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PLANTATION SCHOOLS: A HISTORY OF RURAL BLACK ONE-ROOM
SCHOOLS IN THE MID-SOUTH AND THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA FROM
RECONSTRUCTION TO 1968

by

MAURICE BROWN

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

The University of Memphis

May 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to give thanks to God, who is the head of my life, my wife, Rosary Johnson Brown, for her dedicated support and assistance, and my daughters, India and Ivory, for their continued encouragement. I must next acknowledge the guidance of my dissertation committee chairman, Dr. Arwin D. Smallwood, who served as a mentor throughout this writing process. I would like to give special thanks to my dissertation committee members, each of whom has contributed to my professional growth as a historian, beginning with Dr. Margaret Caffrey, whose teaching professionalism served as a source of inspiration for me as a student in several of her classes. I must also acknowledge her thorough editorial skills, which proved to be invaluable during the writing of this work. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Charles W. Crawford, a man of wisdom, for suggesting that I concentrate on local oral history to identify possible dissertation topics. Finally, I would also like to thank Dr. Randolph Meade Walker for his willing advising in spite of his extremely busy ministerial and teaching schedule.

Additionally, I would like to thank my friend and colleague, Dr. Cynthia Sadler, for her support and words of encouragement as we traveled more than 2,000 miles researching special collections and conducting interviews. I would also like to thank the library staff members of the following colleges and universities for their professional assistance: The University of Mississippi at Oxford and Starkville, Delta State University, Tougaloo College, Rust College, and Fisk University. Finally, I would like to thank the students who attended one-room schools in the rural South and the teachers who dedicated their lives to teaching black students in those crude educational institutions from Reconstruction to 1968.

ABSTRACT

Brown, Maurice. PhD. The University of Memphis. May 2012. *Plantation Schools: A History of Rural Black One-Room Schools in the Mid-South and the Mississippi Delta from Reconstruction to 1968*. Major Professor: Arwin Smallwood, PhD.

This dissertation addressed rural black one-room schools in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta with particular emphasis on Bolivar and Marshall Counties in Mississippi and Fayette County in Tennessee. From Reconstruction to 1968, one-room or one-teacher schools were the predominate model used to educate black students in the Lower South. Influenced by an agrarian economy and white plantation elites, rural black schools provided a minimal eight-grade education that was disproportionately funded and staffed in comparison to white schools. While African Americans constituted the majority of the population in these regions, black education was never considered a priority among white-controlled school boards, state education administrators or elected officials. In fact, the substandard education provided to black students was deemed adequate by whites who realized that under-educating African Americans maintained their political and socio-economic status.

Due to the lack of economic and occupational diversity that emerged after the Civil War, the educational experiences of blacks in the states of the Upper South differed from those of blacks who lived in the cotton plantation regions of the Lower South. The political, economic and social limitations imposed upon rural one-room schools affected the quality, duration and type of education that millions of African Americans received in the Lower South. By comparison, blacks who lived in regions of the Upper South and Border States exercised a degree of autonomy whereby they could control the day to day operations of their schools.

An understanding of the historical correlation between rural black one-room schools, Jim Crow, cotton tenancy, and migration is crucial because these factors defined and shaped the lives of the blacks in both the Upper and Lower South. Although the landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision was a sweet victory, it soured in the Lower South as whites initiated numerous campaigns to maintain separate school systems and perpetuate its antebellum ideology. One-room schools survived in many Tennessee and Mississippi counties until court ordered school desegregation was implemented during the mid-1960s. For nearly one hundred years, African Americans endured an inferior school system that superimposed white supremacy and Jim Crow as the foundation for black education.

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INTRODUCTION

Most research regarding the evolution of black education in the South has been framed within the broader context of African American education in America. While these studies have provided a vast amount of information, their discussions have generally minimized or omitted the importance of rural schools. These rudimentary institutions which emerged during the Civil War and continued into the modern era were the foundation of early black education in the South. Millions of blacks who resided in rural areas looked to one-room schools to provide them with the basic education needed to maneuver and survive within a segregated society.

In extending the discourse of African American education in the South, this dissertation examines rural black schools at the elementary grade level from 1862 to 1968 in three counties located in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta regions of the Upper South and one county in the Piedmont region of the Upper South. Specifically, it explores schools in Fayette County in Tennessee, Marshall and Bolivar Counties in Mississippi, and Caswell County in North Carolina. Whereas these schools faced similar challenges, there were significant differences in their funding, establishment and operations.

In the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta region of the Lower South, the majority of rural African American schools were built, financed, and controlled by plantation owners and corporations. In fact, most of the under-funded, poorly equipped one-room elementary schools attended by blacks were located on or in close proximity to plantations. The vast majority of black teachers hired by the plantation elite and local school officials had only an eighth-grade education or high school diploma. By

providing blacks with a minimal education, whites ensured that their primary workforce remained subordinate, impoverished, and functionally illiterate. This pattern of education for blacks in the Lower South was characteristic of a plantation-based agricultural economy undergirded by a sharecropping and tenancy farming system. Low levels of teacher training, the limited number of African American county training schools, and the emphasis on industrial and agricultural curriculum contributed to blacks receiving an inferior, inadequate, and less progressive education.

In some rural communities of the Upper South, such as Caswell, African Americans enjoyed a level of social, cultural, and in some instances, economic autonomy that allowed them to build, fund, and control their own schools. African American parents, community leaders, and teachers worked together to overcome numerous obstacles imposed by white-controlled school boards. Ultimately, blacks wanted to ensure that the inequalities within the dual education systems at the state and local levels did not prevent their children from receiving the same if not higher level of education that whites received in public schools. To ensure the quality of education that their children received was above minimum, blacks required that their teachers have a college education and teach a progressive curriculum. Further, they used community support to ensure that a black county training school was located in their county and that the number of one-room elementary schools was kept at a minimum level. During the 1920s, with the assistance of the Rosenwald Fund, black parents and community leaders led efforts to eliminate the number of one-room schools and build more consolidated multi-room facilities throughout the county.

This research has several goals: (1) to identify, describe and analyze the social, cultural and economic factors that affected the quality and delivery of education within these counties of the Lower South and those located in the Upper South; (2) to examine the roles of parents, community leaders, and teachers as they relate to the evolution of rural education for African Americans in the Upper and Lower South from Reconstruction to 1968; (3) to review and evaluate historical documents that explain and describe how rural one-room schools located in these Mid-South and Lower South areas were manifestations of Jim Crow policies, racism, paternalism, and plantation labor practices; and (4) to explain how one-room schools perpetuated the dual- segregated education system in the Upper and Lower South. During the 1920s, as the number of one-room schools was gradually being reduced in the rural Upper South, the number of one-room schools in the Mid-South and Lower South was proliferating. These one-room schools evolved and developed within a historical context whereby limited educational opportunities, poor teacher training, inadequate funding, limited occupational choices, and limited economic opportunities adversely affected black education. In the Upper South and Border States, blacks who lived in rural regions where the plantation system was less dominant had more autonomy in controlling the day-to-day operations of their elementary and secondary schools. Therefore, rural black students attending consolidated multi-room elementary and secondary schools in the Upper South were provided better educational opportunities than rural black students in the Lower South.

A review of the existing literature suggests that rural African American students and parents in the Lower South and those in the Upper South faced similar challenges. However, in most instances, parents and teachers in the Upper South were able to utilize

community support to overcome racial, economic, and social barriers in order to provide progressive educational opportunities for their children. Throughout the South, racially motivated systemic political and economic obstacles were designed to ensure that African Americans did not receive a progressive elementary or secondary education. The one-room school was a primary component of the dual education system that existed in the rural South from Reconstruction until court-ordered school desegregation was fully implemented in the early 1970s.

In 1928, in “Common Schools for Negroes in the South,” N.C. Newbold discussed black public education from 1864 through 1920. In his estimation, southern schools were born during periods of economic and political distress when states used new constitutions, amendments, and statutes to redefine or limit their obligations to educate blacks. For example, North Carolina and other southern states added constitutional amendments stating that “...children of the white race and the children of the colored race shall be taught in separate schools; but there shall be no discrimination in favor of or the prejudice of either race.” Subsequently, initial actions taken by southern state governments, the Freedmen’s Bureau and northern philanthropy laid the foundation for a system of segregated common schools for blacks throughout the South. While most southern states restricted tax funding for black education, North Carolina, which was more progressive, acknowledged that “the state’s obligation for the education of the child is the same whether the child is wrapped in a white skin or a black one.” Newbold reached the following conclusions regarding common schools for blacks in the South: (1) they were based on a legal authority established by whites who used their own fundamental and statute laws to determine educational standards and practices; (2) groups

in some states unsuccessfully attempted to destroy equal education for blacks; (3) though engulfed in decades of prejudice, poverty and strife, gradual progress was made; and (4) both progressive black and white leaders rallied to support fairness and justice in education.¹

The *Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (1934), by Horace M. Bond is one of the first comprehensive scholarly historical evaluations of black education in the United States from 1860 to 1933. In discussing the history, economics and current problems of black education, Bond raised a crucial question: “Shall the school in which Negro children are enrolled have objectives, curricula, and methods which are distinct from those obtaining in schools enrolling American white children?”² He found that “The South [was] the only section of the country least able to support even a single system. . . . The result is that Negro children are discriminated against universally in states with a heavy Negro population, all available funds being devoted as far as possible to the needs of white school children.”³ His in-depth descriptions and analyses of rural one-room African American schools illustrated that the lack of adequate state and local funding significantly impacted pupil enrollment, building conditions, and teacher training. In a second publication, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (1934), Bond presented a revisionist interpretation of the development of black education in Alabama with emphasis on the social and economic forces that created a racial caste system and sustained dual public schools. “If Cotton made Ante-bellum

¹ N.C. Newbold, “Common Schools for Negroes in the South,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 140 (1928): 209 -233.

² Horace M. Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1934), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 501.

Alabama, and the slow, hardly-changing mores surrounding the relationship of the races and the economic classes within the races, Steel [was] a symbol of change.”⁴ However, industrialization and the introduction of steel into the state’s economic system did not significantly change the socio-economic status of blacks. The education of blacks remained dependent upon whites in control of finance and legislation. Consequently, they provided African Americans with an education that met their own concept of black status in the socio-economic order.

Growing Up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South (1941), by Charles S. Johnson is one of several studies financed and sponsored by the American Council of Education (ACE) from 1935 to 1940. In his study of elementary and secondary education, Johnson used questionnaires, interviews, and archival sources to analyze the socio-economic and educational problems of black youth in eight rural counties in five states of the Black Belt. Bolivar and Coahoma Counties in Mississippi were chosen because each exemplified the traditional plantation system in the Lower South. Shelby County in Tennessee was selected because it encompassed Memphis, a major southern city where black tenant farmers competed against white land owners in plantation and non-plantation settings. Johnson concluded that in communities of the Upper South, where blacks had more economic autonomy and occupational choices, parents were able to improve their local schools. Youth who were exposed to alternative non-agricultural

⁴ Horace M. Bond, *Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 289.

occupations tended to exemplify a more positive outlook about education and their economic and occupational future.⁵

In *The Negro and the Schools* (1954), Harry S. Ashmore summarized the research findings of over forty white and black social scientists that collected data relative to the structure of biracial education in the United States, with particular attention to the Southern region. Financed by the Ford Foundation Fund for the Advancement of Education, the study was specifically designed to provide impartial data for decision-makers who bore the burden and responsibility of equalizing education or desegregation. The interdisciplinary research team placed their analysis of dual education systems within the framework of the nation's racial history of segregation and its subsequent effect on the structural evolution of America's social systems. In regard to the South, Ashmore believed that the future of its educational system did not rest solely upon "appropriations and physical facilities and curricula ... [but on] ...the complex human relations that divide[d] or unite[d] their communities."⁶ He doubted that decisions reached by the Supreme Court regarding desegregation would "cause any great shift in Southern attitudes, nor any far-reaching immediate changes in the pattern of bi-racial education."⁷

Henry A. Bullock, *A History of Negro Education In the South from 1619 to the Present* (1970), focused on the historical development of educational opportunities for blacks in the South. He used primary sources such as personal diaries, personal papers, plantation records, state and local governmental archival documents, and secondary

⁵ Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), xiii.

⁶ Harry S. Ashmore, *The Negro and the Schools* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 138.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

sources to buttress his comprehensive historical narrative of black education at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Bullock also provided a description of the political, economic, and social dynamics that affected black education over time. He considered the then-current education and social revolution as unintentional “liberating responses elicited by the nation’s effort to maintain the status quo.”⁸ Bullock viewed black education in the South “as the main leverage” for the movement “toward the complete emancipation” of African Americans.⁹

In recent years, emerging scholarship has examined the pedagogy of black teachers within the framework of the African American community. In most instances, it was found that these “teachers frequently rely on the cultural and social underpinnings of the African-American community to strengthen their connections with students and their parents.”¹⁰ In “Constancy, Connectedness, and Constraints in the life of African American Teachers,” Michele Foster collected the life histories of twelve female black teachers in order to document their pedagogy and educational philosophies. The central themes included connectedness and institutional restraints. Foster found that although these teachers faced racism and sexism, they “developed a strong racial consciousness and identity and express[ed] themselves in a shared cultural solidarity with students.”¹¹ Further, black teachers, “reinforced the community’s cultural norms and encouraged

⁸ Henry A. Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South from 1619 to the Present* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), xv.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Faustine C. Jones-Wilson, *Encyclopedia of African-American Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 461.

¹¹ Michele Foster, “On Learning and Teaching: Constancy, Connectedness, and Constraints in the Lives of African American Teachers” *NWSA Journal* 3, no.2 (Spring, 1991), 261.

them to achieve beyond what society expected of them.”¹² While they were shaping and constructing their own realities, they were also instilling similar values within their students and the African American community. Foster contended that the failure to chronicle the positive contributions and methods of black teachers undermined their importance and role in positively advocating and articulating the middle class values that many African Americans embraced as a consequence of receiving a secondary or post-secondary education.

In *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (1996), Vanessa Siddle Walker continued the scholarship regarding the importance of black teachers in the African American community. She argued that traditional portraits of black teachers were a by-product of past treatment by historians and social scientists that tended to over-emphasize the impact of numerous financial and systemic inequalities that existed within dual segregated schools systems. Walker proposed that a paradigm shift should take place; a shift in focus that captures and examines the positive unintended consequences of segregated black Schools.¹³ She believed that the untold and overlooked stories of the many acts of sacrifice made by black teachers and parents to ensure that their children received a quality education should be included in historical narratives. Her research focused on Caswell County Training School, a rural black high school that operated from 1934 to 1969 in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. She found that teaching was more than a job or occupation. It was a mission which placed “emphasis on being sure that all children

¹² Ibid., 233.

¹³ Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1996), 3.

reached their highest potential.”¹⁴ This mission which extended beyond the classroom placed the needs of black students at the center of the school and the community.

Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (2006), examined the perspectives of communities and state and program administrators who worked to make the Rosenwald Building Project a success throughout the South. Her detailed narrative explained that the program’s emphasis on building one- and two-room rural black elementary schools evolved into an increased emphasis on constructing urban multi-teacher elementary and secondary schools in many rural counties in the South. The community involvement component of the Rosenwald Building Project provided blacks with opportunities to rise above the white paternalism and disfranchisement that had influenced black education in the upper and Lower South. African Americans used their own financial resources and labor to construct schools that became a source and symbol of community and racial pride.¹⁵

Similar to Michele Foster and Vanessa Siddle Walker, Adam Fairclough placed the emphasis of his research on the crucial roles of black teachers within the school and the community. In *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (2007), Fairclough began his comprehensive study of black educators in the South with Reconstruction and concluded with the desegregation of schools following the *Brown* decision. He found that black teachers, primarily women, fostered a positive racial identity in African American communities throughout the South for more than a century. “Ever since Reconstruction, black teachers had acted as community leaders, interracial

¹⁴ Ibid., 205.

¹⁵ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).

diplomats, and builders of black institutions.”¹⁶ To educate black students, they endured personal and professional scrutiny from various segments of the black community and the malicious interference of white antagonists. “Being a black teacher . . . demanded faith in the future when the present often seemed hopeless.”¹⁷

This dissertation unites two fields of study—African American history and southern history—to create a synthesized narrative of rural black one-room schools in the Upper and Lower South. It incorporates the perspectives of students, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders of these crude educational institutions. It also examines the roles of white politicians and their constituents who sought to ensure that one-room schools remained the primary places of learning for rural blacks. These schools represented a tangible and ideological socio-economic line of demarcation that Jim Crow and white supremacy superimposed upon the daily existences, hopes and aspirations of blacks. On a practical level, these schools purposely ensured that whites maintained their dominant social, economic, political, and cultural positions in the Lower South. Further, archival evidence demonstrates that white planters and local politicians used their positions to influence the direction of black education until the equalization and consolidation movement ended in 1965.

Chapter One, “Historical Overview,” traces the evolution of African American education in the South from the 19th century to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and subsequent court-ordered school desegregation in the late 1960s and early 70s. It includes a concise narrative of the events, circumstances, and factors that

¹⁶ Fairclough, Adam. *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

influenced the development of one-room rural black schools in the Upper and Lower South. While these schools served as anchors of the black community in both regions, they were shaped and defined by the political and socio-economic climate particular to each area. Though advances in black education and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision were sweet victories, they soured in the Lower South due to concerted efforts by whites to maintain a substandard dual school system reminiscent of the Reconstruction Era.

Chapter Two, “The Dark Ages: White Resistance,” examines the origins of dual education in the Upper and Lower South. During the Civil War and Reconstruction, initial efforts to educate blacks were made by the Freedmen’s Bureau, American Missionary Association and northern philanthropies. Following Reconstruction, education evolved into a segregated dual system throughout the South. Though southern whites embraced educational reforms, they were unwilling to support progressive measures that would lead to improving the overall socio-economic status of African Americans. Therefore, the resulting structure of education for blacks in the South was the establishment of one-room schools designed to provide a rudimentary education that perpetuated the dominant political, social and economic hierarchy.

Chapter Three, “Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald: 1890-1930,” discusses the contributions that Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald and other northern philanthropists made to improve black education in the rural South. The collaboration between Washington and Rosenwald established the administrative structure of rural black education at the elementary and secondary level. This structure, which emphasized industrial and agricultural education, was adopted by southern states

and became the template for dual education throughout the Lower South. While the Washington-Rosenwald collaboration was concentrated in the building of black schools, northern philanthropic organizations such as the Jeanes Fund, the General Education Fund, and the American Missionary Association sought to improve the training and quality of black teachers.

Chapter Four, “Black Teachers: Swimming against the Tide of White Resistance,” analyzes the roles, contributions, and importance of black teachers from 1920 to 1950. Though black teachers suffered hardships, ridicule, and overcame insurmountable obstacles, they were dedicated to educating rural black students. In addition to functioning within the constraints of a white political and socio-cultural climate that devalued black education, black teachers were paid less than white teachers with similar qualifications and training. Further, African American teachers who taught in one-room schools in the Lower South were paid less, received minimal training, and had fewer resources than their counterparts in the Upper South. Yet, these regional and race-based differences did not alter their respective mission of providing black students with the basic skills required to function within the greater society. Instead, these disparities ignited legal battles against the separate-but-equal doctrine that undergirded the entire system of Jim Crow in the Upper and Lower South.

Chapter Five, “Gradual Improvements and Equalization Efforts: 1940-1954,” explores the various steps taken by black educators in both regions to organize and unite at the state, county, and local level for gradual improvements in their respective school districts. Simultaneously, the NAACP, renowned black educators, and other social scientists documented the inequalities inherent to rural black one-room schools and the

dual education system in the South. The data they collected aroused public and legal support for improving or equalizing black education in the United States as a whole and specifically in the Lower South where the inequalities were more widespread and conspicuous. The obvious disparities in the allocation of student expenditures, teacher pay and training, and quality of facilities in dual school systems throughout the South demonstrated that the quality of education received by rural black students was substantially inferior to the quality of education received by rural white students. Since the one-room school remained the primary educational institution for blacks in the Lower South, their inherent inequalities served as tangible evidence that could be used by the NAACP and the other stakeholders to challenge the separate-but-equal doctrine.

Chapter Six, “Conclusion: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Demise of Rural Black One-Room Schools,” discusses issues related to the *Brown* decision and the subsequent dismantling of rural black one-room schools throughout the South. It also examines white and black opposition to school desegregation, equalization as a strategy against school integration, and court-ordered school desegregation. While most efforts used by pro-segregationists to circumvent *Brown* proved futile, these tactics nonetheless forestalled total implementation of the decision for years. Ultimately, equalization and consolidation of schools led to the demise of rural black one-room schools in the Lower and Upper South. Increased allocation of public tax dollars improved the quality of black school facilities, led to increases in teacher pay, facilitated advancements in the training of black teachers, and improved transportation and curriculum for black students. While these landmark improvements in black education changed the socio-cultural climate of the South in the 1960s, many African Americans chose to support pro-choice and

neighborhood schools thereby perpetuating further entrenchment of racial segregation within public schools.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Overview

Prior to the Civil War, slaves throughout the South were systematically and legally denied basic literacy and educational opportunities. Slave masters enforced a rigid code that controlled the physical mobility and economic productivity of slaves.¹⁸ Illiteracy was used as a tool to ensure that slaves remained subservient to whites. The prevailing belief among whites was that people of African descent were biologically, morally, and intellectually inferior. Because they were illiterate, non-whites and people of African descent were systematically denied access to educational opportunities that would increase social, political, and economic competition with European immigrant wage earners, yeomen, and elite white land owners within the dominant society. As far back as the 17th century, members of planter aristocracy who held positions of power within the British North American colonies made it clear that maintaining white hegemony was a priority. African slaves, Native Americans, and other non-white ethnic groups were viewed as a source of dependable agricultural labor that could be exploited by whites. During Reconstruction, African Americans who sought entrance into the economic mainstream were adversely affected because the vast majority of southern whites steadfastly held on to these attitudes and beliefs.

White hegemony was established in the American colonies during the colonial period when chattel slavery became the dominant labor system. In the southern colonies, elite planters in the Chesapeake region enacted laws that defined slavery based on race

¹⁸ Laws of Mississippi, Constitution of the State of Mississippi Chapter 33 “An Act In Relations to Slaves, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes” 1857; section 3-14, 233-255. (Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books> 02/12/2012). Laws of North Carolina, Constitution of the State of North Carolina Revised code 1855; “An Act Concerning Slaves and Free People of Color” sections 25-44, (Retrieved from <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-antebellum/5358>) 02/23/2012.

and ethnicity.¹⁹ During the 1600s, plantation elites in the colonies of the Upper South—Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and Delaware—established a social and economic caste system when they instituted a set of rigid slave laws based on race, biological factors, and ethnicity. These laws and codes were vigorously enforced to ensure that African Americans, Native Americans, and other non-Europeans did not change or alter the social and economic order.²⁰ This racial caste system allowed early colonists to maintain the social order while importing large numbers of other European immigrants into the colonies.²¹

During Reconstruction, southern whites believed it was their civic duty to maintain and foster the racial unity of the dominant group by regaining absolute control of the political, economic, and cultural institutions within their counties and states. They reinstated policies and customs that enhanced their ability to rigorously enforce laws and customs that denied blacks and other non-whites basic human rights.²² These restrictions included prohibitions against any form of literacy, the right to own property, the right to enter into any legal contracts, the right to testify in court, and guardianship

¹⁹ Alan Watson, *Slave Laws in the Americas* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 66; Edward Countryman found that, “Unlike Spaniards or Portuguese, English colonists took neither the law nor the practice of enslavement, black or otherwise, with them when they crossed the Atlantic. They developed their slave system, their slave law, and their eventual presumption that in America being black meant being enslaved themselves” in Edward Countryman, *How Did American Slavery Begin?* (Boston: Bedford /Martin, 1999), 9.

²⁰ Alan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 23-30 .

²¹ Ina Corrine Brown, “National Survey of the Higher Education of Negroes: Socio-Economic Approach to Educational Problems.” (Federal Security Agency, U.S. Office of Education United States Printing Office: 1,6, 1942), 17.

²² Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 141; Charles Pettigrew, a slave holder, is quoted “The power of the master must be absolute, to render the submission of the slave perfect, a southern judge once affirmed” Charles Pettigrew to Ebenezer Pettigrew, May 19, 1802, Pettigrew Family Papers; (ed.), *Judicial Cases*, II, p. 57.

over their children who had been born to parents who were slaves.²³ After the Civil War, southern whites instituted Jim Crow segregation laws and other racially-based codes to ensure that they retained their pre-emancipation control of social, political, and economic institutions. According to Ina C. Brown, “Since the abolition of slavery the color line has served the same purpose. But these practices have not been without serious social and economic consequences; for the low social, economic, and cultural level of the Negro has served as a drag on the entire region in which he lives, and indirectly on the nation as a whole.”²⁴ Since Reconstruction, southern whites have routinely used racially-based laws to manipulate black education as a means to maintain the color line and perpetuate white supremacy. Throughout the South, rural black one-room schools served as the major component or cornerstone of the southern educational system for more than one hundred years.²⁵

Therefore, understanding the differences between African American communities in the Upper and Lower South is important. In the Upper South, whites and blacks had lived in close proximity since the colonial period when these communities were formed. Past biological relationships, familial ties and a shared sense of community impacted racial attitudes and social mores that governed relationships between blacks and whites.

However, in the Lower South, the spaces and places where one-room schools were

²³ Public Statutes of the State of Tennessee Since the Year 1858; chapter 114, 1859-60 section 1; Chapter 35, 1867-68 (Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books> on 02/12/2012). Watson, 66-69; W.E.B. DuBois explains, “How the planters, having lost the war for slavery, sought to begin again where they left off in 1860, merely substituting for the individual ownership of slaves, a new state serfdom of black folks” in *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 104.

²⁴ Brown, 17. DuBois discusses the establishment of laws designed to control black education that began during Reconstruction. These laws were designed to curtail and control black education at the state and local level. They were implemented as a means of reestablishing the concept and practice of ‘home rule’ within states of the Lower South; DuBois, 509-510.

²⁵ Fairclough, 57.

located evolved prior to the Civil War and continued during the first two decades of the 19th century. Mechanization and increased cotton cultivation facilitated the spread of the plantation system and chattel-slavery into the Lower South. The profitability of cotton as a staple crop spurred a new influx of immigrants and increased the migration of whites and blacks into the Lower South.²⁶ Slaves who lived in these plantation communities did not have the sense of community shared by a significant percentage of slaves in the Upper South. Kenneth M. Stamp, in *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*, found that the relationships developed between slaves and masters in the Lower South differed from those established in the Upper South.²⁷ In the Lower South, the principle goal of the antebellum slave owner was to maintain absolute control over the lives of slaves. They held slaves who exemplified traits of faithful subservience and docility in high esteem.²⁸

By the mid-19th century, the Lower South became a significant geographic and economic region. “In terms of gross U.S. exports, cotton cultivated in the lower South moved from being less than 5 percent of all U.S. exports in 1790 to 32 percent in 1820, to 51.6 percent in 1840, and by 1860 increased to 57.5 percent, in the United States.”²⁹

²⁶ Charles S. Aikens, *The Cotton Plantation Since the Civil War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1998), 5; “Increasing demand for cotton caused by the Industrial Revolution and invention of Eli Whitney principle of removing seed from the type of cotton which could be grown in the inland South stimulated production”; Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers: Financing and Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South 1800-1925* (Washington, D.C.: Beard Books, 1968), 246-268; examine the “Return of King Cotton and the Resurrection of the Cotton Factorage System” after the Civil War.

²⁷ Stamp, 34-37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44-45

²⁹ Arwin D. Smallwood. *The Atlas of African-American History and Politics: From Slavery to Modern Times* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998), 58; John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 18-36; explores the “Agricultural Revolution, 1839-1849”; in Sixth U.S. Census, 1840, p. 226-229.

Cotton emerged as a primary staple crop as the southwest territories began to rapidly evolve into viable cotton producing southern states. “Three states alone in the South, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, produced just over 600,000 bales of cotton in 1819-1820 and by 1859-1860 they were the top three cotton producing states in the United States.”³⁰ The combined cotton production of these three southern states was almost five million bales during the last decades of the 19th century.³¹ In *Slave Country*, Adam Rothman revealed that “from the 1820s to the 1850s, the demographic, economic, and political weight of plantation slavery in the United States continued to shift to the south and west.”³² As a consequence of the increased migration of whites into the Lower South, the number of people living in Alabama, Mississippi, West Tennessee, and Louisiana increased from 400,000 people in 1820 to almost 2.5 million in 1860. The racial composition within these three states was evenly divided between white and black.”³³ These statistics provide a historical point of reference for understanding the origins of black and white rural communities in the Lower South during the first half of the 19th century. Most traditional historical narratives of this region failed to explain that while whites formed communities, blacks were simultaneously forming slave

³⁰ Stamp, 27; see John H. Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988) “Appendix A: Taxable Land and Slaves in Mississippi in 1854 and 1857.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 220.

³³ Ibid, 220.

communities on newly established plantations and small yeoman farms that sprang up throughout the westward expanses of the Lower South.³⁴

After the Civil War and Reconstruction, the geographical location of rural southern communities in the Mississippi Delta and Mid-South had not changed significantly since they originally formed during the 1820s. The slaves who lived on these frontier plantations carved out communities throughout the Lower South. Prior to the war, plantations were the dominant fixtures in the majority of rural communities located in the Lower South. After the war, they regained their place of importance.

As large plantations were destroyed during the Civil War, the lives of white and black southerners permanently changed as old social norms and customs were uprooted or altered. During Reconstruction, many rural communities were re-established on the same plantations and farms where these newly freed men, women, and children had previously served as slaves.³⁵ Immediately following the war, some former slaves moved from one plantation to the next to settle a variety of often conflicting aspirations.

Historian Anthony Kaye noted that “the freedmen expressed a desire to preserve their old familiar and geographic ties while reconstructing labor arrangements that allowed them to establish some spatial, economic, and physical relationships between themselves and their former owners.”³⁶ Many rural blacks settled on plantations and established what

³⁴ Census of the Mississippi Territory 1810, Reel 2, Record Group 2, Mississippi Archives and History; See Adam Rothman, 220 “Masters and slaves collaborated in the creation of a cotton economy but not as equals. They lived and worked together in a hierarchical, coercive relationship. Slaves had little choice but to participate.” In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the population of slaves grew from 3,499 slaves in 1801 to 16,703 in 1810.

³⁵ Aiken, 18.

³⁶ Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 212.

was for them, new lives. Before emancipation, the legal protections extended to slave owners had denied slaves the right to self-govern their basic social and physical mobility. Additionally, former slaves had been denied basic personal freedoms such as the right to choose an occupation or change jobs.³⁷

According to Eric Foner, “freedom and a wage system of employment were the new grounds of negotiation between white land owners and black laborers. Freedom of choice and individual responsibilities were new unforeseen realities that affected the decision making process of the freedmen who were eager to redefine the terms of their employment.”³⁸ As freedmen began to move to southern urban centers and reorganized rural plantations, they were hopeful that these new arrangements would not only allow them to redefine the terms of their employment but also give them an opportunity to change their pre-emancipation social status. One-room schools or one-teacher schools became the fundamental institution dedicated to the delivery of education to rural blacks and whites from 1865-1877.³⁹

Efforts to educate former slaves were initiated by northern anti-slavery organizations during the Civil War under the supervision of the American Missionary Association. In *A History of Negro Education in the South*, Henry Allen Bullock found that “benevolent societies sprang up in quick succession to form a complex of freedmen associations that reached such cities as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and

³⁷ Stamp, 34-38; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction Americas Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 78-87; Neil Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1976), 3-16.

³⁸Foner, 213.

³⁹ Andrew Gulliford, *Country Schools in American Education* (Bolder: University of Colorado Press, 1996), 1-33.

Chicago in 1862-1863.”⁴⁰ During the early phases of the war, northern religious organizations such as the Baptist Church and Methodist Episcopal Church became major financial supporters of missionary efforts to educate the increasing numbers of blacks who sought refuge in Union Contraband Camps. As the Union Army established a military presence in the South, contraband camps developed throughout the region. Bullock noted that “the spiritual objectives of their missionary enthusiasm also kept alive their antislavery sentiments that teaching blacks to read and understand the Bible was absolutely essential to their spiritual and moral development.”⁴¹ Northern philanthropic organizations and the National Freedmen’s Relief Association augmented the efforts of the American Missionary Association and the Union Army by supplying funds and materials to assist in setting up schools for blacks.⁴² “By 1866—just one year after the Civil War ended—there were about 1,400 Northern white teachers from dozens of religious missionary associations teaching black children in 975 Southern schools.”⁴³ Near the end of the decade, “there were more than 2,500 Northern teachers in just over 2,000 [predominantly one-room] black schools throughout the South.”⁴⁴

When the military activities associated with the Civil War subsided, black freed men, women, and children expressed a desire to improve their limited educational abilities. According to Foner, “access to education for themselves and their children was,

⁴⁰ Bullock, 19; Louis Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860* (Algonac: Reference Publications, 1986), 238.

⁴¹ Bullock, 24; Benjamin Qualls, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Da Copo Press, 1954), 128-131.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴³ Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005), 35.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

for blacks, central to the meaning of freedom, and white contemporaries were astonished by their avidity for learning.”⁴⁵ To this end, many freedmen began to seek opportunities to gain access to educational opportunities. The Freedmen’s Bureau and northern philanthropy continued their efforts to assist blacks in their quest to receive a basic education. “Plantation workers who remained in the more rural areas of the South made the establishment of a school-house ‘an absolute condition’ of signing labor contracts.”⁴⁶

During Reconstruction, the federal government and northern benevolent groups expanded their efforts to provide educational facilities, teachers, and resources to the freedmen who remained in the South.⁴⁷ In the initial phases, southern governments and their white constituency made it clear that educating former slaves was not one of their priorities. Rather, they wanted to re-coup the social, cultural, economic, and political losses they had suffered as a consequence of the military outcomes of the war. Getting former slaves back to work became a major concern for southern planter elites, as well as the federal government. It soon became obvious to the Freedmen’s Bureau and southern farmers that the task of forging new labor relationships between illiterate blacks and white southerners was going to be a difficult process.⁴⁸

Once Reconstruction began it became clear that ‘the labor problem’ involved more than the questions of wages and hours. The planters’ inability to exert their authority arose from the clash between their

⁴⁵ Foner, 96.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 96.

⁴⁷ Bullock, 28-29.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 22-23; Leon Litwack found that “After emancipation, employers, landlords, and storekeepers, among others seized every opportunity to exploit black illiteracy for personal gain. The value of ‘book-larnin’ was at no time more dramatically impressed on blacks than at ‘settling up’ time and when it came to signing a labor contract.”; Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 54.

determination to preserve the old forms of domination and the freedmen's desire to carve out the greatest possible independence for themselves and their families.⁴⁹

Progressive-minded men like Union General Oliver Otis Howard realized that former slaves needed an adequate education if they were to become self-sufficient and productive. Therefore, Howard, progressive philanthropists, and other Bureau administrators advocated the urgent and practical need to build additional schools for newly freed blacks throughout the South.⁵⁰

During the early stages of Reconstruction, it became clear that educated blacks were more effective than non-blacks when teaching black students. In spite of their progressive ideas about the need for educating former slaves, northern whites found that the racial attitudes of southern whites made it difficult for white teachers from the American Missionary Society (AMA) to teach blacks adequately.⁵¹ Properly trained black teachers in racially segregated schools became a priority due to southern white opposition to integrated schools. "In principle, the AMA and American Freedmen's Union Commission, and a substantial number of Bureau education officials, favored integrated schools, but because they were extremely sensitive to charges of fostering 'social equality' between the races, they in fact established only a handful."⁵² White southern AMA members openly discriminated against northern black teachers who came

⁴⁹ Foner, 136.

⁵⁰ Foner, 96-102; Benjamin Quarles, describes the role of Contraband Relief Association during the early stages of the Civil War. In Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War*, 128-129.

⁵¹ Ibid. For a more detailed explanation of racial attitudes towards black teachers during the initial phases of reconstruction see Bullock, 42-43.

