

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN MISSISSIPPI

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I. INTRODUCTION

In January 1970, a principal spoke to student assembly, newly desegregated, in the southern part of the state of Mississippi. “You people are in a history-making situation,” said B.J. Oswalt to the now unitary high school in Columbia. “It can happen only once and you are part of it. Now, what are you going to do?”

It was a question the nation was asking, as Mississippi schools went through the most massive social change ever requested of any educational system in the United States.

The response in Marion County was surprisingly constructive: the white student body president said, “If everybody can just treat everybody else as a human being, it might just turn out all right – be a big surprise to everybody.” And the black student body president flashed the peace symbol, a unifying gesture to both races, and predicted, “We can become a lighthouse in Marion County.”

Three years later, it is apparent that Mississippi has not yet become that lighthouse and that it still contains potential for vicious racism. But the nation still needs a beacon in the area of race relations, and the state still has a possibility to become that leader. Substantially more desegregated than most other states, Mississippi had not suffered any major blowup, unlike Denver, New York City, and some other Northern cities. Yet it still suffered from day-to-day tyrannies and inhumanities that many other areas would regard as outlandish.

How it was that Mississippi had traversed this far, and what the situation has now become, will be the subjects of this paper.

Beginning in 1954, when signaled by the United States Supreme Court that their efforts might not be foolhardy, black Mississippians began to press for desegregated public education. These efforts were not motivated by a belief that blacks couldn't learn in the absence of whites nor by a desire for social or educational mingling as such. Rather, two major factors caused their efforts.

First, black Mississippians recognized that the state's monolithic pattern of segregation constituted a deliberate attempt by whites, through law and custom, to define the position of blacks and to limit their activities, opportunities, and civil rights.

Second, black Mississippians were aware that “separate but equal” schools did not exist and that white Mississippi had no intention of providing them, since unequal education was part of the very system that kept blacks from voting and denied them full opportunity.

Segregation is defined in this paper to mean a social and cultural system which expresses the feelings of whites that blacks are inferior; it consists of an elaborate racial etiquette, which requires that the races be kept separate whenever they are involved in similar tasks or tasks that might imply social equality, and which allows close physical and social

contact whenever the relationship between whites and blacks is clearly “superior” to “inferior.” Since learning things in school is obviously a similar activity regardless of the race of the participants, the races were kept rigidly apart in educational activities. By contrast, the relationship between white housewife and black maid was allowed to be physically close because it did not imply any kind of equality between the roles involved.

Desegregation is defined as the ending of segregation, in this case in education. It means the ending of dual schools, of racially identifiable institutions, and of separation in the public institutions. It is not identical with integration, which will be used to mean the functioning and working together of both races in a constructive manner as parts of an organic whole or viable institution.

In the context of segregated Mississippi (and of segregated America), and in the context of the basic stasis that had prevailed in Mississippi from 1875 to and beyond 1954, desegregation represents a major black victory. Many recent analysts, black as well as white, have lost sight of that fact and of the fact that the plaintiffs in major segregation decisions, from Brown to Alexander and beyond, have been black children and their parents. Because desegregation has not yet led to full integration, because desegregation in itself has not humanized institutions that manifested a shocking degree of inhumanity, desegregation has been called a failure. Some observers, lacking a sense of history or an understanding of the situation before desegregation occurred, have even termed it a white plot to take away black institutions. But as we shall see, white Mississippi bitterly opposed desegregation every step of the way. Only the courage of many black Mississippians, some of whom paid for their actions with their lives or their health, bolstered by federal allies, particularly in the judiciary, broke down the confining system of segregated education in the state.

The social change wrought by this desegregation has not yet ended. In itself, this change will not bring about any racial millennium. But it represents the first step in the upheaval of the old order that was necessary so that black – and white – Mississippians could begin to achieve freedom and opportunity in their lives.

II. RACE RELATIONS AND SCHOOL SEGREGATION BEFORE 1954

The present situation and future prospects for education and for race relations in Mississippi are influenced by a history that more than that of any other state, resembles a nightmare. Several themes stand out. Since the beginning of white settlement under the French, whites have used black labor and have restricted black opportunities through restricting, among other things, black education. Second, the state has had a large black population, in most years a larger proportion than that of any other state in the nation. In 1970, for example, 56 of the state's 150 school districts had black majorities in their enrollments, more on an absolute basis than anywhere else; the state's population was about 40% black, higher than any other's; and the school age population was almost half black. Thus any change in education or race relations would of necessity be major. Finally, due in part to the hierarchical relations in society that grew out of plantation slavery, education for whites in Mississippi has been at times severely restricted, as has opportunity for poor and working-class white citizens.

A. Education for whites

Although black education has almost always been given even lower funds and priority than white education in Mississippi, white schools in most time periods have been abysmal enough. To understand white Mississippi's response to school desegregation, it is necessary to begin with a survey of the place of education in the lives, minds, and social structure of white Mississippi.

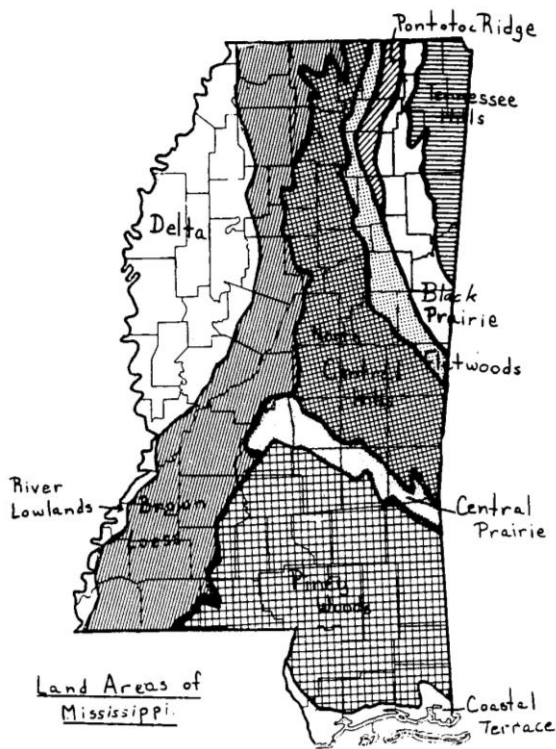
Before 1868 public education for whites was scattered and sparse. Even by 1860 Mississippi was still an overwhelmingly rural state, barely out of frontier conditions. The Chickasaws had begun their "Trail of Tears" westward in 1837, the Choctaws theirs seven years earlier; thus only for one generation had the northern two-thirds of the state been open to white and black settlers in any number.

Frontier violence, sparse settlement patterns, and such pressing problems as the need for the construction of houses and towns retarded the development of schools. But there were also certain ideological retardants. Plantation slavery developed a very different understanding of the operation of society and the place of the individual in society from the ideology that grew in New England or the Midwest. In a plantation society people were not viewed as basic equals, progressing through their own endeavors. The newly rich planter class that came to dominate Mississippi during the 1840s and 1850s did not explain its own good fortune in such terms.

Instead, society was seen as hierarchically ordered. Blacks were considered categorically inferior, not to be educated; increasingly planters and lawyers came to view poor whites as also inferior, poor due to innate characteristics, and likewise not really worth educating. The notion of society as dependent upon an underlying educated citizenry

atrophied; rather an educated elite, firmly dominant economically and politically, was relied upon. The “best people” ruled.

The matter is not quite so simple, of course. Mississippi was also something of a bastion of Jacksonian Democracy. In North and East Mississippi (except for the Black Prairie, where the plantation structure also developed), unlike the Delta and the River Lowlands around Natchez, a strong sense of independence and opposition to the planter elite developed. Yet while Jacksonian Democracy captured most of the votes of this class except in the Northeast counties, the party did not really represent the interests of the common man. Jefferson Davis, for example, was something of a Jacksonian Democratic leader, while at the same time being a rich slaveowning planter. And during the 1850s, Jacksonian Democrats, not Whigs, led the movement in defense of slavery that eventually led to war.



Plantations developed in the River Lowlands and Loess Hills first, then in the Black Prairie, and last and most thoroughly in the Delta. The Loess Hills no longer raise much cotton. For that matter, even the Delta has moved partly to soybeans and catfish. The Black Prairie and Loess Hills now raise cattle and corn more than cotton. The type of society that grew up also differed in racial norms and politics.

Thus the commitment to education for all citizens as a duty of government, growing in the 1830s and 1840s in the Midwest and East, developed less fully in Mississippi. Such an ideology could hardly flourish in a society whose slave code specifically outlawed education for blacks. Thus in the 1830s and 1840s we already see the operation of a principle that will recur over and over again in the state: the way in which the social system operates in order to restrict blacks also means the indirect undermining of the position of all whites below the upper class.

During the administration of Governor Albert G. Brown in the 1840s, the legislature passed an optional local tax measure that permitted taxation for education, but most

communities did not vote the tax into effect. Planters and lawyers hired tutors for their own children, sent them to makeshift private schools, or sent them out of state. Little provision was made except in a few towns for poorer white children. Rural poor whites go no schooling.

The University of Mississippi (“Ole Miss”) opened in 1848 and grew into something of a unique institution. State universities in the East were far overshadowed by the Harvards and Princetons and thus were of little merit for decades. Ole Miss was different. It quickly became the principal institution for the sons of the Mississippi planter and lawyer class, particularly in the Delta. But unlike public universities in the Midwest, which developed into institutions of educational excellence, Ole Miss never became a first-class school academically. A few members of the upper class, aware that the school had failings, sent their children out of state, but most rich Mississippi planters, having seen little need for educational excellence in their own lives or business or farming enterprises, sent their children to Ole Miss for social reasons.

The Reconstruction era, with its emphasis on public education, brought the first real public school systems for whites as well as blacks to Mississippi. Segregation as a system was not completely solidified in those years, which preceded the racist reactionary period of 1875-1900, and it is possible that desegregated education took place in public schools in some areas. Some of the private black schools accepted white students; a white graduated, for example, in the first or second college class at predominantly black Tougaloo College.

A controversy even arose over Ole Miss itself, and in September of 1870 its Chancellor declared, “Should [the University of Mississippi be required] to receive and admit applicants of the Negro race to the University Classes, the members of the present Faculty would instantly tender their resignations.” It didn’t come to that, however. Ole Miss was to hold out for another 90 years.

With the end of Reconstruction, public education for both races faced a severe cutback. The reactionary administrations of the 1880s and the 1890s were controlled by the planter-businessman-lawyer oligarchy, which cared nothing at all about black education and did little for public education for whites. Teacher salaries were reduced by as much as two thirds; the school year was shortened; many schools, especially black institutions, closed entirely.

Between 1900 and 1915, with poorer hill whites now often in control of the executive mansion, agricultural high schools and vocational high schools were established, and the total amount spent on education increased. During these years, busing was instituted in Mississippi, but for whites only. In his autobiography, *THREE YEARS IN MISSISSIPPI*, James H. Meredith tells how white buses passed by his sister while she was walking to school as late as the 1950s. But for whites, busing did begin, and the state increased its coverage of the population of school age whites through both World Wars. Some rural school consolidation took place, again primarily for whites.

By 1954, the white portions of some school systems (Jackson, other sizable towns, some small towns and counties in Northeast Mississippi) were approaching national educational standards. In the Piney Woods counties, which were very poor economically, many white schools were still ruinous. In some plantation areas, the white elite, not valuing education very highly, permitted disastrous superintendents, principals, and teachers to educate their children. But on the whole, white public education by 1954 was at least an established institution, similarly situated if academically inferior to school systems in other parts of the nation. Private schools were few and weak, far less important than “prep” schools were and are in New England.

The role of white public education was broad. Every little Mississippi town had as its most important single white social institution a twelve-grade school, usually located near the center of town. Much local boosterism and hometown patriotism attached to the local white high school’s athletic contests. Social relations in the white community were often mirrored in school activities: in the Delta a planter’s son stood a good chance of becoming student body president. In Shaw, for example, where perhaps 40% of the white school-age population is Italian-American, almost no Italian-American child before 1963 had been selected cheerleader, student body president, or other major officer. Both institutionally and symbolically, the schools were tightly bound to the white community.

The state had passed a toothless compulsory education law that was not enforced at all regarding the black community and was only occasionally invoked against recalcitrant whites. However, the stigma that had sometimes attached to public school teachers in the white community, particularly to males, was declining, and increased teacher pay measures were getting legislative consideration. A true quest for educational excellence, involving a willingness to innovate, to provide good teaching conditions, and so fort, was not apparent, but white public education was receiving considerable support.

B. Education for Blacks

Black education fared far less well. The prohibition against educating blacks has been a deliberate and conscious strand of the ideology of slavery since at least 1700 in Mississippi. As pro-slavery sentiment tightened down in Mississippi between 1830 and 1850, the state made it a crime to teach a black slave to read and write. In actuality time and time again the taboo was broken, because a slaveowner could get more work and more profit from an educated slave, who might become a carpenter, industrial worker, or even bookkeeper. Joseph Davis, for example, brother of Jefferson, allowed and encouraged Ben and Isaiah T. Montgomery, his slaves, to read and write. Ben Montgomery became the plantation bookkeeper, ran the place in his owner’s absence, and developed several patentable inventions.

But educated slaves were the exceptions, and the taboo against black education, dating at least to Bienville’s slave code during French colonial administration of Mississippi, was generally adhered to. (Ironically, the very existence of the taboo in a sense implied that whites suspected blacks might be equal or superior to themselves. For it recognized that

in order to keep blacks down, nature alone would not suffice, but would have to be aided by keeping education away from them.)

Black education in Mississippi began at last in 1862, after the Confederate retreat from Corinth. Union forces gradually swept over the western part of the state. Members of Grant's army and white Northerners associated with it set up makeshift schools serving a few of the thousands of former slaves who had fled to Union lines. When Grant, John Eaton, and others devised "contraband camps" in November 1863, Union soldiers and African Americans founded some schools. At Davis Bend, on plantations that had belonged to Joseph and Jefferson Davis, a unique experiment in black self-rule started under Grant's aegis in the same year. Blacks ran the plantations on a cooperative basis; they established their own school board, and in May 1866, they opened a school.

After the war ended, President Johnson gave signals to the white South that encouraged its feelings of white supremacy.⁽¹⁾ The result was the Black Code, passed first by Mississippi and then by other Southern states. Freedmen's Bureau schools had been reaching thousands of black Mississippians. Northern church and philanthropic groups were founding many private schools for blacks. In the wave of racism accompanying the Black Codes, however, many of these schools closed; white Mississippians burned some of them and drove their teachers out of the country.

Congressional Reconstruction set a different tone. Now, for a time, the power of federal government was lined up at least fitfully in support of the civil rights of black Mississippians. The American Missionary Association (an arm of what is now the United Church of Christ) and other groups founded schools; whether called institutes, universities, or academies, they were in reality elementary schools during their first years of existence. And in 1870 the Republican state government established the first effective public school system in Mississippi. There was no tuition charge, and by the end of the first year 3000 schools had been set up serving 66,000 pupils.

As mentioned earlier, segregation was not rigidly established during Reconstruction, and even in the public schools there was probably some crossing of racial lines. It is certain that faculty desegregation was common. Several private black schools, including Tougaloo, began with all-white faculties that then gradually desegregated. Others began with or quickly developed biracial faculties. Southern whites who taught at such schools were ostracized by the white population in most towns, particularly after the end of Reconstruction when racism triumphed in the state. Northern whites were also stigmatized but were viewed with a bit more tolerance since in a way they were not really transgressing local norms but were "foreigners," from outside the system, operating perhaps under different norms.

During Reconstruction, a struggle for black higher education exemplified the dynamic between segregation and black educational opportunities. Partly to forestall the desegregation of Ole Miss, the state founded Alcorn A. & M. for black students. This established the principle that by threatening to desegregate, blacks might obtain better segregated facilities. Unfortunately, however, after Reconstruction ended in 1876, the

state and nation went so racist that this principle did not really get used again until after World War II.

The Reconstruction period also demonstrated that poor whites benefited from black gains, another principle that was to go without further test for decades. The establishment of a public school system and the emphasis on education that accompanied it was a direct aid to working-class whites, particularly when contrasted to the prewar years, when they found it hard to get even the rudiments of an education.

After Reconstruction, all public education suffered under the new reactionary oligarchy, but black schools were especially hard-hit. The taboo against black education, which had resurfaced briefly in the Black Codes of 1865-67, reappeared. In the violence accompanying the elections of 1875, which ended Republican rule in the state, several black schools were burned and white and black teachers of blacks were beaten or run out of town. Black public education continued in 1876 but on a reduced scale, with school terms shorter than those for white schools, salaries vastly smaller, and teacher preparation inferior.

An ideology arose to rationalize this unfairness. Besides the usual racist assertions about blacks' alleged incapacity to benefit from education anyway, it included a bizarre theory of taxation. Whites pay most of the taxes, went the reasoning, so why shouldn't most of the tax money spent on education go to the white schools? Were not whites being generous, in fact, even in the pittance thrown to black education? Of course, this reasoning confounded wealth and source of wealth, conveniently overlooking the fact that the money with which many white Mississippians paid their taxes was earned by black labor. Moreover, property taxes paid by white landlords were immediately passed on to black families in the form of rent.

Unequal conditions in black schools would continue for as long as the schools were separate, until 1970. Public black institutions of higher learning, such as Alcorn, Jackson State, Mississippi Vocational College (now Mississippi Valley State University), and several junior colleges, have never been made equal. But even more oppressive than the unequal conditions was the atmosphere of subservience and conservatism that whites forced upon black education and black educators. Quite probably, black attempts to establish schools on or improve schools to a plane of equality with white institutions would have been met with outright white repression. Thus most black schools, public or private, took care to pose no direct challenge to white educational dominance. In 1910, for example, when Lawrence Jones founded Piney Woods Country Life School, the most famous private academy for blacks in the state, he implicitly guaranteed to whites in the local area that the school posed no basic threat to white supremacy.⁽²⁾ Only with such a guarantee could the school have survived in its superbly racist environment.

Writing about higher education in Mississippi between 1875 and 1900, Vernon L. Wharton observed:

In the absence of proper provision of schools at state expense, Tougaloo University stood as the one institution where the young Negroes of Mississippi might obtain competent training.(3)

And Tougaloo could provide such training solely because it was not controlled by Mississippi whites or by Mississippi blacks who in turn could be controlled by whites.

In 1890, the political and social conditions under which black schools had to function became even worse. The 1890 Constitutional Convention had as its primary reason for existence the disfranchisement of blacks. Its conveners said so openly. But the constitution this convention produced, which like the Black Codes quickly became a model for other Southern states, did not disfranchise blacks openly. Instead, it contained provisions that were aimed at blacks and were designed to facilitate differential and discriminatory enforcement so as to exclude black voters in many counties. One voting provision required the applicant to read a section of the state Constitution and interpret it to the satisfaction of the registrar. Such provisions inherently opposed black education, since they relied upon a lack of education for their operation. Frequently after 1890 white politicians denounced education for blacks specifically because it might produce black voters who could pass the literacy and interpretation clauses of the 1890 Constitution.

The 1890 Constitution also did something the 1868 Reconstruction Constitution had never done: it sentenced blacks to separate schools de jure. It required the state to maintain separate schools for white and colored students. Intermarriage, incidentally, was also forbidden, and even its advocacy was punishable by a fine and jail term.

After the passage of the 1890 Constitution, black Mississippians realized that in the short run, at least, they had no hope for political equality or even for minimal political or civil rights. Perhaps in response to this realization or to Booker T. Washington's admonition to forget about social and political equality and to turn to education instead, black Mississippians founded several private schools between 1890 and 1910. Unlike the Reconstruction institutions, including Rust and Tougaloo that have survived to the present and a host of institutions that did not, these new schools were not set up by white Northern liberals but were self-help enterprises coming from within black Mississippi. Often against great odds, groups such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.), the several Baptist organizations, and the Church of God in Christ succeeded in founding viable institutions. Although these schools were always under the ultimate control of the mores of the surrounding white community and were never allowed to become serious challenges to white supremacy, nevertheless they provided better educational opportunities than the pitiful one-room schools supported by public funds in most areas. A listing of them would include Jackson College and Natchez Jr. College before 1890, and Okolona, Utica Jr. College, Prentiss Institute, Mary Holmes, Mississippi Industrial, J. P. Campbell, and Piney Woods by 1910.

Northern white philanthropy continued to play a major role in black education in Mississippi. The Jeanes Fund was directly connected with Booker T. Washington and operated under his assumptions. It provided usually one teacher for each county or

district. The Jeanes supervisor, as she was called, visited the black schools, teaching vocational skills and home economics courses. More important was the Rosenwald Fund, which built and sometimes staffed whole schools in black areas. The John F. Slater Fund, Phelps-Stokes Foundation, and later the Rockefeller Foundation also assisted black education, along with such earlier groups as the American Missionary Association, the United Christian Missionary Society (Disciples of Christ Church), and other church organizations.

The private foundations and church groups did not have the resources for the vast job. They could not make up for the lack of equal public funds. Moreover, they could accomplish little without the cooperation of the local superintendents and boards of education, representatives of the local white power structure. Yet these men were sometimes ideologically opposed to the very idea of black education and rarely favored true excellence in black schools. Often the only way to gain their approval was to emphasize the vocational aspects of black education, for even planters could support programs that made their laborers better at hewing wood and drawing water. Such training carried with it built-in obsolescence. For as jobs changed with changing technology, skill requirements also changed, but those who had already graduated, being trained rather than educated, were crippled in making the transition.

Thus when the foundations won the cooperation of local whites, they often lost the chance for real change. The Jeanes Fund shows this problem vividly. The fact that a college-educated teacher visited schools did provide a role model and a bit of an impetus for improvement. Sometimes, association with the Jeanes Foundation did spur local school boards to do more for black education. But except for a few cases, the Jeanes fund made no real change in Southern social structure or black education. By its very nature it was the kind of operation that would never threaten white control or lead to excellence in black education.

What was needed, of course, was equal public expenditure for black schools, but despite the separate but equal doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson and the many related court cases in the early 1900s, separate never meant equal. As Luther Munford put it,

The state of Mississippi spent up to ten times as much per child on white education as it did on Negro education throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Most black schools before 1956 were wooden shacks, often without indoor plumbing, that ran on a six-month schedule designed to allow Negro students maximum time in the cotton fields. As late as 1946, 16 counties had no Negro high schools and only a tenth of the state's school-age black children were enrolled in a school.(4)

Before World War II, school systems for blacks outside the larger towns were rudimentary. Some planters simply refused to allow their plantation's black children to leave the property for education and established one-room schools operating for only three or four months of the year for them. By 1935 public schools for blacks had been established on an eight-month basis in some areas, but Rosenwald schools were still the

most important source of education for much of the black population. The Clarksdale system, advanced for its area, was paying its black teachers in 1941 just one-fifth the white rate. In a Depression year, Bolivar County spent \$283,161 for the education of 6216 white school-age children in contrast to a tiny \$38,765 for 35,708 blacks. The latter figure averages a mere \$1.09 per person per year!(5) As a whole in 1940 the state was spending \$41.71 per white student, \$7.24 per black. The school year was only 124 days for blacks while it was 160 for whites. Black teachers averaged 1.5 years of college, whites 3.5 years. Black teachers received \$232 per year on the average, just 30% of white pay.(6) And, again, only one black child in ten was in school.

Between 1940 and 1954, slow progress took place. Paul B. Johnson, Sr., Governor of Mississippi from January, 1940, to his death in December, 1943, provided some assistance to black public education. During his administration the state passed a free textbook law supplying books at state expense to all pupils in the state on an equal basis. (Mississippi is now one of only nine states in the United States with such a policy.) This was the first major bill since before 1890 that carried within it the promise of “equal” in the “separate but equal” canon, and because of it to this day many older black Mississippians revere Johnson. His support of the bill violated the taboo against educating blacks. But in operation the promise of the bill soon proved fraudulent. Black schools received cast-off books after whites had moved on to new editions. In 1970 in Yazoo City, Munford reports that the white school was using a 1965 world history book while black had books printed in 1958.(7) In some districts as late as 1973 black schools had almost no books at all; I have watched teachers read the lesson from their class’s one book to their 30 students throughout an entire one-hour class period, having on other alternative.

By 1952, black education was only slightly changed from its position of 1940. Now state and local funds came to \$35.27 per black student, but whites were getting \$117.43. Now black schools were open 158 days, but white institutions were open 167. In teacher pay some closure of the ratio, though not of the dollar gap, had taken place: \$1019 for blacks vs. \$1991 for whites. But in teacher training no significant change had occurred: black educators still averaged only 1.9 college years, compared to 1.5 years twelve years earlier and compared to a white 1952 average of 3.7.(8)

Separate and unequal, then, was the state of black education in Mississippi on the eve of the 1954 Supreme Court decision. Blacks might have been satisfied with equal separate schools, but they had not received even an approximation of equality. Events of the next decade would show that only by pressing for integration would either desegregation or separate but equal be achieved.

