

Readers' Voice

In our last issue for 1960 (December 15) we published an article by Rice Estes on "Segregated Libraries," an excerpt from Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, and an editorial, also on segregation, entitled "The Silent Subject." The whole of "Readers' Voice" in this issue is devoted to readers' comments on these features.

Special reference should be made to the first letter below. It is written by Ruth Brown who, after more than 30 years service, was dismissed in 1950 from her position as librarian of the Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Public Library because "the library kept on its shelves the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, and *Soviet Russia Today* and . . . she had participated in group discussions of race relations." Those who are not familiar with the Bartlesville incident should read Everett Moore's "Intellectual Freedom" column in *ALA Bulletin*, November 1960.

Remember Bartlesville

Ruth W. Brown, Librarian, Sterling Public Library, Sterling, Colorado: The articles on segregation in public libraries in *LIBRARY JOURNAL* seem to me to say what should have been said years ago. So many people have been excited about the 1950 events in Bartlesville Public Library. A few newspaper reporters noted at the time that the fight was not only "freedom to read" for white people of Bartlesville and that if it had not included Negroes, there very likely would have been no protest.

Now seems the time for the "silent subject" to be corrected and to say that the passage in Richard Wright's *Black Boy* was no small cause of the librarian's attitude in the Bartlesville case. How can a librarian read it and not be influenced, and how can anyone fail to see that freedom to read must include all who have that desire? I could

not see then and have never understood why the ALA carefully seemed to avoid that angle.

The Bartlesville Public Library was completely integrated. There was no Negro branch so that those whites who objected, as of course we knew they did, had no legal recourse. But that was the real background of all events. Negroes sat where they pleased, browsed where they pleased (no "vertical readers"), and books and magazines of a special Negro interest were provided. The librarian visited the Negro schools as she did the white, and aroused interest in famous Negroes, of whom there were then many and now more and more.

The librarian also had a Story Hour for the 4th grade Negroes, who were brought in their school bus every

two weeks to the library. The Story Hour was held in the main reading room where children were seated in one large room of which the Children's Room is one side and the Adult Room the other. It was a great delight to the librarian, who never had a more appreciative audience, and some white adults who came in also enjoyed seeing the sparkling eyes. We learned later that other whites were saying many untrue things about that Story Hour.

When the 1954 Supreme Court decision came there was no difficulty in Bartlesville, and we know that one reason was that seeing Negroes in the Public Library had given many whites the idea that "separate but equal" was definitely not equal.

Public libraries must be integrated and the ALA and all librarians must take a stand. With each passing year it may become more difficult. Public libraries must not compel the Supreme Court to hand down another decision, but must make freedom to read an actual fact in the United States.

(Continued on p. 732)

SEGREGATION IN LIBRARIES

As Lj Readers See It