⁵² Ibid. For a more detailed analysis of northern attitudes towards and criticism of black teacher, see Fairclough, 35-37.

to the South. Some racially conservative white volunteers refused to share sleeping accommodations with black teachers and also refused to recognize them as serious educators.⁵³

Due to the geographical and social character of the Lower South from 1890 to 1915, whites maintained firm control of the complex political and economic decision-making processes. They used their considerable influences to ensure that blacks recognized and adhered to the color-line. This was especially true as it related to voting rights, educational opportunities, and economic freedom. Whites believed that it was their civic duty to retard and control blacks throughout the region.⁵⁴ “After emancipation, employers, land lords, and storekeepers, among others, seized every opportunity to exploit black illiteracy for personal gain.”⁵⁵ The responsibilities and skills associated with being a wage earner and the primary bread winner of a family initiated new priorities for the freedmen who were being steered into new tenancy labor agreements. They were now expected to negotiate with former slave masters regarding the potential profits yielded from their labor. “The value of ‘book learning’ was at no time more dramatically impressed on blacks than at ‘settling up’ time and when it came to signing a labor contract.”⁵⁶ While they realized an education was essential for their economic independence from whites, blacks believed access to an education was crucial for their children. “Leaving learning to your children was better than leaving them a

⁵³ Ibid., 99. Southern attitudes about the need for whites to teach blacks the ways of whites is discussed in Bullock, 51-52.

⁵⁴ Litwack, 218-219.

⁵⁵ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 54.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 54.

fortune, because if you left them even five hundred dollars, some man having more education than they had would come along and cheat them out of it all.”⁵⁷ Therefore, many freedmen made the availability of education a central issue in their labor negotiations with their new employers.

Even during the Reconstruction process, southern whites exerted their influence on education by containing or limiting the availability of education for blacks. Consequently, “blacks had to overcome formidable obstacles to their education, ranging from organized white resistance to authorized white neglect.”⁵⁸ Some whites even advocated and encouraged violence in an effort to prevent blacks from obtaining an education. “The deliberate burning of schoolhouses, along with the harassment and murder of teachers after emancipation and during Reconstruction, developed into a new wave of terror directed at efforts to educate black children.”⁵⁹ Most southern whites believed that if blacks were allowed to receive an education, it should be designed and implemented in a manner which was non-threatening to the established social order that white supremacy fostered.⁶⁰ Litwack argued that “the idea was to make black education compatible with the prevailing racial hierarchy--indeed, to use the classroom to preserve and reinforce that hierarchy.”⁶¹ Even progressive-minded whites who believed that blacks should receive some form of rudimentary education gave their consent based on a

⁵⁷ Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: the Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1979), 473.

⁵⁸ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 86.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 89; Foner, 422-423.

⁶¹ Melinda M. Hennessey, “Political Terrorism in the Black Belt: The Eutaw Riot,” *Alabama Review*, 33 (Jan. 1980): 35-48.

preconceived set of conditions. Further, they believed that black schools should be “under the control of ‘the best white people of the community’ and with the right kind of teachers, realistic goals, and an appreciation of limits, black schools could be geared to a productive and stable labor force.”⁶² Generally, southern whites believed that education was a delicate issue and should not be under the control of blacks.

Nell Irvin Painter found that “by the late 1870s, the representatives of well-to-do whites effectively controlled state legislatures and executives. They set about undermining public schools, arguing that taxing whites to educate black children was unfair, for Blacks paid little or no taxes.”⁶³ As Southern Democrats began to reclaim dominance of state governments, they took further steps to control black education. By withholding tax money to support rural black public schools, southern Democrats used their political influence to ensure that planters and landlords at the local level maintained control of black education in their respective counties and municipalities.

Redeemed state governments progressively withdrew financial support from Black county schools, condemning vast numbers of school-age children to ignorance. For the next one hundred years, the crop-lien and land-tenure system characteristic to the South’s agriculture system were the most immediate causes of poverty among blacks in the rural South. However, illiteracy made blacks even more susceptible to economic, political, and social isolation, which denied them access to first class citizenship.⁶⁴

By the 1880s, the land-tenure system, crop lien-system, white control of the black educational process, and disenfranchisement were all factors which made life for the new freedmen in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta Regions of the Lower South almost

⁶²Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 90.

⁶³ Painter, 50.

⁶⁴ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 52-54.

unbearable.⁶⁵ These factors also contributed to the Exoduster Movement, the first major post-Reconstruction migration of blacks from the South. A black Texan wrote: “The longer we stay here the worse it will be because our old masters are raising their children to believe and act as they do. We have been free 14 years and we are still poor and ignorant, yet we make as much cotton and sugar as we did when we were slaves, and it does us as little good as it did then.”⁶⁶ Migration from the South continued to be a major strategy used by blacks in Tennessee, Louisiana and Arkansas to escape the cycle of ignorance and the poverty of a repressive southern agricultural caste system that viewed them as nothing more than a source of cheap labor.⁶⁷

Historically, one-room schools were an integral component of the American educational system that served the needs of black and white students. In many of the rural communities in the Upper South, North, and Midwest, school funding was not as constrained as it was in the Lower South. In these areas, whites and blacks had more influence and control of their local school boards. In fact, blacks viewed their schools as a vital part of their communities. Former North Carolina teacher Mildred Oakley Page recalled that “even in the crude, two-room schoolhouse, Black schools were places where order prevailed, where teachers commanded respect, where parents supported the teachers, and where anyone who wanted to learn could learn”⁶⁸ In states such as Virginia, Eastern North Carolina, and Kentucky, black parents and teachers worked

⁶⁵ Charles S. Johnson, *A Preface to Racial Understanding* (New York: Friendship Press, 1936), 30-31.

⁶⁶Painter, 50.

⁶⁷ Johnson, 9.

⁶⁸ Davis Dixon and Felicia Woods, Mildred Oakley Page interview, June 1, 1995, audiotape Behind the Veil Project (Special collections Lemoyne-Owen College).

together to ensure that education at the primary and secondary level was a community endeavor. This practice of community collaboration was a sharp contrast to rural black schools located throughout the Mid-South, and Mississippi Delta regions.⁶⁹

While the focus of this study is confined to examining rural one-room black schools in Fayette, Marshall, Bolivar, and Caswell counties, it should be noted that these schools were symbolic and tangible by-products of the prevailing Jim Crow system. The Mid-South and Mississippi Delta was a microcosm of events occurring throughout the Lower South. Sociologist Charles S. Johnson, in *Growing Up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South*, argued: “The southern rural Negro school faces special practical problems in addition to inadequate funds and unqualified teachers. The general poverty of the population, the demand of the farming system, the poor health of many children, and the long distances between homes and the school all contribute to the difficulties of rural education.”⁷⁰ The origins and evolution of, the justification for, and the longevity of the one-room rural black school was buttressed by the 1896 *Plessy v Ferguson* Supreme Court decision.⁷¹ For young black children who lived on the rural plantations in the Lower South, one-room segregated schools were a part of their social and cultural regime. These schools were an extension of the completely segregated

⁶⁹ For a description of schools in the upper South from Reconstruction through the 1950s, see Arwin D. Smallwood, *Bertie County: An Eastern Carolina History* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 116-120; For a description of rural black schools in the Lower South, see Charles S. Johnson, *Preface to Racial Understanding*, 70-72.

⁷⁰ Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up In the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), 109

⁷¹ Adam Fairclough, *Better Days Coming: Blacks and Equality 1890-2000* (New York: Penguin Group, 2001), 49

society in which they lived. Their classmates lived within the community, and in most instances, the teachers lived in close proximity to the schools where they taught.⁷²

After federally enforced Reconstruction ended in 1877, the overall social, economic, and educational conditions for millions of blacks living in the Lower South steadily declined during the 1880s and 1890s. When black educator Booker T. Washington made his Atlantic Exposition speech in 1895 to potential northern and southern philanthropic donors, most black children in the South did not attend school.⁷³ Southern white political leaders busily worked to adopt laws and implement practices that prevented blacks from exercising their right to vote. Once the majority of African Americans in the Lower South were disfranchised, southern political leaders steadfastly questioned the wisdom of using tax dollars to educate blacks altogether. “Whites did not want to equip blacks with skills that would enable them to compete with whites in the economy. They did not want blacks to circumvent disfranchisement by passing the literacy tests. Above all, ignorant blacks made the cheapest and most reliable laborers.”⁷⁴ Southern whites held firmly to their pre-war antebellum stereotypical beliefs about blacks as intellectual inferiors who were best suited for domestic or agricultural occupations that required arduous manual labor.⁷⁵

From 1880 through 1950, increased literacy was one of the immediate skills one-teacher schools provided to blacks. It was a basic skill essential to their survival and independence. Adult and juvenile literacy rates among African-Americans in the South

⁷² Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 10-11.

⁷³ Fairclough, *Better Days are Coming*, 49.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 48.

⁷⁵ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 93.

increased significantly during this seventy year time span. Robert A. Margo, *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950*, stated that “the black illiteracy rate continued to fall during the first half of the twentieth century, dropping to slightly more than 25 percent in 1920.”⁷⁶ By 1950, he estimated that “between 88 and 91 percent of southern blacks were literate, as measured by the census.”⁷⁷ It should be noted that increases in literacy among blacks in the South during this seventy-year time span was as a result of young people taking advantage of the limited educational opportunities made available to them. Increased literacy among blacks from 1870 to 1930 sparked the Harlem Renaissance, a literary movement that produced a new generation of black writers and journalists who were eager to use their literary skills in self-expression.⁷⁸

Margo also stated that “the long term decline in black illiteracy was achieved by a succession of literate younger cohorts replacing illiterate older ones.”⁷⁹ Because of the physically demanding nature of domestic and agricultural labor, poor adult blacks in the South, especially those in rural areas, tended to sacrifice their educational needs while making them available to children. Also, from the first to the third decades of the 1900s, poor blacks in the rural South continued to work under three basic labor arrangements: sharecropping, tenancy, and individually-owned small farms. Under each of these arrangements, the family’s limited income was dependent upon crop yields. Therefore, in these rural southern black households and communities, black families emphasized

⁷⁶ Robert A. Margo, *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 8.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Bullock, 200-204.

⁷⁹ Margo, 9.

daily farm labor as a priority and regular school attendance became a secondary concern.⁸⁰

From 1880 to the 1930s, in the rural Lower South, black families contended with the social and economic tensions that existed between schools and farming. “Schooling for [black] youth is controlled by the exigencies of cotton. Throughout the cotton belt a late cotton picking season may empty the schools.”⁸¹ From year to year, an average tenant parent was forced to face obvious economic realities. While they understood that their children needed an education, they realized that if they failed to harvest a sufficient crop, the white landowner could potentially replace their family with one willing and able to meet cultivation demands. Therefore, children generally went to school after the crops were harvested.⁸² Because of irregular school attendance, teachers in one-teacher schools often found it difficult to provide adequate instruction during the designated four-to-five month school term. In 1880, the average daily attendance rate for black children (ages 5 to 20) was about 20 percent. From 1900 to 1950, improving daily attendance rates was one of the primary goals of teachers and administrators in rural southern black school districts.⁸³ As daily attendance rates increased during the first half of the 20th century, the rate of literacy among blacks increased proportionately.⁸⁴

During the late 1890s, many black students in the Lower South did not attend school at all. Those who did attend school found that the physical buildings, resources,

⁸⁰ Johnson, *A Preface to Racial Understanding*, 33-36.

⁸¹ Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, 109.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Margo, 11.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

and teachers were inadequate. “In such schools a solitary teacher, usually a young woman with little more education than her pupils, struggled with classes of as many as seventy children spread over eight grades.”⁸⁵ In countless numbers of southern rural counties scattered throughout the Lower South, one-room schools represented the educational standards southern whites believed fulfilled the legally binding separate-but-equal laws sanctioned by state and local segregation policies.⁸⁶

Beginning in the 1900s, northern philanthropic organizations made significant financial contributions to causes related to southern Negro education. However, they made a conscious decision to ensure southerners that their support of black education was not an effort to launch a crusade for racial equality.⁸⁷ Leaders of these organizations also remained indifferent to the racial issues that were taking place in the polarized South. Many of the northern philanthropic leaders were industrialists who did not want to disturb the fragile racial peace in the southern states. “The Peabody Fund, having been established first, had set the tone of noninvolvement in racial matters. It had aimed to keep the peace while holding fast to the racial status quo.”⁸⁸ Northern organizations such as the Southern Education Board improved rural black education by advocating for better educational opportunities for all southerners regardless of race. Additionally, financial contributions of wealthy northerners like Anna Thomas Jeanes were instrumental in establishing a system of basic education for blacks in the rural South. These financial

⁸⁵ Fairclough. *Better Days Coming*, 48.

⁸⁶ C. Vann Woodward. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 71-72.

⁸⁷ Bullock, 121.

⁸⁸ Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 84-106; see Bullock, 121.

contributions served as a vital life-line for the training of black teachers who taught in rural school districts from 1908 to 1921.⁸⁹

Among black educators, Booker T. Washington had a tremendous impact on the development, evolution and expansion of rural black education due to his unwavering support of agricultural and industrial education. When he became president of Tuskegee Institute in Macon County, Alabama, Washington focused on the problems he saw in rural education. He believed that the problems inherent to rural black schools were directly related to the racial problems characteristic to the Lower South during this time period. The rural black one-room schools which were scattered throughout the Mid South and Mississippi Delta were influenced and, in most instances, controlled by elite white planters and landlords who sought to preserve the existing racially segregated social order.

Washington embraced agricultural and industrial education as a viable option because he believed that southern whites would accept this form of black education.⁹⁰ He believed that hard work, self-pride, diligence, and adherence to high moral principles would propel the black race to its rightful position as American citizens. Further, he encouraged blacks to engage in and excel at industrial and agricultural occupations as a means to obtain a desired goal because these types of industrial and agricultural occupations did not threaten whites.⁹¹ Washington adopted a pragmatic approach to

⁸⁹ Ibid., 133-135.

⁹⁰ Hoffschwelle, 11; see Harlan, 238-265.

⁹¹ Ibid., 12; see Harlan, 196-199.

resolve what he viewed as a very complex problem that affected a significant percentage of America's African American population.

Washington's work with the Rosenwald Educational Foundation led to the development, continuation, and expansion of rural education. In the Lower South, the one-room school was the cornerstone of the Washington-Rosenwald collaboration. In 1905, Washington began a campaign to establish a primary and public school program for blacks in Macon County, Alabama.⁹² Public education for black students in the county was hampered by the lack of school facilities. The available schools were dilapidated structures such as those found in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. Using funds donated by northern philanthropists Henry Huttleston and Henry H. Rodgers in combination with monies from the Anna Jeanes Fund and the Tuskegee Institute, Washington developed a project to build black public schools throughout Macon County.⁹³ This building project became the model for the Rosenwald Building Program.⁹⁴ "Roger's contributions helped to construct forty-six one-teacher schools, each costing about \$700. Jeanes provided additional funds for school buildings and industrial supervising teachers. Local people contributed funding for teacher salary supplements in the expectation that a full year's term and pay would improve the level of instruction."⁹⁵ From 1902 through 1910, Washington's Macon County Building Project supervised the construction of one-room schools throughout the rural community. The project incorporated northern philanthropy and black patronage to increase the number of

⁹² Ibid., 24.

⁹³ Bullock, 139-140.

⁹⁴ Harlan, 131-132.

⁹⁵ Hoffschwelle, 25.

available rudimentary rural educational buildings. The success of the Macon County Building Project eventually led to the development of a major campaign to improve rural black education. Once Julius Rosenwald united in a partnership with Booker T. Washington, a more efficient rural educational system for black students evolved throughout the South.

During the first decade of the 20th century, Washington expanded and built upon the work of northern progressives by ensuring that basic education continued to be available to blacks in the South. Rural black education received additional support from the Slater Fund when steps were made to improve teacher education by developing county training schools throughout the South. “In 1911, believing that this foundation [for black education] to have been fairly well laid, trustees of the Slater Fund began to encourage the development of a system of county training schools throughout the South.”⁹⁶ One of the primary tasks of the training schools was to prepare black teachers for one-room schools in the South. The training schools also served as high schools dedicated to providing secondary education and additional training in industrial arts such as hair care, brick masonry, home-economics, and other domestic or industrial occupations. The efforts of the Slater Fund to increase the availability of black county training schools also gradually increased the number of training schools from four in 1912 to one-hundred-seven in 1920 to three-hundred-eighty in 1930 throughout the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Proceedings of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund, 1905-1906 (Report on income and expenditures), 12-13.

⁹⁷ Uillin W. Leavell, *Philanthropy in Negro Education*. Diss. George Peabody College of Teachers, 1930, 118-119.

The county training school model began in Tangipahoa, Louisiana in 1911. By 1912, this system had spread to Mississippi, Texas, and Arkansas. Each of these states received financial support from the Slater Education Fund.⁹⁸ The terms of the grants stipulated that the schools must be officially recognized as part of each county's public school system. Administrators of the Slater Fund and the Jeanes Education Fund insisted on these terms because as late as 1910, there were no state-funded rural public schools beyond the eighth grade in the entire South.⁹⁹

From 1880 through 1915, southern whites believed blacks were assertively attempting to establish their social and economic independence. Resisting efforts to incorporate blacks into the economic and cultural mainstream of American society, southern whites adopted policies that expressed and reinforced their essential belief that blacks should remain permanently socially, economically, and politically subordinate to a superior white population.¹⁰⁰ By 1915, white controlled southern state and local governments made decisions that adversely impacted educational funding structures and opportunities for blacks in rural and southern urban communities. The structure and composition of rural black school boards varied within each southern state and in some instances within each county. "In much of the rural South, where most blacks lived, educational facilities remained primitive, if they existed at all."¹⁰¹ Throughout the first

⁹⁸ Edward E. Redcay and Arthur D. Wright, *County Training Schools and Public Secondary Education for Negroes in the South: the John Slater Fund Studies in Negro Education* (Washington D. C.: John F. Slater Fund, 1935), 16-20.

⁹⁹ Bullock, 123.

¹⁰⁰ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 219.

¹⁰¹ Truman M. Pierce, et al., *White and Negro Schools in the South: An Analysis of Biracial Education* (Englewood New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1955), 290-292.

two decades of the 20th century primary and secondary rural Negro education, in the majority of southern states, suffered as a result of Jim Crow legislation that blocked adequate funding for school buildings and resources.¹⁰²

From Reconstruction until the 1920s, rural black schools in the Upper and Lower South generally looked the same. “Few of the pupils could ever forget the conditions under which they tried to acquire the rudiments of an education: the makeshift, primitive, unpainted one-room board structures, with shaky floors and cracks in the wall and roof, and a potbellied, wood-burning stove in the center of the room.”¹⁰³ The seats for the classrooms were generally made of crudely cut and finished split logs. The front door served as an access and exit point for these buildings. Because of the limited incomes of rural blacks, adequate school supplies such as books, erasers, and writing utensils were scarce. A significant number of rural Negro one-room schools were built on small plots of donated land located in close proximity to neighborhood churches. Additionally, some schools were built and established on plots of land situated on large plantations. Some of the schools were housed within local churches located on plantations.¹⁰⁴

Black teachers and preachers had enjoyed positions of distinction in rural and urban southern black communities since Reconstruction. Throughout the Lower South, blacks were routinely blocked from many traditional middle-class professions. Immediately after emancipation through Reconstruction, preachers and teachers were

¹⁰² Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 66.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 64.; Kim Lacy Rogers, *Life and Death in the Delta: African American Narratives of Violence, Resilience, and Social Change* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006), 99.

¹⁰⁴ DuBois, 524-525.

viewed as being middle-class representatives within their communities.¹⁰⁵ The implicit and explicit relationship between the students and teachers of these rural black communities were social, economic, and in some instances religious in nature. “The relationship of black teachers to the black community was like that of the black minister, only more tenuous. Indeed, comparisons of teachers and ministers disclosed important differences in the ways these individuals functioned as leaders.”¹⁰⁶ In the Lower South, black teachers were a product of the communities where they taught; therefore, they were often members of the community churches that housed many of the schools.¹⁰⁷ Generally, black teachers enjoyed a special social status and were considered to be vital contributors to the community’s social, cultural, economic, and educational viability.

Black students who attended rural one-room schools in the Lower South were typically from lower income families. The heads of these households were men and women who were generally employed in low-paying agricultural occupations with less than a 5th grade education.¹⁰⁸ The majority of the students generally viewed education as a way of addressing practical needs such as being able to read legal papers or being able to count money correctly.¹⁰⁹ Generally, those who came from households where their families were sharecropping or tenant farming did not view education as a resource that would enable them to acquire a higher standard of living. Most agricultural jobs

¹⁰⁵ Gloria Ladson-Billings, *Beyond the Big House: African American Educators on Teacher Education* (New York: Teacher Education Press, 2005), 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ David Marcos Callejo-Perez, “*Schools and the Formation of Black Identity During the Civil Rights Movement: Change and Resistance in Holly Springs, Mississippi, 1964-1974*,” Diss. Florida International University, 2000, 39; see Margo, 105; see 1970 U.S. Census.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt*, 99.

available to young black men required low skills since the primary occupational task was to perform strenuous manual labor. In the world of poor farmers, upward social and economic mobility was not obtained via education. Rather, they believed that a strong back and the ability to maneuver around the social, economic, and political limitations of Jim Crow were more laudable traits for black men in the rural South. Therefore, in the Lower South, the children of rural tenant farmers faced a special set of obstacles as they tried to obtain a basic elementary education.¹¹⁰

Since one-room schools played such a vital role in the lives of African Americans in the Lower South, their shared memories and insights of the events and circumstances associated with being a student or teacher are invaluable. Their perspectives are important because they provide a firsthand contextual framework for examining and evaluating this crucial period in American history. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, argued that “reminiscences are perhaps the most typical product of human memory. Prodded by questions or not, they primarily are the recollections of past events or situations given by participants long after the event. They are the image of oneself one cares to transmit to others.”¹¹¹ The reminiscences of these individuals, like the memories of those who contributed to the slave narratives of the 1930s WPA program, must be collected and preserved. The oral histories of this generation can provide future historians with a reliable primary source of information which if not recorded will be lost.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 108-112.

¹¹¹ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 8.

¹¹² Ibid., 12.

Historically, educational and occupational opportunities for African Americans who lived in the South were limited by state and local governments until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. From 1877 through 1954, Jim Crow was imposed upon African Americans and other non-whites in thirteen southern states. In the Lower South, poorly-funded, ill-equipped, and poorly-constructed one-room schools were used to limit educational and occupational opportunities for African Americans. According to Charles S. Johnson, “Social Discrimination is the unequal treatment of equals, either by bestowal of favor or the imposition of burdens. It carries with it the idea of arbitrariness, of unfairness, and of injustice.”¹¹³ Maintaining political and financial control over African American education at the state and county level was part of a social and economic system designed to ensure that southern whites maintained their influence and perceived dominance over other non-white ethnic groups.¹¹⁴

The time period between 1940 and 1968 is significant because it produced the last generation of blacks who attended one-room segregated schools in the rural Lower South, particularly in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. Beginning in the mid-1930s, the subsidies approved by the Agricultural Adjustment Act and implemented by the Roosevelt administration saved the southern landowner from financial failure at the expense of southern black and white tenant farmers and their families.¹¹⁵ Historically, these African American students and teachers are important because they lived through pivotal transitional time periods in American history. These generations witnessed the

¹¹³ Charles Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1943), xvii.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, chapter 1.

¹¹⁵ Charles Johnson, Edwin R. Embree, and W.W. Alexander, *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy* (Chapel Hill, The North Carolina Press, 1935), 49-50.

homecoming of millions of white and black World War I, World War II, and Korean War veterans as they returned to the South at the end of these great military campaigns.¹¹⁶

In Caswell County, North Carolina, the quality of rural African American education progressed at a faster rate than in the Mid-South. During the 1920s and 1930s parents and community leaders in North Carolina worked with the Rosenwald fund to reduce the number of one-room schools within their counties. From 1924 to 1938, the training of African American teachers in North Carolina significantly out-paced teacher training in Tennessee and Mississippi.¹¹⁷ During this time period, there was a shortage of high-school-trained elementary and secondary African American teachers. This shortage was directly related to the extremely low number of African American county training schools throughout the Lower South. By 1935, the average training for black teachers in North Carolina was two and a half years above high school.¹¹⁸ In rural counties of the Lower South, black teacher training did not improve substantially until the 1950s.

In the Lower South, the basic operation of one-room black schools in Marshall, Fayette, and Bolivar counties shared many similarities. “In the first half of the century, education was a privilege, rather than a right, for African Americans in Mississippi.”¹¹⁹ Tennessee’s efforts to educate its black population, particularly in West Tennessee and the Mid-South, did not fare much better. The Agricultural Census of 1930 indicated that Fayette County had 5,786 farms with 336,437 acres in farmland, the average size of a

¹¹⁶ Smallwood, *The Atlas of African American History and Politics*, 124.

¹¹⁷ Nelson H. Harris, “In-Service Training Facilities of North Carolina Institutions. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 9, no. 1 (Jan., 1940): 44-50.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹⁹ Kim L. Rogers, *Life and Death in the Delta* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006), 98.

farm being a little over 58 acres.”¹²⁰ These figures were based on data from 1930 through 1960 U. S. Agriculture Censuses. This data indicated that these statistics remained consistent for more than 30 years. Therefore, from 1930 to 1960, the majority of the students attending rural one-room black schools in Fayette County came from households headed by parents who were either tenant farmers or sharecroppers.

“As early, as 1940, half of black Tennesseans performed domestic and menial service jobs. Rural blacks mostly sharecropped or picked cotton for two to three dollars per hundred, earning less than four hundred dollars per year as late as 1950.”¹²¹ These types of limited economic and occupational circumstances made migration to northern cities and southern urban centers like Memphis an attractive option for many young rural African Americans from Fayette, Marshall, and Bolivar counties. They joined the swelling numbers of southern blacks who decided to leave farms and plantations to seek better jobs and better educational opportunities. During the 1930s and 1940s, the magnitude of the black migration from the South had a domino effect on the nation as a whole.¹²² “In the decade of the ‘forties alone, the number of Negroes living outside the South jumped from 2,360,000 to 4,600,000, an increase of nearly 100 per cent.”¹²³ The vast majority of African Americans who migrated outside of the South during this time period were educated in a rural one room-school. This meant that when they arrived in

¹²⁰ Dorothy Rich Morton, *Fayette County: Tennessee County History Series*, ed. Charles W. Crawford, (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1989), 54.

¹²¹ Bobby L. Lovitt, “A Profile of African Americans in Tennessee History,” Tennessee Digital Library, <http://www.tnstate.edu/library/digital/document.htm>[accessed January 23, 2009].

¹²² Neil Fligstein, *Going North: Migration of Blacks and Whites from the South, 1900-1950* (New York: Academic Press: 1981),149.

¹²³ C. Vann Woodard. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 128.

the industrial areas of the North, Midwest, and West, they were trained to perform only low-skilled agricultural jobs. By 1960, a significant number of these migrants such as those that left Marshall County, Mississippi arrived in Memphis possessing only a 5th grade education. The large number of blacks leaving the Lower South also impacted the education of those, especially rural tenant farmers, who decided to remain in the region.¹²⁴

While the actual number of African Americans living in the South declined in the 1930s and 1940s, the actual number of whites moving to the South increased. “Within the South in the same decade, on the other hand, the white population increase proved to be thirty-three times as great as the gain in the number of [blacks]. What the South has long claimed as its peculiar problem was no longer a regional monopoly, but a national problem.”¹²⁵ As more and more of the recent black migrants gained the right to vote in their new communities in the North, the political dynamics of the nation shifted. These individuals aligned themselves with political parties to press for additional civil rights within their immediate communities but also in the South where their relatives remained.¹²⁶

The vast majority of African Americans that migrated to the North, Midwest, and West unified behind one party and became Democrats. “The result has been something like a reversal of the traditional position of the two major parties toward the Negro, as a survey of the elections since 1948 would indicate.”¹²⁷ Therefore, the African Americans

¹²⁴ Fligstein, 153.

¹²⁵ Woodard, 128.

¹²⁶ John M. Murrin, et al, *Liberty, Equality, Power* (Mason: Centage Learning, 2008), 717.

¹²⁷ Woodard, 129.

who left the South in the 1930s and 1940s became politically active immediately upon their arrival in their new urban settings. These individuals who had received their basic education in one-room rural schools used these basic skills to improve their socio-economic circumstances. Because of their political activism in the North, they also indirectly changed the political dynamics for their relatives who were still living in the segregated South. Many of these individuals were drawn into politics as a means of addressing the educational and economic problems with their new urban communities. Many black migrants in cities like Chicago, St. Louis, and Milwaukee lived in the older inner city communities that became urban ghettos after years of neglect.¹²⁸

These individuals used their 5th to 8th grade educations and became the new foot soldiers of the revitalized Democratic Party that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Therefore, these individuals used their basic educations to become politically active in the Democratic Party. African Americans throughout the South had used these limited educational opportunities to drastically reduce the staggering level of illiteracy that existed immediately after emancipation. The basic education they received in the one-room schools of the South provided them with basic literacy skills. However; their limited education also negatively affected their ability to compete with better educated northern and southern whites for skilled and semi-skilled jobs in the industrial cities where they migrated to. Many African Americans who were educated in the rural South had received an inadequate education when compared to their white counterparts.

¹²⁸ Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle For Black Equality 1954-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 6-15.

CHAPTER TWO

The Dark Ages: White Resistance

In 1860, at the beginning of the Civil War, Tennessee and Mississippi had substantial black populations. In Tennessee, the black population was 283,010 and the white population was 826,722.¹²⁹ In Mississippi, there were 487,404 blacks and 353,800 whites.¹³⁰ Black education in the South began in earnest in 1862 during the Civil War as a military action designed to address the needs of black refugees who lived in contraband camps throughout the South. In the Lower South, specifically western Tennessee and northern Mississippi, which includes the Mid-South and the Mississippi Delta, blacks joined the Union army and flooded into contraband camps by the spring of 1863. In the Upper South, in states such as North Carolina, the influx of contraband slaves placed added pressure on Union military officials as they sought to assist the former slaves in their transition from slavery to freedom.

Of the 200,000 African American troops that fought for the Union Army between 1862 and 1865, nearly 75,000 were from the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta region. Of that number, 24,052 were from the Delta region of Louisiana, 17,896 were from the Delta region of Mississippi, and 20,133 were from the Mid-South region of Tennessee. These African Americans constituted nearly one-third of the Union troops. In the spring of 1863, contraband camps were formed in Vicksburg, Mississippi after the city fell to the Union Army. As black soldiers, their families, and other blacks began a continuous exodus from rural Mississippi plantations to the city, the number of contraband camps

¹²⁹ 1860, 8th United States Census, Table IV, 378.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, Table IV.

increased. In an effort to ease overcrowding, eliminate idleness, and improve the overall sanitary conditions of the camps, military leaders organized the day-to-day operations of these facilities. One of the most pressing needs besides basic health and sanitation was reducing the extremely high levels of illiteracy among the refugees.¹³¹ During that same year, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned lands, which later became the Freedmen's Bureau, worked with northern religious and philanthropic organizations to establish schools within each camp.¹³² These schools became the template for post-emancipation black education throughout the South. Northern religious and philanthropic groups proved to be invaluable, long-standing loyal supporters of black education in the United States, specifically in the Lower South. When military leaders called upon them for assistance, these groups responded by coming to the South to begin the task of educating former slaves.¹³³

Contraband schools, which initially began in the Upper South, spread to the Lower South as the Union Army gained control of Confederate territories. It is important to acknowledge that from 1862 to immediately after the Civil War ended in 1865 blacks throughout the Upper and Lower South demonstrated a desire and willingness to support efforts to improve their education. With the help of the Freedmen's Bureau, missionary groups, philanthropists, and northern blacks established schools in churches throughout the region. After the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865 and the appointment of

¹³¹ Weymouth Jordan, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* 11 (1939): 47-48.

¹³² LaWanda Cox, "The Promise Land of Freedom," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45 (Dec. 1958): 413-440.

¹³³ Henry T. Swint, *The Northern Teacher in the South* (Nashville Vanderbilt University Press, 1941), 40; For additional information on Freedmen's Bureau, see Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* and Arwin D. Smallwood, *Atlas of African American History*.

Andrew Johnson as President, advances in black education were challenging, particularly in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. Traditionally, historians have often overlooked or under-recorded efforts made by blacks in the South to obtain and support their educational goals and aspirations. “Innumerable obstacles, which should not be minimized, hampered the voluntary efforts made by former slaves to educate their children before the start of Radical Reconstruction and the coming of free public education in the South.”¹³⁴ The unrelenting efforts of whites to deny African Americans full citizenship rights and equal educational opportunities created the environment that produced and made the crude one-room rural black schools of the Lower South necessary.¹³⁵

The basic infrastructure for African American education established by the military and private philanthropic agencies during the Civil War and Reconstruction evolved into the segregated dual education system of the New South. The evolution of this system occurred over a forty-year span beginning in 1862 lasting until the early 1900s. After embracing educational reform and increased consolidation of white schools, state and county officials throughout the Lower South considered racially segregated one-room schools as the dominant type of school for rural blacks. This was also true of the Upper South until the mid 1920s and early 1930s when African American parents and educators in North Carolina used their influence to use Rosenwald Funds to consolidate one-room schools into multi-room facilities. In the plantation region of the Lower South,

¹³⁴ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Random House, 1976), 400.

¹³⁵ Thomas C. Holt and Elsa B. Brown, *Major Problems in African-American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 391.

whites “succeeded in imposing their will on their states and thereby presented a solid regional front in national politics on the race issue.”¹³⁶ In these states, segregation had to be maintained in order to ensure that the South remained a region where white hegemony was preserved. Rural black one-room schools helped to maintain racial segregation within local counties where white elected officials controlled the school boards. Therefore, in the Upper South, Mid-South and Mississippi Delta, whites in rural counties made sure that racially segregated schools survived basically intact until after the *Brown* decision created the need for a comprehensive equalization and consolidation movement throughout the South.¹³⁷ The consolidation and equalization of African American rural schools did not become a priority in West Tennessee and Mississippi until the 1960s when whites attempted to use these measures to circumvent court-ordered desegregation.

By 1866, white resistance to black education was rampant and persistent throughout the Upper and Lower South. In its 1866 annual report to the Freedmen’s Bureau, Commissioner General Otis Howard and bureau officials in Tennessee and Mississippi reported numerous acts of vandalism directed towards black schools, teachers, and students. According to the report, the number of freedmen schools serving black students in West Tennessee in 1865 increased from twenty-three in March to eighty-two by October . The number of teachers increased from ninety-six in March to one-hundred-forty-three in September. However, due to repeated acts of violence,

¹³⁶ Aiken, 164.

¹³⁷ In *The Hardest Deal of All*, Charles C. Bolton found that state-funded equalization was also fraught with problems. First, as one of the poorest states in the nation, Mississippi had limited resources to expend on closing the huge gap between the black and white education created during the first half of the twentieth century. Second, Mississippi, like other southern states, developed its equalization program as a bulwark against perceived threats to segregation. Consequently, equalization proposals were designed to make only minimal adjustments in State spending on black education in the hope that such an effort would deflect a possible challenge to separate but clearly unequal arrangements.

student enrollment decreased from 9,115 to 7,323 and the number of teachers decreased to one-hundred-twenty-three by October 1866. The decrease in students and teachers was attributed to white resentment, overt acts of physical violence, and the destruction of black schools.¹³⁸

The burning, vandalism, and destruction of black schools in Tennessee were not confined to West Tennessee only. These acts also occurred in Nashville, Chattanooga, Clarksville, Tullahoma, Gallatin, Springfield, Spring Hill, Shelbyville, Smyrna, and in West Tennessee, especially in Memphis. The estimated cost of repairing or replacing these schools was \$11,555.71. The cost of repairing black schools in Murfreesboro, Wartrace, Farmington, Brentwood, and Pulaski was under negotiation. Additionally, the cost of replacing black schools, churches, and personal property destroyed during the riots that occurred in Memphis in May of 1866 were not included in this report. The estimated cost of those repairs and loss of property were submitted in a special report to the 39th U.S. Congress on July 25, 1866.¹³⁹

The Memphis Riots were typical of the terrorism instigated by white vigilante groups who were unleashed upon newly emancipated blacks throughout the Lower South from 1866 to 1877. By 1867, the increasing levels of violence against blacks, destruction of property, and deaths related to white vigilantism led to the implementation of military rule in the former Confederate states from 1867 to 1877.¹⁴⁰ The Memphis riot caught the attention of Radical Republicans because the actions of local white belligerents against

¹³⁸ Reports of Assistant Commissioner of Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, State of Tennessee, to The United States Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, Washington, D.C. (Dec., 1866), 131.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

¹⁴⁰ Smallwood, 94-95.

law-abiding unarmed black citizens of Memphis were extremely violent and brutal. Major General George Stoneman, commander of the Tennessee headquarters of the Freedmen's Bureau located in Memphis, instituted a federal military investigation into the riots and submitted his findings to the 39th U.S. Congress. In his report and subsequent testimony before Congress in July 1866, Stoneman testified that:

The outbreak of the disturbance resulting from collision between some policemen and discharged colored soldiers was seized upon as a pretext for an organized and bloody massacre of the colored people of Memphis, regardless of age, sex, or condition, inspired by the teachings of the press, and led on by sworn officers of the law composing the city government, and others.

