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Conflicting Views on Segregation

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Conflicting Views

on

Segregation



REPRINTS OF A
SERIES OF LETTERS

between

DR. D. M. NELSON

President of

MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE

CLINTON, MISS.

and an

UNNAMED ALUMNUS

DR. DOTSON MCGINNIS NELSON

A Biographical Sketch

President of Mississippi College of Clinton, Hinds County, Mississippi since 1932, his name is a synonym for Christian education in Mississippi. He was born near Charleston in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi.

Dr. Nelson received his Bachelor of Science degree from Mississippi College in 1907. After his graduation he became principal of a large consolidated school in Lincoln County.

Dr. Nelson studied law at the University of Chicago. Upon completion of his work there he passed the Mississippi State bar examination and was admitted to the bar in 1910.

He returned to Mississippi College in the fall of 1911 as assistant professor of chemistry, holding this position until 1914 when he became professor of physics at the same institution.

Dr. Nelson continued the study of physics and in 1925 he received the Ph. D. degree from Indiana University in that field.

President Nelson is a member of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Learning, Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, American Council on Education, Optical Society of America, American Association of Physics Teachers, American Association of University Professors, and is a contributor of scientific articles to several scholarly publications. He is also a Mason, a member of the Odd Fellows and Woodmen of the World.

The institution which Dr. Nelson has led for 23 years holds a remarkable record among Christian colleges of our nation. Founded in 1826, the school celebrated its centennial as a Baptist college in 1950 and 1951 marked the observance of a century and a quarter since its founding. This gives Mississippi College the record of teaching longer than any other college in America which is now Baptist controlled. The historic school was first in America

to confer a degree upon a woman; the year was 1833. It is the 13th oldest denominational college in America.

CONFLICTING VIEWS
ON A VEXING ISSUE

by

D. M. NELSON

Herewith is some correspondence between an alumnus and the president of his college. The problem presented and discussed is an ancient one and still unsolved. It is hoped that these divergent views, honestly and calmly expressed, will throw some light upon the oft-recurring problem, if it does not contribute to the solution thereof. While the issue at present is more acute in some areas than others, it has nationwide interest and implications. It, therefore, deserves the calm and considered judgment of all patriotic Americans. The letters follow:

May 18, 1954

Dr. D. M. Nelson

President of Mississippi College

Clinton, Mississippi

My dear Dr. Nelson:

You will recall me as a member of the class of 1917 and a former resident of New Haven, Connecticut. I retired last June and am now living near Poplarville, Mississippi. If at any time I can be of service to Mississippi College, I would be happy to have you call on me.

The purpose of this letter is to mention the "White Supremacy" now before the people of the South. Insofar as this issue applies to education in general, and Mississippi College in particular, I feel sure in your heart you will agree with me that there should be no racial differences. In theory I can see no reason why negroes are not admitted to Mississippi College on the same condition as any other race. I suspect privately in your sincere thinking you agree with this last statement.

Yet, we know full well that in practice there is feeling in our State against such equality.

Some day this issue is going to be forced to where concessions will have to be made, at least in publicly supported institutions. In the name of Christianity, a great institution like Mississippi College should take a lead and not find herself trailing in public thinking and acting. I covet for Mississippi College the honor of being a leader in this field. If Mississippi College would open her doors to negroes, at least to some extent, she would reach a high level of leadership in Christian education. So far as I am personally concerned, I would like to see any person without regard for color or sex admitted if other qualifications are met. If it is felt that the Baptist people of our State will not go all the way with me, then admit ministerial students. If that is too much, then admit married ministerial students who would live off the campus.

The Methodist and Baptist people are the leaders in Mississippi. Perhaps you could approach the proper authority at Millsaps College and see if they would take common action. In some way or other the leaders of Christian education should face this issue. As stated above I would like to see it done without reservation, but I would make concessions for the present in order to keep Christian leadership ahead of the Supreme Court and the politicians.

Remember me to Mrs. Nelson and your lovely daughter. I understand the latter is now married. I hear you met my son-in-law at some event in Arkansas.

Sincerely yours,
/s/ Tom

MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE

FOUNDED 1826

CLINTON, MISSISSIPPI

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

May 28, 1954

Dear Tom:

I have read your letter with interest and find myself in total disagreement with the sentiments expressed. At first I was slightly shocked to learn that one born, reared and

educated in Mississippi should wander so far away in his thinking from the traditions and ideals and way of life of the land of his nativity. Then I recalled that you had spent twenty-five or thirty years in New England as teacher and supervisory officer in the public schools of that section. The manner of life and thought of the people of that area have always been sharply different from those of this fair section.