Finally, overlapping the time period of the decision and not coincidental to it, extensive school district reorganization was underway in Mississippi. In 1953-54, just before the decision, there were 927 white elementary schools in the state, compared to 2328 black elementary schools. This statistic indicates no emphasis upon black education, but just the opposite: 1,040 of the black schools, but only 48 of the white, were staffed by a single teacher. Another 439 black schools, compared to a mere 80 white schools, employed only two teachers. Yet although the total number of school-age children was almost the same,

black and white, there were 438 white high schools but only 276 black high schools! This last disparity, since black high schools were also smaller as well as less numerous than their white counterparts, reflects not only discrimination in facilities but also the fantastically high black dropout rate, caused in part by the total inadequacy of the educational system out from which the children were dropping.

The reorganization, which had already made black and white district administratively unitary for the first time, would have the effect of consolidating black schools and further consolidating white facilities, following that consolidation already effected in 1900-1915. It meant that large sums of money would be made available for the purpose of partially equalizing black facilities in order to stave off the effects of the decision of the Court.(9)

C. Education for Other Groups

Because as practiced in the American South (and in some other places) segregation is a dichotomized system, expressing and formalizing the relation of oppressor to oppressed, it has difficulty dealing with groups in the middle – in this case peoples who are not black, not white. For this reason, these “third groups” tend to put the system to the test, developing complex and ironic relationships within it. An analysis of their situation can often reveal the complexity and power of the formal etiquette system of which segregation consists.(1) Several groups in Mississippi have from time to time found themselves in this unenviable position, including Choctaws, Chinese Americans, Italian Americans, and Spanish-speaking Americans and Mexicans.

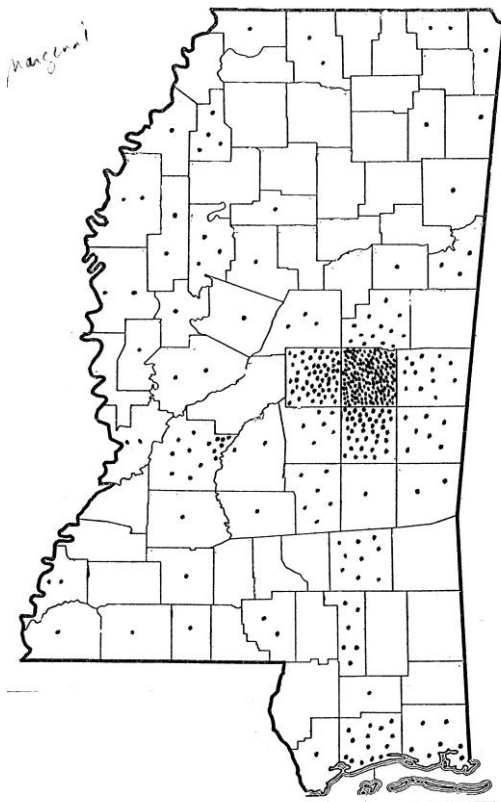
Choctaws were the largest Native American nation in Mississippi before whites and blacks entered. Like the other “Five Civilized Tribes” in the Southeast, they quickly adopted some institutions of the new settlers, including schools. Long before Mississippi whites or blacks had a comprehensive school system, the Choctaws were using money from treaties in the 1810-1824 period to pay for a Choctaw Academy in Kentucky and grade schools in Mississippi. After their removal to Oklahoma in 1830, they continued this emphasis for a while, being more educated than the white or black settlers around them. But those Choctaws who remained in Mississippi now found it impossible to continue to get an education.

Although the removal treaty provided a land allotment system for Choctaws wishing to stay in Mississippi, whites drove the Choctaws off the best land and left those families who stayed in the state scattered about on the least accessible tracts. Their institutions were almost wiped out by the departure of most of the Choctaw population. The federal government closed their Mississippi schools in the 1830s to help drive them to Oklahoma. Late in the nineteenth century counties and missions set up makeshift one-room schools for some Choctaw children. But in 1903 a final government push to move the remaining Choctaws to Oklahoma again closed most of these schools. Up until 1964, all Mississippi Choctaws who wanted a high-school education had to go away from their immediate area – and in most cases had to go all the way to Oklahoma – to get it.

Because of their difficult situation within a black/white polarized system, after 1830 the Choctaws retreated into isolation, playing no role in state affairs. Their school system similarly had to retreat, since Choctaws were neither black nor white and had no wish to be classified as either. Rigidly segregated, the Choctaws were kept out of local white schools and other institutions in Neshoba County, the county of greatest Choctaw concentration. The “Choctaw” school system operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (B.I.A.) was meant for them, but it added a high school less than ten years ago, and its faculties included not one Choctaw until recent years.

B.I.A. teachers were whites from the local area. They did not often overcome their prejudice against this other race and most of them treated the job solely as a source of income, even an undesirable source because of the racial stigma attached to it. They knew no Choctaw and didn’t want to learn it, and they were therefore not able to rise to the challenge of educating students whose first language was not English and who knew little English before their arrival in first grade.

Even after Choctaw Central High School was completed, the educational segregation and isolation of the Choctaws continued. They found no one to play in athletic contests, for example, in a state where every school and every team was racially labeled and where no crossing over racial boundaries was permissible. Therefore they had no interscholastic athletic program at all.

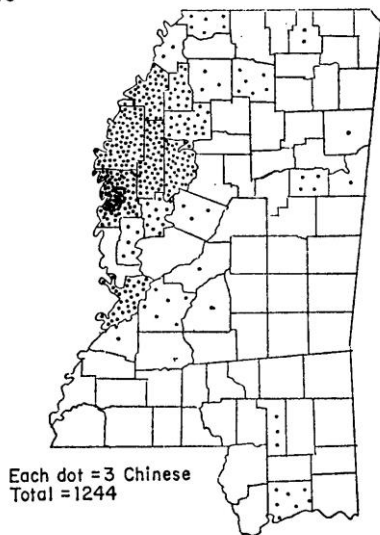


Choctaw population, 1970.
Each dot = 10 people.
In Neshoba County, shaded darkest, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians has a reservation consisting of almost 20 different patches of land, mostly cobbled together during the Great Depression. On that land is Choctaw Central High School, where most Choctaw children attend. Of course, Choctaw children also attend public schools in other counties throughout the state, as shown.

The Chinese faced a different situation. Mississippi has more Chinese than any other Southern state. They have been middlemen between the colonial planter and the colonized agricultural workforce in the heavily-black Mississippi Delta since about 1870. But unlike the Choctaws, the Chinese, whose numbers are only a quarter of the Choctaw total to being with, are spread out over twelve Delta counties. Overwhelmingly they are grocers, serving mostly black clientele.

By the mid-1920s, several Chinese who had managed to bring in their families faced the problem of providing their children with an education. Rejection from white schools was tantamount to complete exclusion from public education in the Delta, as we have seen. Furthermore, many Chinese did not want to be classed “black.” But since they had been brought to the state as sharecroppers in 1870, were not white, and lived in black neighborhoods, whites identified them with their customers and had no intention of classing them “white.” The 1890 Constitution even explicitly forbade Caucasian-Mongolian (*sic.*) intermarriage with the same ferocity directed against Caucasian-Negro unions.

40 CHINESE IN MISSISSIPPI 1960



Chinese Mississippians in their peak population year, 1960, lived overwhelmingly in the Delta, where more than 90% of them ran grocery stores, mostly in the black community. From the 1920s to about 1950, many Chinese children attended separate Chinese schools in Greenville and Cleveland, in the Delta.

A few white schools in small towns, including Rosedale, Louise, and one or two/communities in Coahoma County, had admitted one or two Chinese children, the total population of school age Chinese in their town limits, to white schools. Other families, excluded from white schools in their hometowns, then tried to send their children to these more liberal towns by moving to the town or by boarding their children with relatives who already lived there. The white community then found itself faced with two, three, or more families, with a total of five or ten children. Although these numbers constituted perhaps the smallest “yellow Peril” ever to menace an American community, smaller even than the threat to San Francisco posed by Ho Chi Minh in the 1960s,

nevertheless in most towns school officials and leading citizens – particularly including white grocers – grew sufficiently alarmed to exclude the Chinese completely.

When this happened in Rosedale in the fall of 1924, the Chinese father whose daughter was thrown out took the district to court. The resulting legal battle went to the United States Supreme Court and became a famous case in the series of post-Plessy decisions upholding school segregation.

Gong Lum, a Chinese merchant with considerable standing in the white community in Rosedale, had two daughters. Both were born in Bolivar County and attended white Sunday school. Martha, the older, had been admitted to the public school for whites along with others of her race. But at the noon recess of opening day in October, 1924, the superintendent notified her that she would not be allowed to return.

Lum’s lawyer pointed out: “She is not a member of the colored race nor is she of mixed blood, but that she is pure Chinese. . . [Furthermore,] there is no school maintained in the District for the education of children of Chinese descent.” Therefore they argued that separate and equal facilities were not provided for her, and the Mississippi Circuit Court for the First Judicial District of Bolivar County decided in her favor. . .

The state Supreme Court reversed the decision, citing the 1890 Mississippi Constitution, “separate schools shall be maintained for children of the white and colored races,” and asserting that Chinese are not “white” and must fall under the heading, “colored races.” . . . [To the United States Supreme Court, Lum] boldly asserted that it was a known fact that the white race was the “law-making race” in Mississippi and that it created special schools for itself to avoid mixing with Negroes. “If there is danger in the association [with Negroes], it is a danger from which one race is entitled to protection just the same as another. . . The white race creates for itself a privilege that it denies to other races; exposes the children of other races to risks and dangers to which it would not expose its own children. This is discrimination.”

Their reasoning was equalitarian in a sense; they merely used the white racist rationale for segregation as an “if” clause. Ironically, the Supreme Court, then at its lowest ebb since the 1857 Dred Scott decision in its racist thinking, accepted the rationale. It agreed that “It has been at all times the policy of the lawmakers of Mississippi to preserve the white schools for members of the Caucasian race alone.” By the reasoning of Lum’s lawyers, the Court would then be forced to a paradox if it maintained “separate but equal” in order to pay lip service to the Fourteenth Amendment. Chief Justice Taft tortuously tried to harmonize the two:

A child of Chinese blood . . . is not denied the equal protection of the laws by being classed by the State among the colored races who are assigned to public school separate from those provided for the whites, when equal facilities for education are afforded to the whites.”(2)

The case is important in legal history because it shows the contradictions in the reasoning of Plessy v. Ferguson in even more extreme form than that decision, and because it shows the lengths to which the racist Supreme Court was willing to go to uphold segregation even in opposition to the Constitution. Lum's argument to compound the irony, indicates also the reasoning that the Court would use in 1954 to declare segregation illegal; for Lum had claimed that whites invented segregation and that they did so to separate themselves from blacks and to stigmatize blacks as inferior and a danger to themselves.

The decision was a harsh setback to Chinese Mississippians. The Lums moved to Arkansas. In Rosedale, Cleveland, Greenville, and sporadically in other towns, schools were maintained, usually at public expense, for the education of Chinese children. The school in Cleveland, Mississippi, was the most important; students from other towns boarded there to attend it. Later, gradually, despite the ruling, through persuasion and white intermediaries, the Chinese children were allowed back into public white schools. Greenwood was perhaps the first large system to admit Chinese, in the late 1930s. Clarksdale did so in 1941; Greenville followed suit in 1945. In Greenville formally and in other towns informally, the Chinese leadership was required to guarantee to the white power structure that the children in question were pure Chinese, not "tainted" with a drop of Negro blood. If they could not do so, the child usually went to the black Catholic schools.

For a brief period in the Mississippi Delta, around 1910, Italians who had been brought in to compete with blacks as sharecroppers were denied entrance to white schools. Again, separate and unequal Italian schools were set up! But the Italian consul from New Orleans intervened, and besides, they were white, and that fact eventually made a difference.

Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have worked as farm laborers in Mississippi for over half a century, and they too for a time in a few communities were placed in separate schools. Mostly they were allowed to attend white schools; a few districts allowed them to choose white or black schools as they wished, but did not let them change their mind in midyear. Choosing "black" meant attending an inferior school but being rather well accepted in it. Choosing "white" usually meant performing worst academically and being left out completely socially in the white school.

American Indians outside reservation areas in East Mississippi have fared erratically. Usually, like Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, they did not attend school much.. When they did, they were usually placed in the white school, but sometimes they could make their own choice, like Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.

In each of the "triple-segregated" systems – Choctaw, Chinese, and ephemeral schools for Italians and Chicanos – the faculties were white. This fact was of crucial importance to the minority group itself, for it aided greatly in their upward racial mobility. It also meant they were saddled with racist teachers who in the Choctaw case especially wanted only the money and had little commitment to the educational task at hand. The teachers did receive considerable antagonism from the white community for their assignment,

however, and received in fact an approximation of the opprobrium that was directed at white teachers of black students. The two largest groups, Choctaws and Chinese, were still in a very shaky racial position in 1954, kept out of most white institutions. Ironically, the 1954 Supreme Court decision would lead to a more complete acceptance for them than it would for the black children at whose request it was made.

D. Schools and Social Structure on the Eve of the 1954 Decision

Between the end of World War II and the Supreme Court decision, two trends in Mississippi society were developing that would directly affect the state's reaction to the decision. White leaders of the Mississippi Democratic Party gradually became more and more estranged from the National Democratic Party and its principles. Second, although on the surface blacks were no more secure in their liberty or lives than they had been fifty years earlier, a core of alert black leaders was developing who were keenly aware of national changes and were waiting for those changes to supply them with potential aid in their struggle to break out of their segregated position.

In his demagogic Senatorial campaign of 1946, Theodore Bilbo stressed the need to cut the already tiny black vote. In the years after World War II, black voting shrank to insignificance. The Supreme Court had outlawed the white primary, so blacks could potentially have made an impact, but terror and fraud kept them from the polls. Only in Greenville, a couple of other towns, and in two black-run precincts did blacks vote in any numbers. Ironically, votes in the black precincts were counterproductive, for the state's press merely used the totals from these two polling places to hang the stigma of "nigger lover" around the neck of whatever white politician had been unlucky enough to carry them in the first primary. The number of blacks voting by 1954 was no higher than it had been in 1894.

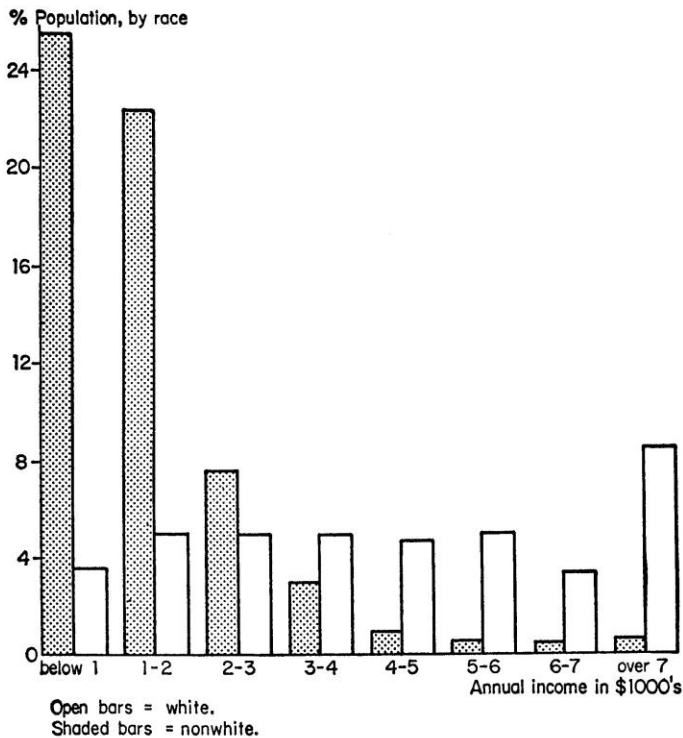
In 1948 the Mississippi delegation led a Dixiecrat walkout from the Democratic National Convention because of a civil rights plank in the party platform. This was a major change since the mid-1930s, when such men as Senator Pat Harrison and even Bilbo had been stalwart supporters of the New Deal. The change in white rhetoric can be seen in the difference between Harrison and his successor, James O. Eastland. Harrison was no racial liberal, but he was in the national mainstream of his party on economic matters and in most other areas. Eastland, on the other hand, espoused politics of the far right, ran for office as a staunch anti-Communist, and represented the economic interests of his class, the planter-banker oligarchy.

Already by 1954 politicians openly supporting the national party had difficulty explaining their actions in state re-election campaigns. The F. D. R. coalition was falling apart as far as the white South was concerned, and its moderating effects on Mississippi politics, caused by the definite and close inclusion of Mississippians in the national political process, was waning. Right-wing ideology began to seep into white high schools, so that anti-Communism came to be equated with patriotism, and commencement speakers, even the student honors winners themselves, spoke obsessively

on these themes. The new political leaders, who would lead the public rhetoric as Mississippi desegregated, were local parochials whose positive reference group was no longer the national political leadership but consisted of hometown politicians and a few Southern nationalists.

In addition to its effects upon politics and white political culture within the state, this new split between Mississippi Democrats and National Democrats meant that the national political leadership of the United States had fewer ties to white Mississippi and less reason to work in Mississippi whites' interest. This was first shown in the Senate's refusal to seat Bilbo in 1946; there is no doubt that he would have been condemned and barred from taking his seat if he had not died from cancer of the mouth. Gradually after 1954 Mississippi blacks came to develop ties to Washington figures that rivaled those of all white Mississippians save the state's two senators; the senators, however, were partly immobilized from using their influence for segregationist causes lest they lose their Democratic Party affiliation and seniority.

Meanwhile, Mississippi was slowly industrializing, except in the Delta and Southwest. More rapidly was it urbanizing, as machinery replaced hand picking and chopping in the cotton fields. Small towns grew in population while their hinterlands declined. Overall the state remained static in population despite its high birthrate. And the number of Mississippi-born blacks in Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, and the small towns of Illinois continued to grow. A phenomenal brain drain afflicted the state: more than two of every three college graduates, black or white, left the state within three years of graduation.



Black social structure was incredibly oppressed. The bargraph shows income by race in Bolivar County, in the Delta, five years after the 1954 decision; it was even worse before. Nearly 50% of African American households earned less than \$2,000!

Statewide, even by 1970 only 12,000 blacks had B.A. (or higher) degrees. The middle class in black Mississippi was made up almost entirely of public-school teachers, the bulk of the 12,000 college graduates.

This tiny black middle class had an ideology that made it more middle class than black. Some were in fact light-skinned, although other individuals overestimated their “brightness” because it was a characteristic value by white, and therefore by colonialized black, society. And as the term “brightness” itself connotes, light skin color was connected in many minds with brightness of intelligence. Many middle-class blacks, aware of their extremely fortunate position vis-a-vis the mass of poor blacks in the state, explained it to themselves by defending the status quo. “I got ahead, I made it on my own,” they reasoned. “Therefore anyone can, if they are intelligent and ambitious and work hard.” Thus they shifted the blame for black poverty from the racist social structure and discriminatory policies of the white establishment, where it belonged, to the backs of the poor themselves. In this shift, of course, middle-class blacks were merely mirroring the explanation of black poverty (and of white poverty) that the white oligarchy had fed to itself, but somehow some middle-class black teachers believed it more sincerely, and were therefore more profoundly anti-black, than even the whites.

We have already mentioned the plight of the black schools themselves. They were tiny; many were not even located in publicly owned buildings but made do in churches, barns, and homes. A handful of black high schools in Jackson, Vicksburg, and elsewhere, were developing a real sense of spirit and excellence. But in general, and especially in the Delta, the black schools in 1954 were so bad that dropouts from them cannot be said to have acted unwisely.

With increasing consolidation, busing was just beginning to reach the black rural population. Of course, it was busing for segregation. At one time, for example, black students from the northeast corner of Hinds County were bused all the way to the southwest extremity, 40 miles each way, past at least two white high schools, to get to “their” school. In larger towns, school officials established a network of small inefficient separate black and white schools to serve small racial enclaves. In addition, attendance zones were drawn, and not in any subtle de facto manner; each town was simply zoned twice, once for blacks and again for whites. If whites and blacks lived next door to each other, one went to the school indicated by the white zone lines, the other to the school indicated by the black zone lines.

III. THE 1954 DECISION AND ITS AFTERMATH

A. Immediate Reaction: "Equalization."

The 1954 Supreme Court decision was not unexpected in Mississippi. Legal analysts had anticipated it, and of course a number of cases involving higher education had intimated it. In its consideration of new consolidation and equalization measures, the state had already begun a protective reaction. Nevertheless, news of the decision hit the state like a bombshell. It was the top story of the day, even of the year. Fred Sullens, editor of the Jackson Daily News, wrote that

Human blood may stain Southern soil in many places because of this decision, but the dark red stains of the blood will be on the marble steps of the U. S. Supreme Court building.(1)

The Sullens editorial was perhaps the most notorious journalistic response from the entire South, but there were other responses, more cautious and more accepting, within the state. Some whites were resigned to desegregation, seeing no way to delay it or to oppose federal power.

"Well, are we going to have niggers this fall?" A parent asked a Cleveland, Mississippi, school official shortly after the . . . 1954 decision. Not that soon, came the answer, but everyone would probably have to get used to it in four or five years."(2)

Some white Mississippians struggled to adjust and expected that they would have to do so.

The same feeling, although muted with continued resistance, can be seen in Governor Hugh L. White's response to the decision:

"We shall resist . . . by every legal means at our command. I want to say that there is no intention to 'defy' the Supreme Court; we are simply exercising the same legal rights to resist the most unfortunate decision that the NAACP exercised."(3)

White's reaction was far more temperate than that of Governor Barnett seven years later.

I believe any dispassionate analysis of the events of 1954-1963 in Mississippi (and in other Southern states) shows that it was a mistake for the desegregation process to be so gradual, even tenuous. During these years white resistance was continuous, fanned by hope of eventual success in stopping desegregation. The cost to white liberals and moderates and especially to black civil rights leaders and children was incalculable.

President Eisenhower's famous remark, "You can't legislate prejudice," which was of course demagogic since the Court was attempting to legislate discrimination, not

prejudice, provided one cue to Southern white racists that the decision might be successfully opposed. The Court's own delay and the cautious wording of "all deliberate speed" expressed in Brown II a year later provided other cues. And as they had in 1865, 1875, and 1890, Mississippi racists again provided a model of resistance for other Southern states and the nation.

Governor White's first act was an attempt to gather black support for his school "equalization" program, tied in with consolidation.

He invited 90 black leaders from all parts of Mississippi to his office and asked them to support a voluntary segregation plan designed to wipe out the estimated \$115,000,000 difference between white and black school facilities. White felt that they would go along with this move to keep the schools separated but make them equal. White began the conference by speaking of "friendly" race relations of the past in Mississippi, but several blacks immediately spoke in favor of abolishing segregation Aware that his plan had failed, White soon called the meeting to an end.(4)

Nevertheless, White did begin the equalization plan, and a huge wave of black school construction hit the state. Today the results are everywhere: modern one-story brick facilities, sometimes built so cheaply that interior walls do not reach the ceiling, making noise levels intolerable, sometimes built reasonably well. They dot the Mississippi landscape, all built between 1955 and 1959. In smaller towns, they are invariably placed at the city limits, usually insulated from the downtown area by the zone of greatest black residential concentration. Perhaps land was cheaper outside town, or perhaps city and school fathers feared the impact of locating so many young blacks within demonstration distance of the business district.

Too often the money ran out before libraries, laboratories, and the like were completed. Too often the emphasis was on the outside, not on the educational process within. Too often courses in agriculture and mechanics continued to occupy students' time even when their own interests were more toward office skills or college preparation. Nevertheless the new black schools did represent a vast improvement over the old, and some white educators did favor the change for that reason.

Even when the new schools were equal physically, however, they were not equal intellectually. Indeed, their educational badness went beyond what might be expected and had complex causes. Most obviously, low-quality black education was still favored openly by many white administrators and citizens, especially in the Delta. One old-line Delta county school superintendent told me he would not hire Tougaloo graduates for the black schools in his district, because "They have too many ideas – they give people ideas." In 1970 a black principal in another part of the Delta said the same thing to one of my students. And as that last incident showed, some black principals came to feel themselves threatened by the idea of change or excellence in black education. They themselves had become pillars of the black community, and they now kept the lid on and stifled possible dissent regarding failings of the black schools. To attack the black high

school meant, to such principals, to attack the black principal. Thus because of his social position the principal became an automatic and effective insulator keeping pressure for change from reaching white administrators.