The teachers of colored schools and preachers for colored churches came to him and represented that their schools and churches had been burned down; that some had been threatened and others warned, asking him for protection and troops to guard their places ¹⁴¹

The actions of the mob resulted in the deaths of forty-six blacks and two whites.¹⁴²

Seventy-five people were wounded, five women were raped, and there were five assaults.¹⁴³ Property damage included the burning of ninety-one houses, four churches, and twelve schools.¹⁴⁴ The total value of property, schools and churches destroyed in the black community was \$114,000.00.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Elihu B. Washburne, "Select Committee on the Memphis Riots," 39th Congress, Report no. 101, (July 1866), 3-5.

¹⁴² Ibid., 34-36.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Racially motivated violence against African Americans during Reconstruction was not confined to the Lower South. Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*, found that “oral and written accounts of the county point out that the Civil War did not end in Caswell, North Carolina when it did in the rest of the country.”¹⁴⁶ While the county had been prosperous during the antebellum period, Caswell was now “a region of struggling farms and widespread tenancy, including sharecropping, the economic cellar into which many blacks and whites fell.”¹⁴⁷ Additionally, Klan violence, which was particularly active in the county, created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation for blacks and white Republicans who supported reform efforts to improve the quality of life for former slaves. “In Caswell, the Klan’s efforts to restore the old Democratic leadership to power—efforts that included the murder of [John] Chicken Stephens, a white Republican—was serious enough that in July 1870 the state’s federally appointed leader, Governor Holden, declared the County to be in a state of insurrection.”¹⁴⁸ The strained relationship between blacks and whites endured for decades. Inevitably, racial tensions created political and economic problems for disfranchised African Americans within the county. They faced an uphill battle in attaining equal funding from the county’s all-white elected school board.

James Blackwell, a former Caswell County commissioner, argued that long-standing feelings of racial animosity was one of the reasons why black elementary and

¹⁴⁶ Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 22.

¹⁴⁷ Caswell County Historical Association, *Caswell County* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 8.

¹⁴⁸ Walker, 23.

secondary schools were systematically underfunded and ill-equipped when compared to white schools within the county. “These feelings, he maintains, lingered through the turn of the century, into and beyond the 1920s and 1930s. Some members of the school board wanted to see Negroes receive more educationally, but there were also ‘diehards’ who didn’t want blacks to have anything.”¹⁴⁹ The negative attitudes held by the ‘diehards’ on the Caswell County School board were typical of the majority of southern whites during post-Reconstruction. The typical black school was a one-room facility located in black churches or abandoned school buildings that were no longer being used by whites.

African American parents and community leaders in Caswell County began their advocacy and activism for progressive education during the late 19th century. Their efforts led to the establishment of Stephens House as a multi-classroom elementary school for blacks in the Yanceyville community in 1897.¹⁵⁰ The four-room school was located in a mansion formerly owned by Chicken Stephens whose daughters sold the property and four acres to a group of progressive blacks for \$400.¹⁵¹ The money to purchase the mansion and land was donated by financially independent blacks who wanted increased educational opportunities for the county’s African American students. Stephens House, renamed the Yanceyville School in 1919, was viewed as a community resource and continued to receive financial support from black parents and community leaders.

Community leaders, teachers, and parents in Caswell County adopted an attitude that stressed “self-help” as a core value. Black leaders did not recoil when whites

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 15.

challenged them to use their own resources to improve their schools. They frequently called upon members of the black community to make financial and personal sacrifices to improve schools within their community. “Ironically, the expectation of self-help was so deeply embedded that Negro patrons themselves frequently made offers much like those of the school board.”¹⁵²

During the first decade of the 20th century, efforts by the Jeanes Fund to improve and revitalize rural African American education began in the Upper South. “The significant beginning was in Henrico County, Virginia, where the first Jeanes agent, or supervising teacher, Virginia Randolph, began work in 1908.”¹⁵³ Parent and community involvement was the cornerstone of Randolph’s philosophy for improving rural black schools. This concept became the core ideology of the Jeanes Fund regarding improving black schools in the rural South. Parents were the link that united schools, students, and community.¹⁵⁴ The black parents of Caswell County adopted this concept as they united to press for better schools, better teachers, and better educational outcomes for their children. “In general, these advocates were parents and community leaders who imposed themselves between the needs of the Negro community and the power of the white school board and made request on behalf of the school.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Ibid., 21.

¹⁵³ Mildred M. Williams et al, *The Jeanes Story: A Chapter in the History of American Education, 1908-1968* (Jackson: Southern Education Foundation, 1979), 16.

¹⁵⁴ Linda B. Pincham, “A League of Willing Workers: The Impact of Northern Philanthropy, Virginia Randolph and the Jeanes Teachers in the Early Twentieth-Century.” *Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 2 (Spring, 2005), 115.

¹⁵⁵ Walker, 19.

In the Lower South, the political and economic realities associated with disfranchisement and the plantation agricultural system hindered, and in some instances, suppressed the concept of “self-help” within rural African American communities. On large plantations, whites politically and economically controlled black teachers, preachers and schools. From 1862 to 1877, northern religious and philanthropic agencies established private and religious training schools in the Mid-South to assist in the training of black teachers. When LeMoyne Normal Institute was established in Memphis in 1862, the curriculum for prospective teachers reflected the expectations held by progressive whites and blacks regarding teacher training during the 1860s. Based on the 1880 - 1881 catalogue:

Black teachers were trained in courses designed to fulfill and convey ten basic principles: neatness of person and dress; purity of word and behavior; cleanliness of desk, books, and classrooms; genteel bearing to teachers and fellow students; punctuality everyday and promptness of duty; respect for all rights of others in all things; earnest devotion to work; quietness in all movements; importance of school attendance; and obedience to the laws of love and duty.¹⁵⁶

The curriculum for first-through-third year students who were trained to teach grades one through eight included instruction in language and reading, numbers, writing, music, physical education, drawing and geography.¹⁵⁷ Teachers were required to engage in religious instruction and participate in industrial training activities throughout the school year.¹⁵⁸ The rudimentary training black teachers and students received during the Civil War and early phases of Reconstruction differed from the curriculum taught to

¹⁵⁶ LeMoyne Normal Institute Training School, “Do Unto Others as You Would that They Do Unto You” (Memphis: S.C. Steam Printers, Lithographers and Blank Book Manufacturers, 1881), 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

white students in southern public schools. In both the North and South, white teachers were trained to teach their students a classical curriculum as well as some basic elements of the standard industrial curriculum.¹⁵⁹

During the 1880s, white Tennesseans united and began a concerted effort to gain control of the black education system in Tennessee. After federally-enforced Reconstruction ended, whites believed it was their responsibility to remain the dominant group and the primary decision-makers at the state and local level. Matters relating to black suffrage, black education, and black economic viability was systematically controlled and directed by whites.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, they designed and upheld measures that placed blacks at the bottom of the political and socio-economic hierarchy. After Radical Reconstruction ended in 1877, some disenchanted blacks left the South, initiating the first wave of post-emancipation African American migration. They became part of the Exoduster Movement that prompted thousands of blacks to emigrate to the North, West, and Mid-West.¹⁶¹

Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s*, examined how whites in the Lower South used paternalism to systematically institute and enforce segregation laws and practices ensuring that they remained the primary architects and arbitrators of racial relations. “Most White leaders of public opinion in Tennessee during the eighties, especially newspaper editors and politicians,

¹⁵⁹ Bond, 26-30; For a detailed explanation regarding education for white planter class students in the South, see Bond, 93-40.

¹⁶⁰ James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1977), 121-32.

¹⁶¹ Nolan, Claude, *African American Southerners in Slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2001), 163.

articulated a racial philosophy of Paternalism.”¹⁶² Denying blacks full citizenship by enacting and enforcing legally sanctioned laws and statutes to restrict their constitutional rights had to be rationally justified by elements of the white Christian community. By 1883, leaders of Tennessee’s white religious community such as the Methodist Episcopal Church articulated this philosophy of race relations as a matter of Christian duty. Atticus G. Haygood, later a bishop in the church, eloquently expounded the doctrine that whites had a Christian duty to protect, uplift, and care for the less fortunate race.¹⁶³ This philosophy was also adopted by secular leaders who were drawn to the philosophy due to its practicality.

Paternalism seemed to be a practical approach because it reflected the attitudes of southern whites who generally believed that blacks were not capable of assuming the responsibilities of full citizenship. In accordance with their Christian duty, most whites believed the past enslavement of blacks and their lack of education, property, and political experience rationalized the need for a policy of white paternalistic guidance.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, southern whites believed that extending educational opportunities and suffrage to blacks was a moral rather than a legal matter. Legally, they believed that the attempts by northerners to extend full citizenship rights to southern blacks could not be justified because of the inferior nature of the former slaves. The concept of Christian duty may

¹⁶² Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 1976), 161-162.

¹⁶³ Atticus G. Haywood, *Man of Galilee* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1891); 35-41.

¹⁶⁴ Cartwright., 162.

help to explain why most one-room rural black schools originated in African American churches throughout the South during and after Reconstruction.¹⁶⁵

In the Lower South, “as early as 1885, small groups of Negroes turned against their limited educational opportunities and sought greater equality through the courts.”¹⁶⁶ Blacks throughout the South became frustrated because their local school boards failed to provide adequate educational opportunities for their children while providing increased opportunities for white students. In the Mid-South, blacks in Arkansas attempted to gain some form of assistance from the state and federal courts to obtain equal funding of their schools. The Arkansas State Supreme Court agreed to hear their case because they were residents of the district where the alleged inequalities existed. “Appearing as residents of the district and as parents of forty children of school age, they charged that a school had been maintained for the white children for three months and that none existed for Negro children during an equal period of time.”¹⁶⁷ The justices of the Arkansas Supreme Court ruled in their favor because the school officials were required to provide equal facilities within their dual systems for both races.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ R. A. Carter, “What the Negro Church has Done,” *Journal of Negro History* 11 (January 1926): 1-5.

¹⁶⁶ Bullock, 214. In *Maddox v Veal* (1885), the Arkansas Supreme Court ruled that the state was responsible for providing equal educational facilities for both whites and non-whites within its dual education system. The court also ruled that the appropriation of funds should not be based on scholastic population or the length of the school term.

¹⁶⁷ Bullock, 215. In *Cummings v Richmond County Board of Education* (1899), the court decided that the school board of Richmond County, Georgia had the legal obligation to provide elementary educational opportunities to the blacks within its dual school district. The court also ruled that the county board was in error when it allocated funds from its tax funds to build a white elementary school while refusing to provide an elementary school for blacks.

¹⁶⁸ Leon A. Ransom. “The Legal Status of Negro Education Under Separate but Equal Schools,” *Journal of Negro Education* 8 (July 1939), 399.

In 1896, the Southern Education Board, a group of moderate northern and southern philanthropists, became impatient with the pace of black educational reform in the Lower South. After surveying the deplorable conditions existing in rural black schools in the Lower South, the board developed a plan to address problems they attributed to the lack of state funds. They focused their efforts on improving black public schools because they believed these institutions were the best hope for a prosperous region. They argued that the underdevelopment characteristic to the South was directly related to the poor educational opportunities offered to rural black students.¹⁶⁹

Tennessee's racial climate was typical of other rural Mid-South and Mississippi Delta agricultural communities from 1890 to 1960. Many of the laws and statutes governing racially segregated schools were designed to enforce the system of Jim Crow and exert paternalistic influence on blacks.¹⁷⁰ Jim Crow resulted in a separate and unequal quality of life for millions of African Americans, who lived in the southern states from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. For example, "in 1901, the [Tennessee] State legislature passed a statute that made it an offense punishable by a fine of \$50 or imprisonment from 30 to 60 days or both for any school or college to educate students in an integrated school."¹⁷¹

In Fayette County, Tennessee, black schools reflected similar characteristics of dual education systems found throughout the South. The first contraband school for

¹⁶⁹ Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 79.

¹⁷⁰ Guion G. Johnson, "Southern Paternalism Toward Negroes after Emancipation," *Journal of Southern History* 23 (1957): 483-509.

¹⁷¹ Tennessee Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *School Desegregation in Tennessee* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Office of U. S. Commission Office on Civil Rights, 2008), 2.

blacks in west Tennessee was established in 1862 by Chaplain John Eaton of the Union Army. The school was located in a contraband camp in Grand Junction, a small town situated in both Fayette and Hardeman counties.¹⁷² “In 1907, there were 68 schools for blacks in Fayette County with 74 teachers. Most were one-room schools located in rural areas.”¹⁷³ In the early 1900s, blacks often donated the land for the schools. Therefore, a number of one-room schools were randomly situated throughout small rural communities in Fayette County.¹⁷⁴ These communities were located in nine towns: Braden, Gallaway, LaGrange, Moscow, Oakland, Piperton, Rossville, Somerville, and Williston. During the first two decades of the 1900s, blacks in Fayette County did not stress school attendance. Porter Shields, who was born in Fayette County in 1896, attended a one-room school during the early 1900s. She recalled that they “had three months of school—that was two months in the winter and one in the summer. That was all the school went on in Fayette County. Well, the white children, they had nine months of schooling.”¹⁷⁵ Shields observed that whites in Fayette County generally treated blacks “all right” as long as they remained in their place socially and economically. “The first high school for blacks was established in Somerville in 1912. Known as Jones Hall, some of the classes were held in Zion Baptist Church.”¹⁷⁶ Generally, the black church supported efforts to promote the

¹⁷² Ames Plantation, “The Beginning of Public Education in Rural Tennessee During the Reconstruction Period: A Look at The Schools at Ames Plantation in Fayette County, Tennessee,” http://www.amesplantation.org/pdf%20files/History%20and%20Geneology/Rhodes%20Institute/Rogers_RIRS_Paper_2009.pdf (accessed 16 March 2011).

¹⁷³ Dorothy Rich Morton, *Fayette County*, ed. Charles W. Crawford (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1989), 54.

¹⁷⁴ “County Boasts Modern System of White and Colored Schools,” *The Fayette Falcon*, 11 March 1937.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Hamburger, *Our Portion of Hell* (New York: Links Books, 1973), 63.

¹⁷⁶ Morton, 54.

importance of education despite the economic and social obstacles that impeded access to education. The church also supported the concept of black teachers teaching black because it was believed that this would help to foster autonomy within the race.¹⁷⁷

Similar to Tennessee, black education in Mississippi was negatively influenced by county and local political forces. After the Civil War, whites sought opportunities to reassert the ideological, economic, and political dominance they held prior to the war.¹⁷⁸ Pre-war white immigrants from Virginia and North Carolina settled in Marshall County and built communities that were heavily influenced by men like Spires Boling. A North Carolinian by birth, he came to Marshall County, Mississippi during the mid-1800s seeking land, opportunities, and wealth. When Boling arrived in Marshall County in 1850, he was a carpenter by trade. His carpentry skills were in great demand as whites began to build homes that reflected the opulence of antebellum wealth. Boling was the owner of Jim Wells, the mulatto father of civil rights activist and journalist Ida B. Wells, who was born in Marshall County in 1862. He was taught carpentry by Boling after he had been apprenticed to him by Morgan Wells, his white owner and father who lived in the Hickory Flats community of Tippah County.¹⁷⁹

Marshall County had an abundant supply of natural and man-made resources which were used to enhance the building boom that took place in Northwest Mississippi during the 1840s and 1850s. “Its forest of Hickory, oak, magnolia, and pine provided

¹⁷⁷ “An Address to the Colored Citizens of St. Petersburg: to the Public and To Whom it May Concern,” in Henry Williams Papers, Virginia State University Library Archives and Special Collections, folder 16, box 1.

¹⁷⁸ Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 38.

¹⁷⁹ Alfreda M. Duster, *Crusade for Justice* (Chicago University Press, 1922), 8.

fine timber; the red clay soil was suitable for brick-making; and the town possessed one of the three foundries in Mississippi that could produce grillwork and other decorative metal fittings found infrequently in other parts of the state.”¹⁸⁰ While white migration into Northwest Mississippi continued to increase, the black population continued to increase as the number of slaves grew in proportion to their white owners. The building boom was further enhanced by the number of slaves in Marshall and Tippah counties who were skilled construction laborers.¹⁸¹ Therefore, blacks in Marshall County were not confined to agricultural occupations prior to the Civil War. A significant number had been taught other skills prior to their arrival in Northwest Mississippi. It should be noted that the 1870 U.S. Census indicated there was a significant mulatto population living in Marshall and other adjacent counties of Northwest Mississippi.¹⁸² The census also indicated that the vast majority of these mulattos were born in the counties where they presently lived. In the case of Ida B. Wells, her mother, a slave named Lizzie, was also a mulatto and lived in Holly Springs. She was also owned by Spires Boling.¹⁸³

After the Civil War, efforts to provide educational opportunities for blacks in Marshall County were led by native mulattos and educated, skilled blacks in conjunction with northern religious and philanthropic organizations. These local blacks and religious groups worked in conjunction with the Freedmen’s Bureau to establish one-room rural schools for blacks throughout Marshall County. Initially, the Bureau, with the support of

¹⁸⁰ Paula Giddings, *A Sword Among Lions* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 18.

¹⁸¹ Reverend John H. Aughey, *Tupelo* (Chicago: Rhodes and McClure Publishing Company, 1905), 419; William B. Hamilton, *Holly Springs Mississippi to the Year 1878* (Holly Springs: Marshall County Historical Society, 1984), 30-31.

¹⁸² Eighth Census of the Federal Population Schedule, 1860, Marshall County, Mississippi, 147.

¹⁸³ Marshall County, Mississippi 1850 Slave Schedule, 119.

these local blacks, attempted to establish racially integrated public schools such as Rust College, which was sponsored by Ashbury United Methodist Church. However, many of the school districts became racially segregated by the 1870s.¹⁸⁴ During the 1870s, black and white Mississippians gradually began the process of establishing patterns of racial segregation in public spaces, places, and accommodations. In the early 1870s, the Mississippi legislature, in an effort to be readmitted into the Union, abolished Black Codes that had been hastily enacted during Presidential Reconstruction. However, blacks and whites in Mississippi sought out opportunities to openly express racial autonomy. By 1870, they were engaged in the process of establishing customs and traditions that recognized racially segregated public accommodations as a social reality.¹⁸⁵ “Indeed with the rise of independent black churches and fraternal societies, the establishment of separate schools, and the rapid expansion of black facilities from skating rinks to bathrooms, separation, not integration, characterized Reconstruction social relations.”¹⁸⁶ Social customs in Bolivar County, Mississippi during the post-Civil War period were reflective of those that took place in rural counties throughout Mississippi and the American South.

Black education in Marshall County did not follow the same pattern as in Bolivar County. Prior to the Civil War, Bolivar County remained a sparsely inhabited county due to flooding caused by the Mississippi River. “In the wake of the final Union victory, two hundred federal soldiers occupied the town, and Holly Springs became the regional

¹⁸⁴ Foner, 366.

¹⁸⁵ Winbourne M. Drake, “The Mississippi Reconstruction Convention of 1865,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 21 (October 1959): 231-34.

¹⁸⁶ Foner, 372.

headquarters for the Freedmen's Bureau."¹⁸⁷ As a consequence of residing in close proximity to a regional headquarters, blacks in Marshall County were among the first freedmen to receive opportunities for basic education. As noted earlier, blacks in Marshall and other adjacent Northwest Mississippi counties were more likely to be trained in skills other than agricultural labor.

Sharecropping and tenant farming were an integral part of Marshall County's agricultural economy. However, the absence of large commercial plantations and the higher percentage of black independent farms provided African Americans a slightly greater level of autonomy over their churches and schools. Therefore, blacks tended to view education as a tool and as an opportunity worthy of personal sacrifice. Historically, Marshall County had been a relatively progressive rural southern county. "The white population of Holly Springs had begun to settle in earnest there in 1837, the year Holly Springs was incorporated and the original Chickasaw Indian inhabitants had been removed to the Indian Territory (later Oklahoma)."¹⁸⁸ Named after former Chief Justice John Marshall, it was the largest of twelve counties carved out of the former Chickasaw lands located in Northwest Mississippi. John Marshall, the richest white man in the territory, also owned most of the land in this area.

The first group of Marshall County white settlers had a distinctive character that affected the settlement patterns and eventual development of this region as land speculation increased and a bank was established. Holly Springs "attracted 'Episcopalians, Virginians and Whigs' -- deserting the thinning soil and accumulating

¹⁸⁷ Giddings, 21.

¹⁸⁸ James Stone, "Economic Development of Holly Springs during the 1840's," *Journal of Mississippi History* 32 (November 1970): 356.

debts of the older cotton states--who brought their 'ruffled shirts,' libraries, and 'slaves' with them."¹⁸⁹ Generally, early white settlers in Holly Springs were more progressive and black slaves were better educated and highly skilled. The rich soil helped to make the farms and small plantations surrounding Holly Springs quite productive. Agriculture was truly the primary business of Marshall County. Cotton and produce were the primary agricultural products that spawned the county's rapid growth. "In a mere twenty years, it would yield more cotton per square acre than any similar subdivision in the world."¹⁹⁰ By 1840, Holly Springs, now the county seat, gradually became a prosperous business center as trade expanded the town's economy. Banking, retail merchants and other growth industries defined the character of Marshall County.¹⁹¹

Unlike Bolivar County, Marshall County had a higher concentration of independent black farmers who owned property. Due of the presence of the Freedmen's Bureau, black men in Marshall County exercised the right to vote before blacks in the Delta and Black Belt regions of the state. By 1867, white resistance to the black vote was rampant in Marshall County and throughout the state of Mississippi.¹⁹² Because of restrictions placed on white males who had fought on the side of the Confederacy, the possibility of a black political majority became a nightmare for whites in Marshall County. "The arithmetic added up to a black majority in thirty-three of Mississippi's sixty counties, including Marshall County, which counted 3,669 black males over twenty

¹⁸⁹Giddings, 17.

¹⁹⁰ Dunbar Rowland, *History of Mississippi Heart of the South* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishers, 1925), 673-677; 1870 U.S. Census.

¹⁹¹ 1840 U.S. Agricultural Census, Marshall County Mississippi.

¹⁹² M.E. Gill to J.M. Langston, Inspector General of Schools, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 15, July 1867. Registers of Letters Received, 3 (Jan. 1867-Aug. 1867).

years of age and 3,025 whites.”¹⁹³ This reality and federal troop occupation proved to be the fuel that ignited violent resistance throughout the state of Mississippi.¹⁹⁴ This same scenario was played out in counties throughout the South as violent white vigilante groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, made blacks the targets of their revenge. “In Holly Springs, whites outnumbered blacks by just under one hundred. Since the majority of registered voters had to participate in the election for it to be binding, the strategy left to the Mississippi Confederates was to keep blacks from the polls.”¹⁹⁵ This often meant that outspoken blacks were targets and victims of white vigilante groups.

Radical Republicans enjoyed a relatively strong presence in Marshall County. Their presence led to a mutually beneficial political relationship between the white northern outsiders and the freedmen of the county. Nelson G. Gill, a former Union officer and leader in the Republican Party, settled in Holly Springs after the war. Gill, who helped the freedmen secure the vote and establish churches, donated land for the first black-owned school in Holly Springs. He and his wife M.E., who were instrumental in the establishment of the school, soon became targets of white opposition. When the opposition turned physical, Mrs. Gill wrote an impassioned letter to the Freedmen’s Bureau asking for protection. “She described to the Bureau how freedmen ‘of sterling character’ participated in all aspects of the school, including ‘the appointment of school officers.’ Though ‘they had no education--they were the board of education.’”¹⁹⁶ The

¹⁹³Vernon L. Wharton, “The Negro in Mississippi 1865-1890,” *Journal of Negro History* 33 (January 1948):13.

¹⁹⁴ George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in Politics of Reconstruction*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 145-149.

¹⁹⁵Ruth Watkins, “Reconstruction in Marshall County,” *Mississippi Historical Society* 12 (1912): 166.

¹⁹⁶ Giddings, 25.

first black high school was sponsored by the members of the newly formed Asbury Methodist Church. This congregation, with assistance from the Freedmen's Aid Society, was instrumental in the founding of Holly Springs' first colored university. Shaw University, which later became Rust College, was established in 1866.¹⁹⁷

The students who attended Shaw came from all backgrounds and ages. However, as a rule, more women were enrolled in the school than men. "By 1870, the year the school was incorporated, the state took over its normal school; and in 1873, the year that a financial panic gripped the country, a 10,000.00 appropriation from the Reconstruction legislature allowed Shaw to acquire additional buildings and grounds."¹⁹⁸ Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, the school was able to weather the economic hardships of the 1877 depression and political storms that ensued once federal troops were removed from the southern states at the end of federal Reconstruction.¹⁹⁹

After Reconstruction, white officials in Bolivar County turned to their best legal minds and state legislators, predominately Democrats, for guidance in overturning "Negro Rule" and "Negro Suffrage." According to State Senator W.B. Roberts, "in 1882 and 1883 the older men called me into conference with them and in deep earnestness explained to me that to retain even a show of white supremacy, which they regarded as necessary, it was my duty as a young lawyer and citizen to use my brains and skill to

¹⁹⁷ Ishmell Hendrix Edwards, "History of Rust College, 1866-1967" (PhD diss., University of Mississippi, 1993), 42, 56.

¹⁹⁸ Belle Strickland to Anna Grover Strickland in Belle Strickland Family Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi, Folder 1. Manuscript Department, 43.

¹⁹⁹ Edward Mayes, *History of Education in Mississippi* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), 269.

devise ways of preventing negro control by any means in my power.”²⁰⁰ Faced with blacks exercising voting rights and holding political offices, Roberts concluded that “with these conditions confronting them, our people were determined to free themselves of the existing government of Negroes and Carpetbaggers.”²⁰¹ Bolivar County had become a stronghold for the KKK in the Mississippi Delta. While this clandestine vigilante group created an environment of racial intimidation, it was generally held in high regard by the county’s white citizenry. Roberts recalled: “I remember as a small boy, my mother arousing me from my sleep to come to the window to see the parade of the Ku Klux Klan on some errand of mercy or, perchance, of vengeance upon some miscreant who had violated the traditions of our people.”²⁰²

The decision to offer blacks an inferior education was reinforced at the state level throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. As early as 1907, state education officials articulated a philosophy and a policy towards black education which would govern black education at all levels for the next fifty years. William F. Bond, state superintendent of education, argued: “If he [a black child] is educated in the right way, he will become a valuable asset. He no longer pays any attention to false prophets of his own race who try to interest him in social equality, the franchise and other rot, but has turned to other leaders whose ideas coincide with those of southern white people.”²⁰³ Bond and the plantation elites of Mississippi believed rural blacks should be taught a

²⁰⁰ Florence Warfield Sillers, *History of Bolivar County Mississippi*, ed. Wirt A. Williams (Jackson, Mississippi: Hederman Brothers, 1948), 161-165.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Neil McMillen, *Dark Journey* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 91.

curriculum befitting particular aptitudes of manual agricultural or industrial laborers. “Agricultural and industrial education for blacks was widely stressed, not merely by southern white supremacists but by northern philanthropists and church boards that looked toward ‘practical education’ as an instrument of race uplift and interregional reconciliation.”²⁰⁴ White planters feared that if blacks received an adequate education they would no longer be willing to work in labor-intensive farm occupations.

In east Bolivar, the educational opportunities for both whites and blacks were limited because of the rugged landscape characteristic to isolated underdeveloped communities. In a study of an east Bolivar community, local historian Evelyn Hammett interviewed individuals who attended schools in the county during this period. Due to the terrain and low population, educational opportunities for blacks who lived in Bolivar County were even more drastically limited during Reconstruction. As early as the 1880s, segregated underfunded schools housed in dilapidated shacks or churches were the norm for black children who lived in scattered, isolated communities throughout Bolivar County. These one-room schools remained the dominant educational venue for blacks from 1865 to 1920.²⁰⁵

Mrs. George Rains, who was white, recalled that formal educational opportunities were almost non-existent. When she was twelve years old, a “centrally located” school was established but “it was four miles from her home in the settlement on Alligator Lake.”²⁰⁶ The school term for whites was confined to three months during the summer

²⁰⁴Willard E. Bond, *I Had A Friend: an Autobiography* (Kansas City, 1958), 123-131 92.

²⁰⁵ Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation*, 1943, 20.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

when the lake was least likely to overflow. Since there were very few roads connecting the scattered villages of the community, heavy rains in the summer caused the lakes and bayous to overflow. Rains remembered that “during the overflow, children went to school in a dug-out, with a smudge-pot burning at the stern and bow to keep away the buffalo gnats. When the water receded, the second state was worse than the first, for then they had to walk through the tenacious mud.”²⁰⁷ Educational opportunities for whites in Bolivar County drastically improved in the 1890s and the first decade of the 1900s. In Mississippi, state-supported, racially-segregated public schools can be traced back to 1890 when the state legislature specifically mandated that separate schools for whites and blacks must be maintained. This law was strictly followed in the Delta until 1972 when the state finally desegregated its public schools in accordance with the 1954 *Brown* decision.²⁰⁸

In the late 19th century, Mississippi politicians viewed black public education as a necessary evil. They openly espoused the virtues of the separate-but-equal policy when it pertained to providing tax-funded basic services such as schools and health. However, when appealing to their white constituents, some state officials declared their loyalty to the white race. Such was the case in 1899 when Mississippi Superintendent of Education Andrew A. Kincannon wrote: “Our public schools system is designed primarily for the welfare of the white children of the state, and incidentally for the Negro children.”²⁰⁹ His conservative views on race and education can be viewed as being the prevailing

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005), Chapter 1.

²⁰⁹ McMillen, 72.

sentiment of white educators in Tennessee and Mississippi. Kincannon, who later became the third president of the segregated West Tennessee Normal College in Memphis, never wavered from his viewpoint on separate schools and the education of blacks. This unofficial policy upheld by white educators in Tennessee and Mississippi was adhered to until after World War II when the federal government required Mississippi to develop an equalization plan. The state reluctantly agreed to develop a plan in order to avoid federally mandated school desegregation.

The legacy and existence of one-teacher schools in Mississippi can be traced back to 1862 when the Freedmen's Bureau established 68 schools in northern Mississippi during the Civil War.²¹⁰ After Jim Crow became the established social order during the 1880s and 1890s, the general poor conditions of southern rural black schools became more entrenched as they deteriorated due to a lack of adequate state funding. Throughout the central and southern counties of Mississippi, church buildings located on or near large plantations served as schools because there was a noticeable absence of public funded schools. "In 1909-1910 there were 3,006 county common schools for the Negro race. These schools were in the main one and two teacher type."²¹¹

In Marshall, and Bolivar, Counties in Mississippi and Fayette County, Tennessee, the vast majority of the black children who attended the one-room rural schools came from poor households where the parents worked as agricultural laborers, tenant farmers, or sharecroppers. Generally, cash was hard to come by in rural agriculturally based

²¹⁰ Charles H. Wilson, *Education For Negroes in Mississippi Since 1910* (Boston: Meador Publishing, 1947), 38; William J. Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1901), 354.

²¹¹ M. E. Muffett, *A Biennial Survey of Public Education in Mississippi*, Mississippi Department of Education, Division of Information and Statistics, 1918, 20.

communities. Therefore, credit and the ability to obtain credit were crucial. In Tennessee, “lien laws” governing the system of farm tenancy and sharecropping were passed in the 1880s and continued to be enforced as late as 1950. “Their worst trouble as tenant farmers developed from the fact that they bought many of their supplies at credit prices which consumed their earnings.”²¹² Therefore, harvesting a sufficient crop was the shared goal of each able-bodied family member. Failure to pay off the end-of-the-year credit obligations threatened the ability of the tenant farmer or sharecropper to feed his family and obtain credit to purchase supplies for the next planting season.²¹³ Their children also understood the importance of hard work and the need to produce a good crop.²¹⁴

Some historians have argued that sharecropping was basically one step above the legal system of peonage. Due to lien laws and other questionable tactics, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between tenant farming, sharecropping, and peonage. Depending on the circumstances, each was used as a system of semi-coerced labor that served as the economic and social foundation of racial segregation in the rural South from 1880 to 1960. “Peonage in the South was complex, confusing, customs and laws

²¹² Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro In Tennessee, 1865-1880* (Washington: The Associated Publishers Inc., 1941), 31.

²¹³ Harold Woodman, “Post Civil War Southern Agriculture and Law,” *Agricultural History* 53, no.1 (January 1979): 322; See U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, Report on Condition of Cotton Growers, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session Report 986 (1895), 294-310.

²¹⁴ Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton and his Retainers* (Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1968), 308-309; See 10th U.S. Census 1880, “Report on Cotton Production,” Volumes 5- 6 for a detailed description of plantation stores and cotton tenancy in Mississippi during 1870s.

intertwined. Planters probably made few distinctions between their legal rights as employers and what had grown into custom, into peonage.”²¹⁵

It is important to note that Jim Crow and compulsory school segregation laws did not originate in the South. In fact, segregation laws originated in the North before the Civil War, and were specifically designed to restrict the socio-economic assimilation of blacks into the dominant society. In spite of their anti-slavery sentiments, northern whites did not want blacks to be an integral part of mainstream society. As early as 1795, the status of free blacks in the Upper South and Northern States was hindered by “deep rooted white prejudices, the fear of large numbers of free Negroes, the impossibility of assimilating them into white society, and the need for a large and cheap servile labor force had combined to frustrate and defeat any plan for abolition.”²¹⁶ Even in the free states of the North, whites were reluctant to grant blacks full citizenship.²¹⁷

Dual education systems were maintained in the Lower South because of the strict enforcement of racial segregation laws prohibiting blacks and whites from attending the same schools. When progressive northerners criticized the Jim Crow restrictions on education, white southerners often reminded them that Jim Crow and dual education began in the North rather than the South.²¹⁸ In Massachusetts, where abolitionist attitudes abounded in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, laws were passed to restrict the social mobility of free blacks within the state. Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Ohio

²¹⁵ Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), x.

²¹⁶ Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 15.

²¹⁷ Jeffery R. Brackett, *The Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1890), 13.

²¹⁸ Cecil Sims, “Legal Implications of the Supreme Court Decision on Segregation,” *Tennessee School Bulletin* 1, 1-4 in Tennessee State Department of Archives and History, Nashville, TN.

were the first northern states to pass restrictive education laws that targeted free blacks. These segregation laws were similar and did not vary substantially from state to state. “Pennsylvania and Ohio, although extending their public school privileges to all children, required district school directors to establish separate facilities for Negro students whenever twenty or more could be accommodated.”²¹⁹ By 1830, New Englanders and other northern states had adopted compulsory segregation laws that governed schools within their states.

Northern whites rather than southern whites were the first to argue that blacks lacked the intellectual capability to learn at the level and rate of whites. “Moreover, some contended that Negroes, after a certain age, did not correspondingly advance in learning--their intellect being apparently incapable of being cultured beyond a particular point.”²²⁰ These were the same types of arguments southern whites used for more than a century when they insisted upon restricting blacks to a certain type of agricultural and industrial curriculum and careers. By the 1830s, statutes or customs were placed on black children in separate schools in nearly every northern community. Similar to southern black one-room schools, northern black schools were predominately racially segregated. In the South, most of these schools were located in scattered rural black communities isolated away from the mainstream of the local townships. This general geographic and demographic pattern was replicated throughout the rural South, especially

²¹⁹ Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 114.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

in counties where the plantation agricultural system was the primary economic industry.²²¹

White political arguments justifying the need for maintaining dual education systems first developed in the North rather than the South. Northern dual education systems of the early 1800s served the same purpose as the post-Civil War southern dual education systems. “White political leaders, including those who were bitterly opposed to Negro education, could contend that widespread illiteracy in the Negro population prevented any extension of suffrage or other civil rights.”²²² After the Civil War, white southerners launched similar arguments as they initiated campaigns to deny suffrage to freedmen in the South. The black educational system that evolved in the North prior to the Civil War was eventually adopted and implemented in the South after the war. “Excluded from white schools, Negroes moved to establish their own educational institutions and enlisted the support of abolitionists, some white philanthropists, and several state legislatures.”²²³ Northern segregation practices and southern Jim Crow laws served the same basic function in both geographic regions. It was a quasi-legal system used by whites to prevent blacks from exercising the privileges and rights of full citizenship.²²⁴

After Reconstruction, North Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and other southern states used Jim Crow as the primary method to maintain racial separation in public

²²¹ Trumann M. Pierce et al, *White and Negro Schools in the South* (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, 1955), 34-35.

