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Bailey Junior High and the Desegregation of Jackson Public Schools

by

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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
MARCIAL DAVIDSON FORESTER, III: Bailey Junior High and the Desegregation of Jackson Public Schools
(Under the direction of Charles Eagles)

This thesis details the history of Jackson, Mississippi through the eyes of education, specifically through the public schools, and in particular Bailey Junior High (present day Bailey Magnet School). Newspaper articles from Jackson's primary media suppliers, along with personal interviews and academic essays, were used to gather information on the subject. Chapter One explores the early years of segregated public education in Jackson, as well as the beginning of Bailey Junior High and the community investment in Jackson Public Schools in the 1930s and 1940s. After World War II, the city's growing population brought greater demands for classroom space, and voters approved multiple school bonds for building and expansion. Also in this period, leaders in the black community began to push for equality in their separate school system.

Chapter Two diverts its focus from Bailey Junior High and chronicles the fight for desegregation in Mississippi and Jackson schools following Brown v Board in 1954. Chapter Three continues along this discussion and details the local effects of court-ordered desegregation in 1970. Jackson Public Schools lost more than 10,000 white students in the following years and found itself under ever-changing desegregation schemes. Most of the efforts of school administrators revolved around stabilizing the schools and stemming white flight in this decade.
Chapter Four describes the rift in community support for Jackson Public Schools that lasted into the 1980s and was illustrated in the failed school bond of 1983. The story refocuses on Bailey Junior High during this time as an example of success and failure in district schools. Chapter Five looks at more recent dissatisfaction in Jackson schools and the actions that officials have taken to surmount frustrations. Bailey again offers an insightful cross-section of these developments on a micro level. Also in the 1990s, Jackson’s school district campaigned to keep pace with growth in suburban school funding and construction, and the city’s voters exercised greater cooperation by approving school bonds in 1991 and 2006.
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CHAPTER ONE

Bailey's Beginnings: 1933 to 1937

As the Great Depression extended into the 1930s, the city of Jackson faced numerous concerns in its ability to meet the growing demand for public education. The need for more schools correlated with an expanding population, as people from the surrounding rural areas moved into the city. Jackson, the state capital, provided greater opportunities to find a job in industry and commerce, and it held the seat of many Mississippi government agencies. During the 1930s, the city's population grew from 48,282 to 62,107 and consisted of 51 percent white residents and 39 percent black residents. With the influx of new families, Jackson's segregated public school system lacked sufficient classroom space for secondary students.

Under its dual education system, Jackson supported six white elementary schools and five black elementary schools. Black students received secondary education at either Jim Hill, established in 1912, or Lanier High, organized in 1925, which contained a junior high as well. No separate junior highs existed for blacks students until the founding of Brinkley in 1956. White elementary students had only two options for junior highs in which to continue their education. Enoch's Junior High, erected in 1921 off West Capitol Street, served as the only freestanding and separate white junior high school. White students nearer to the central and northwardly expanding areas of town attended Central High. Central, located on North West Street since 1889, contained a
junior high as well. With Central’s junior and senior highs both meeting in the same building, the school could not accommodate the growing student population.

Shrinking school space and increased school attendance prompted community leaders to step forward in favor of developing new educational facilities in Jackson’s school district. Edward Latta Bailey, Superintendent of the Jackson Municipal Separate School District (Jackson Public Schools) from 1900 to 1907 and 1908 to 1933, played a major role in the early planning stages. Born in Winona, Mississippi, in 1872, Bailey went on to acquire his Bachelor of Arts degree at Mississippi College. He received graduate level schooling from the University of Virginia, the University of Chicago, New York University, and Harvard. Bailey taught at Jackson Graded School and Millsaps College before serving as superintendent. As head of the state’s largest school district, he worked to meet the increasing demand for public education in Jackson. Near the end of his career, Bailey specifically promoted the construction of a new junior high school to serve North Jackson residents. The new school would also remove the junior high at Central so that Central High could have full access to the downtown facility. However, economic depression and lack of capital funding delayed the project until after Superintendent Bailey’s retirement in 1933 and death in 1934.

Following Bailey’s retirement, the Jackson Public School Board of Trustees selected James G. Chastain as superintendent, and in 1935, Chastain brought a new building program before Jackson voters in the city’s largest school bond referendum to date. Construction estimates totaled $1 million, and city officials requested supplemental funding and oversight from the Public Works Administration (PWA), an important New Deal agency. President Roosevelt’s National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 created the
PWA to contract with private firms for public works construction. Between 1933 and 1939, the PWA funded and administered the construction of more than 34,000 projects, including seventy percent of the new schools built in the United States. Across the state of Mississippi, the PWA helped to build seven new school buildings in those six years. The PWA possessed its own administrative staff and contracted out all construction work to private firms, urging them to hire the unemployed.

To qualify for PWA assistance, Jackson taxpayers had to provide slightly more than fifty percent of the project’s total cost, requiring a bond referendum of $550,000. Public support waned at the call to increase taxes during the nation’s depression, yet community leaders remained committed to improving Jackson’s public schools. In a large meeting held in the City Auditorium, prominent Jackson citizens representing the churches, media, and business community spoke in favor of the bond. The pastor of First Presbyterian Church, J.B. Hutton; local businessman, Calvin Wells; and T.M Hederman and Fred Sullens, the editors of Jackson’s two largest newspapers, worked to gather voter support. Rallying the necessary sixty percent approval, voters passed the bond on December 10, 1935.

In his 1936 report to the school board, Superintendent Chastain recommended that the trustees purchase a site on which to build a junior high for 1,000 North Jackson students. The report also entailed thirteen alterations and modernizations to existing city school buildings and allowed for construction of another elementary school, Poindexter. In addition to accommodating the growth at Central High School, the new junior high would absorb the burden of the seventh-grade at Power Elementary. The cost for the junior high building and acquisition of the 20-acre site totaled $325,000.
board named the new school Edward L. Bailey Junior High, in honor of the late superintendent.

In 1936, the city contracted local architects N.W. Overstreet and H.H. Town to oversee Bailey’s design and construction. Overstreet and Town believed concrete would serve as the most economical material and would typify the “progressive and modern spirit of a young and hustling city such as Jackson.” The concept of an entire building manufactured solely from concrete represented highly innovative design in the late 1930s. In assembling large structures, architects had traditionally utilized a combination of brick, stone, wood, marble, or granite. Bailey’s design, however, used only one material during construction, instead of combining several. Overstreet, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, also wished to introduce modern architectural styles to the city, and many visitors found the art deco interior as uniquely impressive as the building’s exterior. In addition to aesthetic innovations, the architects looked to protect the building from erosional damage. The troublesome and shifty nature of the Yazoo clay on Bailey’s site presented foundational concerns because the school grounds sat near a major fault line. In the end, the choice of concrete proved fiscally, aesthetically, and structurally sound.

The bond stipulated that construction would employ workers from the Jackson area, and in 1936, organized labor met with the school board to request certain changes in the building process. First, the laborers moved that the board increase the common labor rate from $0.30 to $0.40 per hour. Second, the local bricklayers’ union petitioned the school board to change plans for the new junior high from a monolithic concrete structure to a brick school house. The first request passed, but the board denied the second. In
later years, *The Clarion-Ledger* reported that the bricklayers retaliated by circulating rumors claiming the new concrete structure would crumble before students even stepped foot into a classroom.\textsuperscript{13}

Bailey Junior High School, *Jackson, Mississippi*

FIGURE 1\textsuperscript{14}
Lessons from Bailey's Architecture

Workers completed construction on Bailey in the summer of 1937, and the school opened in September. Professional architectural journals of the decade praised Bailey for its conservative-modern style. In a feature article on the PWA, the April 1, 1940 edition of Life magazine pictured Bailey in a two-page spread as an example of the architectural legacy of the PWA, and the February 1938 issue of The Architectural Forum hailed Bailey as the new trend in school design, meeting the standard of “the best current practices.” The two-story structure exhibited fire-proof hallways and twenty-one classrooms along with art, home economics, industrial art, science, visual education, band, and activity rooms. The school boasted a 400 student cafeteria, a basement with male and female locker rooms, a large gymnasium, and a library with oversized windows for maximum natural light. A grand auditorium adorned with bronzed Greek statues anchored the south side of the school and seated 1,200 to 1,400 people. The auditorium served as the site for Jackson’s major entertainment events of that day.

Bailey’s central tower became the building’s most prominent feature and offered a lesson in Mississippi history to students who frequented its front steps. Framing the steps, two rising buttresses depicted bas-reliefs of the prominent figures of the Treaty at Doak’s Stand. In October of 1820, General Andrew Jackson and his chief advisor, General Thomas Hinds, met with Choctaw Chief Pushmataha at the Natchez Trace trading post, Doak’s Stand, less than eighty miles north of LeFleur’s Bluff (present day Jackson). The two parties discussed the acquisition of Choctaw land in Mississippi, and the subsequent treaty expanded American territory from the old Natchez District as far north as Doak’s Stand. Settlers readily spread into the new territory, and from 1820 to
1830 the population of Mississippi swelled by 81 percent. With the opening of this new
land, the Mississippi legislature planned to set up the capital in the center of the state, and
a committee, led by General Hinds, selected the land surrounding LeFleur’s Bluff for the
capital’s location. The North buttress portrayed Andrew Jackson and Thomas Hinds,
the namesakes of the capital city and its respective county. The South buttress showed
the Choctaw Chief Pushmataha and his band of braves. The interior of the central tower
housed a single isolated classroom on its top floor.

Bailey’s architects also celebrated the progressive spirit that had coalesced in
support of educational improvements. Over the North State Street entrance of the
school’s auditorium, a carved inscription read, “That individual is best educated whose
knowledge is broadest whose understanding is deepest and whose service is noblest. If
society would justify its investment in education let it do so in these things.” Such an
investment, however, carried a limited application, as discriminatory practices withheld
most social benefits from black citizens. As long as white power structures controlled
dual education, white citizens could justify the investment. In the coming years, the cost
of maintaining two separate education systems would rise astronomically, and when the
federal government finally enforced racial integration under a unitary system, whites no
longer found justification for an investment they perceived as dangerous. In response to
integration in 1971, an overwhelming majority of whites left the public schools,
transferring their educational assets into the private schools. The flight would continue,
and indifference towards public schools would grow to such a degree that citizens (whose
grandparents had raised taxes for Bailey) would sit idly by while students tried to learn in
overcrowded, dilapidated schools. Despite the excuses which future dissenters would use
in withholding financial support, Jacksonians in the 1930s raised taxes for social betterment during a time of nation-wide depression and uncertainty.

