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## Basements Below the Sanctuary: A Story of the Church School

Rachel Winstead

*University of Mississippi*

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BASEMENTS BELOW THE SANCTUARY:  
A STORY OF THE CHURCH SCHOOL

by  
Rachel Winstead

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford  
May 2020

Approved by

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## **ABSTRACT**

RACHEL WINSTEAD: Basements Below the Sanctuary:

A Story of the Church School

(Under the Direction of W. Ralph Eubanks)

This is the story of belief in a southern Mississippi town and how that belief mirrors the national conservative counterrevolution that took shape at the same time. Hattiesburg's segregation academy and church school were founded in the context of broader social movements. As the political power of the Citizen's Council faltered and white moderates' voices became louder, practical solutions to retain segregation within the boundaries of law grew to be the new focus of white communities. The conservative counterrevolution exploded in the South as Christian morality and "family values" became the rallying cry of former staunch segregationists and white moderates alike. The counterrevolution was a response to the changing social and political landscape. Many Christians believed the country to be in the midst of a moral crisis as de jure segregation ended and the teaching of the Bible in public schools was threatened in the courts. Across the nation, churches began their own schools to combat the secular liberalism which they saw overtaking their way of life. These "church schools" were founded only a few years after the "segregation academies" opened in explicit rebellion of school integration in the South. Since the eras in which these schools were founded overlap, they are often lumped together as a singular movement in popular consciousness. To fully understand the changing face of racism, these

schools must be understood as fundamentally distinct from one another. This distinction highlights the ways in which the ideas of the Citizen's Council were upheld and their defiance was repurposed after many segregation academies closed. This is the story of my hometown. I felt the reality of the story as I grew up, but I only learned it after I left. This is the story of white belief which extends far beyond the borders of a town in Mississippi. This story is America. This story is whiteness reborn.

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## Preface

The sanctuary has a turquoise glow in the midmorning sun. Beams of light filter through tall, slender glass panes and create the shadow of a cross on the carpet. My eyes peer at the pulpit just above the back of the dark wooden pew. The rest of my third-grade class is nestled beside me on the green bench cushion. Mrs. Jones plays the piano, and we sing “How Great is Our God” with our hands glued to our sides. Some days we use hand motions, but today, we are reverent. If a teacher catches us playing during worship, our discipline cards will be changed from green to red. Mrs. Jones stands from her place at the piano, smooths her skirt, and pats her perm before she introduces our chapel speaker.

We know the speaker well. He has been an administrator at Presbyterian Christian School since the 1970s. In a blue PCS polo and a gentle voice, he greets the elementary students and teachers. Today, he tells us a special story about a tiny church school facing a big world. Brave men after God’s own heart opened PCS as a place where children could learn about God. Children in public schools were being persecuted if they prayed to God. We bowed our heads to pray together, thanking God that we could worship him freely at school. After his message that day, I felt proud to be a warrior for Christ. I knew that I was a part of something holy.

I heard this message many times throughout my tenure at Presbyterian Christian School. When I grew older, more pieces were added to the story. I learned what a segregation academy was by learning that we were not one. I remember feeling relieved when I learned my school was started for Christian purposes and not racial segregation. All of my authority figures at school told us that the doors were open to whoever wanted to come to school because we offered scholarships to students who could not pay but wanted to be here. Parents who chose PCS made

sacrifices for their children's spirituality. It was only coincidence that the entire teaching staff and the overwhelming majority of students were white.

My mother went to the largest segregation academy in Hattiesburg, Beeson Academy. My grandmother worked there as the secretary. In 1972, a photograph of a new student and the new superintendent is printed in the *Hattiesburg American*. My six-year-old mother is pictured wearing a lavender dress and knee socks as she holds the hand of the new Beeson superintendent. The caption of the picture states: "Both Beginners."<sup>1</sup> My mother's tiny face smiles at the camera. She went there from first grade to her high school graduation a few years before the school closed. When it came time to pick a school for my sister and me, my parents visited area public schools and PCS. When they toured PCS, they noticed how spacious the classrooms were and how quaint the church campus was. They remember the principal telling them the founding story of PCS. This school was not a segregation academy. They chose for their daughters to be taught in a Christian college preparatory program. Not long after I began school, my mother started working at PCS as a teaching assistant.

PCS did educate me in Christianity. I read the whole Bible multiple times during my tenure there. We had devotions every day and Bible class period in which we learned about Christian theology and apologetics. When I was a fifth grader, I learned theories about the antichrist in a metal trailer before I went to P.E. period. I can still picture the timelines of the world's end on the white board mounted to fake-wooden paneling. I learned the Westminster Presbyterian Catechisms from a pocket-size orange pamphlet that I kept in the front pocket of my backpack. I took the words to heart.

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<sup>1</sup> "New Beeson Superintendent to assume duties July 1." *Hattiesburg American*. 10 June 1972. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/276931009/>



I was constantly immersed in spirituality. At school, I learned about God five days a week in every class period. At church, I learned about God on Sundays and Wednesday nights. When cleaning out a closet a few years ago, I found prayer journals dating back to elementary school. Before I went to sleep, I would write several lines of prayer each night. After I wrote, I put down my pencil and turned on my porcelain nightlight in the shape of an angel.

When I got to high school, I began to see cracks in the founding story that I had believed all of my life. I was involved with programs outside of school which connected me to students outside of PCS. I became close to younger students from Hattiesburg public schools through a tutoring program. I grew up alongside the same twenty students through five school years and summers. As we got closer, I realized how overwhelmingly white the other environments in my life were, and I saw how many more resources surrounded me. Looking to the internet for answers, I began learning the history of America racism as the Black Lives Matter movement began. I started to notice the problems with the social climate around me and began to change my thinking. I knew there was more to the often-repeated founding story of PCS, but I could not find tangible answers.

During my junior year of college, a friend sent me a chapter from Joseph Crespino's *In Search of Another Country*. I learned that PCS had been a part of a massive IRS investigation to determine whether the school was racially discriminatory. The feeling which I could never prove with fact, now had shape and form. The PCS founding story was being questioned on the pages of a scholarly book. I knew I had to learn more. From this early curiosity, this project was born.

I tell you all of this to explain my perspective. This is insider's research. Every interview that I acquired was because of my insider status. I spent the majority of my life inside of PCS's

classrooms and grew up believing the absolute truth of this story. I have a limited perspective and a large margin for error. I wanted to understand the missing pieces of a story which framed my childhood. I hoped to find an absolute truth. I wanted to tell you that truth. I found a more complicated truth than I set out to find. I outlined a project in which I would ask the people who educated me the questions burning in my mind. I planned to return to the place which taught me how to put a comma after this word, and I would ask its people—my people—the hard questions. I didn't anticipate the answers I found. Or the weight of knowing them.

Research is almost non-existent on the current climate of the independent school association in Mississippi, the Midsouth Association of Independent Schools (MAIS). In 2017 a dissertation by the current MAIS director agreed with this fact.<sup>2</sup> Segregation academies are becoming a more popular topic of research, and recent projects such as *The Academy Stories* seek to reckon with the legacy of academies.<sup>3</sup> Church schools have very little research into their past and are often assumed to be segregation academies. However, it is important to understand the church school as distinct from a segregation academy. This distinction highlights the ways in which the ideas of segregationists and segregationist organizations such as the Citizen's Council were upheld and their defiance was repurposed after many segregation academies closed. This project will unpack the specific history of my church school in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. I will trace how white Christian theology and social belief upheld white supremacist structures in the wake of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in my community.

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<sup>2</sup> Blanton, Anthony Shane, "Administrators' Beliefs of the Organizational Effectiveness of the Mississippi Association of Independent Schools" (2017). Dissertations. 1410. <https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/1410Blanton>

<sup>3</sup> *The Academy Stories*. Brice Media, 2019. <https://www.theacademystories.com/>.

I am deeply influenced by both segregation academies and church schools. I am a part of this story, and I do not tell it to condemn white Mississippians or to separate myself from it. Until we heal the deep wounds caused by racism in this country, these narratives must be studied. Knowing the past does not change the present, but we cannot begin the process of healing until we understand that our present looks the way it does for structural reasons. James Baldwin writes, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”<sup>4</sup>

Mythologies are created by cultural and religious traditions to explain our reality. We write histories to make sense of our past and present. We tell mythologies to confirm our identity as the people we want to be. Our cultural memory is housed in present day mythologies. In erasing the history of harm, violence, and disrespect from our popular memory, whiteness claims to be ignorant of American racism. White ignorance cannot be equated with white innocence. In fact, the widespread culture of white ignorance highlights what we choose to mythologize. Choosing to be ignorant of obvious inequality is an active state. When we choose not to know, we do not feel compelled to take action.

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<sup>4</sup> *I Am Not Your Negro*. Directed by Raoul Peck. (Magnolia Pictures), 2017.

## Introduction

In 1976, Bay Street Christian Day School opened in Bay Street Presbyterian Church's basement. Within two years, the day school would change its name to Presbyterian Christian School. Formed in the "hearts and minds" of several men in the local Presbyterian church, the school set out to teach from a "distinctly Biblical perspective." The elementary school began with 23 students ranging in age from kindergarten through second grade. These men along with many others throughout the country believed Christian ideals were receding from public school education. Court cases called for the separation of church and state education, and a rising panic was growing over the morality of the nation's children.<sup>5</sup> Turning away from state supported education, the founders of PCS created their own curriculum with Christian theology as the focal point.

In June of 1980, the IRS began an investigation to determine whether this church school was discriminatory. If PCS did not adhere to IRS guidelines, the school could lose its tax-exempt status. As one longtime administrator noted, the federal government chose this school to be a key school in the Mississippi investigations.<sup>6</sup> These investigations were conducted in every private school in Mississippi following the federal court ruling in the case of *Green v. Connally*. This court case required that schools prove themselves to be nondiscriminatory on the basis of race.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dowland, Seth. *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 2015, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Administrator 3. Interviewed by Rachel Winstead. Oral History. Presbyterian Christian School, 18 December 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Crespino, Joseph. *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*. (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press), 2009, 237.

The need for PCS to distance itself from earlier segregation academies became more urgent as it became a federal case.

In the two decades following federally ordered school desegregation in 1954, white segregation academies exploded across the state. These schools were opened by white parents who refused to allow their children to go to an integrated school. Oftentimes, segregation academies were founded days before a public school was scheduled to be federally desegregated. Many of these makeshift schools met in living rooms and abandoned warehouses before they used state money to acquire a school building for themselves.<sup>8</sup> In Hattiesburg, one of these segregation academies opened a little over a decade before PCS would be imagined. This segregation academy, Beeson Academy, eventually closed because of low numbers and inadequate funding. When the segregation academy closed, they sold their empty desks and schoolbooks to the newest private school in town – Presbyterian Christian School.<sup>9</sup>

Some historians assert that Mississippi private schools can be sorted into two categories. The founders of the “segregation academies” of the 1960s explicitly claimed to open their doors for the purpose of keeping segregation alive. The “church schools” of the 1970s did not cite racial segregation as their founding motive, instead, they professed to be combatting secular influences in their children’s education.<sup>10</sup> The distinction between these types of schools seems to be simple on paper and in the minds of independent school administrators. Segregation academies were founded with discriminatory intent, and church schools were instituted to focus

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<sup>8</sup> Adams, Natalie G. and James Harold Adams. *Just Trying to have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Administrator 3, interview.

<sup>10</sup> Dowland, 27.

upon a biblical pursuit of knowledge. A single story of church schools will not be able to hold the complexity of their founding or of their present.

Historian Joseph Crespino gives staggering statistics to illustrate the dramatic rise in Christian schools in the United states. “In 1954, only 123 Christian Schools existed in the United States with a total enrollment of 12,187 students. By 1981, there were roughly 18,000 Christian schools with more than 2 million students.”<sup>11</sup> As Christian schools have become a normalized part of our educational system, we may easily forget that private protestant church schools were incredibly rare before schools were desegregated. Over a period of 27 years, church schools increased by 14,500% in the United States.<sup>12</sup> There were many social factors which contributed to the rise in Christian schools. These statistics call for a deep investigation into the motivating factors which galvanized such a powerful movement to occur.

Declaring church schools to be renamed segregation academies does not give credit to the full nature of how they changed the way racism adapted in American society. Claiming that church schools are just segregation academies masquerading behind theology leaves out a vitally important factor in their appeal to the white Christian evangelical at the time. This simple view of church schools neglects the complex ways in which narratives of white supremacy were created and reinforced in this new context. White supremacist racial ideology was codified in these spaces into the language of family values. Most of these schools had open-door policies to people of color. There was no written rule which stated that Black students were unwelcome. Some schools sought to have at least one person of color to prove their status as separate from segregation academies; however, the majority of these schools made no effort to encourage

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<sup>11</sup> Crespino, 249-250.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

enrollment.<sup>13</sup> These open-door policies allowed for schools to claim that they had no discriminatory intent towards people of color.