²²² Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 121.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 122.

²²⁴ Ashmore, 9.

accommodations. Racially segregated schools served the dual purpose of placating the desire for educational opportunities in the black community while it simultaneously undergirded the Jim Crow system. Some historians, such as Adam Fairclough, have questioned whether this was or was not primarily due to the limited industrial curriculum that southern whites allowed to be taught in the rural Negro schools.

Perhaps ... criticism of industrial education and undue stress on the disparities between black schools and white schools obscure a more important point: 'Blacks were more often oppressed by the education they did not receive.' Regardless of curriculum and irrespective of how far black schools lagged behind white ones, education could not encourage discontent over the oppression of Jim Crow.²²⁵

Throughout the South, the right to vote and equal access to a public education were two basic civil rights reserved for whites because they understood how to use both effectively. Therefore, after they destroyed the remnants of Radical Reconstruction, whites used Jim Crow peonage laws as a tool to ensure that blacks remained poor, uneducated, and disfranchised.²²⁶ In the Lower South, from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement, the one-room rural segregated schools and the teachers who taught in them were perhaps two of the most poignant images symbolizing the plight and conditions blacks faced in order to obtain an education.

Robert A. Margo, in *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950*, (1990), argued that "Differences in the economic status between blacks and whites were one of the most pressing social issues in the contemporary United States. The interrelations among race,

²²⁵Adam Fairclough, "Being in the field of Education and also Being a Negro... Seems... Tragic: Black Teachers in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 87, no. 1 (June 2000): 73.

²²⁶Daniels, 23-32; See Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Carnegie Institute, 1933) 350-51.

school, and labor market outcomes [were] important factors behind these differences.”²²⁷ Therefore, an historical analysis of one-room black rural schools is warranted to determine the exact role and function of these schools as it related to the communities and the constituents they served. In spite of the success realized by programs like the Rosenwald Building Project, rural black education has always lagged behind education for whites in the rural South. The Rosenwald Building Project produced over 5,000 one- or two-room rural black schools in seventeen southern states even though the curriculum was primarily designed to perpetuate a system of agricultural and industrial training for rural black children.²²⁸

Blacks who lived in counties such as Fayette, in Tennessee, and Bolivar and Marshall in Mississippi, were aware that their personal, financial, and social destinies were controlled by a legal system that outwardly sanctioned racial laws and statues designed to severely limit their educational opportunities. The birth, evolution and growth of one-room rural schools must be examined from a perspective that recognizes land tenure, cotton tenancy, sharecropping, and Jim Crow as interconnected to southern economic, educational, and social realities. “Southern African American schools were deliberately segregated, received limited funds, and were staffed by unskilled teachers. The curriculum focused on skills which prepared them for a life of manual labor and subservience.”²²⁹ From the late 19th century through the first six decades of the 20th century, blacks in the South were viewed primarily as a source of cheap labor. “The

²²⁷ Margo, 1.

²²⁸ DuBois, 568.

²²⁹ William H. Chafe et al., *Remembering Jim Crow* (New York: New Press, 2001) 152.

combination of low educational attainment and poor educational quality made it extremely difficult for black men to compete successfully for better jobs and better pay.”

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Cotton cultivation became the primary agricultural enterprise that established the New Plantation South. The industry was primarily composed of large commercial tenant plantations owned by major international and national investors, large family-owned tenant plantations, and small-to-medium-size independently owned farms. “The Census Bureau’s definition of plantation incorporated three critical elements that historically distinguished it from other types of farms: a large land holding, a large labor force, and centralized management.”²³¹ In 1901, Hobart Ames of North Easton, Massachusetts purchased land located in Fayette and Hardeman Counties near the Grand Junction community. Beginning in 1901 and continuing through 1937, Ames purchased smaller plots of land that were incorporated into a single landholding known as the Ames Plantation. Consisting of 18,600 acres, it was the largest plantation in Fayette County. Ames’s primary objective was to use this land as a home for the National Field Trial Champion Association and a place to hunt.²³² Additionally, he rented plots of land to tenant farmers, raised Aberdeen Angus beef, and used the remaining acres for forestry and agriculture.²³³

²³⁰ Margo, 2.

²³¹ Aiken, 37.

²³² Thomas J. Whatley, *The History of Hobart Ames Foundation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, 2000), 3.

²³³ *Ibid.*, v.

Independently owned farms have been an essential part of Fayette County's economy since the earliest settlements began in the early 1800s. As early as 1826, cotton, sorghum and corn were produced and cattle and hogs were raised on the Reid Farm in the New Bethel area near Rossville. By 1860, twenty-two slaves lived and worked on the 440-acre Petty Plantation where they produced 600 bushels of corn and 69 bales of cotton. In 1876, William and Catherine Wirt Cannon purchased plots of land which were incorporated into one 2,200-acre holding.²³⁴ The 1930 agricultural census indicated that there were 5,786 farms in Fayette County with 336,437 acres being used for agricultural purposes. The average farm was fifty-eight acres. More than eighty-three percent of all farms in the county were tenant farms.²³⁵ In the 1920s and 1930s, obtaining an education in rural Fayette County was a challenge for black students such as Wilola Mormon. She recalled: "My father farmed all the time. Sharecropping work. Not too much schooling as a child. We lived a long ways from the school—a long ways to walk. I got through the sixth grade. I was eighteen years old."²³⁶

By 1911, the Delta and Pine Land Company, located in Bolivar County, Mississippi, was the largest cotton-producing plantation in the United States. The plantation was owned by Fine Cotton Spinners and Doublers Association, a group of fifty privately-owned textile mills located in Manchester, England. The group purchased 38,000 acres near the Scott community. The primary purpose of this commercial plantation was to ensure that the mills in Manchester had a dependable supply of long

²³⁴ Morton, 33-36.

²³⁵ U.S. Agricultural Census, 1930.

²³⁶ Hamburger, 43-44.

staple cotton.²³⁷ DPLC employed 1,000 black sharecroppers which translated into 3,300 working hands and 1,000 mules. The company's assets were estimated at \$5.2 million and the average cotton yield was 15,000 bales per year.²³⁸ According to data published in *Fortune Magazine*, the average tenant family on DPLC was paid \$213.00 in credit and \$254.00 in cash at the end of the year. Company-sponsored data showed that there were seven county elementary schools located on the plantation in 1936.²³⁹

Oscar Johnston, a native Mississippian, was the DPLC president and general manager. His attitude towards black labor was typical of the majority of Delta planters. "Not unlike many wealthy plantation owners and operators in the cotton belt, Johnston held an unmistakable bias toward black labor: Blacks were innately incapable or self-management, and to shepherd them was the social responsibility of the white planter like him."²⁴⁰ He adopted the same paternalistic system that the antebellum plantation owners used to control slave laborers. While many croppers lived "stable lives ... a good deal of liquor [was] cached in the cornfields, Negro bootleggers invade[d] the property, and every year the plantation [had] four or five homicides."²⁴¹ Plantation customs "made Johnston accuser, police, judge and jury."²⁴²

²³⁷ "Biggest Cotton Plantation," *Fortune* XV (March 1937): 125, in Delta and Pine Land Company Papers, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 160, 131,

²⁴⁰ Zhengkai Dong, *From Postbellum Plantation to Modern Agriculture* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1995), 156.

²⁴¹ *Fortune* XV, 160.

²⁴² Sam H. Franklin, Jr., "Early Years of the Delta Cooperative Farm and the Providence Cooperative Farm" 66, unpublished typescript in A. E. Cox Collection, Mitchell Memorial Library, Mississippi State University.

From 1900 to 1920, southern black men who worked their own farms or as tenants and sharecroppers received less education than their white male counterparts. “Had the racial schooling gap been smaller, more blacks would have been employed in nonfarm occupations and industries in the South and more would have migrated north.”²⁴³ One of the factors contributing to this educational imbalance was the reality that agricultural labor did not require a traditional classroom education. Additionally, success for black farmers was based on their ability to produce a crop that yielded an adequate harvest sufficient to translate into a cash profit. Watson Anderson, who attended one-room schools in Marshall County, viewed crop harvest as more important than school attendance. Anderson stated that “the school year was based on a split system. This allowed us, the children, to assist in the harvest and planting seasons.”²⁴⁴ Therefore, small black farmers, tenant operators and sharecroppers relied upon the physical efforts of the entire family to work in the fields during the planting and harvesting seasons. “Traditionally, unpaid family workers have been an important element of the labor supply because the Negro farmer measured his resources in terms of the number of the persons in his family who could perform tasks required in production.”²⁴⁵ The seasonal need for manual labor superseded school attendance. Therefore, the number of days students were able to attend school not only shortened the academic year but also impacted the overall outlook and future of rural black adolescents.

²⁴³ Margo, 3.

²⁴⁴ Watson Anderson, interviewed by author, Memphis Tenn. March 15, 2009.

²⁴⁵ Lewis W. Jones, “The Negro Farmer: The Relative Status of the Negro Population in the United States,” *Journal of Negro Education* 22, no.3 (Summer, 1953): 323.

Sharecroppers were well aware that they had no legal rights to the crops beyond the mere temporary “possession of a servant” who was a laborer hired to tend the year’s crop. This condition prevailed in those states where farmers were classified as croppers and where “the land-cropper relationship [was] created by personal contact.”²⁴⁶ Land owners, not tenants, made the decisions about the type of crops that would be planted and determined the amount of land that would be allocated for crop cultivation. They also negotiated with merchants regarding the prices to be paid for crops. The fact that the majority of black farmers and agricultural workers in Tennessee and Mississippi were either tenants or sharecroppers had legal implications that must be considered. “The legal status of a farmer who does not possess land is of great practical importance since it can either create or destroy his control and ownership of the crop.”²⁴⁷ The families, whose heads of household worked as tenants or sharecroppers, were economically and educationally disadvantaged as a result of legal restrictions that often kept them in perpetual debt. The one-room school served a limited purpose for tenant farmers who believed that their very existence depended on the land and their ability to yield a sufficient crop each year. For most black tenant farmers, sufficiency meant being able to make enough to keep a roof over his or her family’s head and food on the table.²⁴⁸

The widespread over-representation of southern blacks in low-paying agricultural occupations such as tenant farming and sharecropping created a cycle of poverty that lasted for one hundred years after emancipation. In the Lower South, several factors

²⁴⁶ Oscar Zeichner, “The Legal Status of the Agricultural Laborer in the South,” *Political Science Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (September 1940): 419.

²⁴⁷ Zeichner, 418.

²⁴⁸ Rogers, 26-27.

contributed to the continuation and need for one-room schools: Jim Crow laws and statutes that forbade blacks and whites from attending the same schools; state-supported efforts to intentionally under-fund black education at the local and state level; legally sanctioned disfranchisement of blacks; and the racially discriminatory laws that governed tenant and sharecropping farming.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ “Report of the State Superintendent of Schools,” Mississippi Department of Education, 1889-1890, 3-7.

CHAPTER THREE

Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald: 1890-1930

After the United States Supreme Court handed down the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896, white southerners had a federal court case that sanctioned racially separate-but-equal public accommodations, laws and practices. Throughout the Lower South, Jim Crow customs and practices which had received local and state judicial support were now acknowledged as being constitutionally valid at the federal level. “Under the impact of new constitutional interpretations and limited statutory laws, racial segregation became institutionalized and provided a special mold according to which education for Negroes was to be shaped for almost one hundred years.”²⁵⁰ After *Plessy*, whites used the philosophy of separate-but-equal as the foundation to limit educational opportunities for blacks. From Reconstruction to the mid-1920s whites in both regions went a step farther by presenting several insurmountable barriers that included withholding tax funding for black schools and controlling the curriculum offerings available to black children in the South. This was especially true in the rural Mid-South and Mississippi Delta where the plantation system and paternalism presented special challenges. “The bi-racial society in the South limited the education of Negroes to a special kind considered suitable for their status; it anchored the support of Negro schools more in the willingness of white citizens to provide for them than in the ability of the states to support them.”²⁵¹ This made black education a local political issue in an environment where blacks were systematically disenfranchised and lacked any

²⁵⁰ Bullock, 74.

²⁵¹ T. M. Logan, “The Opposition in the South to the Free School System,” *Journal of Social Science* (January 1885): 90-94.

meaningful racial or elected representation. Black students and teachers became the victims of a separate but unequal system that controlled black rural education in the Lower South.²⁵² For rural black and white students in the Lower South, one-room school houses were the primary venues for learning. “For almost 250 years the country school was the backbone of American education. As late as 1913, one-half of the schoolchildren in the United States were enrolled in the country’s 212,000 one-room schools”²⁵³

In 1907, the Tennessee Legislature passed laws which gave counties such as Fayette the authority to establish dual school districts and elect school board members from the county at large.²⁵⁴ Immediately after Radical Reconstruction failed in 1877, southern whites used the concept of ‘Home Rule’ to limit the ability of the federal government to use constitutional authority to enforce federal civil rights statues and prosecute human rights violations at the state and local levels. “The Redeemers who overthrew Reconstruction and established ‘Home Rule’ in the Southern states conducted their campaign in the name of white supremacy....Separation of the races continued to be the rule in churches and schools, in military life and public institutions as it had been before.”²⁵⁵ These types of laws gave local school boards autonomy over the schools within their respective counties. The dual education systems which were developed in the South provided southern whites the legal authority to limit the federal government’s involvement in black education. From 1890 to 1915, local governments in the South,

²⁵² Pierce, 45.

²⁵³ Gulliford, 35.

²⁵⁴ Public School Laws of Tennessee, Act # 4907. 236, Section 2; J.W. Brister, State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Nashville: Brandon Printing, 1913), 14-15.

²⁵⁵ Woodard, 31.

specifically in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta, were also given the authority to restrict the voting rights of black southerners by their local governments.²⁵⁶ Southern whites believed that black disenfranchisement and controlling black education ensured that the basic civil rights of blacks in counties such as Marshall and Bolivar County, Mississippi and Fayette County, Tennessee, were no longer protected by the federal government. Passage of these Jim Crow laws at the state level ensured that blacks could be systematically held back and relegated to lower social, economic and cultural positions. Jim Crow helped to recreate a social caste and economic class system which was based on race, income, and political access. By the turn of the century, whites desired and sought out opportunities to make their schools more progressive while denying black students and teachers equal access, equal funding, and restricting the scope of the curriculum offered to black students.²⁵⁷ These dual education, local government, and disenfranchisement systems were especially in operation in Marshall, and Bolivar, Counties in Mississippi and Fayette County, Tennessee.

In the North, progressive minded industrialists had embraced the concept of improving their public education system prior to the Civil War. When Horace Mann and Henry Bernard began their reform efforts in the 1830s, the educational system in America was being challenged because of a lack of uniformity. “Whether virtuous or scoundrels, teachers before the antebellum period had no specialized training. They were usually hired by town elders or some sort of community group, who attempted to test applicants’

²⁵⁶ Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 218-219.

²⁵⁷ Public Laws of Tennessee, 24-25.

subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, as well as character and religion.”²⁵⁸ Mann and Bernard proposed a statewide, state-funded central public school system using tax dollars. The system would be governed by state boards of education headed by a chief state school officer. Mann incorporated techniques used by two New York state educators, Emma Willard and Samuel Read Hall, into his teacher preparation curriculum. Unlike New York’s system which relied upon private seminaries, Mann insisted that the Massachusetts system be governed by a state board and be recognized as state institutions.²⁵⁹ His emphasis on ensuring that these normal schools remained public institutions would help to make teacher education available to a wider population of people from various social and economic levels.²⁶⁰

In the South, the Normal School movement did not begin until the first decade of the 1900s. In West Tennessee, the General Assembly passed a General Education Law in 1909. This law provided for the creation of state supported normal schools in the eastern, middle and western regions of Tennessee.²⁶¹ The West Tennessee State Normal School, located in Shelby County, opened on September 10, 1912 and trained white teachers for twenty-two West Tennessee counties including Fayette County. The Normal School Bulletin specifically stated: “It shall be open and free to white residents of the state of Tennessee who were a minimum of 16 years of age and had completed the elementary

²⁵⁸ Christine A. Ogren, *The American State Normal School* (New York: Palgrave McMillian, 2005), 11.

²⁵⁹ James A. Fraser, *Preparing America’s Teachers* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2007), 47.

²⁶⁰ Fraser, 48.

²⁶¹ *West Tennessee State Normal School Bulletin 1* (Memphis: C.B. Johnson Publishers, 1912), 2-4.

school course prescribed for the public schools of the state.²⁶² Similar to Tennessee, schools in the Mississippi Delta were required by state law to be segregated. In 1890, the Mississippi Legislature amended the state constitution to include Section 207, which stated that all public and private schools must maintain separate schools for the white and colored races.²⁶³ White legislators and education officials in the Lower South worked to ensure that white educational opportunities and facilities were substantially better than those provided for blacks.²⁶⁴

The education of rural black students and teacher training for rural black teachers suffered at the county level because blacks did not control their schools. In the Lower South, the position of county superintendent was seen as an important political position because the decisions made by the board affected the distribution of funds.

The county superintendent's position remained a plum of political patronage. Superintendents frequently squandered fiscal assets or diverted funds from black schools and applied them to white schools, which enjoyed better-qualified teachers and longer school terms. ... Unlike one-room schools in the Midwest or West, black one-room schools did not hasten assimilation. Instead, they provided only a minimal education and a contribution to cultural isolation--already a serious problem because of enforced segregation.²⁶⁵

While thoroughly segregated, black schools in several progressive rural counties in the Upper South and Border States were in better condition than those in the Lower South. Blacks who lived in progressive rural black communities in the Upper South and Border

²⁶² *West Tennessee State Normal School Bulletin 2* (Memphis: C.B. Johnson Publishers, 1912), 2.

²⁶³ *Biennial Survey of Public Education in Mississippi. Twenty Years of Progress, 1910-1930.* Bulletin 67 (Jackson: State Department of Education, 1931), 11.

²⁶⁴ Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1935), 45-46.

²⁶⁵ Gulliford, 104-105.

States such as Kentucky had more economic autonomy and decision-making input in school-related matters. As a whole, whites in those regions tended to accept that educating black students was a part of their civic responsibilities. Additionally, in Border States a significant percentage of the rural black populations began moving away from farm tenancy toward industrial occupations sooner than blacks who lived in the New Plantation South. Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers represented the vast majority of agricultural workers in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta after Reconstruction. The vast majority of the tenant farmers and sharecroppers who lived and worked on or near cotton producing plantations were disfranchised and lacked the political and economic autonomy to control their schools and churches. Their labor was an essential component of the new plantation system that emerged in the “New South.”²⁶⁶

A significant number of rural one-room schools in the Lower South were undoubtedly a collection of the worst schools in the nation. In 1900, the aforementioned problems combined with poorly constructed physical buildings, poorly trained teachers, and a shortage of schools at the elementary and secondary levels were all common characteristics of black rural schools in the Lower South.²⁶⁷ The reforms in white public education which began in Massachusetts in the mid-1830s did not reach the Mid-South and Mississippi until the second and third decades of the 1900s. When these reforms were initiated in the Lower South in the 1920s, white politicians and leaders within the

²⁶⁶ Charles S. Johnson, in *The Shadow of the Plantation* (1934), provides a concise narrative of the relationship between rural blacks in the southern states and the antebellum and the Post-Civil War plantation system, 1-7.

²⁶⁷ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folks*. (Richmond: Wilder Publications, 2008), 42; For detailed description of the overall state of rural black school buildings and state of rural education in 1910, see Mary Hoffeschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, 18.

powerful elite planter class used their influence to ensure that the reforms helped to improve educational opportunities for white children in rural as well as urban districts.²⁶⁸

The normal school system, while not perfect, produced a significant number of academically trained white teachers in the North and Northwest after the Civil War. The greatest percentage in the growth of state normal schools in America occurred between 1865 and 1890. In the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta, philanthropic agencies funded private black educational institutes to train potential black teachers. From 1890-1909, West Tennessee's black private schools such as Lemoyne Institute in Memphis, Lane College in Jackson, and Fisk University in Nashville were solely responsible for training black teachers in Tennessee. In 1909, the Tennessee General Education Law made provisions for the establishment of the Agricultural and Industrial Normal School, a training school for black teachers that opened in 1912 in Nashville, Tennessee.²⁶⁹

The common school movement did not impact black teacher training in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta significantly until 1920. For southern blacks, the influence of the normal school movement can be traced back to the establishment of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868. Hampton's contributions as a normal school have been obscured to a certain degree because of its later emphasis on industrial education during the 20th century. During its early years, the academic training of black teachers was one of Hampton's primary goals.

The traditional emphasis on Hampton [and Tuskegee] as a trade or technical school, has obscured the fact that it was founded and

²⁶⁸ Public Laws of Tennessee, Albert A. Williams, State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Education, 1920), 27.

²⁶⁹ Tennessee State University, "About Tennessee State University," <http://www.tnstate.edu/abouttsu/history.aspx> [accessed 1 June 1 2011].

maintained as a normal school and its mission was the training of common school teachers for the black educational system. The curriculum was not centered on trade; it was centered on the training of teachers. In order to be admitted to Hampton, a prospective student had to promise to remain through the course and become a teacher. The vast majority did just that. Some 84 percent of the 723 graduates of Hampton in the first 20 years became teachers.²⁷⁰

In many ways the original normal school curriculum at Hampton and Tuskegee was similar to the curriculum being offered in white normal schools throughout the United States.

At the turn of the century, the concepts of Booker T. Washington stressed teaching and the training rural blacks to perform agricultural and industrial occupations. This type of education was well received by conservative black educators in the Lower South. Washington's emphasis on industrial education and his subsequent efforts to build more and better rural elementary school buildings in the South addressed critical issues which negatively affected black education in the Mid-South, Mississippi Delta, and the South as a whole. His two-pronged approach attempted to address the disparities in the funding of black and white public education and to offer an answer to the question of what type of education was best suited for blacks and their intellectual capabilities.²⁷¹ The failure on the part of white southerners to properly fund black education was closely associated to the belief among whites, especially in the Lower South, that black and white intellectual abilities were inherently different.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 33-78.

²⁷¹ Bolton, 22; See R.B. Fulton, "Educational Progress in Mississippi" in *Proceedings of the Conference for Education in the South, the Sixth Session* (New York: Committee on Publication, 1903) for detailed comments regarding racial differences between whites and the negro race.

²⁷² Bond, 310-312. For a detailed analysis of early 20th century literature regarding differences in white and black intellectual abilities, see R.B. Bean, "Some Racial Peculiarities of the Negro Brain,"

In Marshall County, Mississippi Industrial College was established in 1905 by the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. The school's goal was to provide literary and industrial education to black youths. Students were required to possess 16 units of secondary school work.²⁷³ During the 1907-1908 scholastic school year, Lemoyne Normal Institute offered limited industrial training in the field of needle-work to female students. In the Mississippi Delta Region, where the New South plantation system flourished from 1880-1930, the concept of teaching blacks industrial education was well-received. At the post-secondary level, there were two black colleges offering industrial training during the first decade of the 1900s: Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical, established in 1878, and Jackson State College for Negro Teachers, established in 1877.²⁷⁴

Hampton and Tuskegee eventually began to emphasize industrial education more after 1895 when Booker T. Washington began to enthusiastically advocate and champion the practical advantages of industrial education for blacks. He realized that the vast majority of America's black population still lived in the rural Lower South where opposition to providing a classical education to blacks was the greatest and most violent. Washington proposed a compromise for Negro education. In his compromise he told

American Journal of Anatomy 5, (September 1906), 353-433 and F.P. Mall, "On Several Anatomical Characters of the Human Brain Said to Vary According to Race and Sex," *American Journal of Anatomy* 9, (February 1909), 1-32; Additional information related to studies of intelligence can be found in R. Meade Bache, "Reaction Time with Reference to Race," *Psychological Review* 4, 285-289; M.J. Mayo, "The Mental Capacity of the American Negro," *Archives of Psychology* 5, 109-146; Alice C. Strong, "Three Hundred Fifty White and Colored Children Measured by the Binet-Simon Scale of Intelligence," *Pedagogical Seminar* 20, 485-515; William Henry Pyle, "The Mentality of the Negro Child Compared with Whites," *Psychological Bulletin* 12, (January-February, 1915), 12-71.

²⁷³ *Mississippi Industrial College Bulletin*, undated copy in Anita W. Moore Personal Collection, Leontyne Price Library Special Collections, Rust College, Holly Springs, Mississippi.

²⁷⁴ Florence O. Alexander and Mary G. Whiteside, "Higher and Professional Education in Mississippi," *Journal of Negro Education* 17 (Summer 1948): 312-313.

southern blacks to “cast down your buckets where you are” and instructed them to cast down in agriculture, mechanics, commerce, domestic service, and industrial professions. He appealed to whites to cast down upon the 8 millions of Negroes, who would once again, form the South’s basic labor supply.”²⁷⁵ Washington argued that his position was based on the harsh reality of the Negro’s overall social, economic, and educational status in the South.²⁷⁶

When he began his career at Tuskegee, Washington believed that the school should first mold student’s mental attitudes in a manner which would encourage them to develop work habits that exemplified honesty while pursuing industrious trades. He incorporated these tenets into the basic curriculum and emphasized that they should be stressed by school administrators. In addition to improving the student’s basic moral character, the curriculum included practical trades, crafts, and skills which could translate into an obtainable occupation or vocation upon completion of educational training.²⁷⁷ These types of occupations would not disturb the rigid and vigorously enforced social order in the South. Additionally, Washington hoped to train black teachers for public and private schools in the rural South. Their primary goal would be spreading the good news about the virtues of industry and thrift as a means of leading the present and future generations of the black race towards racial reconciliation with white brothers in the South.²⁷⁸ Washington’s philosophy resonated among black and white southerners because “no amount of prejudice could deny the wisdom of developing a sober, thrifty,

²⁷⁵ Bullock, 81.

²⁷⁶ Nolan, 172.

²⁷⁷ Booker T. Washington, *Character Building* (Radford: Wilder Publications, 2008), 25-42.

²⁷⁸ Bond, 119.

and progressive Negro population, if at the same time this development went hand in hand with conciliatory tendencies toward the dominant white population.²⁷⁹ These were the same principles Washington espoused in the Atlanta Compromise speech he made before white southern leaders at the Atlanta Exposition in 1894.²⁸⁰

John Gandy, an African American educator who served as president of the Virginia Teachers Association during the first decade of the 1900s, and W.E.B. Dubois, African American intellectual leader and social activist, became outspoken advocates for improvements in black education in the American South.²⁸¹ DuBois believed that Washington was unwise in advocating agricultural education at a time when industry was beginning to expand in the North. He felt these types of occupations would eventually become obsolete, thus causing blacks in the North and South to become further isolated from the mainstream of America's future workforce. Both men were familiar with the problems associated with rural black schools because both had taught school in the Lower South during the 1890s. DuBois, also a recognized, academically trained sociologist, wrote *The Negro Common School* in 1901 while serving as a professor of sociology at Atlanta University. He provided one of the earliest and most critical evaluations of black rural schools in the Lower South. Dubois studied rural black schools and recorded the voices of black teachers, students, and parents of these crude one-room schools. The observations made by Dubois are typical of the conditions found in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. In a rural Georgia county, a black teacher stated:

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 121.

²⁸⁰ Bullock, 81

²⁸¹ Michael Fultz, "African American Teachers in the South, 1890-1940: Powerlessness and the Ironies of Expectations and Protest," *History of Education Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 401-422.

The colored school is run and governed by the town council. They are to furnish the school, but do little. We have a small school with seven windows and one door. The furniture: 1 table, 2 chairs, 1 stove, 3 common size blackboards, 1 clock, and a chart. The people are all but farmers. We have eighty nine (89) students ... We have two teachers. I get \$20. The assistant gets \$15. The school runs eight calendar months, which is divided into two terms spring and fall... We work very hard for the upbuilding of our colored race. Neither one of us know very much, but we are teaching. We are both home girls, and we are teaching home, but we have very little education.²⁸²

Rural black teachers who taught in one-room schools faced some great challenges at the turn of the century.

The appointment of black teachers was one of the primary methods county superintendents used to control black rural education and promote white supremacy. Captain C.W. Vawter, a white school principal in Charlottesville, Virginia warned that “if a Negro teacher is to go out in his community and array himself against the white race he will be a curse.”²⁸³ Many school superintendents in the Lower South, who were members of the Southern Education Association, believed educational attainment was a secondary consideration when deciding who should become a black teacher in the rural South. “For many superintendents, a teacher’s attitude and conduct outweighed his educational attainment. ‘A cornfield Negro’ who taught ‘honesty and purity’ thought one, was dispensing the ‘sort of education it pays to give the Negro.’²⁸⁴ Black teachers in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta were controlled by white county superintendents and planters. “They called upon teachers to ‘represent’ the black community in the

²⁸² Dubois, *The Negro Common School* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1901), 44.

²⁸³ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 152.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

expectation that they would toe the line. They asked teachers to be their eyes and ears within the black community, even to act as spies and informers.”²⁸⁵

Black education suffered financially during the era of white supremacy, Negrophobia and white racial retrenchment that began in the Lower South from 1877 through 1900. Lynchings, racial intimidation, and mob violence were common in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta during this time period. These types of racial attitudes and tensions influenced social activist, journalist, and teacher Ida B. Wells to begin protests against segregation in interstate transportation in 1883 and a Memphis-based anti-lynching crusade in the 1890s. Her activism, which began in 1883 while teaching at a rural black one-room school in the Woodstock community of Shelby County, became a personal crusade to overturn what she perceived as a violation of her constitutional rights. In September 1883 while traveling back to Memphis after teaching at the Woodstock School, Wells was forcibly removed from a white-only section of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway Line. After being physically and emotionally assaulted by the conductor, William Murray, she filed a law suit against the Chesapeake & Ohio seeking what she perceived to be “justice.”²⁸⁶ This incident and the brutal lynching of her friend, Tommie Moss, owner of the People’s Grocery, and two of his employees in Memphis on March 2, 1892 led to her journalistic crusade for justice.²⁸⁷

Wells used her skills as a journalist to launch an all-out attack against the rising tide of violence and intimidation that whites in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta were

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 15. For a more detailed description of white control of teachers in Bolivar County and other counties in the Mississippi Delta, see Charles C. Bolton, *The Hardest Deal Of All*, 84-85.

²⁸⁶ Giddings, 60-63.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 177-187.

directing towards progressive black citizens. She also used this as an opportunity to encourage blacks to leave Memphis and move westward to the Oklahoma Territory, as 7,000 black Tennesseans had done when they followed Nashville-born Benjamin “Pap” Singleton to Oklahoma in the 1870’s.²⁸⁸ Ironically, twenty years after the first mass exodus of progressive black Tennesseans from the Mid-South, some Memphians agreed with Wells’ assessment of the overall conditions faced by in Memphis. By May 1892, three months after the lynching, 6,000 black Memphians had left the area.²⁸⁹ These two forces, the lack of equitable funding for black schools and Negrophobia continued to be defining characteristics of black southern education.²⁹⁰ The Mid-South, especially Memphis, had its share of grotesque lynchings from 1889 to 1939, as racial intimidation of blacks in the Lower South continued to be a problem. Perhaps none drew as much national attention as the 1917 lynching of Ell Person, a black Memphian, who was falsely accused of raping a 16-year-old white girl.²⁹¹ The brutality and the carnival atmosphere associated with this lynching lead to the establishment of the N.A.A.C.P. in Memphis, Tennessee in 1919.

The lack of academically trained black teachers in the rural Lower South began to emerge as an issue in the first decade of the 1900s.²⁹² In rural communities throughout Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas – especially in Marshall, and Bolivar, Counties in

²⁸⁸ Duster, 2.

²⁸⁹ Giddings, 193-201.

²⁹⁰ Gulliford, 104.

²⁹¹ James Weldon Johnson, “The Burning of Ell Person at Memphis, A Report Made by the National Association of Colored People,” Robert R. Church Family Papers, University of Memphis, McWherter Library Special Collections.

²⁹² Edward E. Redcay, *County Training Schools and Public Secondary Education for Negroes in the South* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1935), 1-8.

Mississippi and Fayette County, Tennessee – whites appointed teachers from the existing pool of students who were enrolled in the seventh and eighth grades of the local schools. Sociologist and Fisk University President, Charles S. Johnson and George Gore, a member of the Tennessee Black Teachers Association, argued that these types of informal practices used to appoint rural black teachers were problematic. According to Johnson, “Home girls with limited academic skills and even less classroom training, teaching in local Black schools they formerly attended, were all too-frequent features in the rural Lower South, as were paltry salaries.”²⁹³ During the first two decades of the 1900s, there was a serious shortage of college-trained black teachers.²⁹⁴ Watson Anderson, a native of Marshall County, recalled that in many of the one-room schools the teachers were either relatives or family friends who had completed their primary grades. He believed that this helped to create a sense of community because each student knew the teacher on a personal level.²⁹⁵ Many of these teachers were no more than 16 years old and possessed only an eighth grade education which they had received in a rural black one-room school.

African American students attending rural plantation schools in Marshall and Bolivar County, Mississippi and Fayette County, Tennessee were forced to deal with these and other pressing issues and realities as they attempted to receive an education in the Lower South faced at the turn of the century. Perhaps this is why Booker T. Washington’s ideology became the dominant educational model for black rural schools in

²⁹³ Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro in American Civilization* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930), 243.

²⁹⁴ Wilson, 194.

²⁹⁵ Watson Anderson, interviewed by the author, Memphis, Tennessee, 15 March 2009.

the Lower South.²⁹⁶ It should be noted that even under the best circumstances, the majority of black students in the Lower South based their educational attainment on reaching and completing the eighth grade. The vast majority of rural dual school districts in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta did not offer high schools for black students during this period.²⁹⁷

Washington was able to persuade northern philanthropic organizations to contribute substantial financial support to make sure that his vision for Negro education was fulfilled. Northern progressives who contributed to philanthropic organizations did not want to challenge the existing Jim Crow system; rather, they wanted to simply provide educational opportunities to blacks. In the absence of adequate state and local funding, blacks were forced to accept their financial support in order to receive an education within the limits of the existing Jim Crow socio-economic structure.

Washington's compromise which featured industrial and agricultural education was well-received by progressive minded northern and southern whites because his observations were based upon some harsh truths.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Harlan, *The Wizard of Tuskegee*, 33-34.

²⁹⁷ A brief bibliography of higher education for blacks in the South before 1940 includes the following titles: Samuel Chapman Armstrong, *Twenty-Two Years' Work of Hampton Institute* (Hampton: Normal School Press, 1893); W.E.B. DuBois, *The College Bred Negro* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1900); Ambrose Caliver, *Personal Study of Negro College Students* (New York: Columbia University Teachers Press, 1930); Background Study of Negro College Students, *Office of Education Bulletin of Education*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1933); "Education for Life," *Journal of Negro Education* 1, no.1, (April, 1932); "The Field and Function of the Negro College," *Fisk University Herald*, 1933; and Fred McCuiston, *Higher Education of Negroes, Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools* (Nashville, 1933). See Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1934) for a more detailed bibliography.

²⁹⁸ John H. Franklin and August Meier, *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century* (Washington D.C. Howard University, 1982), 1-17.

If Washington's proposed educational model had not been adopted and implemented in the last decade of the 19th century and first three decades of the 20th century, many believe that the plight of black education in the Lower South would have been far more dismal. This system remained the dominant model for rural black schools in the South until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when federally enforced school desegregation was fully implemented. "While early philanthropic supporters, especially the John F. Slater Fund and the Peabody Education Fund, conditioned gifts to other schools across the South on their emulation of the same model, the dollars grew exponentially after 1900."²⁹⁹ The leaders of these organizations viewed themselves as friends of the black community, and they especially believed that Washington spoke for the vast majority of southern blacks. "In 1902, John F. Rockefeller Sr. donated \$1 million to create the General Education Board, adding \$53 million in 1909 and \$129 million in 1921."³⁰⁰ Needless to say, some elements among the staunch southern segregationist ranks believed that any type of educational model serving the educational needs of blacks and receiving these amounts of money constituted the same type of northern agitation that had spun the Redemption and Home Rule campaigns throughout the Lower South in the 1870s.³⁰¹

In spite of criticism from DuBois, Washington remained loyal to the concept of industrial education and demonstrated his unwillingness to compromise on any of his original beliefs. He made significant contributions in the areas of Negro teacher training

²⁹⁹ Fraser, 101.

³⁰⁰ Redcay, 8.