In April of 1936, the school board selected R. J. Landis as the first principal of Bailey Junior High. In August, Superintendent Chastain presented plans to the school board for Overstreet and Town to build a stadium behind Bailey with planned seating for 26,000 and two dressing rooms. The Board applied to the WPA for funds to install bleachers and lights, and the stadium opened for its first night football game in October of 1937. The playing field became home to white Central High and black Lanier high football teams. Four years later, the school board officially designated the field “Tiger Stadium” in honor of the Central High mascot. Serving as a small note that racial inequality pervaded all facets of public education, the school board refused to consider the Lanier Bull Dog in naming the stadium.

New Leadership, New Students: 1937 to 1947

In mid-January of 1937, Superintendent Chastain died in office, and the school board filled the vacancy with Kirby P. Walker. In September of that year, Bailey Junior High held its first classes. The junior high found its location advantageous to acquiring an able student body, as the school operated between Millsaps College and Belhaven College. Children from the homes of professors and professionals in the north Jackson area filled Bailey’s halls with many of the city’s brightest pupils. A former Bailey teacher explained that, when Jackson’s junior high students moved up to Central High, Bailey graduates consistently won election to student government offices and represented the high school as Who’s Who. The students and the community took great pride in
their new school, and in the early days many visitors traveled across the country to view Bailey’s renowned architecture. According to Bailey’s second principal, R. B. Layton, so many visitors came that the school required a “standing committee” to show them around.²³

In 1939, Jackson held another successful bond election and accumulated nearly $500,000, in conjunction with WPA funds, for school construction, additions, and repairs. The district also constructed concrete bleachers behind Tiger Stadium.²⁴ Architects of these projects noted that private business seemed vastly improved from the previous decade and cited labor scarcity as an indication of a near end to the depression.²⁵ Contractors also found construction materials in short supply as America moved closer to participation in World War II.

During the years of the United States’s involvement in World War II, Bailey’s students recognized their role in contributing to the war effort, as President Roosevelt called every school house to become a service center for the homefront. Programs such as the Selective Service Board and the Civic Defense Council used Bailey and Enochs junior highs as “day quarters” in excess of 3,000 hours during the war years.²⁶ The Bailey Bugle student newspaper also kept the “Bailey War Report,” measuring the amount of money raised for the war effort during that year. The April 22 edition of the 1942 Bailey Bugle reported that students had raised $32,000.²⁷ Principal Layton, who served from 1943 to 1947, recalled that during World War II, Bailey Junior High sold an estimated $500,000 in government bonds and stamps, more than any other junior high in the nation.²⁸
After the depression years passed, many families could afford to have more children, and the post-World War II years witnessed a nation-wide "boom" in birthrates. Locally, the population explosion presented a significant dilemma for Jackson Public Schools (JPS), as administrators worked to meet the intensified demands for greater classroom space. The district also looked to stem the exodus of underpaid white teachers from Jackson Public Schools, while confronting challenges from black educators concerning the inequality of teacher compensation in its separate system. In February of 1948, Gladys Noel Bates, a black teacher at Jackson’s Smith Robertson school, filed a petition before the school board requesting an end to racial discrimination in teacher salaries. As a result, Bates and her husband, a teacher at Lanier High, lost their jobs in JPS, as did an intervening plaintiff, R. Jess Brown. The school board ignored her petition, and the U.S. District Court Judge Sidney Mize dismissed her case. Bates’s lawsuit, however, helped to alert the national consciousness to the inequalities in Mississippi’s dual school system, and the state legislature spent the following four years distributing greater funds to black schools in an attempt to prove equality could exist in segregated education. The effort to equalize Jackson’s schools also began in this era, and voters passed school bonds in 1948, 1950, 1952, and 1953, totaling $14.4 million.

The school bond of 1950 exhibited a fairly equal disbursement of funding for black and white school construction. In June of 1950, Jackson planned to expand its facilities as the district anticipated an increase of eighty-six percent enrollment over a five-year period. The school board distributed flyers to promote the bond, stressing district enlargement over the previous two years (from 16 to 65 square miles) and
highlighting improvements for both black and white schools. City commissioners placed $13 million on the ballot for seven civic projects, of which $8.5 million went towards the expanding school district. For the 7,103 white students, the city planned to build five new elementary schools and one new junior high school for the southwest area of town. Under the local equalization program, the Jackson school board prepared to construct five new elementary schools, two new junior high schools, and one new senior high school for the city's 6,268 black students. On August 1, 1950, voters approved the entire $13 million bond by eighty-nine percent, including the $8.5 million item for public schools. The United States's involvement in the Korean War, however, limited necessary construction materials, and officials feared that city projects would be delayed. Yet the city denoted the public school projects as its top priority and allowed the school board to finalize its architectural plans.

The administration of Bailey Junior High greatly encouraged such civic commitment. Bailey's student population had grown as the city continued to expand northward, and by 1950 the school's third principal, H. J. Cleland, reported that the junior high came close to running out of adequate space. The school board set aside $70,000 in bonds for improvements at Bailey and planned to meet the increased demand for junior high classes. Even a fire in the summer of 1951 could not deter pupil growth at Bailey. Students crammed into makeshift classrooms in the school's undisturbed levels, as construction crews hurried to repair damage to the roof, auditorium, and second floor rooms.

Across the Jackson Public School district, constant lack of funding exposed the impossibility of meeting demands for both white growth and black equalization. The
district invested millions into dilapidated black schools, yet as Charles Bolton noted in his book, *The Hardest Deal of All*, "equalization efforts only slightly narrowed the wide chasm separating white and black education." The state's low-performing economy, still largely based on agriculture, could not support equal schools for both races, not even in the urbanized capital city. Black community leaders, meanwhile, became quite disenchanted with empty promises of white officials. Following white requests for patience over the previous decade, black leaders had helped to prevent other activists from challenging segregation and the "admitted inequalities" in teacher pay, transportation, and facilities. In the 1950s, however, many blacks, galvanized by their experience in World War II, grew discontented with their legally-imposed inferior status and sought to break down the vestiges of "separate but equal." Yet obstinate white legislatures intended to do everything in their power to maintain the status quo. As challenges to legal segregation in public education progressed through the federal courts, Mississippi lawmakers put a hold on equalization programs and prepared for the long fight to sustain segregation.
CHAPTER TWO

State and Local Responses to Brown

In the wake of the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, which removed the doctrine of “separate but equal” from public education, the Mississippi legislature took up the fight to maintain a segregated society and focused much of its attention on public schools. Between 1954 and 1964, state lawmakers passed forty laws aimed at upholding segregation in public schools. In the months following Brown, the Mississippi legislature sought to codify previously accepted social norms, namely the socially inferior position of the state’s black citizens. Such a response invoked memories of Mississippi’s 1865 legislature, the first Southern assembly to initiate Black Codes.

The tumultuous post-Civil War South saw revolutionary social change, as white Mississippians, no longer able to support military resistance, fortified their defense along battle lines which would hold for more than one hundred years: legislative resistance. The Black Codes attempted to deal with the reality that no law existed that defined what it meant to be “of color” in Mississippi since there had previously been only one category, “slave.” These codes outlawed miscegenation and defined a “person of color” to be someone of one-eighth black parentage, essentially within the last three generations. By such codes, Mississippians made it clear that even though blacks had received emancipation rights as free persons, nevertheless blacks would still be deemed unequal
under Mississippi law. In a manner similar to its 1865 counterpart, the Mississippi legislature of 1954 passed laws designed to hold black citizens in a socially inferior state. The legislative focus on public education began with the Pupil Placement Act, designed to confuse the legal status of segregation by technically assigning students to schools based on factors other than race. The Pupil Placement Act later led to the development of "freedom of choice" plans in Jackson Public Schools. In a Special Session, lawmakers proposed an amendment to the state constitution of 1890 to empower the legislature to close down public schools, provide disposal of school property, and authorize use of state money for "private school" tuition grants. White men in power believed that they could abolish public schools and in the process divert public funds into tuition grants for white children to attend private schools. The newly created private schools, consequently, would not fall subject to court desegregation, and the state could maintain the sanctity of segregated education. In Jackson, no call for compliance with the court's ruling emerged from the white community. David Blankenhorn, in his 1977 essay, "The Message from Jackson," noted that during the late 1950's white resistance blossomed while white moderates fell silent. Responding to the Brown decision, on May 18, 1954 the front-page editorial of the Jackson Daily News read "Bloodstains on White Marble Steps," and declared that "Mississippi will not and cannot try to abide by such a decision." The scope of such a focused response revealed the contentious nature of a mixed education system where blacks and whites interacted daily under equal provisions. Anxious white parents feared for their children in any interracial environment because many believed such racial mixing could lead to miscegenation. One bill from the 1955 Special Session evidenced these fears by banning white and black attendance at the same
school, an understood social practice solidified by law. Similar angst would pervade the coming years in Jackson, as segregationists became more violent and threatening.

*Jackson Daily News* editor, Frederick Sullens, wrote a response to *Brown* claiming, "Human blood may stain Southern soil in many places because of this decision....White and Negro children in the same school will lead to miscegenation. Miscegenation leads to mixed marriages and mixed marriages lead to mongrelization of the human race." With the assurance that public education would remain segregated in Jackson, voters continued to display a commitment to school improvement by approving school bonds in 1956, 1959, and 1964 totaling $15.9 million. Whatever motives underlay school bond approvals, voters demonstrated they would not pull their support from the public schools just yet. Jackson’s commitment correlated to the surety with which white citizens believed they would maintain control over Jackson Public Schools. The district constructed 32 new schools between the years of 1954 and 1970, investing its time, energy, and money into public education. The magnitude of this investment would later dictate the degree of hostility with which whites would fight to preserve social tradition. Minority challenges to the status quo broke down perceived stability over the following decade, and whites largely retracted their loyalty from the schools. A day would come when bond issues would face widespread opposition and ultimate rejections from the white community.

**A New Mississippi Plan: 1955 to 1962**

Mississippi prepared itself for hard-line resistance to any social disturbance in the early 1950s, however, with the Supreme Court’s decree in *Brown II* that school
desegregation proceed “with all deliberate speed,” and placing the burden of enforcement on local school authorities, the courts handed the state legislature a powerful instrument for resisting integrated public schools. Following the Brown II ruling in May of 1955, forty-two blacks, with the support of Jackson’s NAACP branch, petitioned the public school board to take swift action in reorganizing the public schools on a “non-discriminatory basis.” The Jackson Daily News and The Clarion-Ledger retaliated by publishing the names and places of employment of the forty-two black petitioners. Threats of job loss, credit loss, and violence instantly followed the publication, and within one month all forty-two petitioners had removed their names.\textsuperscript{47}

As anxieties over immediate integration subsided, Mississippi took a course of calculated defiance towards the Supreme Court’s ruling. Such blatant disregard extended from the legislature to the classroom. The state legislature of 1956 drafted a resolution stating its doctrine of interposition, and it directed officials to follow this doctrine by prohibiting compliance with desegregation rulings.\textsuperscript{48} Later that session, the legislature repealed compulsory school attendance and sought an amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting the state control of schools.\textsuperscript{49} Lawmakers also outlawed common-law marriages, thus making children of such marriages illegitimate.\textsuperscript{50} Under the pupil transfer provisions, these children could be rejected in applying for school transfers, which white lawmakers assumed as a potential roadblock to minority activists.

