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THE PEOPLE versus SEGREGATED SCHOOLS

DOXEY A. WILKERSON

About the Author

DOXEY A. WILKERSON is Director of Faculty and Curriculum at the Jefferson School of Social Science, in New York City. He was formerly an Associate Professor of Education at Howard University (1935-43), and before that at the Virginia State College (1927-35).

During his tenure at Howard University, he served in several Governmental positions, including: (1) Research Associate of President Roosevelt's Advisory Committee on Education (for which he prepared a book entitled *Special Problems of Negro Education*, published in 1939 by the Government Printing Office); and (2) Education Specialist of the Office of Price Administration.

During June, 1943, he resigned from Howard University and the Office of Price Administration, announcing his plan to join the Communist Party and to work in its educational program in the Maryland-District of Columbia area.

He moved to New York City in the summer of 1944 to become the Executive Editor of *The People's Voice*, a weekly newspaper published in Harlem. In 1948 he joined the staff of the Jefferson School of Social Science.

THE PEOPLE VERSUS SEGREGATED SCHOOLS

By DOXEY A. WILKERSON

The Fight to Abolish Jim Crow Schools

The South is a land of great wealth, with vast natural resources which *could* support its people in abundance. Today, instead, most of that wealth is siphoned off by the great northern banks and industrial corporations, and the people of the South are generally the most impoverished in the nation. At the very heart of this contradiction lies the rotten system of Jim Crow oppression, of which segregated schools are an integral and important part.

Economists estimate that industrial employers make over \$4,000,000,000 each year in *extra-profits* (i.e., over and above "normal profits") by the simple device of paying Negro production workers less than is paid white workers. Moreover, this practice operates to drive down the wage levels of white workers, which means billions more in added profits to the corporations.

So it is, likewise, with the wages of Negro and white workers on the farms, with the rents of tenants in the big cities, with retail prices in Negro residential areas. Discrimination against Negroes yields super-profits to employers and landlords and commercial enterprises—at the expense not only of Negroes, who suffer most, but also of the masses of white people.

Indeed, this is the fundamental purpose of the Jim Crow system. And although it is centered in the South, this special oppression of the Negro people operates to strengthen economic and

political reaction throughout the country, and thus to worsen the conditions of the whole population.

It severely restricts the educational opportunities of Negro children; but it also reduces the educational opportunities of southern white children to levels far below national standards—by imposing the burden of two parallel sets of schools on state and local budgets which are hardly adequate to finance even one decent system of schools.

It opens the way for big industrialists in the North, where trade unions are strong, to take their “run-away shops” to the unorganized, low-wage areas of the South, thus throwing hundreds of thousands of northern workers out of jobs.

It helps politicians who hate democracy to capture and hold public office through racist propaganda and mass disfranchisement, thus depriving the people of any effective influence on state and local governments in the South.

It saddles the national Congress with more than a hundred reactionary representatives and some 34 senators, most of whom betray the interests of the Southern masses, block civil-rights legislation, help impose onerous curbs on organized labor, and strengthen the drive toward war and fascism in our country as a whole.

The special contribution of segregated schools in this process is to permeate the population with race hate and distrust, and thus to forestall united struggles of the white and Negro people for that prosperous and democratic South which is their right. The Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated schools represents, therefore, a major blow to the whole system of Jim Crow oppression. It marks a great forward step in the strengthening of American democracy.

A Great Democratic Victory

The Negro people have been fighting against gross discrimination in education for many decades—through petitions, delegations, protest meetings, legislative lobbies, and enormous fund-raising campaigns. In recent years, under the leadership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, their

emphasis has been on legal action to win "equality" of educational opportunity in the Negro separate school. Some important victories have been won—notably in increasing teachers' salaries, lengthening school terms, extending school plant and equipment and winning admission to the graduate and professional departments of state universities.