³⁰¹ For a detailed description of northern philanthropy and its influence on rural black education in the South, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 86-95.

and expanding elementary education opportunities for rural blacks throughout the Lower South. Many of the teachers in rural black one-room schools who received their teacher training under the industrial banner viewed it as an opportunity to receive an education which perhaps would not have been made otherwise available to them. “It is certainly likely that many of the alumni took the morality they had been taught, and taught to others, with a large grain of salt.”³⁰² The Washington educational model had a tremendous impact on southern rural education and the evolution of the black county training schools which became the template for all rural black schools in the Lower South during the early 20th century.

In the first decade of the 20th century, northern philanthropy began to increase its financial and philosophical influence over black education in the South. Improving the overall quality of black teacher training was identified as one of the issues that affected the delivery of educational services to blacks in the rural Lower South. As early as the 1890s, Mississippi and other southern states began to take steps to legally establish dual education systems for white and black children who attended public schools in the state.³⁰³ “A state Board of Examiners was provided for by the legislature in 1896. This Board provided for the issuance of a state license and a professional license. It marks the first time that the certification needs of high school teachers were in any way provided for.”³⁰⁴ The Mississippi legislature also established a system of training institutes for all

³⁰² Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 244.

³⁰³ *Twenty Years of Progress and a Biennial Survey of Public Education in Mississippi*, 1910-1930, State Department of Education, Jackson, Mississippi, 11.

³⁰⁴ Bullock, 55.

teachers holding state teaching credentials. Due to limited funding, these sessions were offered once a month for each four-month term.

The Normal School movement helped to create the modern education model in America and established a set of uniform standards for training teachers at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary level. By 1901, normal institutes extended into summer schools that provided training for white and black teachers. “Until 1903, approximately 80% of Mississippi’s black teachers had little beyond a seventh grade training in schools that ran four to six months a year.”³⁰⁵ Yet, in the rural South, these statistics had a tremendous impact because the majority of these schools were the one-teacher type. Therefore, when the sole instructor for eight grade levels was not a trained teacher, it became problematic. In the rural Mid-South and Mississippi Delta, this was the reality for the vast majority of the teachers who taught in one-room schools in these regions during the first half of the 20th century. The problems associated with rural one-room schools in Fayette, Marshall, and Bolivar counties are well documented. Evidence of these problems began to surface as early as the 1890s when northern progressives began to increase their efforts to support black education in the South.³⁰⁶

Anne T. Jeanes, a Philadelphian, was one of many Northern philanthropists who made generous financial contributions to black education in the Lower South during the first decade of the 20th century. However, she was the first person to specify that the funds she donated be earmarked for black rural one-room schools. In 1907, just months before her death, she made provisions in her will to make a \$1 million donation to fund

³⁰⁵ “The Negro Teacher” *Mississippi Educational Journal*, 10, (Jackson: 1934), 11.

³⁰⁶ Stuart G. Noble, “Forty Years of the Public Schools in Mississippi, 1870-1910” (PhD diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1918), 20-21.

rural schools in the Lower South. She also directed her attorney to set aside income-bearing securities to further the advancement of elementary and rudimentary rural southern education offered in small schoolhouses. “The fund was to be directed ‘solely towards the maintenance and assistance of rural, community or country schools for southern Negroes.’”³⁰⁷ This fund eventually became known as the Negro Rural Fund. The primary function of the fund during the next 30 years was to build libraries, train rural black teachers, and assist in the development of black normal schools.³⁰⁸

During the first decade of the 20th century northern philanthropic organizations increased their efforts to improve rural African American one-room schools in the Upper South. The work of the Rural Negro Fund began in earnest in 1908 when it hired Virginia Estelle Randolph as the first Jeanes County Supervisor for a rural black county.³⁰⁹ Randolph had distinguished herself as a capable rural teacher in Henrico County, Virginia. While serving as a vocational agriculture extension teacher in a one-room schoolhouse in rural Henrico County, Randolph was noticed by Hollis B. Frissell, a principal of the Hampton Institute Vocational Agriculture Extension Program. He immediately recognized her unique teaching skills and dedication to her students. Frissell contacted Jackson Davis, then superintendent of the Henrico County Schools, and made him aware of her diligence and skills as a teacher. He then asked her to become a

³⁰⁷ Mildred M. Williams et al., *The Jeanes Story* (Atlanta: Southern Education Foundation, 1979), 10.

³⁰⁸ Arthur D. Wright and Edward E. Redcay, *The Negro Rural School Fund, Inc.* (Washington: The Negro Rural School Fund, 1933), 44-46.

³⁰⁹ Benjamin G. Brawley, *Doctor Dillard of the Jeanes Fund* (Nashville: Fisk University, 1971), 16-20.

County supervisor for all of Henrico County's rural black schools.³¹⁰ After some deep soul searching, she accepted the challenge. Her primary task was to train other teachers to use her methods. Shortly thereafter, the Jeanes Teacher Supervisory Program became a central component of the southern rural black educational structure as it was expanded throughout the southern states.³¹¹

As early as 1905, Booker T. Washington, as president of Tuskegee Industrial and Agricultural Institute, began working with Clinton J. Calloway, the agricultural extension director, to develop a program to improve public schools in Macon County, Alabama. Washington developed a program that used donations from private citizens, monies from other philanthropic organizations, and community funds to build new school buildings. He realized that the communities would have to support their schools in order for black education to be successful. Throughout the South, a significant number of blacks who were of adult child-bearing age had lived through the Reconstruction period. During the early phase of Reconstruction, newly emancipated blacks had made steps to build schools in their new communities.³¹²

In the Lower South, plantation elites in conjunction with state and county officials used intimidation, violence and paternalism to control the allocation of funds supporting rural black education. Therefore, the conditions in rural Alabama and rural Georgia were representative of the overall conditions of rural black schools throughout the Lower South.³¹³ Part of Washington's rationale and argument for improved black schools was

³¹⁰ Bullock, 134.

³¹¹ Williams et al., 18-19.

³¹² Foner, 96-97; U.S. Census of Population, 1880, 1890, and 1900.

³¹³ Bullock, 157-158; See Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 66-69.

that these schools could produce higher quality workers, better consumers to buy goods from white merchants, and teach blacks to be better citizens. From 1905 to 1911, Washington's Macon County Project was successful because with the financial assistance received from the Jeanes Fund, northern philanthropic organizations, and the black community, fifty new schools were built. Additionally, Washington now had a process that was tried and tested. This gave him credibility when he appealed to Julius Rosenwald for financial support. Rosenwald was so impressed by Washington and Tuskegee that he became an avid supporter of his efforts to improve black education in the Lower South. As a wealthy Chicago merchandiser and philanthropist, Rosenwald was looking for a charitable organization that was organized based on business principles. He felt that his contributions should be viewed as an investment and not a hand-out. After developing a partnership with Washington, the Southern Education Board became an integral partner in the effort to further enhance rural black education in the South.³¹⁴ Eventually, Rosenwald encouraged other northern progressive whites to join with him in his financial support of Washington.³¹⁵

The establishment of black training schools in the South beginning in 1911 was one of many significant contributions made by northern philanthropic organizations.³¹⁶ During the first decade of the 1900s, initial efforts to train black teachers were concentrated in small private black colleges.

³¹⁴ Charles W. Dabney, *Universal Education in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 59.

³¹⁵ Morris R. Werner, *Julius Rosenwald* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), 107-126.

³¹⁶ Redcay, 2-9.

The county training school movement became a reality during the school year 1911-1912, When Dr. Dillard, B.C. Caldwell, and A. M. Strange worked out a plan whereby the Kentwood Agricultural and Industrial High School of Louisiana was changed to the Tangipahoa Parish Training School for Colored Children. Training schools were also organized in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Texas during that year. In each instance the Slater Fund made a grant according to its policy, and the county officials of the respective states made the schools a part of the public education system.³¹⁷

The diversion of tax dollars earmarked for black education to support white schools was a problem which began as early as 1875. “In nine Southern States, Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, educational expenditures were 5,181,945 in 1875, but in 1880 were a million dollars less: 4,195, 389.”³¹⁸ This trend created a continuous cycle of shortfall in the funding of black rural schools in each of these nine southern States.³¹⁹ The leaders of these northern philanthropic organizations were trying to encourage state officials in the Lower South to support and fund black public secondary schools that could be used to better train black elementary teachers, specifically those who taught in the one-room rural schools. This movement not only encouraged public support of black secondary schools, it also provided an additional influx of funds from the Peabody Fund which contributed \$21,000 and \$52,000 from the General Education Board.³²⁰ By 1916, northern philanthropic organizations had contributed approximately \$108,000 to further the establishment of

³¹⁷ Bullock, 132.

³¹⁸ Bond, 92.

³¹⁹ Edgar W. Knight, in *Public Education in the South* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1922), provides a detailed account of the expenditures of eleven southern states for black education from 1970 to 1988. Data contained indicates that of the 48 states in the United States, Tennessee ranked 40th among the other 44 states in terms of its expenditures for black education. North Carolina ranked 44th, Mississippi ranked 47th and Alabama ranked last at 48th.

³²⁰ Brawley, 75-78.

black training schools in the Lower South.³²¹ As philanthropic giving increased, southern states decreased the percentage and, in some cases, the actual dollar amount earmarked for black education.

It should be noted that northern philanthropic organization realized that without some level of significant financial contribution from outside sources, southern education officials in the Lower South would not make any meaningful efforts to improve the quality of teacher training or improve the physical facilities that housed one-room schools. In the Lower South the administration of rural elementary education was believed to be primarily a county-level responsibility. Black voters were under represented at the state and county level due to disenfranchisement through Jim Crow restrictions. Since whites controlled the vote at the state and local level, they made the financial decisions that affected both black and white schools within their local dual school systems. According to the public school laws of Tennessee:

The County Superintendent, in accordance with the general regulations of the State Department of Education, shall enforce the graded courses of study for the public schools, and the system of promoting pupils through the several grades thereof; and said County Superintendent shall sign all certificates issued by the State Superintendent to pupils who complete the courses of study prescribed for elementary and high schools.³²²

During the first three decades of the 1900s in Tennessee and Mississippi, the scope of rural public education as a whole was limited to providing the majority of its black and white students a basic elementary education.³²³ Throughout the Lower South, the actual educational expectations, goals and the lack of a unified state curriculum for public

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Public School Laws of Tennessee, 1920. Albert Williams State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Nashville, Tennessee, (June 1920), 14.

³²³ W. J. Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (New York: MacMillan, 1901), 354.

schools was a serious problem. Therefore, the significance of a basic elementary education remained very broad and non-specific. In 1934, Ambrose Caliver conducted a survey in Tennessee of the first three decades of public schools. The survey was sanctioned and funded by the Tennessee Education Commission in accordance with chapter 104 of the *Public Acts of Tennessee*.³²⁴ The survey concluded that there were basically eight issues or problems characteristic to Tennessee's public education system. Each county school board was basically allowed to implement its own guidelines and make its own decisions as long as the voters of the county were satisfied. Caliver found that black and white student achievement in Tennessee lagged behind the national average because there was insufficient oversight at the state level. Besides being overly reliant upon one-room schools in rural areas, Tennessee's schools suffered from a lack of direction at the state level. Generally, Caliver found that Tennessee's schools suffered during the first three decades of the 1900s. Eight questions needed to be addressed at the state level in order for Tennessee to improve its schools:

1. Why has there been no definite statement of the aims of public education in Tennessee?
2. How should the aims of public education for a state be determined?
3. What is the relation of aims and objectives to the curriculum, the organization and administration, and other functions of the school?
4. What is the relation of the aims of public education to the aims and purposes of other social agencies such as the home, the church, etc?
5. Should the aims of public education, when once developed, be fixed or flexible?
6. Should the aims of public education be adopted in Law, or should they be made the responsibility of somebody such as the state Board of Education?
7. Should aims for the various divisions of the school system be set forth, and how do these aims differ for the various parts of the school system?

³²⁴ Ambrose Caliver, *Report of the Tennessee Educational Commission*, 1934, xxix.

8. What should the aims of public education in Tennessee? ³²⁵

The lack of uniformity of goals, the absence of a standardized curriculum, and the absence of oversight by state officials was a recipe for failing schools. The excessive number of one-teacher and two-teacher schools in the state made the challenge of improving rural education a mammoth task in the rural Mid-South and the Mississippi Delta. In 1925, Tennessee had over 3,800 one room county schools, of which 2,981 were for white students and 863 were for black students. Fayette County had twenty-two one-room schools for whites and sixty-two one-room schools for blacks.³²⁶ During the first three decades of the 1900s Tennessee, due to its geographic location in the Mid-South, became a destination state as the population began to migrate from the Lower South. Additionally West, Middle Tennessee, and extreme eastern Tennessee became more industrialized and more urban from 1920 to 1930. Caliver found that “between 1910 and 1930, Knoxville increased from a town of 31,000 to a city of 105, 802. Memphis and Nashville passed the quarter-million mark in 1930, and Knoxville was well over 150, 000 in that year.”³²⁷ These types of population changes in rural areas of the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta affected the educational systems in several ways. As areas depopulated, they could not “adequately support an efficient system of schools” which raised “problems of consolidation, transportation, and financial aid from the state.”³²⁸ Additionally, there was a significant number of blacks leaving rural Tennessee counties

³²⁵ Ambrose Caliver, *Report of Tennessee Education: Facts Regarding Public Education and Resulting Problems* (Nashville: Tennessee Education Commission, 1934), 35-37.

³²⁶ State of Tennessee, *Annual Report of the Department of Education for the Scholastic Year ending 1925* (Nashville: Department of Education), 72.

³²⁷ Fifteenth Census of the United States, Population, 1930.

³²⁸ Caliver, 1-2, 9.

and migrating to southern regional cities like Memphis as well as northern urban centers. Data collected by the Tennessee Department of Education indicated that “in 1920, there were 23,995 colored persons living in Illinois who were born in Tennessee; and in the same year, there were 12, 088 colored people living in Ohio who were born in Tennessee.”³²⁹ A significant number of rural black Tennesseans, after receiving only a seventh or eighth education in one-room schools, migrated to the more industrialized cities within the southern region and the North. It should be noted that in Tennessee from 1910 to 1930, the percentage of black males working in rural agricultural occupation decreased from 58.4% to 45.4%.³³⁰

Progressive-minded northern philanthropic organizations were primarily responsible for pioneering unified educational strategies that benefitted black and white rural schools in the Lower South. As early as 1913, after successfully building the first Rosenwald one-room schools in Macon County, the General Education Board and the executives of the Southern Education Board joined forces with the Peabody Education Fund, the Jeanes Fund, and the Slater Fund to work with the Rosenwald Building Fund to improve the overall quality of rural black education throughout the Lower South.³³¹ These northern philanthropic organizations along with the Rosenwald Fund had a profound positive influence on southern education as a whole. After Rosenwald and Washington formed their partnership, rural black education finally had a functional, centralized structure to govern the interest of rural black students at the county level.

³²⁹ Ibid., 10.

³³⁰ Fifteenth Census of the United States Population, 1930.

³³¹ Bullock, 104-107.

From 1914 to 1920, Tuskegee Institute served as the headquarters of the Rosenwald Rural School Building Program. From Reconstruction until the school consolidation campaigns of the 1930s, rural education lagged behind urban education throughout the South. In states such as Mississippi and Tennessee, one-room schools were the dominant type of schools for black and white students. Therefore, Rosenwald did not limit his philanthropy to just black rural education at the elementary and secondary level. By 1931, Rosenwald discontinued building one- and two-room schools and expanded its scope to include funds to benefit white southern education, black secondary and post-secondary institutions, and scholarship opportunities for black scholars to receive undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees.³³²

In North Carolina, African Americans who lived in rural communities used the Rosenwald Fund to reduce the number of sub-standard one-room schools and improve elementary and secondary educational facilities. African American parents, teachers, and community leaders motivated by a sense of self-help employed community activism and volunteerism to build more Rosenwald schools than any other southern state. According to Thomas W. Hanchett, in “The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina,” (1988), “More were erected in North Carolina than in any other state. Through the combination of enthusiastic fund raising by blacks at the grass-roots level, North Carolina constructed over 800 Rosenwald buildings.”³³³ African Americans in North Carolina utilized volunteerism and the Rosenwald Program to overcome political

³³² Hoffeschwelle, 156-160.

³³³ Thomas W. Hanchett, “The Rosenwald Schools and Black Education in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 65 (1988), 387.

and economic obstacles erected by whites which were designed to limit their access to progressive education for their children.

The level of cooperation between Rosenwald Fund administrators, rural African American communities, and North Carolina Department of Education officials was enhanced by the presence of Nathan Carter Newbold, a white educational administrator, who served as the director of black education. Newbold worked in this position for more than 37 years (1913-1950).³³⁴ His commitment to improving black education won him the respect of state legislators, black and white rural parents and fellow educators. Samuel L. Smith, in *Builders of Goodwill: The Story of the State Agents of Negro Education in the South, 1910-1950* (1950), found that, Newbold demonstrated particular skill in convincing state legislators and localities to allocate money to match grants, and as a result North Carolina consistently ranked among the first states to embark on new projects.³³⁵

Rural African American education in North Carolina was improved in the 1920s when Newbold received funds from the General Education Board to hire white assistants who had graduate training in curriculum development. The white assistances worked with rural communities to improve curriculum, teacher training, and to administer the State's Jeanes program for African American elementary and secondary schools.³³⁶ In 1921, Newbold hired William Credle to serve as one of his assistants in the North Carolina Division of Negro Education. Newbold assigned Credle to serve as the state's

³³⁴ Ibid., 406.

³³⁵ Samuel L. Smith, *Builders of Goodwill: The Story of the State Agents of Negro Education in the South, 1910-1950* (Nashville: Tennessee Book Company, 1950), 12-13.

³³⁶ Hanchett, 408.

Rosenwald deputy and as assistant director of schoolhouse planning for both white and black schools.³³⁷ Credle worked with his African American counterpart, George Edward Davis, Supervisor of Rosenwald Buildings, to encourage rural African American tobacco and cotton tenants to contribute to the Rosenwald Fund. In rural tobacco and cotton plantation regions of North Carolina, where white resistance to improved black education was more prevalent, Davis worked with local progressive church leaders and congregations to raise funds. African American religious leaders encouraged their congregations to exemplify self-help as a form of activism. “In a region where whites discouraged black participation in nearly any organized activity, churches provided the single strong institutional framework for Afro-American endeavors.”³³⁸ In rural counties where tobacco and cotton plantations were dominant many of the African American schools were one-room schools located in rural churches.³³⁹

Throughout North Carolina churches worked closely with parents and teachers to encourage congregants to contribute to the Rosenwald Fund. In Caswell County, many of the members of local churches were also active members of the Parent-Teacher Associations at their local school. Women such as Emma Williamson were active and concerned parents who worked closely with their schools and churches to raise money to construct a new school in Yanceyville. Her daughter, Janie Richmond, “recalls that her mother used church contacts to call people together and talk with them about the “dire need” for the school.”³⁴⁰ White school board officials in the country promoted one-room

³³⁷ Ibid., 409.

³³⁸ Hanchett, 414.

³³⁹ Ibid., 412.

³⁴⁰ Walker, 17.

schools as a viable option for African American schools. These one-room schools were cheaper to build than the Rosenwald Schools which had to be constructed to meet the standards of the Rosenwald Program.

The average cost of each one-room school constructed by the Caswell County's school board was \$500 to \$700. "These prices, of course, made the county's Rosenwald schools exceptionally well-constructed Negro schools compared to the other thirty-plus one-room Negro schools, where parents relied primarily on school board resources."³⁴¹ In North Carolina, rural African American communities—located in counties such as Mecklenburg, Bertie, and Caswell—community leaders, parents, and educators worked with the North Carolina Division of Negro Education to reduce the number of one-room school buildings. According to Thomas W. Hanchett:

Creation of the Division of Negro Education in 1921 gave a new impetus to the school building schedule and a trend towards larger structures. No more one-teacher Rosenwald units were constructed in Mecklenburg after 1921, as the county concentrated on two-, three- and especially four-teacher buildings.³⁴²

Of these three counties Mecklenburg utilized the Rosenwald program to consolidate their elementary school and drastically reduce the number of African American one-room schools. African American religious leaders in Mecklenburg were instrumental in making sure that the new consolidated schools were built in close proximity to existing churches.

In Mecklenburg County, North Carolina there were 26 Rosenwald Schools constructed over a ten-year period from 1919-1929. From 1919-1921, four one-teacher schools were constructed within the county. After 1921, five two-teacher schools, eight

³⁴¹ Ibid., 418.

³⁴² Ibid., 418.

three-teacher schools, and nine four-teacher schools were constructed. In Bertie County, there were nineteen Rosenwald Schools built over a ten-year period from 1919-1929. It included six one-teacher, six two-teacher, two three-teacher, and five four-or-more-teacher schools. In Caswell County, there were five Rosenwald Schools constructed during from 1924 to 1929, of which four were two-teacher schools and one was a four-teacher school.³⁴³ Efforts initiated by African American parents in Caswell County to consolidate one-room black elementary schools were basically ignored by white school board members who viewed white educational needs as their priority responsibility.

In the Mid-South, the Ames Plantation in Fayette County, consisting of 18,600 acres, was one of the oldest and largest plantations in Fayette County. One-room schools were the norm for blacks who lived in the rural communities within the county. In the early 1900s, Ames had four schools on the plantation: three for blacks and one for whites. The black schools included New Zion School built between 1870 and 1900, Jones Chapel School which opened between 1904 and 1921, and Jopic School which opened by 1935. Ames School for whites opened between 1915 and 1921.³⁴⁴ Herbert W. Brewster, who was born on Ames to black sharecropper parents and educated in one of the plantations' one-room schools acknowledged that educating blacks was not a top priority for whites in Fayette County. He believed the education board "only wanted you to know how to wash and iron and work in the fields, cut logs and do things that were the chores of

³⁴³ Hanchett, 429-437.

³⁴⁴ Ames Plantation, "The Beginnings of Public Education in Rural Tennessee During the Reconstruction Period: A Look at the Schools at Ames Plantation in Fayette County Tennessee" by Sarah Rogers, http://www.amesplantation.org/pdf%20files/History%20and%20Geneology/Rhodes%20Institute/Rogers_RIRS_Paper_2009.pdf (accessed 6 July 2011).

slaves.”³⁴⁵ He recalled that most of the schools were log cabins located in close proximity to the cotton fields and the teachers were young, possessing only a seventh or eighth grade education.³⁴⁶

Blacks in Fayette County were disenfranchised in spite of being the majority population. Because they were not registered voters, they could not serve on juries or participate in local, state or national elections. Additionally, local landowners and planters used paternalism to control jobs, credit and lending. These types of economic and political strategies proved successful because black tenants realized that the land owners and planters could evict them at any time, for any cause or reason. Prior to 1870, agriculture and agricultural labor in Fayette County was predominantly controlled by small independent farmers who worked and cultivated their own land. “Between 1880 and 1890, there was a 50% increase in the number of sharecroppers and the number of cash tenants doubled, while farm ownership remained the same.”³⁴⁷

Black residents in rural communities welcomed the opportunity to participate in building programs to improve their schools. For the first time since the early phases of Reconstruction, the Rosenwald Building Fund managed by Tuskegee Institute provided an organized system for building black schools. Rural blacks were encouraged to donate their physical efforts and financial support to improve the quality of schools in their communities.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Morton, 37.

³⁴⁸ The financial contribution of blacks to Rosenwald-built schools was generally quite substantial based on their incomes. For example, the 123 Rosenwald schools built in Mississippi between 1920 and 1922 cost \$689,235. Of this amount, blacks contributed 49 percent, the Rosenwald Foundation gave 18

The Rosenwald building campaign in Fayette County was not as aggressive as the campaign conducted in Bertie, Caswell, and Mecklenburg counties in North Carolina. However, the contributions made by the fund in this county were significant. Six one-teacher schools were built by 1921. The Corner School was built for \$1,450 of which \$850 was contributed by the black community, \$400 was contributed by the Rosenwald Fund and \$200 was contributed by the public. The Reeves School cost \$900 of which blacks contributed \$250, the public contributed \$300, local whites contributed \$300 and \$50 was contributed by the public. The Hayes School was constructed at a cost of \$2,000 of which \$350 was contributed by blacks, \$1,150 by the public and the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$500. The Hickory Grove School was built at a cost of \$1,800 of which \$700 was contributed by blacks, \$600 by the public, and \$500 by the Rosenwald Fund. Macon School was built at a cost of \$2,100 of which \$800 was contributed by blacks, \$800 by the public, and \$500 by the Rosenwald Fund. The Reeves School #2 was built at a cost of \$2,050 of which blacks contributed \$700, the public contributed \$600, whites contributed \$200 and the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$500.³⁴⁹

During this same period, three two-teacher schools were also built in Fayette County. The Mc Culley School was built at a cost of \$ 3,200 of which blacks contributed \$ 1,200, the public contributed \$1,200 and the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$800. The Miller School cost \$3,100 of which blacks contributed \$1,800, the public contributed \$500 and the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$800. The Morrow Grove School cost \$3,000

percent, whites contributed 16 percent, and 16 percent came from county funds. See Charles C. Bolton, "Mississippi School Equalization Program," 789.

³⁴⁹ Fisk University, Rosenwald Fund Digital Card File Database, <http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/> [accessed 1 March 2011].

of which blacks contributed \$1,500, the public contributed \$700 and the Rosenwald fund contributed \$800. From 1922-1932 using the same funding formula, the building program built two one-teacher schools (Centre and Pisgah), one four-teacher school (Johnson-Wayman), and one eight-teacher school (Bernard). Blacks made significant contributions to all of the schools during the building campaign.³⁵⁰

Beginning in 1920, the Rosenwald Fund made significant contributions to the Mississippi Department of Education to further advance rural black schools throughout the state.³⁵¹ However, it should be noted that by 1910 the black schools in the Lower South were already deficient because they were under-funded at the state and local levels. Additionally, African American schools in the state of Mississippi had consistently been disproportionately under-funded and received a smaller percentage of state tax dollars ear-marked for education since public schools were established in the late 1800s. By 1930, Mississippi was spending \$5.94 per capita to educate black children compared to \$31.33 to educate white children. These types of deficits persisted for decades. Therefore, when the Rosenwald Building Fund began in 1912, the deficits between black and white educational expenditures were almost insurmountable. During its twenty years of financial support, the Rosenwald Fund, while well intentioned, did not eradicate the huge inequalities that existed between the type of education blacks and whites received in rural communities throughout the Lower South.³⁵² In the state of Mississippi the vast

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ *Biennial Report and Recommendation of the State Superintendent of Public Education, Report of the Supervisor of Negro Schools*, Jackson, Mississippi, 1919-1921, 17.

³⁵² Bullock, 179-183. Additional sources of information can be found in Monroe N. Work, *The Negro Yearbook, 1931-1932* (Tuskegee Institute: The Negro Year Book Publishing Company, 1932).

majority of the school buildings constructed with the assistance of the Rosenwald Program were one-room schools.

During the 1925-26 school year the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$213,757.57 to improve black and white rural Mississippi schools. These funds help to build sixty-six total structures: ten one-teacher schools, twenty-one two-teacher schools, three three-teacher schools, four four-teacher schools, four five-teacher schools, one six-teacher school, and one seven-teacher school.³⁵³ During the 1926-27 school year, the Rosenwald Fund contributed an additional \$278,027 to build more rural black schools. The additional buildings included nine one-teacher schools, sixteen two-teacher schools, seven three-teacher schools, nine four-teacher schools, two five-teacher schools, five six-teacher schools, and two seven-teacher schools.³⁵⁴

As a result of the efforts of the Rosenwald Building Fund in Marshall County, three black elementary schools were built. Built in 1922, the three-teacher Isaac Chapel School cost \$3,800 with blacks contributing \$2,600, whites contributing \$200, and the Rosenwald Fund contributing \$1,000. The Byhalia three-teacher school was built in 1923 at a cost of \$2,400 of which \$1,300 was contributed by blacks, \$200 by the public, and \$900 by the Rosenwald Fund. In 1927, the five-teacher Holly Springs School cost \$5,800 with blacks contributing \$2,500, whites contributing \$1,000, the public contributing \$1,000, and the Rosenwald fund contributing \$1,300.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ *Biennial Report and Recommendation of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction 1925-1927*, Jackson, Mississippi, 1 September 1927, 64.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

³⁵⁵ Rosenwald Fund Digital Card File Database, Fisk University. Retrieved from <http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/?module=admin>. [accessed 20 July 2010].

The Rosenwald Fund also contributed to the building of two two-teacher schools in Bolivar County in 1922. The Duncan School was built for \$3,000 with blacks contributing \$700, the public contributing \$1,500 and the Rosenwald Fund contributing \$800. The Howardon School cost \$3,000 with blacks contributing \$800, the public contributing \$1,500, and the Rosenwald Fund contributing \$800.³⁵⁶

In 1927, Fred McCuiston, Associate Director of Southern Schools for the Julius Rosenwald Fund, reported on the progress of the building campaign:

Summarizing briefly the status of schoolhousing for Negroes, we find that there are 24,079 buildings valued at \$57,142,711, that 22,294 (93.4%) are rural and 1,585 (6.6%) urban. These are distributed among the following type: one-teacher, 15,358 (63.8%); two-teacher, 4,525 (18.8%); three-teacher, 1,702 (7.1%); and four-teacher and larger, 2,494 (10.3%). Of the 22,494 rural schools, 5,000 have been constructed according to plans furnished by the Rosenwald Fund. These buildings represented an investment of 25,342,272, or 44 percent of the value of all Negro school property, and house 13,611 teachers and 612,495 pupils. This means that 40.9 percent of all rural Negro teachers and 41.3 per cent of all rural Negro pupils are enrolled in Rosenwald schools.³⁵⁷

In regard to the overall status of teacher education and training in the South, he reported that "...18,130 (38.7%) of the teaching force have less than a high school training; 27,561 (58%) have less than two years beyond high school training, which is generally considered the minimum for elementary teachers."³⁵⁸ This meant that only 39% of the teachers assigned to Rosenwald schools met the minimum state accreditation or licensure standards. McCuiston expressed concern that in spite of the efforts to make educational opportunities more accessible for blacks living in the rural south, there was still work to

³⁵⁶ Rosenwald Fund Digital Card File Database, Fisk University. Retrieved from <http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/?module=admin>. [accessed 20 July 2010].

³⁵⁷ Fred McCuiston, *The South's Negro Teaching Force* (Nashville: The Rosenwald Fund, 1931), 7.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

be done in the area of daily average attendance. He found that “approximately 1,000,000 (30%) of the 3,048, 289 children of school age never entered a school of any kind last year. Of the 2,165,147 enrolled, 2,038,991 were in elementary grades, 107,156 in high schools, and 19,000 in colleges.”³⁵⁹ Many of the students enrolled in the elementary schools in 1927 were on average several grades behind based on their ages.³⁶⁰

June Dowdy, who was born and raised in Fayette County, attended a one-room school during the 1920’s. She completed the 8th grade which was at that time the benchmark for black students who attended school in the rural Mid-South. She recalled that as sharecroppers, she and her siblings “grew up the tough way and we got our schoolin’ the rough way. Sometimes we were in one grade for two or three years because we didn’t have but six months of school and we could complete only about a month and a half or two months because we had to come outta school and go to the field.” In addition to harvesting crops, they were required to provide labor on a regular basis. They had to perform chores such as cutting wood, busting rail, cutting corn stalks, hoeing the gardens and patching the fence for the cow. Therefore, they were not able to finish a full term in one year.³⁶¹

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, one distinguishing feature that helped to shape black rural education was the dominant use of and reliance on the one-room school. According to a 1930 Julius Rosenwald Report on rural black schools in the South, the one-room school accounted for 63.8% of the 24, 079 black school

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

³⁶¹ Robert Hamburger, *Our Portion of Hell: Fayette County, Tennessee: An Oral History of the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Links Books, 1973), 70.

buildings. These 15,358 schools were used to educate 41.3% of the 612, 495 black students enrolled in rural southern elementary schools. This report also indicated that only 10.3% of all rural black schools in the South were larger than a four-room structure.³⁶² These small schools were located in isolated black communities within the townships of these rural counties. By 1927, due to the efforts of the Rosenwald fund, the Rosenwald Building Program, the John F. Slater Fund, and the General Education Board, the basic infrastructure for Mississippi's rural black training schools was finally in place in the Mississippi Delta. Initially, these schools were designed to train black teachers to teach agricultural education.³⁶³

During the 1920s, northern philanthropic organizations realized that state governments in the Lower South were still reluctant to spend significant levels of tax dollars on black education beyond the elementary level. In spite of the efforts of The Rosenwald, the Slater Fund, and the General Education board to expand access to secondary schools in 1923, there was only one black high school in the state of Tennessee.³⁶⁴ By 1927, there were only 29 high schools for blacks in the entire state of Mississippi, with only one located in Bolivar County.³⁶⁵

According to William Powell, "Negro parents in Caswell County North Carolina, were pleased to have the Rosenwald building, but having a building alone was not enough. They still wanted high school education to be available to all the Negroes in the

³⁶² McCuiston, 7.

³⁶³ Wilson, 71.

³⁶⁴ *State of Tennessee, Annual Report of the Department of Education for the Year Ending June 1936*, 44.

³⁶⁵ *Mississippi Biennial Education Report*, September 1927, 66-67.

county.”³⁶⁶ The parents within the African American community became the principle advocates for progressive education for their children.

Without the efforts of Booker T. Washington and northern philanthropic organizations, the quality of black teacher training in Mississippi would have been far more inadequate.³⁶⁷ By 1927, county training schools sponsored by the Slater and General Education Funds provided industrial arts training for potential black teachers in twenty-nine Mississippi counties. Since most one-room school teachers had only an eighth grade education, any efforts to increase the number of county training schools would directly improve the quality of teachers. Northern philanthropic organizations insisted on maintaining their original requirements before contributing funds. Each county had to acknowledge that these schools were part of each county’s public school education budget.

The schools shall be public school with the property deeded to the county, State or district. At least 1,000.00 annual appropriation for salaries of teachers must be raised by the State or county district. The school must maintain at least an eight-month session. The teaching shall extend from the primary through eight grades, with the intention of ultimately adding four years of high school work. Enough land must be owned by the community to maintain a demonstration farm where the boys, under the direction of a well-trained man in vocation agriculture, learn by actual experience the most practical methods of farming. The school must maintain a home science department for the girls where both cooking and sewing are taught under the supervision of a competent teacher of these subjects.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ William Powell, *When The Past Refused to Die: A History of Caswell County North Carolina*. (Yanceyville: Caswell County Historical Association, 1977), 388.

³⁶⁷ Wilson, 71.

³⁶⁸ *Mississippi Biennial Education Report*, September 1927, 66-67.

Simultaneously, efforts were made by black teachers to establish a set of academic and curriculum standards to govern student achievement within black county training schools.³⁶⁹

In spite of the serious shortage of black training and high schools, white high schools in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta remained racially segregated. In November 1927, Gong Lum, a native-born American of Chinese descent who resided in Bolivar County, petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of Martha Lum, his nine-year-old daughter. He was attempting to overturn a decision made in the State Circuit Court of Mississippi for the First Judicial District of Bolivar County in 1925 that prohibited his daughter from attending the white Rosedale Consolidated School. Although the school was located in her immediate community, the superintendent of Bolivar County Schools informed Martha that she would not be allowed to attend Rosedale because she was of Chinese descent.

The Circuit Court cited Section 207 of the 1890 Mississippi State Constitution which required separate schools for the whites and “colored” races. It argued that because Martha was a Mongolian or yellow race she was not “entitled” to attend a school in the state of Mississippi which was designated for the white or Caucasian race. The Supreme Court decision, delivered by Chief Justice William Howard Taft, upheld the Mississippi Circuit Court ruling because matters regulating public schools were at the discretion of the state and did not conflict with the fourteenth amendment.³⁷⁰ The result

³⁶⁹ P.H. Easom and J.A. Travis, State Agents, Mississippi Department of Education. “Mississippi Negro Rural Schools: Suggestions for Their Improvement” (Jackson, Mississippi: State Department of Education, Bulletin 100 (1941), 6.

³⁷⁰ Supreme Court of the United States, *Gong Lum v. Rice*, 275 U.S. 78 no. 29; submitted Oct. 12, 1927, decided Nov. 21, 1927.

of the ruling influenced Chinese settlement in the South, causing some to leave the Mississippi Delta and move to Memphis and other northern urban areas.³⁷¹ Lum and his family moved to Elaine, Arkansas.