The 1956 legislature also created the State Sovereignty Commission, a pro-segregationist state agency that operated for the next twenty-one years. Sovereignty Commission director Erle Johnston kept close communication with executives of Jackson’s two largest newspapers, Jimmy Ward of the Jackson Daily News and Tom
Hederman *The Clarion-Ledger*, and maintained surveillance over local civil rights activist Medgar Evers as well as the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The Sovereignty Commission also helped to fund the Citizens' Council. In Jackson, Chamber of Commerce president Ellis Wright, Mayor Allen Thompson, and several members of the school board organized a Citizens' Council chapter in July of 1954. In 1958, the state legislature authorized the governor to close public schools and colleges, and, in 1960, lawmakers proposed an amendment to the Mississippi Constitution to remove the provision that mandated the legislature to provide free public schools. Mississippi voters ratified the amendment in the general election of 1960. State lawmakers also authorized local school board trustees to close public schools.

By 1960, the Citizens' Council and the Sovereignty Commission colluded to coordinate and implement government and private strategies to secure a segregated society. Council president, William Simmons, an influential Jackson businessman and staunch segregationist, devised a plan that illegally funneled $120,000 from the Sovereignty Commission to the Citizens' Council. Between 1960 and 1964, these funds worked to harass and frustrate actions of "left-wing...pro-integration people." From the Governor's Mansion in downtown Jackson, Ross Barnett (whose 1960 campaign song said "He's for segregation one hundred per cent. He ain't no mod-rate like some other gent") declared to the news media, that "I would vote for the devil if he were a segregationist....If we lose sight of states rights, we'll lose everything."

In August of 1962, state NAACP Field Secretary Medgar Evers and eight other black Jackson parents petitioned the school board for immediate desegregation of city schools. Evers threatened legal action if the Board would not address his petition in two
weeks, and he considered an attempt to enroll his own children in a white public school. The school board, however, ignored the appeal for integrated schools. As Evers’s petition sat unheeded in administrative offices, local white leaders decided upon a less blatant form of discrimination and planned to allow future requests to stall in “friendly” southern courts.

Jackson Public Schools in the Courts: 1963 to 1971

On March 4, 1963, the U.S. District Court in Jackson filed Civil Action 3379, which stemmed from Evers’s renewed petition and initiated eight years of court battles involving the Jackson Public Schools. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) sent lawyers Jack Greenburg and Derrick A. Bell down from New York to represent Evers, as well as acquiring the assistance of R. Jess Brown and Carsie A. Hall, two of the three black lawyers practicing in Mississippi at the time. The plaintiff’s case stated that Jackson’s district remained segregated in all school-related fields including budgeting, pupil assignment zones, staff, and administration. Bell and Greenburg also pointed out that Mississippi state law required segregation. While black parents in the past eight years had twice sought compliance to the Brown decision, Jackson Public Schools had not attempted to conform to the Supreme Court’s guidelines.

Violence would soon follow the civil action, and on the morning of June 12, as Medgar Evers returned to his home from a rally at New Jerusalem Baptist Church, a sniper, later identified as Greenwood Citizens’ Council member Byron De La Beckwith, shot Evers in the back as he walked to meet his wife and children. Evers died en route to the hospital. In the same month as Evers’s assassination, Jackson’s U.S. District Court
Judge Sidney Mize dismissed Civil Action 3379. Plaintiff attorneys appealed to U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, known to many white Jacksonians as the “mixing court” for its activist temperament in civil rights decisions.

In February of 1964, the Fifth Circuit Court found that Jackson’s public schools illegally imposed segregation based on race and remanded the case to Judge Mize. Blankenhorn claimed that the reopening of the case in May of 1964 “stands as both the culmination of the hate and fury of massive resistance and a subtle but crucial break with that mentality of intransigence.” As the trial reopened on May 18, the school board, represented by the local Cannada firm, argued for legal segregation based on two lines of defense. The school board founded its first argument on the Pupil Placement Act, which allowed local board members to replace pupil attendance zones with “pupil registration zones.” Registration zones still maintained segregation with the same effect of attendance zones, but the district argued that, in principle, it did not force students to attend segregated schools, only to register at them. The school board never openly explained the process to the community, yet it contended that anyone could request to transfer schools under the freedom of choice plan. The district’s argument ignored the fact that pupil placement laws had never been upheld by any federal court, and that the Mississippi legislature continued to operate a dual education system.

The Canada firm’s second defense reverted to tactics argued in Brown a decade earlier. The school board sought to provide scientific “evidence” of black inferiority and suggested that segregated schools kept the different races from mixing, harkening back to white anxieties from the previous decade. The LDF ignored the school board’s testimony concerning black inferiority, periodically reminding Judge Mize of the irrelevant nature
of such "evidence," as *Brown* had eliminated any form of segregation. LDF attorneys, instead, focused their rebuttal upon the district’s discrimination under pupil placement laws. Judge Mize’s decision carefully outlined his approval of the defendant’s arguments, yet, in ultimate deference to the higher courts, he begrudgingly affirmed the plaintiffs’ injunction and approved a plan to begin desegregation in Jackson public schools. Under the plan, the school board allowed “a handful of black children” to desegregate first grade in 1964, followed by a consecutive grade for each of the following eleven years. The plaintiffs’ attorney immediately objected to the plan and began to formulate an appeal to prove that a slow timetable amounted to nothing more than legally extended segregation.

On August 20, 1964, Jackson again faced the prospect of violence as forty-three black first-graders registered at the city’s white elementary schools. While no violence took place, whites still resisted even this most meager form of token integration. Blankenhorn commented that on September 14, 1964, “in bittersweet irony, the largest number of black children attending a white school were those assigned to the Jefferson Davis Elementary School.”

Also that August, Governor Paul Johnson approved a charter for the Council Schools Foundation headquartered in the capital city, and solidified the state’s involvement in Citizens’ Council support. Several weeks later, the first Council School in the nation commenced operations in Jackson with several dozen white students attending. For whites who could not fully pay Council School tuition, the state passed legislation providing free text books and $185 in government grants for financial assistance.
Satisfying the Courts

In June of 1965, the Fifth Circuit Court overturned the 1964 school board plan and ordered a new one to speed up the desegregation process. The new court-order called for three grades to desegregate in 1965, and four grades each of the following two years. In September of 1965, Jackson peacefully desegregated second, third, and twelfth grades on a token basis. The plaintiffs, however, objected to the gradualist nature of this process, while the school board maintained its defense of segregation based on the Pupil Placement Act and opposition to racial mixing. On January 26, 1966, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, fed up with the school board’s acerbic reasoning, ordered fourth, fifth, ninth, and eleventh grades desegregated in September. The remaining four grades had to desegregate the following year under a strictly monitored freedom of choice plan, and the school board sent out school choice forms throughout the district. Judge John Minor Wisdom, of the Fifth Circuit, identified freedom of choice plans as temporary instruments leading to eventual full integration. White citizens, however, would now attach their final hope for segregated schools to the freedom of choice plans they had so vehemently rejected. In September, fourth, fifth, ninth, and eleventh grades of JPS desegregated under the court-ordered freedom of choice plan, and the remaining grades were to follow in the fall of 1967.

In March of 1967, the Fifth Circuit Court, in U.S. v Jefferson County Board of Education, required school boards to take positive steps to end segregated school systems and replace them with “unitary school systems” comprising “no Negro schools and no white schools – just schools.” The LDF filed a motion in U.S. District Court in
Mississippi requesting the Fifth Circuit’s new guidelines apply to the Jackson case. In May, as the motion awaited court approval, the Supreme Court ruled in *Green v. County School Board* that any freedom of choice plan outside of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and Fifth Circuit guidelines was unconstitutional, and Justice William Brennan placed the burden to desegregate upon local school boards. The plaintiff’s lawyers in the Jackson case filed a new appeal for compliance with the *Green* regulations, and the Jackson motion was eventually consolidated, along with thirty other districts, into the District Court for southern Mississippi as *U.S. v Hinds County School Board*. Both the LDF and the Justice Department represented the plaintiffs and sought immediate desegregation in lieu of freedom of choice plans in all thirty districts by September of 1968. The District Court turned down the request, and the Fifth Circuit ordered a special three-judge panel to hear the appeal as its highest priority. After waiting seven months, the panel also rejected the plaintiff’s appeal for full and immediate compliance with *Green*.72

On July 3, 1969, however, the Fifth Circuit reversed the panel’s decision and ordered the thirty districts to submit “unitary” desegregation plans by mid-August for the upcoming school term. Twenty staff members from HEW’s Division of Equal Education Opportunities quickly descended upon Mississippi to aid school officials in the planning process. The State Department of Education compounded difficulties by refusing to cooperate with the HEW team, thus placing the onus upon local school boards to meet HEW regulations.73

President Nixon and HEW Secretary Robert Finch saw the Fifth Circuit’s deadline as unreasonable and pleaded for a delay. The District Court complied and
extended the deadline for the new plans until December 1, 1969. The Fifth Circuit upheld the delay and suspended its July 3 order. In response, the LDF directed an immediate appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Alexander v Holmes County Board of Education*, and on Wednesday, October 29, 1969, the High Court sided with the plaintiffs, ruling that the delay had yielded the most minimal amount of integration.  

The Supreme Court's ruling in *Alexander* shocked many white Mississippians with its severity. It called for a mid-year reordering of the school system to fully accomplish desegregation and ignored the objections of the Nixon Administration. The court also rendered its decision in *Brown II* obsolete, saying that "all deliberate speed' for desegregation is no longer permissible....The obligation of every school district is to terminate dual school systems at once and to operate unitary schools." In Jackson, no whites spoke up in defense of the decision. On December 1, 1969, the Fifth Circuit, based on the Supreme Court’s declaration, ruled that all thirty districts must integrate teaching staffs in each school by February 1, 1970, representing the black-white ratio in the system as a whole. The districts were to integrate pupils in the same manner no later than September of 1970. In mid-December, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, in supervision of the Fifth Circuit, ruled that the Mississippi districts needed to fully desegregate pupils as well as teachers by the February 1 deadline.

On January 3, in a statewide television address, Governor John Bell Williams announced, that "The moment that we have resisted for fifteen years — that we have fought hopefully, at least to delay — is finally at hand....I am frank to tell you that our arsenal of legal and legislative weapons has been exhausted." On January 14, 1970, the full Supreme Court upheld Black’s order, and ten days later, JPS closed for two weeks so
that school officials could hastily work to meet the court’s deadline. Yet, JPS officials refused to discuss the plans with Legal Defense Fund attorneys or Jackson’s black community leaders.

