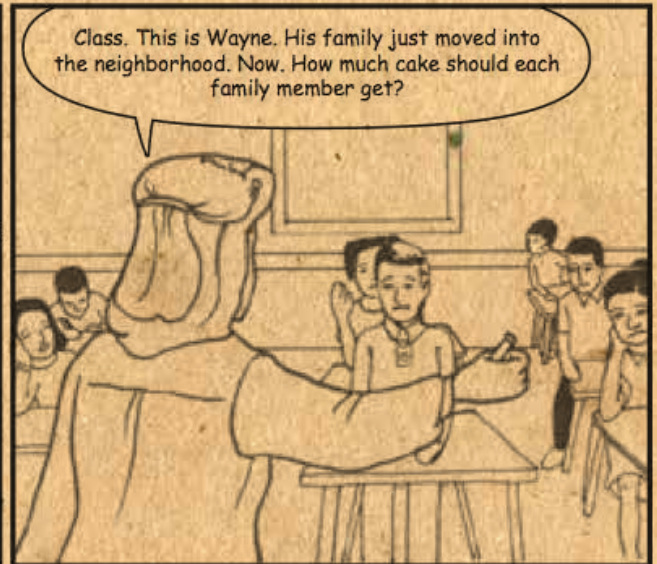
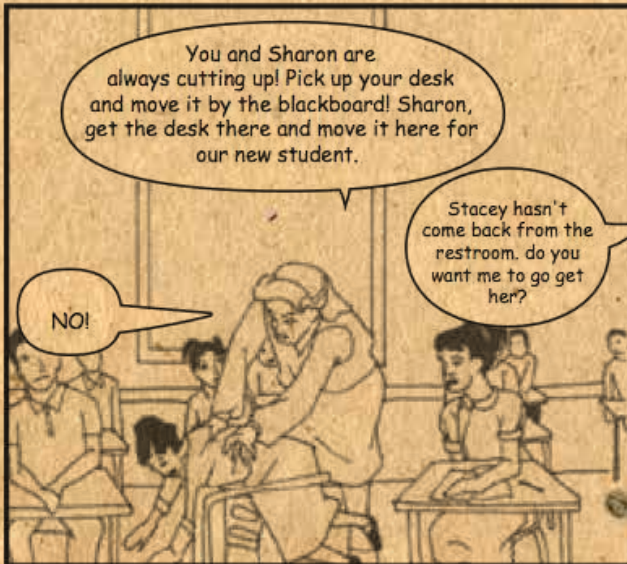
No! Sharon! You have to ASK first!

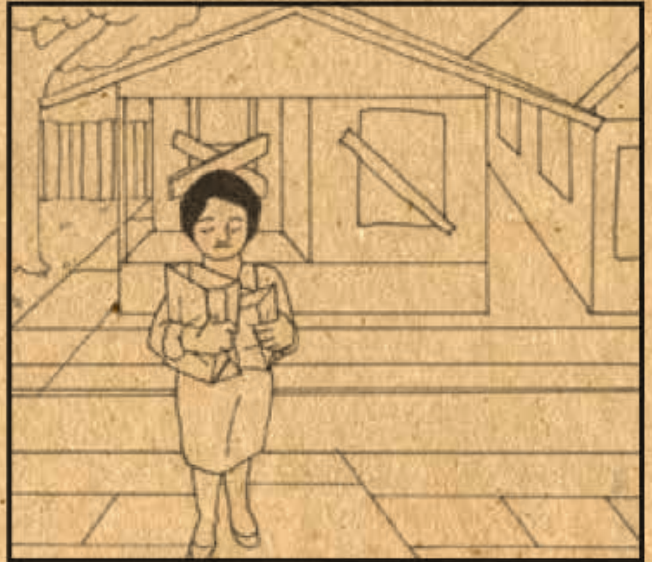
I know, we're sorry about that...



Teacher: Come on in, Wayne.









...“Oh I, I can make a castle from a single grain of sand, I can make a ship sail, oh, on dry land”.

I wasn't sure it was on. Okay. Thanks.

Ooh, I am so sick of that song!

CLICK
Rhonda? Black Monday, it's on. My mother just called me. No point stickin' around.

Did you wear black last Monday?

I'm gettin' back in bed!

We've got another Black Monday?

AACP. She's a member.

I heard if we keep this up, the school system will go bankrupt.

Good Morning, Mr. Thompson.

Are you going to stay, Mr. Thompson?

Well, good morning!

Ooh.

Well, the board docks our pay \$20 a day when we don't show up, and that just means more money for the board, so...How about you?

Ms. Greene!

