Many educators put their lives on the line to ensure future generations will have a chance to excel no matter where they come from. It also took character. These men had to hold their heads up high even when battles seemed impossible. For example, there was a time when black folk were not thought to be capable of being educated.

The education system was going through big changes during these years so there were improvements in some things and setbacks in others. Integration was one such change.

"We lost two generations of black children with integration," Jones says. It was no secret that some white teachers did not want to teach black students. Black students soon became labeled and were put into special programs. "What was the reverse," asked one of the sociology students, "for black teachers and white students?" Some white parents did not want their children taught by black teachers.

One principal recalled a situation where a New Iberia parent wanted her child removed from a black teacher's class. The principal denied the request. The next day her husband appeared with the same request and stated that his wife (who only made it through high school) could do a better job teaching than the college educated black teacher. Circumstances were stressful for these pioneers, but Willis Porter, 73, retired says, it didn't bother him. "It was my job to teach students and that is what I did, no matter who they were."

They had to show children that there was a better way of life through education. Their dedication hasn't been in vain. The group of pioneers has lived to see not only their own children live successfully, but many, many other students excel.

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Things weren't always so simple for him though. "When I began attending Columbia University in New York City, they put me on a special program because I was coming from the South. But after seeing how my grades were they took me off. That just means, no matter where you come from you can learn and be just as good.

"But what are these gentlemen doing in their retirement years? Most are still working." "I retired in 1988 and I've retired those three times since then," says Newmann Braud, 73, a former teacher at Xavier University and University of Houston. "I currently direct the Meals on Wheels Parish Office of Elderly Protective Services.

"As we head into the millennium, blacks have learned one thing for sure and Fonte leaves one thought. "Nobody's going to dig it for us, we'll have to do it ourselves." His advice is to "take advantage of the opportunities available today so that others have worked hard to provide. Many could have chosen easier routes to success, but they chose to stay and give the poor and overlooked a better way of life through education.

What gives them the most satisfaction, Porter says, is not money, not fame, but "when students come back to me and say how much they helped them reach their potential."