You will recall, I am sure, that negro slavery in this country did not originate in the South but in New England. After a fair trial by our Yankee cousins, due to climatic conditions, African slavery proved to be a financial failure and the original owners began to bargain off their unprofitable holdings to the plantation owners of the South. With the money received from their shrewd trading they built stately mansions along the same shores where slave ships had been landing for a century. Many of these still remain as silent witnesses to the truthfulness of the statement that it does make a difference "whose ox is gored."

You will remember also, Tom, how well these Africans were adapted to the climate and way of life of the South and how prosperity followed and how happy, cordial and tender was the relationship that grew up between the benevolent masters and their slaves, the Stowes, the Garrisons and the Philippses to the contrary notwithstanding. Success where there had been failure was a strong provocation to action in reverse from the section whence the traffic had originated. The moral issue connected with human slavery was raised quite tardily and exploited. When it was pointed out that the Constitution recognized slaves as property, the response was immediate and dramatic: "To hell with the Constitution." Agitation continued unabated resulting in the War Between the States and the freeing of the slaves and the pauperizing of the once prosperous South. While in this helpless condition and under control of the carpetbaggers and the freedmen, the 14th and 15th amendments were

passed as war measures to further humiliate a brave and proud people. To add to the loss of everything but honor and the right as the Southerners saw it, the victors set about to place upon the prostrate section a system of economic slavery more destructive, devastating and degrading than was the physical slavery which they professed so to abhor. The irony of this movement was that it was more severe upon the freedmen than upon the native whites.

Now as the South is beginning to prosper again and coming to be recognized as a part of the Union and proceeding with programs designed to enrich the life of all of its people, white and colored alike, we witness the sorry spectacle of a movement born out of the same wicked purpose, yet with a far more deadly design and devastating effect, to wit, to mongrelize the two dominant races of the South. The attempt is to do what the good Lord in His infinite wisdom did not do. He made the people into races, with racial characteristics, with inherent likes and dislikes, similarities and dissimilarities, and it would be as fallacious for mere man to try to improve upon the work of the Lord as it proved to be in his attempt to build a tower to heaven. A long life of study of people of different races, of different stations, of different strata, leads to the inevitable conclusion that there is something in lineage, in ancestry, in blood. Just as there are people with varying talents, there are inherently superior and inferior people. Shakespeare's dictum must continue to go unchallenged: "You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." Close proximity of white and negro children in the schoolroom would ultimately lead to intermarriage and intermarriage of the two races would lead to racial disaster. For according to Pope, even:

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

Until now the High Court has favored the Southern position. Those who have sat upon

its Bench for a century and a half have been profound, constitutional lawyers, passing upon issues that came before them in the light of precedent and according to the organic law of the land. The recent decision has ignored precedent and law and pushed aside all previous pronouncements on this great issue and based its findings upon the flimsy dictum of "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." We have reached a strange place in our history when social theories are substituted for law and long established precedent. Hereafter is it to be that learned men in the social studies will be sought for the Supreme Court instead of learned men of the law?

No, Tom, Mississippi College will not throw open its doors to negro students as long as the present president is permitted to direct its affairs. It shall be our purpose to protect the fair sons and daughters of the purest strain of the Caucasian race and save them the humiliation of close social contact with a race so different in origin, tradition, ideals and aspirations and in every other conceivable way.

We take this position for the good of the negroes as well as of the whites. They have many fine qualities and racial characteristics that should be preserved and developed without uneasiness or embarrassment. In class with young men and young women whom they would accept as superior the negro students would be repressed and ill at ease and frustrated. Herein might be applied the recent doctrine of the "separate but inherently unequal" with full force and effect.

We are dealing with an age-old problem, Tom, and it cannot be solved by maudlin sentimentality or fuzzy thinking or even the fiat of a high court. The South is far on the way toward solving this distressing problem if only let alone by outsiders who are entirely innocent of much that is involved.

We rejoice, Tom, that you have come back to beautiful, glorious Mississippi to spend the evening time of a long, rich and full life. We only wish that we had room for the millions of good people north of the Mason and Dixon

line so that they might come and enjoy with us the warmth of our sunshine, the beauty of our landscapes, and feel the pulsebeats and handclasps of a great people who love their country and worship fervently the living God.