On January 12, 1970, *Time Magazine* published an article entitled “Surrender in Mississippi” which documented the historic breakdown of the state’s dual system. *Time* reported that most diehard segregationist leaders had no more to offer than mere rhetoric, and calls for massive resistance had lost their impact. The article gave an account of Governor Williams, who was a father of two school-age children, equivocally calling for support of the public schools while expressing sympathy for parents who contemplated keeping their children out of the schools. The Governor also conceded that Mississippi had fired its “last legal shot” and had no choice but to surrender. The *Time* article ended on a hopeful note, however, and claimed, that “Despite local fears, neither integration nor the exodus from the public schools is likely to destroy public education in Mississippi,” noting that many parents could not afford the $40 average monthly tuition charged for private schools at that time. Yet the reporter had underestimated the extent of white investment in the dual system. Whites had long been led to believe that segregation would never fall, and nothing short of shock could follow. Shock soon turned into disgust, as many whites began to embrace a perception of public schools as inferior and unstable. The perception would become so deep-seeded that no amount of moderate influence could dissuade whites from a full-fledged exodus from Jackson Public Schools.
CHAPTER THREE

Plaza Plans, Busing, and White Flight

On February 6, 1970, Jackson Public Schools reopened under the court-ordered desegregation plan. The Cannada firm and the all-white public school administration created the plan without consulting the LDF or black community leaders, thereby minimizing true integration and allowing for future residential resegregation. One would assume that because whites controlled the planning, most whites would stay with the schools. *The Clarion-Ledger*, however, reported that on February 7, out of 957 whites “expected” to attend Jackson’s five formerly all-black secondary schools, only 119 whites showed up. These figures came from students registered for new schools in February and did not account for the nearly 10,000 whites who left public schools entirely in 1970.

With an LDF appeal to the Fifth Circuit Court in May, the court overturned the school board’s plan and required Jackson schools to follow a specific HEW contingency plan while assigning a Biracial Committee to work alongside the school board. In June, the Cannada firm stepped down from representing the school board. New hearings opened later that month in Jackson, and district judge Dan M. Russell, Jr. affirmed the HEW plan in July.

The HEW contingency plan combined high schools and junior highs into unusually large attendance zones and divided, or “paired,” them by grades. The plan also
established two 7th and 8th grade centers, three 9th grade centers, two 10th grade centers, and three 11th and 12th grade centers, as illustrated in Figures II and III. After further review, the Fifth Circuit Court ordered an identical plan for elementary schools. By increasing the area of attendance zones and distributing the grades across fewer locations, HEW planners sought to deny any attempts at resegregation while making the newly integrated schools more appealing to white students. The plan, however, would not go into effect until February of 1971, calling for the second consecutive mid-year reorganization of the schools.\textsuperscript{85}
NEW JUNIOR HIGH ZONES — Five zones for junior high schools have been established in the new court plan for the Jackson City Schools. Peeples and Whitten Junior Highs will be paired with the Hill-Isable complex in Zone 1, with grades 7-8 assigned to Peeples and Whitten and grade 9 assigned to Hill-Isable. In Zone 2 all students in grades 7-9 are assigned to Blackburn. In Zone 3 grades 7-8 are assigned to Hardy and grade 9 to Enochs. In Zone 4, grades 7-8 are assigned to Bailev and grade 9 to Rowan. In Zone 5 grades 7-8 are assigned to Chastain and Callaway and grade 9 to Powell. This map is based on an HEW map, but the school district is allowed some flexibility in drawing exact zone lines.

FIGURE II
NEW HIGH SCHOOL ZONES — Four zones are provided in the new integration plan ordered in U.S. District Court for the Jackson City Schools. This map is based on one contained in HEW Plan A, which was adopted by the court. The school district opposed all three secondary school plans submitted by HEW but raised more objections to Plans B and C. Under Plan A, Wingfield (grades 11-12) will be paired with Hill (grade 10). Provine (grades 10-12) will be in a zone to itself. Brinkley will draw 10th graders from Zones 3 and 4, with grades 11-12 going to Murrah in Zone 3 and to Callaway in Zone 4.

FIGURE III

28
The concept of individual grade centers presented an unfamiliar and inconvenient situation for many Jackson citizens, and a Mississippi law prohibiting public transportation for school-age children exacerbated frustrations as families could possibly have to transport students across multiple schools. *Newsweek* interviewed one Jackson mother who had four children in four different schools, with only her "unreliable car" to get them there. 88 Instability and uncertainty filled this transitional time, as the courts had ordered four different desegregation plans for JPS in the previous two years alone.

Assistant Superintendent of Business Administration, William M. Dalehite, noted that the rush in planning subordinated educational purposes and philosophies to color-ratios. Teacher reassignments for desegregation were decided by "a lottery (complete with squirrel cage drum)." 89 Parents sensed the uncertainty in the plan and believed they would lose the stability of neighborhood schools. As a result, several thousand more white parents pulled their children from the public schools. 90

**TABLE I** 91

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In April of 1971, the Supreme Court handed down its decision in the North Carolina case, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, which approved city busing as an additional means for desegregating school systems. For Jackson, a large urban district with segregated housing patterns, the ruling meant that the district would bear the burden of transporting students out of their own neighborhoods and into “foreign” school zones for integration. Also that month, IPS hired an outside consulting firm, Tempo Center for Advanced Studies, to analyze the district’s organizational structure and assist in establishing a desegregation plan that would satisfy the courts. The study stressed that to keep whites involved in the public schools, the district needed to keep busing to a minimum, avoid assigning white students to inner city schools, return to traditional grade-structures, and put an end to court battles. Responding to the Tempo study and the newly approved busing plan, the LDF, Biracial Committee, and school board resumed discussions in May. With assistance from the State Research and Development Center, the parties reached a compromise in Judge Russell’s court and instituted a plan to build two “educational plazas,” close four inner-city schools and five white neighborhood elementary schools, and insure integration by a 300 percent busing increase.

The central feature of the plan rested in the educational plazas, as JPS reassigned fifth and sixth-graders in 20 elementary schools to two educational complexes. Plans for the plazas pictured sixteen “modules” surrounding a common media center/library, each module accommodating 120 students. To win endorsement from both the LDF and the school board, the plazas would employ an “open school” approach to teaching. Contemporary educators saw the open school as more conducive to learning, since it
involved techniques such as non-graded classrooms and team teaching, while focusing on a student's individual growth. Education at the plaza schools would emphasize an informal and flexible environment in which pupils could respond more positively to instruction.  

The district established one plaza at Powell Junior High, located in a North Jackson middle-class black neighborhood, and planned to construct the second in a white South Jackson neighborhood. By dividing the entire city of Jackson into two attendance zones for fifth and sixth-graders, the district hoped to obtain court-approved desegregation and to renew whites' confidence in the public schools, as the plazas prevented school administrators from assigning whites to inner-city black schools. The plan also set up suburban and inner-city "subzones" for the rest of the district schools not included in the plazas. Over the next four years, JPS would bus a considerable amount of students in each subzone to schools outside of their neighborhood for the purpose of overcoming residential segregation. Responding to the plan's approval, the court also granted a three year moratorium on litigation to provide some much-needed stability. The efforts of the city's 1971 plan gained national attention and praise, yet the results yielded great local frustration. Because residential segregation had existed well before Brown, the district still had to provide substantial busing to meet the court's demands. During the three years under the plaza plan, JPS operated 121 buses in transporting 9,000 students of both races out of their neighborhoods and as far as 15 miles to integrated schools.  

In the fall of 1970, Mississippi had begun to receive federal funding from the Emergency School Assistance Program (ESAP) which would spend close to $10 million
on Jackson schools over the next six years in an effort to modernize the district.\textsuperscript{98} The school board had refused federal aid over the past fifteen years because the conditions of acceptance would undermine segregation. With new leadership and new agendas, however, the district readily accepted federal assistance, indicating the vast change within the administration's ideology. One central goal of the administration in using ESAP grant money became stemming the white flight from Jackson public schools. ESAP funds created the JPS Office of Communications and Public Information which launched multiple campaigns involving the city's newspapers, television stations, and businesses, and attempted to display an attractive image of the district to the white community; yet these efforts proved futile.\textsuperscript{99}

White enrollment dropped after the 1971-72 school year, with those whites who had withdrawn firmly setting root in Jackson's blossoming private schools. To make matters worse, the plaza plan received mass amounts of criticism from parents and teachers, both black and white alike. The plaza plan introduced a substantial change in the development of Jackson's public schools. From 1971 forward, the perception surrounding the district focused upon lack of white involvement in the schools. Much of the administrative ideology would move from an open offensive at regaining white pupils to a more subtle approbation and defense of the system as a majority black district.

New Leadership, Stability Needed

The unstable nature of the desegregation years took its toll on all levels of school involvement, perhaps none so harshly as on the superintendent's office. Whereas the district had only employed five superintendents in the past seventy-six years, JPS had
turned over four school heads in five years. Superintendent Martin resigned in August of 1970, due to the intense pace and pressure of desegregation. The school board advanced Harry S. Kirshman from his position in the Educational Administration office to acting superintendent. Kirshman served an intense year, during which JPS worked to formulate the 1971 desegregation plan. In August of 1971, the board named Brandon B. Sparkman as the new school head to replace the acting superintendent. Under Sparkman, the district modified its junior high and high school plan, returning to a traditional 3-3 structure, yet these changes failed to attract white students. In 1973, the board replaced Sparkman with Robert Fortenberry. Fortenberry saw the obvious need to gain stability while managing change within the district, and he recognized that:

Jackson had just come through a period of tremendous trauma in ending the dual school system. There are three phases of school integration: resistance, dismantling, and rebuilding, and Jackson had already gone through the first two stages when I got here. My biggest problem and biggest challenge was that I knew I had to start the rebuilding stage. Even though the community wanted stability very much, I knew I had to go in there and make some more changes....The first step was to gather information that would validate what common sense was telling me.

In the spring of 1974, JPS hired the Gallup Organization to assess the needs of the community. The Gallup poll measured community perceptions of the schools' strengths and weaknesses, and it gauged parental support for the proposed community center. The top concerns presented by both black and white parents involved preparing students who did not go to college and maintaining good discipline within the schools. The poll showed that blacks rated the quality of the teachers and preparing students for college much more favorably than whites. In addition to rating the district favorably, black parents perceived less need for change, signifying the potential for alienation if the district decided to change educational structure. However, school officials also
recognized that change would be necessary to retain and regain white students. The study showed that whites were most dissatisfied with the existing public schools; however, both blacks and whites saw busing as a weakness and hoped to return to neighborhood schools.\(^\text{104}\) Dissatisfaction in the white community translated into staggering losses in student enrollment. Across the district, more than 10,000 whites had left the public schools. At Bailey alone, only 86 whites remained in the entire 713-student body.\(^\text{105}\) Over the following years, the administration would work out several solutions to stabilize white enrollment, however few would garner success.

