

DAILY NEWS

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In 'Bordentown,' integration's loss

"A PLACE OUT of Time" builds a fine historical documentary on the all-black Bordentown School into a larger issue: the price we paid for eliminating black institutions when racial integration started to arrive in the mid-20th century.

It's an uncomfortable and deceptively complex question: Did ending the evil of segregation also require us to lose valuable institutions created to counter it?

The Bordentown school was founded in 1886 because blacks, even in the nominally more enlightened North, often did not have access to full education.

Located in Southern New Jersey, Bordentown aimed to give black children a solid education and a grounding in the discipline needed for a good life.

Its original mission was largely vocational, concentrating on practical, marketable skills like printing or cooking.

By the early 20th century, however, it was also becoming an aca-

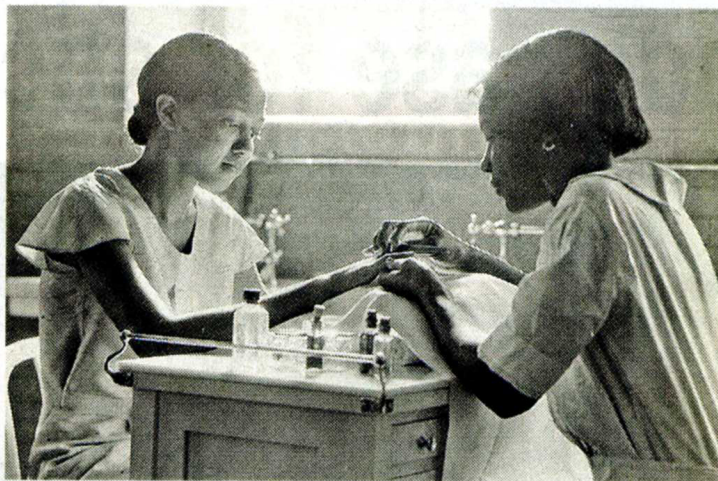
★★★★
**A PLACE OUT
 OF TIME — THE
 BORDENTOWN SCHOOL**
 TONIGHT AT 9, PBS/CH. 13
 BY DAVID HINCKLEY

dem institution that turned out leaders and scholars. Some called it "the Tuskegee of the North."

Filmmaker Dave Davidson and his staff have located a wealth of stills and video from Bordentown, and talked with alumni as well as historians who explain its institutional importance.

Bordentown was a boarding school and a strict one. Students came to its 400-acre campus in September and often stayed until May, with sports, proms and other teenage social activities incorporated into a regimented life.

"A Place Out of Time" doesn't focus much on the fact Bordentown students faced none of the racial issues that came up for students in integrated schools.



Manicuring was one of the skills taught at Bordentown. Photo by Lewis Hine

It pays more attention to the tug of war between the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, who believed all black people needed vocational skills, and W.E.B. DuBois, who felt that the "talented 10th" of black people should hone leadership skills that would elevate their whole race.

Bordentown in many ways blended the two, and claimed great success at both.

Davidson suggests its decline began with World War II, when Bordentown was slow to realize a high-tech war and high-tech economy needed new skills.

The big blow was the Supreme Court's 1954 decision outlawing

school segregation. While the ruling was aimed at all-white schools, it also put an all-black school in an awkward position.

Since Bordentown was run by the state of New Jersey, Gov. Robert Meyner rammed through a plan to convert it to a mental hospital — and just like that, over a few months in mid-1955, Bordentown was gone.

Today, what's left of the campus is a juvenile detention center.

"A Place Out of Time" makes an unassailable case for Bordentown's value over its 69 years. The larger issue remains a discussion-in-progress.

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