Indeed, the wave of new black school construction seemed only to increase the conservatism of many black principals. Not grasping the underlying dynamic that had brought the new schools into being – the relationship between conflict and change, between potential desegregation as a threat and improve segregated education as a response to that threat – the principal saw the new schools as proof that his mode of operation “within the system” could get results and that black education was in good hands.

When the schools failed to improve, this too caused no increased radicalism on the part of the principal. Most black principals in Mississippi, it is probably fair to say, became somewhat retreatist and defeatist. They had grown accustomed to accepting bad facilities and used textbooks from the white superintendent and offered no direct word of criticism. There were some noble exceptions, but most black principals had become resigned to the idea that a black school could not expect decent accommodations or equipment from a white board. In this view, of course, they were only being realistic, but resigned realism is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy, and the principal who expected nothing got what he expected.

Some principals tried to work subtle deals to get special projects approved for the benefit of their school, but few mounted any real campaigns to improve them on a broad front. Then when black parents or community leaders complained about the inequities, black principals, who in a sense had been complicit in them from the beginning, defended their schools as good institutions, not as inferior as their audiences charged. Or at best they emphasized the allegedly unchangeable nature of white control, which thwarted their efforts to improve the schools. Either response let white administrators off the hook. Very few black administrators saw that black complaints should be solicited and magnified so as to constitute a “left wing” with which to argue for some improvements when dealing with the white power structure.

Black students developed a tremendous degree of alienation from some black schools as a result. Many teachers were alienated too, just going through the motions. But this kind of alienation did not move toward positive action or radicalism. Thus in “civics” or Mississippi history courses, such teachers merely followed the line of least resistance, teaching what was in the book as fact. Teaching the progress and basic fairness of American society – the basic subtext of U.S. history textbooks, is intrinsically alienating to poor black students in Mississippi. The notion of teaching “as a subversive activity,” which works especially well with black Mississippians in my experience was never utilized by such teachers. And so I have seen black Mississippi history classes, for example, memorizing the name, county seat(s), and year of organization of each county in the state!

Teachers of this sort could never be effective role models for many of their students. Moreover, the split in status and allegedly in color between middle and lower classes in the black community further alienated teacher from student. Obviously those members of the student body whose bodies were darker than their teacher's could hardly hope to model after them if color was the basis of the teacher's success, since they could not change their color.(5) I have witnessed Mississippi high school teachers – black as well as white – giving decided preference in sympathies, sheer time, and most important in expectations to light-skinned black students. The expectancy effects are particularly crucial. As one light-skinned male put it, “The teacher calls on you more often, expecting more from you. So you study harder.”(6)

Another reason why most black teachers whatever their ideology could not serve as effective role models concerns the economic discrimination that pervaded Mississippi society. Black teachers had already reached their social and economic ceilings within the state. In the entire black community, outside of a handful of doctors and businessmen, there was no one above them. Yet their position was hardly elite, compared to that of wealthy whites. Thus their own lives demonstrated that within Mississippi education did not lead to significantly better careers, incomes, and status. The most likely route to a better income was to leave the state, and that did not require a B.A. or even a high-school diploma. And so in many counties black schools had such an incredible dropout rate that they had several times as many students in first grade as in twelfth.

The low quality of education at Mississippi Vocational College (now Mississippi Valley State), Alcorn A. & M., and until recently at Jackson State, the three public schools for black teachers, completed the cycle. For many years not one state school for blacks was accredited. Recently all three have achieved accreditation, but the two rural schools, Alcorn and MV.S.C., are still far from adequate. Yet their products, as has earlier been noted, were favored by white administrators and some black principals. Forty-seven of 49 teachers at Broad Street School in Shelby in 1971 were graduates of Mississippi Valley State College in nearby Itta Bena, according to one report, and only two of those 47 had studied out of the state for any length of time. In southern counties, Alcorn graduates similarly predominated.

Most of these problems were similar in kind to those faced by other educational systems in America, even in uniraical Northern states; the added racial dimension merely made them still less tractable. And even worse than the controls maintained by white administrators was their praise! For the superintendent was really interested in only two things from the black school: that it did not rock the boat or cause trouble, and that it responded to his administrative needs. Thus a principal was praised if he got his forms in on time, not if his students' national test scores increased. Often this attitude seeped down into the schools, so that principals would interrupt teachers in mid-sentence to have them or their classes fill out a form or complete some administrative task. Entire grades would be dismissed for impromptu assemblies when college recruiters or other visitors came to the school. Subtly, the message communicated was that administration was more important than education, form more important than substance.

I believe it was possible for principals to resist these pressures, but very difficult for them to do so. Board members and even superintendents rarely set foot inside black schools after their dedications except to appear on stage on commencement day. Unfortunately, most principals failed to take advantage of the lack of continuous white control that accompanied this lack of surveillance. The conservative mindsets of the principals in effect replaced the absent white supervisors. The noun “tom” and verb “to tom” are general terms greatly needed in sociological literature. “To tom” can be defined as to modify one’s opinions and actions to suit the wishes of one’s audience or reference group. The term has wider use than in race relations; a tom might also be, for instance, a college professor in the late 1960s who hid or modified his hawk position on the Vietnam War in order to win approval from dove students or colleagues. And another term has some utility: “supertom,” going above and beyond the normal expectations of ones reference group or supervisory group to hold opinions or commit actions more conservative (or more extreme in whatever direction) than even they anticipated. For example, a Delta black high school principal in 1965 refused to allow some young students to re-enroll in his school in the fall because they had participated in Civil Rights demonstrations during the previous summer. His white superiors had not requested or dreamed of such a step, which eventually had to be rescinded anyway when parents complained. I have learned(7) that during Reconstruction there were black members of the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi who lynched and beat other blacks for personal or ideological gain. The supertom principal is the modern equivalent, raping the black community intellectually for the benefit of himself and of the white controlling caste.

In every black high school, however, there were one or two or more black teachers who possessed real dedication and kindled a spark in their student audiences. They made a heroic difference in an otherwise bleak situation. And a few black principals followed suit, using every possible dynamic to gain more resources and more freedom for their institutions from the white power structures that controlled them. This kind of principal welcomed the 1954 decision and the civil rights movement that followed it, seeing them as potential resources in his and the black community’s struggles.

B. Resistance.

The new 1954-based wave of black school construction probably did have an effect on black militancy, but that effect may not have been to delay it. During the summer of 1954, NAACP groups in Vicksburg, Jackson, Clarksdale, Natchez, and Yazoo City filed petitions asking admission to white schools. Robert Patterson, a farmer from Itta Bena, meanwhile was meeting with white businessmen and planters in the Delta town of Indianola organizing the first White Citizens’ Council. The movement quickly spread statewide and then to other Southern states. The first act of the Councils to save segregation was to destroy the NAACP petition movement.

At a meeting in a Jackson hotel, Council leaders discussed the problem and intentionally leaked word to black bellhops that persons who signed the school petition would be investigated by a grand jury. It was only a threat, but it worked. Blacks who had signed

the petition began worrying that they might lose their jobs or be threatened by law enforcement officers.

In Yazoo City, the Council bought a full-page ad in the Herald advising readers to “look over carefully” the list of black petition signers. The town took action immediately. Many of the signers lost their jobs, were refused credit or supplies, and were eventually forced to leave town to look for work. Within two months all but six of the original 53 who had signed the petition asked to have their names removed from it.

Similar pressure campaigns overcame the petition movements in Natchez and Vicksburg. Council leader William J. Simmons described what happened in Clarksdale: “The good folks there had said, ‘We don’t need a Citizens Council, our niggers are good niggers, they don’t want to integrate, if we organize a Citizens’ Council it’ll agitate ‘em.’ But one bright morning they woke up with a school petition with 303 signers, including most of their ‘good ones.’ So they organized a Council. It’s got 3000 members now. The petition collapsed. They all started taking their names off. Really, about all the white people have to do is let ‘em know they don’t want to have all this stuff and that’s about the end of it. Most of them got fired, I suppose.”(1)

By the end of the 1954 summer, the petition movement was dead. Council pressure against the NAACP had been completely successful. The first attempt to breach the wall of segregation ended in failure for Mississippi blacks.

The failure was not theirs alone; the ultimate responsibility must lie with the Federal government and its “justice” Department. From 1868 to the present, we have had laws making it a federal crime to interfere with persons’ attempts to claim their constitutional civil rights. Yet the Justice Department did nothing. Not only did it not enter a single lawsuit against segregation (of schools, Bibles, drinking fountains, etc.), it did not even attempt to help protect the personal safety and property rights of blacks when Citizens’ Council members attacked them after they signed the petitions. Ten years later S.N.C.C. workers would say, bitterly, “There’s a street in Itta Bena called Freedom; there’s a town in Mississippi called Liberty; there’s a department in Washington called Justice.” But already the lawless inaction of the Justice Department was scandalous, equal only to the continuing inactivity of that then-handmaiden of the Mississippi establishment, the F.B.I.

Dr. Kenneth B. Clark has called the “all deliberate speed” edict of the Court a mistake. Referring to a policy of immediate desegregation that he said should have been pursued, he said “It is similar to the effect of quickly pulling off adhesive tape – the pain is sharper but briefer and hence more tolerable.”(2) I believe the historical record in Mississippi proves Clark correct. Holding aloft their victory over the petition movement, crowing over the complete lack of federal response, the Citizens Councils quadrupled their membership and garnered a stranglehold over public rhetoric in white Mississippi. Moderates, who had not been willing to support integration or moral grounds but had suggested it would inexorably come and should be dealt with on a reasonable basis, were completely undercut by the success of the “never” tactics and the complicity and inaction of the federal government.

From 1954 through January, 1970, even through the entire token desegregation period (1963-70), some Mississippi whites would feel certain of the eventual triumph of segregation and racism. Thus all the acts of inhumanity for which white Mississippi became world-famous – from the murder of the three civil rights workers in Neshoba County to the isolation and indignities heaped upon a black second-grader in the playground of the Shaw white school – must be seen not only as examples of massive white racism and cruelty, but also as attempts by white fanatics to stop something that they felt could and should be stopped. This is not to excuse these acts of vicious racism, but to explain them and to claim that they could have been averted.

For as in Presidential Reconstruction almost a century earlier, the Federal Government had sent out subtle signals that racism might triumph. In 1866-68 the federal government was not united. Beginning in 1867, Congress passed strong laws on behalf of civil rights for African Americans, but the President (Andrew Johnson) did not enforce them. Later, the Supreme Court declared many of these laws unconstitutional. The result, especially in 1866-68 was a sense in the white South that Confederates were not defeated, that the results of the Civil War might be reversed. This sense led to the violence that was now visited upon blacks and white Unionists. After 1955 the Supreme Court took strong stands on behalf of civil rights for African Americans, but the Presidents (Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy) did not enforce them. This sense occasioned the tragedies that were now visited upon blacks and white liberals. If the federal government had behaved inexorably, if it had maintained law and order, if it had adhered to or even given consistent lip service to the Fourteenth Amendment, much of the brutality born by black pioneers and by black and white civil rights workers in Mississippi between 1954 and 1970 could have been avoided.

In covering the immediate reaction to the 1954 decision, we turn now last – and least – to the reaction from the state's churches and churchmen. Predictably the black clergy said little. White churchmen said nothing at all. Except for the Catholics, their churches were totally segregated. And they had learned long before not to speak out on "non-Gospel" matters. Their reaction might be exemplified by the words of Dr. John E. Barnes, Jr., Chairman of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, by far the largest denomination among the white population. His leadership in 1954 regarding the possible abolition of public education in Mississippi included the following remarks to the convention:

Many people love to talk about the good old days, but just because something is old that does not necessarily mean it is also good. On the other hand it is well for us to follow paths that are tested by years of experience, that we may know we are following the right paths.

In short, maybe the state should continue what it had been doing, but maybe it should change. He urged all his hearers to "pray before you vote" on the issue.

C. Longer-Term Reaction, 1954-63

As Barnes cryptically indicated, Mississippi's political leadership was taking the state further and further along a series of extreme segregationist measures. The law requiring school attendance, never really enforced, was now repealed, so that the state would never find itself in the embarrassing position of having to force a white child to attend a desegregated school. (The immediate short-run benefit of this move was to save the state money, for state aid to education was and is based on average daily attendance (A.D.A.) figures. Even now that desegregation is no longer an issue and there is no question of abandoning public education completely, this short-run economy continues to be a factor causing legislators to refuse to re-enact a required attendance law.)

Despite opposition from whites in Northeast Mississippi and along the Gulf Coast, late in 1954 Governor White mounted a massive propaganda campaign to convince voters to pass a constitutional amendment authorizing abolition of public schools as a last resort to avoid integrating them, if necessary. His campaign was successful, and on December 21, 1954, the state's voters, by a 2 to 1 margin, passed the proposition. The 1956 state legislature then passed a series of laws designed to circumvent the Brown II decision and make segregation even more rigid. These laws included one establishing a State Sovereignty Commission to preserve segregation. It had authority to investigate and spy on Mississippians whose ideas might be out of line and to spread propaganda about the state and its way of life throughout the nation. Another bill was an Interposition Resolution, condemning the Supreme Court and denying that the Fourteenth Amendment applied to state control of educational institutions.

A new law required that all students study Mississippi history not once but twice during their public-school education. John K. Betterworth, administrator and historian at segregated all-white Mississippi State University, wrote a segregationist history for ninth-graders to use. In conjunction with the fifth-grade text by R. A. and N. P. McLemore, this book ensured that the Mississippi school system would do what it could culturally and intellectually to maintain segregation while its legislators attacked the problem in the legal arena.

A wave of violence in 1955 showed that the new polarization of white Mississippi had reached the local level. Roy Melton was shot in Glendora; Emmett Till was murdered; Lamar Smith, a black political leader in Brookhaven, was shot down on the courthouse square; Reverend George Lee, another Belzoni leader, was killed in an auto crash involving an apparent collision with lead pellets; Dr. T. R. M. Howard of Mound Bayou, a statewide political leader, was forced from the state under threats against his life; and Mack Charles Parker was dragged from his cell in the Poplarville jail and lynched by a band of white men. This repression, coupled with the killing of the petition movement and the upsurge in Council support, temporarily ended effective black social or political initiatives in Mississippi.

On his own, Clyde Kennard tried to gain admission to the University of Southern Mississippi. The result was that on one visit to the registrar's office, he was framed by police who claimed to have found open whiskey in his car. Later he was accused of asking a black boy to steal chicken feed for him and was sent to Parchman Penitentiary. There he developed cancer, was denied medical attention until near death, and finally died under guard at University Hospital. His tragedy, almost forgotten today, demonstrated that more than individual initiative would be needed to combat the massive institutional racism of the state of Mississippi and its public institutions. The case of Clennon King, an Alcorn A&M professor who tried to enter Ole Miss and was sent to the State Mental Hospital at Whitfield, provided further documentation of that principle.

A few whites spoke out, including P. D. East, Ira Harkey, Hazel Brannon Smith, William Faulkner, and Hodding Carter. But the Citizens' Councils remained supreme. As Ross Barnett, their man, moved into the governor's chair, their triumph and control over Mississippi seemed complete. Mildly liberal acts, such as participation by white Tougaloo professors in final oral examinations at white Millsaps College, accepted earlier, now were proscribed. The police-state mentality, the "closed society," was increasing in power.

The first violation of segregation mores in Mississippi in the modern era was the Biloxi wade-in of April, 1960, six years after the May, 1954, school decision. About 45 blacks walked onto the Gulf Coast beaches, built years earlier with federal assistance, trying to end their white-only status. A crowd of whites converged on the scene. Some three rocks; four blacks were beaten with sticks and chains. Later the violence spilled over into Biloxi itself and eight blacks and two whites were shot and wounded. Less than a year later, the first Mississippi sit-in took place. Nine Tougaloo students tried to use the main branch of the Jackson Public Library. Police arrested them within fifteen minutes. Meanwhile, blacks in McComb and Greenwood were beginning voter registration efforts and encountering a new wave of white violence.

In education, however, between 1954 and the entry of James Meredith onto the Ole Miss campus on Sunday afternoon, September 30, 1962, not one black student went to school with whites, and not one white went to school with blacks, nor was there a single instance of faculty desegregation in either direction, at any public school from grade one through graduate study, within the state of Mississippi. Thus the case of Meredith v. Fair, otherwise just one more instance of college desegregation litigation in the South, assumes its unique importance.

D. Meredith and Ole Miss

Much has been written about desegregation at Ole Miss.(1) I will not recount the episode here except to say that Meredith did of course succeed in gaining admission to the school after protracted legal delays, personal and familial harassment, and polarization of the public white rhetoric by Ross Barnett, who like Chancellor Waddell of almost a hundred

years before, threatened to close the school if it was integrated. A few points of sociological analysis are, however, important.

Ole Miss represented the symbolic top of the white educational structure in Mississippi, even though Mississippi State has become the better school. As we noted earlier in this paper, Ole Miss served particular social purposes and was of unique symbolic importance. With its Confederate Grey band uniforms, Confederate flag license plates, and school anthem of “Dixie,” Ole Miss stood for the Lost Cause of the Civil War and the by-no-means lost cause of white supremacy as did no other institution in the South. Moreover, as implied earlier, Ole Miss suffered more than any other Mississippi college from a lack of differentiation of school and society, so that it was both less than a school (in terms of educational excellence) and more than one (in terms of identification with the outside social structure). In a sense few other colleges can claim, its alumni never graduated. The following column, written not for the sports page but for the editorial page of the Jackson Clarion-Ledger (October 6, 1970), shows the symbolic importance of the school to the forces of white supremacy.

Archie’s Army has fired Mississippi folks to fever pitch by rolling over Alabama here Saturday night, largely on the brilliant passing, running and generalship of Quarterback Manning.

Experts in psychology can and probably will tell you there is far more to this mass adulation to [sic.] Archie’s Army than simply public admiration for a great football team. Fans are thinking in terms of a championship, bowl bids and Heisman Trophy honors.

But to many happy fans and others who don’t even understand football, this Archie craze symbolizes a “South Will Rise Again” dream coming true, or something like that.

Delighted followers, including some who don’t pretend to understand football, find their imagination running wild when those Rebel flags flutter and the UM band blares “Dixie” – a tune tacitly banned almost everywhere now, even below the Smith and Wesson Line . . .

Some see not just a marvelous team in action but Confederate legions on the march again, striking back at Mississippi’s oppressors, tormentors and critics.

Not only on the march, but winning – big moral as well as actual victories for this “Most Lied About State In The Union.”

Forward, Rebels!

When he started with Ole Miss, James H. Meredith started at the top.

The Old Miss riot marked the high water point of the state’s racist reaction to the Supreme Court. The period of collective ferment it represented lingered on for some

months before gradually dissipating; even years later, when Meredith and other blacks had come and graduated, Ole Miss students still occasionally showed overt racism toward blacks on campus, long after such acts had stopped at Mississippi State and other white schools.

Despite the reaction, sociologically and legally the desegregation of Ole Miss marked a turning point. It is important to note that Governor Barnett talked about interposition, resistance, and closing Ole Miss, and his speeches helped cause the riot. But it is also crucial to see that he did not actually order state police to keep Meredith off campus. In the end he could not do so, because the Civil War had shown that a state could not militarily defy federal authority. Thus in the Ole Miss riot, and earlier in the court case of Meredith v. Fair, the state gave up the idea of interposition that the legislature had passed in 1956.

Moreover, in arguments before the court the state even gave up its formal defense of segregation itself. Ignoring its own Constitution, which specifically required that education was to be racially separate, Mississippi claimed in court that Ole Miss had no such policy but merely “happened” to be all white. Meredith was not denied admission because of his race, the state maintained, but because of entirely separate factors, such as problems in accepting his transfer credits. (Jackson State, where some of these credits were earned, was not then accredited; the state, which was responsible for this lack of accreditation, then had the presumption to use it against Meredith’s attempts to transfer!) These arguments were completely hypocritical. Most white Mississippians realized their hypocrisy but accepted it if it would serve the purpose of keeping Meredith out. Nevertheless, the arguments represented an important ideological retreat for the state’s white leadership. For the first time the state was admitting that it could not and would not openly try to maintain segregation. Thus the state’s line of defense in this case was a retreat and clearly admitted the inexorableness of federal power regarding segregation as such.

In the same year, black voter registration efforts continued and some desegregation was effected in interstate commerce (some bus, train, and air stations). Owing to these results from the growing Civil Rights movement in the state and to the Old Miss incident itself, there was some freeing of white rhetoric in the state. A group of Methodist ministers, about two dozen in all, issued a statement supportive of desegregation; within a year all of them lost their pulpits. The Mississippi Sociologists, meeting at Millsaps College, were asked to desegregate and meet the next year at Tougaloo College by Dr. Ernst Borinski, white sociologist from Tougaloo. They voted to do so, but the next year all white schools boycotted the Tougaloo event except for the Ole Miss department and one graduate student from Mississippi State. The Old Miss faculty, and not only in sociology-anthropology, had in a sense been “freed” by James Meredith and the events surrounding his admission. An Ole Miss anthropologist wrote a fine series of articles opposing on anthropological grounds the notion of black inferiority; it was published by the Pascagoula Chronicle. Russell Barrett and James Silver wrote books contesting the Citizens’ Council version of events at Ole Miss. And other faculty members for the first time felt not only able but also required to speak out against segregation and oppression.

Paul B. Johnson, who had “stood tall” with Ross Barnett at Ole Miss, took office as governor and delivered a surprisingly progressive inaugural address. At Mississippi State, the state’s “unwritten rule” against participation in national sporting contests where black players might be met was broken voluntarily. The Bulldogs’ basketball team, Southeastern Conference champions, went to the N.C.A.A. national tournament, where their first-round opponent, with four blacks on their starting five, defeated them. The times were beginning to change, but change in the public schools would still be delayed another year.

There was no school litigation below college level in Mississippi from the killing of the NAACP petition movement until April, 1963, not by black plaintiffs, who might have faced retribution, nor by the Justice Department, which would not have. In April, Medgar Evers filed suit on behalf of his son, in the case of Jomo Kenyatta Evers, et al., v. Jackson Municipal Separate School District. For this action and for his other civil rights activities, Medgar Evers would within two months be assassinated.

After his death, the black community and its leaders did not give up or back down. They continued their creative and increasingly effective actions, on the fronts of voter registration, school desegregation, and most important, their actions to change the standards of acceptable conduct in the community as far as interracial contact was concerned. And even though Jackson police had quite possibly been complicit in the death of Medgar Evers, substantial portions of the white community reacted with genuine shock to the event. Bill Waller, later to be elected governor, prosecuted the killer with dedication, although he achieved nothing more than a hung jury for his efforts. In sequence with the events of the previous year, the murder of Evers showed the two choices facing white Mississippi with greater clarity than ever before: on the one hand, desegregation, with some lessening of conflict between black and white and between the state and the nation; on the other, apartheid, maintainable only at the cost of total confrontation with the national government and of police state terror on the local scene.

IV. TOKEN DESEGREGATION, 1964-1970

A. Freedom Summer and the 1964 Civil Rights Bill

As the death of Medgar Evers indicated, the civil rights movement in Mississippi was of growing importance as the era of token desegregation began. The movement and the forces working for school desegregation were so closely intertwined that they might be considered one and the same. Civil rights pioneers such as Medgar Evers and Aaron Henry were directly involved in school desegregation efforts. More generally, desegregation attempts, voter registration efforts, and other activities connected with civil rights workers helped pave the way for change in the schools.

We must remember that on the eve of the 1964 summer, Mississippi white culture was still mostly in the polarized and bitterly racist position it had reached during the Old Miss riot. Some persons had begun to speak out, and Meredith's admission to Ole Miss had definitely begun to move white rhetoric. But it had an incredible distance to go. When President Kennedy was assassinated in November, 1963, white high school classes in some Mississippi towns greeted the news with wild applause. By May, 1964, the state legislature had passed 40 laws directly or indirectly opposing school desegregation.⁽¹⁾ Whites continued to underrate black determination for change because they wanted to believe blacks liked the system as it was. They continued to believe that if only the "handful of outside agitators" could be driven from the state, no challenge to school segregation would ensue and the old system would be free to roll on forever.

