

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

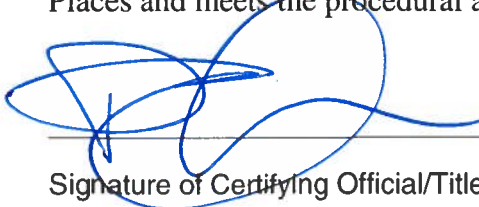
East High School
Name of Property
Denver, Colorado
County and State
NRIS.06000660
NR Reference Number

State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this additional documentation move removal
 name change (additional documentation) other

meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

 Patrick A. Edman, Deputy SHPO 10/14/22
Signature of Certifying Official/Title: Date of Action

National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- additional documentation accepted
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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East High School (5DV.2091, NRIS.06000660) 1600 City Park Esplanade/1545 Detroit Street, Denver:

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Prepared by Annie Martinez, Intern – Colorado State Historic Preservation Office

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph:

Listed originally in 2005, East High School (5DV.2091, NRIS.06000660) was listed under Criterion A at the local level for its connection to great shifts in education and city planning, as well as politics. The resource was also listed under Criterion C for its art and architecture. Denver architect George Williamson's Jacobethan Revival building employs various style defining characteristics. The rebuilt school participated in greater trends of modernization in accordance with the City Beautiful movement throughout Denver. The mural featured in the library, painted as part of the Depression-era Public Works Administration art program, presents the school's role in larger movements of growth and recovery. The new style of education, with increased focus on life skills and current events, led to significant publicity for the school. The school also became an example of successful racial integration among students prior to mandated busing in Denver while the diverse makeup at East led to increased student activism and ethnic recognition throughout the school and community. The original nomination discusses the importance of East High's Black student population as well as the first use of automatic voting machines at this site to elect class leaders. Although well-supported in the textual evidence, the original nomination does not make the case that the school is significant under Ethnic Heritage – African American. Through intimate involvement with racial integration in the Denver Public Schools as well as a student culture of vocal and active racial discourse, East High connected young people with current events and civil movements throughout the community. Activism placed East High students at the forefront of citywide conversation and action. The school's culture of critical engagement from students had far-reaching impacts, as the students who would become the next generation of constituents and leaders were taught to speak up and encouraged to pursue change. The subject of this amendment is therefore to explicate that connection and the significance of East High School in Denver's Black history.

SIGNIFICANCE UNDER CRITERION A: Ethnic Heritage (Period of Significance 1968-1975)

Beginning in 1968, East High School witnessed great shifts in culture and advocacy within the school and greater school district. Through internal efforts led by students and greater motions of integration through busing from the Denver Public Schools (DPS) and the State, these years and the decade to follow define significant changes in the educational and cultural presence of Black students within the school community.¹ East High School demonstrates significance in Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage for Black history as a center of student activism, an epicenter of change following the Noel Resolution, and the introduction of court-ordered busing between 1968 and 1975. The 1973 *Keyes v. School District No.1* case was heard before the Supreme Court and was one of the only segregation

¹ Ira Selkowitz, "East High School," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. 2005.

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related court cases heard outside of the South.² Ultimately it was determined the Denver Public Schools must pursue desegregation among multiple schools, and East High was pivotal in the racial balancing efforts.

Busing at East High:

By 1959, East High School was uniquely well-integrated when compared to other DPS high schools, most of which demonstrated highly stratified demographics. That year, Denver population growth led to a need for the construction of additional schools. However, the attendance boundaries drawn for these schools created several predominantly Black and Hispano schools, prompting concern from parents over educational equity. The district boundary drawing was halted in response to said concerns, and communities sought new resolution from the school board.³

By May 1968, significant pressure on integration plans grew. Following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, school board member Rachel Noel submitted a resolution requesting an integration plan from superintendent Gilberts by September of 1968. Inspired both by her experiences as a Black parent in Denver and by the 1967 *Report of the US Commission on Civil Rights*, Noel hoped to create more equitable treatment for Black children in the school system.⁴ The "Noel Resolution" would pass after significant debate on May 16th, 1968. However, shortly after, school board elections resulted in two anti-busing members being elected to the board, which would be followed by the board rescinding the action for integration. Integration plans were then halted by the majority anti-busing board member base, immediately stopping discussion of integration and busing plans. Following this obstacle to integration, eight families of diverse backgrounds sued the district.

The parents group argued that the Denver Park Hill Schools, of which East High School was one, were systematically segregated by the school board's district boundary policy. Black students living in Park Hill were concentrated at Manual High School and East, while white students living in the same area were sent to other schools. The Federal District Court Judge William E. Doyle upheld the plaintiffs, and ordered the school board to carry through with the initial desegregation/busing plan.⁵ With this initial victory, the plaintiffs argued a second case for desegregation for the remaining schools within the district. However, the lower courts did not agree that Denver Public School policy had intentionally segregated the entire district. The case was appealed and in June of 1973, the Supreme Court ruled on the case in *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, determining that intentional segregation was present and plans for desegregation must be in place for the following 1974-1975 school year. In addition, the court ruled that Denver was in error for not considering Hispano students in the same "racial category" as Black students, since both groups "suffered the same educational inequities."⁶ As noted in the NHL Theme Study on racial desegregation, the case demonstrated that the school desegregation movement was not confined to the South or areas with de facto segregation laws. *Keyes* was the first case of its kind heard in the West or North.

² Susan Ciani Salvatore et. al. *Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States, National Historic Landmark Theme Study*. National Historic Landmarks Program: National Park Service, August 2000.

³ "Composite View of Denver's School Desegregation," *League of Women Voters of Denver*, September 1976.

⁴ Rachel Noel, Speech notes "Educational Equality: 20 Years After the Keyes Case," October 24th, 1989.

⁵ "Composite View of Denver's School Desegregation."

⁶ *Keyes v. School Dist. No. 1*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973) Accessed via Justia.

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The bus balancing proposal laid out by Judge Doyle regarding East High School impacted 667 students, moving their attendance and aiming to result in a “68% Anglo population at East.” Preceding this plan, the demographic at East High was composed of 53.7% Anglo students and 39.6% Black students.⁷ Busing at East High and Smiley Junior High offered to “improve racial balance,” as students were moved to other schools where larger minority populations were concentrated.⁸ This would result in a decreased Black population at East High School shifting the makeup from 39.6% Black to 23%. At East High the shift in diversity composition resulted in significantly more white students at East as the school’s already high black population was shifted to other local schools, including South High School and George Washington High School.⁹ Together with Manual High School, East became part of an “education complex.” Students enrolled at one of the two schools could take courses at either school.¹⁰ Judge Doyle established that the two schools would be “operated pretty much as a single institution,”¹¹ which provided increased vocational opportunities and broke up demographics between the schools.

In June of 1975, community members began reflecting on the roll out and success of desegregation busing in Denver schools including East High.¹² However, metrics to demonstrate the success of busing were indeterminate and produced unclear assessments. Schools sometimes remained socially segregated and ethnic studies courses were still predominantly attended by students of color. Many parents felt excessive time in transportation was time wasted for no real impact, while teachers found mostly success but a general lack of rigor in coursework. Diana English, previously a Black student at East High switched to South High by busing, reported cliquish behaviors at her new school in comparison to more community focused and significantly desegregated school she had previously been familiar with.¹³

In the years following desegregation busing at East High, difficulties troubled faculty and students alike. “The transition wasn’t smooth for anyone. East had been a politically active school during the 1960s. It often had the appearance of a college campus, with civil rights and anti-war protests a constant presence.”¹⁴ However, in 1976—two years after the start of busing at East—new school spirit took root as “East bounces back.”¹⁵ To the students, busing had been a success and to other constituents, “All visible signs indicated that the students were right. Classes were well mixed with blacks and whites usually sitting side-by-side.”¹⁶ Attendees of the school during this time reported a general atmosphere of cohesion and friendships that crossed racial boundaries.¹⁷ Furthermore, “George Rease, the vice principal, said race-related incidents have been non-existent in the past several months,” although in the *Rocky Mountain News* Rease continued to lightheartedly recite a racist incident with a student’s parent, contradicting the success reported from students.

⁷Moran, “Plan for Racial Balancing at East, Smiley Presented.”

⁸Fred Gillies, “Gilberts’ Bus Plan To Shuffle 2,040,” *The Denver Post*, January 4, 1969.

⁹ Interview with Robin Wilton, East High Class of 1973. Conducted by Poppie Gullett, June 16, 2022.

¹⁰ Max Woodfin, “Mood Is Lighthearted at East High School,” *Rocky Mountains News*, September 12, 1976.

¹¹ “Bus Plan to ‘minimize’ Traveling,” April 9, 1974.

¹² Gail Paulson, “Has Busing Worked?,” *The Straight Creek Journal*, June 5, 1975.

¹³ Paulson.

¹⁴ Woodfin, “Mood Is Lighthearted at East High School.”

¹⁵ Woodfin.

¹⁶ Woodfin.

¹⁷ Interview with Robin Wilton, East High Class of 1973. Conducted by Poppie Gullett, June 16, 2022.

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Busing continued across DPS for twenty years. In 1995, a federal judge ruled that Denver Public Schools no longer needed to implement busing in racial balancing of school populations. After twenty years of desegregation busing within the city, Chief U.S District Judge Richard Matsch determined that the schools can make their own policies—so long as deliberate segregation is not present.¹⁸ The judge recognized significant change in Denver population demographics and stated, “The Denver of that day is not the Denver of today.”¹⁹

Black Student Alliance and Civil Rights at School:

In addition to its important place in the *Keyes v. School District No. 1* case, East was also a site of grassroots Black student movements. Black students at East began organizing formally in the 1960s, hosting “Speak Outs”—a meeting for interracial discourse—as early as 1966 where students could share opinions. In mid-April of 1968, East High students hosted their weekly “Speak Out” with discussion regarding the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and local uproar the day following his assassination.²⁰ Just as King’s death had spurred Rachel Noel to action on the Denver School Board, it spurred strong emotions among Denverites. Local looting and window breaking along Colfax Avenue reflected tensions, later mirrored at the Speak Out where students shared beliefs about both the Civil Rights Movement and the local response. School counselor and advisor Arthur Bragg saw “free discussion” and recalled only two physical fights in the years the program ran. In September of 1968, after white students reported being attacked and threatened on campus by five black students—who were arrested later that day—two police officers were stationed at the school.²¹ Though similar events occurred at George Washington High School, they remained unconnected. The *Denver Post* reported, “About 40 percent of East’s enrollment is Negro, and East was plagued with apparently race-connected assaults and robberies last school year,” alluding to a larger string of incidents troubling the school. Possibly in response to the tensions of the year, in November of 1968, the Black Student Alliance at East High hosted a “Project Pride Week ” to educate and share Black and African-American heritage with the student body. This included a book fair featuring Black authors and stories, a film screening, Black business speakers and a Black student art showcase.²²

At one event, five Black speakers presented to 35 primarily black students. Edward Dwight Jr. discussed race in the Denver area and resistance to its acknowledgment. James F. Reynolds, director of the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, suggested white complacency was connected to insufficient activism from Blacks. Next, Reverend George Turner proclaimed that the channel to Black solidarity has not previously but should be through Black churches. Then the speakers shifted as Charles Jones discussed how prayers and protest marches have been insufficient in change and a new stage of “liberty or death” approached. This shift was maintained by Lewis Rhone who presented a more aggressive stance stating, “Black people are looking for human rights, not civil rights. Black power is nothing more than the liberation of black people in this country by any means necessary.” He continued, “We have never seen any people get their freedom non-violently. There is no such thing as a non-violent

¹⁸ Steven Paulson, “Judge Ends Two Decades of Forced Busing in Denver,” September 13, 1995.

¹⁹ Paulson.

²⁰ Bob Saile, “‘Speak Out’ Opens Way for Frank Interracial Exchanges,” April 21, 1968.

²¹ “Officers at Two Schools,” *The Denver Post*, September 28, 1969.

²² “Book Fair Set at East High,” November 20, 1968.

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revolution.” This resulted in vigorous applause and motivating energy from the students in attendance.²³

The Monday preceding April 28, 1969, the Black Student Alliance at East High formed a list of demands presented to Principal Robert Colwell. These demands established their requests for increased visibility and resources for Black students at East High. The demands included the following: Black student and parent participation in reprimand processes at school; a Black headquarters for students and the BSA; reconsideration and development of history courses aiming to bring Black history to all students through a specified department; increased Afro-American courses taught by Black teachers; and that the number of Black teachers at the school be proportional to the student population.²⁴ These demands were deemed unreasonable and out of the control of the school, however students were encouraged to continue studying the demands as discrete subjects. Colwell says demands stem “from a lot of valid, basic, needs” and pointed out that on a teaching staff of 120 only eight teachers were black.²⁵

These calls resulted in the addition of the first African American History course in 1969, taught by Black educators and with demand for seats in attendance growing rapidly in the years to come. One early teacher of the course was Regis Groff, who would go on to become Colorado’s second Black state senator. Groff taught both the standard history and Black history courses, coached the golf team, lived in nearby Park Hill, and had a reputation as a kind and effective educator. Students who took his course recalled one of the key projects was to write a paper on a key Black historical figure. Although the creation of the class stemmed from student action that administration considered “unreasonable,” by 1973 the Black history class was well attended by white and Black students alike.²⁶ Groff’s time teaching the course was short-lived—he replaced lieutenant governor (and first Black state senator) George L. Brown in the state senate in December of 1974 directly from his position at East.²⁷

Principal Colwell’s concessionary response largely stifled student activism as proposals for independent study were deemed insufficient to meet Black student needs and the Black Student Alliance rejected significantly weakened solutions to their demands. The 1969’s *East High Angelus* yearbook continued the theme of student activism, with political and racial discussion regarding the Civil Rights Movement and Denver Schools integration, demonstrating the active and vocal student population.

The power of East High students did not go unpraised or underestimated, civil rights figure and student of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, Jesse Jackson visited Denver in February of 1978 and spoke to students at East High School, one of the most diverse schools in the city. He encouraged them to pursue education and study nightly to enable themselves to battle racism. He assured students “they hold the key to ending racism in America,” and ended his speech with calls for continued and rigorous education for all students.²⁸ In the years following desegregation, East High’s prominence as a hub of political discussion and diversity declined as school spirit shifted and student demographics became more predominantly white, but students continue to take pride in the progressive nature of the school.

²³ Alan Cunningham, “‘Black Power’ Given Violent Meaning,” *Rocky Mountains News*, November 24, 1968.

²⁴ John Dunning, “East High Blacks Demand Bigger Role, End to Racism,” *The Denver Post*, April 28, 1969.

²⁵ “Demands Issued on East High,” *Golden Transcript*, April 29, 1969.

²⁶ Interview with Robin Wilton, June 16, 2022.

²⁷ “Regis Groff to replace Brown in state Senate,” *The Denver Post*, December 11, 1974.

²⁸ Max Woodfin, “Students Hold Key to End Racism -Jackson,” February 3, 1978.

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The Denver Post. “Regis Groff to Replace Brown in State Senate,” December 11, 1974.

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“Students Hold Key to End Racism -Jackson.” February 3, 1978.

Wilton, Robin (East High Class of 1973). Phone interview with Poppie Gullett. June 16, 2022.

Woodfin, Max. “Mood Is Lighthearted at East High School.” *Rocky Mountains News*, September 12, 1976.

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Photo Log and Historic Figures:

- 1 of 10. A primary interior page of the yearbook acknowledged the definitive shift in style and content for the yearbook and depicted scenes of protest and activism among the student population. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1969.
- 2 of 10. A full-page spread shared the Black Student Alliance group and their demonstration of Black pride and activism through hosting the Black Awareness Week which included speakers and representative media. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1969.
- 3 of 10. Hosted as part of the Black Student Alliance's Black Awareness Week, Lou Smith's speech was quoted in the yearbook encouraging Black pride and activism. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1969.
- 4 of 10. One of the most controversial images in the yearbook, this photo led to media coverage from the *Rocky Mountain News* addressing the prominent discussions of race published by the East High students. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1969.
- 5 of 10. The interior cover of the yearbook features newspaper clippings referencing the integration turmoil of August 1969. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1970.
- 6 of 10. A full-page spread featured Black students embracing their heritage and identities while the text urged change and united strength among races. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1970.
- 7 of 10. This dual page spread featured the phrase "integration?" and demonstrated student awareness of greater processes impacting the school community as well as acknowledged the shifts in student population at East High. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1972.
- 8 of 10. This spread encouraged Black Pride as well as featured Black East High students as members of the school community. By publishing this spread, students demonstrated their value for diversity at the school as well as awareness of greater Civil Rights movements in their community. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1972.
- 9 of 10. The presence of the Black Student Union remained and shifted through the years and by 1972 had become the Black Students for Black Action group demonstrating the active role the students took in activism. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1972.
- 10 of 10. Regis Groff taught at East High School from 1967 to 1974 and would later serve Colorado in the state senate in 1974. He taught the original Black American History at East High as well as serving as the Black Student Alliance faculty sponsor. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1972.

