

Another Black Eye

To: Robert D. Snair, Bartlesville Record
Subject: Miss Brown of Bartlesville

After reading your letter regarding Miss Brown, the erstwhile librarian of Bartlesville, I decided to do some more investigating and found an article in the New Republic magazine for Nov. 27, 1950, which leads me to question the fairness of your article and letter.

The New Republic article was written by Jean Begeman and is entitled "Bigotry in Bartlesville." Some of the facts given there conflict with your version. For example: You say that Miss Brown was fired for insubordination. In the article I think you should read, this is their statement of the case:

"On July 25, an hour after she had appeared before an executive session of the Commission, Miss Brown was notified that she had been fired.

"... When Miss Brown appeared before the private meeting of the City Commission, it was apparent that the magazines were only a secondary complaint. Commissioner W. A. Forrest said: 'We know your attitude on race relations. It may be according to the Bible and the Constitution, but it is not according to the wishes of the majority of the people of Bartlesville.' Miss Brown agreed to answer any questions about the operation of the library orally, but asked the Commissioners to submit any questions on her personal views such as her attitude toward the Negro race in writing, to be answered in writing since there was no stenographer at the meeting to record the interrogation. 'We considered that insubordination,' Mayor E. S. Dunaway says. Miss Brown was promptly fired."

This then would seem to be an explanation of the "insubordination" which you say was omitted from the St. Louis Star-Times editorial. Perhaps they were being kind and you or the worried mother didn't realize it. Or did you think that we didn't have access to such "so-called subversive literature" as the New Republic (which according to the same article is still available in the Bartlesville library although at the "discretion" of the new librarian)?

You also forgot to mention in your letter that "no objection had been made to Miss Brown or the publications on her shelves until she had participated in group discussions on race relations."

You also forgot to mention that the magazines Negro Digest and Consumer's Research were also on the "Citizen's Committee" list of subversive literature. Your community must be proud of such an alert, patriotic group of citizens.

When, in your article, you refer to "Oklahoma's fight for civil liberties" I'm afraid you've used the wrong preposition. While it is true that some residents of Oklahoma may be fighting for civil liberties (Miss Brown's defenders are good examples) it has always appeared to me that the state as a whole was pushing the "fight against civil liberties." Perhaps you've forgotten the case of McLaurin vs. Oklahoma State Regents For Higher Education which tells the story of a denial of civil liberties and deliberate humiliation of a man whose skin was the "wrong" shade. Sipuel vs. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma is also a case in point. We can't honestly admit that Oklahoma was ever a leading advocate for civil liberties.

If you and the mother you refer to are tired of seeing your home town receive editorial black eyes, then I would suggest that you lead the way in showing the "white supremacists" in the community the error of their ways and thus remove the cause of the black eyes.

—J. A. B.

RUTH W. BROWN ARCHIVE: