

“The Problem We All Live With”

Norman Rockwell

1963-1964

Social Realism

Oil

3.5 ft by 3 ft (147.5 cm by 91.5 cm)

An iconic image from the civil rights movement in the United States, it depicts Ruby Bridges, a six-year old African-American girl on her way in to an all-white public school in New Orleans on November 14, 1960 during the process of racial desegregation. Because of the threats and violence against her, she is escorted by four U.S. deputy marshals. The painting was originally published as the centerfold in the January 14, 1964 issue of Look magazine.

Questions:

1. Observe the painting. List three things that strike you immediately when you look at it.

2. What do you think Ruby felt like that day?

3. Why do you think Ruby and her family decided to go through with the integration of the school?

4. What impact did her courage have on others?

5. Research Norman Rockwell paintings from the Saturday Evening Post covers. Find and print three examples. Describe these paintings and compare and contrast them with this painting.
6. Why do you think Mr. Rockwell painted this picture? Discuss the professional risks that Norman Rockwell must have taken to paint this in another magazine (he was a Caucasian artist).
7. How would you stand up for what you believe in and go against society if you felt you were advocating for your rights or the rights of others?
8. Read the excerpt from John Steinbeck's Travels with Charley from Through My Eyes by Ruby Bridges. Were his observations similar to yours? List two similarities or differences.
9. Watch "Many Rivers to Cross: Ruby Bridges." Discuss.

TO MY MAMA,

TRULY AN UNSUNG HERO, FOR HAVING THE COURAGE AND FAITH TO TAKE A STAND—
NOT JUST FOR HER OWN CHILDREN BUT FOR ALL CHILDREN;

TO MY TEACHER, MRS. HENRY,

FOR KNOWING RIGHT FROM WRONG AND FOR HAVING THE COURAGE TO PROCLAIM IT TO THE
WORLD IN SPITE OF THE OPPOSITION;

TO MRS. SMITH,

WHO GAVE ME MUCH AND KNEW NOT THAT SHE GAVE AT ALL—I WAS MOST BLESSED TO HAVE
THIS LADY IN MY LIFE FOR A BRIEF PERIOD OF TIME;

TO BOB COLES,

WHO IN MY MIND IS THE VESSEL GOD USED TO KEEP MY STORY ALIVE;

TO MOTHER,

FOR ALLOWING ME INTO HER HEART; FOR ALLOWING ME TO CURL UP IN HER BED WHENEVER
I NEED SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE. KNOW THAT I AM TRULY GRATEFUL FOR HER COMMITMENT TO
MY SPIRITUAL GROWTH,

AND IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER.

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The author John Steinbeck was driving through New Orleans with his dog, Charley, when he heard about the racist crowds that gathered outside the Frantz school each morning to protest its integration. He decided to go see what was happening.

He especially wanted to see a group of women who came to scream at me and at the few white children who crossed the picket lines and went to school. (At the time, I didn't know that there were other children in the building. We were kept apart.) The women were known as the Cheerleaders, and their foul language even shocked a man as worldly as Steinbeck.

I never met John Steinbeck, but he seemed to sympathize with what I was going through. He wrote about me in a book called *Travels with Charley*. Steinbeck left his dog and his truck in a parking lot. He didn't want to take them to Frantz, where his dog could get hurt or his car could get damaged. Instead he took a cab. Fearing that protestors would wreck his car, the

driver didn't take Steinbeck all the way to the school, but left him a few blocks away.

Steinbeck never knew my name. My name and the names of the girls at the McDonogh school were never mentioned on television or in the newspapers. The press tried to protect us.



JOHN STEINBECK, AUTHOR OF *THE GRAPES OF WRATH* AND *THE RED PONY*, WON THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE.



THE ARTIST NORMAN ROCKWELL WAS INSPIRED BY PARAGRAPHS IN *TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY* TO PAINT A PICTURE CALLED *THE PROBLEM WE ALL LIVE WITH*. IT WAS PUBLISHED IN THE JANUARY 14, 1964, ISSUE OF *LOOK* MAGAZINE.

The show opened on time. Sound of sirens. Motorcycle cops. Then two big black cars filled with big men in blond felt hats pulled up in front of the school. The crowd seemed to hold its breath. Four big marshals got out of each car and from somewhere in the automobiles they extracted the littlest Negro girl you ever saw, dressed in shining starchy white, with new white shoes on feet so little they were almost round. Her face and little legs were very black against the white.

The big marshals stood her on the curb and a jangle of jeering shrieks went up from behind the barricades. The little girl did not look at the howling crowd but from the side the whites of her eyes showed like those of a frightened fawn. The men turned her around like a doll, and then the strange procession moved up the broad walk toward the school, and the child was even more a mite because the men were so big. Then the girl made a curious hop, and I think I know what it was. I think in her whole life she had not gone ten steps without skipping, but now in the middle of her first skip, the weight bore her down and her little round feet took measured, reluctant steps between the tall guards. Slowly they climbed the steps and entered the school.

— JOHN STEINBECK, *TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY*