Safeguarded by the first amendment right to freedom of religion, church school founders believed that the government did not have the grounds to question the chartering of a new Christian school. In 1970, the court case *Green v. Conally* decided that private schools had to have a significant minority population to be eligible for tax-exempt status. To prove their nondiscriminatory status, a school had to enroll “20 percent of the percentage of the minority school-age population of the community served by the school.”<sup>14</sup> This IRS investigation enraged Christian school supporters. Over 400,000 protest letters poured into the capitol, and the IRS held four days of hearings. The Reagan Administration cut these guidelines before they were reinstated by the Supreme Court decision *Bob Jones University v. the U.S.* This meant that private schools which did not meet the guidelines were supposed to have their tax exemption revoked. Almost none lost their tax exemption.<sup>15</sup> Concern over discrimination in church schools faded from political conversation with the decades.

PCS never lost its tax-exempt status in the legal battle. This small church school exploded into what is today a 7 million-dollar yearly enterprise which boasts of a comprehensive K-3 through high school education. The school has about 950 students enrolled and employs 90 faculty and staff.

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<sup>13</sup> Dowland, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Dowland, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Dowland, 46.

According to the administration, PCS has never hired a Black person to teach an academic subject.<sup>16</sup> In 2017, the school was over 95% white.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Administrator 1. Interviewed by Rachel Winstead. Oral History. Presbyterian Christian School, December 4.

<sup>17</sup> "Private School Universe Survey." National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the U.S. Department of Education. Accessed January 4, 2020.  
[https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/privateschoolsearch/school\\_detail.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/privateschoolsearch/school_detail.asp)



## Part 1: Ideology

### *Section 1: Black Monday*

On May 17, 1954, the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision sent shockwaves throughout the nation. For half of a century, the white South had militantly guarded the color line through strict Jim Crow law and custom. Reversing the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling, *Brown* ended legal racial segregation. The worst nightmare of Southern segregationists became reality, and they did not accept defeat. The state governments and local governments of the South refused to comply with federal orders. Some of the loudest white voices of white resistance arose from Mississippi. The silence from moderate whites made the defiant voices louder. One of the most powerful voices of white defiance resounded from a podium in Greenwood, Mississippi, and its echoes are still heard today.

Condemning the *Brown v. Board decision*, Thomas Pickens Brady became the intellectual godfather of the white Citizen's Council movement when he gave his infamous "Black Monday" lecture to the Sons of the Revolution chapter in Greenwood.<sup>18</sup> Fired by Brady's words, Robert "Tut" Patterson assembled a group of civic and business leaders to organize against desegregation efforts.<sup>19</sup> On July 11, 1954, the white Citizens' Council was founded in nearby Indianola, Mississippi. Adding more notes, references, and arguments, Brady published his speech into a book with the Citizen's Council press. The text was wildly popular, and soon,

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<sup>18</sup> "Thomas P. Brady, Mississippi Judge." *The New York Times*. February 1, 1973. <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/02/01/archives/thomas-p-brady-mississippi-judge-author-of-citizens-councils.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Rolph, Stephanie R. *Resisting Equality: the Citizens Council, 1954-1989*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 2018. Kindle Edition, 630.

the South was regurgitating his terminology. The Citizens' Council spread quickly throughout Mississippi communities among whites of all social classes.

Stephanie Rolph's illuminating study, *Resisting Equality*, outlines the work and legacy of the Citizen's Council. Breaking apart Council ideology, Rolph shines a light on the reality of the organization. In theory, the Council opposed desegregation through nonviolent practices such as economic intimidation. Engaging state officials, community leaders, law enforcement, and regular folk, the Citizens' Council built economic power networks throughout the state, shutting down businesses or firing laborers who supported desegregation efforts. If a business owner aided an organization such as the NAACP or COFO, their name would be printed in the local paper. White citizens would boycott their business, and their name would be known by local terror organizations. If a sharecropper such as Fannie Lou Hamer put her name on the voter registration list, she would be fired from the plantation. By creating a panoptic environment, the Council retained social control. To the Council's alarm, civil rights work could not always be silenced by their economic intimidation. When this happened, the Council turned to violence.<sup>20</sup>

The Council was *publically* condemnatory of white terror and violence. In popular imagination, the Klan is oftentimes depicted as the looming adversary of the civil rights struggle. While Klan members certainly played a huge role in safeguarding white supremacy, reducing white defiance to Klan activity does not give a full portrait of white supremacist power structures at the time. The Klan did not become powerful until 1963 when many whites believed that the Council was not doing enough to stop integration. An FBI informant stated that memberships in the Klan and the Council oftentimes overlapped.<sup>21</sup> The majority of the enemies to the civil rights

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<sup>20</sup> Rolph, 869.

<sup>21</sup> Rolph, 983.

struggle were not hiding behind hoods. The preachers, mayors, doctors, reporters and city councilmen came to Council meetings in their “Sunday best” while they taught white supremacist ideology and planned community action against successful Black businesses and organizations.

Council members saw their cause as a noble calling from God to protect the people of the South from “outside agitators.” They did not see themselves as monsters. Council members may have differed on certain beliefs about race relations, but they were united in their loyalty to segregation. They were educated people who carefully strategized their white supremacy and clung tight to Christianity. In the mind of a Council member, duty to white supremacy and to the church were one. For segregationists, choosing morality meant choosing whiteness. Thomas Brady explains this belief in *Black Monday*.

If the result of the decision will be harmful to the bulk of the people of this country, will be calculated to foster those forces which seek this country’s destruction, then to fail to resist the decision is morally wrong and the man who fails to condemn it and do all that he can to see that it is reversed is not a patriotic American. There is, moreover, not a case of turning the other cheek as the tinkling cymbals in some of our churches and educational institutions would have us believe, but one of driving the money changers out of the temple.<sup>22</sup>

Brady claimed the decision would be “harmful” to the white majority in the United States, and he stated that outside forces were calculating the “country’s destruction.” He frames the court’s decision as a calculated attack on whiteness. Failing to “resist the decision” was “morally

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<sup>22</sup> Brady, Thomas P. *Black Monday*. (Winona, MS: Association of Citizens Councils), 1955, 40.

wrong,” and defending whiteness was the only patriotic option. In his mind, white people in Mississippi were the guardians of God and country. While some churches were “turning the other cheek” to civil rights legislation, Brady scoffed at this teaching derived from Matthew 5:39 and demanded a more radical approach of his followers. Alluding to a story found in all four gospels, Brady calls for his disciples to throw the moneychangers out of the holy temple. To him, the situation had moved far beyond offering another cheek; Brady desired action motivated by a Biblical anger. Whiteness was his temple, and *Brown* had to be expelled from it. Comparing himself and the Southern segregationists to Christ, he called for a moral cleansing of a holy place through disrupting the economic system. The Citizen’s Council would follow this lead and attempt to purify their towns of civil rights organizing through economic measures.

Segregationists did not see the civil rights struggle as a Southern problem. They believed that “outside agitators” such as the NAACP were stirring up trouble in their peacefully segregated society. They accused civil rights workers of communism and played upon political fears. Brady warned against Christian socialists and communists who supported integration. He believed that national churches in support of integration had been overtaken by these political ideologies. He cautioned against whites succumbing to liberal ideologies dressed in the clothes of Christianity.

Make no mistake about this point. If Christ taught anything it was the teaching of non-violence. If Christ was opposed to anything it was enslavement and torture. If there is a government on the face of the earth which deliberately violates the teaching of Jesus, it is the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This group of Marxian Christians has

undertaken for a number of years to chant about the mistreatment which the minority racial groups have received in this country.<sup>23</sup>

Brady positioned himself and white Southern segregationists as those on Christ's side against "Marxian Christians." He asserted that Christians who promote integration were against the teachings of Christ and supporters of "enslavement and torture." According to Brady's beliefs, the Council's professed commitment to nonviolence made them true followers of Christ. The Marxian Christians who "chant" about injustice were deliberately violating the teaching of Jesus by stirring up trouble.

Many white Southern congregations believed that the voices opposing integration were also denying the existence, sovereignty, and goodness of their God. Brady and other white supremacist leaders fostered a mistrust of outside voices to safeguard segregation. When fellow Christians supported integration, these leaders blamed ungodly intellect for blinding them. They claimed other Christians to be pulling apart the church.

If the Protestant Churches have adopted as their main objective the socialization of this country, they will, like Sampson, pull the Temple down upon themselves. What the churches of America need to do is to teach their youth.... The mixing of church and state will prove disastrous because every time religion has 'locked horns' with government or science, it has walked off with a bloody nose.<sup>24</sup>

Brady preached that the church and state should remain separate for the good of the two bodies. Protestant churches would pull down the sacred temple if they meddled in the affairs of the state. White supremacists made science and government appear to be the enemy of religion. If white

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<sup>23</sup> Brady, 50.

<sup>24</sup> Brady, 55.

congregations believed that science and government were trying to tear down their faith, they would rally to the side of the church. This massive mistrust of science and government shaped the conservative counterrevolution which was beginning to take form.

Council literature and programming used inflammatory language to incite fear, and leaders organized this fear to battle integration. Brady claimed that the communists of America have been trying since 1936 “to destroy the South.”<sup>25</sup> He said that “a bloodless revolution was planned”<sup>26</sup> but integration took the place of this plan. Brady claimed that integration will cause “a black empire to be established in the Southern States of this nation.”<sup>27</sup> This propaganda stirred up white anger and fear. If they could get powerful white citizens in every Southern town to resist integration, the Council would have a powerful front. Brady wrote: “This is no time to be calm... Be deliberate, yes, but not calm. Be determined, yes, but not impulsive. Be resolute, yes, but not violent.”<sup>28</sup>

This was the public rallying cry of the Council. In their literature, radio programs, and community meetings, they called for action in the name of goodness and service to their God.

### *Section 2: Disciples of White Supremacy*

Although it was a powerful economic and political machine, the Citizens’ Council was primarily an educating body seeking to spread white supremacist ideology throughout the world.

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<sup>25</sup> Brady, 61.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

In 1955, the Citizen's Council had a statewide membership of 60,000 and 253 chapters.<sup>29</sup>

However, this number does not include all of the non-members who listened to broadcasts, read pamphlets, or the children who were educated in their schools. The Council accomplished their purpose through a variety of measures. They published pamphlets and educational literature for adults and children alike. This literature circulated their ideas and promoted other white supremacist texts for further reading. The Council broadcasted a national radio show, *The Forum*. This show featured governors, senators, representatives, and prominent businessmen. Oftentimes, these shows did not directly speak on racism, but they spoke about other issues through a white supremacist lens. Across the South, the Council inspired private schools to open in opposition to integration.<sup>30</sup>

During the 1961-62 school year, the Citizen's Council of Mississippi created an essay contest for white high school students. Many students across the state wrote essays on the dangers of integration. A cash prize of \$1,000 was distributed among winners. Students were asked to write a paper discussing why they believed in the "social separation of the races," "the preservation of the State Rights is important to every American" and why "separate schools should be maintained for white and negro races."<sup>31</sup> The descriptive pamphlet gave formatting guidelines, as well as a list of Council-approved texts for student research. The Council clearly explained the reasoning behind the contest in their "purpose" section: "To assist our young people to develop into informed, patriotic, American citizens" by stressing the importance of

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<sup>29</sup>Rolph, Stephanie R. *Resisting Equality: the Citizens Council, 1954-1989*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 2018. Kindle Edition, 910.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>"Essay Contest for Mississippi High School Students," Date Unknown, Box 1, Micellaneous, Broadsides and Broadsheets, Citizens' Council Collection: The University of Mississippi.

states' rights and "maintaining Racial Integrity."<sup>32</sup> The Council asked students to ingest segregationist ideas and craft defenses of their ideology. These contests clearly elucidate the Council's most important goal – teaching the next generation to defend white supremacist ideology.

In another such pamphlet, "*Throwing Children to Wolves*," the Council describes what would happen if white Americans accepted the "clichés and slogans" of those who were seeking to destroy the country through integration.

These atheistic one-worlders who tell us what our socio-Christian duty is; these leftist-liberals who examine our conscience for us; if we sign their 'voluntary' documents and blindly follow them, as the sheep do the 'Judas goat' in the stock yards, then maybe we can save ourselves too.<sup>33</sup>

The Council writer is referring to the outsiders who have come into the South to fight for civil rights. Council members detested civil rights workers from other parts of the country. Seeing them as agitators, they resented "liberal" condemnation of southern segregation. If a Southerner stood against segregation with the liberals, they would be a "Judas goat" in the eyes of the Council. A Judas goat is a trained goat used to herd other animals to slaughter. The life of the Judas goat is spared after it leads the flock to danger. Southerners who chose to leave the defiant white flock created by the Council and follow the Judas goat would be willingly following their destroyer. The Council promoted group identity. Inside of the group they found their

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> "Throwing Children to the Wolves," 1961-1962, Box 1, Miscellaneous, Pamphlets and Broadsides, Citizens' Council Collection: The University of Mississippi.



“socio-Christian duty,” but outside of the group leftist-liberal wolves sought to take their children to slaughter.