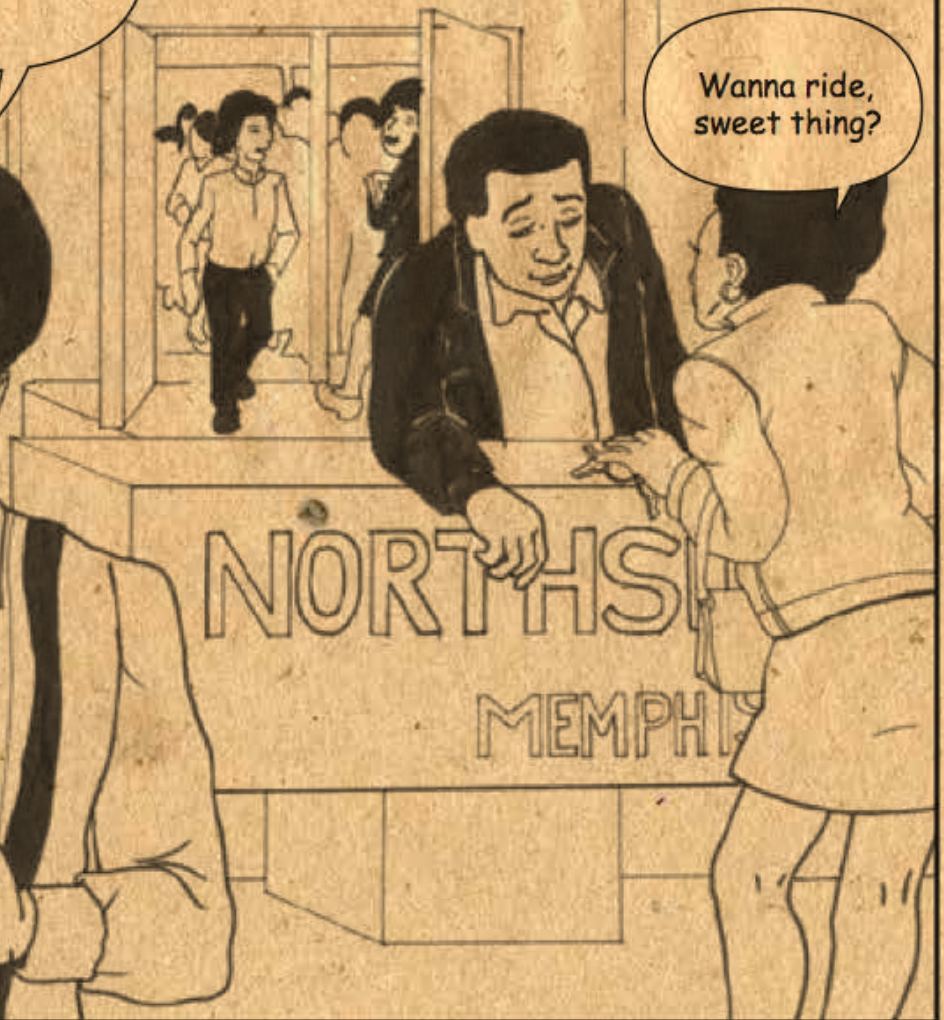
Now if you don't plan to stay today, that's one thing, but I cannot allow you to disturb those who are staying and promote truant behavior.


Yes Ma'am.

Let's make it 300,000 today!

Oooh-weee! I hope they're sweatin' now!

Wanna ride, sweet thing?





Marlana, will you read the page aloud for us?

