

Chapter 3

Rutledge Pearson and the Jacksonville Youth Council NAACP

“Those who have no record of what their forebears have accomplished lose the inspiration, which comes from the teaching of biography and history.”

—Carter G. Woodson

He had sandy red hair, stood about six feet two inches tall, was fair-skinned, and had a magnetic presence as he walked the halls of Isaiah Blocker. A stranger visiting Isaiah Blocker Junior High School, probably would have considered Rutledge Pearson, the dean, or president of the school, based on the respect he commanded.



Rutledge Henry Pearson (courtesy of Mary Ann Pearson).

Rodney L. Hurst Sr.

I transferred from James Weldon Johnson Junior High School to Isaiah Blocker Junior High School in 1955. The public schools of Jacksonville, in 1955, mirrored the segregated South: separate textbooks, separate and unequal equipment, and separate and unequal facilities.

Only a few new things filtered down to us at Isaiah Blocker. We were just part of the overall Duval County Schools Educational System, Negro Division—still separate and very much unequal.

As a new student at Isaiah Blocker, I did not know many students or teachers. As I talked with several students during my transfer-student honeymoon period, one of the students asked my favorite subject. I said American History. They suggested I ask to be assigned to Mr. Pearson's American History class.

I later overheard some of the same students remark how difficult Mr. Pearson's classes were. Did I smell a set-up for a new transfer student? As an A-B Honor Roll student who loved history, I figured I could handle this challenge, so I asked for and got the assignment to Mr. Pearson's class. It is obvious to me now that my transfer to Isaiah Blocker Junior High School and subsequent meeting of Mr. Pearson were parts of God's plan.