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A Study of Little Rock School District 1966-1968 Elections and Their Effect on Public School Policy

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A STUDY OF LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT 1966-1968 ELECTIONS AND THEIR EFFECT ON PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY

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by
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LIST OF TABLES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the school elections in Little Rock have followed a traditional pattern of meager voter turnout. School elections, prior to the 1967 election, were mentioned briefly in newspaper articles. The platforms were of the same general nature year after year. They included taxes, school expansion, better facilities, and higher teacher salaries. Candidates seldom, if ever, campaigned publicly and actively. Posters were usually placed throughout the city. A few days prior to the election, newspaper ads with the candidates' pictures would appear in the Arkansas Democrat and the Arkansas Gazette. The 1967 school election was significant, because that election brought the subject of school desegregation before the public. The next election in 1968 added to the issue of desegregation a specific plan for desegregation of Little Rock Public Schools. This plan was placed on the ballot. Later in 1968, the Little Rock School District of Pulaski County Board of Directors adopted a geographic attendance zone plan to comply with a federal court order to establish a unitary nonracial school system. These issues have now become of interest and concern to the voting public in Little Rock.

I. THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to analyze school board elections for the years 1966, 1967, and 1968. The purpose of the analysis was to establish a relationship between the voters' reactions in the elections and (1) the issues involved, (2) local organizations and individuals stressing immediate desegregation, and (3) the probable result of any further desegregation plan brought to a vote.

II. COLLECTION OF DATA

The type of information essential for this study was A Report to the Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District Little Rock, Arkansas, Desegregation Report Little Rock School District, a census tract map, a ward and precinct map, a census of Little Rock, and various newspaper articles which contained the platforms of the candidates and the issues involved in each election. Copies of the first two items mentioned, the report and the plan, were obtained from the Superintendent of Little Rock Public Schools, Floyd W. Parsons. The census tract map and the ward and precinct map were obtained from the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission. A special census taken of Little Rock in 1964, was obtained from the United States Bureau of the Census. Opinions of the elections and issues were obtained by questionnaire from the candidates for positions in the three elections.

III. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to the Little Rock School District of Pulaski County. The analysis was based on a survey of the school elections in the years 1966, 1967, and 1968. These years offer the contrast desired concerning the public's present interest in its schools and interest previously shown. The years of 1967 and 1968 were used more extensively because of the issues of desegregation, taxation, and consolidation.

IV. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

School Board. The term "school board" shall refer to the seven members of the Little Rock School District of Pulaski County Board of Directors.

Oregon Report. Throughout this report, reference will be made to the "Oregon Report". This report was prepared by the Bureau of Educational Research and Service of the University of Oregon at the request of the school board and Superintendent Parsons. The purpose of A Report to the Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District Little Rock, Arkansas was to assess the current status of Little Rock's effort to move from a dual to an integrated school system. A set of recommendations detailing a program for further school board and community activity was included.

Parsons Plan. The term "Parsons Plan" shall refer to the Desegregation Report Little Rock School District prepared

by Superintendent Parsons at the request of the school board. This report was made available to the school board January 25, 1968. This long-range plan for desegregation of the Little Rock School District placed emphasis on the secondary level for the 1968 school year.

Average Voter. In this report, the term "average voter" shall be interpreted as meaning a person who usually votes only in the major elections such as presidential or gubernatorial. Local elections such as school elections, bond issues, sheriff, and judges seldom interested this voter unless issues on the ballot were highly controversial. These issues, when they did attract his attention, usually had attracted wide public attention.

Little Rock School District. This shall be interpreted as meaning the Little Rock School District of Pulaski County, Arkansas.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND

To survey the elections, some knowledge of the background of Little Rock's school system, desegregation in the schools, and the ethnic composition of various voter wards was necessary.

I. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District of Pulaski County, Arkansas consisted of six members until July 27, 1966. These were elected at large by the qualified voters of the same district. On July 27, 1955, a seventh position was added. The school board voted 3-2 to increase its membership from six to seven in an effort to prevent an even split vote. Membership, by law, was limited to a maximum of eight persons. The law stated that "the school board of any school district in Arkansas, which now has or which, under the provisions of Act 30 of the General Assembly of 1935, is authorized to have five or more school directors, may file a petition with the County Board of Education requesting an increase in the number of school directors to any number not to exceed eight."[1]

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[1] The School Laws of Arkansas, Acts 1963, No. 163, Section 80-502.1 (Little Rock: State Department of Education, 1968), p. 105.

Two positions were normally filled each year in Little Rock's school election. The 1966 election, in which a new member was added, had three positions to be voted on.

Any person who was a bonafide resident and a qualified elector of the district could become a candidate for a place on the school board. This person had to file a petition, in writing, which was signed by twenty or more qualified electors, with the County Board of Education at least twenty days before the annual school election was to be held. At that time, the ballot was closed.

Some of the powers and duties which the Board of Directors have is the care and custody of school facilities, the employment of teachers, paying teachers, and the preparation of budgets. They are charged to do all things which are necessary and lawful for the conduct of an efficient free public school or schools in the district.[2]

II. DESEGREGATION IN LITTLE ROCK SCHOOLS

Little Rock was one of the first school districts in the South to attempt an integrated public school system. Prior to 1954, practices regarding the assignment of all students to attendance centers in the Little Rock School

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[2] The School Laws of Arkansas, Acts 1931, No. 163, Section 80-509 (Little Rock: State Department of Education, 1968), pp. 113-16.

District followed the concept that generally resulted in the drawing of boundaries around a given school. Race was an additional factor in determining pupil assignments, but generally, all students in a given area attended the same school. Desegregation began under the pupil assignment plan. This plan and its replacement, a limited freedom of choice plan, left no legal attendance boundaries within the Little Rock School District.[3]

The eliminating of attendance area boundaries in the Little Rock schools occurred with the adoption of the full freedom of choice plan in 1966.[4] These changes were not made uneventfully. The first major crisis came in the fall of 1957 when Govenor Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guard to avert possible violence as nine Negro students attempted to integrate Central High School. Later in the year, President Eisenhower federalized the National Guardsmen and sent federal troops to insure the students' admission. The Little Rock schools were closed in 1958. When this happened, the liberal groups such as the Special Committee on Public Education, the Arkansas Council on Human Relations,

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[3]Bureau of Educational Research, A Report to the Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District Little Rock, Arkansas (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1967), p. 16.