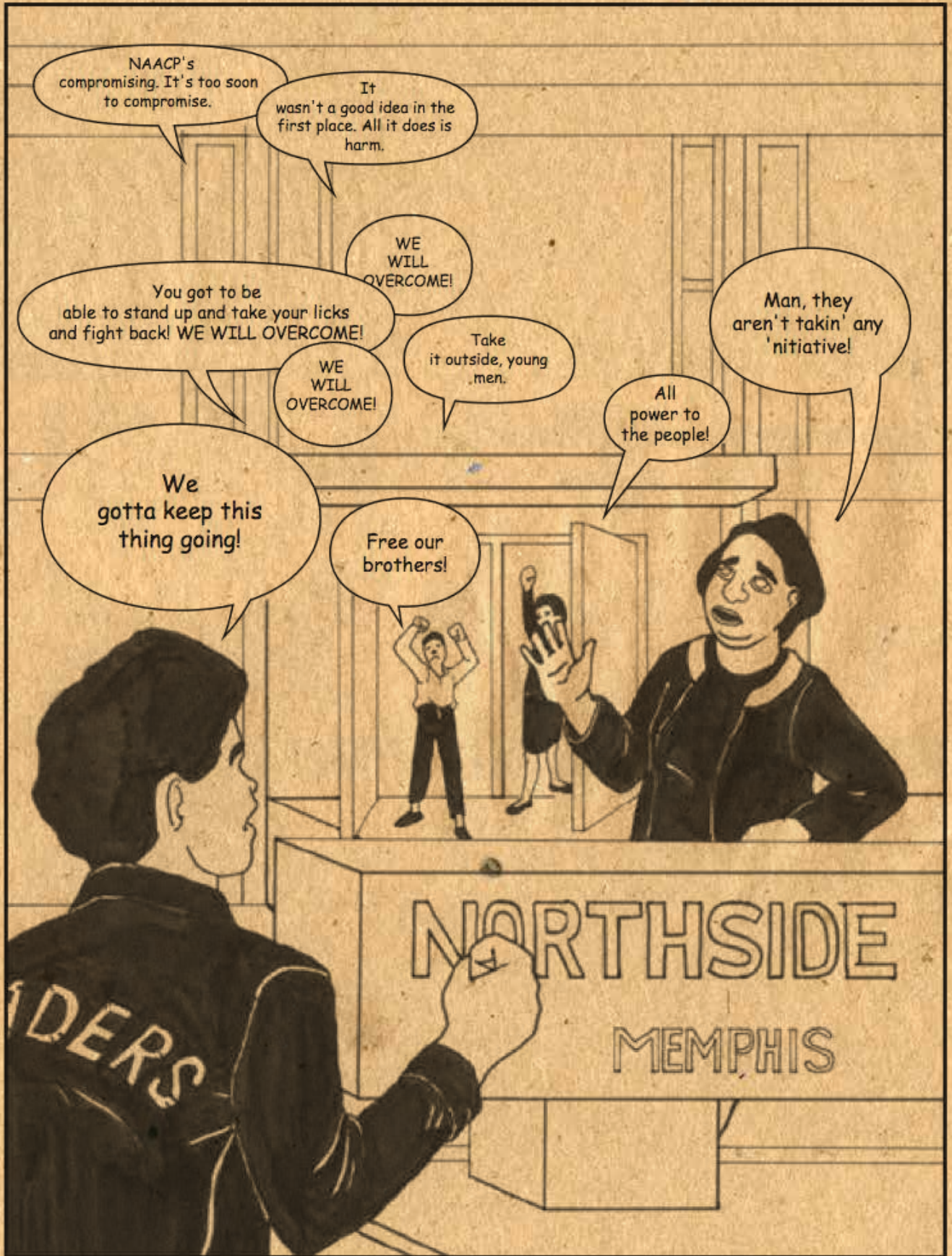
Newspaper's sayin' the Invaders are responsible...

Nah. My cousin's one and they wouldn't--

Mrs. Morris said it was on. They were out last night--

No, they gained some ground with the school board, so they called it off.

I'm sick of our people selling us down the river!



NAACP's compromising. It's too soon to compromise.

It wasn't a good idea in the first place. All it does is harm.

WE WILL OVERCOME!

You got to be able to stand up and take your licks and fight back! WE WILL OVERCOME!

WE WILL OVERCOME!

Take it outside, young men.

Man, they aren't takin' any 'initiative!

All power to the people!

We gotta keep this thing going!

Free our brothers!

NORTHSIDE

MEMPHIS



Yesterday many students mandated to integrate public schools found themselves waiting up to an hour for full buses to return to pick them up.



