

Resource Sheet #4

Interview with David F. Cooke

Interview of David F. Cooke. Interviewed by George Gilliam, Mason Mills, of The Ground Beneath Our Feet project. David F. Cooke served as the basketball head coach at Lane High School in Charlottesville, Virginia, one of the schools that was closed in 1958 and was integrated in 1959. Cooke coached the first integrated teams at Lane High School.

Read the primary source document provided below to identify the following: author/date of the source, reactions to desegregation (favorable, unfavorable or indifferent) and the success or failure of integration.

Mr. Cooke: I started teaching and coaching at Lane High School.

Mr. Gilliam: And racially what was the composition of Lane at that time?

Mr. Cooke: It was completely white, or all Caucasian. . .

Mr. Gilliam: Did you - were you in favor of changing the racial composition at Lane?

Mr. Cooke: There was no question in my mind that that was a plus as far as we were concerned. Not only from a social standpoint but for also the athletic ability. I had known of the success of the kids and the teams at Jefferson High School. So I knew that it would add to the possibility of - for success as far as our programs were concerned.

Mr. Gilliam: Was it your experience that the kids got along pretty well and oftentimes it was the parents who wanted to inject race into it?

Mr. Cooke: I think that was probably an exact explanation of the situation. That I think - I don't know of many of the kids. . .

Mr. Gilliam: [laughter] Now, in your experience, did the - was the - the kids of both races could get along pretty well. Particularly in sports -

Mr. Cooke: I, I -

Mr. Gilliam: ...without parents?

Mr. Cooke: I don't think that there was generally ever a problem between the kids themselves. I think if there were a problem, it was probably from the parents of the kids themselves and not the kids. . .

Mr. Gilliam: As a coach, you of course, wanted to field the strongest team you could and was it your opinion at that time that that team would include some black kids?

Mr. Cooke: There was no question in my mind that if we could include some of the black kids in the - on the teams we would have improve ourselves. . .

Mr. Gilliam: What's - obviously in the early '60s there were those who felt very strongly about the racial issue. They felt so strongly that they let the schools be closed and then a group of them went off and formed a separate school. And now that the climate has changed, what do you think caused the climate to change?

Mr. Cooke: I really think once the integration took part and the people on both sides saw that the - that there was really no problem and I think the acceptance of individuals because of who they were and not what they were was the key to that particular situation in my estimation. . .

Mr. Gilliam: As a coach, did you ever have to mediate any racial tensions?

Mr. Cooke: No. I really don't. We -

Mr. Gilliam: Did you ever talk to the kids and say, "Now we got a black kid that's going to be coming on the team", or -

Mr. Cooke: I don't ever remember ever feeling that we had to do that sort of situation. That they were - I think that the kids were excited about having the potential to have some more good players. I just - I don't remember anything of that nature. I really do not remember any great tensions once it started. You know, none of the teachers - and of course I had gone to school there and I knew all the teachers and I had a great relationship with them and I think they would have said something to me had, you know, there been in the problem one way or the other. But I don't remember any of them having any objections whatsoever to that situation. I just had a feeling that it was a small core of politically strong individuals who controlled that situation and created that Massive Resistance effort, you know.

Mr. Gilliam: And that's right. You're right.

Mr. Cooke: They had worked it out so there were classrooms in the churches and that sort of thing. I'm sure that wasn't anything that was done by the School Board or anybody else. It was handed to them on a platter, I think.

<http://www.vahistory.org/massive.resistance/documents.html>