**New Plans to Stop Decline**

In April of 1975, Superintendent Fortenberry announced a reworked school desegregation plan to combat declining enrollment and relieve dissatisfied parents. Judge Russell approved the 1975 plan to reduce busing for integration purposes and to allow more students to attend schools closer to their neighborhoods. School board member, James Johnson, the only black trustee, acknowledged that making public schools “palatable” to whites currently enrolled in private schools was a major objective of the new plan. The plan represented a series of compromises that ended with the burden of desegregation resting entirely on the black community.\(^\text{106}\) The district abandoned the educational plazas and returned to the traditional six-year elementary grade structure. JPS eliminated many suburban subzones, which had assigned white students to inner-city schools, and allowed for neighborhood schools in these zones.\(^\text{107}\) As a result, nine inner-city schools became all black, legally segregated under the new plan. Black community leaders agreed to the effects in exchange for increased job
opportunities in the form of strict hiring quotas of 50 percent black representation across all levels of JPS. The district recognized nine “target” elementary schools of ninety percent or greater black composition as eligible for state and federal compensatory education funding. The plan removed the 5th and 6th grade education centers begun under the 1971 plan, and instead established 1st - 6th grades in all thirty elementary schools. The plan also eliminated more suburban zones from which students had been bused for purposes of integration but retained the zones in predominately black inner-city areas. Judge Russell placed a four year moratorium on any legal action against the plan, again trying to achieve a much more stable school system.

In response to the proposal, William Simmons, Council School president, released a statement saying that the new plan will not cause whites to leave private schools, “for parents whose children have withdrawn to private schools have already indicated their preference for education as opposed to integration….it seems more likely that those whites still in public schools who value education above integration would be motivated to withdraw.” However, the enrollment results for the 1975-76 school year showed that the new plan had won support of enough white families that withdrawal had nearly ceased for the first time in five years. The system as a whole lost about one percent in white enrollment, while elementary schools halted the decline, experiencing a small gain in white students.

Movement for Community Involvement

In 1977, Jackson Public Schools witnessed a 5.6 percent increase in the district’s enrollment due to the city’s annexation of 40 square miles south and west of the city. JPS
added six former Hinds County schools including Oak Forest, Timberlawn, Van Winkle, West Side, and Woodville Heights elementary schools, as well as Forest Hill High School. The addition of these schools increased Jackson’s white student enrollment in public schools, from 30 percent to 35 percent. In addition to increasing the attendance zones, JPS officials decided to close Central High School, causing an increase in all Jackson high schools, excluding Callaway.\(^{112}\)

In the spring term of 1979, school administrators searched for a way to balance the increasing number of bus routes with the district’s budget. A recent law passed by the state legislature required school districts to provide transportation for all students living more than a mile from their school. As a result, JPS increased its busing budget by $1.5 million from the previous year. To remedy the situation, the district proposed dropping twenty to sixty “short routes” by combining adjoining bus zones into fewer routes. The school board also planned to build a new elementary school at the corner of Callaway High School property for North Jackson residents.\(^{113}\)

In 1979, the Jackson Daily News reported that 910 of 1801, or 51 percent, of JPS teachers were black. This statistic represented an 11 percent average increase over the past ten years, following the 1969 federal court advisement to equalize the racial balance of the district’s forty percent black teacher staff.\(^{114}\) These numbers suggest that white flight extended to teachers and students alike, and teacher ratios began to better reflect the make-up of the community involved in JPS. More positively, racial balance signified the fulfillment of compromise from the 1975 plan, as blacks had gained more jobs and more authority in decision-making. Still, *The Clarion-Ledger* pronounced “Public Schools Big Losers,” in its analyses on the changes in JPS over the past decade and
reported that the district had about 10,500 fewer students than ten years earlier. The article also cited the fact that even with the dissolution of Jackson’s Council Schools three years earlier, private school enrollment had stabilized and even increased while public school numbers remained down.\textsuperscript{115}

With the start of the 1979-80 school year, Jackson Public Schools needed economic revitalization, and over the next four years, school officials would seek to renew community investments in the public schools. By the end of November, it appeared a bond issue would be necessary to maintain upkeep in the public schools. In the decades following the 1935 bond issue that set aside funding for Bailey Junior High, Jackson had accumulated a promising track record by approving eight of its previous nine school bonds.\textsuperscript{116} However, with the exodus of over 10,000 white students from JPS in the past decade, many were skeptical towards the likelihood of passing the necessary 60 percent.
CHAPTER FOUR

Financing Stability in Jackson Public Schools

In the spring of 1981, the Jackson school board redrew attendance zone lines in an effort to cut busing costs and relieve overcrowding across the 31,107 student district. The new lines eliminated many obsolete subzones left over from the 1971 desegregation plan. Over the past decade, older white residents had moved out of several north and west Jackson neighborhoods. Because young black families replaced the older residents, Jackson Public Schools no longer needed to bus as many students to separate school zones for racial balance. School officials also intended to gradually reinstate neighborhood schools across the district. The concept unsettled some citizens, as neighborhood schools renewed images of past segregation, however Superintendent Fortenberry believed that neighborhood schools would generate increased community support for JPS. If the schools pleased parents, the district would be more likely to pass school bonds for needed renovations and construction. Attorney Fred Banks Jr., representative for the plaintiffs in the desegregation lawsuit, echoed Fortenberry’s thoughts and noted the significance of community support in passing a bond issue.117

Fortenberry and Banks’s views represented a new focus for the public schools, outside of attracting whites for racial balance. Over the next ten years, the district would face financial concerns as overcrowding and maintenance costs for aging facilities increased.118 The 1981 rezoning plan reopened several schools that were closed during
desegregation. JPS reinstituted these facilities to provide more classroom space and accommodate shifting neighborhood demographics, demonstrating the district's desire to avoid wasted spending and utilize available resources. Yet school officials would struggle to present a convincing argument to Jackson whites who represented sixty-one percent of the city's population and believed they had no invested interest in the public schools. As a JPS planning commission reported in February of 1981, whites comprised merely thirty percent of the student population, and the district served only seventy-four percent of all school age children within the city limits.\textsuperscript{119} In seeking white support, the school administration adopted a policy in July which allowed white students to transfer from a school of less than 10 percent white enrollment to a school near to them with 40 percent or more white enrollment, given availability. Officials intended to "prevent emotional stress among white children who are zoned to attend mostly black schools."\textsuperscript{120} The policy provided a good example of district attempts to attract whites back to public schools by placing a majority of the burden on blacks, and it demonstrated how great a role race played in obtaining community support.

In accord with JPS's focus on financial stability, bond issues of the 1980s became highly publicized and contentious matters. Historically, revenue from school bonds had allowed JPS to improve and expand, and Jackson citizens had approved seven of the last eight bond measures. A close correlation existed between the level of community interest endowed in the schools and the amount of additional tax support the schools received, as evidenced by past bond campaigns. Yet no matter how controversial prior bond issues had seemed, perhaps none exposed such deep-seeded communal divides as the 1983 school bond.
Bailey and Bond Plans

As the voting date neared for the 1983 school bond referendum, *The Clarion-Ledger* featured Bailey Junior High in several articles recalling past memories of the school which once boasted "shining star status" among Jackson Public Schools. The articles juxtaposed these memories with the current conditions at Bailey. Most of Bailey's 634 students lived in west Jackson and rode busses several miles to the North State Street school. The $42 million bond measure called for massive renovations and new construction, including a new northwest Jackson junior high, to relieve overcrowding throughout the district, in turn allowing Bailey students to transfer to closer schools. The district then planned to convert Bailey into a JPS administrative complex.\textsuperscript{121}

Plans to build a new northwest school for students attending Bailey demonstrated the widening gap between Jackson Public Schools and majority-white northeast Jackson. Prior to desegregation, Bailey had served white students in northeast Jackson and resonated with many as a neighborhood school. Yet with the exodus of thousands of whites from the city's public schools, Bailey constituency had shifted, and though it still operated in a racially balanced neighborhood, the school remained ninety-nine percent black. Thanks to the vision and foresight of Bailey's architects, the building had changed little in the school's forty-six years of operation; however, desegregation and shifting demographics in surrounding neighborhoods had eliminated Bailey's role as a neighborhood school. Administrators believed that problems with student attitudes and discipline resulted from a lack of pride in Bailey because it no longer operated as a
Any plans to reorganize Bailey still depended upon the passage of the school bond, a measure plagued by growing uncertainty.

The 1983 school bond would increase property taxes in the range of $50 to $75 for the average Jackson homeowner, an unpleasant prospect for elderly citizens and for parents with children enrolled in all-white private schools. Parents of Watkins Elementary School students also opposed the bond because of plans to close that school. During the bond campaign, school board president, Rowan Taylor, received many letters accusing the district of irresponsibility with prior funding for school maintenance, yet this argument ignored the fact that the district had received no money for school construction since the $5.8 million bond measure passed in 1964. Taylor claimed that, when it came to educating Jackson’s children, voters had no choice but to approve the bond.

Elaborating on his position, Taylor told a Rotary Club meeting, “I guess there is a choice — we can put them in prisons, or we can pay for them on welfare, but in my mind that’s not much of a choice at all.” The bond did have support from many organizations in the community, including the Jackson Chamber of Commerce, the Jackson Urban League, and various parent and educator groups. In February of 1983, the Board of Governors of the Jackson Symphony Orchestra mailed out a letter to symphony supporters endorsing the February 22 bond issue, essentially demonstrating that the social elite could support public schools. Even with this outflow of approval, the bond still did not gain enough support to surmount the many pockets of prejudice dividing the Jackson community. On February 22, voters rejected the school bond of 1983.
Compounded Frustration

The defeat of the February school bond left many citizens wondering whether the city of Jackson could support a seventy-five percent majority-black school district. The $42 million bond issue received fifty-two percent of 30,000 voters but failed to garner the required sixty percent vote of approval. Jackson school board president Rowan Taylor singled out the elderly and whites with their children in private schools to blame for the failure. The bond obtained a dismal forty percent approval in majority-white precincts.\textsuperscript{125}

One \textit{Clarion-Ledger} columnist asserted that for white parents to send their children to all-white private schools and then to vote against public schools only served to further polarize the city. He went on to claim, that “We are digging the grave of public education.”\textsuperscript{126} Jackson school officials, determined to secure funds for school repair, scheduled a smaller bond measure for a vote in May of that year. The second bond issue received just as much, if not more, media coverage and civic-leaders’ support as the first. The vote on May 24, however, took place during the second-worst flood in Jackson history, and only two-thirds as many voters turned out as in February. To the disappointment of school officials, the result was the same. The May bond issue received fifty-two percent of the vote, failing again to reach the necessary sixty percent approval. School officials believed that an image problem lay at the heart of voter disapproval in the 1983 bond measures.\textsuperscript{127} Later that year, the school board had to go before the city council for additional funds, and the city appropriated $6.4 million in property taxes for public school repairs.\textsuperscript{128}
"THAT'S FUNNY--I GOT ALL THE BOND ISSUES I WANTED WHEN I WAS IN PUBLIC SCHOOL!"