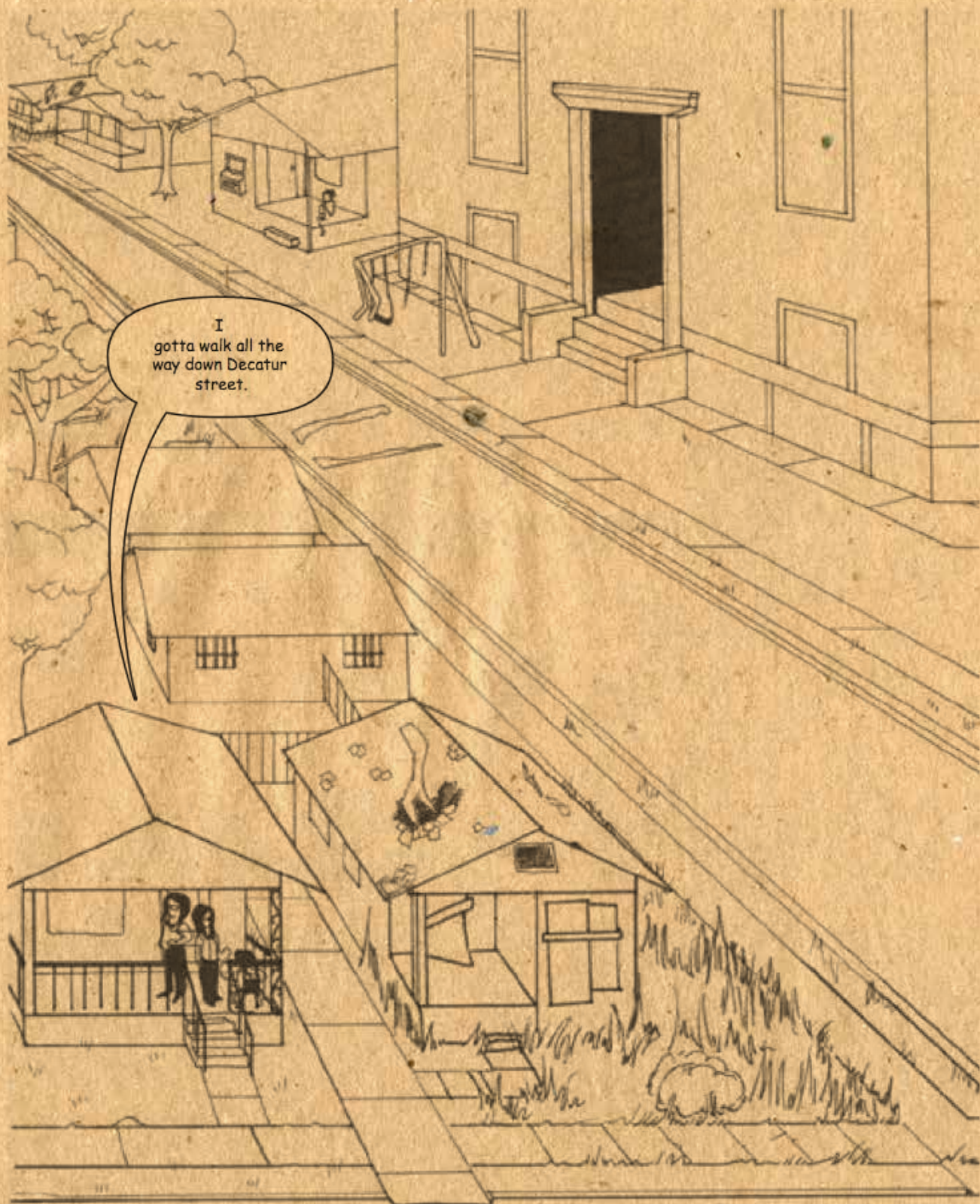
Other bus drivers were hard-pressed to carry even one child to school considering the exodus of families from city schools. Parents also withheld their children from school to protest mandated integration.



Last weekend Citizens Against Busing raised the funds to buy a bus which they buried in a six-foot grave.







In 1961, Sheila Malone Conway and Sharon Malone were two of the first, black, first-graders who enrolled at the previously all-white, Gordon Elementary School in Memphis, Tennessee.

Unlike the violence and hatred that erupted due to public education integration in other parts of the South, those involved with Gordon Elementary's integration carried out a plan that proceeded relatively peacefully. Sheila and Sharon also had comparably good experiences while at Gordon, although this is not to overshadow the fear and danger they faced considering what they knew could happen.

By the time Sheila and Sharon entered they fifth grade, Gordon served an almost entirely black student body. That year black students made up half of Memphis City School System's student body, yet less than three percent of black students were attending demonstrably integrated schools. White students had now "fled" to different, predominately white public schools, private schools, or Shelby County public schools.

Schools in Memphis continue to operate as segregated and unequal communities. "It takes planning and coordination among parties with disparate interests to move a city forward sensibly and peacefully".

Quote from Daniel Kiel, "Exploded Dream: Desegregation in the Memphis City Schools Community," *Law and Inequality* 26 (2008): 302.

Further Reading

The Memphis 13. The Memphis 13 Documentary Official Blog. 2011. Web. 16 June 2008.

Hoppe, Sherry L., and Bruce W. Speck. *Maxine Smith's Unwilling Pupils: Lessons Learned in Memphis's Civil Rights Classroom.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007. Print.

Pohlmann, Marcus D. *Opportunity Lost: Race and Poverty in the Memphis City Schools.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008. Print.

Kiel, Daniel. "Exploded Dream: Desegregation in the Memphis City Schools." *Law and Inequality* 26.261 (2008): 262-303. Print.

Also Visit

The Memphis and Shelby County Room at the Benjamin L. Hooks Public Library.

The National Civil Rights Museum. Memphis, Tennessee. Memphis, Tennessee.

Crossroads to Freedom Digital Archive.

<<http://www.crossroadstofreedom.org/home.user.jsessionid=02C53F6C72C623C9296D270921367591>>.