Council propaganda was written to defend segregation as a Christian value. The Council would publish entire pamphlets of Bible verses defending segregation. The pamphlet, “*Is Segregation Unchristian?*”<sup>34</sup> contained a list of Bible verses from the old and new testament arguing for the morality of segregation. The battle for segregation was constantly reinforced as a holy and heavenly fight. The Council published educational pamphlets as well as pamphlets encouraging members to keep up the good fight and stand against the evils of segregation. In “*To Those Who Stand Against Race Mixing*,” the council offers the inspiration “...So stick to the fight when you’re hardest hit – It’s when things seem worst that you must not quit.”<sup>35</sup> They ask their members to keep hope even when things seem hard. As civil rights advocates gained ground, the Council urged their members to remain defiant.

The Synod of Mississippi of the Presbyterian Church was known for its extreme segregationist views. Revered G.T. Gillespie was the President Emeritus of Belhaven College, a private Presbyterian liberal arts college in Jackson. Before the Synod of Mississippi, he gave the speech, “A Christian View on Segregation.” After giving this speech, the Council would print it and distribute it to their chapters to encourage them in their faith and teach them why the church should be committed to segregation. On the back of the pamphlet Gillespie is described “as one of the outstanding leaders in the Southern Presbyterian church.” He served for thirty-three years

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<sup>34</sup> “Is Segregation Unchristian,” undated, Box 1, Micellaneous, Pamphlets and Broadsides, Citizens’ Council Collection: The University of Mississippi.

<sup>35</sup> “To Those Who Stand Against Race Mixing,” Undated, Box 1, Micellaneous, Pamphlets and Broadsides, Citizens’ Council Collection: The University of Mississippi.

as the president of Belhaven College and was been widely-commended “for his fair-minded and charitable attitude toward those who differ from him.”<sup>36</sup>

The fair-minded and charitable man explained in twelve points how segregation is a Biblical, natural, and nondiscriminatory structure. He asserted that segregation is not “race prejudice” but one of “nature’s universal laws.”<sup>37</sup> However, Gillespie did not only make scientific or social claims. In this speech, he took one of the most sacred Christian spaces and reimagined it as a place of segregation. Gillespie painted a picture of segregation before the throne of God. One day, when believers reach heaven, Providence will see “redeemed humanity made up of the peoples of every nation, kindred, race and language blended into a beautiful and harmonious unity.”<sup>38</sup> Redeemed humanity of all races will be gathered, but “each preserving its own distinctive genius and virtues, the better to shew forth the infinite riches and diversity of the Divine glory and grace throughout ages to come.”<sup>39</sup> Gillespie believed that all races of people will be one day be redeemed, but he claimed that mixing the races would lessen this eventual portrait of redemptive glory. In his mind, races should preserve their own “genius and virtue” to show the God’s glory through their diversity. He did not paint this portrait to incite explicit racial hatred. In his mind, he was describing a peaceful heaven. He envisioned the throne of God as a place where segregation dwells and actually espouses the glory of God. This theology is far more complicated than simple hate; it showed white Christians how to justify racist beliefs in the context of their faith.

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<sup>36</sup> “A Christian View on Segregation,” 1954, Box 1, Micellaneous, Pamphlets and Broad sides, Citizens’ Council Collection: The University of Mississippi.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Gillespie claims that the Hebrews practiced segregation under “Divine authority” for two thousand years. When they disobeyed God’s commandment to segregate, they were harshly punished. Pointing to the Old and New Testament, Gillespie defends the racial status quo.

There is certainly no ground for the charge that racial segregation is displeasing to God, unjust to man, or inherently wrong; Since Christ and the Apostles taught the love of God for all mankind, the oneness of believers in Christ, and demonstrated that the principles of Christian brotherhood and charity could be made operative in all relations of life, without demanding revolutionary changes in the natural or social order, there would appear to be no reason for concluding that segregation is in conflict with the spirit and the teachings of Christ and the Apostles, and therefore un-Christian.<sup>40</sup>

Stating that segregation is Biblical practice, Gillespie argues that ending it would disobey the teachings of Christ. According to this stance, integration would change the natural and social order of society. As Jesus came to fulfill the law of the old testament, he would not change the way things had always been done. He would simply teach “Christian brotherhood and charity” inside of the pre-existing social structure.

The Southern Presbyterian Churches relied on this theology during the civil rights struggle. They claimed that the Bible did not ask them to be a part of any social change movement. This separation of the church from the social conflict was key to the eventual split of the national Presbyterian church. While there were many factors which went into the formation of the PCA, one of their main claims was that the church had no place among social movements.

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<sup>40</sup> Gilliespie, “A Christian View on Segregation.”

The Christian ideologies espoused in Council literature point to how the white supremacist movement retained power through religious belief. These beliefs were wound into political ideology as liberal Christians were branded into heretics. Although many white moderates aided the racial status quo through inaction, white conservative Christians explicitly opposed the civil rights struggle. White supremacy and Christianity were not antithetical; in fact, to many Christians at the time, they were inseparable.

## Part 2: Hattiesburg

### *Section 1: The Council in Hattiesburg*

On March 16, 1956, the Hattiesburg chapter of the Citizens' Council organized in the circuit courtroom at the Forrest county courthouse. An article in the *Hattiesburg American* advertises the event to “all men and women interested in maintaining segregation through lawful means.”<sup>41</sup> At this first meeting, the Council would elect its officers under the leadership of the temporary county chairman, Dudley Conner, who was an experienced organizer and well-known attorney in Hattiesburg. During the 1948 presidential election, he helped lead a voting campaign for the new Dixiecrat party which led to an overwhelming turn out of white voters. The *Hattiesburg American* provided whites free transportation to the polls and encouraged whites to cast ballots for the new party.<sup>42</sup> The Citizen's Council eased into these previously established white power networks and solidified a new center for organization and education.

At the first meeting, a crowd of over 100 people gathered. A motion was made to stay elections until they could recruit more members to their cause. Earle Wingo, a prominent lawyer, was asked to be the inaugural guest speaker. Firing up the crowd, he spoke about the dangers of integration, and the *Hattiesburg American* printed portions of his speech in the paper to send the message to the rest of the town. “The NAACP, that contemptible Communist outfit, has made great use of the Emmett Till case to smear Mississippi. They will do everything they can to split

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<sup>41</sup> “Organize Citizen's Council Tonight.” *Hattiesburg American*. March 22, 1956, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/276970716/>

<sup>42</sup> Sturkey, William. *Hattiesburg: An American City in Black and White*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 240-41.

this nation, to divide it with racial squabbles and conquer it.”<sup>43</sup> As outlined in the previous section, accusing civil rights activists of communistic activity was among the tactics of white supremacists. Along with the rest of the Citizens’ Council, Wingo opposed the international outcry against the Emmett Till case. One of J.W. Milam’s attorneys, J. J. Breland, was a Citizens’ Council official. Of the Till case he said, Milam and Bryant “wouldn’t have killed [Till] except for Black Monday. The Supreme Court is responsible for the murder of Emmett Till.”<sup>44</sup> Council members blamed the Supreme Court decision for their organizing, and men like Breland defended the lynching of a child in the name of black Monday.

Wingo used Brady’s coined term, black Monday, to describe the day on which “nine aged men put a dagger into the heart of the United States Constitution.”<sup>45</sup> Brady’s words and ideas fed the Hattiesburg chapter of the Citizens’ Council, but his words did not only reach those in the meeting. The whites controlling the *Hattiesburg American* made sure that the message was disseminated throughout the community. The final two sentences of this article illustrate the Council’s aim. A final quote from Wingo states “tell the NAACP where it ought to go – and you know where I mean.”<sup>46</sup> Following this statement, the journalist narrates, “Both Connor and Wingo said that the Citizens’ Council plans to achieve its aims ‘by legal means,’ not through violence and emotion.”<sup>47</sup> These two sentences illustrate the contradictory approach of the Council which proved effective to their cause. By covering direct threats with claims of

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<sup>43</sup> “Citizen’s Council Will Elect Officers April 3.” *Hattiesburg American*. March 23, 1956, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/276971377/>

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in: Tyson, Timothy B. *The Blood of Emmett Till*. Simon & Schuster, 2017 Kindle Edition, 78.

<sup>45</sup> “Citizen’s Council Will Elect Officers,” *Hattiesburg American*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

nonviolence, they veiled themselves in a way that the Klan did not. They openly stated that civil rights organizations should go to hell for their sin against whiteness, but they followed these statements by asserting the nonviolence of the group. By publicly distancing themselves from Klan style violence, they organized white supremacy in the name of order behind thinly veiled threats. The Council members still firmly believed in the righteousness of their threats.

A man named M.W. Hamilton was a founding member of the Citizen's Council chapter in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. In 1978, he gave an oral history which is now housed in the Southern Miss libraries' collection. He offers an insider's perspective to the founding of the Citizen's Council, as well as the founding of Hattiesburg's largest segregation academy. In the interview, Hamilton was asked how the Council was organized and what were the founders' intentions; he responded:

Well, the Citizens' Council was basically set up to prevent integration of the schools and the general society. The people of the South didn't want it, and *of course still don't want it*. It was set up to educate the people as to what was going on, what was going on behind the scenes, and how these people operated, and how to watch out for their traps and not fall into them, and how to keep down racial tension as best we could, you know. And that was the purpose of the White Citizens' Council, it was a counterpart, you might say, of the NAACP... They had their organization to promote their interests; we had ours to promote our interests. It was just that simple.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Oral History with Mr. M.W. Hamilton," interview by Orley B. Caudill, Oral History Digital Collection, Digital Reproduction, Historical Manuscripts, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries, page 19. Retrieved from: [https://digitalcollections.usm.edu/uncategorized/digitalFile\\_aa15b5b8-30e9-4d66-9b48-de0fdfafbb73/](https://digitalcollections.usm.edu/uncategorized/digitalFile_aa15b5b8-30e9-4d66-9b48-de0fdfafbb73/)

The primary purpose of the Council was to oppose the integration of the schools, as Thomas Brady's ideology notes. The Hattiesburg Citizen's Council according to Hamilton clearly backed this ideology. It "educated the people" in white supremacy and taught them the false white narratives of what was really "going on behind the scenes." The *Hattiesburg American* supported Council activity and published their rhetoric as they did with Wingo's speech. Hamilton claimed that the Council tried to "keep down racial tension" as best as they could, and to the Council, this meant pushing out any person or organization which threatened white supremacy. As Hamilton stated, the Council saw themselves as the "counterpart" to organizations such as the NAACP. Any group which came to Hattiesburg to fight in the civil rights struggle was marked as the Council's enemy. They spread false information about these organizations through their white supremacist publications and pamphlets. Hamilton stated, "The Citizens' Council didn't, as I knew it, didn't have any night meetings; it was open to the public. They didn't go out and threaten blacks or do anything of that sort. It was an open, wide open, above-board organization."<sup>49</sup> Hamilton and the Citizen's Council believed themselves to be a respectable organization of good, church-going folk. He even claimed that the Council was a non-threatening organization.

M.W. Hamilton was repeatedly accused of Klan Activity and was one of six alleged witnesses to be called from Mississippi to an investigation of the Klan by the House un-American Activities Committee. Alongside Byron de la Beckwith, who murdered Medgar Evers, M.W. Hamilton plead the 5<sup>th</sup> to all questions asked of him.<sup>50</sup> Hamilton was also indicted

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<sup>49</sup> Hamilton, 22

<sup>50</sup> "State Men Refuse to Submit Books," January 13, 1966, SCRID# 6-53-0-21-1-1-1, Series 2515: Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, Mississippi Department



in the Klan firebombing and murder of the two-term NAACP president Vernon Dahmer, but charges were subsequently dropped. As reported in several newspapers and filed in the Sovereignty Commission database, Hamilton was repeatedly involved in assaults on civil rights workers. During one such occasion, a newspaper photographer attempted to take his picture. He spat on the photographer and a fight ensued. His attorney, Dudley Connor, the first Citizen's Council president, was also involved in the courtroom fight.<sup>51</sup> Although Hamilton was repeatedly arrested, he only spent one hour of his life in jail.

Hamilton spoke about the Klan throughout his oral history and discussed going to Klan rallies which he reported to have had 25,000 people in attendance.<sup>52</sup> When asked if he was a part of the Klan, he dodged the question, but he talked about his friendship with Sam Bowers and claimed that the organization was simply misunderstood by the media. Of the Klan he said, "I've even read the charter and bi-laws of the Klan, and of course it's anything except what the press claimed it was."<sup>53</sup> While M.W. Hamilton's ties to the Klan cannot be proven, he defended the organization on record and made a startling comparison between the Klan and the Council. The interviewer asked him what he believed the real mission of the Klan was. He responded,

Well, it's real mission, in my opinion, was almost the same thing as the Citizens' Council was; it was to keep our schools from being integrated, because we knew that when you

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of Archives and History, March 19, 2020,

[https://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/](https://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/)

<sup>51</sup> "Investigation – Hattiesburg, Mississippi, September 16-27 1968" October 1, 1968, SCRID# 2-64-2-20-1-1-1, Series 2515: Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, March 19, 2020,

[https://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=images/png/cd04/027017.png&otherstuff=2164|2120|1111|265121](https://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/result.php?image=images/png/cd04/027017.png&otherstuff=2164|2120|1111|265121)

<sup>52</sup> Hamilton, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Hamilton, 23.

integrated the schools you lowered the standards of learning, and it just wasn't time. The black race in our opinion hadn't advanced to the point where they could contribute anything to the schools if they went in there, and they did better in their own schools, for themselves and the whites, too. And I still think today, and you're an educator, you oughta know, that the standards in the schools have been lowered as far as learning is concerned.<sup>54</sup>

Hamilton saw the Klan and the Council as one and the same. They both had the same end goal in his eyes. As Thomas Brady's ideology instructed, Hamilton believed that the integration of schools would lower the standard of learning for all children and promote interracial sex. Hamilton claimed segregation was actually better for both white and Black students.