FIGURE IV

"NOTHIN' PERSONAL, BOY!"

FIGURE V
Fortenberry and Banks's statements two years earlier seemed prophetic in the wake of the failed bond. JPS had sought to further connect the community and the schools. The district had aimed many of its efforts at attracting whites back into the system to solidify ties with those citizens. JPS endeavors, however, like the reinstatement of neighborhood schools and campaigns for increasing white enrollment, had not succeeded. Without the essential support of the white community, Jackson's public schools could not improve, expand, or rebuild.

In February of 1984, the Jackson Daily News reported on a study performed by the Fantus Company that named education as an obstacle for the city in luring new business. Fantus, a Chicago consulting firm hired by Jackson to evaluate the city's assets and liabilities in seeking out industry and business, reported, that "Most incoming managers and executives enroll their children in the private school system because it is perceived as providing better education, and test scores tend to be ten percent higher than the public school system." Superintendent Fortenberry, however, denied the negative emphasis placed on public schools, even claiming erroneous data, and defended the district's reputation among national educators.

In April, school board officials reviewed the possibility of extending 1981 rezoning efforts to achieve neighborhood schools across the district. Many black community leaders again met the proposal with caution, but in defense of rezoning the district, Superintendent Fortenberry stated, "We don't have a rational zoning plan. What's been done has been done to desegregate the school system," noting that the current plan was left over from the days of court-ordered desegregation. Fred Banks highlighted the fact that most students already attended the closest school to their home,
and students attending a distant school did so because of inadequate building space, not racial balance. Voicing frustration over another quick-fix scheme instead of added funding, Banks went on to say that, “It’s obvious that with the segregated housing patterns in the city of Jackson you cannot adhere” to closest-school attendance without re-segregating the system. James Tadlock, director of program evaluation, estimated that the district bused nearly 9,000 students for the purpose of desegregation in 1984. However, much of the busing simply provided student transportation, since the federal court lifted its control over Jackson’s desegregation three years earlier.133

Alternative Education at Bailey

Failure of the 1983 bond issue did not reverse the attendance trend at Bailey Junior High, and the district continued to question Bailey’s role in designing neighborhood schools. Public school officials believed that the district could not afford to waste school space as its facilities were already stretched thin. At the same time, a group of parents began looking for a secondary school setting in which their children could continue in alternative education. Parents for Alternative Continuing Education (PACE) found their match in Bailey Junior High.

The school board placed certain restrictions on the Alternative School, stipulating that it could not cost more to operate than other junior highs. Since the 1983 bond did not pass, the school needed to use an existing structure for its classes, and the district had been looking for ways to distribute Bailey students throughout schools closer to their homes, thus expanding its neighborhood school plan. In the fall of 1984, Bailey Junior High began to share space with 7th through 10th grades of the Secondary Alternative
School. The Alternative School acted as a “school-of-choice” and took students who elected to come there, rather than being assigned, on a first-come-first-serve basis. The school functioned similarly to Davis Alternative Elementary School, which had operated on Congress Street for ten years, with students learning in an “open class” and responsible for the speed at which they learned. Alternative education required a high degree of parental involvement, and PACE played an instrumental role in the schools’ establishment. Alternative School principle Mary Ramburg explained that in alternative education, the teacher no longer “knows and tells” but “helps the student discover.” In the classroom, teachers divided students into “family groups” of about twenty pupils and taught civic duties in addition to common curriculum. At the end of the decade, Bailey teachers would receive specialized training from federal grants.

Funds for the school went towards instructional use only, not maintenance, and the board required 400 students to enroll before the school could open. To make room for these new students, the district spread 7th graders at Bailey Junior High among Powell, Brinkley, and Rowan. In response to these plans, many parents of Bailey Junior High students spoke out in protest. Most of the youths attending Bailey came from the Presidential Hills subdivisions, Bailey Avenue, and Gallatin Street areas. Even though they did not reside in Bailey’s immediate neighborhood, these parents felt that community pride had developed at Bailey.

The 1984-85 school year began with reports of much needed structural repairs in JPS buildings. In an effort to raise additional funding and build consensus with the business community, school administrators stepped up attempts to increase financial involvement in the city’s public schools. In an effort to further unite the community
and the schools, the school board increased its Adopt-A-School program in connection with the Chamber of Commerce. In February, Millsaps College became the first institution of higher learning to participate in JPS Adopt-A-School program by signing up to sponsor the Secondary Alternative School. Millsaps, located across State Street from the Alternative School, enjoyed a long tradition of academic excellence and offered support in tutoring, equipment donations, and theater department assistance.140

In August of 1985, Emanuel Reeves took over as principal at Bailey Junior High, replacing Carol Adams.141 In September, Bailey Junior High opened its doors for the school’s final year. JPS officials cited the failure of past bond issues and the fact that students no longer came from the surrounding neighborhoods, resulting in declining enrollment, as causes for the junior high’s closure. The Secondary Alternative School, which had been sharing Bailey’s facilities, took over the historic structure as sole occupant.142

As administrators prepared for the 1985-86 school year, considerable changes loomed large upon the horizon. The JPS central office began to research possible school zone restructuring, again looking to establish more neighborhood schools. Officials claimed that the zone changes would not affect racial composition but merely alleviate overcrowding.143 Several days later, school board president Taylor announced that the rezoning plan intended to add whites to public schools, essentially focusing on Casey, McLeod, and Spann elementary schools, the only JPS schools located east of Interstate-55 in predominately white northeast Jackson.144
Poor Image, Poor Funding

With the defeat of two 1983 school bonds lingering in the minds of JPS officials, the administration decided to conduct a survey to test the possibility of passing a bond issue in 1986. The surveys returned a negative response, however, and the school board called off the vote. Seeing that more than two decades had passed since the last successful bond vote in 1964 (an entire generation of children passing from elementary school through college without a success), the state legislature offered a last resort for economic investment in Jackson’s dilapidated schools. Under the Uniform School Law, the school board acquired the power to declare its intent to sell bonds for capital improvement of Jackson Public Schools without voter approval. The board had to present its declaration as a public notice for three weeks, and if no one lodged a protest in that time, it could sell the school bonds. In this manner, the school board compiled a $22 million bond package to replace south Jackson’s Whitfield Elementary and Forest High School and to build a new junior high to accommodate the Presidential Hills subdivision in northwest Jackson.145

Despite JPS efforts to present a favorable image to the public, a negative perception still clung to the minds of those who opposed additional schools funding. The district lacked media support, and Jackson’s two newspapers consistently illustrated unsound conditions at Jackson’s public schools. In May of 1986, one Jackson Daily News article reported on increasing concerns among public school parents about gang violence in the schools. The Jackson Police Department had identified fifty-one gang members in eight of Jackson’s junior and senior highs. Jackson educators promised to meet with city officials to discuss solutions to the problem of gang violence.146 The
following month, *The Clarion-Ledger* revealed that JPS scores had fallen below the national average on the California Achievement Test (CAT). In response, the school administration vowed to revamp the district’s Common Body of Knowledge curriculum to better reflect the national level of education.\(^{147}\) Such accounts underscored characteristics of the public schools which discouraged white support, perhaps even working to justify their resistance.

Further evidence of white distrust surfaced in an August 1986 *Northside Sun* article attempting to unearth tangible reasons for community misgivings towards the public schools. Former public school administrator and state auditor, Dr. Boyd Golding, published statistics comparing Jackson’s school costs and achievements to other Metro area schools. Golding based his attack on second-year test results conducted by the State Department of Education showing that Jackson’s eleventh-graders scored lower on the Functional Literacy Test than any other Metro school system. In addition, Golding expressed concern that Jackson spent 43.65 tax mills for school purposes in the past year while the surrounding districts levied “half or fewer mills.” The article criticized school officials and their handling of Jackson’s allotted budget, claiming that local taxpayers should “never….be called upon to pay off a bond issue.” Golding claimed that any campaign to supplement the district’s $83.5 million budget amounted to no more than political propaganda and wasted taxpayers’ money. Golding called the Emergency School Leasing Authority Act of 1986, by which the district secured over $22 million in bonds, an “unconventional back door legislative act.” The article concluded on a more moderate note, however, stating, that “Jackson must be competitive in taxation to attract industry,” and, “Jackson must be competitive in schools in order to invite people with
Yet as whites had pulled out of the public schools and taken firm root in Jackson’s private academies, the rift between perception and reality widened.

That same month, the school board backed Superintendent Fortenberry’s decision not to promote a JPS teacher to principal because her children formerly attended a private academy. The situation further demonstrated the tension between supporters of public and private schools. Fortenberry commented, that “Personnel in the district have got to be the strongest boosters we have. I think it indicates a lack of confidence [in the public schools] if a person has their kids in another school. We just can’t afford to be sending out any sort of bad messages to parents who do have their children in public schools.”

The beginning of the 1987-88 school year brought more disconcerting news to Jackson Public Schools. The Clarion-Ledger reported in August that the failure rate of Jackson’s eleventh-graders in the Functional Literacy Exam ranked highest of all Mississippi averages. Superintendent Fortenberry again denied the negative perception these results cast upon the district. “These scores do not correspond to what my perception is about what’s going on here,” Fortenberry stated. “Jackson Public Schools have a diverse student population which is typical of urban school districts. Their needs differ from those of upper socioeconomic bedroom communities.” Contrary to Fortenberry’s perception, statistics showed that even though test scores normally correspond to the number of students living in poverty, the city of Jackson, which had a lower number of poverty-level students than the state average, actually maintained a higher failure rate. While 1987-88 represented a poor year for JPS, the Secondary Alternative School, now known as Bailey Alternative School, saw promise in its growing
student population. Among Jackson’s eight high schools, juniors at Bailey compiled the best combined scores on the state’s first literacy exam.\textsuperscript{151}

**Running Out of Space**

In December of 1988, reports showed that an estimated 3,000 additional students had come under the care of Jackson Public Schools as a result of 1986 legislation for mandatory kindergartens. Such changes in education, coupled with shifting populations, caused large disparities within the district. Across JPS, portable classrooms numbered 279. West-central Jackson and south-central Jackson secondary schools retained the fewest amount of students, while growing numbers crowded into southwest and north Jackson schools. Younger black families replaced elderly whites who had moved out of central and west-central Jackson neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{152}

The Jackson school board revised attendance zones in the spring of 1988 and planned to send 3,680 students to different schools the next fall. Shifts in population, changing faces of neighborhoods, and a surge in the size of young black families all contributed to the most extensive rezoning since desegregation in 1971. The plan would ease overcrowding and funnel students into the city’s newly constructed Northwest Junior High. The new Northwest school, located near the Presidential Hills subdivision, became the cities tenth junior high and accommodated overcrowding at Hardy and Powell junior highs (schools that had taken in Bailey Junior High students in 1986). Superintendent Fortenberry assured citizens that the plan preserved desegregation across the district, while eliminating distractions of decay, such as the 279 overflow portables clustered across the district.\textsuperscript{153} JPS administrators still had to maintain the highest levels
of racial balance possible, a difficult prospect considering that black students made up seventy-six percent of the 33,000 student.\textsuperscript{154}

In another attempt to accommodate more students in fewer classrooms, the Jackson school board requested the State Board of Education to allow district classes to exceed the twenty-seven student limit to thirty pupils in overcrowded elementary classrooms. In April of 1988, the State Board granted the first-time request of the Jackson district.\textsuperscript{155} The state's approval demonstrated that denial of funding for school construction and renovation created higher student-to-teacher ratios and caused overcrowded learning environments.

