

Orval Faubus Biography

Orval Eugene Faubus (7 January 1910 - 14 December 1994) was a six-term Democratic governor of Arkansas famous for his stand against integration of Little Rock, Arkansas schools in 1957 in defiance of U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

Early Life

Orval Faubus was born near Combs, Arkansas in Madison County. Faubus's father, Sam Faubus, provided him with an early political education. During the early part of the century socialist causes were popular in the rural mountains of Arkansas. Sam Faubus was a poor hill farmer who became active locally in socialist causes and publicly advocated for women's suffrage, abolition of the poll tax, formed a Socialist Party local amongst his neighbors, and wrote lengthy essays in favor of socialism for the local Madison County newspaper.

Sam Faubus was considered a leader of the movement in Madison, County but the US entry into World War I brought suspicion down on opposition political sentiments. Sam Faubus and a friend were arrested in 1918 by government agents for "distributing seditious material" and "uttering numerous disloyal remarks".

Early Political Career

Faubus's first political run was in 1936 when he ran for a seat in the state General Assembly. Faubus came in second in that contest. He was urged to challenge the result but wisely declined. This earned him the gratitude of the Democratic Party and led to him winning two terms as circuit clerk and recorder.

When the United States entered World War II Faubus joined the United States Army and served as an intelligence officer with George S. Patton's Third Army. During this service Faubus was involved in combat several times.

When Faubus returned from the war he cultivated ties with leaders of Arkansas' Democratic Party, particularly with progressive reform Governor Sid McMath, leader of the post-war "GI Revolt" against corruption, whom he served as chairman of the state's highway commission. When Francis Cherry, who had defeated McMath in 1952 in the latter's third term re-election bid, became widely unpopular, Faubus challenged him in the 1954 primary.

The 1954 election cycle was a bitter one and Faubus was forced to defend his attendance at a defunct northwest Arkansas school known as Commonwealth College as well as his early political upbringing. Commonwealth College was formed as a left-leaning school and Faubus was accused of attending a "communist" school by his political opponents. These attempts backfired in a climate of growing resentment against such allegations and Faubus defeated Cherry to win his first term as Governor.

The political attacks of the 1954 election, though unsuccessful, do seem to have made Faubus very sensitive to attacks from the right. It has been suggested that this sensitivity contributed to his later stance against integration when attacked by segregationist elements of his party.

Little Rock Integration Crisis

Faubus came to international attention during the Little Rock Crisis of 1957 when he used the National Guard to stop African-American children from attending Little Rock Central High School as part of federally ordered racial desegregation.

Faubus's decision led to a showdown with President Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower, in October 1957, federalized the Arkansas National Guard and ordered them to return to their barracks which effectively removed them from Faubus's control. Eisenhower then sent elements of the 101st Airborne Division to Arkansas to protect the black students and enforce the Federal court order.

Ironically, in 1954 Faubus had run for governor as a liberal promising to increase spending on schools and roads. In the first few months of his administration, Faubus desegregated state buses and public transportation and began to investigate the possibility of introducing multi-racial schools.

This, however, led to a political attack by Jim Johnson, leader of the right-wing of the Democratic Party in Arkansas. This attack caused Faubus to reconsider his political position for the upcoming election and led him to fight the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that separate schools were unequal and therefore unconstitutional.

End of Political Career

Faubus was elected governor six times and served for 12 years, maintaining his defiant, populist image while at the same time shifting toward a less confrontational stance with the federal government, particularly during the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, with each of whom he remained cordial. In 1962, Faubus broke with the White Citizens Councils and other far right groups, who endorsed Congressman Dale Alford in that year's gubernatorial election. Faubus cast himself as a moderate, barely winning re-election over Alford, McMath and 3 other candidates. While outcast by black leaders, Faubus nevertheless won large percentages of the black vote (81% overall in 1964). While he carried black precincts in Crittenden and other East Arkansas machine counties (where wealthy planters paid up their workers' poll taxes en masse and hauled them to the polls on election day, carefully recording how each voted) by better than 9 to one margins, he also carried substantial majorities in black urban precincts dominated by African American clergymen, to whom Faubus operatives paid thousands of dollars in "expense money." However, after the abolition of the poll tax by the 24th Amendment in 1964 and the adoption of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, African American voters became more independent, although still largely influenced by their church leaders. This was a substantial shift in political power in Arkansas, although it has been argued that an electorate manipulated by preachers is no more democratic than one manipulated by plantation owners.

Faubus chose not to run for re-election to a 7th term in 1966. The segregationist Jim Johnson, by then an elected state supreme court justice, narrowly won the Democratic nomination, but he was defeated in the general election by Republican reformer Winthrop Rockefeller, who became the state's first GOP governor since Reconstruction.

Faubus did seek the governorship again in 1970, 1974, and 1986 but was defeated in those years' Democratic primaries by Dale Bumpers, David Pryor and Bill Clinton, respectively, each of whom went on to win in November. Faubus lost considerable public support when he divorced his wife of 40 years in 1969 to marry a much younger woman. Alta Faubus had been a gracious and dignified first lady and won her own loyal following over the couple's many years in public life. In addition, electioneering in Arkansas had undergone a sea change in response to the moderating influence of television on candidate imagery. The Democratic party had reformed its own policies in response to public acceptance of the progressive policies followed by Rockefeller. With these changes, a new generation of appealing Democratic candidates easily contrasted themselves favorably in voters' minds with Faubus' old-style politics.

Final Chapter

In the 1970s Faubus's financial position had deteriorated to the point where he was forced to accept a position as a bank teller at a local Huntsville, Arkansas bank and sell his home. Yet in spite of his demagoguery of the race issue, Faubus retains a grudging admiration among many, particularly older, Arkansans for his defiance of President Eisenhower and the national press. The virtual re-segregation of Little Rock's public schools, which in 2004 are 70 to 90 percent black in spite of 50 years of litigation and massive busing costing hundreds of millions of dollars, has led many to question the efficacy of the Brown decision. Central High School, while formally integrated with some 30% white enrollment, operates a 2-tier curriculum, with 95% of the white students in advanced math, english, science and language classes which, in some cases, are all white. Critics point out that Little Rock housing, like that in many U.S. cities, remains largely divided along racial lines. However, others argue that the present situation is due to economics and personal choice, not to legal barriers, which Brown struck down, and to that extent Brown has been successful. No elected official, they say, would today dare imitate Faubus by using the police power of a state to deny public services to members of any minority.

Faubus died of cancer on 14 December 1994.

Source: http://www.biographybase.com/biography/Faubus_Orval.html