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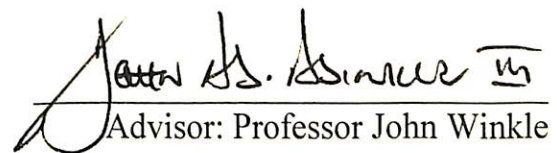
AN EDUCATIONAL DIVIDE:
THE EFFECTS OF THE PRIVATE SCHOOL MOVEMENT ON MISSISSIPPI
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by
Milton Oliver Fletcher

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

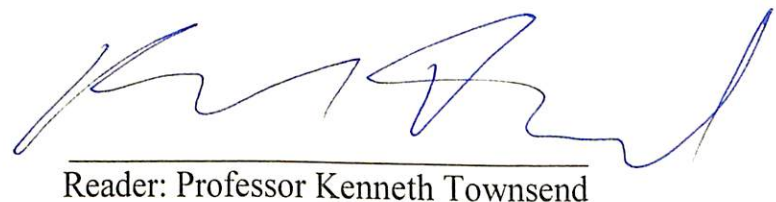
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ABSTRACT:
AN EDUCATIONAL DIVIDE: THE EFFECTS OF THE PRIVATE SCHOOL
MOVEMENT ON MISSISSIPPI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In 1954, the Supreme Court decided that a young girl named Linda Brown could attend her neighborhood school, despite the color of her skin. This facially simple ruling sent shock waves throughout the entire nation, but none were as strong as in Mississippi. Over the next twenty-five years, integration with “all deliberate speed” became more and more of a reality as private, segregated schools began to arise all over the state.

This thesis will examine the actual effect that the private school revolution had not only on public education but also on education in general within Mississippi. The effect will be examined through many lenses, including student attendance, community support, and racial demographics. Educational statistics of towns with similar characteristics (population, racial proportions, and income levels) but different responses to integration will be examined.

Many different mediums of study have been used in this endeavor, including government documents (encompassing Sovereignty Commission files), interviews, educational statistics, and other educational studies. The goal of the research is to examine a dark time in Mississippi’s history and determine the best way to move forward. The fourth chapter will study possible solutions to the failing Mississippi public educational system and the still-lingering effects of a segregation no longer decried by law but instead by distinctions of “public” and “private.”

Thesis Outline

I. Intro

II. History

- A. Pre-*Brown* Segregation
- B. Post-*Brown* Segregation
 - 1. Supreme Court cases
 - 2. Creative Segregation
- C. The Private School Boom

III. Questions Regarding Educational Gaps/Problems

- A. Brief Overview of Education in Mississippi
- B. Correlations Drawn from Rise of Private Schools and Downfall of Public Schools
 - 1. Comparison of Similar Rural Towns
 - a. Aberdeen
 - b. Kosciusko
 - 2. Comparison of Similar Urban Towns
 - a. Tupelo
 - b. Columbus
 - 3. Comparison of Public schools Before and After Private School Surge
 - a. Jackson
 - b. Mississippi, Collectively

IV. Solutions

- A. Vouchers
 - 1. School Choice
 - a. Positive Aspects
 - b. Negative Aspects
 - 2. Chilean Voucher Program
 - 3. Vouchers in Mississippi
- B. No Child Left Behind and School Accountability

V. Conclusions

Chapter One

Introduction

Private schools have been a part of American life ever since the first European settlers appeared. Even after the first state sponsored “public” schools were chartered, private schools remained a more appealing option for many parents. Private schools received a great boost in June of 1925 when the Supreme Court ruled, in the monumental case of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* 268 U.S. 510 (1925),ⁱ that the option to attend a private school was a constitutionally protected right. Private schools existed for many reasons, some of which were religious, academic, and cultural, but private schools in Mississippi created in the era enclosed by two Supreme Court cases, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (347 U.S. 483) of 1954 and *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* (396 U.S. 1218) of 1969, are unique. The overwhelming majority of private schools that arose in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, especially the late 1960s and early 1970s, did so in response to integration.

After the Supreme Court decided that the doctrine of “separate but equal” was unconstitutional in 1954, private segregated academies slowly came into existence in the state of Mississippi, especially in large metropolitan areas such as Jackson. The huge surge did not appear till the late 1960s and early 1970s, in part because (contrary to the Supreme Court’s ruling) integration was neither “speedy” nor “deliberate”. Charles C. Bolton noted that “[b]etween 1966 and 1970 the number of private schools in the state rose from 121 to 236, and the number of students attending these schools tripled; much of this growth occurred in black-majority districts”ⁱⁱ.

In the period between September 1969 and February 1970, public schools in Jackson lost sixteen percent of their white student populationⁱⁱⁱ. In 1970, enrollment dropped by 4,258 in Jackson's public elementary schools^{iv}. The drop in enrollment was not as problematic as the loss of the community's more influential and wealthy parents to the private school system. After integration became unavoidable, many white parents not only moved their children to private schools, but also used their influences to weaken the schools. It was not uncommon for "whites to control many of the administrative positions and hold a majority on the school board. In many cases this led to a gradual decline in the financial health of the district as white administrators reduced the tax base necessary to support the district"^v.

The goal of this study is several-fold. The first is to examine a bleak period of Mississippi history, that of segregation and the fight to preserve it through private school systems. The second is to examine the modern landscape of education in Mississippi, a state that is consistently ranked last or nearly last in national educational rankings. This thesis will analyze what actual differences exist between public and private schools, other than the obvious segregation of races. Another goal of the this study is to determine what affect the private school movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s had on Mississippi's public education system. The answers to these questions are important since they can help determine why education in Mississippi is in such a poor condition today. This analysis will show a clear picture of what Mississippi's education system needs to improve and how it needs to accomplish these improvements.

The heart of the study will draw correlations between the creation of private schools and the current problems in public education. In order to study this hypothesis,

towns will be compared that are similar (with regards to racial composition, income levels, and size) but took different paths during the period of integration. The overall school systems (both public and private) will be analyzed in towns in which a successful^{vi} private segregated academy formed and towns in which they did not. Methods of analysis of schools systems are a very controversial issue and deserve a scholarly study solely on competing methods, but, for this purpose, common methods such as graduation rates, student performance, and funding will be used. Another type of comparison was mentioned earlier with regards to Jackson, but simply analyzing the education system in a single town before and after the private school movement is actually very difficult because of the added variable of time. It is much harder to collect data on school performance (since the maintenance of statistics based on quality of education are somewhat recent), so many times other factors, such as student enrollment or racial composition, will be analyzed.

A study on education would be incomplete in simply comparing and casting blame on past generations, so a portion of the study will deal with possible solutions to the failing and sometimes segregated educational system in Mississippi. Two programs in particular will be analyzed: school vouchers and the recent No Child Left Behind Act.

Today, many parents with school-aged children living in Mississippi are forced to choose between sending their children to a failing public school or an expensive (and usually segregated) private school. While not all private schools are better than public schools, a private school certainly affects the school district in which it is located and from which it draws students. This paper hopes to analyze the history, differences, and

relationships between the two types of schools and to provide hope for an improved educational system.

The following chapter will address the history of Mississippi's school system. It will give an overview of the separate and unequal conditions of the (state sponsored) segregated schools both before and after the *Brown* case. It will then outline the response that many had to integration in the 1960s and 1970s, the creation of private, segregated academies. In Chapter three, the thesis will present the analysis of the effect of private schools on overall education. The education systems of similar towns and cities will be compared with the only variable being a nearby, successful private school. The fourth chapter will address problems and solutions in the current educational landscape. The fifth chapter will draw conclusions from all of the preceding chapters and present a summary of how education in Mississippi became what it is today and ways for it to improve.

Chapter Two:

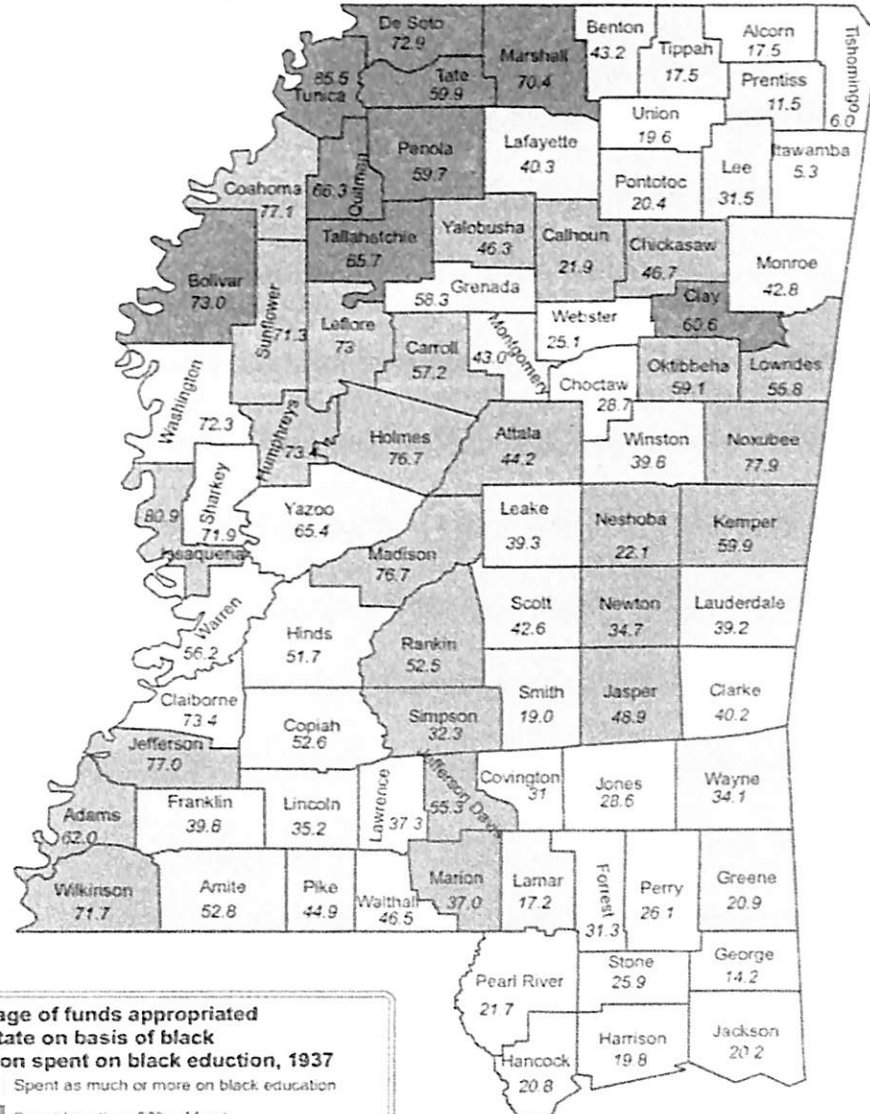
History

Mississippi's Dark History of Segregation

Preceding the landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the law regarding public schools was governed by the Supreme Court's "separate but equal" doctrine. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on this issue in 1896, in the now infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537) case.^{vii} In 1927, the "separate but equal" standard was expanded by a case that began in Mississippi. In *Gong Lum v. Rice*, (275 U.S. 78), the supreme court ruled that not only were black children excluded from all white schools, but any non-white (in this case a young Chinese girl) children were as well.^{viii} History shows that Mississippi was in non-compliance with the "separate but equal" standard even into the mid-twentieth century. In 1952, education in Mississippi had "inefficient organization, woeful conditions of school facilities, and inadequate teacher's pay."^{ix} The average teacher pay was only sixty percent of that in other southern states. The Mississippi legislature allotted funds to be used specifically on black education that was based on the black population. The map on the next page, Map 1^x, illustrates the difficulty local school districts had in receiving the funds that were allotted to them. Only twenty-six of eighty-two counties gave the full amount to black education that was allotted by the legislature. In 1952, Governor Hugh L. White recognized the problem of predominantly black schools being separate but still unequal, and he created a committee to look at the public

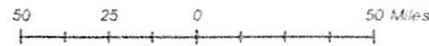
Map 1

Mississippi, 1940 % Black Population



Percentage of funds appropriated by the state on basis of black population spent on black education, 1937

- Spent as much or more on black education
- Spent less than 50% of funds
- Spent between 50% and 75%
- Spent between 75% and 100% of funds



Source: "A Percentage Comparison of State per Capita Receipts and Total Expenditures for Negro Schools in Mississippi, 1937." General Education Board, Early Southern Program, Mississippi, reel 78

education system. The committee completed the task, and the governor called a special session in 1953 to act on the findings.

Much of the power structure in Mississippi predicted the looming legal decisions regarding segregation and vowed to stop integration at all costs. In the special session of 1953, the House of Representatives passed a resolution that gave the legislature the power to completely dismantle the public school system. The Senate blocked the action, leaving the state with a decision to make. Something had to be done about the educational disparity within the state.

Most Mississippians did not take such an extreme position in regards to integration, “[i]n 1950 the editor of the Grenada (Miss.) *Grenada County Weekly* expressed succinctly the rationale behind the state's recent efforts to improve black education: ‘I claim that we had better do a little than to be MADE to do a heap.’”^{xi} The “little” action proposed by the legislature was coined “equalization” and “included a building program to improve school facilities for blacks, equitable salaries for black and white teachers, and equal spending for school buses.”^{xii} Ultimately, the “equalization” that some moderates hoped to achieve was never close to becoming a reality. The following chart, Chart 1^{xiii}, illustrates the “[P]er [C]apita Local Education Funding, by Race, for Select Mississippi School Discripts” in 1962.^{xiv}

Another tactic used to modernize black schools was consolidation. White students in Mississippi had been helped by this practice for over thirty years, but the right had not yet been extended to most black schools. In 1910, Mississippi had 4,256 white schools.^{xv} That same year, the legislature passed a bill that allowed rural school districts to combine with each other and provide the local communities with additional numbers to

Chart 1

Per Capita Local Education Funding, by Race, for Select MS School Districts in 1962

| School district | \$ spent per white student | \$ spent per black student |
|-------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Benton County | 59.42 | 15.63 |
| Amite County | 70.45 | 2.24 |
| Canton | 35.79 | 17.00 |
| Clarksdale | 146.06 | 25.07 |
| Coahoma County | 139.33 | 12.74 |
| Coffeeville | 68.95 | 6.55 |
| Greenville | 134.43 | 34.25 |
| Grenada | 79.00 | 27.38 |
| Hattiesburg | 115.96 | 61.69 |
| Jackson | 149.64 | 106.37 |
| Meridian | 116.58 | 63.11 |
| Montgomery County | 48.73 | 6.71 |
| Sharkey-Issaquena | 18.75 | 25.74 |
| Tishomingo County | 41.60 | 2.70 |
| Tunica County | 172.80 | 5.99 |
| Statewide | 81.86 | 21.77 |

Source: *New Orleans Times-Picayune* (1963) article citing information from an unpublished report by the Mississippi State Department of Education, American Friends Service Committee Archives, Philadelphia.

raise funds for the consolidated schools. As a result, in 1946, the state had 861 white schools.^{xvi} Over the same period, the black schools actually increased from 3,006 in 1910 to 3,737 in 1946.^{xvii} Charles Bolton quotes the Mississippi Board of Development in 1944 as stating that:

There is as much difference between the modern Mississippi consolidated school plant and the one-teacher school it has replaced as there is between the modern automobile and the 1890 horse and buggy.^{xviii}

The 1953 special legislative session gave lip service to both equalization and consolidation, but little money was actually given to the black schools. That inequality of fund allocation changed with the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

***Brown v. Board of Education* and Mississippi's "deliberate speed"**

When the highest court in the land told Linda Brown of Topeka, Kansas that she could attend the "white" school, the face of education in Mississippi began a transformation that deliberately took many years and, for many of those years, was kept segregated. In 1942, the state spent an average of \$47.95 on each white student, but only \$6.16 on each black student. Furthermore, black teachers earned on average of sixty-four percent less than their white counterparts.^{xix} As the "separate but equal" doctrine had begun to be debated leading up to the decision by the Supreme Court, Mississippi had made promises but did not produce many results. The appropriations made for equalizing the segregated education system in the special legislative session in 1943 were not on the agenda. After the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown*, Mississippi attempted to save the

segregated school system by finally bringing the black schools to the same level as the white schools. In *Mississippi: A History*, Westley Busbee wrote that “[e]ven in the face of that decision, white Mississippians still clung to the belief that by taking steps toward equalization they could control the meaning of ‘deliberate speed’ and prolong, if not avoid altogether, school segregation^{xx}”.

Another solution to segregation was reconsidered after *Brown*. In November of 1954, a constitutional amendment was passed in both legislative houses that authorized the legislature to abolish all public schools as “a last resort.”^{xxi} Some of the optimistic views held by the hard-line segregationists were forever dashed when President Eisenhower in 1957 used military force to segregate the public school system in the neighboring capital of Little Rock, Arkansas^{xxii}.

Shortly after the Court’s decision in *Brown*, a group of white community leaders met in Indianola, Mississippi to discuss how to uphold segregation. The group dubbed themselves the “Citizens Council,” which is considered to be Mississippi’s less violent version of the Ku Klux Klan. While not actively involved in violence, its members asserted their control by evicting, firing, or otherwise disrupting the lives of anyone who tried to aid the end of Mississippi’s segregation. William Doyle points out how engraved and intrinsic the segregationist beliefs were:

At the time the Citizens Council was not at all a renegade force or historical aberration— it articulated the majority view of many white Mississippians, and many other white Americans for that matter, who thought that integration was a bad idea.^{xxiii}

The Council even went so far as to actively feed propaganda to children in grade schools. One school lesson states that “[f]amous scientists say races are very different. The white man is very civilized, while the pure Negro in Africa is still living as a savage”.^{xxiv}

Another claims:

God wanted the white people to live alone. And He wanted colored people to live alone. . . . Negroes use their own bathrooms. They do not use the white people’s bathroom. The Negro has his own part of town to live in. This is called our Southern Way of Life. Do you know that some people want the Negroes to live with white people? These people want us to be unhappy. . . . God made us different. And God knows best.^{xxv}