The cases decided by the Supreme Court on May 17, 1954, mark a new high level of this struggle. Arising in black-belt counties of South Carolina and Virginia, and in Kansas, Delaware and Washington, D. C., they called, not for spurious "equality" between separate white and Negro schools, but for the complete abandonment of the Jim Crow school system—for the integration of white and Negro children in the same schools.

This demand was brilliantly argued before the Supreme Court by N.A.A.C.P. Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall and his associates. It was actively supported by all the mass organizations of the Negro people and the entire Negro press. It was endorsed by the A. F. of L. and C.I.O., by the American Jewish Congress and other organizations of the Jewish people, and by scores of predominantly white religious, professional, youth, and community organizations throughout the country.

The campaign for integrated schools was further strengthened by powerful support from abroad. America's Jim Crow system is well known and strongly denounced by the democratic, peace-loving peoples of the whole world. Criticism of the way Negroes are oppressed here is especially sharp in the countries of Africa, India, and Latin America, and in the Soviet Union, China and the People's Democracies of Europe—where *all* forms of racial discrimination are rigidly banned by law. Coming at a time of growing crisis in United States foreign policy, this pressure from abroad was a major factor in forcing our Government to make a big concession to the embattled Negro people and their allies in this country—to outlaw the segregated school.

The *legal* issue before the Supreme Court was the same in 1954 as in 1896, when, in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, the Court nullified the 14th Amendment. But the *political* situation was entirely different. Thus, what the earlier Court could do with white-suprema-

cist arrogance, the present Court could not do at all. It had to bow to the demands of the Negro people and other democratic forces in our country and throughout the world, when it declared:

"We come then to the question presented: Does segregation in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunity? We think it does."

Let there be no unclarity on this point: The decision outlawing segregated schools was wrested from the Supreme Court and the Eisenhower Administration through powerful democratic struggles by the united Negro people and their allies. It was a great democratic victory of the people; and its social and political implications are far-reaching, indeed.

Think what full implementation of the Court's decision could mean. Some 9,000,000 white children and 2,600,000 Negro children now attending segregated elementary and secondary schools in the South would be brought together in the classroom and on the playground. This itself would be a telling blow against racism. Hundreds of thousands of white and Negro teachers would merge their professional associations for a common approach to common problems. White and Negro parents in thousands of communities would begin to work together in the P.T.A.'s. And this process of building Negro-white unity could be extended to scores of thousands of youths and their teachers in hundreds of southern colleges and universities. The impact of this development could do much to undermine the whole structure of Jim Crow laws and practices in all fields.

But this legal victory is still to be realized in practice. All the Supreme Court has done thus far is to *proclaim* that segregated schools are unconstitutional. Implementing decrees have yet to be won, and even then the struggle actually to *abolish* segregated schools will be long and bitter. Moreover, that struggle cannot be confined to the educational front alone. There will have to be powerful and winning assaults against Jim Crow practices in the even more fundamental areas of job discrimination in industry, semi-feudal survivals on the plantations, and ghetto housing in the

cities. But struggles on these different fronts mutually support one another; and the recent decision of the Supreme Court enhances the effectiveness of them all.

Ku Klux Klanism Defies the Court

If anyone thought last May that "it's all over but the shouting," his illusion must have been thoroughly shattered by the Dixiecrat counter-offensive against the Supreme Court decision. The opposition is determined and sinister, and is now beginning to merge with the "Cold War" McCarthyite-fascist attacks against all civil liberties.

When beginnings were made in the fall of 1954 to integrate the schools of Washington, D. C., Baltimore, Maryland, and Milford, Delaware, the white and Negro pupils and their parents accepted the change without incident. Desegregation was proceeding until Bryant Bowles and his so-called "National Association for the Advancement of White People" intervened to organize mob violence in defiance of the law. Bowles appealed to hoodlum elements in the communities by shouting the slogans of Hitler—calling Negroes "dupes" of Communists and "left-wingers," charging that N.A.A.C.P. "bosses are Jews," and whipping up emotional fervor "to save the white race." And he succeeded, *temporarily*, in disrupting the process of school integration.