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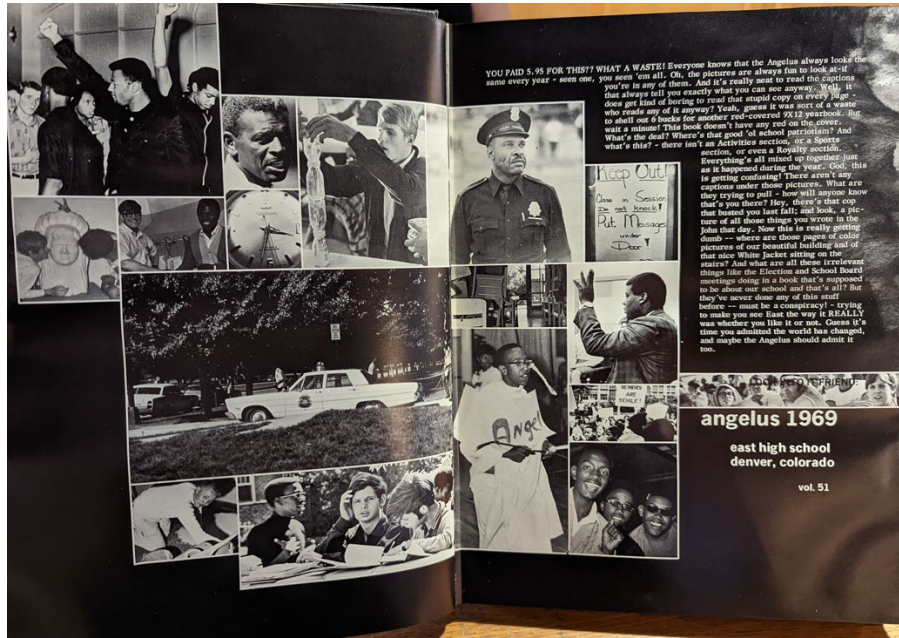


Figure 1. A primary interior page of the yearbook acknowledged the definitive shift in style and content for the yearbook and depicted scenes of protest and activism among the student population. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1969.

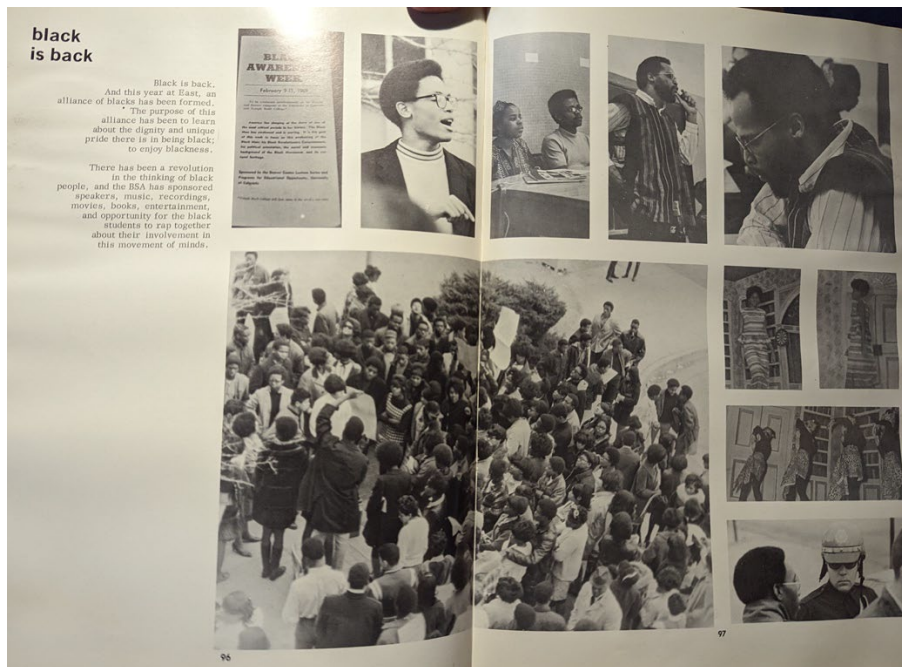


Figure 2. A full-page spread shared the Black Student Alliance group and their demonstration of Black pride and activism through hosting the Black Awareness Week which included speakers and representative media. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1969.