In the wake of another quick-fix to district overcrowding, school board president Ollye Shirley stated, “We need to build schools where we have the major growth, but we have to pass a bond issue to do it. We need to sell the public on the fact that we desperately need new schools in the northwest and central part of town.” The school board recognized that only twenty-five percent of families sent their children to either public or private schools, and its members hoped to sell the older public on new construction by opening the schools to community activities. Officials noted that deterioration cast the schools in a poor public image, leading to less taxpayer support. Superintendent Fortenberry blamed the problem on taxpayers’ repeated denial of bond measures for school improvement.\textsuperscript{156}

The next school term, Governor Ray Mabus presented a plan for Better Education for Success Tomorrow, or Mississippi’s BEST, which would create a special bond fund available to districts for capital improvements, such as air conditioning. The state would base repayment on a district’s financial ability and would not require a tax increase.
Voters would not consider a bill until January of 1990, so the Jackson school board approved a special tax increase in December of 1989 to pay for cooling in twelve public schools. One impetus for immediate funding stemmed from an incident in August, when, during a 100-plus degree heat wave, Superintendent Fortenberry had to cancel classes for a week. Jackson taxpayers had twice defeated bond issues that would have paid to cool all public classrooms. At that time, about sixty percent of Jackson classrooms had air conditioning; however, Bailey Alternative School had none.\textsuperscript{157}

Early in the fall of 1989, Superintendent Fortenberry resigned after seventeen years as head of Jackson schools. Fortenberry became superintendent in 1973 and led JPS out of its troubled years following court-ordered desegregation. Fortenberry’s administrative secretary, Barbary White commented on the legacy he left, saying, “His uniform curriculum, his formal staff development program and use of technology to promote learning and to appraise performance were the first in this state.” White also heralded Fortenberry’s concern for raising the self-esteem of black students who had previously been subject to discriminatory administrative practices.\textsuperscript{158}

Fortenberry’s efforts did not go unnoticed. In 1986, he was nationally recognized with an award from the Freedom Foundation. This accolade reflected Fortenberry’s desire that all children receive a quality education under guided progress. His policies had helped to raise student scores on the CAT, insure significant gains in teacher pay, reform and improve curriculum to national standards, and promote biracial management. He believed that teachers must stop using background as an excuse for their students’ poor achievement and begin testing all students. He strongly believed all students, regardless of background could learn, and this responsibility rested upon the schools.\textsuperscript{159}
In response to the vacancy at the head of JPS, education chairmen of the state NAACP chapter, Morris Kinsey, along with other black community leaders, called for the school board to select a black superintendent for its first time. Several board members also recognized the need for the incoming superintendent to better identify with Jackson's seventy-nine percent-black school district. Later that year, the school board hired Ben Canada as the district's first black superintendent.
CHAPTER FIVE

Bailey Magnet School

In the fall of 1990, the city of Jackson received a $4 million two-year federal grant to train teachers and implement a “magnet school” program at Bailey Alternative School.\(^\text{161}\) As a magnet school, Bailey kept much of the “open class” structure and philosophy from alternative education, as well as maintained an open attendance policy. District attempts to attract a diverse student population represented the main change in Bailey’s status. The alternative school merely presented an opportunity for racial diversity, yet the magnet school actively worked to bring whites into the school for greater racial balance.\(^\text{162}\) Such administrative policies evidenced an extensive change over the past two decades. Whereas the 1970 school board opposed any federal money, assuming that acceptance would lead to forced integration, the 1990 school board readily accepted federal assistance for district improvements.

Improving the District’s Image

Efforts to diversify JPS and shift its image away from strict racial divides received national attention in the early 1990s. *The Los Angeles Times* featured a story on the work of Parents for Public Schools in their campaign to improve the district’s image. First organized in Jackson in 1988, the group aimed to reverse the pattern of white flight from the public schools by promoting the district’s strengths. Business leaders and public
school administrators had led similar attempts over the past twenty years. Parents for Public Schools, however, possessed a unique quality, in that campaign leaders were mostly white parents who truly affirmed the value of Jackson Public Schools.\textsuperscript{163} The \textit{New Orleans Times Picayune} explained that the group hosted "fancy galas" and spoke at civic club meetings to convince white parents that sending their children to public schools was socially acceptable and the best way to prepare them for the real world.\textsuperscript{164} The \textit{Atlanta Journal} reported that parents often used economic arguments to emphasize their point, showing that it did not make sense to pay property taxes and then send one's child to a private school.\textsuperscript{165}

Parents for Public Schools also took care not to alienate potential black supporters. As one parent put it, "We're not trying to bring in more white people for our own comfort level or to make the schools any better. The schools are already good. I just feel that all of us, children from all walks of life and experiences, should be able to go to school together."\textsuperscript{166} The group won approval from several black leaders, including Ollye Shirley, president of the school board; E.C. Foster, president of the City Council; and Ben Canada, incoming JPS superintendent.\textsuperscript{167} The parents' campaign achieved greater balance between the community and the schools than earlier district rezoning. Yet even though Parents for Public Schools had attracted national attention and initial support, it remained uncertain whether the group could re-instill public trust in JPS. The group's first big test came in the form of a 1991 bond issue, which would fund much needed school repairs.

In the spring of 1991, the school bond issue heightened the intensity with which voters scrutinized upcoming summer elections. Aware of the city's resent voting history
on school bonds, school officials split up the different projects instead of pushing one large program on voters. The ballot listed ten public school projects separately, totaling $74.9 million, and allowed voters to approve all ten, some, or none. Mayor Kane Ditto spoke before a crowd of educators, clergy, business leaders, and politicians stating that, "This bond issue is crucial in terms of the image of the city. How we educate our young folks determines the kind of future we have." Rowan Taylor, former school board president from 1978 to 1988 said, "I reflected a lot on those defeats [in 1983]. This state and city has a habit of shooting themselves in the foot. This is an opportunity we can't afford to miss."  

In June, Jackson taxpayers voted from sixty to sixty-four percent in support of the five passing projects, totaling $57.2 million. While the projects did not receive as strong a consensus as measures from the 1940s, still the 1991 bond issue became the first to pass voter approval in nearly thirty years. Approved items included adding new cooling systems to eleven schools without air conditioning, replacing portable classrooms, building new wings, buying library books, and creating science laboratories. The failed items included purchasing computers, improving security systems, and upgrading athletic fields.  

With the beginning of the 1991-92 school year, JPS instituted a new middle school plan which transformed school structure. While attendance zones remained the same, the plan restructured the district's junior highs, changing them to middle schools, grades six through eight. The administration then spread Jackson's ninth-graders throughout the city's high schools to join grades ten through twelve, and sixth-graders moved from elementary schools to join grades seven and eight. School officials believed
that the plan helped sixth, seventh, and eighth-graders make a smoother transition into
senior high, and the district also made changes to teaching methods for its middle school
students.

School Violence and Falling Grades

High spirits from the successful bond measure would not last the year, and JPS
again faced serious issues in student discipline and academic achievement. Problems
with gang violence in schools resurfaced in the first month of classes for the 1991-92
year. In response to a fatal stabbing at Murrah High and a shooting in the parking lot of
Provine High, JPS hired private security guards to patrol all eight of the city’s high
schools. In October of 1993, a seventh-grader at Chastain Middle School pulled a loaded
.22-caliber RG14 and roamed the halls pointing it at teachers and students. In response to
these incidents, as well as strong urging from Parents for Public Schools, JPS added six
metal detectors to middle and high schools, bringing the total to thirty-six detectors for
the district.\textsuperscript{170} Superintendent Canada stressed the importance of safety in a learning
environment, emphasizing that, “Students who feel safe and secure learn better.” The
district’s increased security did not ease all concerns, and both black and white parents
threatened to take their children out of public schools.\textsuperscript{171}

In addition to violence, low grades reflected poorly upon Jackson Public Schools,
and in the fall of 1993, a \textit{Northside Sun} editorial chided JPS officials for acting
irresponsibly in keeping its lowered deficiency rating undisclosed to the public. The
Mississippi State Department of Education lowered the district’s rating from a Three,
“adequate,” to a Two, “deficient,” over the summer. The editorial highlighted the fact
that Jackson received the deficiency rating despite having one of the highest per pupil budgets in the state. It concluded that, “No problem can be fixed until it is first recognized by all involved.” The publication’s condescending tone had not changed much from the previous decade; however, the intent of such reporting evidenced a true concern for accountability in the schools.

Finding a New Purpose for Bailey

In May of 1994, parents at Bailey Magnet School expressed dissatisfaction in the school’s “wandering focus,” and the district planned to review whether Bailey fulfilled its purpose as a magnet school. The federal government had provided substantial grant money for the purpose of drawing whites back into the district, yet in Bailey’s four years as a magnet, the school had reached ninety-six percent black enrollment in an eighty-three percent black district. Bailey also did not operate any differently, in structure or curriculum, than Jackson’s other seven high schools. Bailey’s poor reputation among other public schools concerned students, and rumors began to circulate that Bailey Magnet may close soon. Later that summer, a school board committee met with a task force from Bailey to discuss the school’s future. The task force returned in December and recommended that Bailey purse an art and humanities focus. The school board, however, rejected this presentation and required the task force to seek a new direction.