[4]Ibid. pp. 46-47.

and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and moderate segregationists joined together to get the schools reopened. The moderate segregationists were those who favored the amount of integration necessary to satisfy the law. In 1959, they were successful in getting a recall election to unseat three of the segregationist members of the school board.[5] The United States Office of Education in March, 1966, set forth guidelines concerning desegregation in the Revised Statement of Policies for School Desegregation Plans under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Under the guidelines, the determination of whether a free-choice plan is an effective means of completing the initial stages of desegregation was made by ascertaining whether a substantial percentage of students had in fact been transferred from segregated schools. In the case of Little Rock, the limited freedom of choice plan was not effective.[6] The Little Rock School Board took voluntary action in March, 1966, to adopt a full freedom of choice plan based upon the guidelines of the United States Office of Education.

The freedom of choice plan was found to be too slow, according to the Oregon Report. The Oregon Report concluded

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., pp. 12-14.

that the freedom of choice plan that was being used could not alone satisfactorily resolve the problem. It stated that such factors as the ability of parents to transport students to the schools of their choice and the availability of space at the school chosen had to be considered. The housing patterns of the city were factors.[7] When put on the ballot in the 1968 election, the Parsons Plan was voted down. Later in the year, August 16, 1968, a federal court ordered the establishment of a unitary, nonracial school system. The Little Rock School Board, on November 16, 1968, adopted a geographic attendance zone plan to comply. The plan, as of November 16, 1968, was being considered by the courts.[8]

III. THE WARD STRUCTURE

To analyze the school elections required data about the racial proportion in various sections of the city. The city of Little Rock, Arkansas, was divided into five wards. By referring to a ward and precinct map, the areas of the city could be classified as the upper, the middle, the lower-middle, and the lower sections. The information pertaining to wards, as to racial proportion and location within the city, was obtained by overlaying a census tract map of Little

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[7] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[8] News item in the Arkansas Gazette, November 16, 1968.

Rock onto a ward and precinct map and using a special census taken of Little Rock in 1964. The special census was taken using the census tracts contained on the census tract map. The information was compiled by census tract as to population, race, age, and sex.[9] The information was approximate. That is, the dates of the ward and precinct map and the special census were different by two years, but the population and residential areas had not changed significantly. A slight difference existed in some census tracts and ward boundaries. The approximated percentage of the wards by population and race is given in Table I.

Ward One, the highest in Negro population, extended west of Main Street twenty-five blocks to Jones Street. This was a lower social and economic residential section of the city. Ward Two, having the next largest Negro population, was a lower social and economic section of the city. It extended from Main Street, east to the city limits. The Municipal Airport and many industries were located in this

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[9]Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, Urban Area Map (Little Rock and North Little Rock. Little Rock: Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, 1962); Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, Ward and Precinct Map (Little Rock and North Little Rock. Little Rock: Metropolitan Area Planning Commission, 1965, Revised June, 1966); and United States Bureau of the Census, Special Census of Little Rock, Arkansas, 1964. Population Series P-28, No. 1375, September 14, 1964 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1964.)

Ward. Ward Three was located west of Main Street and it bordered Wards One, Two, Four, and Five. This was a lower social and economic section of the city. Many lower-middle class people were located within this area, but the majority were in the lower class. Ward Four extended west from Jones Street to the outer limits of the city and south from West Eighth Street to the southern limits of the city. This was a lower-middle to middle class section, with the lower-middle class being in the majority. Ward Five extended north from West Eighth Street to the Arkansas River and west from Elm Street to the western limits of the city. This was a lower-middle, middle, and upper social and economic section of the city. The majority was middle class with the upper class being second highest in number.

TABLE I

PERCENTAGE OF NEGRO AND WHITE POPULATION BY WARD

Ward	Population	Percentage Negro	Percentage White
I	13,027	61	39
II	13,622	46	54
III	10,025	18	82
IV	38,371	11	89
V	37,575	1.5	98.5

CHAPTER III

THE 1966 ELECTION

On Tuesday, September 27, 1966, the Little Rock School District held an annual school election for the purpose of filling three vacancies on the school board. No increase was sought in the millage rate. The millage on the ballot was for the 47 mills then in effect.

I. THE ELECTION AND ISSUES

As mentioned in the introduction, the school elections in Little Rock had a traditional pattern of meager voter turnout. The 1966 election did not break the tradition. The fact that a Negro was running for one of the three positions did not affect the voter turnout.

The election was characterized by its lack of issues and open campaigning. The campaigning done was primarily through personal contacts, small groups, and a few small newspaper advertisements by some of the candidates.[1] The Arkansas Democrat newspaper stated that less than one-fourth of the qualified electors in Little Rock turned out for the election.[2]

II. THE CANDIDATES

The positions to be filled were Positions One, Two,

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[1] News item in the Arkansas Gazette, September 25, 1966.

[2] News item in the Arkansas Democrat, September 28, 1966.

and Three. Position One was held by Russel H. Watson, and Position Two was held by W. C. McDonald. Neither of these men sought re-election. Position Three was a new position created by the addition of a seventh member to the school board.[3] The candidates for Position One were George B. Brittain, an insurance executive, Dr. Travis L. Wells, a physician, R. B. Chitwood, Comptroller for Southwest Hotels, Incorporated, and Dr. Edwin N. Barron, Jr., a physician.[4]

Position Two had two candidates, Dr. George E. Lay, a physician, and Winslow Drummond, an attorney.[5]

Those candidates for Position Three were Eugene R. Weinstein, sales manager of Block Realty Company, T. E. Patterson, Executive Secretary of the Arkansas Teachers Association, Don Jones, owner of the D. F. Jones Construction Company and former State Representative, and Dr. W. A. Strickland, Professor of Pharmacy at the University of Arkansas Medical Center.[6]

III. ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTION

Few voters went to the polls on election day. As is common in school board elections throughout the country, an

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[3]News item in the Arkansas Democrat, July 27, 1966.

[4]News item in the Arkansas Democrat, September 25, 1966.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

apathetic response of only 17 per cent of the total registered voters was recorded. Appendix D, page 55, contains this information.

In the race for Position One, Barron was the winner, carrying 36 per cent of the votes cast. The only consistent loser was Chitwood. Table II on page 21 gives the election results by wards on the number of votes cast for each candidate. Wells, the runner-up, carried Wards One and Two, but ran second to Barron in the other three wards. The only significant difference in the number of votes cast for Wells and Barron was in Ward Five; Barron received twice the number of votes as Wells in this ward. The lack of issues in this election makes it difficult to determine a cause for Barron's victory. There was no difinite voting trend set in the race for Position One. This can be illustrated by the fact that three of the four candidates each carried at least on ward.

This same response was present in the race for Position Two, in which Drummond was the winner. The election results by votes cast for Position Two are in Table II on page 21. The votes received by the two candidates did not vary by a significant number in Wards Two through Five. Drummond won the election by carrying Ward One.

The winning of Position Three by a Negro, Patterson, stands out conspicuously from the other victories. Patterson

was the first Negro to be elected to a position on the School board. Patterson carried Ward One by 73 per cent and Ward Two by 62 per cent. The voters' response in the other three wards was similar to those for Position One and Position Two. Strickland was the only candidate to receive more votes than Patterson in Wards Three and Four. Weinstein and Strickland received the majority of the votes in Ward Five. Patterson won by carrying 35 per cent of the total votes cast for Position Three. This was a narrow margin. Strickland followed with 33 per cent. The candidates who answered the questionnaires in Appendix A, page 47, indicated four to one that the majority of registered voters in the Little Rock School District were not disappointed that a Negro had been elected to a position on the school board. However, they agreed four to one, that the election did not indicate that the white people felt that Negroes should be represented on the school board.

TABLE II

VOTES CAST BY WARDS 1966

Position	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Cammack Village	Absentee	Total
I								
Brittain	194-14%	154-17%	221-21%	759-47%	585-22%	69-17%	10-14%	1992-25%
Wells	532-39%	394-42%	305-29%	312-19%	524-20%	87-21%	19-28%	2173-27%
Chitwood	131-10%	88-9%	157-15%	139-9%	443-17%	61-16%	10-14%	1029-13%
Barron	498-37%	293-32%	374-35%	407-25%	1077-41%	188-46%	31-44%	2868-36%
II								
Lay	418-32%	410-48%	530-52%	879-56%	1294-50%	193-48%	19-35%	3743-48%
Drummond	872-68%	437-52%	492-48%	685-44%	1301-50%	208-52%	36-65%	4031-52%
III								
Weinstein	141-10%	109-11%	195-18%	277-18%	789-30%	163-40%	9-14%	1683-21%
Patterson	1036-73%	629-62%	255-24%	351-22%	459-17%	72-18%	27-41%	2829-35%
Jones	79-6%	72-7%	157-15%	239-15%	342-13%	55-14%	12-18%	956-12%
Strickland	155-11%	199-20%	459-43%	717-45%	1043-40%	117-29%	18-27%	2708-33%

Ward totals contain votes cast in that ward by candidate and the per cent of total votes cast in that ward.

CHAPTER IV

THE 1967 ELECTION

On Tuesday, September 26, 1967, the Little Rock School District held an annual school election for the purpose of filling two positions on the school board. Included on the ballot was a 47 mill tax, 1.5 of which was to be used for school improvement.

I. THE ELECTION AND ISSUES

The 1967 school election was the turning point concerning interest displayed by the public. This change in attitude and interest came about in June, 1967. The school board, in regular session on April 7, 1966, adopted a statement in which its intention to step up the pace of desegregation was made known. The intention was to comply with the guidelines set forth in the Revised Statement of Policies for School Desegregation Plans under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Their first step toward this intention was the adoption of the full freedom of choice plan in 1966. The next step proposed was to employ a team of experts in the fields of education, sociology, and human relations to make a survey. They were to make recommendations for specific steps for accomplishing this goal. The Bureau of Educational Research and Service of the University of Oregon was retained. After their study was completed, the report was

presented to the school board on June 3, 1967.[1] The main recommendations were integrated school staffs, integrated school populations, compensatory education, reorganization of the grade structure, and an educational park.[2] A summary of the Oregon Report is in Appendix E on page 56. The school board did not indicate whether it was ready to adopt or reject the recommendations of the report. However, individual members of the school board and the candidates expressed their opinions as election day drew near. Although the Oregon Report was not being voted on, it was the main issue in the election. Appendix A, page 47, shows that all candidates who answered the questionnaire chose the Oregon Report as the main issue. If the candidates for the school board who favored the Oregon Report were elected, it would be a sign of dramatic changes to come. The 47 mill tax was a significant issue, which will be discussed later in this chapter, but it was not an issue in the same category as the Oregon Report. Superintendent Parsons estimated that 12,000 voters would turn out. Other observers predicted that 25,000 would vote in the election, because of the intense controversy

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[1] Floyd W. Parsons, Desegregation Report Little Rock School District (Little Rock: Metropolitan High School Printing Department, 1968), pp. 2-3.

[2] Bureau of Educational Research, A Report to the Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District Little Rock, Arkansas (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1967), p. 108.

over the Oregon Report and its recommendations.[3]

II. THE CANDIDATES

Two positions were to be filled by this election. Position One was held by Warren K. Bass, a C.P.A., and Position Two was held by James M. Coates, an insurance executive. The candidates for Position One were Bass, the incumbent, William R. Meeks, a realtor, and Mrs. Glen Alber, a housewife. The candidates for Position Two were Coates, the incumbent, and Daniel Woods, an industrial relations manager.[4]

The two incumbents, Bass and Coates, had a favorable opinion of the Oregon Report, while their opponents were against it. All candidates except Mrs. Alber favored the 47 mill tax.[5] In the Position One race, Bass ran on his record and that of the school board. Meeks made the Oregon Report his major issue. He felt that the Oregon Report would lead to confusion, tension and a lowering of educational standards for all children, and that the freedom of choice plan should be continued. The other candidate, Mrs. Alber, made the Oregon Report her main issue.[6] Coates,

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[3]News item in the Arkansas Democrat, September 24, 1967.