Abidingly your friend,
D. M. Nelson, President

September 9, 1954

Dr. D. M. Nelson
President, Mississippi College
Clinton, Mississippi

My dear Dr. Nelson:

I received your letter dated 6 July in answer to my letter dated 25 June. It was kind of you to take time to write me. I do not wish to carry on correspondence indefinitely. There are a few points I wish to cover in the nature of explanations. This letter does not require an answer unless you have some special point you wish to make or review.

Your letter gave the impression that you might have felt that I commented unfavorably on the quality of your Christian views. I certainly never meant to make such an impression and am most sorry if I phrased a statement which would make one think I made an improper personal remark.

No one has made any reference to my long residence outside of Mississippi. I feared someone might brush aside my views with the comment that I picked up those ideas outside of the state. When I was a student at Mississippi College—prior to 1917—many times I walked over to Dickey Institute and talked with the people there. My views then were substantially the same as they are now. The promotion of the Missionary Work in the Baptist Church and the teaching at Mississippi College, then, seemed to be out of line with our practice of excluding negroes from our Colleges and churches. There are many well informed people in Mississippi today who have never resided outside the state and who share these opinions with me. So far as I am concerned this idea carries the label, "Made in Mississippi."

Mississippi College has rendered a valuable service to the white race, and indirectly to all races, during the years of her life. I feel that her contribution would have been of a still higher order had this privilege been extended to all humanity without regard for color and race. It is even more urgent that the future be dedicated to the direct service to all mankind without regard for color and race. It seems very probable that in the near future our state institutions of higher education are going to be compelled by law to admit negroes. If this occurs, Mississippi College will be standing out as a poor exception or be compelled to enter via the back door. It would be far better for Mississippi College to be a leader, especially in a humanitarian program of this kind. Mississippi College cannot afford to be on the wrong side of a moral question. I gravely fear the sentiment expressed in your letter is not going to stand the test of time.

It is quite possible that my viewpoint is a minority one at present, although I believe there are far more people holding it than is generally supposed. If that is the case I predict within a few years a rising tide of public sentiment will demand a review of the position. It is perhaps now later than we think.

I represent no one. The above are my personal views. I express them because they seem to be the accumulated experience of mankind. They are not original with me. I have often been mistaken in the past. It is possible I am in error here.

To you, personally, and all those connected with the responsibility of directing Mississippi College, I tender my very best wishes.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Tom

MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE

FOUNDED 1826

CLINTON, MISSISSIPPI

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 13, 1954

Dear Tom:

Your letter of September 9 was duly re-

ceived and at the time only casually read. It came during the opening of college which is a very busy period, as you well know. Then, too, the enrolment in Mississippi College continues to rise, requiring much thought and planning to meet the demands made upon us. Lately I have re-read your letter more carefully and now feel that it deserves an answer, even though you said none was expected.

Rest assured, Tom, that your letters have given no personal offense, nor do I question the sincerity of your convictions and belief on an ancient and stubborn problem. We are fortunate that we live in a country where differences of opinion can be held and expressed on controversial issues that arise. I am in agreement with the great Frenchman who said in substance, "I do not agree with a thing you say, but I would contend to the death for you to say it." And on the age-old question of what is the proper relationship between the white and Negro races in this country, we are as far apart as the poles of the earth in our basic philosophy.

It is being argued with a good deal of heat at present that not to admit Negroes to white schools is violative of the spirit of the Declaration of Independence and the Fundamental Law of the Land. Since when did this become so? The authors and framers of these great documents by word and deed were squarely on the other side of the question. Also, the profound lawyers and jurists that have adorned the bench of the highest court in the land up until the recent decision were squarely and unequivocally on the other side of the issue.

It is being argued also with even greater heat that it is unchristian to segregate the white and Negro races. It is contended that the races should be permitted to mix freely in public and private. Again we demur and call for the chapter and the verse of the Bible. The whole tenor of the Scriptures is against mixed marriages and the pollution of the blood of distinct and separate races. The upward climb of mankind has been made through the thought

and labors of the dominant races in the various areas of the world. History is not so much the record of the events of nations as a whole as it is the chronicle of the contributed civilizations of the superior races. O, you say there is no superior race or person! Then again you deny the whole tenor of the Scriptures and throw into the wastebasket the parable of the talents whose significant truth is verified daily before our very eyes. Communism, as you well know, is based upon Karl Marx's doctrine of internationalism and the classless society and the obliteration of all national and racial distinctions and the final amalgamation of all races. The early Christians in their zeal, actuated by a noble sentiment, as you will remember, tried an experiment of having everything in common and it would not work, even though they were of the same mind and purpose.