The actual extent of desegregation was as close to nil as mathematically possible. Meredith had graduated from Ole Miss in June, 1963. A second black, Cleve McDowell, entered the University under a court order the same month, but was expelled on September 24, 1963, in an incident involving a pistol he was carrying for self-protection. In the summer of 1964 a third black entered the University of Mississippi, again under a court order. That was it: no school desegregation anywhere but at Ole Miss, and none even there without separate judicial proceedings for each new applicant. The shock of real public-school desegregation, then, even on a token basis, was yet to come.

One concern of civil rights movement leaders, therefore, was to try to ensure that the little children who by themselves bore the burden of token "freedom-of-choice" school desegregation would not be killed or their parents attacked or forced to leave the community. Between 1962 and the end of the Freedom Summer – the 1964 Civil Rights Summer in Mississippi – the movement in the state had succeeded in some of the actions necessary to achieve this goal. It had definitely increased consciousness and hope among Mississippi blacks. The idea that change would come, that passive defeatism was no longer appropriate, had come into Mississippi alongside the civil rights workers who had entered from outside and those who had risen up from within its borders. Second, the movement had focused national attention on Mississippi, through the Freedom Vote, the Jackson sit-ins, the movement in the Delta and McComb, and the Freedom Summer itself, with its attendant murders and church burnings. This national attention, mobilized

under President Johnson's administration into the most effective concern for civil rights since Grant, was none too effective, but it was far better than the federal disdain that had preceded 1962.

Some desegregation had taken place, particularly in interstate commerce. A new influx of civil rights lawyers entered Mississippi in 1963 and 1964, including the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and the Lawyers' Constitutional Defense Committee (A.C.L.U.), joining the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., and the one or two black lawyers from within the state who had taken civil-rights cases. Moreover, in their own performance of the daily tasks of living together and getting along as a movement, the civil rights forces had directly affronted and shocked the collective conscience of white Mississippi. Bearded whites walking with, talking with, living with, and touching black women; black men walking and living with and touching white women; conduct and dress often considered outrageous and immoral by the white establishment – all these things perhaps momentarily increased white resistance to the movement and its aims, but over the long haul such conduct moved white perceptions of what was “acceptable” or at least “allowable” in the community and made school desegregation less outlandish by comparison.

Finally, the civil rights movement in the state began a careful campaign to bring home the costs of continued segregation directly to the doorsteps of white Mississippi. Concerts and lectures that would have been given to segregated audiences were called off after Tougaloo students and faculty members and other persons in the state contacted the stars and speakers and urged them not to perform under such conditions. Al Hirt, Gary Graffman, and others canceled bookings, and white Mississippians came to realize that they would have to give up the possibility of participating in sports, music, and other aspects of national culture – as well as economic growth – if they continued their policy of formal segregation. Then Joan Baez gave a well-publicized integrated concert on the campus of Tougaloo College, and substantial numbers of young white Mississippians came to hear her. The message was becoming clearer. Desegregation was inevitable, and to accede to it was in the self-interest of whites.

The 1964 Civil Rights Bill came in the midst of these actions. It prohibited “the extension of federal financial assistance to any dual or segregated systems of schools based on race, color, or national origin.” Its provisions gave the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare the responsibility to deny funds to districts not in compliance with its desegregation guidelines. In addition, they authorized the Justice Department to file suits regarding desegregation, authorization it did not legally need, since statutes dating back to 1868 would have sufficed, but which it claimed to require before moving in this area. But even with this backing, neither H. E. W. nor Justice took any major action in Mississippi until 1968.

Of more immediate importance to school desegregation in the 1964-67 period, the Civil Rights Act did help desegregate some public facilities in Mississippi. The NAACP developed a flying squad of integrators who tried facilities all over the state. Sometimes they were admitted because it was known they would carry a protest to the Justice

Department if they weren't, while local blacks were still denied entrance. (Mississippi's restaurants, motels, and other accommodations were not fully desegregated even as of this writing, in 1973.) But some restaurant owners were relieved to be able to behave morally, and these welcomed black patrons, sometimes effusively.

This desegregation of public facilities shocked the white collective conscience and led to some "ax-handle" incidents similar to Lester Maddox's well-publicized escapade in Atlanta, but it also further increased the realization among members of both races that desegregation was inevitable. This realization was the strongest ally the black population possessed in the state. The symbolic importance of the token desegregation of public facilities in 1964 and 1965 to school desegregation, then, was major, for it meant that no longer would the schools be the only formerly-white institutions in Mississippi to admit blacks.

Now in autumn, 1964, public school desegregation finally began in Mississippi, the last state in the Union. Because its school term began earlier than the other districts under 1964 court orders, Biloxi, then a segregationist haven on the Gulf Coast, was the first district to enroll blacks in white schools. By the end of September, the following was the total extent of desegregation in all public schools (including universities) in the state:

Desegregation, 1964-65 School Year

2 blacks at the University of Mississippi
18 blacks in 4 formerly white Biloxi schools
39 blacks in 8 formerly white Jackson schools
1 black in 1 formerly white Leake County School
0 blacks in 0 formerly white Clarksdale schools
(Although under court order, the school district found that no blacks applied the first year.)

Token desegregation had come, with the burden to fall on the shoulders of exactly 60 students.

B. The Burden of Token Desegregation

What was it like for those 18 children in Biloxi, the one girl in Leake County, or the very few who the next fall would try to attend white schools in other districts? In a few places, the best, they were treated with studied indifference. More often, there was a mixture of complete isolation coupled with occasional acts of outright hostility. In some places, hostility was nearly continuous.

Lydia Williams has described her situation as a senior in a Mississippi high school under freedom of choice as one of only two black seniors in the school that year. She was directly excluded from the basketball team, the senior dance, and most other activities.

Often my sisters and I would approach a table only to see the white students already seated get up and move . . . I did not feel any welcomer in the classroom. Except for English and chemistry, I was never asked – not once – to respond and I felt too uncertain of the reaction of the teachers and students to volunteer. Classmates always referred to us as “the niggers. . .”(1)

I remember watching a little third-grader at the white school in Shaw and writing the note: “No one on earth is more alone that these black children.” The boy forlornly bounced a ball by himself while the white kids and the teacher played together in another part of the playground. Throughout every minute of the school day, a wall of total silence and hostility separated him from every other person near him.

First and second-graders in Shaw had a better time of it. A founder of the local chapter of the [White] Citizens’ Council confessed to me that he was worried that the little kids seemed to play together without consciousness of racial differences. By third or fourth grade, he said, the parents have talked to their children enough that this doesn’t happen. But even in the first two grades, teachers would sometimes intervene to stifle the normal friendliness of children.

Black parents faced serious pressure too. At Madison-Ridgeland, a rural district adjoining Jackson, whites struck back in 1965 as token desegregation began. One parent lost his job. Others got threatening phone calls, witnessed whites driving repeatedly by their homes, and in one case waited all night keeping armed watch while whites surrounded the house but backed off. Their children were harassed in school. One white man helping them received a citation for reckless driving while he was parked! Within two weeks, all the black children who had tried to desegregate were back in Rosa Scott, the black school.

**THE FOLLOWING ARE NAMES OF PARENTS
AND/OR GUARDIANS OF CHILDREN INTER-
GRATING THE DURANT PUBLIC SCHOOL:**

Barbara Carroll	Odelle Durham
Lillie Mae Cox	Eula McGee
Henry D. Hill	Albert Patterson
Amanda Ellis	Meetis Powell
Ruth Sara Hill	Mildred Coffey
Mary Louise Ellis	Ellowise Power
Laura Cox	Annie Mae Robinson
Rubertha Glover	Hattie B. Saffold
Lillie Mae Cox	Connie Bell Wright
Annie Lee Green	Jimmie Higgins
Katie Mae Griggs	Bessie Mae Huntley
Martha Hightower	Nathaniel Bailey
Annie Dora Eskridge	Elnora Lewis
Zebedee Larry	Curtis Lee Carter
Andrew Durham	Pearlie C. Carter
Sarah Artin	John Allen Wright

In Durant, after registration in the fall of 1965 indicated some black families were planning to send their children to previously white schools, this notice appeared on telephone poles. It was, of course, intended to be an open invitation to the white community to fire or harass these parents, and an open attempt to intimidate the parents themselves.

In Leake County, several homes of black families suing to desegregate the public schools were shot into.(2) In Sharkey-Issaquena District in the South Delta on November 24, 1966, shots were fired into the home of Mrs. Lillie Willis, wounding her daughter, who had tried to transfer to the white school.(3) The previous fall, 32 shots were fired into the home of Amos Walker, an Aberdeen black sending his child to a white school. A 1966 poll of black parents with children in formerly all-white schools showed that 28% had been pressured or fired by their employer while 47% had received threatening phone calls or been physically intimidated.(4)

In every district, black parents and children had to bear the burden of initiating the lawsuits or provoking the change required to bring the public schools into conformity with the United States Constitution. They received no aid from the state, of course, and none from the federal government. To the contrary, individual black families and small organizations, such as the miniscule local chapters of the NAACP, the Freedom Democratic Party, and the Mississippi office of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., found their resources – time, money, and even lives – pitted against the public treasury. Local, state, and sometimes national tax money was spent to oppose their obtaining their rights. School districts used tax dollars, collected from black as well as white citizens, to pay lawyers to keep black children in inferior and segregated schools. In what could perhaps be considered the final insult, the Jackson Public Schools as late as 1968-69 used public funds to pay the expenses of an aged Columbia University psychologist, Henry Garrett, to testify in court on behalf of this school district, roughly half of whose students were black, that Negroes were in his view inherently inferior to whites in intelligence.

In addition to direct white harassment, violence, and economic reprisal, black parents faced indirect pressure through their black associates. We have already discussed how it was that elements of the black middle class came to identify themselves with the white oppressor and supported the status quo because it ensured their own security of position. Change in the public schools potentially threatened the black teacher or principal, of course, for this institution was the source of their livelihood and status. Some black educators acted independently and gave at least covert support to desegregation and to the interests of the black community. But it was easy for white society to mobilize some black teachers and administrators into a defense of school segregation. Some did it for their own good. Others persuaded themselves that the interests of the black community would best be served by the status quo, that black schools were good, that they were not under white control, and that desegregation should not be pursued. Some were even affronted by the idea of desegregation, seeing it as a slap in the face.

Thus a Madison County principal said to black parents who complained about school conditions after desegregation, you all wanted this integration, now don't come to me with your complaints about it! In adjoining Leake County, after thirteen black families filed a petition with the school board February 23, 1962, seeking desegregation, according to them the black principal personally wrote each parent who had signed the

petition, spoke of the advantages of the segregated schools, and urged them not to take further action to change the system because the white community would react adversely to such efforts. We have already recounted how a Delta black principal embarrassed his own white superiors by his extensive harassment of young people who had participated in civil-rights activities. The paramount example of this kind of behavior was the public statement in the fall of 1968 by Rev. E. J. Yarbrough, black Baptist minister in Neshoba County, that he would send his children to another county if the courts forced them to attend desegregated schools.

It was hard for black parents and children to persevere in the face of white harassment, knowing that some high-status elements of the black community also opposed them. It took a great deal of belief in the justice and ultimate triumph of their cause for them to do so. Often black families pulled together, the parents not wanting to back down and appear weak in front of their children, the children not telling their parents of their bad times at school lest they seem to be asking for relief.

The last incident of outright mass violence blacks faced was the last major anti-desegregation riot in Mississippi. It took place on the first morning of the fall term of 1966-67 in Grenada. An angry mob of 400 whites attacked 150 black students attending two formerly white schools, beating them with sticks and chains and kicking them after they were down. By this time, however, two years after the beginning of token desegregation in the state and two years after the Freedom Summer, such an action did not draw support from all over the state. Instead, citizens of other towns gave a sigh of relief that it had not happened in their communities. Outright mob violence was over in Mississippi. (By way of contrast, white mobs were still burning buses or beating black children in the early 1970s in New York, Denver, small cities in Michigan, and other Northern communities.)

But although most white Mississippians may have felt the riot was extreme, they continued to fight desegregation by milder means. In Grenada they used chains, in Jackson Province High School, epithets, and in many places, silence. Two sociologists wrote from the Delta:

A white school principal reported, with a mixture of concern and satisfaction, "At our high school they get the 'deep freeze treatment.' Not one white student has spoken to them. It's been 100 percent." Originally, a few white students were friendly to the Negroes, but they were soon taught better by their peers and parents.(5)

Yet through it all, summoning perhaps some memory of the department of pioneering black students on white college campuses seen on television a few years earlier, or inspired perhaps by the ideals of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., without formal training in nonviolence or in how to deal with hatred, in scattered towns throughout the state these black children preserved. I remember the awe that colored a nonblack parent's voice in Clarksdale as she told me of the graduation of the one black senior at Clarksdale High School in the spring of 1967. Throughout his entire senior year, she said, not one person

had spoken to him or sat down with him, and no one had thought he would stick it out, but he did, without outward sign or complaint. And sometimes, this quiet black heroism reached out to touch white classmates, and at year's end a black girl might be asked by several other students to sign yearbooks reciprocally. These white children were trying to behave nonracistly, and they should be honored for it; but it did not help their black peers that most of them had been afraid to make such a gesture earlier in the year, before school ended.

In some formerly white schools, including those in Greenville and in several Northeast Mississippi towns, there was little open harassment. There and elsewhere, the greatest difficulty faced by black desegregators was academic. In Greenville, for example, in junior high school blacks made up 15% of the student body but had 47% of the failures. Racist grading was not to blame, admitted black leaders. The effects of unequal separate previous education were involved. According to the sociologist, "older students fared worse because they had longer exposure to the crippling Negro schools."⁽⁵⁾ But in some other districts, the academic troubles visited upon black children were not so benign. Several systems threatened black children with academic failure, demotion, or loss of credits if they transferred to the white school under "freedom of choice." And after they did, they might face repeated tests, always failing them according to the teacher, but never being allowed to see the results or learn about the kinds of mistakes they allegedly committed. The message was plain in these classes: transfer back or flunk out.

An important research question, not systematically studied to my knowledge,⁽⁶⁾ is the effects of token desegregation upon the lives of the black children who participated. Were their career aspirations affected? Was their self-respect increased, by having taken the abuse that white society offered, by having met the challenge? Were they more bitter toward whites? More understanding? Rather than speculate, I can only plead for some research on the subject, perhaps through oral history, for the questions are important. We know the effect of token desegregation upon society and the more complete desegregation toward which it led, but we do not know the results upon the individuals who participated and suffered through it.

C. "Freedom of Choice"

The state had now (1964-65) moved beyond its "never" position into an uneasy interregnum between total segregation and whatever social and cultural system might replace it. This interregnum lasted until January, 1970, and in some ways still exists today. It has been marked by continuing conflict between the races as federal vacillation repeatedly encouraged white segregationists not to give up. And it was marked as well by sheer awkwardness. Most absurd, perhaps, was a listing of institutions for possible class field trips put out by the Jackson Public Schools. Symbols identified each institution as open to white, black, or integrated groups, and, sure enough, some sites could be toured either by black classes or by whites, but were closed to mixed groups!

The period was made more difficult by the existence of a basic fallacy in the minds of many in Mississippi and some in Washington as to what was going on. Some H. E. W. bureaucrats and almost all Mississippi whites came to feel that the battle was for “freedom of choice,” meaning freedom for a child to choose a “white” or a “black” school. By 1968, seeing that total segregation had been defeated, segregationists switched to a defense of “freedom of choice,” which they had previously attacked. Now they labeled it a “basic American freedom.” But the Court had never set freedom of choice as an end, but only as a permissible means, the end being the total dismantling of dual education. Freedom of choice was permissible only insofar as it moved toward that goal. But progress toward full desegregation was agonizingly slow, so slow that in fact it represented no real progress but only a continuing arena for conflict. White liberals as well as blacks grew disgusted at the incessant delays. As one Jackson housewife put it, “Our real problem down here has been the foot dragging on the part of the courts. The business community has had a ready-made excuse to delay taking a stand on this thing.”

H. E. W. also procrastinated. Administrators of school districts that had acted with good faith to meet H. E. W. guidelines looked like fools when neighboring district were able to evade those guidelines by submitting sham plans without retribution from the department. For years, H. E. W. did not require faculty desegregation. This meant that schools were completely identifiable by race and it put the entire burden of desegregation on the children who desegregated rather than on the system. When H. E. W. did begin to require faculty desegregation, token compliance was accepted.

The interregnum was indicated by the state’s formal pledge of compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a pledge made in the second month of 1965. In July of that year, Tishomingo County in the far Northeast, with a black student enrollment of only 200 (compared to 2300 white pupils), became the first district to submit a voluntary desegregation plan. Teachers in the district voted unanimously in favor of the plan, which unlike many later plans of other districts involved all twelve grades at once. Earlier, districts in Lee County, Greenville, Tupelo, Vicksburg, Corinth, Pontotoc, and Fulton voted to comply. All but Vicksburg and Greenville are in Northeast Mississippi. Other district followed.

Statistics are available on the number of school districts with various types of desegregation plans in each year. For example, in 1964-65 95 of the state’s 149 districts were in compliance with H. E. W. through submission of acceptable “voluntary” desegregation plans. Another 21 had acceptable court-ordered plans. Nineteen had submitted unacceptable plans, and a recalcitrant fourteen had refused to submit any plan. But these figures represent only the formal reporting sent to Washington. In reality, as we have seen, only three districts had any actual desegregation that year – Biloxi, Jackson, and Leake County. Moreover, by 1966-67 the number of district with unacceptable plans or no plans at all had swelled to 55. Thus many if not most of the “voluntary” plans were not truly serious timetables whose intent was to move the districts toward full desegregation with “deliberate speed.” Rather they were fraudulent documents intended to get the district off the hook with H. E. W. for a year or so.

During the period, the forces of racism and repression fought what amounted to delaying actions. Their strength, supreme at first, was undermined by their increasing need for hypocrisy. This need had first been shown by the state's lawyers during Meredith v. Fair, who claimed Meredith had been rejected due to qualifications, not race. This kind of deceit became customary in legal cases and desegregation plans throughout the state. Probably it was the most effective tool for delay under the circumstances, but as the idea of delay indicates, it was purely a defensive, not an offensive, posture. And it mitigated ideological fever, or what might be termed "racist idealism," so that segregationists were reduced to such ironic gestures as supporting Senator Stennis and Attorney General Summer's goose-chase efforts to desegregate the North.

Almost without exception Mississippi's public leadership provided open support to the segregationist "never" shouters right up to the end of tokenism in 1970. In 1967, for example, every candidate for governor appeared before the Citizens Council to pledge public support for its principals. Even William Winter, the front-runner and an alleged moderate, cited his Confederate lineage and promised that he was a segregationist.

Moderates tried to signal their moderation by sly code words but were afraid to take any real stands. In these years, as has often occurred in Mississippi history, the state's political leadership lagged behind even its white constituency. Mississippi's Congressional leaders, spearheaded by Senator Stennis, participated in and sometimes led efforts by white Southerners to reverse or undo the Court's decisions by preventing their enforcement by the Executive branch. In April and May of 1966, Stennis coordinated an effort to get all Southern senators to sign a letter to President Lyndon B. Johnson urging him to prevent "illegal, unfair, and unrealistic" action by the Office of Education. This kind of step on Stennis's part was considered moderate in that it was "within the system" and did not advocate violent defiance. Nevertheless, it did not represent constructive opinion leadership.

Congressman John Bell Williams, on the other hand, knew little restraint in his public remarks. The most statesmanlike utterances throughout this period from any elected official came, surprisingly, from Governor Paul B. Johnson, Jr. Johnson had been Lt. Governor during Ross Barnett's administration; at Ole Miss "little Paul had stood tall" in symbolic defiance of the law; when he succeeded Barnett it was largely because of segregationist support. But his inaugural address set the tone for the public conduct of his administration; in it he advocated progress and constructive actions. Later, when Citizens' Council events were held, Johnson would conveniently be out of state. The formal and informal relations between the state and the Council eroded rapidly, and so did the power of the Council. White moderates began to see that the Council was not omnipotent after all.

All this is not to suggest, however, that desegregation was actually taking place. The table shows what was happening.

Percentage of minority [black] children in majority ["desegregated"] schools.*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1964-65	0.0% (60 children in 3 districts)
1965-66	0.6%
1966-67	2 %
1967-68	3.9%
1968-69	7.1%

*Note the caution in the text regarding the unsuitability of this percentage as an index of desegregation and regarding the problems in terminology with this table's title.

Even as late as 1968-69, thirteen districts had no black student in school with whites while Smith County had exactly one! In other districts, "freedom of choice" was not working so as to end dual schools. In Jackson, for instance, where some of the earliest and most vigorous legal and community efforts were made to end segregation, less than 10% of all black students were in predominantly white schools by 1968-69 and there was only minimal faculty desegregation.

Even the index used for desegregation indicated part of the problem. For just as the term "freedom of choice" was a misnomer as well as a misconceived means of reaching desegregation, so the H. E. W. figures were from their inception based on a false concept. The use of "percent black children in white schools" presupposes, first, that "black" and "white" schools still identifiably existed. They did, of course. But their existence was unconstitutional. Therefore by definition such an index could never show the degree of compliance with court orders directing that schools be operated in a constitutional manner. From the beginning such an index was a hoax. Moreover, the statistics were usually given in a one-way direction. They did not include the percentage of white children in formerly black schools. This percentage was vanishingly small until January of 1970. Thus it was of no importance throughout the period of freedom of choice. But even so, a true index should have taken note of it. For even if, for the sake of example, 50% of the blacks in a given district were in majority-white schools, 80% of the whites might still be in all-white schools. This would happen, for example, if the district had a low black population and had further gerrymandered its schools so as to keep blacks out of most white schools. The index, in short, related to getting blacks out of black schools and into white ones. This was an incomplete and biased manner of indicating compliance with the Court orders to end dual schools, and it again placed the burden of desegregation on the backs of black children rather than on school systems.

H. E. W. statistics are further incompetent because they are sensitive to the overall racial composition of the population. A good index would not be affected by the population. Let us take two examples:

	% black in student enrollment(overall) in white schools	% of black students in school	% if white students in school with blacks
County A	10%	100%	15%

County B 40% 80% 100%

How could such statistics come about? County A has a small black school population, which might be concentrated in just one of the county’s several “white” schools; that school enrolls 15% of the district’s white student enrollment. All other white students attend all-white schools. H. E. W. statistics would show the county 100% desegregated! By contrast, County B might have one all-Black school, enrolling 20% of the county’s black students; the rest of the county’s fairly large black enrollment is dispersed among several white schools so that not a single all-white school remains. County B would be termed only 80% desegregated, less than County A! Yet 76.5% of all students in County A attend uniracial segregated schools (all-white institutions), while only 8% of all students in County B do so (all-black institutions).

An even more crippling problem afflicts H.E.W. statistics when applied to majority-black districts. Jackson, for example, had about a 60/40 black/white student enrollment ratio after full desegregation in 1970. (The white percentage had been reduced by some pullout into private schools.) If every school in the district were set up to have exactly the same racial mixture, which if perhaps mindless is surely rather complete desegregation, then every school in the district would have been majority black. H.E.W. would then conclude statistically that no desegregation existed, since every black was in a majority-black school! And in fact, Jackson showed only about 25% desegregation on H.E.W.’s reports, solely because its desegregation was not so thorough-going, there being still some all-black or nearly all-black schools, thus leaving some schools to be majority white whose black minorities could then count as “desegregated.”

Mississippi counties vary in black population proportion from about 5% in the Northeast to about 75% in the River Lowlands and some Delta counties. In order truly to ascertain whether segregation is still being practiced, whether race or some characteristic tied to race still affects pupil placement, an index must be utilized that will not be affected by percentage black in the population. The Gini Index, computed from a Lorenz Curve, is perhaps the best such tool. Appendix A discusses the calculation of this index. I do not know of studies using this index in the North, but I suspect that many Northern districts would end up considerably more segregated than most Mississippi districts if their indices could be compared.(1)

Whites looked at the H.E.W. statistics in 1967 or 1968 and said, “I told you so.” They claimed that the lack of freedom-of-choice desegregation proved that Negroes did not want desegregation after all but were only being misled by a few agitators and civil rights lawyers. Of course the proponents of this position ignored the harassment, social and economic pressure, isolation, and academic hardships faced by desegregation pioneers. And almost everyone missed the fact that it was ideologically difficult for blacks to advocate desegregation against white opposition. Unless one was rather clear in one’s understanding of the operation of society and the way it defined blacks’ “place,” then it was hard to understand the point that attending white schools was a challenge and a way to begin changing the system. Otherwise, it might appear to be a case of blacks’ being

“color struck,” of choosing a white school because they identified with whites over blacks, or felt superior to other blacks, or felt white schools were better than black school, or felt their child could only learn in the presence of white children. There is also the problem of how to deal with those who said one was merely moving toward whites only to have them move away from you. For desegregation involved a movement “toward” the oppressor and a commitment toward the system, even though at the same time it did represent a way to change that system. Dealing with all these ideological attacks and incongruities was not easy, and this difficulty may have operated to hold down the number of freedom-of-choice desegregators.