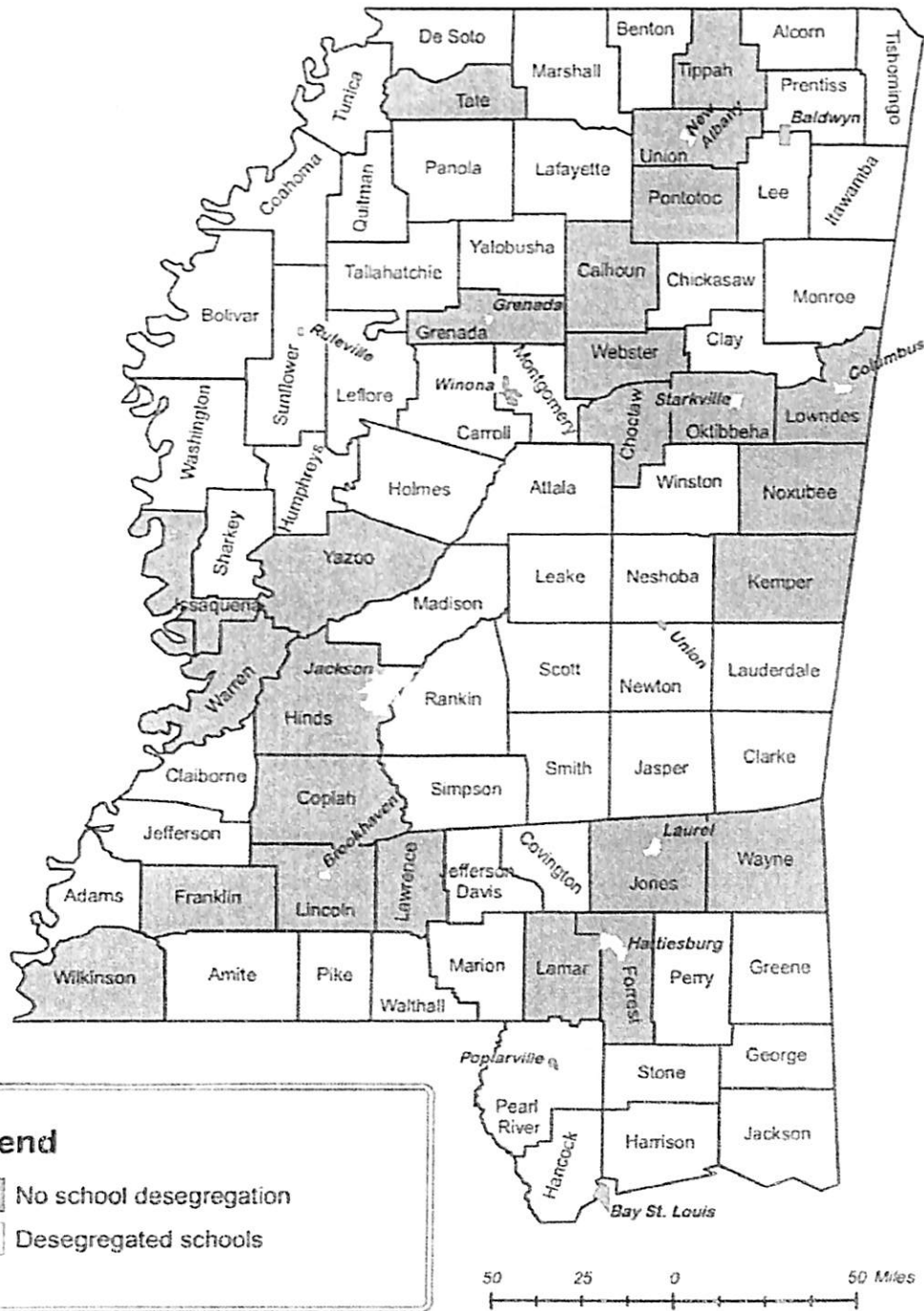
One winning essay in a contest sponsored by the Council reads:

We in the South do not intend to obey men, however exalted their seats or black their robes and hearts. We intend to obey the laws of God and the laws of this country which are made in accordance with the Constitution. As long as we live, so shall we be segregated.^{xxvi}

Over the next fifteen years, the state government would try to fight integration on many fronts. In 1956, Governor Coleman was elected on the platform of keeping Mississippi segregated; he did so by creating the legendary State Sovereignty Commission, which, with its large budget and influential members, was very effective. The recently opened files of the Commission reveal that they funneled at least \$195,000 to the Citizens Council of Mississippi.^{xxvii} At this time, many lawsuits were being filed by black parents and organizations such as the NAACP, but the most important would turn

Map 2

Mississippi School Segregation Fall 1966



Source: "Negroes in Desegregated Schools in Mississippi, Autumn 1966." Delta Ministry Papers, MSU.

out to be *Singleton v. Jackson Municipal Separate School District* 396 U.S. 290 (1969).

The ruling in *Singleton* eventually eliminated state sponsored segregation and caused a side effect that Mississippi is still experiencing today—the founding of private schools. From the late 1950s to the late 1960s a few Mississippi school districts began to integrate. But even in 1966, only “7,200 black students attended formerly all white schools, while fifty-four percent of the state’s 148 districts maintained strictly segregated schools (Map 2). Even two years later, still less than 7 percent of the state’s black children attended classes with whites.”^{xxviii}

The Court’s mandate ran contrary to the rhetoric preached by Governor Ross Barnett, who, like Governor Coleman, was elected on a hard line segregationist platform. *Time* classified Governor Barnett “as bitter a racist as inhabits the nation.”^{xxix} Barnett is quoted in William Doyle’s book, *American Insurrection: The Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962*, as stating:

‘I believe that the Good Lord was the original segregationist,’ declared Barnett. ‘Mixing the races,’ he explained, ‘leads inevitably to the production of an inferior mongrel.’ Another time he intoned, ‘The Negro is different because God made him different to punish him. His forehead slants back. His nose is different. His lips are different. And his color is sure different.’ Said Barnett, ‘If a Negro wants to make good, we’ll go all out to help him, but God intended that we shouldn’t mix’.^{xxx}

During the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, a trickle of private schools began to open all across the state. It was common practice for the money saved by operating

one integrated school rather than two segregated schools to be funneled towards the creation of new private schools. In 1969, a three-judge federal court panel ruled the practice illegal because it “fostered the creation of private segregated schools. The statute . . . supports the establishment of a system of private schools operating on a racially segregated basis as an alternative to white students seeking to avoid public desegregated schools”^{xxxvi}.

While that ruling decided that state money could not be actively contributed to aid the creation of private schools, the state still found avenues to aid the funding of private schools. All schools were eligible for tax-exempt status contingent upon a two-thirds vote in both chambers of the legislature.^{xxxvii} Private schools were also eligible for free textbooks, as long as they “maintain[ed] educational standards established by the State Department of Education for state schools.”^{xxxviii} This law was challenged in *Chance vs. Mississippi State Textbook Rating and Purchasing Board*, but the Supreme Court upheld the law.^{xxxix}

Singleton and Mississippi’s Rise in Private Schools

The year 1970 marked the ruling made in *Singleton v. Jackson Municipal Separate School District* that all state-sponsored segregation had to end by February 1st, 1970. Not coincidentally, the state saw a huge rise in the number of private schools in that year: “[b]etween 1966 and 1970 the number of private schools in the state rose from 121 to 236, and the number of students attending these schools tripled; much of this growth occurred in black-majority districts.”^{xxxv} Canton, Mississippi exemplifies this era

in that “nearly every one of the district’s twelve hundred white students left to go to the new Canton Academy in early 1970 rather than attend classes with the city’s thirty-five hundred black children”^{xxxvi}. Even more shocking, from 1969 to 1970, enrollment in private schools increased at a nearly two hundred percent growth rate, with over sixty-one private schools created in that year alone.^{xxxvii} This increase was typical for states all over the South. Attendance “in segregated private schools in the South has increased 10 times since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights act [until 1970].”^{xxxviii}

Interestingly enough, while the reasoning for creating the private school system is clear, the reasons for parents’ decisions to enroll their children in the segregated academies were somewhat varied. It is safe to assume that the majority of people simply did not want their children to attend an integrated school, but a minority of others feared social ostracism. One teacher in Canton moved to Canton Academy because she claimed that “it would have been bad for my husband’s business if I had refused”^{xxxix}. Similarly, in Indianola, Mississippi, a fight nearly occurred when a lawyer accused another man of being a “nigger lover” because he did not send his children to the new, segregated Indianola Academy^{xl}.

In the period between September 1969 and February 1970, public schools in Jackson lost sixteen percent of their white student population. In 1970 to 1971, enrollment dropped by 4,258 in Jackson’s public elementary schools and over 10,000 (or forty percent) in all of the schools^{xli}. Some of the more extreme segregationists sent their children to schools sponsored by the Jackson Citizens Council. These schools made their teachers sign a contract with a clause stating that “forced congregation of persons in social situations solely because they are of different races is a moral wrong, and...the

proven educational results of such forced interracial congregation are disastrous for children of both the white and black races.” Not all of the students who left the Jackson Public School District went to private schools. Many moved to surrounding communities that were integrated but had a much smaller black population. For the next few years, the number of white students deserting the Jackson Public School system continued to climb slowly, but never as dramatically as they did in 1970.