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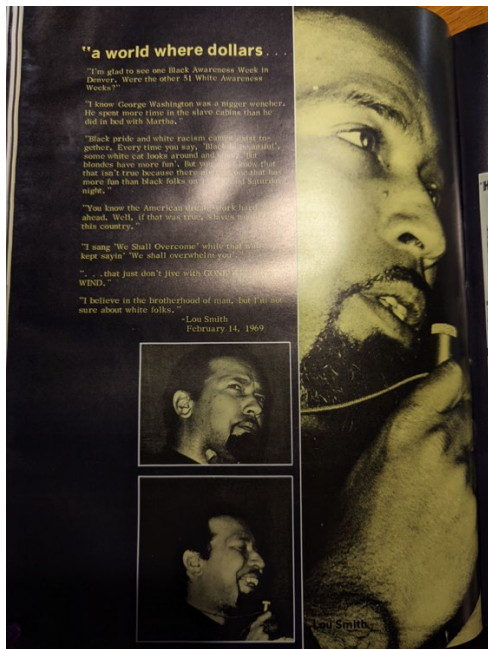


Figure 3. Hosted as part of the Black Student Alliance’s Black Awareness Week, Lou Smith’s speech was quoted in the yearbook encouraging Black pride and activism. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1969.

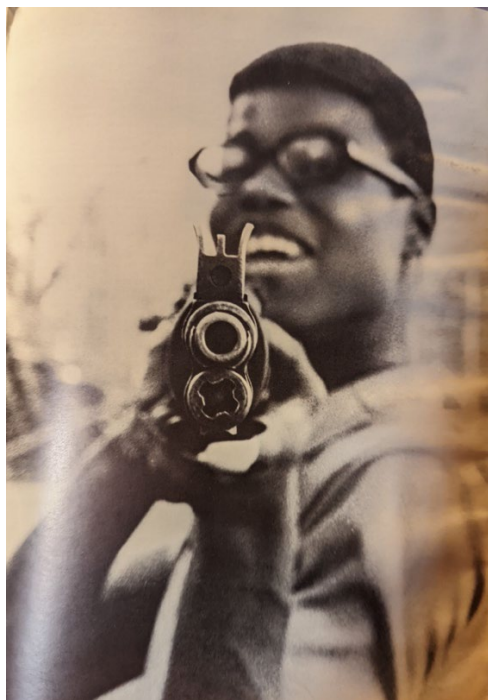


Figure 4. One of the most controversial images in the yearbook, this photo led to media coverage from the *Rocky Mountain News* addressing the prominent discussions of race published by the East High students. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1969.

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Figure 5. The interior cover of the yearbook features newspaper clippings referencing the integration turmoil of August 1969. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1970.



Figure 6. A full-page spread featured Black students embracing their heritage and identities while the text urged change and united strength among races. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1970.

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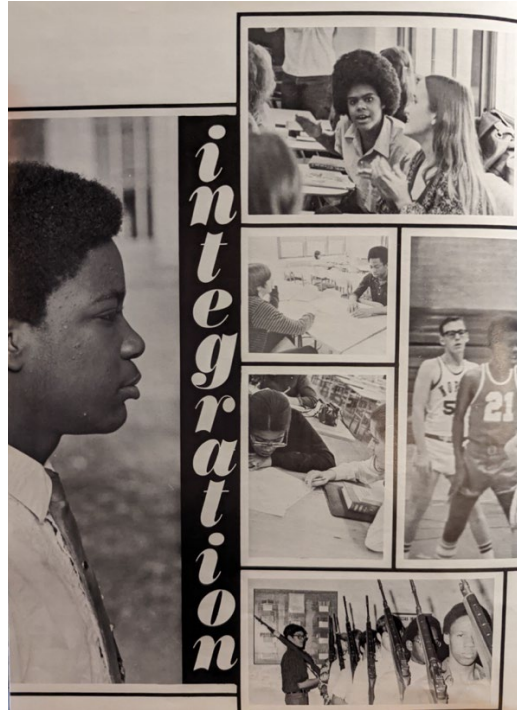


Figure 7. This dual page spread featured the phrase “integration?” and demonstrated student awareness of greater processes impacting the school community as well as acknowledged the shifts in student population at East High. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1972.



Figure 8. This spread encouraged Black Pride as well as featured Black East High students as members of the school community. By publishing this spread, students demonstrated their value for diversity at the school as well as awareness of greater Civil Rights movements in their community. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1972.

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Figure 9. The presence of the Black Student Union remained and shifted through the years and by 1972 had become the Black Students for Black Action group demonstrating the active role the students took in activism. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1972.



Figure 10. Regis Groff taught at East High School from 1967 to 1974 and would later serve Colorado in the state senate in 1974. He taught the original Black American history at East High as well as serving as the Black Student Alliance faculty sponsor. SOURCE: East Tower Museum, East High Angelus Yearbook 1972.