This Bowles is a disreputable character in his own right, having been brought into court six times last year on charges of fraud, and again for beating up a Negro postman. Even more sinister, he is the conscious agent of some of the most reactionary Dixiecrat and pro-fascist forces in our country. His purpose in the border areas was to "demonstrate" that desegregation will not work, and thus to discourage any further efforts to apply the Supreme Court ruling. It is a sad commentary on the administration of "justice" in our country that this Negro-hating tool of fascists, when brought to trial in Delaware for disrupting the public school system, was acquitted by the court on a technicality!

What happened in Milford, Baltimore and Washington was but

a preliminary skirmish in the great Battle of Desegregation still to be fought out in the Deep South. The Bourbon rulers are busy with other plans to "save Jim Crow."

Open defiance of the Supreme Court ruling is expressed by the governors of several southern states. Governor Hugh White, of Mississippi, for example, told the *Pittsburgh Courier* (Dec. 11): "We're not going to pay any attention to the Supreme Court's decision."

The political leaders of four states—South Carolina, Louisiana, Georgia and Mississippi—have put through laws which authorize them to turn public schools over to private agencies or local school boards or municipalities for continued operation on a segregated basis. Their fear and hatred of democracy is so intense that they would destroy *all* public schools in order to preserve their cherished and highly profitable system of racial segregation.

Plans are openly discussed in political and educational circles to gerrymander school district boundaries to conform to segregated white and Negro residential areas, and to authorize school principals to give transfers-out to individual white pupils who happen to get caught in "Negro districts," and *vice versa*. This device supplements the ghetto housing imposed upon Negroes by the banks and real estate corporations. It has long been used to circumvent laws "prohibiting" school segregation in the North—with the result that there are hundreds of Jim Crow schools in New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Los Angeles and other northern cities with large Negro populations. The Dixiecrats are strengthened in their defiance of the Supreme Court decision when a bigot like New York City Superintendent of Schools William Jansen tries to rationalize this practice as "natural segregation."

Moreover, lynch-terror is being organized on a systematic basis in the South. The "White Citizens Councils" being set up in the several counties of Mississippi and Alabama, for example, openly proclaim their intention "to make it difficult, if not impossible, for any Negro who advocates desegregation to find and hold a job, get credit or renew a mortgage." Negroes have aptly dubbed these councils the "Uptown Ku Klux Klan," and are taking steps to com-

bat both their economic thuggery and their not-too-veiled threats of mob violence.

White citizens who advocate desegregation are being labeled "Communists" and subjected to reprisals. Dr. Lee Lorch, for example, head of the department of mathematics at Fisk University, applied last fall to enroll his two children in a Negro elementary school in Nashville, Tennessee. Shortly afterward, he was haled before the House Committee on Un-American Activities on the ground that some stoolpigeon had called him a "Communist" *more than four years ago*; and then he was fired by the executive committee of the University's Board of Trustees for refusing to turn informer before the Congressional Committee. It is ironical, indeed, that a great Negro institution like Fisk should thus comfort the enemies of Negro freedom.

In another significant challenge to the Jim Crow system, Carl Braden, a copyreader on the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, bought a house last May in a lily-white neighborhood; and then transferred it to his Negro friend, Andrew Wade IV. The night after the Wade family moved in, a fiery cross was burned beside the house, and shots were fired through the windows. For several weeks the Wades were subjected to threats of violence and other pressures designed to force them to vacate. Then the house was bombed.

The grand jury called to investigate the case returned no indictments against the racists who had been trying to drive the Wades from their home. Rather, it indicted Vernon W. Bown, a white friend of the Wades who volunteered to help guard their home—*accusing him of setting off the bomb!* And it indicted Carl Braden, his wife and several of their friends—for "*advocating sedition!*" Said the grand jury, with typical McCarthyite distortion: "It is very significant . . . that this case seems to follow the pattern used by the Communist Party in this country to create trouble between the respective races in this country, and that one of the specific methods of doing this is by the purchase of property for Negroes in areas which normally are occupied by white persons, and then causing incidents such as this." Braden was tried, convicted and sentenced to *15 years in prison* and a fine of \$5,000!