[4]News item in the Arkansas Gazette, September 19, 1967.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

campaigning for re-election for Position Two, based his campaign on the theme that the Little Rock School District was operating three systems, one in east Little Rock for the Negroes, an integrated system in central Little Rock, and a practically all white one in the west end of Little Rock. He contended that the freedom of choice plan was doing a horrible job in the east and central Little Rock, and a reasonable job in west Little Rock only. He favored a transportation system to establish racial balance at the secondary level.[7] Woods, the other candidate for Position Two, made the Oregon Report his main issue. Woods said that he was unalterably opposed to putting sociological needs above educational needs. He was concerned that the school board was losing sight of its major obligation--the administration of quality education. He supported the neighborhood school system, compensatory education, and the improvement of the freedom of choice plan so that it would be non-discriminatory.[8]

III. ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTION

The number of voters exceeded that recorded in the 1966 election by almost 5000 votes. The most significant change came in Ward Five where the response was up 239 per

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[7]News item in the Arkansas Gazette, September 24, 1967.

[8]News item in the Arkansas Gazette, September 24, 1967.

cent. This indicated a definite interest in the issues which might possibly affect the white population of the ward. Appendix D, page 55, contains this information.

In the race for Position One, Meeks was the winner. He won by receiving 53 per cent of the votes cast. His only opposition was Bass with 40 per cent of the votes. Only seven per cent of the total votes were cast for Mrs. Alber. Bass carried Ward One with 71 per cent of the votes cast and Ward Two with 69 per cent of the votes cast. Meeks carried Ward Three with 51 per cent, Ward Four with 51 per cent, and Ward Five with 64 per cent. The election results by ward and candidate for all positions is shown in Table III, page 28. By referring to Table I, page 16, it can be determined that the wards carried by Meeks were predominantly white, and Bass carried the wards which had a high percentage of Negro population. Appendix B, page 50, shows that the four candidates considered their views on the Oregon Report as the determining factor in the election. The only candidate to oppose the tax was Mrs. Alber. The tax was approved by receiving 70 per cent of the total votes cast. Table III, page 28, shows the voting results by wards.

Position Two was won by Woods. He received 59 per cent of the total votes cast for that position. The results of this race was the same as for Position One. Woods carried the predominantly white wards--Ward Three with 58 per cent

of the votes cast, Ward Four with 60 per cent, and Ward Five with 71 per cent. Coates carried the wards which had a high percentage of Negro population--Ward One with 74 per cent of the votes cast and Ward Two with 72 per cent. Again, the main issue was the Oregon Report, and the candidates' views concerning it determined the election results. This race contained two widely disparate views on the length to which the Little Rock School District should go toward desegregating its schools. Coates was the most enthusiastic supporter of the Oregon Report.[9]

The candidates answering the questionnaire were equally divided on their views concerning the most objectionable suggestion of the Oregon Report. Appendix B, page 50, shows that two candidates chose the educational park, and the other two chose integrated school populations. The candidates unanimously agreed that the majority of voters seemed to favor the "neighborhood school" concept. They indicated too, that the majority of voters seemed to feel that the procedures followed by the United States Supreme Court for school desegregation, were too rigid for the situation at the time. They seemed to resent anyone who favored or had part in the preparation of, the Oregon Report.

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[9]News item in the Arkansas Gazette, September 27, 1967.

TABLE III

VOTES CAST BY WARDS 1967

Position	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Cammack Village	Absentee	Total
I								
Bass	1059-71%	618-69%	508-40%	1062-38%	1839-30%	84-34%	57-32%	5227-40%
Meeks	368-25%	221-25%	650-51%	1459-51%	3898-64%	146-58%	108-60%	6850-53%
Alber	65-4%	55-6%	108-9%	318-11%	373-6%	20-8%	14-8%	953-7%
II								
Woods	386-26%	243-28%	723-58%	1695-60%	4326-71%	170-69%	129-72%	7672-59%
Coates	1082-74%	628-72%	533-42%	1120-40%	1743-29%	78-31%	50-28%	5134-41%
47 MILL TAX								
For	801-64%	315-56%	745-63%	1781-67%	4283-75%	190-81%	108-65%	8223-70%
Against	457-36%	250-44%	434-27%	889-33%	1450-25%	45-19%	59-35%	3584-30%

Ward totals contain votes cast in that ward by candidate and the per cent of total votes cast in that ward.

CHAPTER V

THE 1968 ELECTION

On Tuesday, March 12, 1968, the Little Rock School District held an annual school election for the purpose of filling two positions on the school board. A three mill tax increase and the Parsons Plan were on the ballot.

I. THE ELECTION AND ISSUES

Although the 1967 school election created more public interest than previous elections, the 1968 school election was a more turbulent, issue-minded, and group fought effort. As directed by the school board, Superintendent Parsons did prepare and make available a plan for desegregating the Little Rock School District by January 25, 1968. Parsons apparently used the Oregon Report as a guide in drawing up the Parsons Plan. A summary of the Parsons Plan is in Appendix F, page 58. According to Parsons, the Parsons Plan was, "A plan designed to improve instruction and to implement desegregation with major emphasis on the high school level."[1] A proposed three mill tax increase was tied to the Parsons Plan. Two mills of the tax was for a $5,176,000 bond issue to build and remodel schools in keeping with the plan.

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[1]Floyd W. Parsons, Desegregation Report Little Rock School District (Little Rock: Metropolitan High School Printing Department, 1968), p. 1.

One mill was to be used to eliminate student fees.[2]

As the Oregon Report had been the main issue in the 1967 election, the Parsons Plan proved to be so for the 1968 election. By referring to Appendix C, page 54, it can be determined that three of the four candidates chose the Parsons Plan as the main issue in the election.

The voter turnout for the 1968 election did not represent a majority of the registered voters. The Table in Appendix D, page 55, gives the number of registered voters. An increase in interest was shown by the voting public on issues and candidates which could affect the public schools. By referring to Table IX, page 55, it can be seen that the voter turnout for the 1967 school election showed an increase of approximately 38 per cent more than the 1966 election. The 1968 school election had an increase of approximately 52 per cent more voter turnout than the 1967 election.

II. THE CANDIDATES

The two positions that were filled by the election were held by Mrs. Frank N. Gordon and Dr. John H. Harrel, Jr. Opposing Mrs. Gordon for Position One was Jimmy L. Jenkins, an industrial supply salesman. Dr. Harrel was opposed by

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[2]Ibid.