A Mississippi school official in 1971 stated the obvious when he said, “[t]he private all-white school is nothing new in Mississippi. We’ve had a private school system all along, but the state supported it. Now we have to find private support for it”^{xlii}. History shows that much of the “support” given to the private schools was superficially disguised public funds. In the city of Jackson:

[S]chool officials allowed city school buses to be repainted white and remarked Council Schools...[and also in Jackson] a principal allowed representatives from the Citizens’ Council schools to come in the summer of 1970 and collect excess supplies, from sport equipment to soap to pencils.^{xliii}

This continued, discreet public funding of private schools seemed to take place all across the state; in Canton “the public schools sold the local academy desks for fifty cents each and three school buses for \$500”^{xliv}. As soon as private schools in many areas opened, former public school teachers rushed to take positions there. School districts such as Benton County, Greenwood, and West Point had teachers who refused to teach at integrated schools, but the school officials claimed:

[T]he teachers had binding contracts but could not be forced to transfer to a different [segregated] school midyear, public school officials in these districts

continued to pay teachers from public funds, although a number of teachers took jobs in private segregated...for the remaining part of the year.^{xlv}

Mississippi's Lingering Segregation

Once *Singleton* put the final nail in the state-sponsored segregation coffin, residents in Mississippi used private schools to maintain segregation.¹ The often-cited Supreme Court case on this subject was *Pierce vs. Society of Sisters* 268 U.S. 510 (1925). This Oregon decision granted parents the right to send their children to private schools, meaning the state could not mandate that all children attend public schools. Many of the school boards were still controlled by white community leaders, so if a private school was created, the white leaders had little reason to make improvements upon the already lagging black schools. Robert Clark, a teacher in Holmes County, Mississippi said, "it's very likely we'll have an all-black system, and that will be bad as long as the whites control it. I expect they will try to make the system as rotten as they can."^{xlvi}

There is no denying the reasoning for or the effect of private schools within the state. James Sansing wrote, in his 1971 doctoral thesis, that "the existence of new private schools in some [Mississippi] communities already is depriving the public schools of funds and general public support."^{xlvii} It is simply not possible for a state to have a

¹ An interesting strategy that some school districts in Amite County, Carroll County, and Coffeeville used was to segregate schools by sex rather than by race. A common fear of the white community was the intermingling of races with regards to sex, and this school system quelled that fear. The school districts argued that the plan was educationally motivated, but within a few years judges disagreed and these schools were integrated (with regards to sex).

private school system take away eleven percent of the state's total enrollment in elementary and secondary schools and it not have an impact of the public educational system.^{xlviii} The only question that remains is the degree to which private schools affected the public education system. If this question can be answered with any amount of certainty, many of the questions regarding the quality of education in Mississippi will be answered as well. The answer could explain why some seemingly similar communities have very different public education systems and why many of the state's schools, both public and private, are still mostly segregated. Answers to how the "white flight" affected public education can also help in analyzing the current problems of Mississippi's education system.

Even Governor Williams, who actively "encouraged – whether by implication or through unequivocal statements – whites to move their children to private schools,"^{xlix} realized "that a permanent, mass abandonment of the public schools would damage the state's continuing effort to attract industry to the state."¹ In order to examine how much effect the private school movement had on education in Mississippi, one must find a way to compare school districts that opened and supported private schools with those that did not. The next chapter will jump from the "white flight" era (discussed above) of the late 1960s and early 1970s to the modern education system in Mississippi and attempt to compare various Mississippi schools.

The following chapter will rely mainly on state and national rankings to try to obtain a clear picture of how the public education system compares to other regions and other states. Generally, the rankings are based upon standardized test scores, graduation rates, and teacher pay. The next chapter will undertake the task of connecting the

Mississippi's education system of the past with that of the present. It will analyze how the varying community responses to integration (usually acceptance or defiance) have affected the modern schools systems.

Chapter Three:

Connecting the Past with the Present

This is the section of the thesis which will attempt to show the relationship between Mississippi's modern educational landscape and the 1970s surge in private schools in response to integration. The problem with this type of comparison is several-fold. First, records of school performance were not kept in the 1960s and 1970s, so it is not possible to have a direct comparison of public schools shortly before and shortly after a nearby private school was opened. Consequently, any comparisons will have to be made via other, more indirect grounds: student enrollment, racial composition, and district comparisons. Another problem with studying school data is that schools can never be similar enough to compare only one variable. As is mentioned later, I compare school districts that are similar in most regards except for a nearby private school in one, but a completely scientific study is not possible. That being stated, the methods employed in this thesis, though indirect, are sound enough to examine the effect the "white flight" had on Mississippi's public education system.

Before analyzing individual districts within the state, it is important to put the state's entire educational atmosphere into context. While there are few (if any) arguments that assert education in Mississippi has not improved over the last thirty-five years, the state still lags behind in almost all national rankings and studies conducted on education. One specific leap that Mississippi has successfully taken concerns high school retention. In 1969 the "completion rate had been 62 percent, including 74 percent of the white students and 50 percent of black students. There had been virtually no change in the following decade, and by 1980, the rate had risen only one point to 63 percent".^{li} The

1980s and 90s proved to be a period of great success for lowering dropout rates. After a series of “dropout prevention” programs and new federal funding, the drop-out rate plummeted to only 1.8% in the 1990-2000 school year.ⁱⁱⁱ Notwithstanding the improvements that Mississippi has made in some other aspects of its public education system, in 2006 Mississippi’s public schools were still ranked forty-eighth² out of the fifty states by Morgan Quinto Press^{liii}. Other respected organizations consistently rank Mississippi in the bottom ten percent of the fifty states.³ It is important to keep the national context of Mississippi’s education system in mind while analyzing the effect of the private school rise on Mississippi’s educational system.

There are two methods I will be use to test the effects of the increase in the number of private schools. The first method will compare two Mississippi towns similar in population, racial breakdown, and income. The variable between the two is that one of the towns contained a successful (in terms of enrollment only) private school. This method allows a comparison at least some degree of accuracy of the effect of the private school on the public education system. The actual comparison will largely rely on national and state rankings in three categories: elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools.^{liv} Obviously, there are other factors that contribute to a school’s success:

² The results are based on “21 key elementary and secondary education indicators reported from *Education State Rankings*, an annual reference book that compares the 50 United States in hundreds of education-related categories. The 2006 award measures states based on factors including expenditures for instruction, pupil-teacher ratios, high school graduation and dropout rates, and reading, writing and math proficiency.” Morgan Quinto Press.

³ While I found no evidence to support his claim, I think it is relevant to include a claim consistently made by former Governor Ronnie Musgrove. He has stated on several occasions that if the Delta region were excluded when the state’s educational system was assessed, the state would be ranked twenty-seventh.

the leadership ability of the school board, the amount of parental involvement, and other immeasurable factors. But, given the similarities of the towns yet the stark differences in the schools systems, this method seems to be one of the best ways of showing the relationship between private segregated academies and public schools.

The other method of comparison employed in the thesis is a bit more abstract. Data from the city of Jackson, which contains the largest public school district in Mississippi and the largest number of private schools, will be compared before and after the private school rise in the late 1960s to the early 1970s. The reason for the use of Jackson is simply that, given its numbers, it would be one of the places most affected due to the rise of private schools within or near its school districts. As stated earlier, very few records were kept regarding school performance during the era in question, so other methods such as student enrollment will be used. Another complication with this particular comparison is the fact that much of the greater Jackson metropolitan area was segregated right up until integration (at least in the public schools) became mandatory. These factors illustrate the difficulty of a scientific analysis of the precise affect of private schools, though it still gives an overview of the effect in question.

A Comparison of the Educational Systems within Two Rural Mississippi Towns

A comparison of similar towns with and without private schools indirectly shows how much they affected the caliber of public schools in the area. Kosciusko and Aberdeen are two rural Mississippi towns, similar in size and racial composition. The following table, Table 1, illustrates the similarities: ^{iv}

Table 1

Similarities Between Kosciusko and Aberdeen

| | Kosciusko | Aberdeen |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Population (Year 2000) | 7, 372 | 6, 414 |
| Median Resident Age | 37.3 | 34.1 |
| Median Household Income | 21, 737 | 23, 530 |
| Median House Value | 51,700 | 60, 200 |
| Racial Percentages: | | |
| Percentage of White Residents | 53.4 | 39 |
| Percentage of Black Residents | 44.6 | 60.2 |
| Educational Data: | | |
| High School or Higher | 61.80% | 59.80% |
| Bachelor's Degree or Higher | 13.30% | 14.70% |
| Graduate or Professional degree | 5.20% | 4.50% |
| Unemployed | 7.20% | 9.20% |
| 2004 Crime Index (Higher= More Crime) | 292.2 | 227.1 |
| Average U.S. = 325.2 | | |

The similarities expressed in the table above illustrate why these two towns were chosen. They are statistically very similar, except for their public school systems. As the rankings will show, Kosciusko has a substantially higher ranked public school. One likely reason is that Aberdeen has the large, private Oak Hill Academy nearby (founded in 1965).

The public school systems of Kosciusko and Aberdeen are substantially different, even though they have roughly the same number of teacher and students. This claim is based on their state and national rankings made by PSK12, which is a private organization that ranks school districts within a given state. They base the rankings of elementary schools on standardized tests given in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The subjects are language, reading and math. In order to rank the schools, the number of students who scored at the advanced level on the three tests are added together and added with the results from the other two years (combined to be nine sets of advanced placement students) and divided by three to get the average for all the elementary grades. This final number is the “actual score”, and, in order to rank the schools, they simply put them in order from highest to lowest. There are a total of 527 elementary schools in the state. As of 2003, Kosciusko elementary schools were ranked 176th with an actual score of 228.7. Aberdeen was ranked 382nd with an actual score of 103.1.^{lvi}

The second ranking is that of middle schools, or the seventh and eighth grades. The process is very similar to the rankings in elementary schools. Three standardized tests are given to all seventh graders and eighth graders in reading, language, and math. The same formula for taking the average is used. There are a total of 291 middle schools ranked. Kosciusko ranked thirty-first with a combined score of 151.5. Aberdeen was not included in the data.

The rankings with regards to high schools are a little different. Rather than use the number of student testing at the advanced level, the standard is that of students passing the standard Reading and Algebra tests. The percentage of students who pass them is then added together. There are a total of 251 high schools ranked. Kosciusko

High School ranked fiftieth with an actual score of 179.9. Aberdeen High School ranked 221st with a combined score of 117.0.^{lvii} The two high schools are similar in size with Kosciusko having 584 students with 35 full-time teachers (for a ratio of 17 to 1) and Aberdeen having 497 students with 38 full-time teachers (for a ratio of 13 to 1).^{lviii}

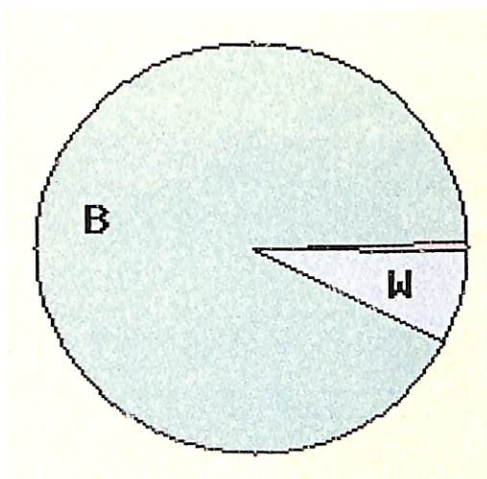
An interesting difference between the two schools is their respective racial makeups. The racial demographics in Kosciusko High School roughly mirror those of the town: fifty-five percent white to forty-five percent black^{lix}. Aberdeen High School is ninety percent black and less than ten percent white (see Chart 3c).^{lx}

Chart 3

Racial Makeup of Public Schools in Aberdeen and Kosciusko

Chart 3a. Racial Makeup of Aberdeen and Kosciusko Public Elementary Schools

Aberdeen:



Kosciusko:

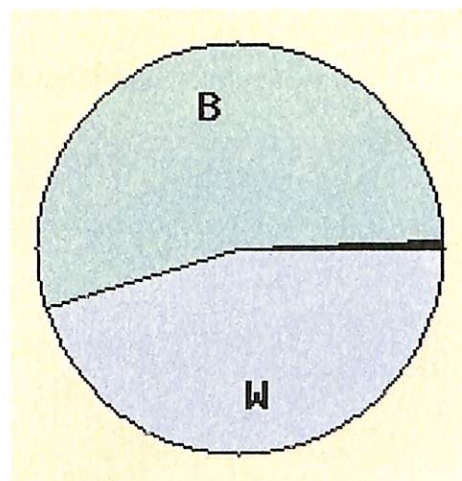


Chart 3b. Racial Pie Chart of Kosciusko Public Middle Schools

(Data for Aberdeen not available.)

Kosciusko:

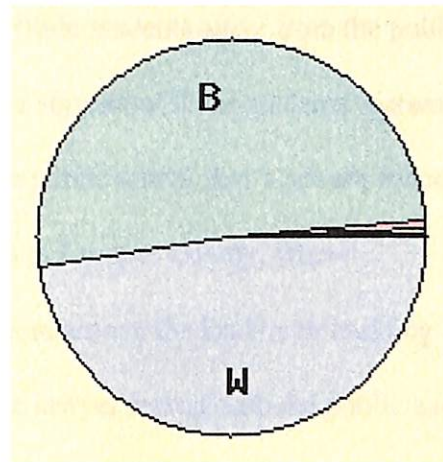
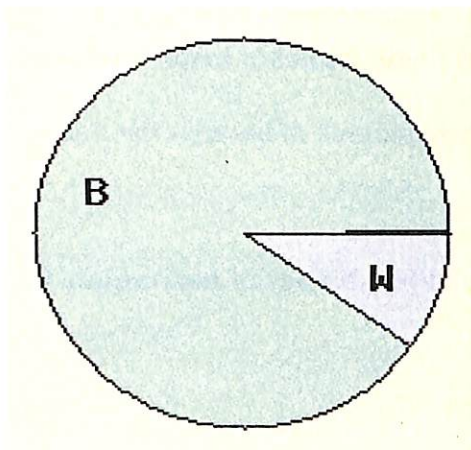
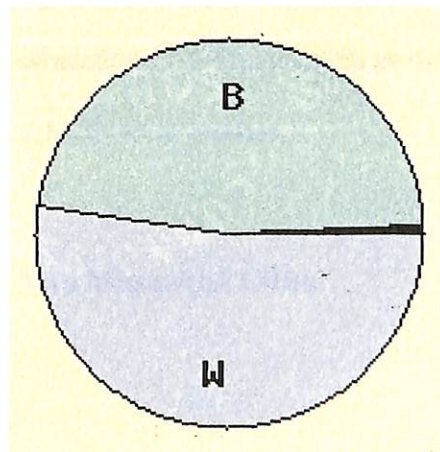


Chart 3c. Racial Makeup of Aberdeen and Kosciusko Public High Schools

Aberdeen:



Kosciusko:



As the charts show, the demographics of all schools in Kosciusko are roughly similar to the racial composition of the town; however, in Aberdeen there is a much larger black population in all the schools than in the town itself.

Many white students left Aberdeen's public school system in the 1970s, but the problem is now much deeper. Oak Hill Academy was started in 1965^{lxi} as a private segregated academy. It began to immediately draw white students away from the public school, but even more importantly it sucked away the support of those students' parents from the public school. The vacuum of support for a public school that a private school creates is illustrated by an account of private schools in Kemper County, where:

[T]hose who ran the public schools were among the leaders in building a private school system for whites. One lawyer served both the public and private schools. One public school board member sat on the finance committee of the new private academy, while the wife of another board member was the academy's board of trustees. In addition the children of all the public school board members attended the private school.^{lxii}

It was obvious to the public school assistant superintendent of this county that "some of the school board members aren't interested in public education."^{lxiii} Stories such as this one are not unusual in communities in which private schools were created.

A Comparison of the Educational Systems within Two Mississippi Cities

Another comparison between two similar towns illustrates findings similar to those in Kosciusko and Aberdeen. The two towns analyzed earlier were two rural Mississippi towns, both with populations under 7,500. Tupelo and Columbus are two good examples of more urban cities in Mississippi. While there are more differences between Tupelo and Columbus than the earlier comparison, they still serve as good models for studying the effects of private schools on the public education system. The table below, Table 2^{lxiv}, illustrates the a few of the towns' statistics.

Table 2

Similarities Between Tupelo and Columbus

| | Tupelo | Columbus |
|---|--------|----------|
| Population (Year 2000) | 34,211 | 25,944 |
| Population (Year 1970) | 20,471 | 19,381 |
| Median Resident Age | 34.9 | 33.8 |
| Median Household Income | 38,401 | 27,393 |
| Median House Value | 92,800 | 67,900 |
| Racial Percentages: | | |
| Percentage of White Residents | 68.7 | 43.3 |
| Percentage of Black Residents | 28.3 | 54.4 |
| Educational Data: | | |
| High School or Higher | 81.20% | 72.10% |
| Bachelor's Degree or Higher | 26.70% | 22.90% |
| Graduate or Professional degree | 8.50% | 7.70% |
| Unemployed | 4.60% | 10.40% |
| 2004 Crime Index (Higher= More Crime) Average U.S. = 325.2 | 401.3 | 320 |

As is seen in the above table, the population of Tupelo has grown at a much more rapid rate than that of Columbus. It is possible that a reason for this disparity in growth is the result of the differences in the school systems. The data show that Tupelo and Columbus are somewhat similar, even though Tupelo seems to be prospering a bit more than Columbus. As with the earlier comparison, the state rankings of both public education systems will be analyzed in three categories: elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. Since the process of determining the rankings has already been detailed, a table, Table 3, will expedite this comparison.

Table 3

Middle and High School Ranking for Tupelo and Columbus

(Data from elementary schools not available.)

| | Tupelo | Columbus |
|------------------------|--------|----------|
| Middle Schools: | | |
| Actual Score | 160 | N/A |
| Ranking (2003) | 21st | N/A |
| High School: | | |
| Actual Score | 182.8 | 160.5 |
| Ranking (2003) | 87th | 156th |

The racial demographics of these two schools are even more revealing than their rankings. The following table and chart (Table 4 and Chart 4)^{lxv} represent the racial proportions of the high schools of Tupelo and Columbus.

Table 4

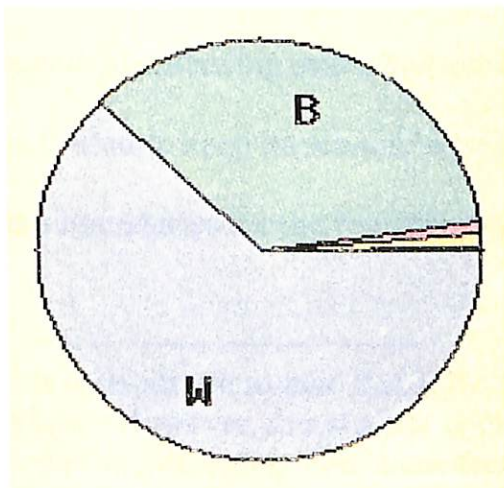
Racial Makeup of Tupelo and Columbus Public High Schools

| Racial Percentage: | Tupelo | Columbus |
|-------------------------------|--------|----------|
| White/Non-Hispanic | 62.40% | 19.30% |
| Black/Non-Hispanic | 35.40% | 79.50% |
| Hispanic | 0.90% | 0.40% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 1.20% | 0.80% |
| American Indian/Alaska Native | 0.10% | 0.10% |

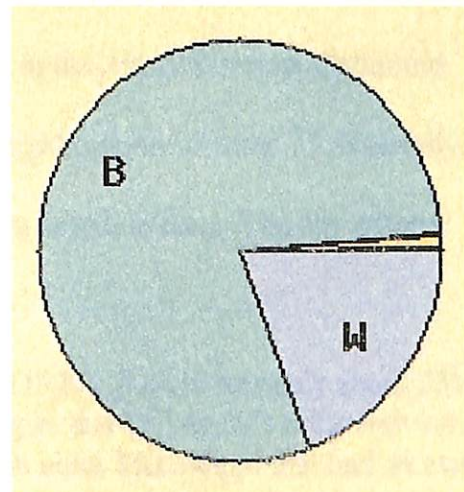
Chart 4

Racial Makeup of Tupelo and Columbus Public High Schools^{lxvii}

Tupelo:



Columbus:



The above charts show that the racial demographics of Tupelo High School roughly mirror that of the town (off only by around 6%); however, the demographics of Columbus High School are much more skewed. In Columbus, black high school students account for 79.9% of the school populations, while the town is only 54% black. The reason for this disparity is the same as it was in Aberdeen: a private school. In Columbus, Mississippi, a private segregated academy was started in 1968 by the name of Heritage Academy. Today the school has over 600 students and charges \$4,350 per year in tuition.^{lxviii} In Tupelo, there is no private school as large as Heritage Academy that draws away from the public schools' student population and community support.⁴

The story behind the integration of Tupelo schools is a very interesting and uplifting one. In 1970, when other school systems were doing everything they could to fight integration, Tupelo "had few whites [that] left the public schools, and within a few years the integrated schools of the town were actually a source of civic pride among whites."^{lxix}

The citizens of Columbus, Mississippi did not have the same reaction. After the mandate outlawing state-sponsored racial segregation in the *Alexander* case, Columbus still tried to keep its schools segregated by having "neighborhood schools."^{lxx} Naturally, the boundaries for the "neighborhoods" were all drawn based on race. The city entered

⁴ It is important to note that at the time of integration (1970), Tupelo was only about 25% black. However, this statistic does not necessarily negate any of Tupelo's progressivism regarding desegregation, since there are many towns in north Mississippi that had an even smaller black population and fought segregation just as hard as towns with majority black demographics.

into a seven-year-long court battle fighting to keep its neighborhood schools, all the while losing students and support to the newly created segregated academy. In 1977, a federal court finally ruled that Columbus had to consolidate its six segregated elementary schools into three integrated schools.^{lxxi} After seven years of fighting, the school officials had to convince angry parents that integration and continuing support for the public school system was a good idea. A member of the school board, John East, attempted to quell the fears of parents by stating, “you’re not going to like it [but] [m]y child is going to be in public schools...My child is going to get a good education and yours is too.”^{lxxii} While the efforts of the school board members might have temporarily calmed parent’s concerns, the years following 1977 resulted in a significant desertion of the Columbus Public School District. This situation contrasts starkly with Tupelo’s acceptance of integration. As the data show, today Tupelo’s public school system is largely considered one of the best in the state.

The Effect of Integration on Education in Jackson, Mississippi.

As detailed in Chapter Two, one of the most extreme accounts of “white flight” was in the state’s capital, Jackson, Mississippi. Some of the most vicious fights regarding integration occurred in Jackson, as those who opposed integration did not make up a minority of the white community. There are countless stories, such as the one in Lake Elementary in Jackson, that detail the segregationist mindset of entire community.

At Lake Elementary:

[W]hen school began in fall 1970, under an integration order that paired white and black elementary schools, white mothers first marched on city hall, then picketed the school and sat-in at the school's library, next tried to teach classes in an unused portable classroom until evicted, and finally held classes for several weeks in an old school bus parked across the street from the elementary campus.^{lxxiii}

After segregation (at least state-sponsored segregation) was finally pushed out of Jackson's public schools, most of Jackson's white residents went with it.

Today there are twenty-two private schools in and around Jackson, Mississippi.^{lxxiv} After years of fighting integration, the common response for white parents was to simply move to a "whiter" area or to send their children to private schools. As the students left, so did the community support. For a period (as detailed in Chapter Two), the school board of Jackson and many other Mississippi towns let already underfunded black schools become even more so.

The demographics of a few modern Jackson schools are detailed in the chart below, Chart 5.^{lxxv}

Chart 5

Racial Makeup of Select Public Schools in Jackson

Chart 5a. Lanier High School

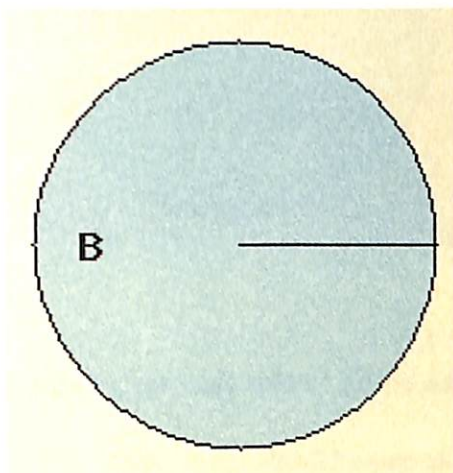


Chart 5b. North West Jackson Middle School

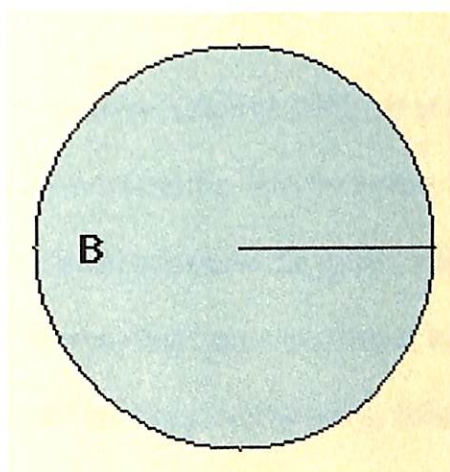
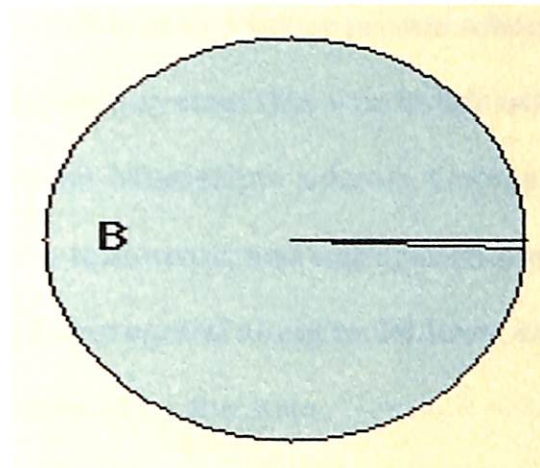


Chart 5c. North Jackson Elementary School:



As can be easily seen by the graphs, the only school that is not 100% black is the elementary school which is 0.9% white. This should come as no surprise after remembering that “in the fall of 1970, ten thousand whites, or over 40% left the Jackson Public Schools.”^{lxxvi}

Lanier High School in Jackson is ranked 234th out of 251 (using the same rankings as the earlier schools) in a state that is in the bottom ten percent of the nation’s educational quality. There are good schools in the greater Jackson area, but they are almost all private or located in areas that have an extremely high cost of living compared to inner-city Jackson. For example, Jackson Preparatory School was developed in 1970 by “some of Jackson’s wealthiest citizens...[which gave the school] ample resources and soon [it] developed into a top-notch school, although it was only available to those who could afford the tuition.”^{lxxvii} The current cost of tuition at Jackson Prep is \$8,800 plus several hundred dollars worth of fees and books.^{lxxviii} This is in a state that is ranked fiftieth of all the states in terms of yearly income; the average yearly income in Mississippi in 2003 was \$33,665.^{lxxix}

The simple facts show that parents residing in districts with sub-par schools, who have the ability to send their children to a better private school, do just that. In many school districts, the dual education system that was in full swing before integration is still just as powerful. Today, in some Mississippi schools, George Wallace's dream of "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever" is alive and well. Many district schools are still segregated along racial lines, even though racial segregation is no longer sponsored by the state.

There is no denying that the rise of private schools in the state during integration has adversely affected the public education system. The following chapter will attempt to sort through a variety of solutions. Some of the solutions are still only theoretical and have never actually been implemented. Other improvements are currently being practiced with a plethora of results. After the looking at the modern landscape of the state of Mississippi's educational practices and some of the contributing factors, it is no longer a question of whether improvement is needed, but of what exactly should be done to achieve results. The next chapter will attempt to shed some light on this question.