Thus do the enemies of Negro freedom transform our courts

into instruments of Jim Crow oppression! Thus is the Big Lie of "Communist force and violence" used to thwart the democratic aspirations of the Negro people! Thus does the cult of racism merge with the pro-war, fascist ideology of "anti-Communism"—posing an added threat to the peace and freedom of our entire nation!

In further preparation for the big Battle of Desegregation, a racist ideological campaign is getting under way to incite backward elements among southern whites to fight against the Supreme Court ruling. Spokesmen for the Dixiecrats are haranguing the "White Citizens Councils" and other groups with anti-Negro and anti-Semitic diatribes. Thousands of hate-leaflets attacking the Court decision are being mailed out by such outfits as Bowles' "N.A.A.W.P." and the "Christian Anti-Jewish Party." And that vicious and inflammatory "Birth of A Nation" film, which pictures Negroes as brutes and glorifies the KKK night-riders and lynchers, is just now being refurbished in technicolor—at the cost of more than \$8,000,000—to spew race hate again from the screens of the nation's theatres.

Against this background of legislative skulduggery, racist persecution and mob violence, the attorneys for the Wall Street-Bourbon alliance proceed, with gentlemanly decorum, to petition the Supreme Court to allow them to handle this troublesome question of desegregation in their own way—and time!

Where Does Eisenhower Stand?

Arguments were scheduled for December 6 on what decrees the Supreme Court should issue to implement its ruling against segregated schools; but they were postponed after Mississippi's Senator Eastland blocked confirmation of Federal Judge John Marshall Harlan's appointment to the vacancy on the Court. Eastland's protracted tenure in the Senate is based on the Jim Crow disfranchisement of most of the citizens in his district; and he is understandably disturbed over this appointment of the grandson and namesake of the one Supreme Court justice who dissented in the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896.

Although oral arguments were postponed, briefs were filed by

all parties to the five desegregation cases involved; and "friend of the court" briefs were entered by the U.S. Attorney General, the American Veterans Committee, and at least five southern states not directly involved in these cases. The N.A.A.C.P. brief urges the Supreme Court to order complete school integration by September, 1955, with a leeway of one year provided in cases where special administrative difficulties are met. In general, the briefs by southern states urge the Court to let the Federal District Courts (located in the South) handle all problems of implementation, with only general directions from the Supreme Court; and they call for a "gradual" approach to desegregation.

Attorney General Herbert R. Brownell's brief appears to support *both* these opposing positions. On the one hand, it includes many fine-sounding statements of principle, in seeming support of the N.A.A.C.P. On the other hand, the specific decrees which the Attorney General's brief asks the Supreme Court to issue would leave things pretty much in the hands of the Federal District Courts, in obvious support of the basic position of the southern states.

This looks like a clever bit of double-talk. Attorney General Brownell is well aware of the historic white-supremacist role of the southern Federal District Courts to which he would give final authority to approve state plans for the integration of white and Negro schools. Why, then, did he fail to propose a definite time-limit, like the N.A.A.C.P.'s September, 1955? Are his fine statements of principle designed to serve as window-dressing, while the Bourbon rulers of the South proceed, through the lower courts which they dominate, to sabotage the Supreme Court decision by means of endless litigation and "gradualism"?

These questions take on special significance in the light of President Dwight D. Eisenhower's statement on the school segregation cases just a few days before the Attorney General's brief was filed. The President told a press conference that he was sure the Supreme Court, in formulating its implementing decrees, would take into account the emotional strains and practical problems growing out of this issue. Georgia's Negro-hating Herman Talmadge, then governor, promptly hailed the President's statement as evidence that the Eisenhower Administration is moving toward his way of think-

ing on this issue—and there is substantial reason to fear that he is right.