The Lum case reflected the gradual tide of resistance taking shape in the various regions of the Lower South. People of color sought relief through the courts as it related to Jim Crow laws and practices which they believed violated their constitutional rights. Throughout the Lower South, blacks and other minorities were increasingly expressing their dissatisfaction with the limited educational and occupational opportunities available. During the first three decades of the 1900s, the basic elementary education offered in the one-room schools that dotted the landscape of the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta became a means of preparing them to leave the South. From 1900 to 1940 more than 320,000 blacks left the South and headed to northern cities.³⁷² Migration was a contributing factor to the significant decrease in the number of cotton-producing plantations from 1910 to 1940. In Alabama, the number of plantations decreased from 7,287 to 1,801. In Georgia, the decrease was from 6,627 to 1,840. Plantations in South Carolina decreased from 5,105 to 1,737. In Texas, the decrease was from 3,468 to 359. Tennessee had a decrease from 1,413 to 647. Mississippi and Louisiana had the smallest decreases of all states in the Lower South. Mississippi decreased from 7,960 to 6,668 and Louisiana decreased from 2,480 to 2,292. In total, plantations in the Lower South decreased by 50.1 percent.³⁷³

³⁷¹ Kofi Lomoley, *Encyclopedia of African American Education* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), 291.

³⁷² McMillen, 259. See U.S. Census, *Census of Population: 1950 Part 24 Mississippi*, Table 5, 24-7-24-8.

³⁷³ Aiken, 67. See U.S. *Agricultural Census for 1916 and 1948*.

In the Lower South, the majority of the one-room schools were located in school buildings or churches which were on or in close proximity to the plantations where the students and their parents worked as tenant farmers.³⁷⁴ Therefore, as the number of plantations decreased and the rate of black migration increased, access to an education was difficult for black students who remained in depressed areas of the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. In 1900, blacks represented 32.3 percent of the total population of the lower South. However, by 1930 blacks represented only 24.7 percent of the total population, a decrease of 7.6 percent. In Tennessee, the percentage decreased from 23.8 percent in 1900 to 18.3 percent in 1930. In Mississippi during the same time period, the percentage decreased from 58.5 percent in 1900 to 50.2 percent in 1930.³⁷⁵ These trends were problematic for rural black schools in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta because school expenditures were derived from the total taxable revenues generated from the sale of agricultural produce and goods. In an environment where blacks were disenfranchised of the vote, they were not in a position to affect or influence public sentiment as it related to the expenditure of public tax dollars to fund their educational system. By 1930, Tennessee allocated \$86 per student for education while states in the Upper South allocated \$162; the national average was \$241.00 per student.³⁷⁶ In 1930, Mississippi did not track public expenditures of tax dollars for public education. The earliest published records of these expenses begin to appear in the 1939-1940 school year. These figures showed that by 1940 Mississippi spent \$25.33 per student to educate white school-aged

³⁷⁴ Johnson, *Shadow of the Plantation*, 12-13.

³⁷⁵ Monroe N. Work, *The Negro Year Book* (Tuskegee: Tuskegee Institute, 1932), 338.

³⁷⁶ United States Office of Education. *Official Report of the Tennessee Department of Education*. Washington D.C. (1931), Bulletin #20.

children and \$5.14 per student to educate black school-aged children. Therefore, the earliest available data for Mississippi indicated that the state spent well below the regional average for the Lower South for education. The average for the remaining states of the Lower South was \$ 47.00 per child for white students and \$ 17.30 per child for black students. Therefore, by 1940, Mississippi continued to allocate fewer public tax dollars to educate its white and blacks students than any other state in the nation.³⁷⁷ The common school fund which was allocated by the state was paid directly to each county. The county board of education was given the authority to allocate funds for their dual school systems without any oversight from the state Department of Education. Since 1910, each year the various county school boards were required to submit data based on race regarding attendance, student teacher ratios, the number of schools and type of buildings to the State Department of Education. This data was then published in the State Department of Education Biennial Report.³⁷⁸ The Department of Education was also responsible for tracking emergency funds received from the federal government to fund county schools.

By 1930 the quality of education provided for rural black students who attended one-room schools had improved marginally. However, it should be noted that the black schools in the rural South lagged behind the average schools in the United States as a whole. One of the reasons these schools lagged behind is the gap in the amount of public tax dollars spent on rural black students in the South during the first four decades of the

³⁷⁷ Public School Expenditures Black and White: Comparative Data From Official Reports 1939-1940. (Atlanta Georgia: Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 1942); in Charles E. Wilson, *Education for Negroes in Mississippi Since 1910*, 52-53.

³⁷⁸ J.B. Wright. "The Development of Public Supported Secondary Education for Negroes in Mississippi" (Master's Thesis: Iowa State College, 1935), 45-46.

twentieth century. “The pitiful state of rural black education before World War II is best illustrated by statistics. In 1930, when the average national expenditure per pupil was 99.00, for blacks it was 12.44 with two southern states spending only 6.50 per student per year - black and white.”³⁷⁹

Lenora Briggs, born in the Winterville community of Washington County in 1911, explained the process of getting an education in a rural area in Mississippi:

After attending the St. Joseph, one-room school, in Washington County’s Winterville community, grades one through five, I then attended Cooper School, another one-room school, located in the Lamont community of Bolivar County for my sixth grade. I then went to Moorhead, Mississippi, to attend school at the Almeda School where I did my junior high school: the seventh, eighth and ninth grades. . . . It was a girls’ school. The boys commuted. The girls stayed in dormitories and the boys came every day to school. It was a very, very nice school. I believe it was operated by the same people that operated Tougaloo, Talladega A.M.A School.³⁸⁰

Lenora remembered that many of her schoolmates were several years behind their age group because it took most of them two years to finish each grade. This was especially true of students who lived on plantations with parents who were tenants or worked on shares. Their labor was needed on the farm to ensure that the crops were planted and harvested; therefore, they would work a semester and lay out the next to help their parents work the land.³⁸¹ Many of her fellow students were 18 years or older before they finished the eighth grade. Those who left the plantation moved to local towns, migrated

³⁷⁹ Gulliford, 105.

³⁸⁰ Daisy M. Greene, Interview with Lenora Briggs, 22 April 1977, Washington County Library System Oral History Project, William Alexander Percy Memorial Public Library, Greenville, Mississippi.

³⁸¹ Matilda Briggs Young, Interview by author, Memphis, Tennessee, 15 July 2010; Lenora Briggs, Interview by Daisy Green, Greenville, Mississippi, 23 April 1977.

North, or entered the military after completing the eighth grade. Those who remained in the area married and leased a piece of land from white landlords.

Since there was not a high school for blacks in Bolivar County in the 1930s, she and her siblings attended Coleman High School in Greenville. After graduating from Coleman, she began teaching at the Saint Thomas Baptist Church one-room school in the Lamont community of Bolivar County. Her parents were members of the church which was located on the Delta and Pine Land Company plantation. Her salary was \$25 per month.³⁸²

In 1934, Briggs left the teaching profession and the South because the pay for teachers was not enough. She moved to St. Louis, Missouri where she lived with her sister, who helped her secure a job as a domestic. After attending beauty school, she received a beauticians' license and used her savings to open a beauty shop in St. Louis. When her marriage failed, she returned to Bolivar County in 1947 and resumed her teacher training at Tougaloo Normal School in Jackson. She then realized that teaching was her calling and began to attend weekends, winter, and summer sessions at Tougaloo until she received a B.S. Degree. Beginning in 1947, she and her younger sister Matilda Briggs Young taught at the Lake Vista two-room school on the DPLC plantation. Her pay increased to \$125 per month for a split six-month school term.³⁸³

³⁸² Lenora Briggs Interview, 6-8.

³⁸³ Ibid., 9-16.

CHAPTER FOUR

Black Teachers: Swimming against the Tide of White Resistance

As early as 1920, the National Association of Teachers of Colored Schools advocated and pressed their white colleagues in the National Education Association to become partners with them as they lobbied national education officials to allow black teachers to have more input in the decision-making process. During his address at the 1920 NATCS annual convention, John Gandy, president of the association, noted that “however, much we regret to say it, at present there is no opportunity for Negro people to share directly in determining the educational policies of the country.”³⁸⁴ At a later convention, he spoke of the lack of progress made in the South regarding black education: “There will never be any satisfactory provision in the South for the education of the Negro until the education officials and the public are brought to the connection between Negro education and the economic progress and welfare.”³⁸⁵ Black teachers realized and lamented the fact that, as a rule, especially in the rural Lower South, blacks primarily relied on the goodwill of the whites to make decisions about black education at all levels.

The economic depression of the 1930s created even more challenges for black teachers in the South. In Mississippi, financial support which was always a concern for black public education in the state suffered more as philanthropic donations declined. Black teachers were directly affected as their already meager salaries were reduced to less than subsistence levels.

³⁸⁴John M. Gandy, “President’s Annual Address,” *National Note Quarterly* 3 (January 1921): 5-6.

³⁸⁵“1000 Teachers and Delegates At National Teachers’ Meet,” *The Afro-American*, 8 August 1925.

Warrants were issued for which there was no money to cash them. Some schools did not open in the rural areas; others ran an average of 100 days. Teachers taught for salaries as low as \$15 per month. Meanwhile, some schools were kept open by parents who supported the teachers with food and shelter. Teachers gave from two to three months of volunteer services in order to keep their schools on the state accredited list. The typical annual (yearly) salary reported for rural teachers in 1936 in Mississippi schools was \$125, and for the city school system \$285. The school term in rural areas was 100 days, and in city schools 160 days.³⁸⁶

Nationally, as a result of the depression, the number of black teachers declined slightly. However, in Mississippi and Tennessee, New Deal initiatives prevented massive job losses among the ranks of black teachers. This occurred as daily attendance increased due to the massive unemployment growth in the southern agricultural sector. Once New Deal assistance began in 1935, the federal government gave southern states over \$20 million to ensure that schools remained open. Due to federal oversight, black schools and black teachers received a more equitable distribution of the federal funds. The NAACP worked with the Roosevelt administration to ensure that black teachers received an equal portion of federal dollars disbursed under New Deal programs.

During the 1930s African American educators in the Upper South were receiving more academic training than African American teachers in the Lower South. Increased teacher training translated into better teachers at the elementary and secondary level. In North Carolina, curriculum reform became a priority for black and white educators. In 1934, a state-wide biracial committee was empanelled to address issues associated with curriculum reform for elementary and secondary schools throughout the state.³⁸⁷ North

³⁸⁶ Cleopatra D. Thompson, *The History of the Mississippi Teachers Association* (Jackson: Mississippi Teachers Association, 1973), 15.

³⁸⁷ James E. Hillman, "North Carolina's Curriculum Program," *The High School Journal* 18, no. 5 (May 1935), 147- 157.

Carolina-Winston Salem Teachers College, Elizabeth City State Normal, and North Carolina College for Negroes were instrumental in the implementation the enhanced elementary and secondary curriculum.³⁸⁸ Improved laboratory courses in physical education, science, health and language arts were offered at each of these institutions to provide African America teachers the instructional training needed to teach a progressive curriculum.³⁸⁹ In the Upper South, the debate that centered on whether to teach agricultural verse classical education to African American students was resolved during this time period. However, in the Lower South where local white school boards controlled the curriculum taught in blacks schools, this issue persisted well into the 1950s.

As early as 1934, teachers at the Caswell County Training School (formerly the Yanceyville Training School) had received enough college level education and teacher training to receive an advance certification from the state of North Carolina. According to Vanessa Walker: “Even in 1934, each of its four high school teachers held ‘A’-level certifications (a strength that continued until the school closed, though white teachers in the county did not always hold ‘A’ certificates).”³⁹⁰ Due to the lack of high schools or county training schools, black teachers in the Lower South were struggling to receive teacher certification at the high school level. “In 1934-35, the average level of training for the 6,790 African American teachers in the state of North Carolina was more than two and a half years above high school graduation, and in 1937-38 the index of training for Negro teachers was 712.6 or slightly more than three years above high school

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 150-152.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 151-152.

³⁹⁰ Walker, 8.

graduation.”³⁹¹ The North Carolina In-Service Teacher Training Program provided venues for black elementary and secondary teachers to receive training above the high school level. Beginning in 1921 and continuing through 1938, black teachers in North Carolina took advantage of the state-supported extension programs and summer schools that were offered at four black state colleges and four private colleges.

In 1936, an eighth grade education was the norm for African American students in the Upper and Lower South. However, in North Carolina, the number of African American students attending high school continued to increase from 1924 to 1936. In 1924, only 2.3% of the 297,911 African American students enrolled in North Carolina Public Schools attended high school. By 1936, the number of African American students attending high school increased to 310,765 and the percentage attending high school increased five-fold to 10.9%. These were significant improvements that directly affected the delivery of education at the elementary and secondary level. However, it should be noted that the greater percentage of both black and white students in North Carolina were enrolled in grades below eighth grade from 1924 to 1936. According to data supplied by the North Carolina Department of Education, 81% of its entire student population was enrolled in grade levels below the eighth grade in 1936.³⁹²

In 1936, the number of one-room schools was substantially lower in North Carolina than in Tennessee and Mississippi. Additionally, the one-room school was not the dominant type of public school building. By 1936, there were multi-classroom

³⁹¹ Harris, 49.

³⁹² Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina for the Scholastic Years 1933-1934 and 1935-1936 (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Education), 22-23. [Retrieved from <http://www.archive.org/details/biennialreportof193436nort.pdf>] on 01/28/2012.

facilities that outnumbered one-room schools at a ratio of four to one.³⁹³ Therefore, it is fair to say by 1936, the average black students attending rural elementary schools in North Carolina were being taught in a multi-classroom facility by a teacher who had an average of three years of college level training. The student-teacher ratio was 1:33 based on average daily attendance. These statistics indicated that teacher training, the number of multi-classroom facilities, and the number of publicly funded black rural high schools within the state made North Carolina's African American rural schools substantially better than those in Tennessee, Mississippi, and other states located in the Lower South.

From 1930 through 1950, rural black teachers in the Lower South continued their struggle to provide a basic education for their students. During the 1930s and 1940s, rural black teachers continued to be negatively affected because of the unequal distribution of state and county tax dollars.³⁹⁴ This problem had persisted since the dual education system was instituted in the 19th century following the end of Reconstruction in 1877. The inequalities in educational training and the proliferation of salaries for white teachers in the Lower South after the passage of *Plessy v. Ferguson* was a growing trend in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. The legalization of separate-but-equal public accommodations became a social and political reality as gaps between black and white educational expenditures became more evident. The NAACP and black teachers in the South sought redress in state and federal courts to get local school districts to provide black students the equal schools specified by the *Plessy* ruling.

³⁹³ Ibid., 30-31

³⁹⁴ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 305.

In the early 1930s, black educators were prepared to go to court to address the inequalities that existed between black and white teacher pay rates.³⁹⁵ During this time period, black teachers turned to the NAACP for legal assistance and guidance as they sought to challenge education-related issues at the national, state and local level.³⁹⁶ After considering the options available to them, the NAACP's legal team decided to gather data from past legal challenges to school segregation since *Plessy* before moving forward on any new cases.³⁹⁷ The NAACP decided that rather than pursuing multiple issues, black teachers should identify one common inequality and unify their efforts to increase their odds of obtaining a favorable outcome. The organization further realized that "the common ground of discrimination was supplied by the sizable differentials that existed between the salaries paid to White verses Negro teachers. It was estimated that these differentials amounted to a loss of approximately 10 million dollars annually to Negro teachers."³⁹⁸ By 1936, the NAACP began a legal campaign to ensure that local school districts throughout the South, where a dual system was maintained, made constructive efforts to equalize the salaries of black and white public school teachers.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ John H. Thompson, "The Courts and the Negro Separate School," *Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (July 1935): 419-433.

³⁹⁶ Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 104-119.

³⁹⁷ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 134.

³⁹⁸ *D. E. Williams v. D.B. Bradford*, 158, N.C. 37 (1911); decision of the Supreme Court of North Carolina which mandated that the state was responsible for the maintenance of schools for Negro children. Therefore, there could not be discriminatory funding practices which favored one race over the other. A detailed explanation of this ruling can be found in Bullock, 215- 216.

³⁹⁹ Mark V. Tushnet. *The N.A.A.C.P. 's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 78-80.

From 1900 through 1940, black teachers did not have the same opportunities for obtaining additional training beyond the eighth grade because of the continued shortage of black public high schools in the majority of rural counties throughout the Lower South. The training of black teachers in the Mississippi Delta and Mid-South had remained substantially inadequate during the 1920s and 1930s because of the lack of secondary and post-secondary educational opportunities.⁴⁰⁰ Efforts to improve black education in the South was often carried out by southern whites who believed that equalization rather than integration was the best approach to take to resolve the educational inequalities between blacks and white. Additionally, the Lower South was becoming less black, and whiter due to migration patterns within the region as a whole.⁴⁰¹ “Overall, then, the South was going whiter during the forties, and the trend was reflected in internal population shifts which were changing the face of the region.”⁴⁰² By the 1940s, when school equalization efforts began in the Mid-South, state and local governments focused on several systemic problems related to the delivery of education in rural black schools. The Mississippi Delta did not begin equalization in rural black schools until the early 1950s on the eve of the *Brown* decision.⁴⁰³ The shortage of publically-funded rural black high schools or training schools was an acute problem in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. This was directly related to the shortage of

⁴⁰⁰ Ambrose Caliver, “Report of Tennessee Educational Commission. Part One: Facts Regarding Public Education and Resulting Problems” (Nashville: Tennessee Education Commission, 1934), 156-157.

⁴⁰¹ Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population (1920); see Fifteenth Census of the United States, Population (1930).

⁴⁰² Ashmore, 56. See 1940 Population Census and 1940 Agricultural Census for Mississippi and Tennessee.

⁴⁰³ Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 41-42.

adequately trained black teachers in rural school districts, especially in the state of Mississippi. Despite the contributions made by the Rosenwald Building Project, the poor physical conditions of rural black schools remained a problem in Bolivar, Marshall, and Fayette counties where the one-room school remained the centerpiece of rural black elementary education. The lack of publicly-funded black high schools made it difficult to produce a pool of adequately trained teacher candidates to meet the needs of rural black schools. Further, low salaries and inadequate training contributed to the shortage of black teachers because it was difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers.⁴⁰⁴

In 1950, Mississippi had 9,767 white teachers, of which 6,403 (65.6%) had a four-year B.A. degree compared to 6,748 black teachers of which 1,500 (22.2%) had a four-year B.A. degree. Of the 9,767 white teachers, only 88 (0.9%) had a high school diploma compared to 2,013 (29.9%) of the 6,748 black teachers who had only a high school diploma. Black teachers with a B.A. degree were paid an average annual salary of \$1,479.79 compared to white teachers who received an average of \$1,954.70 for the same level of training. Black teachers with a high school diploma received an average annual salary of \$663.97 compared to \$1,184.30 paid to white teachers with the same level of training.⁴⁰⁵ From 1890-1960 in Marshall County, the number and percentage of black students attending publically-funded high schools was higher than other counties in the state. In Holly Springs, the presence of Mississippi Industrial College and the normal

⁴⁰⁴ Johnson, *The Negro in American Civilization*, 245-246.

⁴⁰⁵ State of Mississippi Department of Education Statistical Data on School Session (1950-1951), 8-11.

school at Rust College improved black high school attendance rates within the county as a whole.⁴⁰⁶

In Fayette County, student enrollment had been predominately black since the 1870s. In spite of this fact, Fayette County school board officials continued to underfund secondary education to support its black student population. Fayette County Training School, built and founded in 1912, was the only black high school in the entire county. Located in Somerville, the training school was originally called Jones Hall Colored School. In 1928, with the assistance of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, local leaders were able to construct Fayette County Training School, two miles south of Somerville. In 1940, the county issued a bond to fund the cost of constructing a two-story brick building to house the black training school.⁴⁰⁷

By 1930, teacher training for America's white teaching force was in good condition when compared to the dismal circumstances faced by black teachers throughout the Lower South. During this period, the Rosenwald fund, the Jeanes fund (Rural Negro Fund), the Southern Education Board and the Slater Fund worked to raise private and state funding to improve the overall quality of black teacher training in the South. In spite of the second wave of northern migration by southern blacks, the vast majority of the nation's black population was still living in the rural South. A large percentage of the three million school-age blacks still lived in rural areas of the segregated South where their parents worked as tenants, sharecroppers, and agricultural laborers.⁴⁰⁸ Yet, the vast

⁴⁰⁶ David Marcos Callejo-Perez, "Schools and the Formation of Black Identity During the Civil Rights Movement: Change and Resistance in Holly Springs, Mississippi, 1964-1974," (PhD diss., Florida International University, 2000), 35.

⁴⁰⁷ Morton, 54.

⁴⁰⁸ U.S. Census Characteristics of Population, Vol. I, 1940.

majority of black teachers were not adequately trained to teach the limited curriculum offered black students in one-room schools. From 1920-1930, white teacher training in the United States improved as more normal colleges opened in the North and Northeast continued to build upon a tradition that began in the 1830s.⁴⁰⁹

In his 1931 report to the Rosenwald Fund Executive Board, Associate Director Fred McCrustion indicated that the majority of the teacher training in the Lower South was conducted by private colleges funded by philanthropic agencies rather than the state-supported schools. He found that “during the past ten years these young colleges have made a vigorous growth, and at present enroll more than three-fourths of all students taking teacher training work. Two-thirds of these colleges offer a standard four-year course leading to bachelors, and in some states offer graduate instruction.”⁴¹⁰ The shortcomings of the separate-but-equal policies that governed the socio-economic and educational conditions for southern blacks manifested in the disparities existing between state-supported black and white teacher training programs in the Lower South.⁴¹¹ As a rule, Southern states routinely withheld tax revenues that should have funded black schools while avidly spending more on white education. McCuistion reported that:

The situation in teacher training schools for Negroes is different, due to conditions existing in the South during the time many of these schools started. Three states have provided standard colleges for the specific purpose of training teachers, though the work in all the states has been developed in institutions operated by individuals, communities, counties, private denominational organizations, and state land grant colleges, in

⁴⁰⁹ Fraser, 118-130.

⁴¹⁰ McCuistion, 11-12.

⁴¹¹ Ambrose Caliver. “Education of Negro Teachers.” *National Survey of the Education of Teachers Bulletin* 1, 4 (Washington, D.C: 1933): 10-11.

such a haphazardly manner that no state can yet claim an efficient well rounded program for teacher training.⁴¹²

In fifteen southern states, private funding for colleges offering black teacher training out-paced state funding substantially. There were also a disproportionate number of private colleges that offered teacher training programs for blacks than did state colleges. By 1931, in fifteen southern states, there were only twenty-seven state normal or land grant schools that received public tax dollars offering teacher training for black teachers as compared to a combined total of fifty-six private colleges. Four of these state-supported African American colleges that offered advanced teacher training were located in North Carolina where African American teacher training was substantially out-pacing black teacher training in the Lower South. These fifteen states had a combined total of 110 high schools that offered teacher training programs for black teachers. In these southern states, there were a combined total of 189 schools at all levels that offered some form of accredited teacher training. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, there was only one black state normal college with a teacher training program receiving 100% state funding in 1931. Yet, there were six private black normal schools offering teacher training. The one state-supported school—Alcorn Agricultural & Industrial—received \$750,000 as compared to the six private colleges that received a total of \$1.3 million from northern philanthropic agencies.⁴¹³

In Tennessee, the numbers were similar to those in Mississippi and the other fifteen southern states. The Tennessee Department of Education reported that only one state normal college offering black teacher training received 100% state funding.

⁴¹² McCuiston, 12.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 13.

Tennessee State Normal School in Nashville received \$1 million for teacher training as compared to five private schools that received a total of \$3,150, 000 to administer their black teacher training programs.⁴¹⁴ “Practically all of the Negro private colleges in Tennessee pre-dated the founding of the state Negro institution by a substantial number of years: Knoxville College appeared in 1863, Fisk University in 1866, Lemoyne in 1870, Lane in 1882, and Meharry Medical College in 1876.”⁴¹⁵ Each school was founded as a result of the missionary efforts sponsored by northern religious organizations such as the American Missionary Association. The only state-supported college for blacks was Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial in Nashville, founded in 1912. It was one of four public institutions which had been established as state-supported colleges between 1911 and 1916. Due to the efforts of private colleges and universities, the training gap between black teachers and white teachers had diminished substantially in Tennessee by the end of the 1940s. Though the disparities in training persisted, the number of black teachers holding a bachelors degree at the county level had improved.⁴¹⁶

Unlike its neighbors in Mississippi, initial equalization efforts in Tennessee were slightly more successful in the 1940s. In fact, many of the negative trends in black rural education began to improve significantly by the early 1950s. According to the 1940 State of Tennessee Department of Education Annual Report, Fayette County had a total of ninety-three publically funded schools, of which twenty-five were white one-room

⁴¹⁴ Ambrose 13; For actual number of Negro Training Schools in the State of Tennessee, see State of Tennessee Annual Report of the Tennessee Department of Education for the Scholastic Year ending June 30, 1934, 70.

⁴¹⁵Herman H. Long, “The Negro Public College in Tennessee,” *Journal of Negro Education* 31, no. 3 (Summer 1962): 341.

⁴¹⁶ State of Tennessee. *Annual Statistical Report of the Department of Education for the Scholastic Year Ending June 30, 1950* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Education, 1950), 45.

elementary schools and sixty-three were black one-room elementary schools. The other five schools included one seven-room elementary school and four high schools. There were 1,902 white school-aged children living in the county compared to 6,062 black school-aged children during this school year. The combined average daily attendance in publicly-funded elementary schools for black and white students was 5,464. Records indicated 1,240 (69.19%) of the eligible 1,902 white students attended school on a regular basis and 4,224 (69.68) of the eligible 6,062 black students attended elementary schools on a regular basis. There was a 25% drop-out-rate for black students and a 34% drop-out rate for white students. There were no publically funded black or white high schools operating in the county during this academic year.⁴¹⁷

The lack of adequately trained black teachers also impacted student-teacher ratios which often reached levels as high as one certified teacher for every 45 to 100 students.

This heavy enrollment is usually in the first four grades. Thus the serious overloading of teachers is due to the large number and variety of classes, together with the limited time available, and not so much to the average number of pupils. In a typical one-room school of eight grades a teacher must conduct approximately thirty classes a day.⁴¹⁸

Since Tennessee A & I was the only state-supported black college, the primary responsibility for training black teachers in the state was shouldered by three privately-funded black normal schools: LeMoyne located in Memphis, Lane in Jackson and Fisk in

⁴¹⁷ *State of Tennessee Department of Education Annual Report for the Scholastic Year ending June 1940*, table 3 and 8. These figures show that Fayette County's actual number of black students not enrolled in school was disproportionately higher than the actual number of white students not enrolled in school. The ratio is 4 to 1, indicating that for every one white student not enrolled there were four black students not enrolled in school during this time period.

⁴¹⁸ McCuiston, 24.

Nashville. Similar to other states in the Lower South, Tennessee was reluctant to allocate the funds needed to build black high schools that offered teacher training programs.⁴¹⁹

In Mississippi, during the decade of the 1930s, there were only 100 black students enrolled in a state-funded college-level teacher training program: seventy-five were in public colleges and twenty-five were in private colleges that received a state subsidy. In Tennessee, there were a total of 650 black students enrolled in a college-level teacher training program. Of those, 250 were attending a state normal school and 400 were enrolled in private schools. (In addition to those enrolled in college-level teacher training programs)... 4,042 black students were enrolled in private and public secondary training programs.⁴²⁰ State education officials in the southern states relied upon private institutions to fund the cost of training black teachers. Private institutions were not able to provide enough funds to ensure that an adequate number of southern black teachers were trained to meet the needs of the black population.⁴²¹

The need and desire to provide additional training opportunities for rural black teachers was one of several issues that contributed to the low level of black education in the Lower South as a whole.⁴²² For more than 20 years, from 1912 to 1932, the Rosenwald Fund, the Rosenwald Building Project, the Rural Negro Fund and black community-based fundraising were the key financial supporters for the building of additional black rural schools in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. Northern philanthropy and progressive southerners attempted to eradicate thousands of dilapidated

⁴¹⁹ Horace M. Bond, 264-274.

⁴²⁰ McCuiston, 14.

⁴²¹ Horace M. Bond, 281.

⁴²² P.H. Easom and J.A. Travis, Mississippi's Negro Rural Schools, Suggestions for Their Improvement, *Mississippi Department of Education Bulletin* no. 100 (May 1941), 7.

one- and two-room shacks which served as schools throughout the South. In 1926, more than 80% of all rural southern schools were the one-teacher type. “By 1939-1940 seemingly little had changed: 79.7 percent of the African American schools in eight states and the District of Columbia were one teacher (52.8) or two teacher (26.9 percent) structures.”⁴²³

Throughout the Lower South, local school officials still refused to provide state-funded transportation for black students in rural areas. In some instances, their daily commute to and from school was from eight to ten miles per day. Due to the lack of transportation, average daily attendance rates for rural black school-age children were lower than those for whites, particularly in counties where there were more black children. In Fayette County, the burden of transportation was somewhat eased when black men who owned buses volunteered to transport students to school for a modest fee of approximately \$1.25 per month. Initially, these services were only provided for the limited number of black high school students who lived outside of the Somerville city limits in remote locations throughout the county. Fayette, Marshall, and Bolivar counties provided transportation for black elementary students until after *Brown* in the mid-1950s when they ceased due to the increase in the consolidation of one-and-two-room schools and a shift in emphasis to neighborhood schools.

During the first three decades of the 20th century, in some counties, the legal status of black one-and-two-room public schools was not clearly defined.⁴²⁴ However, white political and civic leaders made efforts to improve the quality of white elementary

⁴²³ Fultz, 402.

⁴²⁴ Leon A Ransom, “The Legal Status of Negro Education Under Separate School Systems,” *Journal of Negro Education* 8, no. 3 (July 1939): 395-405.

and secondary schools. Black schools, on the other hand, remained primarily one-and-two-teacher elementary schools.⁴²⁵ “The fact that such a large percentage of Negro school buildings [were] privately owned (65.1 percent, as opposed to 22.2 percent of the white schools) explains in part the poor conditions of many of the buildings and their unsuitability for school purposes.”⁴²⁶ Further, one-room schools located on plantations were considered private property, especially those that operated in plantation church buildings.⁴²⁷ Therefore, they were beyond the scope and control of public and private entities. For example, Ames Plantation in Fayette County and Delta and Pine Land Company Plantation in Bolivar County owned and controlled the schools located on their properties. Many plantation owners objected to intervention from outside funding sources because they wanted to remain the sole authority over black schools located on or in close proximity to their land. When they combined their authority to control the activities that took place with the physical buildings and their control over the hiring process and curriculum, plantation owners virtually controlled the entire educational process. Additionally, since most of the churches were located on plantations they also influenced the religious activities within these isolated rural black communities. Consequently, the geographic location and demographics of black communities had a direct bearing on the quality of education that African Americans received. Due to the limited tax base, black teacher pay was low and the conditions of the schools were

⁴²⁵ S. L. Smith, “Negro Public Schools in the South,” *Southern Workman* 56 (July 1927): 316-321.

⁴²⁶ Fultz, 403.

⁴²⁷ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 80-81.

usually worse than in those areas where blacks owned their property and realized higher wages.⁴²⁸

In 1933, Dr. Ambrose Caliver, specialist of Negro Education for the U.S. Office of Education, conducted a survey of black elementary and secondary education in the United States. The survey revealed what was generally understood among national education officials: the states in the Lower South and Mississippi Delta regions ranked lowest in terms of black teachers having the minimum training and education required by their respective states. Mississippi's black teachers ranked at the bottom of the national survey in terms of teacher training and readiness to teach.⁴²⁹

Not only was Mississippi the only state to record an increase in the number of Black teachers with lower levels of training in one-teacher schools from 1930 to 1935, but by the 1934-35 school year, its 92.9% of African American teachers in one-teacher schools with four years or less of education beyond elementary school was more than 21% higher than that of Arkansas, the state with the highest proportion. Similarly, Mississippi ranked last in terms of the proportion of Black teachers having six or more years of education above elementary school in 1935. That year, it was the only state with less than 10% of its Black teachers having standard training in one- and two-teacher schools (4.3% and 9.7%, respectively).⁴³⁰

A 1939 Mississippi Department of Education report indicated that this trend continued over the years: "there were 5,930 colored teachers, 600 were college graduates, 2,330 on college level, and 3,000 below college level. Most of the latter group was practically

⁴²⁸ Rupert B. Vance, *Human Factors in Cotton Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1929), 226.

⁴²⁹ Ambrose Caliver in *Mississippi Educational Journal* 10, (1933-1934), 11-12.

⁴³⁰ Michael Fultz. "Teacher Training and African American Education in the South, 1900-1940," *Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 2 (1995), 199; For detailed discussion of Teacher Training in Mississippi see Ambrose Caliver, *Education of Negro Teachers* (U.S Office of Education Bulletin no. 10: Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933) and Charles S. Wilson, *Education For Negroes In Mississippi Since 1910*, 195.

untrained.”⁴³¹ Ironically, the 3,000 untrained teachers were routinely placed in one-room schools where the student teacher ratios were high and the building conditions were the worst.

In the 1940s, the Rural Negro Fund (Jeanes Fund) merged with several other funding sources to create the Southern Education Foundation. As the need for more trained rural supervisory teachers grew, the foundation was not able to fully meet the financial needs of rural southern schools. “To continue the admirable pace set for improving Negro education in 804 southern counties, especially because of the size of the Negro population, was a monetary problem of great magnitude.”⁴³² Southern state governments, especially in the Mississippi Delta where the modern plantation system survived the longest, simply refused to use public tax dollars to adequately fund black education. This meant that over the first 30 years of its existence, black teachers, black administrators, and black teacher supervisors associated with the Jeanes fund received pay far below the scale set for white teachers, administrators, and teacher supervisors.⁴³³

In rural black communities in the Lower South, teachers functioned in various capacities. When conditions allowed, they undertook the responsibility for improving the school themselves. “Given the prevalence of dilapidated one-and-two-teacher rural schools during this period, this responsibility was understandable as daunting.”⁴³⁴ Those who received formal teacher training were taught that a clean and wholesome classroom

⁴³¹ *Biennial Report and Recommendation of the State Superintendent of Public Education* (September 1939), 30.

⁴³² Williams et al, 18.

⁴³³ McCuiston, 20-22.

⁴³⁴ Fultz, 408-409. See Adam Fairclough, “Missionaries to the Dark South,” in *A Class of Their Own*, 99-131.

enhanced the teaching and learning environment. To this end, black teachers often took it upon themselves to seek out any and every viable source of additional funding for their schools.⁴³⁵ In spite of their low pay, black teachers were expected to teach, instill, and exemplify moral character, citizenship, and Christian principles that their students could model and emulate. Generally, they were regarded as individuals who to some extent had used education as a mechanism to uplift themselves and consequently could uplift the race. Ambrose Caliver succinctly described the degree of responsibility of black teachers: “In the hands of the Negro teacher rests the destiny of the race. Whatever career a child will eventually follow, the fundamental knowledge, habits, attitudes, and ideals which he will need for life in general and for his vocation in particular, will be influenced more greatly by his teachers than any other group of persons.”⁴³⁶

During the 1920s through the 1950s, the *Journal of Negro Education* advocated and encouraged blacks to strive to acquire a voice in the control of their education.⁴³⁷ In the rural Lower South, where plantation elites basically controlled the entire education system, blacks lacked voting power and had little to leverage in order to gain a voice in the operation of their schools. In his assessment of rural black schools in the American South, Swedish economist and Nobel Laureate Gunnar Myrdal concluded: “In the South practically all Negro teachers--from the lonely teacher in a dilapidated one room school house isolated off somewhere in a rural county, to the president of a Negro college--are appointed by white leaders and they hold their position under the threat of being

⁴³⁵ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 227.

⁴³⁶ Ambrose Caliver, “Some Problems in the Education and Placement of Negro Teachers,” *Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 1 (January 1935): 99.

⁴³⁷ W. W. Sanders, “The Problem of Negro Education Presented to the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association,” *The Bulletin* 12 (March 1934): 9.

dismissed if they become troublesome.”⁴³⁸ Further, Myrdal observed that “one of the things which demarcates them (whites) as superior and increases the future potentialities of their children is the fact that white children in publicly supported school buses are taken to fine consolidated schools while often Negro children are given only what amounts to a sham education in dilapidated one-room schools or old Negro churches by underpaid, badly trained Negro teachers.”⁴³⁹ Even under the best circumstances, white political and economic leaders throughout the South used their influence, when given the opportunity, to deny blacks equal access while insuring that poor whites realized a clear advantage as it related to educational opportunities.⁴⁴⁰

In the plantation communities of the Lower South, Whites were keenly aware that they were not knowledgeable of all activities within isolated black communities. Therefore, they used black preachers and teachers—the leaders within these communities—as sources for information. “African American teachers were caught in a racially and ideologically charged middle. Their status and abilities were of interest and concern to their fellow African Americans in the drive for justice and equality; their performance was also of interest to southern whites determined to maintain the racial status quo.”⁴⁴¹ Black teachers were striving for educational reforms and improvements while southern whites were doing everything in their power to minimize and suppress

⁴³⁸Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 769.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 894.