When the white South began to realize that integration was inevitable, a new era of education began – white flight to segregation academies. In *Just Trying to Have School*, Natalie Adams and James Adams study how resistance to integration across the state of Mississippi was different for each county and city.<sup>55</sup> Many communities and local Citizen's Council chapters across the state opened up private academies. Today, historians refer to these schools as segregation academies. M. W. Hamilton was among the founding members of Hattiesburg's largest segregation academy – Beeson Academy. When the Hattiesburg Council "started promoting private schools," Hamilton went into action.<sup>56</sup> The school met without its own location for several years. Along with a few other Council members, Hamilton garnered donations and acquired land for the school, building materials, and money from Hattiesburg

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<sup>54</sup> Hamilton 23.

<sup>55</sup> Adams, Natalie G. and James Harold Adams. *Just Trying to have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Hamilton, 22.

patrons interested in the school. Across the South, many communities banded together to create segregation academies. The Mississippi Private School Association (MPSA) was created to unite segregation academies against the federal government. This movement was far bigger than Hattiesburg. Private school was becoming the alternative for white parents looking to remove their students from integrated schools.

### *Section 2: The Segregation Academy*

This school which M.W. Hamilton helped found opened in 1964 with a small class of 32 students who met in a living room.<sup>57</sup> The school expanded into a larger operation the following year and announced its first headmaster in the *Hattiesburg American* on August 12, 1965. After a 30-year tenure in the public school system, J.A. Beeson left his position of principal at Hawkins Junior High to head this new “nonsectarian” school. As Hamilton stated in his interview and the *Hattiesburg American* confirmed in print, a group of parents and community members banded together to research the best ways to start a private school with imminent desegregation on the way. This group formed their own school association called the Forrest County School Foundation. With school starting in September, the founders had a month to recruit students, hire more teachers, and find a building. J.A. Beeson advised prospective parents to obtain registration forms and turn them in with their \$35 registration fee. In his research into private schools, Judge William Haralson found that “in most cases the churches have come forward and provided

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<sup>57</sup> “Dedication ceremony scheduled Sunday at Beeson Academy.” *Hattiesburg American*. April 11, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/276994994/>

classroom space while the schools were getting started.”<sup>58</sup> The judge asked interested parents to, “consult with their ministers and congregations regarding use of their classrooms in establishing this private school.”<sup>59</sup> Although the school had been declared nonsectarian from the start, the founders looked to churches for support as was the custom according to Judge William Haralson’s research.

Grades were added yearly; sometimes two grades could be added in a year. On April 11, 1969, the *Hattiesburg American* reported on the dedication ceremony for Beeson Academy’s new building which would house 130 students from kindergarten to 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The ceremony attributed much of the school’s success to its first headmaster, and his honorary portrait would be hung in the newly built school. The article noted that the school would no longer receive any more state grants, and it would be run as a nonprofit and tax-exempt entity. The ceremony lineup boasted appearances by prominent community members including Reverend W.J. Stanway, the pastor of First Presbyterian church, who gave the opening prayer. Reverend Stanway would play an important role in Hattiesburg’s fight to retain segregation in white churches, but on this day, he was simply supporting the local Council school with his prayer.<sup>60</sup> Soon, he would become a key supporter of a church school.

The facility breathed a new life into Beeson. The school began branding itself as the elite academic option in Hattiesburg while still retaining the “old-fashioned virtues” and “love of God and country.”<sup>61</sup> In 1975, an editorial on Beeson in the *Hattiesburg American* claimed that Beeson

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<sup>58</sup> “Beeson to head private school.” *Hattiesburg American*. August 12, 1965, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277002029/>

<sup>59</sup> “Beeson to Head Private School,” *Hattiesburg American*.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> “Much Progress noted at Beeson Academy.” *Hattiesburg American*. March 28, 1975, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277040492/?terms=beeson%2Bacademy>

has “for a number of years” been the place for students of high academic standing to “meet the challenge of a more rigorous, a more advanced, and a more enriched academic program.”<sup>62</sup>

Beeson advertised itself as the only school in Hattiesburg where “advanced” students could find the academic challenge they need. The Citizen’s Council educational pamphlets had been asserting for twenty years that public education would lose its rigor after integration. Steeped in the reality made by Council propaganda, many parents believed that a school like Beeson would give their child the best education. The board branded Beeson as the place for elite education in Hattiesburg. At this time, they also opened the school up to different religious traditions. The article stated:

The members of Beeson’s Board of Directors, the faculty, the staff, and the student body represent various religious denominations and faiths, predominantly Christian and Protestant. However, the school is not under the direction, influence, or support of any particular church, and students of all creeds work comfortably within the framework of the school.<sup>63</sup>

Beeson advertised that they were not under the “direction, influence, or support” of any particular church. In this article, Beeson painted itself as an accepting place of “all creeds.” They focused upon their academic excellence and the promise that students of all beliefs can “work comfortably within the framework.”<sup>64</sup>

During the following year, an article on Beeson seemed to pivot on this point. The school still focused on academic excellence within their student body and welcomed all students with

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> “Much Progress noted at Beeson Academy,” *Hattiesburg American*.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

the “capacity to learn.”<sup>65</sup> However, the school seemed to cling more tightly to its Christian values than it did the year before in the newspaper. Interestingly, during the year between the publication of these two articles, a new Christian school announced its opening. This new school had been started by the Hattiesburg Presbyterian community. Published a month before the new church school would open, the Beeson article stated:

Although it is non-sectarian, Judeo-Christian principles are at the heart and essence of Beeson Academy’s foundation. The school strives through staff example and teaching to emphasize moral values. School begins each morning with a devotional.<sup>66</sup>

While the school welcomed students of “all creeds” in the previous year, this year they claimed that the essence of the school was defined by Judeo-Christian Principles. All creeds would not fit into a school with the “heart” and “essence” of Judeo-Christian principles. Beeson focused on the “moral values” taught in their curriculum. They emphasized that each day was started with a devotional.

The following year, Beeson became even more strict in its resolve to change the narrative of its founding. On July 3, 1977, Beeson firmly denied other motivations for its founding, presumably, in hopes of attracting students as the enrollment dwindled. “Created as an independent, nonsectarian school, Beeson is dedicated to helping students become effective citizens of our community and nation. *For no other purpose does Beeson Academy exist.*”<sup>67</sup> Beeson claimed its nonsectarian beginnings but changed the word “private” to “independent,” a

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<sup>65</sup> “Beeson Academy Meets Educational Need.” *Hattiesburg American*. July 4, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/276931369/?terms=beeson%2Bacademy>

<sup>66</sup> “Beeson Academy Meets Educational Need.” *Hattiesburg American*.

<sup>67</sup> “Beeson Academy has served students for 11 years.” *Hattiesburg American*. July 3, 1977, (emphasis mine) <https://www.newspapers.com/image/279245303/?terms=beeson%2Bacademy>

linguistic switch which still proves important in independent schooling today. Focusing on the moral education of their students, Beeson hoped to help students become “effective citizens.” The final sentence of this quote is the most telling. According to a PCS administrator’s interview, there was a community agreement that Beeson was the town’s white academy. Attempting to deny their segregationist roots, Beeson reconstructed the narrative.

### *Section 3: Tension in the Presbyterian Church*

On January 22<sup>nd</sup> of 1964, Black activists in Hattiesburg launched a voter-registration campaign with one of the largest organized protests of the civil rights struggle to date. Known as Freedom Day, this peaceful protest took place outside of the office of the circuit clerk as Black citizens demanded their right to vote. Over 150 Black citizens made it into the office to register by the end of the day. The circuit clerk of Hattiesburg, Theron Lynd, had previously refused to register Black voters even after receiving a federal contempt citation. Lynd’s predecessor, Luther Cox was infamous for asking Black voters to answer the question “how many bubbles in a bar of soap?”<sup>68</sup> Civil rights worker, David J. Dennis Sr. recalls his memories from his work with the Hattiesburg struggle. He particularly remembers harassment and violence by the Hattiesburg police department. One night after he was arrested for a traffic violation, he describes, “Once the officers put me in the car, they began a conversation about integration and how wrong it was, proclaiming that God did not intend for the races to be together.”<sup>69</sup> On another occasion, Dennis

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<sup>68</sup>Sturkey, William. *Hattiesburg: An American City in Black and White*. (Boston: Harvard University Press), 2019. 275.

<sup>69</sup> Dennis, David J. (“Dave”), Sr. “Unsung Heroes of 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer.” *The Southern Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2014): 44-50. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/567248>.

was beaten profusely by police officers for telling them that his mother was white and his father was Black. Hattiesburg was a stronghold of voter discrimination and state sanctioned intimidation in the state of Mississippi, but the efforts of activists rose up to meet that challenge.

William Sturkey writes about the Hattiesburg Freedom school movement in his illuminating study *To Write in the Light of Freedom*. Black Mississippians led the charge in organizing across communities. White ministers from the North came to help with the fight. Fifty Northern ministers organized by the United Presbyterians participated in the Freedom Day protest. The Hattiesburg Ministers' project came under the leadership of the National Council's Commission and subsequently became a part of Delta Ministry. The ministers, who were sent to Hattiesburg mostly on a rotating basis, hoped their presence would bring together this ultra-religious Piney Woods town. Instead of unifying the body of Christ, the white Christians in Hattiesburg were agitated by the Northern ministers' efforts, and almost all white congregations were hostile to them.<sup>70</sup> These ministers embodied Gillespie's image of the "Judas-goat" to white churches. They were attempting to lead the white flock away from God's purpose into the ruins of communism and atheism.

Northern interventions in Southern Presbyterian churches such as the Delta Ministry would contribute to the split of the Presbyterian church. In his book *Divine Agitators*, Mark Newman outlines the efforts of the Hattiesburg Ministers' project, and familiar names of Council and clergymen appear in the text. Reverend Bob Beech was serving as a pastor in a small church in Hebron, Illinois before he came to work with the freedom struggle. Beech was inspired to

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<sup>70</sup> Newman, Mark F. *Divine Agitators : The Delta Ministry and Civil Rights in Mississippi*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 2004. Accessed March 25, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central, 14.



work in Mississippi by fellow ministers who had aided in the Hattiesburg struggle. Within two hours of his arrival in Greenwood, Mississippi, Beech was arrested. He was soon released, but he was newly dedicated to the cause in Mississippi. He accepted a co-directorship of the Hattiesburg Ministers Project and moved his wife and three sons to Mississippi. The Ministers' project worked closely with COFO, but they focused specifically on rallying moderate whites to their cause. While some moderate whites agreed with the tenets of COFO's voting drive, almost none would speak out. Only one Episcopal church and one Catholic church allowed Black worshipers at their services.<sup>71</sup> The white churches were either stalwartly opposed to the Hattiesburg freedom struggle or quietly accepted the rule of white supremacy.

Beech and his family were relentlessly harassed by members of the white community. No one would rent him a house. After he bought a house, a cross was burned in his yard during the first few weeks his family lived there. He received threatening phone calls full of obscenities and threats several times a day. After attending a service at the most-liberal Presbyterian church with his family, he was asked by the pastor and an elder to never return. When church members saw Beech in their pews, several of them had threatened the pastor to pull their financial support from the church.<sup>72</sup> Just after the Klan's cross was burned in his yard, Beech was attacked by M. W. Hamilton in his hardware store. Beech went into Polk Hardware to buy a stepladder. As Beech was signing a check, Hamilton recognized his name and swung at him. Beech's three sons witnessed as their father had his shirt ripped and his face bruised. Beech pressed charges, but the

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<sup>71</sup> Newman, 50-51.