Republican Party campaigners made full use of the Supreme Court decision in their quest for votes in the 1954 elections. But now that the elections are over, there are ominous signs that the Eisenhower Administration is trying to make peace with the Dixiecrats—at the expense of the democratic rights of the Negro people. And the same thing is true of leaders of the Democratic Party, who began the current session of Congress by making a “gentleman’s agreement” with their Dixiecrat colleagues not to “divide the Party” by pressing for civil rights legislation.

The people of our country dare not rely on these Big Business politicians to integrate white and Negro schools. The actual abolition of segregated schools must be won in the same way the Court victory of last May was won—through even more powerful mass pressures by the Negro people and their allies.

The People Will Uphold the Law

The fight to abolish segregated schools should be waged with confidence that the Supreme Court decision can, indeed, be translated into practice. It is entirely possible for the democratic forces of the people to overcome the diehard opposition of the Dixiecrats and their agents.

There is a very broad coalition of organizations which are formally committed to support of the Court decision. Among them are many predominantly white organizations *within the South*—including the Texas C.I.O., the Georgia Federation of Labor (A.F.L.), the Southern Baptist Church Convention, other Protestant and Catholic church bodies, the Southern Regional Council, the Southern Conference Educational Fund, some newspapers, and many civic, professional, student and other groups. On the national front there is an even wider range of groups which have spoken up on this question—including A.F.L., C.I.O., the Communist Party, U.S.A., the National Council of Churches, and many, many more. Added to these are practically all of the organizations of the Negro people, North and South—forthright and militant in their demand for “DESEGREGATION NOW!,” even in the face of actual and

threatened lynch-terror. And the democratic, peace-loving peoples abroad are watching carefully to see whether our Government lives up to the Supreme Court pronouncement which the Voice of America was so quick to beam to all the world last May 17.

This broad popular support represents a formidable obstacle to those who want to sabotage the Court ruling.

That is why most southern governors refused to go along with South Carolina's Byrnes, Georgia's Talmadge and Mississippi's White in their open defiance of the Supreme Court decision, but *say* their states will obey the law. They knew that the people of the South cherish their public schools, want them improved, are hostile to proposals for turning them over to private agencies, and are disposed to abide by the ruling of the Supreme Court.

That is why the Eisenhower-Brownell Administration finds it necessary—even though with double-talk—to *say* they are for desegregation. They feel the pressure of the democratic people's forces of our country; and they are especially sensitive to criticisms on the Negro question from abroad.

It is relatively unimportant whether these southern governors, the President and the Attorney General are "sincere." But it is extremely important that they feel compelled to take a public position in support of the Supreme Court decision. The same democratic people's pressure which forces them into this official posture can also force them actually to abolish segregated schools.

Indeed, desegregation is already under way. As N.A.A.C.P.'s public relations director Henry Lee Moon points out in *The Nation* (Dec. 18, 1954), by last fall "four major cities and more than two-score smaller cities and towns in seven states had begun the process of integrating their formerly segregated school systems." White and Negro Catholic and other parochial schools are likewise being integrated in several southern states.

The white supremacist opposition to placing Negro teachers in charge of classes which include white pupils is being overcome in some of these localities; and it can be overcome generally by the urgent needs of the schools and the pressure of the people. The schools of our country—already short some 150,000 teachers—simply cannot dispense with the services of the 113,000 Negro teachers

now employed in segregated schools. Moreover, the democratic people's forces which are able to compel desegregation in the schools will also have the strength to assure the integration of white and Negro teaching personnel.

The fight to abolish segregated schools is a winning fight. What we need most at this time is *united and demonstrative action* by the broad coalition of people's organizations which support the ruling of the Supreme Court.

Labor Must Lead the Way

A few days after the Court decision, the National Committee of the Communist Party (*Daily Worker*, May 24, 1954) hailed the ruling as "a mighty blow against the historic patterns of school segregation," and declared: "This decision gives the Negro people and their friends the opportunity to unite more firmly in a mighty coalition to wipe out jim crow in the whole South and in the entire economic structure of America. This victory opens up the possibility for the Negro people and labor to march forward more resolutely along the path of Negro representation in government and all other areas of life."