These difficulties also relate back to the basic problem with freedom of choice token desegregation itself: freedom of choice asked black parents and children themselves to remedy white-controlled institutions. It asked blacks to volunteer to act in such a way that the systems would end dualism and operate constitutionally. Yet a main strand of black ideology seems to me to be an alienation from white society at precisely this point. This is, if something is wrong, in this case morally and constitutionally wrong, with the (white) system, one black response is to withdraw from moral participation in that system and to say “they did it, let them fix it.” (Black dissidents from the Vietnam War, it seems to me, often were less active in their dissent and blamed the war more on “them,” compared to white dissidents who felt a greater need to get the war stopped, perhaps because the whites felt by identification a greater involvement in getting it started.) At any rate, under freedom of choice the people who created the wrong were not asked to right it, while the victims of the system were expected to change. It was backwards from the start.

In fairness to H.E.W., conditions were difficult for its effective operation. At one point only two people were expected to handle Mississippi and Kentucky combined! This was not only far too few, but the very pairing of Mississippi and Kentucky, greatly different noncontiguous entities, was an obstruction to efficient monitoring. White Mississippians made things no easier. When H.E.W. officials met with the Leake County school board in 1969, a group of angry white citizens surrounded them, and the highway patrol had to be called to guarantee their safe passage out of the county.(2)

H. E. W. did cut off federal funds to a few Mississippi districts in 1965-66 and to a few more the next year, but the department did not usually punish evasion, only defiance. Moreover, districts could operate after federal funds cutoffs without great difficulty. Only 20% of school monies in the state were federal. Much of federal money went for special programs, such as school lunches, and many districts used federal money in their black schools to make up for the lack of locally raised funds. Thus the cutoff of federal money sometimes hurt black children more than it did the school district as a whole. Moreover, some Mississippi districts, such as Warren County, perhaps looking toward a day of possible federal control, had utilized no federal funds and had nothing to be eliminated.

Given these points, H.E.W. edicts carried surprising force. In only a few districts were they outwardly defied. Most administrators comply, at least pro forma. This was in part because the requirements weren't too strict: they did not end dual schools, and they

weren't enforced very harshly. But more than that was involved. A role issue was at stake. Administrators didn't want to be "unprofessional" and didn't want to lose part of the money, programs, and "empire," under their control. Also, some administrators at heart didn't believe in segregation and didn't mind being "forced" to comply and begin to end it. In short, administrators and boards sometimes used the threat of losing their 20% federal funds as an excuse to desegregate, even if only on a token basis.

School boards used all kinds of devices to get H.E.W. to accept their desegregation plans while also ensuring that little desegregation would take place. Despite considerable black pressure, one district switched from gerrymandered zoning to freedom of choice to testing in order to evade desegregation, and it succeeded. Two of the commonly used devices, zoning and testing, had interesting overtones for class relations within the white community, as well as caste relations outside.

At least two districts, Clarksdale early during token desegregation and Greenville in 1969, used zoning so as to place almost no blacks in the major white schools. Some whites did get zoned into black districts, however. When this happened, the whites thus zoned were almost always working class or lower class. They were not within the reference group of the school board, in the first place; white realtors (who were within this reference group) then made money as many of the zoned families hastily sold out and took up new residence within the "white" zones. Thus school zoning worked consciously as a weapon of class antagonism. It also increased residential segregation.

Ability testing was used to segregate classrooms within "desegregated" schools, working to put most of the blacks together away from "their" (the establishment's) children. Again, if some poor-white children ended up with the black children, administrators were not concerned; they might even be pleased, because the system then looked more genuine. Sometimes whole schools were "tracked" in this way. Bolivar County School District #3, for example, used testing during the summer of 1969, and on the basis of results put 87 whites and 68 blacks into the former white school, 21 whites and 575 blacks into the former black school. Only five of the 21 whites showed up for class in the fall. Except for Meridian, to my knowledge, the testing process was not honest or unbiased, and this charge was sometimes proven in court. And the procedure again shows the relation between caste and class. The white upper class was willing to subject white working-class children to conditions it deemed unsuitable for its own children, if doing so would help keep white upper-class children segregated for another year. One would hope that this kind of treatment would lead to greater solidarity between working-class whites and blacks, against the upper class, and perhaps this is beginning to happen.

Meanwhile, die-hard segregationists were developing a "fall-back" position: segregated private schools. In 1964 Mississippi had just three nondenominational private schools. Now there are more than 240, serving almost 10% of the white population.

The movement began faltering. In Jackson in 1964 when token desegregation began, the Citizens' Council made a major effort to begin private education, but it could muster only 24 students in six grades! A feature story on the school in the ever-racist Jackson

newspapers was garnished with photos, but the careful reader could see that some of the children appeared in more than one photo because there were not enough kids to fill the page. Private schools set up that year in Clarksdale and Leake County folded. The minimal desegregation of public education in 1964 simply did not represent a threat great enough to make white Mississippians part with money to take their children out of public schools.

By the next fall, 50 private schools had been chartered by the state, but fewer than two dozen actually opened their doors. The legislature had made tuition grants available to nonsectarian private schools, but even so private schools had little appeal.

In Holmes County, the situation was different. There, uniquely, black parents in 1965 began to make use of freedom of choice as a serious means of ending dual schools. (This county, a stronghold of the Freedom Democratic Party, was dotted with black landowning small farmers; it would later elect the only black to the Mississippi Legislature.) Faced with a significant number of transfers, white parents pulled out their children. In Tchula, for example, 43 black children came to attend grades 1-4 and the 100 white pupils expected to attend did not show up. All four white teachers resigned. Central Holmes Academy in Lexington was hastily launched, staffed mostly with white previous public-school teachers. Later, fires destroyed much of two non-black public schools in the western part of the county.

The embryo segregation academies set up by the Citizens Council, Jackson's First Presbyterian Church, and other groups began inauspiciously, then. White Mississippians were not fanatic enough to pull out of white public schools because a few black children had transferred in. But the movement grew as desegregation spread slightly in 1967-68. 138 private schools operated in the state that year. The next year, the Citizens Council alone claimed to be operating more than 50 schools. And the Holmes County situation showed how fragile white support of public education might become in those areas where plantation racism was strongest and the black population ratio largest. There, as events in Holmes County indicated, the white community would be willing to remove books, white teachers, resources, and support from public education, even to the extent of promoting a scorched-earth policy toward the remains, maintaining only a white school board, superintendent, and principal to guarantee that the education of black children would remain under white control.

And the areas of high black school-age population were considerable. Mississippi's public school population was about 50% black, statewide, in the period 1968-1970. Throughout the state, huge Protestant church "education buildings" stood largely vacant, except during Sunday school, inviting greater use. As full desegregation approached, during the calendar year 1969, things would be to touch and go.

V. HIGHER EDUCATION

It is appropriate that we here discuss desegregation in higher education in Mississippi, because higher education is still in a state of “freedom of choice” token desegregation. Tougaloo College and the University of Mississippi had been forerunners of token desegregation in the state, but when court-ordered massive desegregation ended tokenism in the public schools in 1970, no comparable change took place in higher education. By the fall of 1967, Mississippi’s white institutions had 7.6% of all black enrollments in higher education in the state, the lowest percentage of any state in the Union. The percentage has probably not risen above 15% as of 1973 and is probably less than 12%.

Jackson State College, Alcorn A. & EM., and Mississippi Valley State College are still the “black” state schools; Mississippi State University, the University of Mississippi, the University of Southern Mississippi, Delta State College, and Mississippi State College for Women are still “white.” These racial designations are maintained by administrations and faculties that are essentially completely white or black, particularly in the case of the white schools. Private education is the same, with Tougaloo, Rust, and Mississippi Industrial being black (though with integrated faculties and administrations), Mississippi College, Millsaps, William Carey, Blue Mountain, and Whitworth being white (with white administrations and faculties). Mississippi’s institutions of higher education have gone no further in terms of ending racial identification than its public schools had in about 1968-69.

Within these institutions, there is still greater racial symbolism. Cheerleaders are white at the white schools, black at the black institutions. Faculties are even less desegregated than are student bodies at all of the white institutions. About the most significant desegregation, in fact, has taken place on the faculties at black schools and on the athletic teams at State and Southern. State has had a starting black quarterback, rare in the United States, and Southern has had a standout black halfback and other football players. (The importance of football in Mississippi, incidentally, can hardly be overestimated; there have been anguished editorials asking where are the black stars at Ole Miss and pointing to racism there as perhaps one reason.)

Higher education remained basically segregated for three reasons. Most obviously, of course, in a segregated society no institution is going to desegregate automatically, without coercive or ideological force. Second, higher education in the state has never been hit by a major court order. And finally, the state had consciously planned to maintain segregated higher education since 1865 and had taken steps to do so.

The court order front is interesting. Jackson State College, under a black administration subservient to a white board, refused in 1969 or 1970 to honor contracts it had made with two instructors, one white, one black, for reasons connected with free speech and racial activism. The white instructor had testified in court on behalf of The Fox, a D. H. Lawrence-based film then under attack for alleged obscenity; the black instructor had shown support for a black student demonstration while a graduate assistant at Ole Miss.

In the lawsuits resulting from this action by Jackson State, complete faculty desegregation of the state system of higher education was one form of relief requested, but the case was settled before a decision was reached. Such desegregation, involving similar racial ratios in each faculty in the system, would have revolutionized the character of all of the schools in the state. The change in itself might have been beneficial, but it also would have left each faculty with a heavy white majority.

It was also rumored during the last year of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration that H. E. W. would move to withdraw all federal support from Mississippi's higher education system, due to its obvious and continued segregation. This would have crippled all of the schools, since federal money supports agricultural research at Mississippi State and Alcorn, dormitory construction at all of the schools, and student loans and work-study funds everywhere. The Johnson administration stopped moving on controversial domestic issues at about this time, however, seeking continued support for the Vietnam War. Senator Stennis of Mississippi was of course a key senator in this regard since he was and is chairman of the Senate Armed Forces Preparedness Subcommittee. Under Nixon, of course, whose Southern Strategy led to the nomination of such folks as Heynsworth and Carswell for the Supreme Court, no H. E. W. or Justice Department action has been taken.

The reasons why action might be taken are several. Not only is the system segregated, but also as with the public schools, white supremacists control it. And in emulation of Louisiana, if not quite so thoroughgoing, Mississippi has deliberately set up its institutions of higher education to serve the same areas of the state in order to maintain segregation. It is an open secret that the last black school to be established, Mississippi Valley State College (founded as Mississippi Vocational College after World War II), was located in the Delta to serve that area's large black population because it was unthinkable that those students might go to Delta State College or Ole Miss. (Incidentally, M.V.S.C. suffers from the same location problems that plague the newly built black high schools throughout the state. It is not only located "out from" Greenwood, the only nearby town of any size, but is also "out from" Itta Bena, its mailing address. Literally, it is in a poorly drained cotton field.)

Thus we now find two institutions, Delta State and Valley State, comparable in programs, set up within a few miles of each other. The same situation affects black Utica Junior College, located near to white Hinds Junior College, and Coahoma Junior College, in competition with Delta Junior College and Northwest Mississippi Junior College. Furthermore, the lion's share of money and resources has gone to the white schools, particularly in the case of Hinds Jr. compared to Utica.

The state is taking steps to increase segregation in its system of higher education. The University of Southern Mississippi is trying to get approval to locate an entire residential center in Natchez, in Southwest Mississippi. The only school now in that corner of the state is Alcorn, which draws many of its residential students from Natchez and also has a large commuting contingent from the city surrounding rural area. If U. S. M. succeeds, Alcorn, which is "out from" Lorman, a country crossing in turn "out from" Port Gibson,

will be crippled. For many blacks in the area will find a Natchez location both cheaper and more congenial. Obviously if race were not factor a Natchez center would be a “natural” for Alcorn to initiate, since Alcorn already serves the area and is located nearby while Southern is across the state in Hattiesburg. So it goes.

The state has been inching towards the most crucial step in its increasing dualizing of higher education: the locating of a university in Jackson. Due to historical accidents, all three of the major white institutions are located noncentrally in small towns. The most important areas of population concentration and growth in Mississippi are the Gulf Coast and Jackson; neither is served by a state university. Several junior colleges are located on the Gulf Coast, and the University of Southern Mississippi has begun upper-level service there to complement them and to move towards the establishment of a full branch university on the Coast eventually. This is a non-racial maneuver designed to serve population needs. But in Jackson the situation is not so benign.

Here the state has set up an Education and Research Center, supposedly under the joint control of the University of Mississippi, Mississippi State, and Jackson State College. Situated in the most elite white suburban part of the city, a census tract with a 1970 median family income of more than \$30,000, the E. & R. Center is not on a major highway but is located near a road familiar to whites but not to blacks.(1) It is not even visible from this road, and its location is as white as can be found, short of Idaho.

The E. & R. Center has moved gingerly toward to a full graduate program. The state would like to make it into a degree-granting graduate center, but it fears federal retribution and also jealousy from the white universities who would share in it only from a distance. There is great demand from Jacksonians for more graduate programs; this is shown by the popularity of graduate work at nearby Mississippi College, a school so weak that its faculty for offering a Master’s in sociology consists of one Doctor of Theology and one Master of Social Work! Meanwhile, the fastest-growing school in the state is Jackson State College. It is also the black school with the highest proportion of whites (still much less than 5% however) in its student body. Jackson State offers a few master’s degrees, mostly in fields allied to education, and if it were allowed to expand its degree offerings it would without a doubt attract many students, including substantial numbers of white students. This the state intends to prevent, for it does not want Jackson State to become the leading institution in the state or even to achieve parity with the three white universities.

Nevertheless, Jackson State will expand in enrollment and further embarrass the state on this issue. Also embarrassing is the naked inequity in funds spent by the state at its black schools compared to the white colleges. Only two of the eight institutions of higher learning do not have graduate programs, for example – two of the three black schools. At the end of 1972, the Board of Institutions of Higher Learning in Mississippi reported the following average annual faculty salaries paid in each of its eight schools.

Average Salaries in Mississippi Institutions of Higher Education (Public), December, 1972.

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Ave. Salary</u>
Mississippi State	White	\$14,314
University of Mississippi	White	\$13,721
University of Southern Mississippi	White	\$13,209
Delta State College	White	\$12,502
Mississippi State College for Women	White	\$12,050
Jackson State College	Black	\$11,748
Alcorn A & M College	Black	\$10,370
Mississippi Valley State College	Black	\$ 9,379

And during 1973 a lawsuit was filed correctly charging the state with discrimination, segregation, and inequality in its extension program headquartered at Mississippi State (white) and Alcorn A & M (black).

If the federal government in the future does again begin to enforce the constitution regarding racial segregation, then I would predict a funds cutoff in Louisiana over the outrageous separate, parallel, and unequal statuses of L.S.U., Southern, L.S.U.N.O., and S.U.N.O., to be followed by the threat of similar action in Mississippi. The state might then respond by fairly minor palliatives, such as increased cooperation and complementation between Delta State and Valley State, allowing Alcorn to share in the Natchez center with Southern Mississippi, and increasing the formal ties between Jackson State and the E. & R. Center and granting Jackson State university status. But even in the absence of federal action, the state is living on borrowed time, for at some point the alert corps of civil rights lawyers in Mississippi will get around to the matter. The main reason for inaction so far, even in the outrageous case of the University of Southern Mississippi at Natchez, is that the parties directly hurt by the state's actions are the black schools and their administrations; it is precisely these persons who are under state control and do not speak out against the state. In fact, when asked to defend the fact that Alcorn A & M salaries are second lowest in the state, the head of the state board retorted that Alcorn's president wants it that way. He gave the same answer to defend the fact that salaries for black extension service specialists at Alcorn range from \$10,1000 to \$12,000 while salaries for white specialists at Mississippi State range from \$12,000 to \$22,000.

Change in the colleges and universities, then, has by no means been great enough o qualify as constitutional. Nevertheless, there has been change, most of it related to civil

rights and desegregation pressure. Before 1965 the faculties and student bodies of the state schools were all black or all white (except for the instances of student desegregation, such as Meredith, already described). As early as 1967, white students who needed for reasons of economics or convenience to remain home while attending college, including night sessions, voluntarily began to attend Coahoma Junior College, Jackson State, and other formerly all-black institutions. In the summer of 1965 black students desegregated Mississippi State; the University of Southern Mississippi, Delta State, and Mississippi State College for Women followed shortly thereafter. Black enrollments, particularly during summer sessions, are now especially substantial at Delta State and Hinds Junior College, due to their location near large black populations. One black junior college (T. J. Harris) was absorbed by its white counterpart (Meridian Jr. College), leaving just two black junior colleges in the state system. One of these – Utica Junior College – is located very rurally, “out from” the tiny town of Utica, and faces severe competition from Hinds Junior College. Hinds has a better location, much better facilities, and is much larger; Utica’s enrollment is in a decline.

The student desegregation of state schools has barely touched Alcorn and M.V.S.C. In 1972, for example, Alcorn had just two white students and nearly 3000 blacks. This is due to location and the fact that these schools are disadvantaged in money and programs compared to white state schools.

Faculty desegregation has outpaced student. More than a quarter of the faculty at Jackson State is nonblack, including a number of “third world” persons.

Student body desegregation, slow though it has been, has caused change. So has the general ideological change caused by the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Before 1962, the institutions of higher learning in Mississippi served as tools of social and cultural control. Academic freedom was tenuous at best. Sociologists did not write on controversial issues; when dealing with noncontroversial topics, such as analyses of the distribution of services to rural Mississippians, race was not usually included as a potential independent variable, so its effect could be overlooked. During the period 1954-62, things got worse, not better, as the “closed society” closed down. Initiatives that had been permissible, such as speaking engagements by white faculty members from black schools at white schools, or visitors of another race at public lectures, became off-limits. Controversial speakers were no longer invited to Mississippi State, Ole Miss, or Millsaps. Citizens’ Council pressure openly influenced who could appear. At Mississippi State, the editor of the student newspaper was fired by the student government for expressing support of the fact that Millsaps College had a white Tougaloo professor to lecture on its campus (and was embroiled in controversy as a result). After the Jackson Opera Guild stated that blacks could attend its production in the summer of 1965, a year after the Civil Rights Bill, Belhaven College threw those blacks who tried to attend off its campus, which housed the performance. Belhaven’s president, formerly principal of the segregated high school down the street, refused even to answer a protest about the matter. Even as late as 1975 professors at white state schools were still being used as expert witnesses in court opposing civil rights.

We have already seen how the Ole Miss riot caused the beginning of changes in this pattern. The threat of intervention by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (the accrediting agency for Mississippi and the South) helped when state leaders demanded that James Silver and other “traitors to the Southern way of life” be fired from Ole Miss. The editor of the Rebel Yell, Ms. Sidna Brewer, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize because of her outspoken editorials that year, and she was not fired. As the forces of segregation and repression fell into greater disarray during the freedom of choice era, faculty members spoke out to a greater extent.

The new black presence at the white schools, small as it was, made for considerable intellectual improvement. When the Chancellor of the University of Mississippi, for instance, officially joins the Black Student Union in celebrating Black History Week and “recognizing the accomplishments of outstanding members of the black race,” as happened in 1970, the change in intellectual climate is obvious. And this change was not due solely to changes in academia in the nation and world; the presence of black students on the campus was a vital ingredient. Indeed, Chancellor Porter Fortune’s action was in the context of previous black demands and an imminent black student demonstration for black faculty, and end to Confederate symbolism, etc.

Black student demands at Ole Miss, Mississippi State, Delta State, and elsewhere have been keyed to intellectual issues. For example, blacks and liberal whites united to challenge and defeat the infamous “speaker ban,” which required outside lecturers to be cleared by the state college board and in effect prevented the appearance of liberals or radicals. These actions have expanded the horizon of what constitutes legitimate spheres for student protest or involvement in Mississippi, and whites have learned from blacks in this regard. Thus desegregation was a major factor leading to the opening of the state college board to student representation, for example.

Now that the “closed society” has begun to open and change, a bit more intellectual pluralism is allowed. The establishment’s use and abuse of its universities as handmaidens of repression is mitigating. Since white Mississippians no longer desire to mobilize totally to defend segregation, greater dissent can be tolerated. Thus in 1973 a controversy arose when the editor of the Mississippi State student newspaper printed a column that seemed atheistic or blasphemous to some, but no one was fired.

The greatest site of intellectual repression now is the University of Southern Mississippi. Its president, W. D. McCain, is an old-line segregationist. His level of intellectual responsibility has been shown by the proven charges of plagiarism against him in published work. Faculty advisors of unpopular organizations at Southern are not rehired. Textbooks are forced upon professors. Black students were expelled for expressing solidarity with mourners of the Jackson State massacre.

The black schools, too, have had their share of repressive administration. Alcorn had continued conflict under its previous president, and Mississippi Valley State College suffered a huge drop in enrollment in 1970. This drop was caused by its own administration, which had arrested and expelled 900 students (out of about 2900)

engaged in peacefully protesting such matters as poor instruction, lack of academic scholarships (only athletic scholarships were given out), and the need for a private phone not monitored by the college switchboard.

Delta State College had academic freedom problems during this time, too, and there was one protest; significantly it was by 51 black students and one liberal white. All 52 were arrested. The white students and faculty neither noticed nor protested their shackles; the few faculties who wanted to protest felt no one would support them.

Repeated incidents shook Jackson State each spring. Students were frustrated by white society and by feelings against some practices and problems at Jackson State. Having no real outlet, they took to milling around and stoning cars on busy Lynch Street, which split the campus in two. In the spring of 1970, law enforcement forces were called to the scene, and on May 14, led by highway patrolmen, they opened fire on students in and around Alexander Hall, killing two and wounding a dozen more.

The students did not feel that Jackson State was in truth a “black school,” but no protests have ever been carried from J.S.C. or other campuses to the College Board. Yet the greatest millstone around the necks of those at white or black state schools would be progressive is the Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning. Appointed by Mississippi’s recent governors, the board is benighted both racially and educationally. As late as 1970, its chairman said in a speech at the University of Southern Mississippi that he has heard definitions of there term “racist,” and that they seem to fit him, and he was proud of it and had no intention of denying it. He seemed genuinely surprised when white students in his audience were shocked at his remarks. Governor Waller has appointed one black to this board (out of thirteen members), but much more must be done to make it truly representative or constructive.

Change among white students at public and private colleges has been marked. It is shown, for instance, by the warm responses given to black speakers Aaron Henry and Charles Evers by audiences at Millsaps, Ole Miss, State, and even Mississippi College. Every school in the state has signed a desegregation pledge except Whitworth College. Whitworth, an aged institution that had passed out of existence, was revitalized by segregationist Baptists after Mississippi College finally faced financial realities and voted to desegregate.

The pledges of compliance, however, are more ritual than fact. Bland racism still permeates the white schools, public and private. In 1966, for example, a study commissioned by the state board recommended special roles for each of the state’s “major universities” and suggested possible state aid for each of three “important” private colleges; all six were white institutions. Millsaps has blandly suggested that it had the highest proportion of black students of any college in the state when in fact not only did all of the black colleges have a higher percent, so did William Carey. Faculty hiring lags furthest behind. The white colleges signed their compliance pledges and have a trickle of black students. Therefore, they feel, they are integrated; in reality they are not even desegregated. When asked why they have no black professors, or only one or two, they

cite “logistical” problems, invoking pay, qualifications, location, and the like. “Qualified black” is spoken in situations where “qualified white” would be outlandish. White faculty members and administrators hire at the places where they graduated or have connections – mostly southern white schools such as Vanderbilt, Auburn, L. S. U., and Mississippi State. Then they feel it is the chance of the marketplace that they have no blacks on their faculty and they delude themselves into thinking they hire nonracially. Legal action or black student pressure will be required to get any change in this area.

In such a situation, with a slowly increasing number of increasingly aware black students opposing continuing bland racism, conflict is inevitable. Demonstrations and arrests have already taken place at Delta State and Ole Miss. Black students will continue to press for an end to Confederate symbolism at Ole Miss and will begin to do the same at Southern. They will demand more black professors and staff. And they will continue to challenge the monoracial cultural scene still represented by the curriculum and extracurricular activities at the white schools. At the black schools, particularly Jackson State and the private institutions, white presence will slowly increase. And perhaps there or at the Medical School or Mississippi State, true pluralism will come into being.