<sup>72</sup> Newman, 56.

city court dropped the case because they claimed there was insufficient evidence and a lack of a witness.<sup>73</sup>

In 1964, the Hattiesburg American reported that the Mattoon Presbytery invited local Hattiesburg Presbyterians to Illinois to tell their side of the civil rights struggle. “A deeply concerned” member sent a leaflet and an attached note to the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce explaining their desire to connect with the town’s ministers and “hear an account of your church in the civil rights struggle.”<sup>74</sup> The church member lamented how divided the Presbyterian church had become over issues of race, and their congregation wanted to offer their deepest sympathies to the Hattiesburg church dealing with such racial “rabble rousers.” The note stated “I think it is safe to say that the majority of the members of the Presbyterian Church is opposed to taking part in racial demonstrations.”<sup>75</sup> This note created a solidarity between the Illinois and Hattiesburg congregations. This congregation member claimed that the Illinois Presbytery did not want to “debate the civil rights issue or any segment of it;” they wanted to support their brothers and sisters in the faith. More notes like these came into the Hattiesburg Chamber of Commerce office from congregations.<sup>76</sup> Nationally, Presbyterians were divided, and they were looking to Hattiesburg for answers. The article ends with a plea of prayer for the team of apologists traveling to Illinois, one of whom was the editor of the *Hattiesburg American*. “The men who are making the trip would appreciate the prayers of all in the Hattiesburg area that, with God’s help,

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<sup>73</sup> Newman, 57

<sup>74</sup> “The Church and its Purpose.” *Hattiesburg American*, February 22, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277210274/?terms>

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Dupont, Carolyn. *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1975*. (New York: New York University Press), 2013. Accessed March 25, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central, 195.

they may present a convincing picture of the Christian church and its purpose as it has been understood down through the ages.”<sup>77</sup>

In *Mississippi Praying: Southern White Evangelicals and the Civil Rights Movement*, Carolyn Dupont outlines the conference between the Mississippi and Illinois church. Presbyterian clergymen in Illinois were deeply divided as to whether or not the church should intervene in the civil rights struggle. The Hattiesburg Presbyterian churches sent their best conservative apologists including: three local ministers, a prominent lawyer, and the *Hattiesburg American* editor. Reverend W.J. Stanway, the pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Newton Cox, the pastor who refused to allow Beech to return to his service, and Reverend Edward Jussely, the future founder of PCS, were among those who made the trek to Illinois.<sup>78</sup> Over 600 people crowded into the sanctuary to hear the debate. Ten veterans of the Hattiesburg Ministers’ Project were in attendance. Reverend Robert Moore gave personal testimony attesting to the discrimination in the Hattiesburg clerk’s office and the intimidation which Black voters faced in the community.<sup>79</sup>

The group from Hattiesburg fervently denied these claims and condemned the Ministers’ Project to be against Presbyterian theology. Attorney Frank Montague, a Presbyterian church elder, refuted the Moore’s assertion that Black citizens faced discrimination when they attempted to register to vote. Reverend Stanway insisted that the Presbyterian church could only act on what was written in the Bible. Reading from a five-page printed document, he claimed that there was no Biblical foundation for the involvement of the church in civil rights issues. In fact, along

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<sup>77</sup> “The Church and its Purpose,” *Hattiesburg American*.

<sup>78</sup> Dupont, 195.

<sup>79</sup> Dupont, 196.

the same vein of Reverend Gillespie in the Citizen's Council pamphlet, he asserted that it was the church's duty to stay away from political movements and never "prostitute" itself to politics. The apologists did not claim to hate their Black neighbors; they simply refuted their struggles as lies and declared that it was not the place of the God's people to intervene.

In the audience, Reverend John Cameron of Hattiesburg listened to these speeches. Reverend Cameron was a Black pastor in Hattiesburg whose church served as the central location to the voter-registration drive. At the end of the debate, the moderator refused to let him speak. Apparently, the group from Hattiesburg had made it a pre-arranged condition of their appearance in Illinois that Reverend John Cameron would not be allowed to say anything. The moderator ended the meeting with a benediction.<sup>80</sup>

The Southern Presbyterian's long battle against the Northern ministers is also documented in the Sovereignty Commission Files. In 1967, Reverend W.J. Stanway was still the pastor of First Presbyterian church in Hattiesburg, and he was the chairman of the Committee of Church Extension for the Synod of Mississippi. Reverend Stanway submitted a report to the national Presbyterian U.S. Board of Church Extension on behalf of the Synod of Mississippi. The report stated all of the reasons why the Synod of Mississippi believed that the Delta Ministry should be defunded. Reverend Stanway gives the following reasons:

The fact that the Delta Ministry is not performing a proper church related ministry; the Delta Ministry's past activity has been related to dissension and conflict; the Delta

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<sup>80</sup> Dupont, 197.

Ministry's creating of antagonism between classes of Negroes, and the absence in the Delta Ministry of primary emphasis on spiritual development.<sup>81</sup>

When mapped onto the history of strife in Hattiesburg, these words seem to have a clear meaning. Stanway's language is vague enough to allow for alternate interpretations. Indeed, the Delta Ministry was not performing a usual ministry, and there certainly was conflict surrounding the Delta Ministry as white citizens were openly hostile to ministers. His claim that the Delta Ministry incited "antagonism between classes of Negroes" fits into the white supremacist belief that white Northerners created the civil rights struggle. Black organizing had been going on in Hattiesburg long before a white Northern minister stepped into the struggle. He called for the church to refuse to be a part of this political struggle. Stanway's argument reframed the issue as an issue of church operation and duty.

The Presbyterian church fractured in 1973, and Southern Presbyterians left the PCUS to create the PCA. In his book, *How is the Gold Become Dim*, Morton H. Smith explains the grievances of conservative Presbyterians against the liberal-leaning PCUS. Analyzing the changes made by the National Assembly of the PCUS, Smith explains how the "liberal element" have overtaken the theology of the denomination.<sup>82</sup> His study results in the finding that the liberal Presbyterians are showing "increasing evidence of unbelief." He mourns over their loss of faith, "First, all who believe in the Bible, and are committed to the Reformed Faith, must weep

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<sup>81</sup> "Presbyterians Approve Church Extension Report" Sovereignty Commission Online, SCR ID # 2-157-2-40-1-1- 1 Series 2515: Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Records, 1994-2006, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, March 19, 2020, [https://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/r](https://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/r)

<sup>82</sup> Smith, Morton H. *How is the Gold Become Dim (Lamentations 4:1): The Decline of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., as Reflected in its Assembly Actions*. 2nd ed. Jackson, MS: Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church, faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed faith, 1973, page 200.

over such a defection from the faith. ‘How the gold is become dim!’”<sup>83</sup> Despairingly, he calls for the conservative Presbyterians to split from the liberal denomination to form their own church. In her work, Dupont highlights how “advocates of segregation often morphed into champions of a restrictive emphasis on literal biblical interpretation.”<sup>84</sup> Writing for pages on single words in the Westminster Catechism, Smith is clearly an advocate for strict Biblical interpretations.

As a whole, the majority of the book is dedicated to biblical interpretation, but through these theological technicalities, Smith shows how embedded segregation is to this belief system. Smith wrote counterarguments to numerous publications of the PCUS; one such publication addressed housing discrimination, “Equal Opportunity in Housing.” Smith quotes this PCUS paper, “The 108<sup>th</sup> General Assembly affirms that segregation and discrimination in housing on the basis of race or religion, enforced by either law or custom, is a violation of Christian ethics.”<sup>85</sup> Smith cites his dissent with the scripture.

It is interesting to see that there is no Biblical reference given to demonstrate the validity of this as a breach of Christian ethics. One wonders what the General Assembly would do with God’s commandment to Israel to segregate itself from the Canaanites. Presumably this was against the “Christian ethics”, and therefore, immoral, despite the fact that it was distinctly commanded by God.<sup>86</sup>

Smith stated that segregation is Biblical, and those who argue that it is against “Christian ethics” are in violation of God’s distinct command to his people. To the PCA, the church’s split was not about racial issues; it was over Biblical interpretation. They believed the liberal interpretation of

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<sup>83</sup> Morton, 199.

<sup>84</sup> Dupont, 200.

<sup>85</sup> Morton, 198

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

the bible could not validly demonstrate that segregation was not ethical, and therefore, the church was moving away from a strict interpretation of the Bible. The split was about more than racial issues and included a host of other disagreements on topics such as feminism and communism. Another major concern was the PCUS's announcement that evolution was not contrary to Biblical teaching.<sup>87</sup> The conservative Presbyterians saw their denomination becoming liberal in their theological stance on social movements, and in 1973, they chose to leave the denomination.

In 1976, Presbyterian Christian School would be founded in the basement of a newly-declared PCA church by Reverend Ed Jussely and other PCA church members.

#### *Section 4: The Church School*

On March 6, 1976, an advertisement for a new school appeared in the "Religion" section of the *Hattiesburg American*. A little white girl dressed in a plaid jumper and knee socks is holding two over-sized books beneath one arm. Raising her small finger, she points to one word in the headline spelled out in all capital letters: "Announcing Bay Street Presbyterian CHRISTIAN Day School."<sup>88</sup> The word *Christian* is underlined in both the title and the descriptive blurb beside the girl. To the right, the contact information for the school and a Bible verse from Proverbs surrounds a large cross: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."<sup>89</sup> The school's advertising intent was made clear to any prospective parent scanning the Saturday "Religion" section over their cup of coffee. This

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<sup>87</sup> Morton, 58.

<sup>88</sup> "Announcing Bay Street Presbyterian Christian Day School." *Hattiesburg American*. March 6, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277224355/>

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

school is “dedicated to excellence in academic and spiritual instruction.”<sup>90</sup> No further information was included in the advertisement besides the fact that the school will open with kindergarten, first, second and third grades in September of 1976 and will add school years in succeeding years. The advertisement has very few words, but the little white girl, the cross, and the word *Christian* have a powerful effect.

On July 23, 1976, another advertisement appeared. The little white girl, the bible verse, and the statement of intent remain. This advertisement had more information, but the impact of cross and the little white girl are still more powerful than any of the words on the page. They grab the attention of the reader before their eyes travel to the rest of the text. The title is reduced in font size and the capitalized words were switched: “BAY STREET PRESBYTERIAN Christian Day School.”<sup>91</sup> The spread has six key bullet points: “grades, Christian environment, top quality teachers, small classes, full curriculum, and comfortable facilities.”<sup>92</sup> Under each bullet point there is further explanation as to why each aspect of the school creates the ideal learning environment for the little white girl to their left. Grades will be added yearly. The whole child would be educated at PCS “mentally, socially, physically and spiritually.”<sup>93</sup> The classes would be restricted to twenty students for the ideal learning environment, and the facilities would also be state of the art. To the parent looking for the best place to educate their child during turbulent times of receding faith, this small school seemed to be a halcyon sanctuary.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> “Bay Street Presbyterian Christian Day School,” *Hattiesburg American*. Jul 23, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/276942414/>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



The founders wanted parents to see that Bay Street Presbyterian Day School was the only option for parents who wanted to keep Christian morals and principles in their children's education. A pithy yet powerful advertisement came out the next month on August 28<sup>th</sup> reinforcing this idea. The headline states in all capital letters: "DO YOU WANT THE BEST FOR YOUR CHILD?"<sup>94</sup> Guarded by twin crosses, the small box has only one paragraph beneath the headline. "Give your child a chance. Enroll him or her now in the Bay Street Presbyterian Christian Day School. 5 year old kindergarten, first and second grades."<sup>95</sup> This advertisement was urgent and packed with meaning in the midst of the conservative counterrevolution. It directly addressed the panic growing among white conservative Christians. In his book *Family Values*, Seth Rowland writes, "Where liberals saw social movements of the 1960s as catalysts of social justice, conservatives saw them as incubators of societal breakdown."<sup>96</sup> Bay Street Presbyterian Day School was the "chance" a parent could give to their child by removing them from the outside world's social breakdown.

The religious section of the *Hattiesburg American* gave information on all sorts of activities and news. In November of 1976, the paper reported on the upcoming participation of the Bay Street Presbyterian Day School in a worship service for the church's congregation. The children were set to "praise to God for Himself and his attributes" and then "thank God for specific blessings He gives His people."<sup>97</sup> The paper printed the names of the students set to speak in front of the crowd and gave their parent's names. On the same page of the paper, a

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<sup>94</sup> "Do You Want the Best For Your Child." *Hattiesburg American*. August 28, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277425928/>

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Rowland, 7.

<sup>97</sup> "Bay St. Presbyterian Day School: children to participate in worship service." *Hattiesburg American*. November 20, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277444782/>

report on race relations in the Southern Baptist denomination was printed. In a denomination that was openly started to oppose integration in the church, the national Southern Baptist church had changed its stance on race relations by 1976. However, the president of the denomination admitted that some congregations “regrettably follow a closed-door policy.”<sup>98</sup> The article emphasized that each church retains autonomy over their *individual* belief, and since integration, *independence* had become a “watchword” to the Southern Baptist believer.

Self-determination is the distinctive tenet, with each person free to interpret Scripture according to his own mind and conscience. Baptists insist on individual independence in beliefs. While this makes for many differences, the common bond is acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord and the New Testament as the guide to faith and practice.<sup>99</sup>

The language of independent church leadership was running throughout Christian communities at the time as the fear of large national denominations permeated communities. Southern churches wanted the freedom to set their own belief systems after they felt attacked by what they perceived as outsiders. There was a strong emphasis on personal belief and creating tight-knit communities that solidified in this time period. Explicit and widespread discrimination was no longer socially acceptable, denominations blamed individual churches for their continued racist practices, and they safeguarded the individual church communities right to believe in discrimination by holding no congregations accountable for their actions. Emphasizing “individual independence” created a structure in which community based discrimination could thrive and national denominations could wash their hands of racism.

