Foreword

This study of the Mansfield, Texas, school desegregation crisis in 1956 fills an important niche in the history of the civil rights movement and in the history of southern public education. By exploring carefully the relationship between school desegregation and politics, both state and national, the author helps explain the slow progress in integrating public education during the years immediately after the Brown decisions. That analysis of the politics of school desegregation clarifies why Mansfield, despite a failure to desegregate, did not become a focal point of national attention and debate as did Little Rock, Arkansas, in the following year.

From reading this account of events in Mansfield and those related to its school desegregation case, one is also reminded of the important role states of the Border South played in the early efforts to integrate public education. Too often the later struggles to desegregate public accommodations and to regain voting rights in the Deep South drew attention away from states like Texas. Because some cities and towns in the Border South integrated earlier with less resistance, the slowness of overall change, even in these states, has sometimes been ignored.

The efforts of African American parents in Mansfield and black attorneys in Texas, who sought better education for a younger generation, also provide important examples of courage in trying to achieve positive and peaceful change. Their actions seem even more impressive because they faced emotional and sometimes threatening efforts to maintain a segregated and unequal system of public education.

This account of the Mansfield school crisis will immediately stand as one of the few in-depth analyses of desegregation in Texas public education. It also offers insight into the debate about whether Dwight Eisenhower provided active or passive leadership as president. Furthermore it contributes to a fuller understanding

of Allan Shivers, who sought to maintain his popularity as governor amid other political controversies by opposing school integration in Texas. Finally, this book should have a long-term value as a stimulant to the writing of further and much-needed studies of public education at the state and local levels and especially of school desegregation for communities large and small across Texas and the nation.

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