

Walk Right In DVD reflects summer of 1968

Written by



In the summer of 1968, 140 students from inner city and rural America gathered at the Yale University Divinity School to participate in an educational experiment. White, Black, Puerto Rican, Indian American, and Asian American students, labeled by New Haven newspapers as "underachievers," were introduced to a "Great American Books" curriculum that included *The American Constitution*, *Native Son*, *Antigone*, and *The Communist Manifesto*. No one told them they weren't supposed to excel, and so they did.

The group of 110 boys and 30 girls (the first women to attend Yale before it went co-ed) participated in "T" (therapy) discussion groups to tackle the messy topic and tensions of race and social justice following the largest period of civil unrest in America after the assassination of Martin Luther King. Safe within the walls of Yale's Divinity School, the YSHS students, encouraged by the staff, found their voices and the inspiration to succeed academically.

Larry Paros, the YSHS director from 1967-68, has captured the impact of this transformational summer in a documentary entitled "Walk Right In, The Story of Yale Summer High School (www.walkrightin.com). Using his own funds, he located former students, teachers, and staff whose testimonies prove his belief that education transforms lives. Yale Summer High School succeeded because it set

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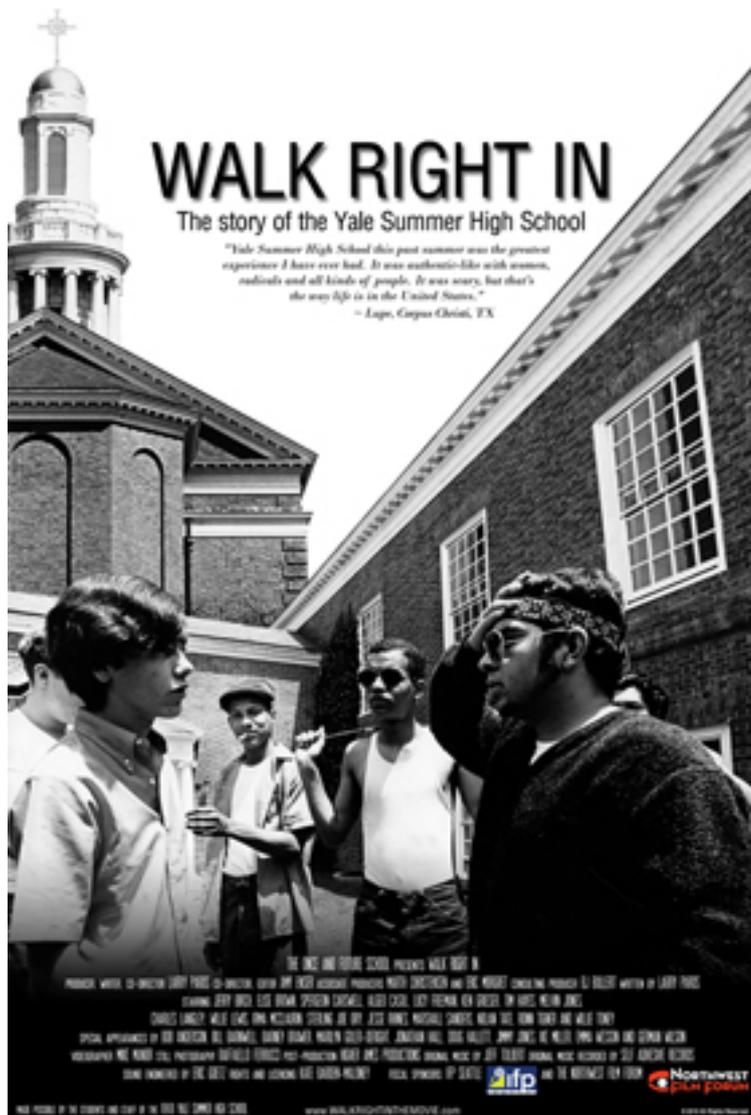
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high expectations and encouraged students to rise and learn. It offered a template for establishing a successful learning environment and a model of education reform.

The film explains why Yale University fired Paros and discontinued a program that all agreed, including Yale's outside consultant, was a success. Many YSHS alumni went on to college and became lawyers, community organizers, educators, counselors, therapists, and transportation employees. Most have children who attended college.

Paros has bet his life's saving that the film holds a message for today's efforts to reform education. He is distributing free copies during February (Black History) and March (Women's History) to inspire a national conversation on race and education reform.

In exchange, he asks recipients to post their screening dates and reviews on the film's website and Facebook page. The film has been accepted by Culture Unplugged for free streaming on its website: (<http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/11452/Walk-Right-In>).



Dr. Irma McClaurin, a Raleigh-based consultant and Culture and Education Editor of Insight

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News and former President of Shaw University, is one of the people featured in the documentary. At a time when the country is erupting with concern about education reform, school success, and the growing Achievement Gap, "Walk Right In, The Story of Yale Summer High School," documents successful education reform. McClaurin, is a past Associate VP at the University of Minnesota, where she was tenured, and the Founding Executive Director of the University of Minnesota's first Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center in North Minneapolis. She was also tenured at the University of Florida in Anthropology.

As a consultant in Raleigh, she has provided technical assistance to the Friends of Oberlin-Pineview Cemetery to help preserve an historic African American cemetery. She is a published author in anthropology, literature, and poetry and a regular contributor to Insight News (www.insightnews.com).

McClaurin's story is particularly telling. She grew up with her mom and siblings in the projects of Chicago after her parents divorced when she was eight. Her father had a second grade education and her mother had dropped out of high school. In the 1960s residentially segregated educational system of Chicago, McClaurin attended an all-girls vocational high school and trained to become a secretary. She worked her way through school as a legal secretary and took college prep classes, encouraged by teachers, and not discouraged by family who had never attended college.

McClaurin, along with the late Tonda Woolfolk, left Chicago for New Haven. She had been selected by the Mundelein College (now closed) Upward Bound Program to participate in the Yale Summer High School. The experimental curriculum included arts and culture trips, "T" (therapy) group discussions of race and social justice issues and offered youth dismissed as "underachievers" a unique learning experience.