Charles A. Brown, a lawyer.[3]

The two candidates for Position One had opposing views about the issues involved in the election. Mrs. Gordon strongly supported the Parsons Plan, while Jenkins was equally opposed to it.[4] The situation was the same in the race for Position Two. Dr. Harrel supported the Parsons Plan, and Brown opposed it.[5] Both Jenkins and Brown were strongly against the "busing" provision of the plan.[6] Brown stated, "......to start upon a multi-million dollar business experiment, using our children as guinea pigs, is not my idea of education first." [7]

III. ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTION

As in the 1967 election, Ward Five showed a definite interest in the contest. While there was some increase in voter participation in Wards Three and Four, 41 per cent of the registered voters in Ward Five went to the polls, an unusually large number for a school board election. The basis for this response seemed to have its origin in the controversy around the Parsons Plan. Appendix D, page 55,

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[3]News item in the Arkansas Gazette, March 10, 1968.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]News item in the Arkansas Democrat, March 10, 1968.

[7]Ibid.

contains this information.

In the race for Position One, Jenkins was the winner. He received 60 per cent of the total votes cast for that position. The wards voting heavily for him were Ward Three with 64 per cent, Ward Four with 68 per cent, and Ward Five with 63 per cent. Mrs. Gordon carried the wards with a high percentage of Negro populations--Ward One with 71 per cent and Ward Two with 59 per cent. The total of the votes cast by candidate in each ward is in Table IV, page 36.

Brown was the winner in the race for Position Two by receiving 61 per cent of the total votes cast. He carried the predominantly white wards--Ward Three with 65 per cent, Ward Four with 69 per cent, and Ward Five with 65 per cent. Harrel carried the wards with a high percentage of Negro population--Ward One with 69 per cent and Ward Two with 55 per cent.

The Parsons Plan did not run as well as the candidates who supported it. Table V, page 37, gives the votes for and against the plan by wards. The plan fared better in the wards with a high percentage of Negro population, but even in these wards, it was defeated. In Ward One, 54 per cent of the votes cast were against the plan, and in Ward Two, 63 per cent were against it. The predominantly white wards voted heavily against it--Ward Three with 70 per cent, Ward Four with 76 per cent, and Ward Five with 69 per cent.

An array of organizations were active for and against the Parsons Plan. Organizations which strongly supported the Parsons Plan were the Urban League of Greater Little Rock, the Arkansas Council on Human Relations, the various Neighborhood action Councils of the Pulaski County Economic Opportunity Agency, the lay governing board of Pulaski Heights Presbyterian Church, the Executive Committee of Greater Little Rock Ministerial Association, and the League of Women Voters of Pulaski County.[8] The major Negro organizations opposing the Parsons Plan were the East End Civic League and the Arkansas Democratic Voters Association. The major white organization opposing it was "A Committee for Neighborhood Schools" formed by business and professional men to gather opposition to the plan.[9]

Several well known business and professional men took stands on the Parsons Plan. Four stood out conspicuously: W. R. Stephens, president of Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company, William Rector, a real estate and insurance man, Dr. Jerry Jewell, president of the Arkansas Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and John Walker, a Negro lawyer.[10] Stephens had not been publicly

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[8]News item in the Arkansas Gazette, March 10, 1968.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

involved in Little Rock school issues prior to 1968, but lent his name and his money to the cause of the Parsons Plan. He had, in the past, been a long time supporter of former Governor Orval E. Faubus, who was considered a segregationist. Rector, who ran unsuccessfully in 1959 for the school board against a Faubus supported segregationist, led a campaign against the Parsons Plan and supported the candidates who opposed it. Jewell, who had been active in desegregation efforts, was against the Parsons Plan. He contended that the plan did not go far enough. Walker, who had represented many desegregation suits on behalf of Negroes, expressed his desire for the defeat of the Parsons Plan. He did so on the grounds that its defeat would make the Little Rock School District appear sufficiently reluctant to justify a far reaching desegregation edict from the Federal Courts.[11] The prominent business men who supported the Parsons Plan were B. Finley Vinson, president of the First National Bank in Little Rock, Tad Phillips, vice-president of M. M. Cohn Company, R. Grainger Williams, president of Williams and Rosen, Incorporated, and R. H. Matson, Jr., president of Matson Construction Company.[12] This election created more interest than prior elections, and many more voters turned

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[11]News item in the Arkansas Gazette, March 10, 1968.

[12]News item in the Arkansas Democrat, March 1, 1968.

out--50 per cent more than for the 1966 school election. The effect the organizations had on these extra voters is questionable. Appendix C, page 54, shows that the candidates were equally divided as to whether the voters were aware of the organizations, but were three to one in thinking that the voters were not acquainted with the functions of the organizations.

TABLE V

VOTES CAST-PARSONS PLAN-1968

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Cammack Village	Absentee	Total
For	724-46%	374-37%	456-30%	1046-24%	2331-31%	80-29%	51-32%	5062-31%
Against	864-54%	637-63%	1042-70%	3273-76%	5133-69%	195-71%	107-68%	11,251-69%

The ward totals contain the votes cast for and against and the per cent of the total votes cast in the wards.

TABLE IV

VOTES CAST BY WARDS 1968

Position	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Cammack Village	Absentee	Total
I								
Jenkins	450-29%	404-41%	949-64%	2902-68%	4630-63%	179-65%	105-67%	9619-60%
Gordon	1112-71%	592-59%	531-36%	1341-32%	2713-37%	96-35%	52-33%	6437-40%
II								
Brown	493-31%	442-45%	974-65%	2998-69%	4830-65%	168-61%	105-66%	10,009-61%
Harrel	1089-69%	537-55%	516-35%	1361-31%	2604-35%	106-39%	54-34%	6267-39%

Ward totals contain votes cast in that ward by candidate and the per cent of total votes cast in that ward.

CHAPTER VI

I. SUMMARY

The three school elections, 1966-68, offer a sensitive indicator to the attitude of the people concerning the administration of their public schools. The school election of 1966, as usual created sparse interest. The next two elections, 1967 and 1968, contained potent issues. The 1967 election, with its Oregon Report as a suggested guide to school desegregation, created approximately 38 per cent more response of voters to the polls. The 1968 election, with a definite plan for desegregation, was widely publicized and discussed. There was an increase of approximately 52 per cent more votes cast than in the 1966 election.

