

# An Introduction to *the ripple, the wave that carried my home*

By WILLA J. TAYLOR



*A life-size bronze statue of Rosa Parks, sitting on a bus bench at a Dallas Area Rapid Transit in Dallas, Texas*

I grew up in a segregated Dallas, Texas.

I was a senior in high school before schools were forced to integrate. That September, I went off to Skyline to be a part of the new school's first senior class. Most of my other friends who I had spent years studying with, playing tetherball and softball with, who I had led as drum major of the James Madison High School Marching Band, were scattered between Krozier Tech, Lincoln, and Roosevelt high schools.

Segregation robbed me of the opportunity to graduate with

all the kids I had grown up with, and the plans we had for prom and senior week and commencement vanished. But segregation also meant that now all of my teachers were Black. It meant that I lived in a community with dentists, doctors, lawyers, businessmen and women, publishers, professors, musicians, chefs, athletes. Because neighborhoods were redlined and Blacks were only allowed to live in certain communities, those communities were home to all the talent, experience, and striving of a people. It meant that even though I didn't grow

up seeing folx who looked like me on television, I saw folx who made a way against impossible odds. It meant I saw endless possibilities for what I could be in life. It was a cocoon.

My Nana and Papa, an African Methodist Episcopal minister, lived on the corner of our block. Dr. Smith, who pulled all my baby teeth, lived two doors down. Mrs. Roach, my fourth-grade teacher, lived across the street from Nana. All my cousins lived within three blocks. The elementary school, the library, the park, my high school, the grocer,

our church...my entire life was in the blocks that made up South Dallas.

In the flashback years when Christina Anderson's *the ripple, the wave that carried me home*, is set, there were laws on the books in Texas that prevented me, my family, and every Black citizen in Dallas, from attending the school of their choice, from living in neighborhoods on the east side of the city, of shopping in certain stores, and attending the State Fair on any day other than "Negro Day."

Up until the mid-1960's, an elaborate system of codes and laws kept Blacks from enjoying equality in Texas. It impacted everything: towns had sundown laws, where it was not safe to be caught after sunset if you were not white; restrooms and water fountains were labeled "Colored" and "White", and most often the ones for us coloreds did not work. This was de jure segregation.

My dad worked on the railroad, first as a Pullman porter, then as a dining car cook (these were the days of luxurious train travel!), but my mother and I had to wait in a separate "Coloreds Only" area at the train station each summer when we rode the train with him. When we drove to see my paternal grandmother in Ft. Worth – about 40 miles away from our home – my Nana, my mother's mother, would pack us a shoebox lunch because there were no public accommodations along the freeway that would serve



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Blacks (even with [the Green Book](#) there was nowhere to stop).

Tejanos (Mexican Americans of southern Texas) didn't fare any better even though most of the legal codes did not apply specifically to them. They could not commingle with whites in public accommodations like restaurants, bars, barbershops, theaters, etc.

And when the US Supreme Court struck down *Brown vs Board of Education*, which effectively eliminated segregation in schools, the Texas legislature passed laws encouraging school districts to ignore the federal rules.

In 1972, the year I graduated,

the city slowly – and begrudgingly – integrated. Years of lawsuits and protests, and changes in federal enforcement of the new Civil Rights bill of 1964, forced the state to open public accommodations, schools and universities, restaurants, and rest rooms.

Segregation kept people of color from opportunities to advance, to build generational wealth, to be educated in the best schools. But the communities that were created by that forced division, bred a generation of activists determined to change the laws. And the world.