Chapter Four

Problems and Solutions

Thomas Jefferson was one of America's first supporters of a publicly funded education system. He is quoted as stating:

I have indeed two great measures at heart, without which no republic can maintain itself in strength: 1. That of general education, to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom. 2. To divide every county into hundreds, of such size that all the children of each will be within reach of a central school in it.^{lxxx}

After *Brown* was decided, the Mississippi legislature apparently did not agree with President Jefferson, since they voted to reserve the right to completely eliminate the public school system as way to fight integration. While the drastic event of closing all the public schools never occurred and thus does not further blemish Mississippi's already dark past, in many areas private schools were opened so that schools systems could remained segregated. The new private schools not only served as vacuum that attracted wealthy students, but also one that drew community support away from the public schools. As a result, many children were restricted from a receiving a better education because of their parents' income. Parents that send their children to a private school essentially accept a double tax: the tuition for the private school and the taxes they already pay to support the local public school. Many parents simply cannot afford to pay for their children's education at all, much less twice. The economic barrier is a huge problem for many of America's less wealthy families.

Something needs to be done to give all children residing in Mississippi (regardless of race or parental income) a chance to get a quality education. For black Mississippians, their public school system was inarguably unequal to that of the white schools preceding integration. In many communities, integration brought about a new type of separation, one divided among public and private schools. Mississippi's history of racial segregation, followed by the large-scale desertion of public schools by white students, gives credence to the argument that:

[T]he academic underachievement of many African Americans rests in the fact that they understand social inequities; they develop a black cultural frame of reference that suggests that hard work is not rewarded equally throughout American society. In other words, a common thought among some African Americans is that white Americans will always devise ways to limit the economic, social and political participation of African Americans.^{lxxxii}

Some argue that the existing inequalities in schools are so great that, in order to bring some students the quality education that they deserve:

[E]qual funding may not be adequate funding. Some schools in urban communities need extra funding to be elevated to even an acceptable baseline... To make matters worse, the least experienced teachers are the ones left to try and address the issues in these 'needy' urban schools.^{lxxxii}

The School Voucher Debate

Another idea that has been debated as a possible solution to educational disparity is a school voucher system. School voucher programs are very controversial subjects, but on the surface they seem to deal with immediate problems— giving parents living in districts with failing schools the option of sending their children to a better quality school (regardless of where the school is located). A common criticism of this program is that low performing schools might sink to even lower levels.

Milton Friedman, a libertarian economist, first articulated the idea for a school voucher system in the 1950s. He theorized that a system of school choice would sponsor healthy competition in public schools (or as he called them, government schools) and bring market influences into the public education field. Since Friedman, general support for voucher programs has come mainly from the conservative side of the political spectrum. This started to change in the 1980s and came to a head in 1990, when Wisconsin's legislature experimented with a voucher program that allowed children residing in low-income areas of Milwaukee that had failing public schools the option of attending school in another district. The movement began in the urban areas of Milwaukee rather than any think-tank or lobbying group. The movement resulted in inner-city residents pairing up with conservative Republicans to do battle in the state's legislature.

Interestingly enough, most of those opposing the state voucher system are the “groups that have historically claimed to represent the urban poor in education and

politics.^{lxxxiii} Some of the biggest critics of the school voucher program are teacher unions

“which have vast resources, huge memberships, pervasive political clout, and by almost any estimate are among the most powerful interest groups in all of American

politics.”^{lxxxiv} A common argument against a voucher system is that:

[Vouchers] would wreck the public schools by draining off resources and children. In the process, vouchers would undermine cherished values the public school system has long stood for-- common schooling, equal opportunity, democratic control-- and create a system driven by private interests.^{lxxxv}

It is very interesting to compare the arguments against a system of vouchers to those against the Mississippi private education movement. Essentially the same problem of dropping student enrollment and faltering community support that occurred after the private school movement could occur if a voucher program is initiated. According to the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a larger percentage of minorities support vouchers than do white people^{lxxxvi}. Although, it has been theorized that “black support for vouchers is mainly a rejection of the status quo-- that is, poorly performing schools and students, rather than an endorsement of this particular program^{lxxxvii}”.

Following Wisconsin’s lead, other states have begun voucher programs in order to remedy this disparity in the quality of education its citizens are receiving. In 1995, students in Cleveland, Ohio were given the voucher system as a means for urban parents

to have the opportunity to send their children to better schools.⁵ The Florida's Opportunity Scholarships Program gives students enrolled in failing public schools vouchers for private schools^{lxxxviii}.

The voucher program is not without its setbacks. The People for the American Way have calculated that the program in Milwaukee has had 6,000 participants from 2000 to 2002 alone and has cost the state of Wisconsin \$22 million.^{lxxxix} They predict the costs will continue at an average of \$11 million per school year.^{xc} Some of the reason for the high cost Wisconsin has experienced is because its voucher program includes private schools. Essentially, the state of Wisconsin is paying for students to go to private schools rather than giving that money directly to the public schools. Another type of school voucher program would be limited only to public schools. This would not give parents as much choice as an unlimited voucher program, but more than they would have without any voucher program in place.

Interestingly enough, the first experiment with a program designed to provide parents with school choice vouchers was in direct response to the *Brown* case:

Prince Edward County [in Virginia] attempted to make public funds available to white students so that they would not have to attend public schools with blacks but instead could opt out of public schools and use tax vouchers to pay for private school tuition.^{xci}

⁵ In this particular program, almost all of the students who accept the vouchers use them at private Catholic Schools. A law suit was filed on the grounds that by giving Catholic schools state dollars, the establishment clause of the first amendment was being violated. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court. In a 5-4 ruling, the Supreme Court upheld the voucher program.

This specific instance is often cited as one of the arguments against a school voucher program. It is argued that while it may provide a way out of failing schools for some, it could also further segregate school districts (although that would be nearly impossible for some districts in Mississippi).

Some argue exactly the opposite about vouchers promoting further segregation. In 1998, a paper by Jay P. Greene and Nicole Mellow was presented at a meeting of the American Political Science Association that argues vouchers eliminate more segregation than they create. They based their argument on the assumption that:

Private schools are more successful at integration than public schools, partly because private schools do not require that their students live in particular neighborhoods, so they can more easily triumph over segregation in housing to provide integration in school.^{xcii}

They continued their argument along these lines by summarizing that the various religious pursuits and “the higher social class” found in private schools “contribute to better racial integration.”^{xciii} While this may be the case in other areas, it is not in most Mississippi private schools.

Another problem that vouchers could create (as mentioned in the Wisconsin voucher program) is a further drain of funding from all school districts, but especially from the ones that need them the most. If vouchers were given out to every student, some districts would suffer a funding shortage equal to that of the amount of money spent per student times the number of students within their particular district who attend private school. As is stands now, parents who elect to send their children to private schools are still funding the public schools of the districts in which they reside. The voucher

program would give the money collected for the public school back to the parents. While benefiting parents who already send their children to private schools, an obvious question arises: “how impoverished school districts, forced to cut important programs, would be in a position to offer excellent educational services to students, their parents, and the community at large?”^{xciV}

A Chilean Experiment with School Vouchers

While evaluating the pros and cons of a school voucher system, it is helpful to look at programs implemented not only in American locations, but also in various other countries. In 1980, a Chilean school voucher plan began under Dictator Augusto Pinochet.^{xcv} The program immediately privatized all schools and provided a “voucher” or set amount of money for any Chilean child to use towards his or her education. Since all schools were made private, all teacher contracts were privatized and the national teacher’s union was immediately dismantled.^{xcvi} One immediate problem with the voucher system was that the individual voucher was not sufficient at all schools. Many elite schools charged much more than the voucher provided, thus still creating a barrier for students with less wealthy parents.^{xcvii}

A study done by a Stanford professor, Martin Carnoy, on the Chilean national voucher plan has proven to be quite startling. One of the first things Carnoy noticed was a decrease in overall educational spending:

In 1985 the federal contribution to education was 80 percent of the full amount of educational spending, and total spending for education was 5.3

percent of the nation's Gross National Product (GNP). Five years later, the federal portion was 68 percent of the total, and the full amount had fallen to 3.7 percent of the GNP.^{xviii}

Another finding of the Carnoy study directly contradicted many of the arguments made by both Chilean and American proponents of a voucher system: that school competition (or a privatization of schools) would increase student performance. Carnoy found that the scores of two nationally standardized tests in both language and mathematics actually went down. The tests were given in both 1982 and 1988; the scores of the language tests dropped fourteen percent and the scores of the mathematics tests dropped six percent.^{xix} Perhaps one of the most troubling findings is the fact that the newly private schools actively discriminated against certain students. Carnoy reported that:

[N]ot only were 'difficult to manage' students usually consigned to last-resort schools, but once private voucher plans were put in place, middle class parents derived pleasure from the idea of segregating their children from these problematic and usually low-income students.^c

Unfortunately, school vouchers created the opportunity for segregation, which served to promote and solidify the Chilean system of social classes.