There is no question that the major break-through of last May 17 can become an historic turning-point in the fight to rid our country of the whole exploitative system of Jim Crow oppression. Obviously recognizing this fact, the Negro people are pressing right ahead in their fight to end segregation in the schools and on all other fronts. Their forward movement must be matched by far more vigorous activity than is now taking place among their democratic allies throughout the country. The hundreds of organizations formally on record in support of desegregation should now speak out anew.

Organized labor should meet on a regional basis to plan implementation of the Supreme Court decision. It should initiate and lead community councils to mobilize the people to put the decision into life.

A. F. of L., C.I.O. and independent labor political action committees should spark legislative programs in the Congress and State legislatures to combat Dixiecrat laws and advance anti-segrega-

tion, equal rights legislation.

Let the Supreme Court receive scores of "friend-of-the-court" appeals, calling for prompt implementation of the ruling against segregated schools.

Let President Eisenhower and Attorney General Brownell know that the people want an end to Jim Crow.

Let elected public officials and candidates for election—in both the North and South—be deluged with demands for them to speak up in support of desegregation.

Let there be public mass meetings throughout the country: "Desegregation Parades" in large cities; delegations, resolutions, petitions, letters-to-the-editor, and every other form of activity to register the widespread people's support for the end of segregated schools.

Let there be thousands of contributions to the Educational Equality Fund of the N.A.A.C.P.

The labor movement of our country has a special interest and a key responsibility in this struggle. Labor has always pioneered in the battle for democratic public schools. And only the great trade-union organizations of the working class can rally that massive support which the Negro people now need in this fight to abolish segregated schools.

Let the trade unions of America now mobilize their millions of members, especially in the South, in active struggle to back up the ruling of the Supreme Court.

This fight to abolish segregated schools is closely bound up with the fight for economic security, for an end to McCarthyite repression, and for peace. And only the firm alliance of the labor movement and the Negro people can provide the basis for that broad people's coalition which is necessary to win these gains.

Let the people's organizations of our country now unite in an all-out struggle to abolish segregated schools. In the process we will help weld together those democratic forces which can move our whole country along the path to jobs, democracy and peace.

SUGGESTED READING IN NEGRO HISTORY

NEGRO LIBERATION <i>by Harry Haywood</i>	Paper \$1.00; cloth \$2.25
THE NEGRO PEOPLE IN AMERICAN HISTORY <i>by William Z. Foster</i>	\$6.00
BEN DAVIS—FIGHTER FOR FREEDOM, <i>by Claudia Jones</i>	.25
AMERICA'S RACIST LAWS <i>by Herbert Aptheker</i>	.10
AFRICA, AFRICA <i>by Derek Kartun</i>	Paper \$.75; cloth \$1.50
FREDERICK DOUGLASS: SELECTIONS, <i>edited by Philip Foner</i>	.35
IN BATTLE FOR PEACE <i>by W. E. B. Du Bois</i>	Paper \$1.00; cloth \$2.50
NEGRO REPRESENTATION <i>by Pettis Perry</i>	.10
NEXT STEPS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR NEGRO FREEDOM <i>by Hugh Bradley</i>	.15
RESISTANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA <i>by Alphaeus Hunton</i>	.35
THE NEGRO PEOPLE AND THE SOVIET UNION <i>by Paul Robeson</i>	.02
THE NEGRO IN HOLLYWOOD FILMS <i>by V. J. Jerome</i>	.25
THE NEGRO PEOPLE VERSUS THE SMITH ACT <i>by Lloyd L. Brown</i>	.05
MARXISM AND NEGRO LIBERATION <i>by Gus Hall</i>	.10
FORBIDDEN FREEDOM <i>by Cheddi Jagan</i>	Paper \$.75; cloth \$1.50
THE PATH OF NEGRO LIBERATION <i>by Benjamin J. Davis</i>	.05
THIS IS MY HUSBAND <i>by Esther Jackson</i>	.25

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