Until it does, the desegregation problems in the state’s colleges and universities adversely affect the public schools, for these colleges train almost all of Mississippi’s public-school (and private-school) teachers. During the freedom of choice era, many problems were created or maintained by teachers and administrators, both black and white. From petty but tragic reutilization such as calling black children “niggers” to outright deception and policy-making intended to make desegregation fail, many Mississippi white educators and some black ones have participated in anti-black and anti-desegregation actions. Such behavior had its roots in the larger white community, of course, but also in the schools of education around the state. Education faculty members in Mississippi’s colleges have on the whole lagged behind their colleagues in law, medicine, and arts and sciences in providing opinion leadership regarding desegregation. Sometimes they directly aided segregationists, in fact. When H.E.W. finally began requiring some public-school faculty desegregation in 1967, for example, a Delta State educator testified that no D. S. C. student in education would be willing to teach in a black school and that such feelings were probably universal among the white teachers and teachers-to-be in the state. He was wrong, even regarding his own students, but of course he spoke in such a context that no Delta State students could come out and contradict him. They might quietly go and accept assignment to a black school, but they could not speak out against him publicly without being called a “nigger-lover” and traitor.

His statement does show the harsh situation that white teachers who taught in black schools sometimes found themselves. Administrators, too, were in a dilemma. If they advocated at least minimal compliance with court and H E.W. orders, they risked attacks from the white community on their jobs and status. On the other hand, if they acted as agents of white racism they risked destruction of their own institution; they also had trouble justifying their own conduct to themselves as professional educators. Caught in this dilemma, many behaved as nobly as they could, trying to build up their schools and handle problems smoothly despite pressure from parents, politicians, and others.

Black faculty who taught in white schools had awkward relations too. In some schools they were outrightly denied use of such facilities as the teachers lounge and were treated by the principal as if they were civil rights extremists – “the enemy.” But more often they were tolerated and professionally if not socially accepted, for the system needed to have a token representation of blacks in the white schools to avoid H.E.W. trouble.

VI. MASSIVE DESEGREGATION

A. The Stennis Delay

Time was running out on freedom-of-choice tokenism. In May, 1968, in a Virginia case, the Supreme Court had ruled such plans unconstitutional unless they resulted in the elimination of dual schools. In Mississippi they were assuredly not so resulting. And so, on July 3, 1969, the Fifth Circuit ordered 30 Mississippi districts to take whatever steps were necessary to desegregate their schools completely by that fall.

But at the same time the courts were finally demanding compliance, the Southern white supremacists had found a new friend in Washington. As Roy V. Harris, Citizens' Council leader from Georgia put it, "Nixon, at least, has at last lent some respect to the freedom-of-choice idea." And Bill Simmons in Jackson, national leader of the Councils, said "I see some pretty good signs that we're making progress." Blacks and liberal whites, meanwhile, were dismayed at the assertion that freedom of choice was adequate. They knew better.

On August 11, 1969, H.E.W. was supposed to file plans for the 30 districts to desegregate completely. H.E.W. personnel were ready to do so, but at the last minute, apparently at the instigation of John Mitchell, then United States Attorney General, Secretary Finch of H. E. W. filed for a delay order. The United States had switched sides and now appealed on behalf of the white defendants. The Fifth Circuit and later Justice Black of the Supreme Court were somewhat taken aback. Touring Hurricane Camille damage on the Gulf Coast, Mitchell got a warm welcome from white Mississippians, which Nixon noted as part of his administration's Southern strategy. 90% of the attorneys in the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department protested the department's policies, and some H. E. W. workers, unable to accept the change in policy, resigned or were fired.

What had happened to cause the change? First, Nixon's great sensitivity to white supremacists and his desire to win their votes in 1972 and undercut another Wallace campaign.⁽¹⁾ Second, pressure from Senator Stennis regarding defense spending. The latter was crucial. Stennis called Nixon and told him he might have to go home to Kemper County, one of the 30 "Alexander" districts involved, to "help his people" deal with desegregation. This would have abandoned the ABM debate, then at a crucial point, to its enemies. Chairman of the Armed Forces Preparedness Subcommittee, Stennis carried crucial weight in favor of a high level of defense spending, a major policy of the Nixon administration. Nixon caved in and ordered the delay, perhaps happily. Stennis got what seemed to be a one-year delay in desegregation to show his constituents. And to many white Mississippians, delay still meant never. Nixon abetted this dream, coming out for a "moderate" course between "instant integration" (15 years after Brown) and continued segregation. (Such a course means in effect a "moderate" position between justice and injustice!)

Stennis, however, should have known better and probably did. For it was legally predictable that a year's delay was all that could possibly be obtained, and in fact the Fifth Circuit on November 6, 1969, ordered complete desegregation in all but three of the

districts by the end of the calendar year. An Munford put it, this “marked the first time a district had been ordered to implement a new desegregation plan during the school year, and the first time a school system had been ordered to make moves publicly opposed by the President of the United States.”(2) The result was that instead of a fairly orderly process at the beginning of the school year, desegregation took place in January or in some cases February. Schools had to close down for several days while equipment and teachers were transferred and administrative details taken care of. Even the senior year for many students was split down the middle as they transferred from one school to another. Bitterness was great, and it was directed against the courts, instead of at Nixon and Stennis, where the blame belonged.

The only positive result of the Stennis delay was surely an unintended consequence: because the changeover came in midyear, pullout to private schooling was slightly lessened, for some parents decided they would wait and see, being as how it was only for four more months. This was particularly true for seniors, waiting to graduate.

Thus, chaotically, in the middle of the school term, with less than two months for preparation, desegregation came to Mississippi. The “Alexander” cases mark the clearest end of tokenism and the beginning of complete desegregation. Only 22 of Mississippi’s 148 districts were operating unitary systems before the Alexander decision. Within ten months of it, all but two were forced to join in.

An ironically the decision suited the situation. More preparation would not have helped, really, for as a superintendent admitted, the state and the districts never prepared to act until finally ordered to do so. More delay would not have helped. Indeed, more than half of all Mississippi superintendents said privately that their jobs were easier when the federal government firmly demanded desegregation than when it vacillated, for without coercion even moderate educators simply could not act constructively for fear of being called “nigger-lovers.”

Throughout the state, school boards and parents had known for years that this day would come but had somehow never prepared for it. White parents and administrators had been aided in their procrastination by the “never” shouts from their political leaders and by the repeated avenues of evasion, culminating in the Stennis delay, which politicians held up as potential escape routes. Now communities hastened to adjust to the change, at last.

B. Initial Reaction.

Between 1969, when the Supreme Court declared that freedom of choice was not ending segregation, and the summer of 1970, when the Justice Department attacked nineteen holdout “hard-core” Mississippi districts that according to John Mitchell “could not or would not come into compliance,” Mississippi underwent massive desegregation. In most of the Alexander cases, the change came at midyear, January or February, 1970. In other districts it came in the fall of 1969 or the fall of 1970.

To see how sweeping the change was, we must remember that in 1970 Mississippi had 56 districts (out of 150) with black majorities, more than any other state. Mississippi’s black population percentage was about 40%; its school. Population was almost half black; no other state could boast as high a ratio. The change in schooling was greater than that ever required of any other state anywhere in America.

Governor John B. Williams’ reaction was just barely moderate.⁽¹⁾ He came close to advocating boycott but veered off, saying resistance was useless. He ended up in a “pluralist” position saying all choices parents might make – public, private, or no schooling – were legitimate. He also warned against damaging public school property. His moderation was reportedly urged upon him by the state’s business community and his statement was commended as “statesmanlike” by Senator Stennis. Eastland’s response was to mail out a Citizens’ Council solicitation letter at this point. Stennis voiced support for the public schools, and he and Attorney General Summer took people’s mind off the desegregation by promising to carry the fight to the rest of the nation. Desegregating the North, they claimed, might lead to a reversal of the nation’s commitment against segregation. This move helped drain off hostility, for Mississippi was going to “show” the North by making them do it too!

48 Mississippi Representatives praised a brief flurry of resistance, which occurred in Forrest County, but in general the Legislature was very moderate during 1969 and 1970. And Governor Williams himself, to the surprise of many, left his own children in heavily desegregated Central High School during the first year, although he removed them to a Citizens’ Council school the next fall.

On the whole, Mississippi’s white parents reacted with less racism than did their leaders and with less resistance than most observers had predicted. In a survey by James Palmer, 40 superintendents reported no apparent opposition to desegregation whatever, and another 69 reported only verbal opposition. These figures are overly rosy, but it remains true that in 1970 Mississippi “bit the bullet” and desegregated, to a greater extent than Georgia, North Carolina, or a number of Northern states. The percentage of black children in 100% black schools, 88.2% in 1968, fell to 10.8% in 1970, a percentage better than the national average and than many states in the North and South. Indeed, urban areas in the South, outside Mississippi, proved most recalcitrant in accepting full desegregation, perhaps because they were emulating northern urban sophisticated resistance patterns.

Mississippi blacks in schools of varying racial composition, 1968 and 1970. (HEW statistics)

<u>Year</u>	Percentage of all black students who attend:			
	<u>100% black schools</u>	<u>99-100% black schools</u>	<u>90-100% black schools</u>	<u>0-49.19% black schools</u>
1968	88.2%	92.4%	92.7%	6.7%
1970	10.8%	19.0%	35.5%	26.4%

Mississippi's acquiescence was abetted by a growing sense of hopelessness and powerlessness in the face of the power and distance of the federal bureaucracy. This feeling fueled Wallace's try for the Presidency in 1968, but in 1970 in Mississippi the same feeling helped lead to less troublesome desegregation.

Three basis reactions emerged: cooperation, evasion, and withdrawal. We shall study each in turn.

C. Cooperation

Some communities, administrators, and parents tried to make the changes as smoothly as possible. A few districts even desegregated without specific court orders; others waited for the court but they sincerely and constructively followed its instructions. Many smaller districts eliminated their dual schools by pairing. The formerly all-black school became, for instance, the new junior high for all races, while the formerly white school became the new unitary senior high. Such districts retained vestiges of segregation, if at all, only on the grade-school level.

In Northeast Mississippi, administrators sometimes simply eliminated black schools and absorbed their students into white schools. This allowed white parents to avoid the onus of sending their kids to black-identified schools, but it also wiped out the athletic teams, symbols, and school identity of the black institution. Such desegregation, although constructive when compared to actions in some other parts of the state, showed the one-sided frame of view of the school officials. Their reference group was the white community; for they assumed that the black community would simply accept whatever desegregation it received. As will be seen later, this was not always the case.

In Starkville, a rather heavily black community toward the Northeast, 76% of white parents surveyed by Mississippi State sociology graduate students claimed prior to school desegregation that they would not be willing to send their children to a school formerly occupied by Negroes. As is often the case regarding attitude responses, however, what they did was different from what they said. When desegregation was put into effect using the better formerly black institutions, only a small fraction of white parents opted to take their children out of public education rather than send them to these schools.

Perhaps the greatest success came in New Albany. Despite local opposition, New Albany completely desegregated its four schools in 1969, in advance of court requirements. Each school was made about 30% black, with a high school, “middle school” (grades 6-8), and two elementary schools. Under Superintendent Bryant Smith, the system then focused on education. Smith brought in consultants, used team teaching, some non-graded programs, individualized instruction, and other innovations. One result was that after a year of desegregation, in 1.0 years of schooling white kids had advanced in reading by 1.1 years; meanwhile blacks, substantially behind at the beginning, had advanced by 1.4 years. It seemed as if desegregation was helping both races.

New Albany’s accomplishment was short-lived, however. According to an H.E.W. employee, the black community recognized Smith’s commitment and “stood behind him for a long time,” but for reasons I do not know, the whites apparently withdrew their support and he took a job at Ole Miss. Since then, charges of racism have surfaced in New Albany. The student council, colors, cheerleaders, singing groups, and high-school faculty are, it has been charged, far too white. In 1970-71 the district hired eighteen white teachers and not a single black. Comparing 1970-71 statistics to 1968-69, we find nine fewer black teachers and sixteen more white ones. Black identity and black power are obviously being eroded.

Aberdeen, also in the Northeast but much blacker in population than New Albany, desegregated slowly but with surprisingly little friction or white pullout. Clear federal court pressure was a key ingredient.

One school board member credited Federal Judge Orma R. Smith of the North District of Mississippi with exercising great influence over the community’s peaceful acceptance of integration. “Judge Smith took the time, on the bench, to carefully trace the development of the law in this thing from way back to the first Brown case in 1954. He had a packed courtroom, and the people listened. It took him a long time, but when he was through, the people could see that there wasn’t any relief left in the courts. You’d be surprised to see how much that meant here.”

Another factor in Aberdeen was industry. The Black Prairie had been settled before the Civil War as a heavily-slave plantation area. But early in this century, with plantation cotton declining, the area turned to cattle and then to industry. Sociologically, Aberdeen behaved not like a plantation town, but like the other industrialized towns in Northeast Mississippi that had moved to a business or Chamber of Commerce ethic.

In Aberdeen, as in so many other small communities across the South that held white students [in desegregated schools], the presence of new industry played a big role in determining the attitudes of the white business community.

Industry played a crucial role, too, in Jackson. The state capital and only city larger than 60,000 people, Jackson might have been predicted to be more urban, hence more urbane and progressive about desegregation. But for a long while things were touch and go; the

white population almost polarized into all-out support of segregated private education, which in Jackson would have been Citizens' Council education. Citizens' Council leadership had been strong in Jackson since before the Ross Barnett administration. Also influenced by the rabidly racist Hederman press, its city leadership included old-line segregationist Mayor Allen Thompson. In court Jackson had been particularly futile and recalcitrant. But then the business community finally intervened. Recognizing that Jackson had not gotten a new industry in years and suffered national notoriety over its civil-rights opposition, the business establishment directed that a more progressive mayor replace Thompson, and its choice won easily. Now the Chamber of Commerce, the school board and its attorney, and even the newspaper ownership had to come face to face with the stark reality that their city would not progress economically or symbolically in the South if it destroyed its image over school desegregation. As the attorney put it,

Dave Scott, the president of Allis-Chalmers, came to Jackson . . . and he made it clear that . . . a stable quality program of public education was a requirement before Allis-Chalmers would consider locating in a community.

Allis-Chalmers delayed a final decision for two full years while waiting to see what the city would do. It represented exactly the kind of non-textile industry the city needed. Enticed by both a carrot and a stick, the white establishment finally made a commitment to both public and private education. The newspapers printed generally favorable stories about both, and support groups such as Jacksonians for Public Education were formed to lend respectability to the idea of staying with the public schools and to combat specific rumors and problems.

Jackson went on to garner favorable coverage in the Washington Post, New South Notes, and network television for its "success story" in desegregation. For two days in a row CBS-TV compared Jackson's massive bussing, smoothly instituted in the fall of 1970, with the bus-burnings and protests in Pontiac and Kalamazoo, Michigan. And Allis-Chalmers is now locating a major plant near the city.

But like New Albany, Jackson has had its seamy side. Cheerleaders and some other positions at formerly white schools, such as homecoming courts, were all-white the first year; in some schools this discrimination lasted into the second and even third years. At one school, accommodation to the roughly 50% black population that moved in at mid-year consisted of the token gesture of having the all-white cheerleading squad add some "black" cheers to their usual repertoire. Blacks who had held such positions as cheerleader in their former high school were angry at being told that they could not even try out "until next year."

Students of both races were upset about the elimination or curtailment of extracurricular activities, a statewide occurrence. Some schools took this step earlier, under freedom of choice desegregation, because they were unwilling to countenance the appearance of social equality between the races even if only one black child was involved. Hollandale and some other districts even cut out the yearbook, not an activity at all and which had maintained a completely nonblack staff, so that black and white pictures would not

coexist equally on the page! Needless to say, community and parental pressure caused such steps, not pressure from the students themselves. Organizations like the Girl Scouts and Hi-Y that had used school activity periods or enjoyed school or P.T.A. sponsorship were crippled across the state and have not yet recovered.

In Jackson and elsewhere it was also charged that the better black teachers, including most of those with M.A. degrees, were pulled out to the previously white schools, in exchange for unseasoned neophyte white instructors. Parents and graduates of Lanier High School in Jackson, the major black high school in the system after desegregation, charged that their school had definitely been hurt by this policy. It is also possible, however, that the younger newer white instructors were more flexible than older whites and were a better choice for transfer. Lanier students went on to complain that the new white teachers were too easy! This was something of a novel charge for students to make of teachers in any system and contrasted with the academic difficulties faced and criticized by blacks in some other schools. Lanier students suggested that the new white teachers were perhaps unsure of themselves and didn't want to face pressure or charges of "racism" or "white standards" from black students and parents and therefore made few academic or disciplinary demands.

Statistics on suspensions and expulsions, it was alleged, showed that Jackson over penalized its black students. Blacks charged that interracial incidents would sometimes be followed by the suspension of the black, but not the white, participants. While admitting that the state history textbook used by the district was biased, the superintendent in Jackson nevertheless reneged on a tentative agreement to allow a new book to be used in the district on a pilot basis.

92% of Jackson's students registered for the second semester in 1969-1970, following the midyear desegregation. There was some white pullout and a bit more the next fall, when bussing began. Since then, private school enrollments have declined as an increasing number of whites returned to the public schools. Public-school faculty members, who even at the system wide meeting held to discuss the impending desegregation changes seated themselves according to race with the whites at the front of the auditorium, black teachers to the rear, have begun talking to each other and even socializing together after school. In the first year of desegregation, about a dozen interracial boy-girl friendships formed at one high school in Jackson, and it is now fairly common to see white and black kids, school friends, shopping together on the weekends or sitting together at rock concerts or athletic contests. Needless to say, this did not happen before 1970.

Forrest, Mississippi, had school administrators with particularly positive attitudes, and the results included constructive statements about the process, classroom as well as school desegregation in the first year, and little white pullout. Hurricane Camille wiped out the old schools in Pass Christian, giving the system a chance to begin anew. Officials were at first going to rebuild the schools in the way and location they had previously been, but H. E. W. said no. So the school system made a fresh start, with schools not afflicted by previous racial designations.

Some districts held white students by desegregating racially while institution racially while institution segregation by sex! This bizarre practice will be discussed later, in a special section on sex and race. Other schools, including those in Rolling Fork and Yazoo City as well as all of Kemper County, held whites in the schools during the first year by illegally maintaining classroom segregation so that white children never encountered black peers even though the school as a whole was allegedly desegregated. This behavior does not fall under the rubric “cooperation” and will be discussed later as an example of “evasion.” Yazoo City should be stressed in this regard, however, since Yazoo, the story of a brief visit home by Willie Morris, made a major point of the town’s “successful desegregation.” All that happened in Yazoo City was that its upper-class whites signaled the rest of the white community that they would not condemn as “nigger-lovers” those whites who stayed with the public schools. (In Canton and Flora, the upper class gave just the opposite signals and managed to get nearly total pullout.) Meanwhile, most of the upper class took its own children out of the public schools into private segregation academies. Those whites who remained, as has already been noted, were not truly desegregated either.

Throughout the state, sports and extra-curricular activities, when they were allowed to continue, proved not to be problems but problem-solvers. As an observer in Clinton put it,

The closest interaction black students have with white students is through sports. There is more of a “desegregation” through these courses than through any other course. For example, in the physical education class the girls take showers together; play on the same team with the same goal in mind to win over the other team. During this class I believe the students forget about color and the idea of one race being superior to another because they have the same goal in mind and are not under any influence other than to win.

There were some positive outgrowths of the desegregation process. Throughout the state, some of the transferred teachers refused to report to their new assignments. In a few cases, real hardships of a new commuting route or the like were involved. But most white teachers who refused to teach after desegregation did so because they did not want to interact with black students or in a desegregated environment. Most black teachers who refused the new assignments did not want to interact with white students or in a desegregated environment. There may have been more hate involved in the first group, more fear or timidity in the second, but in either case the schools were surely better off without these individuals. For even in the absence of blacks, before desegregation took place, a white teacher unwilling to teach blacks was surely infecting his or her white pupils with elements of this racism. And I cannot see how a black teacher unwilling or afraid to teach whites could possibly have previously been instilling positive feelings of self-worth among black students.

Academic freedom increased after the shakeup in most districts that cooperated. Districts as a whole were freed to innovate, for both good and bad reasons. Jackson undertook its first curriculum revision in more than two decades. Teachers were given greater freedom

to experiment with their own styles of teaching. Hinds County Public Schools, not previously noted for educational leadership, got a special grant and arranged for a consultantship with out-of-state educators to set up special nongraded individualized instruction at formerly black Carver Junior High School out from Raymond. The school was renamed Carver Lab School and the new programs gave educators something to talk about besides the racial ratio (about 80% black, 20% white). Innovation, then, was used to get parents' minds off the past and off desegregation. It was also used to deal honestly with students from different orientations with diverse strengths and weaknesses.

Some folks innovated for hypocritical reasons. If the schools were now "ungraded," then blacks might be held back while whites made more rapid progress without the onus of "flunking" anybody. White parents could be told that individualized instruction ended the chance that their child might have to go slow because of "slow" black classmates. Team teaching meant that no white parent had to be told his or her fourth-grader had a black teacher, for Johnnie had five teachers, black and white. In Clarksdale and some other districts, innovations that looked good on paper were criticized by some parents because students were allowed to learn nothing without getting negative feedback.

D. Black Reaction to Discrimination

On the whole, the students in cooperating districts got along well. In several schools, students of different races united to vote for interracial student governments and homecoming courts. But in some schools, problems remained. Students mourned the closing of their former alma maters and the elimination of dances, clubs, and yearbooks. In some schools, black students were not allowed to become cheerleaders, were not chosen for homecoming courts, or faced strict conduct rules not applied to their white classmates. Moreover, mores and folkways sometimes were merely different in white schools compared to black, or vice versa, and students tried to adjust but sometimes felt the "new" rules were being used against them unfairly.

Protesting various kinds of discrimination, black students walked out of schools in Noxubee County, Yalobusha County, Jackson, Meridian, Greenville, and elsewhere. Fighting went on for three days in Moss Point. The white superintendent in Greenwood was blocked in an auditorium by jeering black students who demanded an end to classroom segregation in supposedly newly desegregated Threadgill Hill School. In Greenville, black parents and teachers supported a student walkout from Greenville High School. Their student demands included an end to what black people termed a "dual standard" of discipline for black compared to white students.

This new black protest is the most important single product of desegregation. It will increase. And for the first time it is directed against white administrators and board members. Before desegregation, protest was muted. Directed toward pillars of the black community (black principals), it was usually deflected by them so that it never reached whites. Now however it is clear to blacks that anti-intellectual and discriminatory practices in schools emanate from the whites on top of the system. Moreover, there is a

new feeling that these whites are accessible and that blacks can do something about the problems.

The change is sweeping, even affecting black identity. As a young desegregation pioneer said to Robert Coles, “Maybe because of all the trouble going to school in the beginning I learned more about my people.” For as black students and teachers begin to protest, they discover that change in institutions is possible and that they can bring it about. The lesson, incidentally, has not been lost on white students, who have suffered from some of the same weird conduct and dress codes over the years; some recent protests have been interracial.

There was still plenty to protest. Some of the odious practices were simply anti-student; others were anti-black. Forrest, for example, instated a new conduct code stipulating that students use daily baths in order to be “free of body odor.” Writing such an item into a code reflects white stereotypes of black people, of course, and offends blacks. Another school used federal money given to desegregating schools for a special program of restroom disinfecting. In McComb, students were suspended or expelled for “black boy-white girl and white boy-black girl overtures.” Jackson and a few other districts held summer workshops in topics related to desegregation; otherwise nothing was done about racist teachers.

Formerly black schools were usually somewhat freer and less tense than formerly white schools, but there were major exceptions both ways to this generalization. In black schools whites were more likely to be recruited into student governments and cheerleading squads than blacks were in white schools. Some formerly white schools simply operated just as they had before desegregation, admitting no change, no adjustment to the different styles of their new black constituents.

In schools where no compromises were made and which refused to allow cultural pluralism but maintained white style throughout, initial reactions from blacks were nonetheless positive. Blacks felt that the mere fact of desegregation showed that whites were trying, and they felt the thing to do now was to try to work things out. This feeling permeated a football game I watched between Jackson Murrah and Jackson Lanier, the historic first meeting between these leading white and black, respectively, schools. Some 50 blacks had tried out for football at Murrah, but only two or three remained on the squad, none as starters. Lanier, with only seven whites in its entire student body, fielded an all-black team. The game was clean, even polite; it was obvious that both sides wanted to make the occasion “work.” But at Provine and Wingfield in Jackson, black students staged walkouts protesting all-white cheerleaders and other problems. And at schools where these problems were not resolved, students in the position of Murrah’s blacks began to root for the black opponent, identifying on the basis of race rather than with “their own” school. In short, where nothing was done to make new students feel that a school was theirs, they didn’t feel that way; in those cases, school activities instead of promoting unity further fractured it. A student of mine, observing schools southwest of Jackson, said that where cultural pluralism was not allowed, black students and parents ceased participating.