Entire library shelves are devoted to the current debate on school voucher programs, but most agree that voucher programs are generally more applicable in larger metropolitan areas (especially if vouchers are limited to use in public schools). Larger cities, by their very nature, would have more school districts within driving distance from which parents could choose. With size constraints considered, school voucher programs

in Mississippi would likely be utilized more frequently in areas such as Jackson, where numerous school districts of varying quality exist within a reasonable driving distance.

Several outcomes are possible if an experimental voucher program were implemented in all of Mississippi, just for areas with failing schools (similar to the Florida program), or only in certain urban areas. One possibility is a huge desertion similar to the one spawned by private schools in the 1960s and 1970s. The schools that are perceived to be better could be overrun with students while other "failing" schools would lose both students and much-needed funds. Another scenario involves failing schools getting further ignored because the voucher programs make people believe that students "choose" to go these schools. Of course, good things could come from a Mississippi voucher program as well. It is exceedingly difficult to tell a child he cannot go to a better school simply because his parents can't afford it. A voucher program would hopefully eliminate that type of income segregation. While vouchers seem to be a promising immediate fix for at least some students, they also run the risk of greatly hurting schools districts that are already suffering. Most people still agree that the better option would be to improve failing schools rather than deserting them.

The No Child Left Behind Debate

Other possible solutions include more stringent state and federal monitoring and intervention. In the last few years, a new phrase, "school accountability," has entered the public discourse. A program called "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) was signed by President Bush in 2002, which had a stated goal of bringing accountability to school

districts. If one listened to the stated goals of the NCLB, it would be clear that the school districts needed a way to measure their levels of educational quality. As Stanley Katz, the president of the American Council of Learned Societies, said, “[w]ho can be against accountability?”^{c1} Katz went on to clarify, “the answer, of course, is that it all depends upon how accountability is defined, assessed, and enforced.”^{cii}

Prior to the mid-1960s, school accountability consisted mainly of using the resources of the school responsibly (as discussed earlier, something many schools in Mississippi certainly did not do). Beginning in the mid-1960s and lingering until today, the phrase “school accountability” has mainly has come to mean student accountability. While most agree that this linkage is a positive step, it is worth pointing out that the students have been made “an instrument of school accountability.”^{ciii}

The wording in the NCLB executive summary states its intention to eradicate achievement gaps among various social classes and races:

The NCLB Act will strengthen Title I accountability.... Assessment results and State progress objectives must be broken out by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no group is left behind. School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress toward statewide proficiency goals will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures.^{civ}

The way that NCLB attempts to determine gaps is by testing students at various stages of their educations. However, the tests go a step further; the students have to pass the test in order to proceed to the next grade level.

Requiring a passing score on a standardized test before allowing grade elevation has been harshly criticized. Critics argue that the students are being punished for the shortcomings of schools. It has been compared to:

The Food and Drug Administration setting standards for product quality by punishing individuals who consume faulty products or the Federal Transportation Commission setting new standards for air safety and enforcing them by punishing passengers for security violations at airports.^{cv}

On top of punishing the students for failing schools, critics also argue that no funds are made available to help school districts improve. The only incentive for schools to improve is empathy for the students and fear of public embarrassment.

Public embarrassment has been taken to an extreme in many schools in Florida. The Florida legislature decided that the best way to fix the problem of severely overcrowded, failing public schools was to label them with a "D" or "F".^{cvi} The letter was boldly displayed on the front door of failing schools, reminding students, teachers, parents, and the public at large that the school they were entering was sub-standard. What the Florida (as well as many other states) did not do was provide money or help of any kind to fix the failing schools. As a result, students were retained in various grades because they could not pass the standardized test, and schools were allowed to keep running at "F" levels.

It seems obvious that some scale available to measure school performance needs to be in place, but NCLB does punish the students for the faults of the school. Many schools struggle because "they have never been expected to use high academic standards

as a basis for teaching all children before, and they are struggling because many schools lack the essential ingredients to meet the needs of the children they serve."^{xvii}

Furthermore, NCLB provides no help for struggling schools. Some states have done the opposite of helping their schools; they have publicly humiliated them without providing them a means for improvement.

On the surface, both voucher programs and school accountability programs look very helpful to students living in districts with under-achieving schools. Vouchers offer the students hope of going to a better school, regardless of their parents' income or area of residence. School accountability programs seem to offer a way to measure the performance of schools and to hopefully provide a way for low performing schools to better educate their children.

Unfortunately, the most prominent experiment with school accountability did anything but help schools improve. NCLB punished students attending "bad" schools and mocked the schools that were not able to perform. While experiments with vouchers have not been quite as discouraging as NCLB, vouchers still have major issues that could drastically hurt public schools. This entire thesis centers on a large migration from the public school system and a very similar occurrence could happen if a state-wide voucher program were initiated. Rather than running from the problems (many of which were exaggerated if not created by outside forces) facing many public schools, it seems the best strategy would be to simply give the school districts the tools they need to improve their schools.

Chapter Five

Mississippi Conclusions

As pointed out in the first chapter, private schools have and always will be a part of American society. They came into existence long before the first public school was organized, and some are considered the best schools in the country. However, the huge surge of private schools in Mississippi in response to integration did not occur because of lofty scholarly ambitions. Private schools appeared by the hundreds in Mississippi for a very simple reason - white parents did not want their children to attend school with black children. The table below, Table 5^{cviii}, further illustrates the evacuation of public schools by white students:

Table 5

Percentage of White Enrollment in Public Schools, 1968-9 vs. 2001-2

| School district | Percentage white enrollment, 1968-69 | Percentage white enrollment, 2001-2 |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Biloxi | 86 | 55 |
| Brookhaven | 58 | 39 |
| Columbus | 58 | 18 |
| Hattiesburg | 55 | 11 |
| Jackson | 54 | 4 |
| Laurel | 53 | 13 |
| McComb | 49 | 21 |
| Starkville | 54 | 32 |

Sources: MEA Statistics, 1968-69, RG 48, vol. 185, MDAH; 2001-2 Mississippi Report Card, available at <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/Account/RC2B/RC2b.htm> (accessed on July 29, 2004).

As a consequence, Mississippi has had to deal with the effects of the private schools and the large scale desertion of the public schools for the last thirty years. It will likely still be dealing with these same issues thirty years from now.

Preceding the much-needed *Brown* case, black Mississippians had never been given a fair chance to receive an equal education. As documented in the second chapter of this thesis, black school children not only received less money from the state legislature for their education, but they were not even given the small amount of money that was set aside for them. For years they had to deal with vicious, segregationist governors like Ross Barnett who advocated that "the good Lord was the original segregationist".^{cix}

Countless districts across the state have suffered from both a drain of students and community support that can be directly traced to the creation of nearby private segregated academies. Segregated academies, with mascots like the Patriots, the Rebels or even the Confederates, acted as vacuums for white students and funding. There are many cases in which the public schools acted as tax-dollar money launderers to fund private schools and thereby promote segregation.

The study of similar towns with the existence or nonexistence of a private school as the variable is very telling. It is very easy to see how a community reacted to integration. One simply has to look for a private academy that was founded in the 50s, 60s, or 70s. Towns such as Tupelo and Kosciusko that more or less accepted integration (at least after it became inevitable in the public sector) had a head start on fully funding both white and black education and are today more successful than districts that tried to fight an impossible, racist battle.

The private school movement has created a serious problem all over the state, but especially in the capital of Jackson. The white desertion of the Jackson Public School System is one of the most extreme and saddest cases of "white flight" in the entire state, if not the nation. The pie charts presented in Chapter Three, depicting the racial demographics of some of the city's public schools, are 99-100% the same color. No one can argue that school integration was successful in Jackson, Mississippi.

Parents currently residing within the Jackson Public School District are trapped. They must either to send their children to failing, nearly segregated schools or pay several thousand dollars to send their children to private schools. On top of the private school tuition, they have to arrange transport, all the while paying taxes that support the public school system. To many parents, private schools simply are not an option.

Several plans have been debated as a possible key to the cage in which low-income parents find themselves. Two of these plans are a school voucher program and NCLB. At the first glance, the voucher program looks very appealing. Rather than give money directly to a school district for each child it teaches, a "voucher" would be given to the parents. The voucher would be good at any public (or in some cases private) school. Proponents argue that it would break the barrier that keeps many students from receiving a quality education, but there is no question public schools would suffer another crippling blow. There is no question that the "No Child Left Behind" act leaves not only children behind, but also the schools that need the most help.

Over the course of this study, disappointing discoveries have included the treatment of many black students in the 1960s and the undeniable, venomous racism that was spewed by many Mississippians and the state's leaders in response to integration.

However, there is no question that the biggest disappointments were the many problems with the "solutions" to failing schools. While it is important to understand the history of our state and how the public school system grew into what it is today, it is much more important to move the state forward. I began this study with the opinion that a voucher program would do wonders to education. After spending many hours in the library mulling over its implications, I have come to the conclusion that there are many large and potentially crippling problems with a voucher program. A little hope is granted when I think of how easy a solution sounds. Rather than run from failing schools, Mississippi should fix them. Mississippi's education system has been separated into many different categories: black/white, urban/rural, public/private. Mississippi needs to unite all of its school districts under the category "successful" It will take Mississippi a while to recover from the deep cuts that segregation and the battle to keep it, but with proper funding and programs that actually help failing schools, Mississippi can overcome its history.

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- xlvi Bolton. *The Hardest Deal of All* p. 178
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