

INTEGRATION

Cathy Glover

The movement for black equality in the South took place over many years in many ways. Southern society has a longstanding tradition of racism and discrimination towards blacks. The South has a legacy of white supremacy in which blacks are portrayed as inferior in every aspect when compared with whites. The racial caste system of Jim Crow ensured the social segregation of blacks and whites in the South. Among the numerous examples of social segregation in the South, perhaps the most significant, and the focus of this paper, is the segregation of public schools. The South was not alone in the segregation of schools but without a doubt resisted and resented the integration of public schools more than any other part of the nation.

A desegregated school is incompatible with a segregated society. A segregated society is one in which members of different races rarely come into contact with one another as equals. All aspects of daily life are separated, and contact between the races is regulated so that one race is always in a superior position to the other. White-imposed segregation of blacks and whites was historically the prevailing practice in the American South. There had always been segregation through informal custom in the South, known

as de facto segregation. After the Civil War and Reconstruction era, Southern states began to pass laws decreeing the segregation of the races. This was de jure segregation. Together, the de facto and de jure components of segregation eventually became known as Jim Crow.

Segregation, whether de jure or de facto, is discriminatory. Not only does segregation limit opportunities, but it is an insulting and degrading practice.¹ The decades after Reconstruction saw actions by both state and federal governments that legally sanctioned one education system for whites and another for blacks. In 1896 the United States Supreme Court sanctioned "separate but equal" public accommodations in Plessy v. Ferguson.² Throughout the 1950's the entire American South was segregated. By law, blacks were kept in all-black schools.³ Having chosen to finance two educational systems, Southern states offered black citizens schools that were blatantly

¹Academic American Encyclopedia, 1983 ed., s.v. "integration, racial,"

²Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, 1989 ed.

³Danny Lyon, Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 9.

inferior to the schools provided for whites.¹

The United States Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas in 1954 marked a turning point in the educational history of black Americans. It was the first time a powerful agency of the federal government had taken a stand against segregation.² In Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas the court ruled that it's 1896 decision in Plessy v. Ferguson upholding "separate but equal" facilities was invalid and that segregation necessarily meant inequality.³ The Brown decision was handed down by a unanimous court headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren of California. The decision held that segregated schools violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Because of the longstanding and complex nature of the segregation issue, however, the court granted state school boards a reasonable time in which to submit desegregation plans

¹Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, 1989 ed.

²David Miesick, Royce Singleton, Jr., and Jonathan H. Turner, Oppression (Chicago: Nelson Hall Co., 1984), 128.

³Academic American Encyclopedia, 1983 ed., s.v. "integration, racial."

to federal district judges for their approval.

Southern authorities responded to Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas by vowing noncompliance. Southern states enacted a barrage of new laws to prohibit or indefinitely postpone integration: Pupil Placement Laws, Freedom of Choice Amendments, tuition grants, repeal of compulsory attendance laws, modification of teaching tenure, closing of public schools, state interposition and nullification of the Brown decision, and mob violence.¹

The new strategies devised by local school boards to refuse black children became known as pupil placement laws. According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, they became the "principal obstacle" to desegregation in the South. These pupil placement laws provided local school boards with reasons to reject black applications for admittance to white schools. The most common reasons for rejection were black parents' failure to complete complicated special admission applications and the failure of their children to "pass" newly developed compulsory admission tests or interviews.

¹Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, 1989 ed.

When local petitions were taken to court by black parents, local and state courts almost always ruled in favor of local school boards. Since appeals through the federal court system were time consuming and costly, few cases were ever taken into higher courts on appeal. Those parents who did persevere into higher courts, however, often won. Also significant in the decision of black parents to pursue equal education for their children was the strong tradition of Southern racism. Black efforts to enter white schools generated new and escalated existing antagonisms that led to increased discrimination.¹

From a political perspective southerners resorted to the compact theory of government in their effort to overturn the Brown decision and protect regional values. Drawing upon the writings of Jefferson and Calhoun, Southern theorists concluded that the Brown ruling was unconstitutional. According to this rationale, public education was constitutionally a function of the states and not the federal government. Therefore, the Supreme Court had exceeded its

¹David Miesick, Royce Singleton, Jr., and Jonathan H. Turner, Oppression (Chicago: Nelson Hall Co., 1984), 129.

authority by amending the constitution, rather than merely interpreting it.

Interposition, a doctrine adopted by eight Southern states in 1956 and 1957, was designed to defeat court ordered desegregation. Under the plan, the sovereignty of the state would be interposed between the federal courts and the local school officials. Advocates of the doctrine were convinced that federal judges would not issue contempt of court citations and jail governors and other elected state officials who refused to obey desegregation orders. Critical to the success of this plan was regionwide noncompliance.

Meanwhile, schools in portions of some states were closed to prevent integration. Several states favored the idea of closing public schools and providing tuition grants to students who would attend private schools.¹ Governor Lester Maddox of Georgia planned to close the state's schools rather than accept government proposals for desegregation. Maddox called school desegregation a communist plot and proposed that Sunday school rooms be turned into private schools which would

¹Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, 1989 ed.

not be subject to desegregation plans. Governor George Wallace of Alabama made numerous speeches to enthusiastic white audiences in which he urged them to use civil disobedience to regain freedom of choice in their children's schooling.¹

In four Southern states, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Georgia, the doctrine of nullification was implemented as legal action to declare the Brown decision to be null and void. In these four states, as well as others in the old Confederacy, over 450 new segregation measures were passed. The new laws protected segregation and made desegregation illegal.²

Throughout the 1950's, Congress was kept out of the Southern desegregation issue because of the efforts of powerful Southern Congressmen and their allies to block legislation to enforce desegregation orders. Congressional unwillingness to help blacks was based at least in part on the fact that blacks had never really voted in large blocks in national elections. Thus, there was no incentive to come to their aid. In the

¹Britannica Book of the Year 1969, 1970 ed., s.v. "Race, religion, and sex."

²Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, 1989 ed.

1960's, however, blacks practically everywhere in the United States began to vote in federal and local elections. Black voter registration increased dramatically. Sensing this change in the character of the voting public, members of Congress began to change their positions and enforce desegregation orders.¹

In Alabama, some farsighted politicians and educators had already seen the likely pattern of events to come and in the 1940's and 1950's began to make education for blacks truly separate and equal. Black teacher salaries had increased 212 percent between 1939 and 1951, and funding for black students increased 310 percent in the 1940's. Isolated attempts to integrate schools in September of 1954 in Montgomery, Anniston, and Brewton failed, but a committee drafted an Alabama School Placement Law in 1955 just to be on the safe side. It allowed superintendents to assign students to schools based on academic preparations and programs, availability of transportation, and other

¹David Miesick, Royce Singleton, Jr., and Jonathan H. Turner, Oppression (Chicago: Nelson Hall Co., 1984), 130.

considerations.¹

Blacks grew impatient with the slow progress in achieving desegregation. Blacks increasingly resorted to direct forms of protest. There were sit-ins at segregated lunch counters and Freedom Rides that challenged segregation in transportation facilities. Defenders of segregation often employed violence against blacks or civil rights workers in an attempt to halt their activities.

Significant desegregation occurred only after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It empowered the U.S. Attorney General to bring lawsuits on behalf of black plaintiffs and prohibited spending federal funds on segregated schools and colleges. In Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education in 1969 the United States Supreme Court unanimously ordered all school segregation ended immediately.² By 1974 de jure desegregation had been accomplished. Ninety-two percent of black students in eleven former Confederate

¹Leah Rawls Atkins, Wayne Flint, William Warren Rogers, and Robert David Ward, Alabama: The History of a Deep South State (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 547.

²Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, 1989 ed.

states were attending school with whites.

In the final analysis, Southern attempts to maintain legal segregation failed. None of the tactics employed to resist desegregation brought success. Americans rejected the outdated belief that blacks are inherently inferior. Interposition ultimately forced whites to decide that desegregated schools were preferable to no schools. Violence proved to be counter productive. It seems the South was *forced* to restructure, if not rethink, it's positions regarding blacks, their educations, and in general their place in Southern society.