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<sup>98</sup> “Southern Baptists Independent.” *Hattiesburg American*. November 20, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277444782/>

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

The idea to open Christian schools like PCS spread throughout the state. In fact, the idea to open PCS came from news surrounding First Presbyterian Church's day school in Jackson.<sup>100</sup> In a public letter written to her father printed in *Scott County Times*, a PCS mother spoke high praise of the school and emphasized its small, Christian charm. She wrote:

Scott is so happy and is learning so much. We are especially pleased with the Bible workbooks, which are taught along with the other subjects. Brent and I wave good-bye to them every morning from the carport, as Scott hops into the pickup truck with Bob.<sup>101</sup>

She goes on to say that Mr. Bob Jussley, the school founder, dropped off her son at the end of the school day in the church bus. This article makes no mention of race because it did not have to. Beneath the picture of the smiling white mother, a reader knew that this church school was run by a white church. The school founder who picks up and drops off children himself feels safe and insular, far from the unrest in the desegregating public schools of that time. The church school seemed a dream to white parents in a state of panic at the prospect of public school. This idea of the small church school was so appealing that the *Scott County Times* believed it important enough to be printed in their paper an hour's drive from the school.

In December of 1978, the school changed its name to Presbyterian Christian School and moved into the Woodland Presbyterian Church facility as their numbers grew and new grades were added each year. Grades four through six would be housed at First Presbyterian Church. During the 1980-81 year, the school boasted a total of 150 students and sought to expand further. A *Hattiesburg American* article stated the purpose of PCS is "to develop children spiritually and

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<sup>100</sup> Administrator 3. Interviewed by Rachel Winstead. Oral History. Presbyterian Christian School, 18 December 2019.

<sup>101</sup> "Carol-ettes." *Scott County Times*. September 15, 1976, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/261178492/>

academically so that they will be able to accept the responsibilities of adult life as committed Christians, doing all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31)”<sup>102</sup> Five years later, the rallying-cry of the school stayed true to its original purpose. The school published this detailed account of the tenets which upheld their Christ-centered education. The school steadfastly declared that the “entire program” would be shaped by “a genuine commitment to the Christian faith.”<sup>103</sup> The school was not merely Christian in name, but the faith was woven into the daily life of the school. The founders wanted a school entirely characterized by a “climate of Christian values.”<sup>104</sup>

Fast forward 25 years from the Bay Street basement to July of 2001. A full page paid advertisement was published in the *Hattiesburg American*. There were new building blueprints, sports photos, and graduation statistics. The now-established school was bursting at the seams with success as it had continued to thrive and grow. The school served 750 students across two campuses with a full K-12 education. The elementary school was still housed at Woodland Presbyterian Church with the addition of two classroom buildings. The high school sat in an open field at a new facility across town. Next year, a gym and cafeteria were scheduled for completion. Nonetheless, the school retains its mission:

Although growth has taken place and physical changes have occurred, PCS remains committed to the original goals of teaching sound academics in a Christian context from a Biblical perspective that openly acknowledges God’s place as Creator and Sustainer of all reality.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “Presbyterian Christian School continues its growth in 1980-1981” *Hattiesburg American*. April 30, 1981, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/278855904/>

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> “The Development of PCHS” *Hattiesburg American*. July 1 2001, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277267409/>

The school was becoming the “premiere private school option for Hattiesburg which it never intended to be.”<sup>106</sup> With impressive academic achievement, Christian values, and a quaint atmosphere, parents were continually drawn in.

### *Section 5: The Schools Meet*

In 1979, a published article claimed PCS and Hattiesburg Prep were considering a merger. The next day, the *Hattiesburg American* printed a retraction. Both administrations refuted the claim. Hattiesburg Prep officials claimed they “have made no definite plans to close the school but did say that it was possible that the school could be sold by the end of the school year...”<sup>107</sup> A Presbyterian Christian School official, Reverend Gerald Morgan, denied the merger more fervently, “‘There’s no way there can be a merger,’ he said, noting that the nature and identity of the Presbyterian Christian School would rule out a take-over of any institution that does not use Christian doctrine as the basis of education.”<sup>108</sup> PCS had plenty to lose if it were associated with the segregation academy.

At the time, PCS was only a kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade school and could not house the influx of students from a kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade institution. The paper noted that PCS officials “have been asked what their expansion plans are by Prep officials.”<sup>109</sup> Several parents of Prep students had attended an orientation meeting at PCS a few nights previously.

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<sup>106</sup> Administrator 3, Interview.

<sup>107</sup> “Hattiesburg Prep, Presbyterian Christian School officials deny merger considered” *Hattiesburg American*. December 16, 1979, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277697786/>

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

Morgan and other PCS officials told the *Hattiesburg American* they were displeased with the media reports which “implied the school is considered an alternative to public schools because of tax credits.”<sup>110</sup> Morgan asserted that all prospective students and teachers must go through an interview process before coming to the school because the school was only interested in families who were seeking a Christ-oriented education.

While PCS officials denied any association with the segregation academy, Hattiesburg Prep officials seemed interested in the small church school. Prep was in financial trouble as numbers were diminishing, and they were investigating other options.

Prep director Perkins said the talks between Presbyterian Christian School and Prep officials have been only a part of a study being made to determine what would happen to Prep’s students if the school is sold and also to determine how Hattiesburg can retain a ‘quality private academy...’ ‘There has been no effort at any point to consider mergers,’ he said, ‘because we are only trying to find out if there is an organization that has school experience that we could lend our support to...’<sup>111</sup>

Prep officials were clearly interested in retaining a “quality private academy” in Hattiesburg. The schools were not considering merging, but Prep was considering endorsing PCS as the new private school option in town to their current students. PCS was open to new parents visiting, but they were not interested in becoming the successor to Prep as the new segregation academy. Prep officials were not forthcoming with their study findings, but they strongly implied that endorsing PCS was an option for their students.

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<sup>110</sup> “Hattiesburg Prep, Presbyterian Christian School officials deny merger considered,” *Hattiesburg American*.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

... the study, which is nearing completion, has not enabled officials to ‘draw any definite conclusions’ as to the fate of Prep, but ‘if we found the right answers we would probably be willing to sell our property.’ ‘The study may indicate that maybe we should not stay in the school business... *Why keep it if you’ve found the answers elsewhere?*’<sup>112</sup>

Prep officials declared that they would be willing to leave the school business if they found answers elsewhere. In 1979, the answer was not the small Christian elementary school. Prep kept their doors open until 1986 when they would be forced to close due to low enrollment.

PCS needed to distance themselves from the segregation academy if they wanted to stay afloat. Private schools of all creeds had been undergoing civil rights investigations through mandate of the federal *Green* court cases. To pass an investigation, Mississippi private schools had to demonstrate a commitment to promoting racial diversity by adhering to a set of guidelines. The Citizen’s Council was in vehement opposition to these cases, claiming that they violated states’ rights and infringed upon individual freedom. In 1971, the Citizen’s Council founder, William J. Simmons, took to the *Clarion Ledger* to express his discontent.

Inevitably, we must feel some annoyance from the denial of a tax exemption which may create some financial difficulty in some financially marginal instances. However, the past fifteen years have accustomed us to bear with reasonable equanimity the discrimination that has been applied to us for being white.<sup>113</sup>

Simmons believed that the federal investigations were a form of reverse racism against whites. In *Green vs. Connelly*, Simmons asserted that private schools were not asking for tax-exempt status

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<sup>112</sup> “Hattiesburg Prep, Presbyterian Christian School officials deny merger considered,” *Hattiesburg American*, (emphasis added).

<sup>113</sup> “U.S. High Court: Simmons Says Decision Affirms Education Right” *Clarion Ledger*. December 21, 1971. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/179921329/>

to be created for them, but they were fighting for their right to retain tax-exemption status. Simmons claimed “all-black, all Chinese, all-Indian, all-Spanish”<sup>114</sup> private schools were given their rightful tax-exempt status, and all-white schools deserved to have their rightful 501(c) status. Since many private schools were thriving in the state, he believed the investigations were a sort of acknowledgement to the private schools’ success. The Council claimed that the federal government was trying to prevent white success in Mississippi.

In June of 1980, the IRS was ordered to investigate every private school in Mississippi founded around the time of desegregation, including church schools. In Hattiesburg, a federal court had ordered further desegregation in Forrest County public schools a year before PCS’s founding.<sup>115</sup> Since PCS was founded only five years after the first round of desegregation in the Hattiesburg school district, the IRS initiated an investigation into their affairs along with many other church schools around the state. This investigation infuriated white Mississippians as it went beyond school investigations. Since most church schools were extensions of churches, congregations were suddenly under threat of losing their tax-exempt status. The *Clarion Ledger* made it clear to their readers that the federal court was attacking Mississippi churches.

At issue is the tax-exempt status of churches. Because most churches with schools operate them as a ministry, not as a separate legal entity, the IRS can only deal with the schools by revoking the churches’ tax exemptions. Thus, all church contribution, including tithes and offerings, may be declared no longer tax-deductible.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> “U.S. High Court: Simmons Says Decision Affirms Education Right” *Clarion Ledger*.

<sup>115</sup> Crespino, 237.

<sup>116</sup> “IRS outlines requirements for private school exemption” 04 September 1971. *Clarion Ledger*. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/277020431/?terms=green%2Bconnally>



While *Green vs. Connally* before 1978 was focused upon the freedom to discriminate in private schools, this new case was threatening the heart of Mississippi – freedom of religion.

The church schools were supposed to be protected under the safety of the first amendment. Adding to white Mississippians' anger, this *Green vs. Miller* investigation was conducted only on church schools in Mississippi, but the case had national implications. Thirty-four congregations across the state hired lawyers who specialized in first amendment law.<sup>117</sup> One current PCS administrator has been at the school since 1977. He recalls this time and the anxieties of the administration.

I know the reason because there were a lot of schools that were just overtly started for segregationist reasons. And we were saying we weren't. And I think the powers that be - the federal government or whatever were saying "yeah, sure." And they sort of picked some schools and we happened to be the Mississippi school they picked to prove it.

"Prove that you're not. Prove that you are what you say you are." Well, how do you prove it? I mean, we were totally open door, but we didn't have... I don't know that we even had any minorities here at that time.<sup>118</sup>

For PCS, the tax-exemption status was a testament to their racially inclusive, open-door policy. They were offended that their church was being implicated along with segregation academies. *Green vs. Miller* would affect not only their school's tax exempt status, but it would put their church's status in danger as well. The church school had been receiving donations through the church since its inception. According to this administrator, if someone wanted to donate to the school, they placed a sticky note on their check and left it in the offering plate on Sunday

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<sup>117</sup> Crespino, 257.

<sup>118</sup> Administrator 3, Interview.

morning. The donation would be tax-exempt since it was given to the church. The school was viewed as a ministry of Bay Street and Woodland Presbyterian churches, and therefore, members assumed it was protected under the first amendment's guarantee of freedom of religion.

We were part of a national case that eventually sort of paved the way for Christian schools to exist and not be harassed as segregation academies, because I think a lot of what was happening in those days was that some schools were perhaps coming out of the woodwork calling themselves Christian schools just to hide behind the church.<sup>119</sup>

This Mississippi investigation would pave the way for church schools across the nation to be distinguished from segregation academies. The Mississippi church schools fought the courts and won. Civil rights activists were outraged by the federal government's refusal to take action against church schools because they believed they were merely made-over academies protected by the church. PCS never lost its tax-exempt status, and this court case is viewed as a turning point in the battle for Christ in a world of receding faith among Christian school communities.

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<sup>119</sup> Administrator 3, Interview.

### Part 3: Survive and Divide

In 1955, C. Van Woodward published a book entitled *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. Woodward's book was released into one of the most turbulent times of American racial history. Jim Crow legally ended in the year prior to the publication. Woodward's book studies the history of Jim Crow as it informs his present:

The twilight zone that lives between living memory and written history is one of the favorite places of mythology. This particular twilight zone has been especially prolific in the breeding of legend. This process has been aided by the old prejudices, the deeply stirred emotions, and the sectional animosities that always distort history in any zone.<sup>120</sup>

Woodward saw the long threads of Jim Crow which were informing the time of white defiance after *Brown*. He writes into the present, but understands that "it is rather inevitable that I shall make mistakes." He goes on to say "I shall expect and hope to be corrected." Through Woodward's posture, I will attempt to write into the mythology of our own time.

As I have written in previous sections, the history of PCS is far more complicated than the popular founding narrative. Stories of our past inform the way we see ourselves in the present. Telling only part of the founding story creates an incomplete narrative which reinforces the school's image of white innocence. The administrators who I interviewed for this project have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of Christian education. Their commitment to young people is evident. In analyzing these interviews, I found similar themes. No person that I interviewed claims to be racist. In fact, they all condemned racism and asserted that PCS "does

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<sup>120</sup> Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. New and rev. ed. Vol. GB6. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1957, 8.

not see color.” Ta Nehisi Coates describes racism as, “Racism is not merely a simplistic hatred. It is, more often, broad sympathy toward some and broader skepticism toward others.”<sup>121</sup> This skepticism tends to result in both intentional and unintentional discrimination. Through this section, I hope to highlight current narratives which shape beliefs of white communities, and I hope to raise more questions. I do so knowing that I am an insider to this culture, and this perspective brings along its own perils. This is a small project of only four oral histories focused on one member MAIS school. I ask for more research to follow, and as this is an early project, I welcome challenge and correction.