The types of social functions given at the school are no longer of any interest to them anyway, because they are all white forms of entertainment that represent white values exclusively.

This was a major problem, for many white educators were simply not aware that their meetings, singing groups, cheers, and even styles of basketball were “white.” To surmount this difficulty required not only good will but also great sensitivity.

Across the state, there was a major decrease of black power in the schools. To me, as I have surely made clear, much of this power had been a sham, a front for what was really white control, and I feel the black consciousness and conflict that ensued after desegregation compensated for the loss. Nevertheless, the loss was real and important and should be chronicled.(1)

Most districts downgraded their former black high school into a junior high, leaving the new unitary high school with a former white identity. Black high school principles became junior high or elementary principals or were kept on to become assistant principals under whites. Black teachers were often transferred from high school to lower grades, leaving the high school faculty disproportionately white. (This may have been done because whites considered blacks to be “good with children,” or because whites questioned black competence with high-school subject matter.) And as we noted in the case of New Albany, without black principals involved in hiring, whites tended to be hired to replace departing teachers of either race. In Hattiesburg, for example, black under representation on the faculty had already existed before desegregation but became much worse afterwards.

Percentage black, students and faculty, Hattiesburg, 1968-71

<u>Year</u>	<u>Percentage black, Students</u>	<u>Percentage black, faculty</u>
1968	45%	38%
1971	46%	31%

According to Munford, only 44 of the 79 black principals in the Alexander districts held on to their jobs during the first year of desegregation in those districts. “In no case where a significant number of white students were put in a black school was the black principal retained,” according to him;(2) my records show that this did happen, but only in four schools. According to Ward and Clark, the state had lost half of its visible black leadership from the public schools by the beginning of 1971. James Palmer’s table, reprinted below, shows the extent of the problem.

<u>School category</u>	<u># Districts in category</u>
Higher % black in faculty than in student body	7
0-5% more whites in faculty than in student body	20
5-9.9% more whites	46
10-14.9% more whites	40
15-19.9% more whites	16
20-29.9% more whites	15
over 30% more whites	3

(Incidentally, most northern schools would be guilty of discrimination on this kind of index, probably to a much greater extent than Mississippi. The statistics are as equal as they are solely because Mississippi is still close in time to the period of segregated education that required black faculties. The imbalance will grow, in emulation of Northern practice, as we get further from the segregation era and black incumbents leave, retire, or die.)

The reasons for under representation of blacks in teaching staffs are several, in addition to racist hiring. Even before desegregation, most districts showed the pattern because white schools had a more favorable student/faculty ratio and because most specialist teachers were white. After desegregation, faculty ratios were often unchanged, sometimes mandated not to change by court orders, while student enrollments became somewhat blacker as some whites pulled out to private academies. Some principals were genuinely ignorant as to how to find black applicants. And some districts used testing (National Teachers Exam, etc.) for new hiring or for retention, and the tests discriminated against black teachers.

The issue was slightly more complex than sheer racism. Some districts had never before hired blacks on academic, intellectual, or professional grounds. Indeed, as we have mentioned, some districts specifically avoided hiring blacks who might be creative teachers. But now, for the first time, because white children might encounter black teachers, white citizens became concerned about the quality of black teachers in their district. Some districts suddenly imposed intellectual qualifications, such as a cutoff score on the National Teachers Exam, qualifications that some black teachers could not meet. Some of these teachers should never have been hired long ago, and their nonretention was not purely racist.

Racism was directly involved in the assignment of principals, however. Many white principals had never been appointed on the basis of their academic qualifications. Some were former coaches and the like who had gained community support for the step up.

After desegregation black principals with substantial experience and advanced degrees were sometimes replaced with white principals with less education, less experience, and different skin pigmentation. In West Tallahatchie, for example, the black high school principal became a junior high principal while a white football coach was elevated to the high-school principalship. In Jackson, though about 60% of the students are black, seven of nine junior high schools were headed by whites; only eighteen of 55 principals in the system were black. Moreover, above the level of principal the district's administration grew even whiter, black participation even more token.

Athletic leadership positions were also affected. Coffeeville blacks boycotted for a long time protesting the lack of black principals and the complete absence of black coaches. A visit by a team from the national Education Association found no district in the state in which a black was head coach in a substantially biracial school. My own survey in 1971, remembering that the state had about a 50% black enrollment, showed 180 white head coaches and 27 black, only eight of whom were coaching in previously white schools. On the assistant-coach level, the ratio was closer but still not equal: 292 whites and 147 blacks were assistant coaches.

In at least one district, firing, demotion, or non-retention was not limited to blacks. Starkville fired four teachers, two black and two white, supposedly on a nonracial basis, but the two whites happened to be persons who had bucked the white administration on a few points and were the only white teachers in the entire system to be members of the N.A.A.C. P.!

This last incident points to a relation between white solidarity and lack of academic freedom which parallels that in higher education. Academic freedom has not been popular in Mississippi. School conduct codes have tended to be restrictive, informal, unequally applied, and subject to the whim of administrators. Due process is rare for students or faculty. Teachers have been fired for such offenses as asking students to write an essay on what is wrong with Mississippi! Book lists have been carefully supervised to keep out sex, profanity, or racial liberalism. But in all of these areas, rapid change is taking place. Black students and faculty, sometimes with white support, have challenged procedures in several districts. And the concept of pluralism, though not openly advocated anywhere, is surreptitiously gathering support so that conduct that would have been condemned before desegregation, especially intellectual conduct such as classroom challenges, is now acceptable by members of either race.

Black protest has just begun in many districts, and it will build in the future. Those who regard conflict in itself as destructive and divisive will be horrified by it. Those who see it, as a potentially civilizing and humanizing device will be heartened.

E. Evasion

The foregoing analysis applies to those districts that constructively or destructively were trying to desegregate under court orders or ahead of them. There were two other responses: evasion and white withdrawal. Evasion was more transient and tended to resolve into cooperation (in most cases) or withdrawal.

Evasive tactics ranged from continued segregation of classes or even schools in defiance of court orders to more subtle techniques to cause blacks to return to their old schools. In East Tallahatchie, for instance, a complicated bussing system during the day ensured that whites would visit black schools only for part of their schooling and were not really assigned to black schools. Vicksburg allowed high school students to choose “their” high school for homeroom and activities; students were then bussed to that schooled for an end-of-day activities period.

Classroom segregation within “desegregated” schools was common. The following description of two Hinds County schools indicates the pervasiveness of the practice in some districts:

Both whites and blacks are housed on the campus, but in different areas and in separate buildings. The blacks eat in the cafeteria at one time and the whites eat at another at X [former white high school], and at Y [former black school] the whites do not eat in the cafeteria but bring their lunches and remain in their classroom during the lunch hour. At first the black students at X were not allowed to use the library but were later granted special hours. The white principal at X appointed a so-called black principal so that he would not become involved with black students. Students remain under their same instructors in both situations. The white teachers transferred with their classes and so did the blacks. When school is out, white students catch their segregated buses and the black students do the same. With the exception of the black students who had entered the white school in 1967, under freedom of choice, there is no real desegregation in either of the two school systems.

This observer went on to assert that the black student in such situations is alienated from the school and realizes that he or she is “being used to obtain federal funds for a school he hates.” She called such a situation the “segregation of integration.” “The pressures of the school serve as a demotivating element in his life,” she said, “because he suffers from emotional letdown, physical abuse, and psychological torment.” Through this kind of desegregation problems arise that sharpen inter-group hostility.

Classroom segregation was justified, according to administrators, because blacks were studying different books from whites or the two races were at different points in the same book. The actual reasons were two: simple racism, to maintain segregation, on the one hand, and a misguided attempt by white administrators to retain white students, on the other. The practices were most common in districts black enough or racist enough to be threatened by white flight but whose leadership still hoped to hold whites by maintaining

white control over and segregation within the public schools. The technique worked in Yazoo City and other districts, at least for a few months while whites got their private schools together. But it again showed that the reference group for administrators was solely white. For this kind of segregation was even more open and damaging to black students than was their previous confinement in separate institutions. Nobody cared how the black students felt about classroom desegregation as long as this gimmick could help out the whites.

Madison-Ridgeland School in Madison County offered another type of evasive practice. The policy was to let blacks in but do everything possible to force them to transfer back to Rosa Scott, the black school. Both schools retained racial identities and transfers were allowed. Some white teachers seated all blacks in the rear of the classroom, all whites in the front. Then they took attendance by calling all the white names and concluding by asking, "Are all the niggers here?"(1) In Jones County, teachers commonly required side-by-side seating, with blacks on one side of the room, whites on the other. In some other areas, students voluntarily segregated themselves, particularly in cafeterias, and each race then looked with suspicion upon its own members who fraternized with the "enemy."

Often segregation went beyond the classroom. Buses were commonly segregated, even though in Jones and other counties this meant two buses, one white, one black, had to cover the same routes. Sometimes black students were even assigned to come to school and leave school at different times from whites, so that the two groups would not encounter each other even outside the building.

Two districts, Clinton and Durant, separated from their county unit systems in order to maintain white/black ratios more favorable to the white community. Whites elsewhere in Holmes County were in a state of complete polarization against public education, so in the case of Durant, this was perhaps a constructive move; the resulting system was not heavily white. Clinton whites were simply trying to get away from Hinds County blacks; Clinton also allowed illegal transfers by whites, rented addresses, and other gimmicks to boost their white enrollment.

Most of the tactics of evasion were only temporarily successful. Black protests, H. E. W. action, monitoring by people in the community, and legal action by civil rights lawyers stopped the cruelest of them. Some districts moved toward full cooperation; in other cases when classroom segregation ended, the whites then withdrew to private academies. But in most areas the only legacy of the temporary practices of evasion was further alienation of black students from white administrators and institutions.

F. White Withdrawal

In some districts, total or near-total white withdrawal from the public schools left them completely or overwhelmingly black. All or almost all whites pulled out in Indianola, most of Coahoma County, Tunica County, Wilkinson County, and in a number of other districts in the River Lowlands and Delta. White pullout was high in several counties in

the central and southern parts of the Loess Hills including Canton, the northern half of Madison County, and Carroll County. It was also high in Kemper County, Noxubee County, and some other heavily black areas on the Alabama line.

Television commentators, newsmen, and sociologists have focused on where, when, how many, and why whites pulled out. This emphasis emanates from a white perspective, however. In its reporting of a brief white boycott in Petal, CBS-TV spent two days interviewing white parents about desegregation and never even talked with blacks. Blacks don't care so much about white pullout, and maybe sociologists have overemphasized the matter. As Charles Evers put it (and I am quoting from memory), "If they don't want to go to school with us, they can do without and grow up ignorant with no schooling just like we had to."

Generally, the areas of high black population were the areas of high white withdrawal. According to Munford, white flight was highly correlated with % black in the overall population, not so much with the school-age population or in the enrollment of a given attendance zone. Thus even if part of a district was more than half white, if the entire district was heavily black, whites pulled out. Munford explains it this way:

In majority-white areas, whites who controlled the political and economic institutions could look to the principle of majority rule as an assurance that desegregation would not threaten their power. In black-belt counties, however, white supremacy had no such consolation. In the ruthlessly democratic setting of a schoolyard playground white children would inevitably learn that black students were people, sometimes superior human beings with aspirations and dreams . . . White supremacy would not allow its children to learn that lesson, for to do so would have meant the end of white supremacy and the beginning of a desegregated society in which a white skin was not an automatic ticket to political and economic ascendancy.(1)

Munford's explanation is bolstered by the high correlation between black population percentage and percentage of white withdrawal in the Alexander districts, a relation so strong that it "explains" 74% of the variance in the dependent variable.(2) A double independent variable is potentially involved, however, as Munford implies. The other possibility is racism, particularly the virulent form of white racism involved in plantation slavery and plantation sharecropping ideology. The two covary. An area that develops a plantation system based on the exploitation of black labor – whether under slavery or later under sharecropping – develops a high percentage of blacks in the population, via purchase, recruitment, and sometimes even theft. It also develops a rabidly racist ideology to explain to itself how it is that the terrible conditions of black poverty it has created are not immoral and are of no consequence. That blacks are subhuman, lazy, noncaring, stoic, unaffected by conditions – these are all elements of plantation ideology that help explain to upper-class whites "why" blacks are poor. Even if plantation exploitation ended, such an ideology in the white population would surely make white parents want to do almost anything to avoid letting their children interact on a level of equality with such persons.

Munford found that white leadership, of either a racist or stick-with-public-schools variety, had little effect upon white pullout rates after the first year. Population percentage made the difference. Of course, all of the Alexander districts were areas of scant progressive white leadership, for they all were recalcitrant enough to come under that court decision. Moreover, the best cases for testing whether white leadership or white racism was more basic explanatory devices than percent black were not Alexander districts. It would be interesting to study such ex-plantation-ideology areas as Monroe County, Lowndes County, and even Marshall County, that have substantial black populations yet had rather low white pullout. In contrast, some former plantation areas continue to espouse racism, whether manifested in white pullout or in lack of conformity with H. E. W. or court edicts; these include Rankin County and other districts. But as Munford points out, including non-Alexander districts would complicate the analysis because it would involve a number of other potentially important independent or intermediate variables, such as varying legal histories and degrees of desegregation itself.

Statewide statistics of white pullout were misleading due to two unrelated causes of enrollment decline, which by sheer coincidence happened at the same time as Mississippi's school desegregation. The first was the state's declining birthrate. For years the state's school enrollment had been growing, like those of other states; then one year before massive desegregation the trend reversed. Smaller cohorts in lower grades caused by fewer births in the 1960s meant that normal graduation and dropout attrition was not fully replaced.

Second, the state's enrollment and even Average Daily Attendance figures were not accurate but inflated. This was a complex and controversial issue that even reached the attention of national columnist Jack Anderson. Racism was charged but perhaps not justified. Briefly, what happened was that superintendents and principals would claim higher enrollments and AFA's than existed in order to claim greater success in reaching the school-age population and in order to get more funds, which were paid according to attendance. Then every ten years, when the Census came out, enrollment and attendance figures had to be lowered to bring them into line with the number of children actually available in the district. Involved in all this was the absence of a compulsory attendance law in the state.

The unreliability of state statistics is shown by the following table, from figures noted by H. J. Kirksey (responsible for this whole line of analysis):

Enrollment, by race, in 1957-58, as reported in that year and as reported three years later, for the same year, for the state.

<u>Race</u>	<u>1957-58 enrollment, 1958 figures</u>	<u>same, 1960-61 figures</u>
White	281,684	272,238
Black	268,246	264,179

In some districts, despite known high dropout rates, there were more children in a given grade than had been born in the cohort years earlier! After each decade the figures were revised downward, and it was just coincidence that the revision was needed in 1970-71, when desegregation took place. Moreover, the changes in pupil assignments brought the fraud to light in many schools. Jackson Provine, for example, found itself much more “white” than expected after desegregation because some of the black students who were supposed to enroll at Provine had never existed at the former black high school. The practice didn’t hurt education, for it merely allowed principals and superintendents to get more money for their schools, but it did contribute to scare headlines like “State Schools Lose 43,695.”(3)

Where white pullout was unanimous or nearly so, how was this accomplished? Why was there no white deviance, or almost none? The answer, of course, was organized pressure. Sending a child to public school is not like voting; it is a public act, repeated every day, and neighbors know the content of the choice being made and can stigmatize the family and child for the act. In areas where pullout was total, the white establishment first took steps to direct its school board and superintendent to render the public schools particularly black in identity and particularly inhospitable to whites. In Noxubee County, when the final desegregation order was handed down, the superintendent himself allowed as how this order would end public education, at least for whites. In Canton, the authorities closed Canton High School, the former white institution, even though it was located on a major highway roughly on a dividing line between the white and black sections of town. It was not even used as the new “unitary” junior high. Instead, Rogers High School, the former black school, located “out from” Canton on a small road little known to whites, became the unitary high. Therefore whites had to walk an average distance of one to two miles, through the entire length of the black community, to reach the school. If the decisions by many districts to downgrade black high schools to junior highs showed bland racism, the decision in Canton to make the black high school the unitary senior high was motivated by open and purposeful racism.

In Canton, as in some other towns, whites then tried to eliminate any reason for white parents not to send their kinds to the private segregation academy. The president of the board of the new Canton Academic Foundation, Inc., said,

We are doing something here that to our knowledge had never been done before outside the public schools. We’re taking everybody whether they can pay or not. Everybody is paying what he or she can.

This step, also taken in Wilkinson County and elsewhere, was taken to get total white pullout. Working-class whites suspected that its true intent was to get them committed to the private schools and to get the public schools identified as completely black so that later the benevolence could be rescinded and the school could charge what it wanted. An alternative explanation is that even token white desegregation in a majority-black institution shocks the mores of white Canton (and Woodville and other towns) and they could not permit it. Furthermore, if any number of whites attended public schools, that would threaten white supremacy, following Munford's argument. It would also threaten the existence of the private academy. In Jackson, white students in Citizens Council schools were often asked by their public-school friends why they chose private education and their responses were defensive. Later Council school enrollments dropped, partly because the public schools had remained an attractive and interracial identified alternative.

In Canton the first year, only about three dozen whites stayed with the public school, including just one white senior. At first the black students at Canton Rogers High School isolated him. Then, according to my informant,

He got up in a meeting and said it was his decision to attend Rogers. Many of his friends would have stayed in the public schools, he said, but their parents wouldn't let them. "I was lucky enough to have parents who let me make the decision. I chose to come; nobody told me to." He was there to get an education, he went on, and he wanted to have friends, just like everybody else. He was crying, a little, and after he spoke everybody came together and it just as if he's been there from the beginning.

In Woodville, in the far Southwest, only two white children showed up for public school after desegregation. They were the children of a logger and his wife who lived in a three-room house in the woods and earned \$250/month. The white superintendent showed the attitude of the rest of the white community toward their actions in the following televised interview:

[How will they be affected by going to the school?]

Emotionally . . . Other children in the community won't associate with them.

[Other white children?]

Other white children. They will carry a stigma with them.

The racism of national television commentators helped drive the two children to the white private schools within two weeks. Over and over they were asked questions like "Don't you think there will be problems, with so many of them [blacks] and so few of you?" These questions helped undermine their ideological reasons for choosing public education. And their manifest reason --- money -- was undermined from the beginning

when Woodville whites announced that they could attend the segregation academy without charge.

In both Canton and Woodville (Wilkinson County), the white superintendent and school board stayed on even after most white students and teachers had withdrawn from public education. Even though the Woodville superintendent stated openly that he and the rest of the white community would stigmatize white children who stayed with his own school system, he himself obviously did not feel so stigmatized. The reason was that unlike those counties where the desegregated schools remained partly white, in the counties of white pullout the white superintendent was not identified by whites as an ally, even an unwilling one, of desegregation or of the black community. Instead, whites wanted the white superintendent to stay on as a tool of white supremacy. They went on to continue to contest viciously the elections for school board, even though their children were no longer in the schools.

The actions of white superintendents in Canton, Madison County, Wilkinson County, and other districts hit by white pullout showed their role as complete sycophants for the white upper class. Of course, this is just what they were before desegregation as well, but the process could not be seen so openly. The superintendent presided over the ceremonial school-community functions before desegregation, such as commencement, presentation of awards, etc. Since as we noted these occasions replicate the class structure within the community, symbolically they placed the superintendent on top of the hierarchy. However, everybody knew that this was not really true and that the superintendent in fact could be fired at the urging of the white establishment with just about as much ease as the local white Baptist minister. The superintendent's own children, for example, would usually not be considered for the top positions or elite groups.

After white withdrawal the superintendent's position in the community can perhaps be expected to deteriorate. No longer does he preside, even as sycophant, over an important white institution. He therefore loses some crucial face-to-face contact with the white upper class – a prime source of his status. He still has to preside over the black ceremonial occasions, such as commencement, but probably spends as little time as possible at the now-black school. There may even be a stigma attached to his position. Of course, when asked “how was it to present all the cheerleader awards . . .” by a white racist, he can say “you know I have to do that, part of my job.” But it's no source of status to him, any more.

The Mayor of Hollandale, J. W. Fore, told of his concern about the effects of white exodus that had hit public schools there and was perceptive about the ultimate source of the movement:

It's unfortunate that a bunch of big planters have been able to sway the people to do their way. One of them said, when I told him that the white workers would move out, “hell, let them move.” Maybe I'm wrong; maybe they can run both school systems. But how can you run a town where the wealthy people have their children in private school and the working people have to move?(4)

Whites strained, then, economically and in terms of political resources and time, to control the public schools and set up private parallel institutions.

Usually the parallel institutions were not parallel, especially at first. In Woodville, formerly abandoned buildings housed the new white segregation academies, even though a new white public school stood vacant due to administrative decision to abandon it and increase the black identification of the public schools. Court orders usually (but not always) prevented the outright transfer or sale of public educational facilities to the segregation academies. However, students and teachers were encouraged in many districts and by the state attorney general to take their books and other supplies from the public schools when they left for private education. An abandoned tent factory in Canton, a metal prefabricated structure, housed Canton Academy for its first two years. Churches and their "education buildings" came forth in Jackson and elsewhere. Some of the new private schools were elegant. The Citizens Councils in Jackson secured a huge loan from the city's two main banks and erected beautiful campuses in different white suburban locations throughout the city. Others, however, were makeshift.

Usually classrooms were adequate, but special facilities were not. Many schools lacked an auditorium, cafeteria, gym, playing field, and music room through their first two or three years of existence. One makeshift school in west Jackson was set up in an abandoned filing station! The children read the Bible together where the grease racks used to be and at recess played ring-around-the-rosie around the old pump foundations. Sometimes the private schools illegally made use of the public-school facilities that had been abandoned by the white administrators, but civil rights lawyers could not take time to stop these practices everywhere and the Justice Department was not interested in enforcing the details of the court edicts. In Jackson, white private institutions such as the YMCA and Millsaps College opened their athletic facilities and auditoriums to segregation academy activities, thus helping them complete more equally with public education.

Costs ranged from about \$30/month, less for multiple enrollments from the same family, to \$1000/year in those schools that purported to be more than mere alternatives. Usually there was an additional "capital funds" payment or "membership fee" to cover part of the loan and building costs; this ranged from \$50 to \$500 and more. In 1970, to cite a specific example, the Citizens Council schools charged \$450 for elementary school tuition, \$600 for a secondary school student. Middle-class whites could pay such fees, but in the poorest state in the Union families in the working class with more than one child had trouble.

Some families simply pulled their children out of public schools into no schooling. Mississippi had long since rescinded its truancy law, so there were no sanctions against the dropout. Not only racism, but also the problems of adjusting to a new school or of figuring out a way to get there deterred attendance for some after desegregation, both black and white. The lack of seriousness with which some Mississippians of both races take education is shown by statistics defining reasons for dropping out, collected by the state department of education. In 1970-71, the year of greatest increase in desegregation,

the largest single category of reasons for dropping out was simply “disliked school,” which might or might not be due to desegregation. Amazingly, 27 families allowed first-graders to leave school for that reason! 357 students left school because they were “needed at home,” including 20 students in grades one through four!

The families who sent their children to the new segregation academies received an education under rigid white control. The Bible and Christianity were stressed.⁽⁵⁾ Ideology, like that in the public schools during the 1960s, was John Birch. A Canton Academy high school student said his courses in the academy, compared to previous public-school instruction, were “about the same, except that we study a lot about the evils of Communism.” A girl who attended a Jackson Citizens’ Council school reported:

We were taught that Earl Warren is a Communist, that the Supreme Court is under Communist control, and that integration is a plot made up by Communists and Jews.

Christian symbolism was sometimes extreme. In Greenville, the new segregation academy’s motif was a cross and flag and open Bible. The use of the cross as a symbol of racism dates back to KKK days and before, of course, and the relation of religion to racism has been documented many times by sociologists elsewhere in America.