Over the next year, Superintendent Canada stepped down, and the school board selected T.C. Wallace to head the district. JPS also elected a new board member, reorganized its central staff office, and restructured several school clusters. Mildred Mason, recently appointed as Associate Superintendent for Instruction and Student
Learning, asked Bailey to renew its search for a focus, and in January of 1996, the school board approved a concept allowing Bailey students to specialize in health-related areas. Hilliard Lackey, president of Bailey Magnet Parent-Teacher-Student Association, noted that in reviewing the needs of the community and future career opportunities Bailey’s focus seemed best suited for health professions. The concept also aligned well with Bailey’s geographic location, as the school sat within one mile of Jackson’s five largest healthcare facilities.¹⁷⁶

The program would introduce more math and science classes into the school’s curriculum and planned to set up student internships with the local health facilities by the 1997-98 school year. According to Principal Dorothy Terry, the student body actually initiated the proposal for a health or math-and-science focus in an effort to improve the school’s image and curriculum. At that time, Bailey’s perception as a “dumping ground for problem students” worried some parents and students, however, many claimed that they chose Bailey for its smaller environment, as it oversaw 500 students that year compared to 864 at Wingfield High and 1,505 at Provine High. Bailey’s small enrollment, however, did not please many administrators, and the school’s numbers had declined steadily since 1993. Principal Terry anticipated that the new health-related focus would spur greater enrollment at Bailey, helping to close in on the school’s capacity of 700 students.¹⁷⁷ In July of 1996, the district again experienced a period of instability, as the school board fired Superintendent Wallace.¹⁷⁸ In the summer of 1997, the school board selected Jayne Sargent as its new superintendent and instituted plans to transfer 571 students to again relieve overcrowding.
Keeping Up With Suburbia: Neighborhood Plans

In February of 1998, the Jackson school board approved a comprehensive “neighborhood plan” for the next fall which would remove all remaining subzones left over from desegregation and shift 931 students to other schools. The district primarily intended to relieve overcrowding across its fifty-eight facilities, however, the school board also sought to keep white families in JPS who were considering a move to the suburban schools. When dealing with two main groups of students, studies showed that the ideal racial proportions were around sixty-forty, no matter which group represent the majority. School board member Lynn Evans noted that the district had, “done a good job in Jackson attracting the black middle class to public schools. We haven’t done as good a job keeping the white middle class in public schools.” As part of the neighborhood plan, Bailey Magnet School acquired its own student attendance zone for the first time in fourteen years. With 325 students, Bailey held the smallest high school enrollment in the district; however, the restructured zone added another 275 students, bringing the school population closer to administrative expectations. The new students came from eliminating a Wingfield subzone and redrawing lines at Murrah High, located behind Bailey. The issue of overcrowding at Bailey did not concern Principal Terry, yet she did wish to maintain enough space to implement the school’s focus on health-related professions.
### TABLE II

**Bailey Alternative School Enrollment 1989-2005**

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### TABLE III

**Jackson Public School Enrollment 1989-2005**

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</table>
A senior demographer for the state’s College Board Center for Policy Research and Planning understood the change in racial mix to reflect the general population shift out of Jackson to surrounding counties, particularly Madison and Rankin. Student enrollment in Madison County schools rose 4.5 percent, and Rankin County schools increased enrollment by 2.8 percent. The Mississippi Private School Associate, however, experienced minimal change over the same period. Leo Stevens, president of Parents for Public Schools, identified a school system supported by both race as “vital to the future progress of Jackson, both economically and socially.” Superintendent Sargent echoed Steven’s point, signaling the importance of community support in passing school bonds. Sargent also commented that, “When you have a better mix of the races, you have more peer associations and more cultural kinds of associations that are easier to accommodate when you have a larger number of any race of children.”\textsuperscript{183} Even the \textit{Northside Sun} editorial column endorsed the district’s plan and welcomed the return to neighborhood schools, praising the decision to adopt more neighborhood schools and pull back on busing. The editorial conjectured that neighborhood schools could translate into racially balanced northeast Jackson public schools, as well as permit a better social experience of students, give the community a sense of ownership in schools, and augment parental involvement in JPS.\textsuperscript{184}

School officials also hoped that the return to neighborhood schools would give residents a sense of ownership in JPS.\textsuperscript{185} Building confidence in the public schools remained a major goal of school officials, and administrators recognized the importance of Jackson’s Adopt-A-School program in this endeavor. During the 1998-99 school year, more than 30,000 volunteers donated over 15,000 hours of service through the program.
Eighty-four businesses partnered with fifty-eight schools throughout the city, and volunteers tutored, spoke to classrooms, and worked to beautify school grounds. Adopt-A-School also raised financial support, accumulating $160,000 which allowed many schools in the district to survive budget cuts without losing essential teaching materials.\(^{186}\)

Also in the fall of 1998, Jackson Public Schools planned to build new facilities at Wingfield, Jim Hill and Murrah high schools to create centers for ninth-graders. These centers would relieve overcrowding, since Jackson’s eight high schools were not built to accommodate ninth-graders in addition to grades ten through twelve. The state would fund the centers through the Mississippi Adequate Education Program, created by the 1997 legislature to aid school systems statewide. The centers would also help ease ninth-graders’ transition into high school and help to calm disciplinary problems that come from overcrowding and stress in new environments.\(^{187}\)

**District Frustrations**

Contrary to administrative desires, the district’s white enrollment continued to fall, representing an overall steady decline in students over the past four years, as Jackson families moved to suburban neighborhoods. October reports showed that the majority of white families who remained in the city did not send their children to neighborhood schools, and four out of six public schools in predominately white northeast Jackson held student populations of more than eighty percent black. Despite implementation of Jackson’s neighborhood school plan, shifting enrollment trends continued to puzzle school officials in the following years. Parents and administrators became frustrated over
disparities across the city, as some schools suffered from low student enrollment while others remained overcrowded. In March of 2000, The Clarion-Ledger reported on the district’s predicament, showing that few children lived where JPS had built schools thirty or forty years ago, yet the district could not build classrooms fast enough in the parts of town where families were moving. Bailey represented the underused school houses and had lost 142 pupils, or eighteen percent of its student population, since 1991.188

As the 1999-2000 school term came to a close, JPS decided to administer “exit tests” to sixth-grade students for the first time in its history. While the tests demonstrated school officials’ dedication to raising standards across the district, nearly a quarter of sixth-graders, or 563 students, failed one or more sections of the exit tests. Some parents saw this as a sign of the poor quality in JPS, yet others thought it showed a lack of financial commitment in the schools. One parent observed that more classrooms might translate into greater success and stated that, “If these kids are getting to the sixth grade and aren’t getting the basics, they aren’t getting something in K-5. We need to spread these kids out, get more teachers so there can be a better teacher-to-child ratio and the children get more time and attention.”189 Discontent within the system led to greater discussions on options for improvement, and officials again brought up rezoning plans. In the spring of 2002, JPS rezoned more than 1,000 middle and high school students to relieve overcrowding at some schools and maximize space at others.190

In the summer of 2002, Superintendent Sargent retired from the district, and the school board named former Jim Hill principal, Earl Watkins, as its new school head. At his first interview with the press, Watkins shared his vision for a progressive district which would educate “the whole child” by using “the whole community.”191
next three years, however, JPS continued to experience problems with exit testing, accountability, and overcrowded classrooms. As the public schools opened for the fall term of 2004, many administrators expressed disappointment in the “extensive” use of portable classrooms across the city. Superintendent Watkins stressed that portables should be temporary fixes to overcrowded schools, but he explained that deficient funding prevented the district from building any permanent school additions. Compared to neighboring districts with new school bond support, Jackson’s 287 portables overwhelmingly outnumbered the combined 49 portables in Madison and Rankin County schools. Parents shared these administrative concerns, not only for the poorer academic environment of portable classrooms, but also for the issues of convenience and safety. In the coming years, parents and school officials would realize that no level of rezoning could mend the state of Jackson Public Schools. Two years later, the district would push for additional funding in the form of the largest school bond measure in state history.

The 2006 School Bond

During the summer and fall of 2006, public school supporters campaigned for the upcoming bond issue that would fund the construction of two new middle schools and one elementary school, while replacing two aging middle schools and adding classrooms to five elementary schools and one high school. Campaigners called phone banks, canvassed public parks, and advertised on the radio to rally a strong voter turnout. The $150 million in construction projects on the November ballot comprised the largest school bond measure of any Mississippi district, and many Jacksonians recognized the
weight of such an historic endeavor. Unlike recent measures, the 2006 bond found public support in nearly every community sector. While no organized opposition emerged, some business leaders pointed out that such a high bond could cost businesses thousands of dollars in tax money and feared that companies might move out of the city. Yet even this apprehension could not diminish public support, and 81 percent of 35,000 voters approved the bond measure, making it one of the most successful in Jackson’s history.
Jackson Public Schools, 2005

FIGURE VI

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
MIDDLE SCHOOL
HIGH SCHOOL
OTHER SCHOOLS
AND OFFICES
FIGURE VIII

Jackson Zip Codes, 2000

70
TABLE IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population of the Jackson Urbanized Area, 1990</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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TABLE V

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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

The story of Jackson Public Schools turned dramatically in the wake of impending desegregation during 1970. The white community overwhelmingly disconnected itself from eighty years of investment in public education, and white enrollment would continue to dwindle over the following thirty years. Administrators responded by doing everything in their power to regain “stability” in the schools, yet often times this stability became synonymous with stemming the white exodus from the schools. Thus, a quite limited form of school development followed, until a push for community ownership in JPS gained momentum in the 1980s. However, the call for white reinvestment in public schools fell on obstinate ears, as many publically shifted their negative perceptions away from race and onto poor conditions in the majority-black public schools. White voters blocked two crucial school bonds in 1983, and their impoverished perception of the public schools became a self-fulfilling prophesy.

On a smaller level, Bailey Junior High served as model of this activity. Within three years of operating under desegregation orders, Bailey became roughly eighty-five percent black. Moreover, the district phased out Bailey from 1984 to 1986 as the junior high failed to enroll students from the nearby neighborhoods. Alternative education found a home in Bailey’s corridors, yet the district later moved Bailey to a magnet school in hopes of again attracting whites back to the public schools. The attempt proved as
unsuccessful as earlier rezoning strategies, and with the passage of the 2006 school bond, talks have been renewed questioning Bailey's role as an effective education center in Jackson's neighborhood school scheme.

As a hopeful note on increased civic harmony, school bond successes in 1991 and 2006 came as a result of more moderate white approval in the public schools. Dick Molpus, an early leader in Parents for Public Schools, claimed that the 2006 school bond vote crossed "racial lines and neighborhood lines" in different parts of the community. The vote did seem to represent a culmination in Jackson's movement for increased community support of its public schools. However, as Figure IX, Table IV, and Table V demonstrate, the statistics indicate that Jackson's racial balance has shifted to such a degree that black consensus holds greater influence over shrinking white numbers. It seems that school bond success may have come nearly at the point of resegregation, as whites continue to leave the city and its public schools. Still, the successful bond measure signifies greater approval of public schools by whites as the community begins to understand the close relationship between civic improvement and public school performance.
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