Stephanie Rolph concludes *Resisting Equality* by asserting that the work of white supremacist organizations was not lost to history. Their “patient cultivation” of white supremacy in American society has continued to live on by finding “new ways to survive and divide.”<sup>122</sup> In a 1979 interview, Citizens’ Council founder Robert Patterson denied that the civil rights movement truly changed the beliefs of white Southerners. In his opinion, the actions of white Northern liberals angered the South and made liberalism the new enemy of Southerners. By this time, the Council had fallen from its powerful political position. The interviewer asked Patterson if he believed that Southern whites left the Council because they accepted the new racial climate. He responded:

I don’t believe that. If they do [accept the new racial order], why do they all live in the suburbs, and why do they move out of the neighborhood when Negroes move in? And why do they send their children to private school? And why do they manipulate and

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<sup>121</sup> Coates, Ta Nehisi. “Fear of a Black President.” *The Atlantic*, September 2012. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>.

<sup>122</sup> Rolph, Stephanie R. *Resisting Equality: the Citizens Council, 1954-1989*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 2018. Kindle Edition, 3486.

move to go out to an area that doesn't have many Negroes in it so they can send their child to a virtually all-white school? . . . They haven't accepted integration. They've run from it.<sup>123</sup>

Despite the Council's demise, members saw many of their goals achieved in the post-civil rights era. Although Council members failed to reverse the *Brown* decision, Mississippi retained almost all-white school options. When open defiance to court ordered desegregation failed, white families simply left. Today, the practice continues as parents move further into the suburbs to send their children to whiter schools, and independent schools offer overwhelmingly white classrooms.

Whiter schools tend to have access to more wealth and concentrated resources because of the long history of racial economic exploitation in America. Beginning with a quote from the book of Deuteronomy, Ta Nehisi Coates tracks the economic exploitation of Black Americans' labor in his article, "The Case for Reparations." He explains:

With segregation, with the isolation of the injured and the robbed, comes the concentration of disadvantage. An unsegregated America might see poverty, and all its effects, spread across the country with no particular bias toward skin color. Instead, the concentration of poverty has been paired with a concentration of melanin. The resulting conflagration has been devastating.<sup>124</sup>

Through multiple generations, Coates shows how white supremacist structures have stolen and unfairly profited from the labor of Black Americans. Not only has the white population profited

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<sup>123</sup> Rolphe, 3557.

<sup>124</sup> Coates, Ta Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic*, June 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

from Black Americans' labor, but white minds tend to consciously erase this fact. Denying white supremacist structures, whites create cultural narratives that disrespect Black Americans and deny the influence of this long history of economic exploitation. These narratives are used to justify persistent racial segregation and the concentration of Black and Brown lives facing poverty in America.

Private schools account for 25% of all elementary and secondary schools in the United States. These schools graduate 10% of the nation's children and hire 13% of the nation's teachers.<sup>125</sup> In 2017, Mississippi had 545,000 school age children with 44,000 being educated in private schools.<sup>126</sup> On the MAIS "history of the association" website tab, there is no mention of the segregationist beginnings of the MAIS. The tab gives a detailed account of MAIS legal history and names each man who was involved in the beginning of the school association. Bill Simmons, the most prominent founder of the Citizens' Council, opened the first meeting and became the first secretary of the organization. His name appears several times throughout the piece, yet there is no mention of his extensive Council work. A long list of cultural events from the year 1968 is listed. According to the MAIS, the peak event of 1968 was the following:

And, it was the year the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals invalidated a Mississippi law that provided tuition assistance for private schools. The law required that (1) the State have no involvement in the recipient school, (2) involvement in a recipient private school by a

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<sup>125</sup> "Private School Survey 2017-18 School Year." National Center For Educational Statistics. The United States Department of Education. Accessed January 20, 2020. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/pdf/questionnaire2017-18.pdf>.

<sup>126</sup> Kitterage, Brett. "Exploring Mississippi's Private Education Sector." Empower Mississippi, August 2017. <https://empowerms.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mississippi-Private-School-Survey.pdf>.

State official would be a criminal offense, and (3) the preponderance of the recipient school's funding could not come from State tuition assistance.<sup>127</sup>

This decision of the court took away the ability of the state to issue tuition vouchers to white students who could not afford the private schools. The list of schools on the MAIS charter are segregation academies. The men who founded the MAIS are represented as brave men who were unafraid to face the injustice of the federal courts. The MAIS history page does not address racial strife or discrimination in their history. They cite their founding as a stand against unfair federal government regulation. There is no mention of the Citizens' Council even though the Council School Foundation is listed among the charter members. Reinforcing their narrative of states' rights, they tell a fraction of a story to an audience who has not been taught to understand the real history. The history venerates conservative Mississippi standing up to unjust national government.

In designing interview questions, I expected to get short answers when I asked about the racial history and statistics of independent schools. I found the opposite to be true. Officials were eager to talk about the subject. I was not the first to bring up the topic in any interview. The MAIS, formerly the Mississippi Private School Association, is well aware of its history. Shane Blanton, the director of the MAIS, finished a dissertation at the University of Mississippi in 2017. In his work, he did a study on administrators' beliefs about the effectiveness of the MAIS schools. He writes about the history of racial segregation in the MAIS, and its impact on the member schools today. He argues "The fact that students are not aware of the historical past of

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<sup>127</sup>"Midsouth Association of Independent Schools." MAIS Website. Accessed March 15, 2020. <https://newsite.msais.org/index2.html>.

private schools in the state is a testament to the Association and academies across the state to be more inclusive and focus solely on the education of students rather than politics.”<sup>128</sup> If member schools follow the lead of the MAIS, the students are not aware of the history because they are not taught it. By framing racial issues as a matter of history, interviewed MAIS administrators embrace the idea of colorblindness. As *Administrator 1* stated in an interview, his philosophy on the racial composition of his school was passed down from a former PCS administrator and summed up in one phrase, “I don’t know. We are just here for the kids.” Both PCS and the MAIS officials claimed they do not take any sort of demographic statistics of their students or faculty.

During the 2017-18 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education conducted a study on private school enrollment across the country. Asking administrators to send in statistics, they received widespread participation. Among most private schools across the state, the statistics are disproportionately white. The Presbyterian Christian School student body was reported to be over 95% white.<sup>129</sup> Less than 5% of students identified as Asian, Black, or Hispanic. According to the United States Census Bureau in 2019, the city of Hattiesburg was estimated to be 52.5% Black, 40.9% white, 3% Latino, and 1.2% Asian.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Blanton, Anthony Shane, "Administrators' Beliefs of the Organizational Effectiveness of the Mississippi Association of Independent Schools" (2017). Dissertations. 1410.

<https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/1410>

<sup>129</sup> “Private School Universe Survey.” National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the U.S. Department of Education. Accessed January 4, 2020.

[https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/privateschoolsearch/school\\_detail.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/privateschoolsearch/school_detail.asp)

<sup>130</sup> “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Hattiesburg City, Mississippi.” Census Bureau QuickFacts. United States Census Bureau. Accessed March 25, 2020.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/hattiesburgcitymississippi>.



In American schools, racism no longer appears as the scene depicted in Norman Rockwell's painting of Ruby Bridges. White mobs do not rally outside of newly integrated schools, and children of color are not escorted by officers into the first grade. However, these images still have power over our current racial landscape and contribute to the ways in which white people conceptualize racism and make living mythology. Many white Americans condemn these mobs of the civil rights struggle while refusing to recognize persistent structural racism in America. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes this issue in his book *Racism Without Racists*, "Today 'new racism' practices have emerged that are more sophisticated and subtle than those typical of the Jim Crow era. Yet, as I will argue, these practices are as effective as the old ones in maintaining the racial status quo."<sup>131</sup>

The 1950s, 60s, and 70s were undoubtedly marked by changes in the racial status quo of the United States. Segregation academies were legally required to open their doors to all races. Employers were not allowed to legally discriminate on the basis of race. However, Jim Crow did not end with the passing of the Civil Rights Act. When white Americans realized that the old avenues of white supremacy were no longer an option, new roads were constructed to the destination. Bonilla-Silva described the post-civil rights era to be in a state of "colorblind racism." After the civil rights struggle, denying racism while actively supporting policy to suppress Black and Brown Americans became the new strategy. Bonilla-Silva writes:

Compared to Jim Crow racism, the ideology of colorblindness seems like "racism lite."

Instead of relying on name calling (n-words, spics, chinks), color-blind racism otherizes softly ("these people are human, too"); instead of proclaiming that God placed minorities

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<sup>131</sup> Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2018, Kindle Edition, 591.

in the world in a servile position, it suggests they are behind because they do not work hard enough...<sup>132</sup>

Rather than use the religious language of the Council, a barrier is created to separate whiteness through “otherizing.” Robert Patterson’s statement follows this line of logic, and he praised the changing nature of racism. White Americans have not had a total change of heart but a change of practice. To understand the American racial climate, one must understand colorblind racism as a sociological concept.

Administrators claiming not to see the race of their students exacerbates the problem. Schools should give all of their students the same respect, but claiming not to see the racial makeup of a school is a tool used to deny the need for structural change. By refusing to see obviously disproportionate racial statistics, no one must reckon with the fact that Robert Patterson’s assertion from 1979 is still alarmingly relevant in 2020. By claiming to be blind, the racial status quo is asserted, and schools can declare that they have no more work to do. Sociologists Victor Ray and Louise Seamster explain how scholarship must match the changing nature of racism. “Rather than taking formal institutional statements about commitment to equality at face value, scholarly attention should be placed on revealing the changing mechanisms of exclusion.”<sup>133</sup> To understand racism in America today, we must understand the power of narrative and the nature of humans to adapt.

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<sup>132</sup> Bonilla-Silva, 3.

<sup>133</sup> Ray, Victor and Louise Seamster. "Rethinking Racial Progress: A Response to Wimmer." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 8 (2016): 1361-1369.

In an interview, *Administrator 1* asserted multiple times that the racial climate of schools has nothing to do with racism. While making his assertions that the problem is not about race, he defended his points with racial images.

I think that [white flight] became a coined word because it was true. 99% of private schools in the 70s were all white. And people left basically because they didn't want to go to school with minorities or they didn't want to go to the area of town that the minorities were in. And now, it's just the same thing. It's just no skin color to it. Its that people don't want to go there [Hattiesburg High] because they feel like they may be better than that.

So they moved to Lamar county so they can go to Oak Grove or Sumrall.<sup>134</sup>

*Administrator 1* did not deny that white flight existed. He agreed that private schools were all white in the 1970s. White families left because they did not want to integrate schools. He believes the “same thing” is happening today, but he denied race having anything to do with racial segregation in schools. *Administrator 1* believes schools are racially segregated because of “economic flight.” People don’t want to go to Hattiesburg High, the city high school, because they feel they are “better than that.” Schools in Lamar county are known to have whiter populations and more funding. I asked a clarifying question, “So you believe it is about economics and not skin color?”

If you go to Hattiesburg High, and there's, well, I look at their look at their composites in the paper they may have two or three white kids in a class of 300 or 400, or however

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<sup>134</sup> Administrator 1. Interview by Rachel Winstead. Interview. Presbyterian Christian School, December 3.

many they may have. It's just the people even there aren't necessarily white people that are leaving. People that have the money to get out, to go to a better area for their kids.<sup>135</sup>

By referring to the pictures of graduates in the paper, he pointed out that there are only “two or three white kids.” Using white images as a measuring factor of school success, he highlighted this low number is a reason for “people that have money to get out.” Claiming that race is not a factor, he cited images of children of color in the paper as the reason people search for “a better area for their kids.” He claimed families of every ethnicity are leaving Hattiesburg public schools to search for better educational opportunities for their children. His logic states that white populations leave not because they are white, but because they are wealthy.

Resources are concentrated in majority-white schools because of generations of economic exploitation by whites. When white flight happens, the wealth tends to follow the white population. Presbyterian Christian School is a certified 501(C)-3 nonprofit which turns over 7 million dollars a year.<sup>136</sup> The school has recently equipped every student with a MacBook or an iPad to take home. Textbooks were transitioned to eBooks, and teachers are able to connect students to online learning platforms. Upon *Administrator 1's* request, the PTA donated a state of the art computer lab. Raising the funds in a matter of days, the \$25,000 lab was funded after a few phone calls.<sup>137</sup> Administrators are thankful to God and patrons for blessing PCS with its many resources.

*Administrator 2* said that administration is tasked to provide parents with a reason to spend \$8,000 a year on tuition. To do this, “You know, you need to be able to sell the product

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<sup>135</sup> Administrator 1, Interview.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

that they're paying for.” The school must provide the education and amenities which attract parents. When the school needs something, the money and connections are there to acquire it.