The private schools were rigid, clean-cut, and patriotic. In a work, they were to many kids “uncool.” Speakers were carefully monitored; Jackson Preparatory School, for instance, made sure ahead of time that visitors were Caucasian and “safe.” Some institutions had existed prior to 1970 but were then affected adversely by the change. St. Richard’s in Jackson and other white Catholic schools had gone along with token desegregation when the public schools in their communities did so. But when the public schools desegregated fully, the Catholic schools did not follow suit. Neither did previously existing elite prep schools such as Episcopal St. Andrews in Jackson. They used the desegregation in 1969-70 as an excuse to swell their class size, expand their offerings, and even add new grades and buildings to house the racists fleeing from public-school desegregation. In so doing, their reputation for small classes, innovative instruction, and the like went down the drain, for they had accepted students whose parents were not interested in innovation but segregation.

In the short run the segregation academies provided an important safety valve for diehard racists. The work of establishing and financing a new school gave them something to do and an “escape” from the “crisis.” A brief segregationist resistance movement, FOCUS (“Freedom of Choice in the United States”), played a similar stopgap role before its collapse. The academies removed the most racist children and parents, and those least tolerant of educational innovation, from the public schools, to the latter’s gain. Black children were helped because they did not have to associate with the worst of the white racists, and so were white moderates and liberals. But in the long run, these schools are cancers in the community. They know it and so they encysted themselves behind chain link fencing with barbwire along the top. Even schools located on major highways with no residences or pedestrian traffic for miles around fortify themselves this way, keeping

out unknown menaces. Forty years from now, powerful Mississippians will exist throughout the state who have to rationalize that their attendance as children at such schools was a good thing, and they will surely do so by retaining racism in their view of the world.

In areas where private schools dominate, economic stagnation is sure. Almost all industries will behave like Allis-Chalmers and avoid places where public education seems unviable. There are already reports of the exodus of working-class whites away from such areas as well, because jobs are not available and because education costs too much. Thus ironically the private schools may contribute to an increase in black population proportion and help to end white dominance in their counties.

Enrollment in private education has already slumped. From a high of 11.8% in 1970, including 3% in parochial and pre-desegregation private schools that were not purely segregation academies and including black private schools, it is now down to just over 10% of all Mississippi school-age children. This was more than twice the percentage of a decade before, but hardly a stampede. Catholic schools were down almost 25% from 1964 levels. Forrest County had six segregation academies in the spring of 1970, but only two reopened the next fall.(6)

In Indianola, a system with total white withdrawal during the first year of desegregation, 200 white students returned to the public schools the next year. In Canton more than 100 whites are now in public schools, and white enrollments have also increased in most of the other districts initially marked by total or near-total withdrawal. This pattern confounds “tipping point” theory and goes against what supposedly has happened throughout the rest of the country. For supposedly, when a public school goes 30% or more black (some say 50%), it passes a critical “tipping point.” Whites become unwilling to send their children to it, and it and its neighborhood soon go all black. But in Mississippi, both during the initial desegregation in 1970 and during the subsequent re-enrollment of whites in public education, schools that were 80* or even 100% black would slowly gain white enrollment. Whether this means that some white Mississippians are less racist or less fearful of blacks than Northerners or urban Southerners, or whether the tipping-point theory is invalid in the North as well as the South, I do not know. It is altogether remarkable, however, that in the state that shouted “never” longest, whites are now willing to enroll their children in schools overwhelmingly black.

Another factor weakens segregated private education much more broadly even than the return of whites to public schools. Gradually, very gradually, the general society in Mississippi and the United States is becoming desegregated. Black presence is growing slowly at white universities and colleges even in Mississippi, as we have shown. South Central Bell and Mississippi Power and Light have finally hired a black junior executive or two, and it is only a matter of a few decades before they demand country club privileges and the like for them. This puts the private academies into ideological contradiction. For they supposedly supply “quality education” in order to prepare their graduates better than the now-desegregated public schools can do. Better for what? For participation and advancement in American higher education and in society as a whole,

of course. Yet those colleges and societal institutions are now at least tokenly desegregated. There is a problem when college recruiting teams visit the schools for even the teams, let alone the campuses they represent might now be interracial.

In short, the academies are already becoming anachronisms. In areas where pullout was only partial, students who attend them are already becoming defensive and slightly ashamed about doing so. Already issues have arisen on field trips, cheerleading schools, and statewide contests; school administrators have had to choose between not participating, on the one hand, and taking the chance of encountering a black or two on the other. Either way they lose.

Further problems are legal. In 1973 the Legal Defense and Educational Fund won a case against the application of the state's free textbook law to segregated private institutions. Segregationists were incensed, because unlike the other laws that civil-rights forces have successfully overturned, Mississippi's free textbook law was passed when segregation was not even an issue and was a progressive move educationally and racially. Yet from a different perspective, the decision was correct, for no longer could tax dollars, collected from blacks and racially progressive whites as well as segregationists, be used without their consent to support segregation indirectly.

As this paper was written, a court decision in Virginia attacked segregated private schools' right to be segregated! Two black parents charges that their children were kept out of segregated academies due to race and that this violated a Reconstruction law requiring that blacks be allowed to make contracts on the same basis as whites. Already the pattern of the past is repeating itself: as in the case of Ole Miss, the schools retreated and argued that they were not really segregated but rejected blacks for nonracial reasons. It will be some time before a suit like this is filed in Mississippi, because it is hard to believe that blacks want to go to racist academies or want to force them to close so that their students come back to public schools. The decision in Virginia is also still on appeal. But legally as well as societally, the segregation academies in Mississippi seem to be living on borrowed time.

Again, they have already prepared a "fallback" position. You will remember how the Citizens Councils in 1955 predicted that desegregation would never come to Mississippi, and the evidence of the destroyed NAACP petition movement seemed to prove them correct. After Meredith, they predicted that desegregation would not spread beyond an isolated case or two and that Mississippi whites would remain mobilized to prevent it. By 1967, they were saying that current (token) desegregation rates showed that complete desegregation would take fifty to a hundred years. In 1970 they recognized that desegregation had come to Mississippi but said it had not and would not come to them. The new claim is more ephemeral and psychological. Desegregation may permeate the society, a Citizens Council leader told me, but whites will not be overcome as long as they do not internally submit to it.

This position is not subject to defeat, unlike its predecessors, because it is not empirical at all. The Court never tried to limit attitudes, but only action. If racists participate in

desegregated institutions but remain racists at heart, so be it. I suspect, however, that segregationism if not racism will disappear as an ideology. Even the segregationist academies, in many cases, will tokenly desegregate to avoid legal trouble and financial difficulty, I predict. As Mississippi truly desegregates, “mere” discrimination, rather than apartheid or segregation, will remain as its paramount problem in human relations and civil rights. And in this regard, the state has at least as far to go in order to allow all its citizens equal opportunity as has its sisters in the Union.

G. Sex and Race

Throughout the history of racism in America sex has played a strange and important role. (1) So it went as Mississippi desegregated. A brief mention of some of the oddities is in order, since they may bear upon more general attempts to build a theory of racism and sexism in society.

Probably it is true that sexual equality is the most basic kind and the gravest fear of the white supremacist. The treatment of black children in Shaw was indicative of this theme, for the little children were allowed to play together whereas by third or fourth grade play was eliminated. I have elsewhere (2) discussed how Chinese children were accepted socially by Caucasians in the Delta until about seventh grade, that is, until puberty. And all over Mississippi, as desegregation took place, the very last school organizations and positions to be desegregated were those symbolic of white female sexuality: pep squads, cheerleaders, and homecoming courts.

Several districts exchanged racial segregation for segregation by sex; these included Amite County, Coffeeville, and some schools in Pike County. We have already mentioned the disciplinary action taken in McComb against interracial liaisons. Nevertheless they existed there and in many other towns. One principal showed the sex/race hang-up in its most ornate form. Previous to desegregation, for better traffic flow his stairwells were labeled “UP” and “DOWN”. After desegregation he changed them to “BOYS” and “GIRLS.” His reasoning: with the short skirts girls wore these days, boys could look up the girls skirts as they climbed the stairs, and he didn’t want any interracial skirt-looking!(3)

Even districts that retained most of their extracurricular activities cancelled their school proms and other dances. Each race was then free to establish its own “private” prom, and usually social class discrimination as well as race affected the list of invitees to such functions, particularly in the white community. School plays and musical shows were carefully arranged so that one race was excluded or danced or interacted only with persons of the same race. Yet there was one breakthrough: a skit in a Jackson high school involved a take-off on the three bears, and behind their masks Papa Bear was a black male, Mama Bear a white female, and perhaps owing merely to chance Baby Bear was according to one observer “a high yellow mulatto!”

Also in Jackson extreme racists suggested that white segregationists use sex as a weapon against blacks. A leaflet was circulated in the Jackson Public Schools suggesting that white female teachers might try to involve black people in positions of administrative power in illicit sexual affairs and then expose them, so that black representation in decision-making positions might be reduced. The suggestion was far-out and not very workable, and this plus the fact that the sheets was circulated to black teachers as well as white suggested that its author(s) might not be serious but might simply have written it as a hoax to stir up trouble.

VII. CONFLICT AND ACCOMODATION

By 1973, Mississippi had passed beyond public school segregation into a new period of desegregated education perhaps moving towards integration. Many students were citing with approval the “broader forms of learning” afforded by desegregated schools and were becoming aware of the limitations on their knowledge of society and of the people within it under the previous system. The white student body president of Wingfield High School in Jackson said that integration was good because it increased the contact between the races. Those who expected this new contact to be without conflict were disappointed with the results. As we noted, conflict began at once, and it continues to today and will continue for years to come. But it is conflict, not withdrawal or isolation, that makes each group aware of the needs and feelings of the other, and it is conflict that can move the system toward change.

Indeed, conflict will surely increase. The Lanier-Murrah football rivalry will not always be marked by stiff politeness. Some Southern cities have to play all football contests during the afternoons, so that daylight hours will keep conflict from becoming unchecked. The following account of events as early as March, 1969, in rural poverty-stricken Tunica County provides as clear a model of one kind of expectation for the future as the politeness of the Murrah-Lanier game does of another:

Tear gas was used to break up a group of rock-throwing, window-breaking rioters in Tunica County in March of 1969. A boycott of a Tunica County school by Negroes and marches had led to mass arrest of Negroes that had angered the blacks. (1)

Continuing reasons for conflict included:

--simple misunderstandings, of the nature of rules being applied evenly but striking one group as unfair because they are new to that group.

--insensitivities and breakdowns in communication caused by misunderstanding.

--continuing tendency to inject race into issues where it is a minor or absent factor. For example, a poor black teacher or white teacher may cause students of the opposite race to

generalize about all teachers of that race. Personal abrasiveness or shyness may be taken by persons of the opposite race to connote racism or disdain.

--personal racism. This does still exist, to be sure, and almost no district has ways to deal with it. In fact, most principals refuse to hear a complaint on the issue, feeling it might be too explosive to be mentioned or feeling that it threatens the "professionalism" of the teacher and is not a "professional" complain. This suppresses but does not solve the problem.

--white symbolism, particularly the use of Dixie and other Confederate, segregationist, or slavery-related symbols.

--continuing existence of groups that are school-related but still segregated. Examples as late as 1972-3 include the Callaway High School, Chargettes, a white female drill team in Jackson; the South Natchez High School Colonel's Ladies, also white and female; and the European trip of a group of students from Forest Hill High School, all white.

In 1972 and 1973, well after the initial desegregation and the wave of black and white protests it engendered, protests continued to hit Mississippi schools in Laurel, Columbia, Meridian, Jackson, and elsewhere. An example of the dynamics typically involved may be seen in the Leland walkout, in March of 1972. Shortly after school began on a Friday early in March, black students walked out. Leland High School has 350 black students, 86 whites; most of the blacks left. Initially the protest was sparked by the suspension of two black students the week before after a fight between blacks and a white student; the white student was not punished. The boycott continued the next week, and black students and parents listed seventeen grievances, including:

--equal recognition, of students' as well as faculty's side in disciplinary questions.

--re-establishment of the junior/senior prom.

--more black books, assemblies, and principals.

--an end to alleged firing of those black faculty members who participate in community activities.

--an end to corporal punishment.

--an end to segregated treatment by disciplinarians and by the school nurse.

--more P. T. A. meetings.

--resignation of the principal.

--amnesty for participants in the boycott.

Blacks also wanted choir robes and a rule requiring class attendance for students failing a given class.

The first response by the administrators and board was an escalation of the conflict. They requested their attorney to check the ordinance on trespassing, so they might move legally against demonstrators on school property or against students who came back to school without going through "proper procedures." And they instituted those procedures, which initially required each parent to come to the school with the student and sign a statement acknowledging that their child had broken the school conduct code and was being readmitted on probation. Gradually, however, as the parents and the local NAACP president as well as the students themselves and the PTA continued to oppose some of the practices at the school, a dialogue ensued between the parties that resulted in what amounted to amnesty for the boycotters and in the granting of some of their grievances.

One should not generalize from the experience of one child or one school to the district or to the state or nation, though it is all too easy to do so. I have heard from the parents of one Jackson white student that their child, who previously had made many black friends, this year found the school so polarized that any black who sits with whites in the cafeteria or talks with them after school is chastised by this peers as a "honky-lover." At the same time, race relations that were tense and bad the previous year in another high school this year were greatly improved. Each school seems to go through cycles of trust and distrust between the races, both on a faculty and a student level. The cycles are painful for the participants, particularly when they reveal the extent to which the initial trust was shallow. Thus two white high schools in Jackson, now desegregated, have moved through opposite courses: in one, relations were bad, led by a distant and unconstructive administration, through the first year, while in the other constructive policies and attempts by students to relate to each other succeeded well during that period. Two years later, after an administrative change at the first school, relations were much better, while at the second school the races were going through some of the conflicts that had marked the other school in its first year. It may be that trust and communication can never be taken for granted but must be re-established with each new generation, and since a school generation is a very short time, the inference must be that conflict will be almost constant.

So will communication, however, Human relations groups have been established in many schools; in others, a biracial student government functions as such an organization in fact and possesses far more influence than student governments did in either high school before desegregation. In at least two Jackson schools, the P. T. A. has been changed to a P. T. S. A., the S. meaning "students." In Pass Christian High School on the Gulf Coast, an Afro-American Club was organized that has become so important that white students have begun joining it and other clubs were being formed in Biloxi High and other nearby high schools.

In direct academic matters, communication between teacher and student has also increased. We have already mentioned team teaching, individualized instruction, and the like, which do increase teacher-student contact. There is more reliance on discussion, less

on lecture, compared to past years. In Jackson, a course can be instituted by students if ten or more of them at a high school request it. Activities are seeping back in; as Assistant Superintendent Martin in Jackson noted, “The social activities of the high schools have tended to solve problems, not cause them.” Media centers have been opened to students and audio-visual equipment, famous for remaining in locked closets in the past, has been brought out into the open.

Some district used the new stress on innovation even if no learning resulted. Others used tracking and individualized instruction to relegate blacks to the same kind of inferior education that the 1890 Constitution presupposed. But these were the exceptions. In most districts throughout the state, blacks were definitely joining the reference group of administrators and faculty. That is, “students to be served” by whites who ran the school systems now meant “students, black as well as white.” The difference was shown in a new concern for all students.

For example, Biloxi, Gulfport, Jackson, and other districts started new dropout programs to try to reach those who had left or were probably about to leave the schools. A Team Counseling Program begun by Tougaloo College and the Jackson Public Schools used college students on a one-to-one basis to help students in academic or other difficulty; it was accepted by a district that only two years before had refused to allow students from Tougaloo to practice teach in its institutions! In Liberty, there had never been a summer school. Students who failed senior courses or needed for other reasons to repeat a class had no way to do so. But in the first year after desegregation, only 22 of more than 50 black girls (Liberty was segregated by sex) graduated because of academic difficulties in English and other areas. And last year a summer school was set up, so these students were not just thrown out but were aided and prepared. This was a quantum jump beyond either failing them or passing them without preparation.

Some changes went beyond the schools into the communities themselves, just as the Citizens’ Councils had predicted and feared. Parents began to interact, a bit. PTAs had not previously been strong, particularly in the black community, and some districts even abolished them during desegregation because they were a “social” activity, but in other districts, they increased somewhat in scope and membership. Panel discussions were sponsored by Jacksonians for Public Education and E.S.A.P. groups in other towns. Typically a black and a white educator would discuss educational challenges together, followed by questions. Teachers began to interact, inhibited however by the continued refusal of the Mississippi Education Association (white) to merge with the Mississippi Teachers Association-National Education Association (predominantly black). In several district, whites initiated drives to instate one and sometimes even two black members on previously all-white five-member school boards. (Whites did not, however, press for a third black!)

What of the future? “Mississippi will come out ahead of everyone else,” said a white Southern woman to me, a long-time H. E. W. observer of the state’s school desegregation patterns. “I know it’s ahead of Georgia. Mississippi has had a great deal of civil-rights activity, and that has shaken people. Civil-rights civilizes a community.” On the other

hand, we must remember that it was in 1870, more than a century ago, that a young white man was able to marry a beautiful black woman and still continue to serve without difficulty as state senator from Yazoo County. In many ways, the state has not gotten to where it was during Reconstruction. And its progress has depended upon federal intervention in support of Constitutional rights, intervention that, just like a century earlier, shows signs of flagging.

Within a year, however, there will be no more transferees. That is, students in a school will not have come to that school from “their” school as a result of court orders in 1970; rather, they will have attended that school, that desegregated school, “their” school, from the beginning of their educational experience. This will decrease those kinds of conflict that are unproductive and will increase the mutual identification of both races with their joint institutions. In Jackson and some other towns, new schools and educational parks are planned that will further eliminate the past racial separateness and identity of the schools. And the graduates of these institutions will then have the rest of their lives to think over the fact that they did participate on a level of at least formal equality with members of the “other” race, yet the sun still rose in the east and their lives still seemed possible to them.

Not until the year 2005, however, will Mississippi have produced a school superintendent who himself (herself?) was a product of desegregated public education. And it may take that long for Dixie to be eliminated not only from schools but also from the current ideologies and faiths of white Mississippi and relegated to the history books where it belongs. Conflict will continue. But joint activities will slowly grow. The Chamber of Commerce ethic that allowed the state to desegregate without tearing itself completely apart is not pluralist enough or humane enough to lead to true integration. Working-class white ideologies, as well as black views and feelings, will necessarily have to be included. But the state has surely come a long way when it had developed a man like Meridian County Judge H. C. Watkins, who produced something of a model for future conduct when he refused to adjudge ten black children officially delinquent for their involvement in interracial violence at a local junior high school. He said:

We must all have the strength to face up to the enormity of our errors and the seriousness of our predicament. There is no need to merely prolong the bad dreams from which our school system is trying to awake. We must avoid the ugly violence that now tempts many of our people. We cannot reconcile the deep divisions in our society by merely patching over them. We can only reconcile them by instituting the reforms urgently needed . . .(2)

If that attitude grows throughout both races throughout the state, then Mississippians will not only endure through the new period of national reaction on issues of human rights in this country, they will prevail.

ENDNOTES

II. Race relations and school segregation before 1954

B. Education for Blacks

1. For example, he telegraphed Mississippi Governor Sharkey, urging token granting of the franchise to blacks, but clearly from a position of continued black subservience to the white Confederate elite.
2. See Lawrence C. Jones, Piney Woods and Its Story and The Spirit of Piney Woods. See also Beth Day, The Little Professor of Piney Woods, whose title itself fits into Southern white racist speech patterns toward educated blacks.
3. Vernon L. Wharton, The Negro In Mississippi, 1865-1890 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 255.
4. Luther Munford, Black Gravity: Desegregation in 30 Mississippi Districts. Princeton: B. A. Honors Thesis, 1971, 155-156.
5. James W. Loewen, The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, 65.
6. James W. Loewen, Charles Sallis, et al., Mississippi: Conflict and Change. New York: Pantheon, 1974, chapter 12.
7. Munford, 122.
8. Loewen and Sallis, et al., chapter 12.
9. James M. Palmer, Mississippi School Districts: Factors In The Disestablishment of Dual Systems. Mississippi State University: Social Science Research Center, Report #40, August, 1971, 23-24.

C. Education for Other Groups

1. The aim of this etiquette system, according to Fanon, is to furiously deny the basic humanity of the oppressed group.
2. All quotes from Loewen, The Mississippi Chinese, 67-68.

III. The 1954 Decision and its Aftermath

A. Immediate Reaction: "Equalization"

1. Quoted in Loewen, Sallis, et al., Mississippi: Conflict and Change, chapter 15.
2. Walter Lord, The Past That Would Not Die (NY: HarperCollins, 1965).
3. Loewen, Sallis, et al., Mississippi: Conflict and Change, chapter 15.
4. Ibid.
5. Big Bill Broonzy, a Mississippian, wrote a song line that summarizes this discussion: "If you're white, all right; if you're brown, stick around; but if you're black, get back, get back, get back!"
6. Loewen, The Mississippi Chinese, 145. The student is part Negro, part Chinese, part Caucasian.
7. From historian William Woods.

B. Resistance

1. Loewen, Sallis, et al., Mississippi: Conflict and Change, chapter 15.
2. Cf. Nancy Hicks, "Integration Delay Termed a Mistake," New York Times, November 9, 1969, section 1, 66.

D. Meredith and Old Miss

1. See, for example, James H. Meredith, Three Years in Mississippi; Russell Barrett, Integration at Old Miss; James Silver, Mississippi, The Closed Society; and Walter Lord, The Past That Would Not Die.

IV. Token Desegregation, 1964-1970

A. The Freedom Summer and The 1964 Civil Rights Bill

1. Munford, Black Gravity, 6.

B. The Burden of Token Desegregation

1. Lydia Williams, "The Loneliness of Being Black," Seventeen, July, 1971.
2. "Leake County School Desegregation Asked," Associated Press, in Jackson Clarion-Ledger, March 8, 1963.
3. United States Commission on Civil Rights, Federal Enforcement of School Desegregation, September 11, 1969 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), page 2. Cited in Munford, Black Gravity, 8.
4. Kenneth Dean, "An evaluation of school desegregation in Mississippi," manuscript.
5. Michael Aiken and N. J. Demerath III, "The Politics of Tokenism in Mississippi's Delta," Trans-Action, April, 1967, 30.
6. Ibid.,
7. In the several volumes of Children of Crisis, Robert Coles has made a beginning, but his work needs follow through and further support.

C. "Freedom of Choice"

1. Negroes in Cities, by Taeuber and Taeuber, uses a similar index for all large cities in America, but it is a study of residential, not school, segregation.
2. Munford, Black Gravity, 15.

V. Higher Education

1. Jackson has many such routes, such as Old Canton Road for whites and Palmyra-Gordon-Whitfield Mills for blacks. Cf. The Image Of The City by Kevin Lynch for a nonracial discussion of this phenomenon.

VI. Massive Desegregation

A. The Stennis Delay

1. The Watergate scandal has shown that Nixon also diverted old campaign money into undercover attempts to beat Wallace in Alabama at about this time, so worried was he about the possible loss of the South in 1972.
2. Munford, Black Gravity, 21.

B. Initial Reaction

1. In Mississippi a “moderate” has been defined as a white who is unwilling to oppose lynching, but does advocate use of a low tree.

D. Black Reaction to Discrimination

1. Clell Ward and Robert Clark have done so in Racism and the Desegregating Process: A Mississippi Study (Jackson: Educational Resources Center, 1970).
2. Munford, Black Gravity, 146.

E. Evasion

1. First-year students in one of my Tougaloo classes were able to infiltrate two of these classes in nearby Madison Ridgeland High School because “all niggers look alike” and the racist teachers had not bothered to learn their black students’ names or remember their appearances. This reminded me of a common camouflage for runaway slaves: they would simply join plantation work gangs during the day, picking and hoeing with the rest, and thus escape attention from the white overseers and owners.
Only on the third day, when one student wore a big “Afro,” did one of the teachers notice something amiss!

F. White Withdrawal

1. Munford, Black Gravity, 106.
2. Munford, “White flight from desegregation in Mississippi,” 12-26 of Integrated Education, XI #3 (May-June, 1973), 20-21.
3. Billy Skelton, ““State Schools Lose 43,695,” (Jackson Clarion-Ledger, October 2, 1970.
4. Jim Leeson, “Introduction” to “Majority-Black School Districts in the Eleven Southern States,” 2.
5. I assume they ignored the twelfth chapter of Numbers, which describes Moses’ interracial marriage and tells how God punished Miriam with leprosy for her criticism of it.
6. Munford, Black Gravity, 209.

G. Sex and Race

1. Calvin Hernton’s Sex and Race In America is full of suggestive hypotheses on this subject.
2. Loewen, The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White, chapters five and six.
3. I am indebted to Rims Barber for this and other observations.

VII. Conflict and Accommodation

1. James Palmer, op cit., 59.
2. Reported in Integrated Education, May-June 1971, 61.