It is our abiding conviction that every race, like every individual, has a distinct mission to fulfill. Like individuals, some races have five talents, some three, some one, each according to its several ability. It is the responsibility of each race to find its place and under God to work out its manifest destiny. The negro race, though one of the oldest, has never built a worthy civilization. Their talent seems to lie in another direction.

Our forefathers who crossed an unknown ocean and cleared an unbroken forest and displaced the primitive people found here were not seeking a place for the amalgamation of the white and black races. Rather were they interested in building an asylum where the oppressed could come and live their own lives in peace under God and worship Him according to the dictates of conscience. However dimly may have been the vision they remained steadfast in their purpose and marched steadily toward their worthy goal. The part our great country has played in the tremendous events of the last forty years is familiar to all who read and think. Through her wealth of material resources and her moral and spiritual strength, she has retarded the enslavement of

mankind and prevented the destruction of existing civilizations. This she has done without any desire for power or the hope of reward. She has been traveling toward her fore-ordained destiny.

As you know, Tom, the tendency is toward mass movements with little thought for the individual. The "One World" idea with a one-world government is a popular thought today. This is a beautiful dream but void of any possibility of reality. Racial differences and affinities and antagonism cannot be ignored. Any proposition to efface national and racial borders is not the conclusion of sound reason and good judgment.

Then there are also increasing numbers that would merge all religious denominations into one corpulent body. This would not deepen conviction and belief nor make for spiritual health and strength but would rather tend to weakness and slovenness and a decrease in initiative and interest. To take the position that positive religious belief is a matter of little consequence, that one creed or one denomination is as good as another does not favor a militant and aggressive Christianity, but rather encourages a lazy indifference to the Truth.

The Mississippi River better fulfills its mission when kept within its banks. To destroy its levees would broaden its waters but without control. The most fruitful Christian is the one who believes something definite and is willing to contend earnestly for it. The best world citizen also is the one whose patriotism has been rooted first in the soil of his own state and community. Some water, to be sure, is found scattered over the landed areas of the earth, but the great body of it is contained in the rivers, and seas, and oceans. Some grass is found on the mountain side, but most of it is on the plains. Likewise there are bits of truth around the fringes and at the extremities of many issues, but the great mass of it is found in the golden mean. It pays to operate where the bulk of the truth lies.

Much is being said currently about giving the legislature the authority to abolish the

public school system. Actually, the Supreme Court did that in its recent decision. The governor and legislature are asking only for permission to remove the debris in order to start all over again. These elected officials are citizens, too, and are as much interested in the welfare of Mississippi as any one else. If we cannot trust our elected officers, then representative government which has contributed so richly to our national greatness has gone with the wind and may the Lord have mercy upon us. Certainly the legislature will not abolish the public schools unless it becomes the alternative with the integration of the white and Negro races. There are some things dearer than life itself. Otherwise our soldiers and sailors and airmen in our generation have died in vain.

Until your September letter, Tom, I had strongly felt that your sojourn in New England, where a similar problem faced our Yankee cousins centuries ago and which they solved by passing it on to our section for value received, had influenced your views and that a few years of fine living in the land of your nativity might improve your thinking on this all-important matter. While recent events have dimmed that hope, still we have not despaired altogether; for we are reminded by another that "As long as the lamp holds out to burn, The vilest sinner may return."

As ever your friend,
D. M. Nelson, President

public school system. A similar system
Court did not in the least diminish
power and legislative authority
mission to receive the same
all over again. However, the
are, you may say, as you
relate of the school system
cannot be left out of the
entirely governmental system
so fully to our national government
with the mind and may the hope
upon us. Certainly, the system
let the public schools receive the
alternative with the integration of
and Negro race. There are some
that the self-interest of
religion, all these things
in fact.

Until your September letter
strongly for that your school
land, where a similar problem
Turkey, where contact was
asked by sending you a copy
received, but I believe your
few years of the living in the
activity might improve your
all-important matter. While
dimmed that hope, all we
altogether, for we are
that "As long as the
The silent corner



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