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- 1896- Plessy v. Ferguson establishes separate but equal doctrine
- 1910- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People established
- 1946- President Truman created the President's Committee on Civil Rights; desegregation of the armed forces ordered
- 1954- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas overturns ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson
- 5 Dec. 1955- Establishment of Montgomery Improvement Association, chooses Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as it's leader
- 11 Dec. 1955- Rosa Parks, a black woman, refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus to a white man
- 1955-1956- Montgomery bus boycott began a series of black protests; prompted by the arrest of Rosa Parks
- 1957- Martin Luther King, Jr. and supporters found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to provide an institutional framework that would allow blacks to go beyond the NAACP's strategy of litigation and lobbying
- 1957- President Eisenhower used federal troops to protect black students who were admitted to Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas
- 1 Feb. 1960- Four black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina sat at a lunch counter reserved for whites; began the second major phase of the Southern black struggle
- May 1960- The Congress of Racial Equality sent thirteen riders through Southern states on a bus trip to expose the extent of segregation in bus terminals. White mobs attacked buses near Anniston, Alabama and at the Birmingham, Alabama bus station.
- 1961- Freedom Rides began; marked the beginning of the third phase of the Southern black struggle

Spring 1963- King and the SCLC began a protest movement in Birmingham, Alabama which culminated in August with a march on Washington, D.C.

1964- Mississippi Freedom Democratic party formed as an alternative to the all white Southern Democratic Party

1964- U.S. Congress passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act

7 March 1965- Selma march began; ended in Montgomery on March 25, 1965

Summer 1965- Voting Rights Act passed; suspended literacy tests that had barred blacks from polls, banned poll taxes as a suffrage requirement, gave the President the authority to send examiners to register blacks to vote in the South

1969- U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ended all school segregation

Gift and Release Agreement

We LEON GARRETT and Cathy Glover
Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

Do hereby give and grant to Dr. Suzanne Marshall, Assistant Professor of History, Jacksonville State University, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at

Houston Cole Library

on the date(s) of March 10, 1995

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

Leon Garrett
Interviewee's signature

Address 125 Bayley St.
D Piedmont, AL
Phone 205-447-7612

Date March 10, 1995

Cathy Glover
Interviewer's signature

Address 514 Mountain St
Jacksonville, AL 36205
Phone 205-435-5434

Date March 10, 1995

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Leon Garrett (M/F)
 Address: 725 Gayley St. Piedmont, Al. 30272
 Phone number(s): 205-447-7612
 Approximate age or date of birth: May 18, 1933
 Mother's Name: Luella Garrett
 Father's Name: Oscar Garrett

Places lived and when: born in Cherokee Co., lived there until 1959 Piedmont until present time

Education: P.H.S. (Bethoon), Nolan, Tuskegee Inst., B.S. in English

Religion: Baptist

Business, political and social memberships (past and present) APhiA Frat., ACT board, AIDS board, Dir of A.L.A., ADIS B. A. (board)

Present occupation: Retired

Former occupations: teacher, principal, superintendent A.C.S.

Special Skills: basketball

Major Accomplishments: Retiring! motivate + cultivate young minds —

National Events in which interviewee has participated: Nat. Concl. Teac. of English NEA member, NAASP

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: A.S.S.B. resolution committee AASA Am.

National born U.S. citizen? (Yes/No)

Naturalized Citizen: (Yes/No) Date:

Country from which he/she emigrated: _____

Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee: _____

Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: Dena Lang, Dr. Theresa Kaiser (Sup. Piedmont schools)

Additional information: _____

MA. English
Columbia, NY
MA. Ed. Adm.
Univ of A.
EDS. sup of adm.
Univ. of AL
Phd. program
in doctoral

Educational groups,
Dem. Exec. Committee
Chamber of Commerce
B.O.D.
School board
in Piedmont
All state
School board
(honorary)

Prepared Questions

Tell me about the area that you grew up in.

What about your family?(siblings, occupations, etc.)

What were your early years of school like?(conditions, quality)

Tell me about the first desegregated school you were part of.

Do you think the black community fully supported integration and did you personally?

Were there racist attitudes or violence among the students in the early integrated schools?

How did desegregation affect your personal situation?

How did you deal with any confrontations or problems that arose?

Do you feel integration affected the quality of black or white education?

Did teachers or administrators show favoritism to students of the same race as themselves?

As a person of a defferent generation it is difficult for me to see any adverse effects of in integration in the African-American struggle for equality, both in society and education. Do you feel it had any negative points?

I was presented with the argument by a black friend that integration took the black communities' opportunity to study and pass on their heritage and culture from them and forced them to learn history and such from a white perspective. What are your views on that idea?

Did integration have any effect on the way you viewed or felt about white people?