⁴⁴⁰ Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 250.

⁴⁴¹ For a detailed description of the ideological social status of Black teachers in the rural Lower South and their role in promoting virtues of industrial and agricultural education see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 110-147.

black educational opportunities. Black teachers had to be conscious of the social and cultural boundaries imposed by whites while simultaneously trying to be role-models for their black students.⁴⁴²

When most blacks entered into the teaching profession, they generally remained in that occupation and embraced it as a life-long calling. Although their preparation and level of training were usually below that of white teachers, the academic achievement of black teachers was “considerably above those of the black community as a whole and ... they represented the upper level of intelligence and training in their race.”⁴⁴³ Black women, who “constituted the largest percentage of rural and urban black elementary and secondary level teachers,” were committed to teaching because of their “strong belief in the value of education.”⁴⁴⁴ They took the responsibility for educating the children of their communities seriously.⁴⁴⁵ In an effort to maintain the image of affluence, many rural black teachers held other jobs to supplement their low and often meager incomes. Irene Smith, who taught in Fayette County for twenty-six years, worked on her family’s farm. Earnestine Brown, also a Fayette County school teacher, supplemented her income by playing the piano for several churches. Since teaching was not a year-round occupation, secondary employment was a common practice among teachers.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, southern black teachers complained that they were not being paid on the same level as their white counterparts. In their estimation, this situation was grossly unfair since they were making strides to overcome

⁴⁴² Bond, 263-264

⁴⁴³ Fultz, 418.

⁴⁴⁴ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 223- 224, 227.

⁴⁴⁵ Bullock, 153.

the training gaps between them and white teachers. Data from the U.S. Office of Education indicated that by the early 1930s black educators had significantly increased their training levels. While the average black elementary school teacher in the Lower South in 1929-30 possessed approximately 70% of the training (years beyond eighth grade) of comparable white teachers, she received only 41% as much salary.⁴⁴⁶ However, in some states located in the Lower South, black teacher training lagged behind southern white teachers as a whole, and they were not keeping pace with black teachers in other regions where the plantation system had declined more rapidly.

The desire for professional training, increased salaries, and input in the decision-making process prompted black teachers in the South to organize at the state and local level.⁴⁴⁷ Black teachers began to establish state and local teacher associations to ensure that they had some form of a collective voice.⁴⁴⁸ Working with the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools, black educators in Mississippi and Tennessee pressed for additional training opportunities, particularly for teachers who had not attended a training school or a normal college.⁴⁴⁹

Since its inception, the Anna Jeanes Fund and its supervisors worked with rural black teachers throughout the Lower South providing immediate basic teacher training. Generally, Mississippi and Tennessee did not provide any financial assistance to the

⁴⁴⁶ David Blose and Ambrose Caliver, "Statistics of the Education of Negroes," U.S. Office of Education, Circular no. 215, Washington D.C., 1943, 5.

⁴⁴⁷ Cleopatra Thompson, *The History of the Mississippi Teachers Association* (Jackson: Mississippi Teachers Association, 1973), 51-80. See George W. Brooks, *History of the Tennessee Education Congress 1923-1967*, 15-16.

⁴⁴⁸ Percy E. Murray, *History of the North Carolina Teachers Association* (Washington: National Education Association, 1984), 15-16.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

support the efforts of the Fund. However, it should be noted that in 1948, Eunice Mitchell was hired by the Tennessee State Department of Education to work as a consultant for in-service teacher education in the Division of Negro education. Her primary task was to develop and implement a program of in-service professional growth for Tennessee's Jeanes Supervisors. In collaboration with Tennessee A&I, the state's only Negro state normal college, the program was designed to reach as many teachers as possible during two summer sessions in 1948. According to Mitchell, "This program of graduate study may lead to the attainment of the master's degree upon the completion of a thesis revealing adequate ability in conducting precision work with respect to the investigation of a significant educational problem."⁴⁵⁰ While many of the Jeanes supervisors took advantage of these additional training opportunities, their primary concern was finding resources to provide training for the teachers who had the responsibility of teaching rural black students on a daily basis.⁴⁵¹

Black educators realized that their training and salary deficits were a part of a systematic effort on the part of whites to prevent them from freeing themselves of the social, economic, and political caste system perpetuated by southern plantations.⁴⁵² In the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta, white politicians and civic leaders in collaboration with planters and plantation elites controlled the administration of black schools. They made key hiring decisions at the state and local levels as they related to teachers, principals, and other supervisory staff. For example, the Delta Council, established in

⁴⁵⁰ Eunice S. Matthews. "Current Trends and Events: Launching A Program Of In-Service Professional Growth for Jeanes Supervisors" (Tennessee State Department of Education, 1948), 131.

⁴⁵¹ Williams et al, 34.

⁴⁵² Bond, 282-283.

1935 to promote the region's agricultural interests, impacted black schools by using its considerable influence to control the distribution of state and local taxes. Additionally, the Council influenced administrative decisions regarding black school expenditures and physical plant construction at the state and local level.⁴⁵³ In Bolivar and Marshall Counties, the local school boards, which often functioned at the discretion of white planters, controlled the budgets of the dual education systems within these counties. As late as 1933, blacks represented the majority of the population in both counties; however, they did not receive an equitable share of the funds appropriated for county school funding. Specifically, in Marshall County, the black population of 17,770 represented 72.2% of the total 24,869 residents. Similarly, in Bolivar County, blacks constituted 82.4% (52,591) of the total 71,051 population. Marshall County black public schools received 43% of the funds allocated for the dual education system. Bolivar County one-room schools received 28% of the funds allocated for its dual public education system.⁴⁵⁴ By 1939, Mississippi as a whole spent less than any other state in the United States to educate its black students in its public schools. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, in 1939, for every ten dollars spent on white education, the state spent only one dollar on black public education.⁴⁵⁵ Jim Crow, white paternalism, and reliance on a

⁴⁵³ Resolutions Adopted by Delta Council, Eleventh Annual Meeting, 8 May 1946, in Walter Sillers Papers, Delta State University, Capps Archives & Museum, Box 6, Folder 18.

⁴⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Census. Fifteenth Census of the United States, (1930), 1282, 1285. For data on the percentage of total county expenditures for black schools, see Mississippi Department of Education, Mississippi Negro Schools, Division of Negro Affairs. See Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey* 77.

⁴⁵⁵ *Mississippi Schools For Negroes, Facts from a report to the Executive Committee* (Vicksburg: Mississippi Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, 1942), 10. See Charles S. Wilson, *Education For Negroes in Mississippi Since 1910*, 51.

declining cotton-based economic system sustained the social order that created the second-class elementary, secondary, and higher educational system for blacks.⁴⁵⁶

In spite of whites placing heavy emphasis on teaching black children industrial education, southern black teachers continued to teach their students classical curriculum whenever possible.⁴⁵⁷ Although white southerners professed a desire to see blacks trained in industrial arts, their failure to finance black education as a whole led to the inferior status of black southern education and the gradual demise of agricultural and industrial curriculum at all levels of black education by 1940. “The causes of this inferiority were beyond the capacity of the Negro educators to correct. They stemmed directly from financial neglect--from the bitter base on which the Negro colleges rested which was not sufficient to support learning at the higher level.”⁴⁵⁸ Private philanthropic dollars were the lifeline of black post-secondary education. Through the 1930s, land-grant colleges were virtually unfunded by southern state tax dollars and received only token financial assistance from the federal government. Black land-grant and private colleges did not receive adequate funding until the 1940s and 1950s. While funding increased to \$38,318,254 from 1947 to 1948, it was not equitable to white institutions.⁴⁵⁹ Financial support for black education did not increase significantly until the curricula for

⁴⁵⁶ Myrdal, 896-897.

⁴⁵⁷ Bullock, 165.

⁴⁵⁸ Monroe Nathan Work, *The Negro Year Book, 1916-1917* (Tuskegee: Department of Records and Research Tuskegee Institute, 1917), 232-233.

⁴⁵⁹ Jessie Parkhurst Guzman, *The 1952 Negro Year Book* (New York: William H. Wise, 1952), 220.

black schools began to include all the courses that were being taught in white schools and colleges.⁴⁶⁰

Black teaching professionals who received only an eighth-grade education in one-room schools in the Lower South realized that they had received an inferior education compared to their white counterparts. “For the most part, teachers, ministers, doctors, and other professionals who served the black communities absorbed the inadequacies that schools experienced.”⁴⁶¹ Their skills and services were greatly needed and gladly received by the black community. However, when evaluated against the standards established for whites, their skills were below the norms of other professionals.⁴⁶² Blacks were receiving a separate education, but because the process was not equal, the system produced unequal or inferior outcomes. “The institutions which trained them fell into the same categories as their white counterparts, but the adjective ‘Negro’ heavily charged with lower standards was used. The finished products of these colleges were ‘all right’ for the Negro community but generally inadequate for service in the larger American society.”⁴⁶³ These are the outcomes that served as the core of the NAACP’s legal assault on the separate but equal doctrine which sanctioned segregated schools.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁰ Bullock, 165.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, 184.

⁴⁶² Bond, 305-330. Provides a detailed analysis of intelligence studies that compared the intellectual capabilities of Native Americans, European Americans, and African Americans. These studies were conducted from 1906-1926.

⁴⁶³ Bullock., 185.

⁴⁶⁴ Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 198-199.

It soon became obvious to black education officials that industrial education had failed to meet the needs of African American students.⁴⁶⁵ As the southern agricultural system and cotton tenancy declined from the 1930s through the 1940s, blacks left the South and gravitated to northern manufacturing jobs. Due to the lack of adequate funding and the inability to attract highly skilled black teachers who had been trained in the industrial arts, black colleges did not promote industrial education. The primary obstacle which prevented the training and hiring of highly skilled black industrial arts teachers was the long-standing unwillingness on the part of white planters and politicians to pay black teachers the same type of salary that a white teacher would receive.⁴⁶⁶ Whites believed that blacks who received a good industrial and agricultural training were taught by their teachers to aspire to land ownership rather than tenancy. Southern planters wanted blacks to be a perpetual source of labor rather than land owners who could become their competitors.⁴⁶⁷ In the Lower South, black schools were governed by the traditional conservative views of black education that were framed and articulated by white educators and political leaders during the last decade of the 19th century and first decade of the 20th century.⁴⁶⁸ In the early 1930s, rural black teachers in the South began to resist the conservative ideas supported by black pioneer educators such as James H. Dillard, President of the Jeanes Foundation. However, the desire to abandon traditional industrial education actually began in the 1920s. Some black educators believed that

⁴⁶⁵ Bullock, 147-166.

⁴⁶⁶ Bolton, *Hardest Deal of All*, 18.

⁴⁶⁷ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 120-121.

⁴⁶⁸ J. H. Phillips, "The Essential Requirements For Negro Education," *Southern Educational Review* 5-6 (February-March 1908): 294-302.

many of the problems that persisted in one-teacher rural schools were a result of placing too much emphasis on industrial education.⁴⁶⁹ Efforts to discard industrial curricula began in privately funded black schools that received the majority of their financial support from northern philanthropic organizations. Progressive black educators, such as Fisk University President Charles S. Johnson and young black teachers who taught at private high schools, normal schools, and other institutions of higher learning believed that classical education was essential to effective teacher training.⁴⁷⁰

In 1936, black teachers in Tennessee faced a similar set of circumstances as they struggled to educate their rural students. According to Tennessee Department of Education officials:

One educational issue that has been decided, at least in theory, is that every colored child in Tennessee is entitled to an equal educational opportunity with that of every white child in the State. Although an equal educational opportunity is subscribed to in theory, this much desired status has not been attained in fact. Although public opinion has been increasingly favorable to the eradication of ignorance where ever it may be found, it has not been possible in many counties of Tennessee to develop an adequate school program to make this possible.⁴⁷¹

The number of public high schools for blacks increased from one in 1923 to forty-five in 1934. Additionally, fifty-six percent of the state's black teachers were supervised by Jeanes teachers. Seventy-six percent (767) of the 1,009 black schools were of the one-room type. The black school year consisted of 144 days compared to 157 for whites. Of the 4,646 white elementary schools in the state, 2,098 were one-teacher types and 1,518

⁴⁶⁹ Donald Generals, "Washington and Progressive Education: An Experimentalist Approach to Curriculum and Reform," *Journal of Negro Education* 69. no. 3 (Summer 2000): 215-234.

⁴⁷⁰ Fairclough, *A Class of their Own*, 304-305.

⁴⁷¹ *State of Tennessee, Annual Report of the Tennessee Department of Education for the Scholastic Year Ending June 30, 1936* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Education), 44.

were two-teacher types. Due to consolidation there were 1,030 white county schools that had three or more teachers.⁴⁷²

In Fayette County, located in the southwest region of Tennessee, the total population in 1930 was 28, 891. Blacks represent 74% of the total population. The black population was 21,095 and the white population was 7,070. The racial demographics of Fayette County were unique when compared to the counties located in the middle, east, and extreme southeast regions of the state. Black teachers were paid substantially lower salaries than white teachers. On average, all Tennessee teachers were paid approximately 49% less than the national average in 1933. Data indicated that elementary teachers who taught in one-room schools received a median annual salary of \$553. Data also showed that the national median salary for elementary teachers was \$1,090.⁴⁷³ In 1937, the sixty-nine black schools were in worse condition than those of whites. Only one of the sixty-nine schools was a high school, the remaining were one-room schools.⁴⁷⁴ In the 1940s, black teachers were still paid well below the national median income and less than their white counterparts in the state. Sam Carpenter, a black teacher for Fayette County, stated that his “1940 to 1941 teaching salary was 62.00 a month.”⁴⁷⁵ In Tennessee, these inequalities between white and black teacher salaries persisted until 1947 when a state-wide two per cent sales tax was enacted. This sales tax made it possible for the state to

⁴⁷² *State of Tennessee Annual Report*, 1936, 110.

⁴⁷³ *Report of the Tennessee Educational Commission* (Nashville: Tennessee Education Commission, 1933) 98. See Annual Report of the Tennessee Department of Education, 1932-1933 and Research Bulletin National Education Association 11 (March, 1933), table 62, 63.

⁴⁷⁴ No Author, “County Votes Modern System of White and Colored Schools,” *The Fayette County Falcon*, Somerville, Tennessee, March 11, 1937.

⁴⁷⁵ Frankie L. Hunt, “A History of the Desegregation of the Fayette County School System: Fayette County, Tennessee 1954-1980,” Diss. University of Mississippi, 1981, 69-70.

raise the minimum annual salary for a teacher with a bachelor's degree to \$2,007.00.⁴⁷⁶

When the American Missionary Association began training black teachers affiliated with private schools, these institutions began to receive the majority of their financial support from northern philanthropic organizations. Most black public school teachers believed that black educators who taught at private schools were shown favoritism. "Public school teachers resented the dominance of private school teachers. The prominence of white teachers in the associations—few in number but influential by virtue of their position—caused jealousy among black teachers."⁴⁷⁷ The elitist attitudes of black private school teachers created tension that resulted in a reluctance of black public school teachers to join teacher associations. Both black and white private school teachers openly expressed their contempt for black public school teachers who taught in rural black one-teacher schools. "They believed that the mass of rural public school teachers were not fit to teach and disparaged them in contemptuous terms. Worn-out politicians, broken-down preachers, sickly youth, and the lame, halt and cripple find an asylum behind the teacher's desk, complained a speaker at the Alabama Association's 1889 meeting."⁴⁷⁸ Public school teachers believed that advocacy for higher standards by black teacher associations translated into a loss of jobs for them due to their poor academic and professional training. Since participation in southern state associations was low, efforts to establish a viable national black teachers association proved to be unsuccessful.

⁴⁷⁶ James E. Gibbs, Report to The Educational Survey Committee of The Tennessee, Legislative Council, 1957. "Public Education in Tennessee: Grades 1 through 12," 178.

⁴⁷⁷ Fairclough, *A Class of their Own*, 312.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 314.

When the National Education Association (NEA) openly denied membership to black teachers in southern and border states in the late 1880s, efforts were made to form a viable national association for black teachers. However, the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools (NATCS) did not emerge as a viable national organization for black teachers until 1904 when founding president, John Robert Edward Lee, convened educators in Nashville. “More than 125 teachers representing 14 states across the United States responded and attended the 3-day meeting.”⁴⁷⁹ According to its constitution, the purpose of the organization was: to harmonize and unite the agencies now at work for the elevation of the African American people; to arouse a deeper educational interest among them; to encourage good citizenship; and to ascertain and publish statistics showing educational status.⁴⁸⁰ NATCS was not immediately embraced by black teachers during the first decade of its existence. Yet, membership increased substantially during the 1920s as better trained black teachers were employed in public school systems. Additional gains in membership “coincided with the increase in the number of private black high schools and county training schools that opened in the South.”⁴⁸¹

As membership in the national association grew, so did the formation of state teacher associations. “The state associations made themselves more attractive to ordinary teachers by publishing regular journals, rotating the venues of their annual meetings, and organizing local units that enjoyed voting power.”⁴⁸² Between 1877 and 1923, twenty

⁴⁷⁹ Lomoley, 477.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 476.

⁴⁸¹ Fairclough, 314-315.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

state associations formed across the country. Although the reasons for the founding of these associations varied, they had one common theme: “the call for greater professionalism among African American teachers.”⁴⁸³

This assertion carried a twofold agenda. It was simultaneously: (1) a demand for better training so as to carry out what amounted to the sociopolitical obligation of providing for ‘the education and elevation of our race’ and (2) recognition that desired outcomes would be more readily achieved through united group organization.”⁴⁸⁴

Although black educators in Mississippi had attempted to form an association in 1893, the formal organization, the Mississippi Association of Teachers in Colored Schools, was not established until 1906. The purpose of MATCS as stated in its first constitution included: “(1) to urge better preparation for our teachers in the schools; (2) to urge teachers to do faithful work in the schools; (3) to urge people of the community to provide better school houses; (4) to urge better home improvement; and (5) to ask for longer terms and better compensation.”⁴⁸⁵ The Tennessee State Association of Teachers in Colored Schools organized in July 1923. The preamble of its constitution aptly expressed the organization’s purpose and objective:

We, the teachers in the colored schools in Tennessee, in order to develop a greater spirit of friendship and fraternity among those working for a common cause, to draw ourselves together in social feeling and intercourse, to discuss methods of teaching and courses of study, to promote the cause and elevate the standard of education to the end that the noble ideals embodied in Tennessee’s Educational creed may be made a reality, do hereby bind ourselves together...”⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸³ Linda C. Tillman, *The Sage Handbook of African American Education* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 68.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁴⁸⁵ Thompson, 101.

⁴⁸⁶ George W. Brooks, *History of the Tennessee Education Congress, 1923-1967* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1975), 15.

The establishment of both the Mississippi and Tennessee associations was guided by the presidents of black land-grant colleges in their respective states: John A. Martin of Alcorn Agricultural & Mechanical College and William Jasper Hale of Tennessee Industrial & Agricultural College.

While the national and state associations made strides to improve training, professionalism, and other issues related to the general concerns of its members, the NAACP initiated a systematic legal attack in the Lower South and border states against the system of separate-but-equal education. The NAACP used *Plessy v. Ferguson* and subsequent cases to demand that states where dual education systems existed meet their constitutional responsibilities to provide equal educational opportunities, facilities, and teachers.⁴⁸⁷ Its attack on separate-but-equal was not limited to schools and educational opportunities. The organization also challenged separate-but-equal accommodations in the U.S. Military and within U.S. war industries, racial discrimination in primary elections (*Smith v. Allbright*, 1944), racial discrimination in interstate commerce (*Morgan v. Virginia*, 1946), and racially discriminatory restrictive covenants in housing (*Shell v. Kraemer*, 1948). These types of challenges got the attention of southern white politicians and school boards who eventually began to push for increased equalization of black and white schools within their respective dual education systems.⁴⁸⁸

From 1940 to 1950, equalization efforts in Tennessee reduced gaps in the level of black and white teacher training and teacher pay. “By 1950 white teachers in Tennessee averaged 2.9 years of college training. This was a 0.1% year increase from the 2.8 year

⁴⁸⁷ Charles H. Houston, “A Challenge to Negro College Youth,” *Crisis*, January 1938, 4-5.

⁴⁸⁸ Williams et. al., 70.

average reported in 1940. Black teachers in Tennessee averaged 3.3 years of college training in 1950 which represented a 0.5% year increase from the 2.8 year average reported in 1940.⁴⁸⁹ These gains in education and training for African American teachers was a singular pinnacle because teacher pay was based on years of education, training and certification level. Since teachers were paid based on their level of college training; “the gap between the salaries of white and [black] teachers in the South [closed] at about the same pace as the gap between the relative amounts of training.”⁴⁹⁰ By 1950, Tennessee black educators were paid \$2,244 per year, compared to \$2,141 for white educators.

However, in Mississippi, the gap between black teacher training and white teacher training actually widened from 1940-1950.

In 1940, black teachers in Mississippi had an average of 1.5 years of college training compared to 3.5 years for white teachers. By 1950, black teachers in Mississippi had an average of 1.2 years of training compared to 3.5 years for white teachers. This was a decrease of 0.3% years of training. The gap between black teacher salaries and white teacher salaries widened during this time period. In 1940, white teachers averaged \$776 per year while blacks were paid \$232 per year. In 1950, white teachers were paid an average salary of \$1,991 per year compared to black teachers who were paid \$1,019 per year.⁴⁹¹

Equalization efforts in Mississippi were hampered by actions at the county level to ensure that local tax revenues were not used to adequately fund black schools. “Mississippi’s efforts to solve the problems of unequal salaries for white and black teachers foundered on a similar failure of state leaders to provide a clear and unequivocal mandate to local

⁴⁸⁹ Ashmore, 158.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

officials.”⁴⁹² Local political officials refused to adhere to any mandates which were provided by state officials who encouraged them to use the funds to bring blacks schools and black teacher salaries in line with their white counterparts. This type of resistance to equalization was more pronounced in Mississippi and the Mississippi Delta where white resistance to equalization was entrenched.

⁴⁹² Charles S. Bolton, “Mississippi’s School Equalization Program Mississippi Equalization Program, 1945-1954: A Last Gasp to Try to Maintain a Segregated Educational System,” *Journal of Southern History* 66, (November 2000): 797.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gradual Improvements and Equalization Efforts, 1940-1954

In Caswell County, North Carolina, the consolidation of rural African American one-room schools began during the 1920s and 1930s as a result of the community's participation with the Rosenwald Building Project. In spite of the efforts of black teachers, parents, and community leaders to improve education within the county, there were areas that needed to be perfected. As a result of working with the Rosenwald Building Project, African Americans constructed several multi-classroom elementary facilities throughout the county. However, in Caswell County the number of one-room schools was still relatively high when compared to other counties in North Carolina. By January 1940, African Americans in Caswell County were lobbying their local school boards to provide funds to build a new high school to replace the ten-room Yanceyville Training school. They argued that the present school building was outdated, overcrowded, and needed substantial repairs. In August 1938, members of the Caswell community contacted N.C. Newbold, director of the division of black education in North Carolina. After visiting the school and meeting with parents, community leaders, and school officials, Newbold made several recommendations to the Caswell County School Board.

The director suggested, in a series of items numbered one through three, that the superintendent and his board consider the fact that 'there is no well-built permanent school building for Negroes in the county' that they were maintaining thirty-two one-teacher schools, 'which is perhaps the largest number of such schools in any county in the State'; and that the white children had eight or ten large consolidated units with 'reasonably adequate bus transportation.'⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ Walker, 49.

The overall accomplishments of rural blacks in Caswell County in regard to improving their elementary and secondary educational facilities continued to outpace those made by blacks in rural communities in the Mid-South and the Mississippi Delta. The current high school in Caswell was founded in 1919 as a result of a concerted grassroots effort conducted by parents and community leaders.⁴⁹⁴ The consolidation of the county's black elementary and secondary schools lagged behind the consolidation occurring in the county's white schools. African American parents and community leaders were now ready to concentrate their efforts to substantially improve the county's black high school.

Following his inspection of the Caswell County school facilities and meeting with black parents and community leaders, N.C. Newbold made additional recommendations. He stated that "it is natural and reasonable that the colored people of the county would now be hoping and trusting that a beginning at least may be made in establishing standard consolidation units for their children."⁴⁹⁵ His recommendations reflected the general goals and expectations of the African American community who wanted to improve their high school. He appealed to the county school board by asking:

Would it be possible for the county to plan for an adequate brick building at Yanceyville to serve in place of the present wooden structure? Could you arrange to secure perhaps funds for a building such as is needed, which would probably include fifteen or twenty classrooms, an auditorium, and other necessary facilities with aid from the PWA? Such a building and its equipment it seems would cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$60,000, of which amount approximately \$27,000 might be secured from PWA. As I understand it, applications for aid from this fund will be received up to September 30, 1938. I understand one

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 50.

colored citizen has offered to donate to the county 9 ½ acres of land as a site for the new school at Yanceyville.⁴⁹⁶

The construction of the new African American high school in Caswell County did not begin until 1948 and was not completed until March 1951. World War II interrupted the normal regime of personal and community life as men went off to war and county and federal financial priorities were shifted to support the war effort.⁴⁹⁷ When the new high school was completed, it became the centerpiece of this predominately rural African American community. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) provided the community a venue where educational, social, and business issues could be addressed.⁴⁹⁸ The organization bolstered community pride when they hosted talent shows in the school's new auditorium. These talent shows provided a venue for students, teachers, and parents to showcase their talents.

In North Carolina, the total number of one-room elementary schools had been reduced to 296 by 1952. Of that total, sixty-three were white schools and 233 were black schools. The state had a total of 957 high schools: 721 were white and 236 were black.⁴⁹⁹ Additional school consolidation of black elementary one-room schools had occurred since 1938. In 1952, there were only twenty-four black one-room schools and eleven two-room schools in the county. Caswell

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁹⁹ *Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of North Carolina for 1950-1952.*, Part II: Statistical Report 1950-1951, 46-48. Retrieved from (http://www.archive.org/details/biennialreportof195052_nort.pdf) 02/04/2012.

County had more one-room schools than any other county in the state.⁵⁰⁰ By 1951 North Carolina had further reduced its reliance on one-room elementary school facilities to educate black students in rural counties. Additionally by 1952, North Carolina had substantially increased the number of black rural and urban high schools. In the Lower South, efforts to improve the quality of black elementary and secondary education had gradually improved but still remained noticeably behind the pace set by North Carolina. In 1952, one-room schools remained the primary type of school used to educate African American students in the majority of rural counties in Mississippi.⁵⁰¹ During this time period, due to the shortage of African American county training schools and high schools, the vast majority of black students attending elementary schools in Marshall and Bolivar counties of Mississippi were also less likely to attend high school than students in Caswell County, North Carolina.

Matilda Briggs, a native of Bolivar County, attended the St. Thomas Baptist Church one-room school from 1933 to 1940. The school was located in Lamont, a small town situated between Winterville and Scott. Similar to other one-rural schools in this region, it barely met the minimal standards for educating black children.

At St. Thomas we made the best use of what we had. We would get on our knees and use the benches for a desk when we had a long writing assignment. The parents would donate the portable black boards because St. Thomas was a church with only one room which was also used as a sanctuary, you could not have a permanent black board. The parents served as the trustees of the school and made sure we had firewood,

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁵⁰¹ *Biennial Report of Mississippi Department of Education, 1952-1953*, 64.

books, and basic supplies. Some of the teachers from the city did not care about the students and some of them were very good and dedicated teachers.⁵⁰²

Matilda believed that she and her siblings were blessed for several reasons. Her father, Sam Briggs, owned his own land and also worked as a blacksmith. He was able to make enough money to send his children to Coleman High School in Greenville. Sam had to pay tuition for his first set of children because they lived outside of the district. He realized that this was his only option because Bolivar County did not have a rural high school for blacks. After the first set of children completed Coleman High School, the principal allowed the others to attend for free providing Sam paid the room and board for them to stay with a local family during the school term. Matilda recalled that her father brought them home on weekends and then transported them back to Greenville on Mondays. She also found that living in a large family was a blessing because they all shared in the work around the farm. Her father also leased land from whites to ensure that he had enough cotton harvested to turn a profit from year to year.⁵⁰³

Matilda's first teacher was her sister, Lenora. As customary during this period, when blacks graduated from high school, they were recruited to teach in one-room schools. Lenora encouraged Matilda and the other students to study at home whenever possible. She recalled that she and her siblings were motivated to do well in school by their father. Although he was uneducated, he stressed the importance of receiving an education to all of his children. For many of the students who lived on the plantation their

⁵⁰² Matilda Briggs, Interview by author, Memphis, Tennessee.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

commute to and from school was as far as five miles. When her father was not able to transport them, she and her siblings had to walk only one mile to and from school.⁵⁰⁴

Like her sister, Lenora, Matilda became a teacher of a one-room school in Bolivar County after completing Coleman High School. After her sister moved to St. Louis in 1934, there were no trained teachers in Lamont. Therefore, teachers came from the city and lived with local people in the community during the seven-month split school term. The first term ran from October through December and the second term ran from May through July.

In Fayette County, black teachers faced similar challenges as they attempted to improve their educational training and teach rural students in the Mid-South. Irene Smith Boyland, whose family had lived in Fayette County since 1870, was born on March 26, 1919. Like many of the elders in the community, her parents received their basic elementary education in the same one-room school that their children now attended. In April 1933, Irene graduated from Fayette County's Ebenezer Elementary Public School and later graduated from Fayette County Training School. Smith became a teacher in Fayette County in the 1940s and served as principal of the Corner School, a one-room rural elementary school from 1943 to 1944. From 1945-1965, Smith served as teacher of the Mosby School, a one-room Fayette County elementary school. While teaching, she furthered her education by attending Lane College where she received a four-year Bachelor's degree in 1955.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Irene Smith Boyland, personal papers in possession of Rosary H. J. Brown.

Irene's teaching contract specified her duties, academic expectations, and salary for the school year. She was expected to maintain a daily attendance roll, read a bible verse each day, have at least two fire drills per month, maintain an accurate inventory of county-issued school equipment and supplies on hand when applicable, and inform the County Superintendent of any supplies needed for daily instruction.⁵⁰⁶ Fayette County teachers taught basic education and physical education. Additionally, the contract specified that they were expected "to give instruction in physical education, to teach forestation, teach the Constitution of the United States and Tennessee Constitution, and public decorum as it relates to public safety on public thoroughfares, highways, and streets of the State of Tennessee."⁵⁰⁷ Further, they served as the primary custodian of school property during the school term.

In one-teacher schools, black teachers were required to teach each subject daily for each grade. Myles Wilson, a former Fayette County student who attended a two-room school, recalled that "in the late 1950s, his education was administered by two teachers who taught eight grades. Although the children were supposed to be taking five subjects each day, many times some of these lessons were left off."⁵⁰⁸ Due to the limited resources and other restrictions, black teachers could not deliver the same quality of education to their students as their white counterparts. In Tennessee, the allocation of public school funds was the primary responsibility of county school board members. Prior to *Brown* and the 1960 voter registration campaign in Fayette County, blacks lacked

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Hunt, 69.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 70. Wilson later became a teacher at Fayette-Ware High School.

the legal standing and political power to influence their school board. Therefore, the allocation of funds to support black schools in Fayette County was left in the hands of the school board and registered voters who elected these officials.

By 1940, social, economic and political conditions were less than ideal for black tenants and sharecroppers who lived and worked on plantations in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. “The survival of individuals and families was often contingent upon the luck of good health and abundant harvests and upon the goodwill of plantation owners who displayed a modicum of fairness. Even with such good fortune, life was often short and difficult for sharecropping families.” Incidents of disease, lack of medical care, and improper diet further exacerbated the overall conditions of tenant farmers and sharecroppers. For example, infant mortality rates “reflected the widespread lack of medical care.” While the “state’s infant mortality rate was 55.6 deaths per 1,000 live births,” the death rate was 60.9 among black infants and 46.3 among white infants. In spite of these conditions, the average sharecropper family began their day at 4.30 a.m. After a breakfast that mainly consisted of salt pork, grits, biscuits and gravy, they began their work in the fields by 5 a.m. Normally, at 11 a.m., they returned home for a lunch consisting of more pork, greens, corn bread and a dessert of pie or cake. After a one-hour rest, they returned to the fields and worked until nightfall. The evening meal was normally the leftovers from lunch. This cycle continued from March through November year after year. “Poverty, ill-health, and early death were the results of the structural violence of the systems of white supremacy and segregation.”⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁹ Rogers, 21-23.

After World War II, the educational opportunities for blacks in the rural Lower South gradually began to improve as a result of a series of events which had taken place during the 1930s to 1945. The Great Depression, the New Deal, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, increased industrialization, increased northern migration, and increased farm mechanization directly impacted rural black education throughout the Lower South.⁵¹⁰ These events changed the economic and ethnic demographics of the entire nation as well as the Lower South. Specifically, educational opportunities for rural blacks who lived within sub-regions of the Lower South such as the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta gradually began to improve as the political, economic, and social dynamics of the nation changed.⁵¹¹

Blacks who lived on plantations in Fayette, Marshall and Bolivar Counties continued their exodus away from the South, leaving the farms and plantations. “Once wartime jobs became available, millions abandoned the rural South altogether. Although a large portion of these migrants move to the North, many headed to cities like Memphis, either to stay briefly before moving farther north, or to remain permanently.⁵¹² Before World War II, the vast majority of the black migrants from the rural Mid-South and Mississippi Delta came to these northern and southern urban centers possessing either a seventh or eighth grade education. They were hardworking individuals who were eager to exercise the right to vote. For individuals such as Susie Bryant, who had lived in

⁵¹⁰ Aiken, Chapter 5, “*The World of Plantation Blacks*,” 122-164. Smallwood, Atlas, 125.

⁵¹¹ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 315-318. See Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 203-205, for additional details on educational, political, and economic changes within the South from 1945-1952. See Neil Fligstein, *Going North: Migration of Blacks and White from the South, 1900-1950*, a quantitative study of reorganization of southern farming and governmental control of agricultural production.

⁵¹² Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 9.

Greenwood, Mississippi and later moved to Memphis, voting was viewed as a special privilege.⁵¹³ However, Bryant and other black migrants had to cope with rigidly enforced Jim Crow codes that governed segregation in public places and spaces in Memphis, just as it had in the Mississippi Delta.⁵¹⁴ Mississippi Delta cities such as Greenville, Leland, Greenwood, Cleveland, and Clarksdale had a significant increase in population from 1940-1980 as the net black population began to decrease and undergo redistribution from farms to cities.⁵¹⁵

The plight of rural black schools in the South began to change gradually in the 1940s as a result of the pressure placed on southern planters to sustain its black labor force. Increased demand for unskilled industrial workers drew blacks to urban cities in the South, Midwest, and far West. After the United States entered World War II in 1942, the shortage of black agricultural labor became a pressing issue in most Mississippi counties. Delta Planters realized that the need for textiles to supply the war effort indicated that the cotton and textile industries were about to experience a boom.⁵¹⁶ Oscar Johnston and Delta and Pine Land Company officials were acutely aware of the economic dynamics which were taking place in the world as a result of the European conflict.

America's entrance into the war created an increased need for industrial workers as millions of white males enlisted into various branches of the military. As president of

⁵¹³ Ibid., 15.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 17

⁵¹⁵ Charles S. Aikens, "A New Type of Black Ghetto in the New Plantation South," *Annals of the Association of Geographers* 80, no.2 (June 1990): 223-246.

⁵¹⁶ Zhehgkai Dong, "From Postbellum Plantation to Modern Agribusiness: A History of the Delta and Pine Land Company" (PhD. diss., Purdue University, 1993), 181.