*Administrator 3* noted that the scrutiny of these “doctors, lawyers and Indian chiefs” pushes PCS to achieve higher educational standards in comparison to the city’s public school system.<sup>138</sup>

*Administrator 1* stated:

So, when you're talking about a school and we aren't all doctors and lawyers, don't get me wrong. But most of the people here are professional people. Their expectations are high, which puts a little more burden on us to make sure that our standards are high... *But you understand what I'm talking about.* There's, there's a difference in what your goals are.

And I think that in the Delta, that’s why you see the white population dwindling.<sup>139</sup>

By having the scrutiny of “professional” parents, the school is expected to achieve academically.

To *Administrator 1*, there is no mistake as to what the ethnicity of the average “professional” parent looks like. Because the Delta is losing its “professional people,” the white population is dwindling. *Administrator 2* stated:

...so we put the focus more on Christian principle, Christian education, than we do on any kind of a skin color. Yeah, we're majority white. And, you know, that does come with labels being a, you know, elite white, you know, rich kid school.<sup>140</sup>

Christian education is the mission statement of PCS, and they do emphasize Christian education.

As previous sections discuss, the history of church school education has been intertwined with

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<sup>138</sup> Administrator 3. Interviewed by Rachel Winstead. Interview. Presbyterian Christian School, December 18.

<sup>139</sup> Administrator 1, Interview (emphasis added).

<sup>140</sup> Administrator 2. Interviewed by Rachel Winstead. Interview. Presbyterian Christian School, December 4.

perceptions of white innocence from its inception. Administrator 2 quoted a popular saying of Administrator 3, “The school never intended to be the private school option of Hattiesburg.”<sup>141</sup>

*Administrator 1* views the skewed racial climate of PCS as an indicator of greater neighborhood segregation. Claiming the school is less than 25% students of color, he believes the problem lies with communities of color being unaccepting towards PCS. He states:

Independent schools are not going to integrate until communities, until subdivisions integrate. The reason being is I've seen so many students, minority students in particular, that will come to an independent school and then go back into a neighborhood and be ostracized because they're going to that school. So they don't end up staying there. So, until the communities mix, it's going to be hard to mix schools.<sup>142</sup>

In *Administrator 1's* view, the school is not at fault for its racial makeup. He believes segregated subdivisions must integrate before change can come to independent schools. The need for change is placed outside of the school.

While PCS does not have dominion over who enrolls in their school, they have control over who they hire. The student body is not the only racially skewed population at Presbyterian Christian School. In an interview, *Administrator 1* discussed hiring the school's first full-time Black faculty member. The administrator could not immediately recall which year, but the teacher was hired after the 2015-2016 school year. When *Administrator 1* made the hire, he told his new employee, “You've got to be a success.”<sup>143</sup> The following year, the school hired another Black faculty member. Both teachers were hired for athletic positions. According to the

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<sup>141</sup> Administrator 2, Interview.

<sup>142</sup> Administrator 1, Interview.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

administration's account, a Black teacher has still never been hired to teach full-time in a classroom at PCS.

As long as independent schools have open-door policies, they are protected under the law to hire as they see fit. The MAIS accreditation has a "pure degree" clause which allows for uncertified teachers to instruct their specialized subject. Teachers do not have to go through rigorous classroom training to teach. Therefore, PCS has a much larger pool of potential teachers. According to *Administrators 1, 2, and 3*, private schools have extreme flexibility in hiring. Ray and Seamster, who study racial theory and discrimination in hiring practices, write "It is not necessary to post a sign claiming no blacks need apply. It is effective, and legal, to simply not hire them."<sup>144</sup> PCS has never hired a Black applicant to teach an academic subject in its 44-year existence.

The open-door policy of Presbyterian Christian School does not tell the full story. To understand discrimination in hiring, we must look to the changing mechanisms of exclusion. Racial discrimination may not appear in the PCS hiring process through explicit statements. The written application has no discriminatory clause.<sup>145</sup> The largest section on the application is the "Christian World and Life View" section. The applicant is given an outline of PCS belief and must commit to Biblical teaching standards. Administration has the largest say in hiring choices, and they cite the Lord's will as the main guide in their hiring process. *Administrator 2* stated, "We believe God provides who he wants to work here."<sup>146</sup> *Administrator 1* told stories of

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<sup>144</sup> Ray and Seamster, "Rethinking Racial Progress."

<sup>145</sup> "Application for Teaching Position." Presbyterian Christian School. Accessed March 12, 2020. [https://www.pcsk12.org/sites/default/files/District/EMPLOYMENT\\_APPLICATION\\_FOR\\_INSTRUCTIONAL\\_POSITION.pdf](https://www.pcsk12.org/sites/default/files/District/EMPLOYMENT_APPLICATION_FOR_INSTRUCTIONAL_POSITION.pdf).

<sup>146</sup> Administrator 2, Interview.

administration's prayer meetings before making hiring decisions. He told of two separate accounts when a perfect applicant walked into the office during a prayer.<sup>147</sup> The administration believes that God will lead them to his choice.

I asked three PCS administrators about the hiring process at PCS. The process is an insular one. *Administrator 1* says that he keeps a list of names to the side for when he needs to fill a position. *Administrator 3* says that many times the positions are filled by teachers with whom the board and administration are already familiar. When *Administrator 1* interviews applicants, the first thing he asks is "tell me a bit about yourself and somewhere work in a five-minute testimony."<sup>148</sup> The administration asserts that the first qualification a teacher must have is a strong relationship with Jesus. Secondly, they must have the degree qualification. Many of the teachers are parents of PCS students.

PCS administrators stated that they do not believe there is any discrimination in their hiring process. All interviewees agreed that hiring teachers is one of the best parts about being a part of the independent school system. *Administrator 2* believes hiring in the public school system is more difficult because of the "red tape" surrounding hiring decisions.<sup>149</sup> Independent schools in Mississippi are held to no such scrutiny. An MAIS administrator describes the school association as an administrative body to coordinate sports and accreditation.<sup>150</sup> The organization does not keep up with the day to day activities or hiring processes of their member schools. The independent schools agree that this sports and accrediting role should be the function of the

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<sup>147</sup> Administrator 1, Interview.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Administrator 2, Interview.

<sup>150</sup> MAIS Executive Official. Interviewed by Rachel Winstead. Oral History. MAIS Main Office, December 13.



MAIS, as private schools want the maximum amount of freedom. If an applicant is not hired in a member school, there does not have to be an explanation as to why. If a school believes that teacher is not a good fit, the school can let the teacher go without stating a reason.<sup>151</sup>

The school wants their teachers to teach every subject from a perspective of the “a biblical worldview.”<sup>152</sup> Science is taught from a creationist perspective, and evolution is taught as Biblically incompatible. If science books are secular, the curriculum is amended to discuss why creationism is the truth. *Administrator 1* describes:

For example, in history, we want to make sure that students understand that in history, a biblical world view of history is that there was a beginning, there will be an end, and the middle is playing out God's plan. So, we would teach to that particular end. When you're teaching math, you try your best to use all the natural illustrations that you can use with your geometry in particular... And we just, you know, we make sure that we look at those things as we do English, as we look at a particular essay or a particular Canterbury Tales or something like that. We talk about what, you know, what is the theological reasoning behind this or how does this how does this fit or contradict with the types of religious or theological beliefs that we have?<sup>153</sup>

PCS uses mostly Christian textbook companies such as Abeka and Bob Jones University. The MAIS official stated that these were the two most popular textbook companies among church schools.<sup>154</sup> In May of 1983, a supreme court decision ruled against Bob Jones University's policy

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<sup>151</sup> Administrator 2, Interview.

<sup>152</sup> “Mission Statement” Presbyterian Christian School. Accessed April 4, 2020. <https://www.pcsk12.org/about/mission-and-history>

<sup>153</sup> Administrator 1, Interview.

<sup>154</sup> MAIS Executive Official, Interview.

against interracial dating and marriage. After the IRS revoked their tax exemption status for racial discrimination, Bob Jones took the decision to the supreme court as they believed their first amendment rights were being infringed upon. The University did not drop its ban on interracial dating until 2000 on CNN's Larry King Live. In 2008, Bob Jones University issued an apology for their racist past.<sup>155</sup>

The longstanding mistrust of government has been a part of the MAIS from its inception. Segregation academies began in rebellion of court ordered desegregation. Church schools opposed the removal of the Bible from public school education. The IRS investigations made private schools across Mississippi resentful of government oversight. One PCS administrator formerly worked for the MAIS and headed the MAIS accreditation process in 1985.

The Education Reform Act of 1982, which was passed by Governor Winter, pushed by Governor Winter, went into effect in '85 and it tied school accreditation and teacher certification together. Meaning that you couldn't renew your state certificate unless you taught in a state accredited school. Most of the independent schools in the early 70s and I say the most of the vast majority dropped state accreditation because they required the state to approve your budget. Private schools are not going to let the state approve their budget.<sup>156</sup>

Following this statement, I asked him, "Why is that?" He replied "Well because it's not their business..."<sup>157</sup> Independent schools are wary of state and federal oversight. In the eyes of this

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<sup>155</sup> "Bob Jones University regains nonprofit status 17 years after it dropped discriminatory policy" *Greenville News*. 16 February 2017. Accessed 3 April 2020. <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/education/2017/02/16/bju-regains-nonprofit-status-17-years-after-dropped-discriminatory-policy/98009170/>

<sup>156</sup> Administrator 1, Interview.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

administrator, the reform act which “may have been meant to destroy private schools” turned out to be a great thing for independent schools. This law which “the state intended for evil, but God intended for good” united private schools under stronger bonds within the MAIS.<sup>158</sup> Today, accreditation of independent schools is overseen by the MAIS on a rolling five-year basis.<sup>159</sup> Independent schools in Mississippi pride themselves on their ability to educate freely under the rights accorded to them by law.

### *Conclusion*

The legacy of the church school is deeply tied to the theology of its roots. PCS professes that their beliefs have not changed since the founding. Today, the school still echoes the beliefs and language of its earliest advertisements. The social media accounts feature posts telling the founding narrative. In 2020, Reverend W.J. Stanway’s son, Bill Stanway, is the head of the board of directors at PCS.<sup>160</sup> The school administration is adamant in their commitment to the founding story as free from racial struggle. Students are taught to revere the men who went to Illinois to defend segregation in their churches and deny the white supremacist structures fought by Black freedom workers. Reverend John Cameron went to Illinois to tell the truth about the voting discrimination and violence, and the Hattiesburg Presbyterians, led by W.J. Stanway, deliberately silenced him in front of the assembly. By not allowing him to speak, they retained moral superiority and white innocence in front of the crowd. Does the school revere this part of

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> MAIS Executive Official, Interview.

<sup>160</sup> “Board of Directors.” Presbyterian Christian School. Accessed March 30, 2020. <https://www.pcsk12.org/about/board-directors>

its founding? The school may or may not intentionally discriminate, but it does nothing to reckon with the past.

We return to mythologies to make sense of the hazy twilight zone. As the living memory of the civil rights struggle fades into history, the memory is spun into legend. Pieces of the story are sewn together to fabricate stories of white innocence. Children are not taught the real story. These repeated mythologies attempt to justify the reality of an almost-all white school. Though the stories have shifted, the percentages remain the same. Reverend Gillespie and other Council members preached that God wanted his people to be segregated. Today's preaching is much subtler; it "otherizes softly." These mythologies are full of power. As they are passed along, they become each new generation's guide to interpret reality. They safeguard white supremacist structures.

In the fourth grade, my favorite place to go at the old school was *Administrator 3's* office. Twice a week I went to spelling bee practice with him. I studied for weeks to be the spelling bee champion in my grade because I knew I would get to spend time out of class and in his office. As the youngest student who got to participate, I proudly strutted to the office in my plaid skirt and knee-high socks. As I crossed through the breezeway, the sanctuary rose to my right on a hill and the trailers sank to my left beside the playground. When I reached the small office, I sat cross-legged on the gray carpet looking up at *Administrator 3* behind his desk. He called out words to us, and we repeated their spelling.

Ten years later, I walked onto the new PCS elementary campus. The long gray-blue hallways of the school looked nothing like the church campus where I attended. Everything seems to be made of order and straight lines. As I wait for *Administrator 3*, I look up at the

mission statement above the front desk. Little blonde girls in plaid skirts filter in and out of the office as I wait. The secretary tells me he is ready to see me. He greets me with a large smile. This office is brighter than the small room at the old church. This time, I do not sit on the carpeted floor; he offers me a leather chair. In the afternoon sunlight, he tells me the story again. This time, I listen with a different perspective.

A few weeks before our interview, the second grade at PCS took a field trip to Bay Street Presbyterian Church. As the students sat in the sanctuary below the cross and the organ pipes, *Administrator 3* told them the founding story of PCS. Nestled between the pews, living memory, and written history, they learned to revere the church school mythology. The legend of the church school grows more powerful in our current twilight zone. After they heard the story, the children were brought to the basement below the sanctuary to remember where it all began.

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