II. CONCLUSIONS

To the average voter, the election of school board members created little interest. The presence of a Negro candidate in the 1966 election did not bring an increase of voters to the polls. The Arkansas Gazette and the Arkansas Democrat made little mention of the election except to note that a Negro had been elected for the first time to the Little Rock School Board. Appendix D, page 55, shows that only 17 per cent of the registered voters voted in this election. Appendix A, page 47, shows that four of the five candidates answering the questionnaire, indicated that they thought the majority of voters who did not vote were aware

that there was a Negro candidate.

The taxes necessary to operate the schools had been difficult to get, but those in force were not questioned to any degree. Appendix A, page 47, shows that five of the candidates agreed that a millage increase was difficult to get voter approval. This could have been the result of voter apathy. The people who routinely voted in school elections could have had a greater interest in lower taxes on property. The taxes which had appeared on the ballot, prior to the 1967 election, had not interested the majority of voters enough to get them to the polls. Appendix A, page 47, shows that four of the five candidates thought the outcome of the election made little difference to the average voter.

The 1967 school election was an entirely different situation. This was the year that the Oregon Report was submitted to the school board for study. The dramatic changes proposed by the Oregon Report to desegregate the Little Rock School District proved to be unacceptable to the voters. There was considerable controversy created over the report. Appendix B, page 50, shows that the four candidates answering the questionnaire were divided as to whether the report was presented to the public in a satisfactory manner. Public officials and the news media did little to clarify the situation. The voters were forced to

vote in an emotional climate. Only recently after all of the research and approval had been completed on this thesis, Dr. Barron, a member of the school board, admitted his part in producing such a climate. For this interesting development, refer to Appendix G, page 59. The four candidates who answered the questionnaire indicated that they felt that the information the public did get about the report was offensive even to those who considered thenselves moderates. The candidates' responses are in Appendix B, page 50.

When the Parsons Plan was submitted to the voters in the 1968 election, the situation was different from the 1967 election. The voters had a specific plan and a tax to support that plan before them. Appendix D, page 55, shows that the turnout of registered voters increased each year from 1966 through 1968 in all Wards except One and Two. Ward Five had the most significant increase. In the 1966 election, 18 per cent of the voters registered in Ward Five voted. The 1968 election had 41 per cent voting in Ward Five. In 1968, 29 per cent of the total registered voters participated in the election. The Parsons Plan was considered to be a poor plan by three of the four candidates. Despite any merits of the plan, it was defeated by a wide margin in all wards.

From the conclusions arrived at regarding the three

school elections of 1966-1968, leadership in desegregating the public schools was inadequate. A change had to be made before any plan could be put before the voters and accepted. The problem of school desegregation in Little Rock is seemingly the white people's; The Negroes apparently are depending on the laws and the courts instead of politics. The wards with the high percentage of Negro population had no increase in the per cent of registered voters voting in the 1967 and 1968 elections over the 1966 election. The opposite was true in the predominantly white wards. Ward Five more than doubled the voter turnout in 1968 over the 1966 election.

Appendix C, page 54, shows that most of the candidates in the 1968 election did not believe that the majority of white voters supported the desegregation laws enacted. They indicated too, that they felt any plan submitted within one to five years would meet defeat at the hands of the voters. Until the average voter understands what a plan suggests, its logic and merits, and is assured that his rights too will be considered and protected, all plans will meet the same fate as the Oregon Report and the Parsons Plan. It will be interesting to see how long it is before intellect and common sense can over-ride the emotionalism which now governs the policies and procedures concerning desegregation plans.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

1966 SCHOOL ELECTIONS

1. What do you think was the main issue in this election?

   ( ) A. Millage
   ( ) B. A Negro candidate
   ( ) C. School improvement (facilities, teacher salaries)
   ( ) D. No special issues

2. Do you think there was a lack of issues in this election.

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

3. Do you think this school election aroused any more interest among the voters than the previous school election?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

4. Do you think a millage increase for schools is difficult to get approved by the voters?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

5. Do you think the majority of voters who voted in this election:

   ( ) A. were aware of the candidates' background and qualifications.
   ( ) B. were aquainted with the qualifications of only one candidate and just voted for anyone in the other two positions.
   ( ) C. knew very little of any candidate.
   ( ) D. were members of various civic organizations and researched the candidates' qualifications.

6. Do you think the majority of registered voters who did not vote were aware that there was a Negro candidate?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

7. Do you think the majority of registered voters in the Little Rock District were disappointed that a Negro had been elected to a position on the school board?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

1966 Continued

8. Do you think the majority of registered voters who did not vote were concerned about any effect the outcome of the election could have?

( ) YES ( ) NO

9. Do you think the election indicated that the white people felt that Negroes should be represented on the school board?

( ) YES ( ) NO

TABLE VI

1966 SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Question Number	Answers	No Comment
1	(B) 1, (C) 1, (D) 2	1
2	(YES) 3, (NO) 1	1
3	(YES) 2, (NO) 3	
4	(YES) 5	
5	(A) 3, (B) 1, (C) 1, (D) 1	
6	(YES) 4, (NO) 1	
7	(YES) 1, (NO) 4	
8	(YES) 1, (NO) 4	
9	(YES) 1, (NO) 4	

Five of the Ten candidates answered the questionnaire.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

1967 SCHOOL ELECTION

1. What do you think was the main issue in this election?

   ( ) A. The Oregon Report (was not on the ballot)
   ( ) B. School improvement (facilities, teacher salaries)
   ( ) C. Millage
   ( ) D. Quality of education
   ( ) E. Qualifications and background of the candidates.

2. What do you think determined the outcome of the winning candidates' races?

   ( ) A. The position taken on millage.
   ( ) B. The position taken on school improvements.
   ( ) C. The position taken on the Oregon Report.
   ( ) D. The candidates' qualifications and background.

3. Do you think the majority of registered voters felt the procedures followed by the United States Supreme Court, for school desegregation, were too rigid for the situation at the time?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

4. Do you think there was significant resentment of the United States Supreme Court and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

5. Do you think it was resentment for the United States Supreme Court and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare that was reflected in this election?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

6. What do you think was the most objectionable proposal of the Oregon Report?

   ( ) A. The educational park.
   ( ) B. Cost
   ( ) C. Integrated school staffs.
   ( ) D. Compensatory education.
   ( ) E. Reorganization of grade structure.
   ( ) F. Integrated school populations.

1967 Continued

7. Do you think the suggestions offered in the Oregon Report for desegregation were offensive to those voters who considered themselves moderates?

( ) YES ( ) NO

8. Do you think the majority of voters, who voted, favored the "neighborhood school" concept?

( ) YES ( ) NO

9. Do you think the majority of voters resented anyone who favored or had part in the preparation of the report?

( ) YES ( ) NO

10. Do you think the changes proposed in the Oregon Report were too far reaching in cost for the voters to support the candidates who favored it?

( ) YES ( ) NO

11. Do you think a higher millage than was on the ballot would have been passed by the voters?

( ) YES ( ) NO

12. Do you think the Oregon Report was presented to the public in a satisfactory manner?

( ) YES ( ) NO

13. Do you feel that most objections to the Oregon Report were well founded?

( ) YES ( )NO

14. Do you think the quality of education was of major concern to the voters, black and white, in this election?

( ) YES ( ) NO

15. Do you think the majority of voters had lost faith in the manner their school system would be run due to controversy regarding the Oregon Report?

( ) YES ( ) NO

TABLE VII

1967 SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Question Number	Answers	No Comment
1	(A) 4, (D) 1, (E) 1	
2	(C) 4, (D) 1	
3	(YES) 4	
4	(YES) 4	
5	(YES) 3, (NO) 1	
6	(A) 2, (B) 1, (F) 2	
7	(YES) 4	
8	(YES) 4	
9	(YES) 4	
10	(YES) 3, (NO) 1	
11	(NO) 4	
12	(YES) 2, (NO) 2	
13	(YES) 2, (NO) 2	
14	(YES) 2, (NO) 2	
15	(YES) 3,	1

Only 4 of the 5 candidates answered the questionnaire.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

1968 SCHOOL ELECTION

1. What do you think was the main issue in this election?

   ( ) A. Millage
   ( ) B. Race
   ( ) C. Parsons Plan
   ( ) D. Quality of education
   ( ) E. Qualifications of candidates

2. Do you think the Parsons Plan was rejected by the voters because of:

   ( ) A. Race
   ( ) B. Cost
   ( ) C. Lack of agreement among black and white organizations alike as to the merit of the plan.
   ( ) D. It was a poor plan.

3. Do you think this was the most turbulent, issue-minded, and group fought election to date?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

4. Do you think the different organizations, black and white, caused confusion and lack of faith in the plan by the positions they took?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

5. Do you think the voters gave serious thought concerning the cost of the Parsons Plan and the advantages to be gained from it?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

6. Do you think the voters feared the approval of the plan would eventually eliminate the "neighborhood schools"?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

7. Do you think the majority of voters who voted in this election were acquainted with the functions of the various organizations involved?

   ( ) YES ( ) NO

1968 Continued

8. Do you think the majority of voters were aware of the existence of the various organizations which supported or opposed the Parsons Plan prior to the election?

( ) YES ( ) NO

9. Do you think the lack of unity on the part of the Negro organizations was a major factor in the Negro support for the Parsons Plan?

( ) YES ( ) NO

10. Do you think the lack of unity on what the Negro organizations wanted in the way of a school desegregation plan impressed the white voters that the Negro would not be satisfied with any type plan?

( ) YES ( ) NO

11. Do you think the majority of professional people involved working for or against the Parsons Plan, W.R. Stephens, William Rector, and Dr. Jerry Jewell, for example, supported positions which was the opposite of what might have been expected?

( ) YES ( ) NO

12. Do you think the candidates supporting the Parsons Plan and receiving the majority of Negro votes, was an indication that they shared Dr. Jewell's opinion that the plan did not go far enough?

( ) YES ( ) NO

13. Do you think the majority of voters approved of the Greater Little Rock Ministerial Association taking sides publicly in the election?

( ) YES ( ) NO

14. Do you think the opinions of the League of Women Voters of Pulaski County had any significant effect on the majority of voters?

( ) YES ( ) NO

1968 Continued

15. Do you think the tactics used by the various organizations working for school desegregation caused friction between the races?

( ) YES ( ) NO

16. Do you think the emphasis on school desegregation was placed more on the past than the present?

( ) YES ( ) NO

17. Do you think the majority of white people supported the various desegregation laws enacted?

( ) YES ( ) NO

18. Do you think the solutions to the desegregation question will probably come from: CHECK ONE OR MORE

( ) A. Mature individuals, black and white, from the middle class.
( ) B. Businessmen
( ) C. College professors
( ) D. Government
( ) E. Mass involvement by parents.

19. Do you think any plan submitted in the near future, one to five years, would be defeated?

( ) YES ( ) NO

TABLE VIII

1968 SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Question Number	Answers	No Comment
1	(A) 1, (B) 2, (C) 3, (E) 1	
2	(A) 3, (C) 1, (D) 3	
3	(YES) 1, (NO) 2	1
4	(YES) 1, (NO) 3	
5	(YES) 2, (NO) 2	
6	(YES) 3, (NO) 1	
7	(YES) 3, (NO) 1	
8	(YES) 2, (NO) 2	
9	(NO) 3	1
10	(YES) 1, (NO) 3	
11	(YES) 1, (NO) 3	
12	(YES) 1, (NO) 3	
13	(YES) 1, (NO) 3	
14	(NO) 4	
15	(YES) 2, (NO) 1	1
16	(NO) 2	2
17	(NO) 3	
18	(A) 3	1
19	(YES) 3	1

TABLE IX

APPENDIX D

TOTAL REGISTERED VOTERS AND VOTES CAST

Ward	Registered Voters	Votes Cast	Per Cent Voting
I	6075	1411	23
II	4786	1009	21
III	5268	1066	20
IV	13,904	1617	12
V	14,327	2633	18
TOTAL	44,360	7736	17
	1967		
I	6545	1492	23
II	4991	894	18
III	5312	1266	24
IV	15,422	2839	18
V	15,702	6110	39
TOTAL	47,972	12,601	26
	1968		
I	7955	1582	20
II	5509	996	18
III	5504	1490	27
IV	18,240	4359	24
V	18,357	7434	41
TOTAL	55,465	15,861	29

APPENDIX E

SUMMARY OF THE OREGON REPORT

The Oregon Report was based heavily upon the educational park concept, but included elements of freedom of choice, pairing, and alteration in grade structure. It depended strongly on integration of professional staff, improved communications at all levels, and on the provision of compensatory education and special services.

The proposed plan called for abandonment of the neighborhood school concept in favor of the developement of a centralized approach with larger enrollments at each attendance center. In Little Rock, the entire system of dispersed schools would have been viewed as an educational park for grades one to twelve. All buildings would have been considered one school complex. Grades eleven and twelve for the entire district, with the exception of those in the vocational-technical programs, would have been housed in a single unit so that all juniors and seniors would attend one school. Students in grades nine and ten would have attended one of three units for these grades. Intermediates, the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, would have attended one of the middle schools; younger pupils, grades one to five, would have attended one of the elementary schools.

Several of the existing buildings would have been

scheduled for immediate abandonment, some for interim use with early abandonment planned, and many for long-term use.

APPENDIX F

SUMMARY OF THE PARSONS PLAN

The Parsons Plan, over a three year period, would have created mandatory attendance zones for Hall, Central, and Parkview High Schools. It would have phased out all-Negro Horace Mann High School and left Metropolitan High School untouched. The junior high schools would have been unaffected, but two elementary school educational complexes would have been established to provide racially balanced attendance centers. Under this plan, all students in a specific grade would attend school together. Because the attendance zones for the high schools would extend the length of the city from east to west, transportation would have been provided for high school students living more than two miles from their school beginning in 1970.

Dr. Barron Apologizes for Making Oregon Report an Emotional Issue

Dr. Edwin N. Barron Jr., in his last meeting as a member of the Little Rock School Board Thursday, made a lengthy valedictory in which he apologized for helping create an emotional issue of the Oregon Plan.

He also proposed that tuberculin skin tests be required for all school staff members and that smoking be banned on school property.

The Oregon Plan, so-called because it was done under contract by the University of Oregon, was a comprehensive effort to create racial balance in the Little Rock Schools. It came out in the summer of 1967 and drew such a storm of opposition, including that of Dr. Barron, that the School Board abandoned it.

Dr. Barron said he recently had reread the Oregon Report and his own comments at the time. "I must admit that I feel a great deal of genuine shame in creating or helping to create an emotionalism" about it, he said, adding that his statements condemning the report were "not entirely motivated by virtuous thought."

"As a result," he said, "support came to me from areas where I would not really have cared to have support."

Dr. Barron said he now had "grave doubts" of the sincerity of his action then.

Dr. Barron said he wished it to be known that "I am not and never have been a segregationist."

"At one time I might have been, and was, an opportunist, but not a segregationist," he said. His 3½ years on the Board have convinced him, he said, that "all men are brothers" and that all owe a debt to society and are responsible both to themselves and their fellow men.

Proposals by Dr. Barron On Page 4A.

Dr. Barron, who did not choose to run for re-election and has since moved outside the Little Rock District, reiterated his regret for "any part I had in creating emotionalism that has taken away from logic and reason in the community, state and world."

"I apologize to you, the patrons of the city and to all men for creating an emotionalism about an issue that should have been considered logically," he said.

He said his conscience had bothered him and that he'd talked earlier with Superintendent Floyd W. Parsons, who reassured Dr. Barron that his own actions were not influenced by what Dr. Barron had done.

He could have remained a resident of the School District, Dr. Barron said, but he cited a quotation from Confucius to the effect that those offering themselves for public service must be sure they are "sufficiently virtuous."

"I must tell you that the major reason I chose not to run was that in searching, I cannot come up with an answer that, intellectually or on the point of selfishness or lack of it, that I was of sufficient virtue."

Dr. Edwin N. Barron Sr., the Board member's father and himself a former Board member, attended the meeting and said at the conclusion of Dr. Barron's remarks that he had no regrets of his son having served and that he was "extremely proud of the statements" his son had made.

A STUDY OF LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT 1966-1968 ELECTIONS AND THEIR EFFECT ON PUBLIC SCHOOL POLICY

An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to the

Division of Graduate Studies

Ouachita Baptist University

In Partial Fullfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Ray Earl Garner

May 1970

Garner, Ray Earl, A Study of Little Rock School District 1966-1968 Elections and Their Effect on Public School Policy. Master of Arts, American Civilization, May, 1970, 59 pages, Bibliography, 10 Titles, Other Sources, 2.

The purpose of this study was to analyze school board elections for the years 1966, 1967, and 1968. The purpose of the analysis was to establish a relationship between the voters' reactions in the elections and (1) the issues involved, (2) local organizations and individuals stressing immediate desegregation, and (3) the probable result of any further desegregation plan brought to a vote.

To survey the elections, some knowledge of the background of Little Rock's school system, desegregation in the schools, and the ethnic composition of various voter wards was necessary. An explanation of the prerequisites of school board members and how they are elected, the laws which govern school board activity, and school board members duties and powers is discussed. Little Rock was one of the first school districts in the South to attempt an integrated public school system. A necessarily brief history of school desegregation in Little Rock public schools is included.

The type of information essential for this study was A Report to the Board of Directors of the Little Rock School

District Little Rock, Arkansas, Desegregation Report Little Rock School District, a census tract map, a ward and precinct map, a census of Little Rock, and various newspaper articles which contained the platforms of the candidates and the issues involved in each election. Copies of the first two items mentioned, the report and the plan, were obtained from the Superintendent of Little Rock Public Schools, Floyd W. Parsons. The census tract map and the ward and precinct map were obtained from the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission. A special census taken of Little Rock in 1964 was obtained from the United States Bureau of the Census. Opinions of the elections and issues were obtained by questionnaire from the candidates for positions in the three elections. The questionnaire was the basic research tool used in this study. Another major source of information was the local news media.

The three school elections, 1966-68, offer a sensitive indicator to the attitude of the people concerning the administration of their public schools. The school election of 1966, as usual created sparse interest. The next two elections, 1967 and 1968, contained potent issues. The 1967 election, with its Oregon Report as a suggested guide to school desegregation, created approximately 38 per cent more response of voters to the polls. The 1968 election,

with a definite plan for desegregation, was widely publicized and discussed. There was an increase of approximately 52 per cent more votes cast than in the 1966 election. As for future plans for desegregation, most of the candidates felt that any plan submitted within five years would probably meet defeat at the hands of the voters. Until the average voter understands what a plan suggests, its logic and merits, and is assured that his rights too will be considered and protected, this probably will be true.