DPLC, Johnston quickly realized that the exodus of black tenants and sharecroppers was a serious problem. In a letter to C. C. Smith, Assistant Director in the Cotton Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Johnston explained that blacks throughout the Delta were leaving the plantations “by the thousands.” While some were drafted into the military, others moved to “northern and coastal industrial centers where wartime orders opened the door of employment to an increasing number of unskilled workers.” To counter the loss of the plantation’s black labor force, Johnston “instructed his unit managers to make a ‘special effort to get families, the heads of which are 45 years and up in age ... with as many girls of work age as possible” because boys 18 years-old and older would not remain on the plantation for the entire season. He and other planters took aggressive steps to curtail the migration and alleviate labor problems. They unsuccessfully sought the use of west coast Japanese-Americans who had been federally relocated to the Delta to assist in planting and harvesting cotton. Johnston also wrote to the U.S. Employment Service in Washington stating that the registration of “able-bodied Delta and Pine Land laborers under the Selective Service Act [disturbed] the entire plantation labor system.” His “demand that farm labor be classified as ‘essential occupations’ under the executive War Manpower Directives” was not recognized.⁵¹⁷

The transition from manual labor to mechanization continued in the 1940s as competition between large and mid-sized farms forced planters in the Mid-South and

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 183-186. For additional information regarding the impact of mechanization and the war on the Southern plantation system, see Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, “Mississippi Delta Planters and Debates Over Mechanization, Labor, and Civil Rights in the 1940s,” *The Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 2 (May, 1994) and “Fighting for What We Did Not Have: How Mississippi Veterans Remember World War II,” and Neil R. McMillen, ed., *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South*. McMillen estimated that 85,000 black Mississippians served in the armed forces during World War II. He provided a detailed analysis of how the war affected black veterans during and after the war.

Mississippi Delta to choose between manual labor and farm mechanization.⁵¹⁸ By 1944, the shift to the wage system occurred as mechanization increased in relation to crop production and harvesting. After the war, mechanization increased in the Mississippi Delta and white agricultural workers were given preference for jobs operating mechanized farm equipment. On mid-size farms, which were generally family enterprises, black agricultural workers were often overlooked for jobs operating farm machinery. In these instances, blacks increasingly migrated to urban areas where they worked in small manufacturing plants that developed throughout the South. Mississippi planters were stunned as cotton lay unharvested in the fields and profits decreased.⁵¹⁹

The survival and longevity of the rural black one-room school was directly related to the economic and political goals of whites who created and maintained the New South and the plantation system. The rate and pace of decline of the “Jim Crow” plantation system was slower in the Deep South than it was in the Upper South and the Southern Border States.⁵²⁰ “The relative importance of the plantation regions was maintained by several devices in which racism was central. Although disenfranchisement eliminated the political threat of blacks in the southern states, blacks had to be kept repressed.”⁵²¹ Delta and Pine Land Company officials made some improvements in working and living conditions of black workers. However, these measures were implemented in adherence to the overall racial and paternalistic structures that existed on most plantations. Since all

⁵¹⁸ Johnson, Embree and Alexander, 43-44.

⁵¹⁹ Zhengkai, 184-185.

⁵²⁰ Aiken, 110-111.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

agricultural entities were primarily motivated by profits, any efforts to improve the lives of black laborers were linked to increasing revenues.

One-room schools were an integral part of an economic system used by southern whites to maintain racial segregation, economic dominance, and to ensure that there was an abundant supply of low-skilled blacks available to meet the needs of its agricultural labor force.⁵²² Therefore, when blacks left the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta before, during, and after World War II, some openly admitted that they were leaving because they were trying to escape from more than just bad economic conditions. “If blacks often cited hard times as their reason for leaving, they also frequently alluded to social causes, to caste discrimination, dilapidated housing and inferior schools, legal injustice and mob violence.”⁵²³ The war, increased black northern migration, and increased mechanization brought about gradual political, economic and social changes within the plantation system. These factors facilitated a transition from the New South to the Modern South.

Prior to the war, educational opportunities for black tenant farmers and sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta were limited. Delta Planters generally agreed that educating black tenants and sharecroppers was not a priority because it did little to enhance their commercial goals and expectations. Plantations in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta shared several commonalities, including a desire to make as much as possible while paying their laborers as little as possible.⁵²⁴ White Planters such as Oscar Bledsoe III, whose family had owned and operated the O.F. Bledsoe Plantation in

⁵²² Zhengkai, 170-171.

⁵²³ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 263.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 128

Greenwood, Mississippi since 1849 held a staunchly traditional view of blacks as being only a source of cheap and dependable labor.⁵²⁵ He believed that since the New Deal, outside forces and individuals such as Eleanor Roosevelt and the Agricultural Adjustment Agency had unwisely interfered with the relationship between black tenants and white land owners in the Mississippi Delta and other states within the Lower South.⁵²⁶

In 1943, Frank Welch, Dean of Agriculture at Mississippi State College, published “The Plantation Land Tenure System in Mississippi,” a report that summarized a cooperative project between the Mississippi Experiment Station and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Welch found that “the Plantation system neither encourages nor requires a high level of literacy on the part of its general labor force. As a consequence, the percentage of functional illiteracy is still high among Delta plantation labor groups.”⁵²⁷ One of the factors examined in the study was illiteracy and educational status of 220 heads of families who were tenant farmers and sharecroppers who lived and worked on plantations in the Mississippi Delta.

Welch found that of 129 heads of black sharecropper plantation families, 60 could read and 69 (53.5%) could not read. Among tenant heads of families, 17 were surveyed; 7 could read and 11(64.7%) could not. The study also surveyed 23 wage-earning croppers of which 12 could read and 11 (47.8%) could not read. There were 51 regular

⁵²⁵ Oscar F. Bledsoe III, “The Political Aspect of the Delta and the Plantation System,” May 1942, in Sillers Papers, Box 14, Folder 23. This memo from Bledsoe was sent to Delta Council members who were concerned with the increased migration of black tenants and sharecroppers to the North. Bledsoe provided a concise history of outside government sponsored interference into the internal affairs of Mississippi Delta planters and their once-faithful black labor force. In summarizing some of the causes of the black exodus, Bledsoe stated that the New Deal and efforts to increase the black vote had undermined the superiority of white farmers and agitated blacks, causing them to become dissatisfied with their circumstances in the South.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

⁵²⁷ Frank J. Welch, “The Land Tenure System in Mississippi,” Sillers Papers, Box 29, Folder 9.

wage-worker heads of families included in the study, 27 could read and 24 (47.1%) could not read.⁵²⁸ The study revealed that school absentee rates were high among children of Delta plantation workers. Approximately 56 (24.2%) of the 231 children between 6-18 years of age within the sample were not enrolled in school.⁵²⁹ According to the U.S. Census 1940, there were 51,348 total sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta of which 4,412 (8.6%) were white. There were 7,244 wage earning share croppers of which 2,869 (39.65%) were white. The 1940 Census records show that the majority of the Mississippi Delta's population (81%) was black and predominately they lived in rural areas of the region as compared to 19% white. In the non-farm areas of the delta, there were approximately 45,000 residents living in rural towns within the Mississippi Delta with a racial composition of 49.2% white and 50.8% black.⁵³⁰ In spite of the advantage of population size, blacks in the Mississippi Delta were disenfranchised and were politically powerless even in rural urban centers.

By 1940 blacks who lived in the Delta did not have any decision-making authority within the dual educational system and remained vulnerable to planters and politicians who allocated funds to operate black schools. Generally, white officials believed that improving black education should be handled wisely because it was so closely related to controlling black labor. Members of the Delta Council such as Walter Sillers, a legislator and plantation owner, and Oscar Bledsoe, had a vested interest in controlling black education in the Delta. On May 2, 1942, Bledsoe wrote to Sillers:

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ United States Census, 1940, Agricultural Mississippi, 1, 26-33.

Thanks for your asking me to assist you on the Resolution Committee of the Delta Council; but I do not think I can be much help to you for the following reasons. The Federal government has made a close study of labor conditions here in the Delta, and the plantation system is under fire, as they found wide-spread mistreatment and unfair dealings with the sharecropper. A pink group in the Department of Agriculture, led by Appleby, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, and backed by Mrs. Roosevelt and the President, are determined to buy up the Delta plantations and turn them over to the negroes in order to prevent these unfair dealings and also to promote their standing with the northern Negro vote.⁵³¹

In spite of this type of opposition, the Delta Council passed a resolution on May 4, 1943 that advocated improvements to black educational facilities, especially school buildings. The council unanimously adopted the resolution believing it would be useful in improving the overall happiness of the black labor class in the Mississippi Delta.⁵³² Due to his political standing as a senior legislator and Speaker of the House, Sillers believed that these resolutions would be considered seriously by the Mississippi General Assembly.

State supported efforts to use tax dollars to improve rural black teacher training began in the 1940s. For more than forty years, rural black education suffered because over 60% of the states rural black teachers did not have a high school diploma.⁵³³ The standard level of education for a rural black teacher in Mississippi during this period was completion of the 8th grade. Emily May Carouthers remembered that in the early 1900s, she attended a Buena Vista one-room school located on the Delta and Pine Land Company plantation. Her cousin, Jeremiah, who was also enrolled in the school, turned

⁵³¹ Bledsoe letter to Sillers, 2 May 1942, in Sillers Papers, Box 14, Folder 23.

⁵³² Minutes of Delta Council Committee Meeting, 4 May 1943, in Sillers Papers, Box 14, Folder 22.

⁵³³ Bolton, *Hardest Deal of All*, 30.

around the next year and taught her at the same school after he finished the eighth grade.⁵³⁴ Minnie Jameson of Fayette County recalled how easy it was for her to get hired as a teacher in Mississippi after she finished the black training high school in Somerville.

Many of the teachers in Mississippi had not finished the twelfth grade. So since I had completed the twelfth grade, they talked with the county superintendent and she told 'em that I could get an emergency certification to teach and if I would enroll in school when school was out then I could teach. So this is what I did from '45 to 48.⁵³⁵

In the 1950's, the number of one-room schools in Bolivar County declined as the number of two- and three-room schools increased. Even though there was a decrease in one-room schools, they remained the dominant type of school building throughout many remote counties in the Mid-South and the Delta until the 1960s. State school officials finally acknowledged that there were disparities in black and white educational facilities as a result of inequalities in the distribution of education expenditures at the state and local level.⁵³⁶ However, because of racially motivated political resistance and a refusal on the part of local whites to use county tax dollars to fund black public education on a fair and equitable basis, ambitious equalization campaigns spearheaded by elite planters within southern rural counties were often unsuccessful.

During the early to mid-1950s, more black county training and high schools were constructed in rural counties throughout the South. The training schools educated a new generation of one-room school teachers. In 1951, Mississippi had over 1,400 one-room

⁵³⁴ Ibid., 31.

⁵³⁵ Hamburger, 32.

⁵³⁶ *Biennial Report and Recommendations of State Superintendent of Public Education, 1943-44 and 1944-1945*, 38-43.

schools with the vast majority located in rural black communities.⁵³⁷ Increasingly, the relationship between black schools located in the small southern urban centers and rural black schools improved as more graduates of small urban schools chose to teach in rural schools located in their immediate or adjacent counties. With the exception of Mississippi, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the overall quality of black teachers gradually improved in the rural and urban Mid-South, especially in Tennessee. By 1950, only 44 of 1,418 black Tennessee teachers had less than one year of college academic training and 103 had graduate degrees.⁵³⁸

Prior to *Brown*, the NAACP increased its efforts to establish a strong presence in the Deep South and Mississippi Delta. One of their goals was adequate funding for black schools in the rural and urban South. “This strategy of educational equalization sought to ensure a balanced distribution of resources between separate black and white schools.”⁵³⁹ Eventually, in the late 1940s, the NAACP shifted its focus to legally challenging Jim Crow Laws and racial segregation based on the *Plessy* doctrine. Many southern blacks and whites continued to work toward equalization after the NAACP shifted its focus. Progressive whites and state governments that wanted to promote the virtues of the Modern South believed that equalization was the best approach to resolve problems characteristic to black education in the South. “By the 1940s many Mississippians, black

⁵³⁷ *Biennial Report of Mississippi Department of Education, 1952-1953*, 64. In 1950, Tennessee had 1,744 one-room schools of which 1,286 served white students and 458 served black students in rural West Tennessee counties; see *State of Tennessee Annual Statistical Report*, Tennessee Department of Education for Scholastic Year 1950, 53.

⁵³⁸ *State of Tennessee Annual Statistical Report, 1950*, 45.

⁵³⁹ Charles S. Bolton, “Mississippi School Equalization Program, 1945-1954: A Last Gasp to Try to Maintain a Segregated Educational System,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 66 no. 1 (Nov. 2000): 782.

and white, increasingly understood that the state's minimal support for black public education would no longer do."⁵⁴⁰ Black educators, who for decades had been paid less than their white counterparts, pressed local and state governments to increase funding for black education.

In the Mississippi, the Delta Council and other civic organizations which were controlled by elite southern planters fought to maintain racial segregation and the plantation system of the New South. Using their political influence in the state legislature, they endorsed laws to preserve the status quo. These efforts to improve black education while preserving the concept of separate-but-equal became known as the Mississippi Equalization plan. In June 1945, the Delta Council Educational Policy Committee drafted a proposal that outlined how they believed the state should approach efforts to improve black education. The members of the committee wanted to have their suggestions incorporated into the language of Senate Bill 619, which was under consideration by the Mississippi state senate. The committee, chaired by Hudson Kyle, proposed that the Delta Council "endorse the principles of Senate Bill 619 for the enlargement of vocational education in the State, but that the bill be so amended as to permit State control of the grant of Federal funds and that there be no interference or dictation to the State Department of Education by the Federal government."⁵⁴¹ Generally, the Delta Council opposed efforts by the federal government to ensure that blacks received an equal share of federal dollars which were earmarked for vocational education. Just as they had opposed the Roosevelt administration's efforts to ensure that

⁵⁴⁰Ibid., 784.

⁵⁴¹Delta Council, Report of Educational Policy Committee, 14 June 1945, Sillers Papers, Box 14, Folder 22.

southern blacks received an equitable share of New Deal funds, the Delta Council opposed any language that explicitly stated or dictated guidelines for distributing a fair share of federal dollars to blacks.⁵⁴²

The Delta Council adopted a similar stance when they used their considerable influence to affect the content, delivery and outcomes of black education at the state and local level. Its Educational Policy Committee proposed:

1. That better school buildings and equipment be furnished to Negroes of the State, this to be effected by legislation permitting counties to levy up to a two-mill levy and a biennial appropriation by the legislature of two million dollars to match funds secured by two-mill tax.
2. That the Multiple adoption of textbooks be recommended.
3. That increased salaries be paid to better-trained Negro teachers. (never occurred)
4. That a junior college be established in the Delta for training Negro teachers, this college to be established and maintained by state appropriation.
5. That the county superintendents of schools in the Delta counties be urged to have county surveys made of their respective Negro school systems, with the idea of relocating schools where necessary and to establish a county vocational school, if necessary. (Bolivar County Mississippi complied)
6. That the Delta Council urge the Board of Trustees of Higher Institutions of Learning to appoint a liaison man to supervise the training and instruction in Negro institutions of higher learning.⁵⁴³

The origins of Mississippi's equalization program can be traced back to 1941 when the Mississippi Association of Teachers in Colored Schools (MATCS) became frustrated after meeting with state and local political leaders. Disappointed with the

⁵⁴² R. B. Snowden to Oscar Bledsoe III, 22 April 1942, Sillers Papers, Box 14, Folder 23.

⁵⁴³ Delta Council: Report on Education Policy Committee, Sillers Papers, Box 14, Folder 22.

responses they received from political leaders, black educators united and mobilized because “they left the meeting ‘without promise’ and without hope.”⁵⁴⁴ The organization created a legislative committee to “use whatever method available to law-abiding citizens in a democracy to secure better educational opportunities for [their] children and better salaries for [their] teachers.”⁵⁴⁵ Although initial efforts were unsuccessful, MATCS gained momentum throughout World War II. Ultimately, the organization believed that the courts would eventually be the next progressive step in their campaign to achieve school equalization in Mississippi. By the end of the war, Bolivar County became a focal point of the equalization movement. “In January 1945 T.R.M. Howard, a black doctor from Mound Bayou, bluntly announced to the black Greenwood Civic League what most of his listeners already knew: the state’s black educational system was a failure.”⁵⁴⁶ By the end of the war, the Mississippi legislature and local governments had not done much to improve black elementary and secondary education in the state.

However, for black educators, the thousands of dilapidated one-room schools located in every rural county in Mississippi were tangible and symbolic evidence that black education was inferior to white education. “During the 1909-10 school year, the state had 3,006 black schools; a number that had increased to 3,737 by 1946, only 100 had been consolidated.”⁵⁴⁷ Therefore, in 1946, as the consolidation movement began to crystallize in Mississippi, the problems that black educators faced surfaced and were manifested in rural black one-room schools. As late as 1946, “most rural schools in the

⁵⁴⁴ Bolton, “Mississippi School Equalization Program,” 784

⁵⁴⁵Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶Ibid., 784.

⁵⁴⁷Ibid., 788.

state had short terms, few supplies, and poorly paid teachers in one-, two-, or three-teacher operations. But during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Mississippi, like other southern states, dramatically upgraded white schools, while black education--receiving only limited state aid--languished.⁵⁴⁸ Southern whites implemented school consolidation programs that formed larger modern grade schools for whites that employed at least one teacher for each grade. These schools were managed by local county officials appointed by county governments that had taxing authority. Mississippi passed legislation in 1910 that allowed county governments to establish consolidated white rural school districts and granted them the authority to levy taxes to support each system. "While providing little benefit for blacks, the consolidation of white schools created additional burdens for black schools and black taxpayers. In some places, county officials actually moved black schools to make way for the new, larger white schools."⁵⁴⁹

By 1946, as a result of white school consolidation, Mississippi realized a noticeable improvement in white elementary and secondary education in the state of Mississippi. Whites had basically discontinued using one-room schools altogether. G. J. Cain, State Superintendent of Schools in Mississippi, acknowledged that "there is as much difference between the modern Mississippi consolidated school plant and the one-teacher school it has replaced as there is between the modern automobile and the 1890 horse and buggy."⁵⁵⁰ Each county controlled school consolidation for white schools and made sure that local taxes were used to adequately fund these schools.

⁵⁴⁸Ibid., 787.

⁵⁴⁹ Bolton, *Hardest Deal of All*, 19.

⁵⁵⁰ G. J. Cain, "Financing the Public Schools of Mississippi" (August 1946), 14-15, Mississippi Biennial Report.

Disenfranchisement of blacks at the county and state levels ensured that whites controlled and dominated the political process. Without political power blacks in the plantation regions of the Mid-South and the Delta were denied an opportunity to establish agency or control of their schools. “More typically, school consolidation was for whites only, and it widened the inequalities between the educations of the two races throughout Mississippi.”⁵⁵¹ Throughout the South, school consolidation proved successful for white education from 1910 to the 1940s. However, for blacks, school consolidation and promises of equalization had a totally different meaning.⁵⁵² Whites were content with continuing the emphasis on industrial training and limiting the scope of black education to eight grades of schooling.

World War II marked a period of transition for blacks in America. Blacks in the Lower South mobilized and took steps to change their social and economic conditions. “Black Mississippians were deeply moved by wartime idealism and were increasingly sensitive to their anomalous position in a democratic nation. The call to serve in the armed forces if often only in a segregated labor battalion quickened black pride and eroded the oppressive isolation of rural life.”⁵⁵³ For William Lucas Sr. of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, the military and industrial mobilization caused by America’s entrance into the war forced black and white Mississippians to come into contact with other races in America and abroad. Traditional assumptions about race were being challenged as black

⁵⁵¹ Bolton, “Mississippi’s School Equalization Program,” 790.

⁵⁵² The efforts to improve white education in the South during the Progressive era can be traced in Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern States, 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill: The North Carolina University Press, 1958); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), examines and describes the evolution of black education from Reconstruction to the New Deal.

⁵⁵³ McMillen, *Dark Journey*, 302.

and white southerners were forced into the national and international social mainstream. Their wartime experiences forced both black and white Mississippians to consider new, less racially stratified, social and economic possibilities.⁵⁵⁴

In the mid-1940s, throughout most regions of the Lower South, more funds were gradually made available to black schools at the local level. As improvements were made, more blacks took advantage of improved educational facilities. From 1940-1952, the South as a whole began to spend more money to educate black and white children. Mississippi's per pupil expenditure increased from \$19.52 per student in 1940 to \$61.89 per pupil in 1952, an increase of 217%. The Tennessee per pupil expenditure increased from \$33.47 in 1940 to \$101.27 in 1952, an increase of 204%.⁵⁵⁵

Before *Brown*, the racial atmosphere and arguments against governmental oversight in local political affairs hampered efforts by state and federal officials to implement a meaningful equalization program at the county level. Black Mississippians realized that by not consolidating and funding black schools at the same rate as white schools, the state was ensuring that black schools remained inferior to white schools.⁵⁵⁶

Sidney D. Redmond, a black physician from Jackson, Mississippi, lamented that:

The sending of the Negro boy and girl on a several mile trudge, to an old 'tumbled down,' one or two teacher-room shack, where one teacher has to try to teach 5,6, or 7 grades, while the white child whizzes by in a bus

⁵⁵⁴ Rogers, 103.

⁵⁵⁵ Pierce et al, 156.

⁵⁵⁶ Bolton, "Mississippi School Equalization Program," 782. Legal scholar Derrick A. Bell Jr., in "The Remedy in *Brown* is Effective Schooling for Black Children," *Journal of Social Policy*, 8, no. 11 (1984): 15 argued that, "the mandated physical separation of Black children in segregated schools was a manifestation of the real evil, racism, and not the evil itself." With school integration literally forced on an unwilling white South, white racism remained "as viable and as pernicious a force for harming the hearts and minds of black children in a racially-balanced school as it ever was under the pre-*Brown* 'separate but equal' system."

bought and paid for with the taxes paid by all the people, to a 12 grade school house, of 12 or 15 rooms, of commodious proportions, manned by 15 to 20 well paid teachers-where the work is so divided and systemized that real results are possible.⁵⁵⁷

In Bolivar County, consolidation was hampered at the county level due to disenfranchised black taxpayers who were denied opportunities to have a say in how their schools were operated, financed, or located. Key decisions affecting rural and urban black schools were being made by outside forces who did not consult blacks. By 1950, there were only 49 white one-room, 83 two-room, and 116 three-room schools operating in the entire state of Mississippi. However, there were still 1,563 one-room, 733 two-room, and 174 three-room black schools. There were 393,804 white school-age children and 492,349 black school-age children in the state. Of that number, there were 281,510 white school-age children and 274,605 black school-aged children enrolled in school.⁵⁵⁸ From 1946 through 1956, the NAACP adopted a policy that focused on challenging the separate-but-equal doctrine in the federal courts rather than at the state and local level. The NAACP sought federal assistance to enforce the courts' decisions at the state and local levels where government officials were increasingly resisting federally imposed mandates to speed up the state's equalization efforts.⁵⁵⁹

During the post-World War II period of the 1940s, the courts gradually began to rule that state and local officials had to show a good faith effort to equalize school systems if they were going to use the *Plessy* case as a precedent for maintaining a dual

⁵⁵⁷Bolton, "Mississippi's School Equalization Program," 790.

⁵⁵⁸ J.M. Tubbs, *State of Mississippi Department of Education: Statistical Data on School Session 1950-1951*, Jackson Mississippi, 7.

⁵⁵⁹ Don Shoemaker, ed., *With All Deliberate Speed: Segregation Desegregation in Southern Schools* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 2.

system of education. In Virginia, there were two court cases, *Corbin v. County School Board of Pulaski, Virginia* and *Smith v. Prince Edwards County Virginia*, brought before the Federal Courts in the early 1950s. In each case, the courts ruled that separate-but-equal was constitutional; however, the standards for meeting the equal status were more rigidly defined by the federal court. The courts found that there were noticeable inequalities with each of these dual systems as it related to curricula and facilities. If the counties wanted to maintain their dual system of education, each would have to take steps to ensure that these inequalities were remedied immediately. Both school boards argued that they lacked the financial resources to bring the black school system up to par with the white school system. “The court held that neither the poor financial condition of the school district nor the disproportionate amount of school taxes paid by whites had any bearing on the case. Subsequently, when improvements to the Negro school proved inadequate, the plaintiffs petitioned for a contempt citation.”⁵⁶⁰ By 1952, the federal courts and black plaintiffs who brought cases to court were no longer willing to accept token equality within southern dual school systems as it related to teacher pay, adequate buildings, and the allocation of per pupil expenditures.⁵⁶¹

During the 1950s, rural black schools in Marshall County did not experience any significant improvements. Generally high unemployment rates negatively affected rural black communities and schools within the county.⁵⁶² Marshall County rural black

⁵⁶⁰ Ashmore, 50-51.

⁵⁶¹ Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), argued that the NAACP's persistent support for equalization litigation might have been a strategy which was as effective as their decision to attack the legality of racial segregation because of massive resistance by whites to abandoning Jim Crow. See Bolton, “Mississippi School Equalization Program,” 782.

⁵⁶² Callejo-Perez, 33.

schools were relatively better than those found in counties in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta due to its lower concentration of tenant farmers and sharecroppers. With a higher percentage of black independent farmers and land owners, Marshall County black schools were better funded. Students viewed school attendance as a priority and crop harvesting was a secondary consideration.⁵⁶³

The perspectives of students who attended one-room schools in Fayette County and Marshall County provided additional insights regarding the social and cultural aspects of these schools. Their varied experiences were directly related to the circumstances they experienced in racially segregated communities. However, as a whole, these individuals acknowledged that these institutions affected their personal, philosophical, and psychological well-being. Generally, each of these individuals believed that the segregated schools they attended were woefully inferior to the schools their white neighbors attended. They were aware of the social, cultural and economic conditions that created the need for one-room schools and the subsequent effects these schools had on limiting their educational and occupational opportunities.

Watson Anderson Jr. was born and raised in Hearn Grove, a small community located near Byhalia in Marshall County. His family was poor, yet they managed to purchase 125 acres. From 1946 to 1948, he attended the one-room Hearn Grove Elementary School where his sister-in-law, Ethel Watson, was his teacher. He then attended Isaac Chapel School, another one-room school located in Byhalia, from 1949-1955. He recalled that his “great-grandfather, Sam Watson, donated the plot of land that

⁵⁶³ Hamburger, 39-40.

the Hearn Grove School was built on. The school was right next to the cemetery and within walking distance of the Hearn Grove CME Church.”

There were fifty of us in this one-roomed school and we didn't have a serious discipline problem because the teachers ruled with a good piece of wood, a ruler, and an open line of communication to our parents. If I cut up in school, the teacher disciplined me. When I got home, I was disciplined again by my parents, and that was the way I learned to respect authority.

The schools were sub-standard compared to the white schools located in and around Holly Springs. Parents and teachers, who did as much as the “white folks allowed,” wanted to make sure that all of the basic subjects were taught. The church, parents, and teachers expected each child to put forth their best efforts to succeed in school. Usually, the textbooks were second-hand and often fell apart before the school year ended. Parents saved money and gave it to the teachers to buy extra copies of the books so that every child had a book for each subject. “The white folks didn't care about blacks receiving an adequate education. All they cared about was making sure Negroes stayed on their side of the track and stayed in their place.” Whites donated funds to pay teachers' salaries. The county also paid a portion of the Jeanes teacher's salary and was expected to purchase resources for instruction. The Jeanes teacher came out twice a year to inspect the grounds and attendance rolls.⁵⁶⁴

James T. Robinson was also born in Marshall County, as were his parents and grandparents who migrated there from North Carolina in 1878. His family owned one of the largest farms in the county. Robinson recalled that his father, Thomas Robinson “worked hard and paid for 425 acres of land before World War II began. He managed to save money to purchase their farm during the depression.” His father stressed the

⁵⁶⁴ Watson Anderson, interviewed by author, Memphis, TN. March 15, 2009.

importance of literacy and education to his sons and daughters. The one-room dilapidated McComb School was located a mile and a half from their farm. His sister, Lillian Talbot, was his first teacher. All of his teachers had a high school education but none had a college education. The black teachers were supervised by “an old white woman named Mrs. Watkins, who was the Jeanes teacher for Marshall County.” The teacher taught 33 students five subjects: reading, writing, math, spelling, and civics. The books were used because the white county school board insisted that they be used. The land for the school was donated by a wealthy white land owner, Bud McComb, who lived in Marshall County. In spite of the poor conditions, the county insisted that the school met the minimum criterion for Negro education. Students—who came from homes where the parents worked as tenants, sharecroppers, and small independent farmers—attended school nine months each year on a split schedule to accommodate the planting and harvesting seasons. The school day consisted of a seven-hour day with a 45-minute recess for lunch and physical play. Classes began at 8 a.m. and ended at 3 p.m. Rust College and Mississippi Industrial College, which educated black teachers and semi-professionals, had input into the daily operation of the schools. Robinson believed industrial education was a “mixed blessing” because it restricted blacks to agricultural and industrial occupations.⁵⁶⁵

Othello Robinson, James Robinson’s brother, also attended McComb Elementary School from 1953 to 1956. When the school was permanently closed the following year, he attended Pleasant Grove, a one-room school in Red Bank. He recalled that, “things hadn’t really changed at McComb from the time my older siblings left and I started

⁵⁶⁵ James T. Robinson, interviewed by author, Red Bank, Mississippi, March 28, 2009.

attending. You just had to make the best of a bad situation. The important thing was to get an education.” He later transferred to the Rosenwald School in Byhalia for grades five through eight. He graduated from Simms High School located in Holly Springs in 1962.⁵⁶⁶

Equalization efforts in Bolivar County, like most Mississippi counties, moved at a relatively slower pace than other regions of the South. Equalization measures proposed by Governor Hugh White were rejected by state legislators who expressed the resentment and opposition of their white constituents. Beginning in the 1949-1950 school year, Bolivar County began to provide publically funded bus transportation for black students. This significantly improved the average daily attendance rates for black students. A. H. Ramsey, Superintendent of Bolivar County Schools, reported: “Before the transportation of colored pupils was begun, there were 62 one-room teacher schools with an average daily attendance (A.D.A.) of 2,481 which comprised 29% of all the colored pupils in school that year. With the advent of transportation the 62 were reduced to 30 in 1952-53 and again to 26 in 1953-54.”⁵⁶⁷ The improvement in school attendance rates for black rural students in Bolivar County was directly related to the reduction in the number of one-teacher type schools and improved transportation. A county-wide consolidation program from 1948-1954 reduced the number of one-room schools significantly and changed the composition of black education in the county. Ramsey found that “in 1948-49, there were only two schools for colored pupils in the County with more than 7 teachers; in 1952-53, there were six with more than 7, while in 1953-54, 44.6% of all

⁵⁶⁶ Othello Robinson, interviewed by author, Red Bank, Mississippi, March 28, 2009.

⁵⁶⁷ A.H. Ramsey, “A Study of Bolivar County Schools: 1953-54,” Sillers Papers, Box 60, Folder 12.

colored pupils were in schools with more than seven teachers.”⁵⁶⁸ Additionally, in each school district within Bolivar County, blacks now had representation on the local school boards. By 1953, the all-black town of Mount Bayou and Cleveland’s black school districts were given the authority to levy taxes for the support of their black schools.

School attendance rates were an important variable that affected black rural education in the South. The vast majority of Mississippi students (approximately 89%) were enrolled in elementary schools, grades one through eight. In 1943, there were 554,756 eligible black school-age children registered in Mississippi. Of that number, only 444,898 (80.2%) students attended public schools on a consistent basis. By comparison, there were 224,950 white students registered to attend grades one through eight. Of that number, 178,940 (79.5%) attended school on a regular basis. At the high school level, grades nine through twelve, there were 67,426 students registered. Of that number, 55,022 were white and 12,404 were black. Among registered white students, 46,793 (85%) attended on a regular basis; among registered black students, 10,061 (81%) attended on a regular basis. The low number of blacks registered in high schools was directly related to the low number of publically supported black high schools in the state. By 1943, there were only 100 tax-supported black high schools in the state compared to 565 white tax-supported public high schools. Of the 3,637 black elementary schools, 2,315 were one-room schools. Of the 1,319 white elementary schools, only 148 were one-room schools. White elementary public schools had experienced a significant level of consolidation by 1943.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ State of Mississippi Department of Education, *Statistical Data on School Session 1943-1944*.

When blacks protested against inequalities in Mississippi's dual education system, they pointed out the disparities in teacher-student ratios, teacher training and salaries. For example, in 1943, there were 15,864 public school teachers: 9,317 were white serving 279,972 students and 6,547 were black serving 274,784 students. The teacher-student ratio for whites was one-to-thirty while the ratio for blacks was one-to-forty-one. Of the 9,317 white teachers, 4,577 had at least four years of college training while only 684 of the 6,547 black teachers had similar credentials. Of the black teachers, 4,746 had less than two years of college as compared to 1,299 whites. On average, white teachers received \$991.47 per year compared to black teachers who received an average of \$334.56.⁵⁷⁰

Black elementary schools in Mississippi did not undergo significant consolidation until the 1950-1951 scholastic year when the number of one-room schools was reduced to 1,514 statewide. These schools were replaced by 733 two-room and 174 three-room structures. By 1952, there were 267 tax-supported black public high schools. Due to the shortage of black high schools in rural areas, most blacks who lived in rural communities never attended high school. Since their local school boards refused to fund black high schools, they were limited to an elementary school education. While approximately 80% of black school-age children were enrolled in elementary schools, less than 12% of the black school-age population was enrolled in public high schools. Approximately 78% of white school-age students were enrolled in elementary level schools and 22% of them were enrolled in tax-supported public high schools. On the eve of *Brown*, the majority of black students in Mississippi were still enrolled in one-room schools while white students

⁵⁷⁰ State of Mississippi Department of Education, *Statistical Data on School Session 1943-1944*.

attended 541 consolidated elementary schools with seven to sixteen classrooms per school.⁵⁷¹

Mississippi's lack of success as it related to school equalization for rural black schools was reflective of the Lower South as a whole.⁵⁷² From 1940 through 1952, average daily attendance for black students in the South increased as southern states began to spend more money to improve or equalize black schools. "Since 1940, the South has made its greatest efforts on behalf of public education, and it has given Negro children the largest share of the total outlay they have ever known. In 1951-52, the thirteen Southern states spent more than 1.2 billion for school operations--nearly four times the expenditures for 1939-40."⁵⁷³

"In Tennessee by 1940, there were 4,554 white schools in the entire state compared to 1,073 Negro schools. One-room schools accounted for 42% of the 4,554 white schools and 60.5% of the 1,073 Negro schools."⁵⁷⁴ These figures indicated that Tennessee school officials relied heavily upon the one-teacher type school buildings to meet the needs of rural black students. These figures are also consistent with the reality that completing eight years of school was the benchmark for the average black student in rural Tennessee. Additionally, the majority of Tennessee's black population lived in rural counties in the southwest region of the state; therefore, the majority of black rural

⁵⁷¹ Mississippi State Department of Education, *Statistical Data on School Session 1950-1951*.

⁵⁷² Thomas R. Waring, "The Southern Case Against Desegregation," *Harper's*, January, 1956, 39-45.

⁵⁷³ Ashmore, 62-63.

⁵⁷⁴ Pierce et.al., 226.

one-room schools in Tennessee were located in these southwest Tennessee counties.⁵⁷⁵

By 1950, nearly one-half (45.3%) of black rural elementary schools remained one-teacher type buildings.⁵⁷⁶ Tennessee's school equalization efforts which began in the 1940s were not totally motivated by race. Geographically, the majority of the state's black population lived in counties in the southwest section of the state where cotton and agriculture were the dominant industries. Northeast, Middle, and Southeast Tennessee were more industrialized and their population had a lower concentration and percentage of blacks.⁵⁷⁷

The recollections of black students who attended one-room schools in Fayette County, Tennessee, and Marshall County, Mississippi had similar themes. Born in 1928 in Fayette County, Bertha Franklin Kolheim described her birthplace as a small rural community located between Moscow and Rossville, Tennessee. Her parents were tenant farmers who "worked hard to keep a roof over their heads." She attended Hayes Grove Elementary School which was "basically a one-room shack that had no indoor heat except a pot-belly stove, no plumbing except a pump-well and a nearby out-house. Since we went to school during the day, we didn't notice that we didn't have electric lights." Her earliest memory of racial attitudes was associated with the death of her uncle, George Franklin, who was killed by a group of white men who became enraged when he opened a grocery store in Fayette County.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁵ State of Tennessee. *Annual Report Tennessee Department of Education for the Scholastic Year ending June 30, 1940*, Table IV, 82-83.

⁵⁷⁶ State of Tennessee, *Annual Statistical Report of Department of Education, 1950*, 52.

⁵⁷⁷ U.S. Census, *Characteristics of Population, 1940 and 1950*.

⁵⁷⁸ Bertha Kolheim, interviewed by author, Memphis, Tennessee, 3 March 2009.

Kolheim remembered using second-hand books throughout her education. “The schools taught you the basics and just enough to survive. After finishing the eighth grade at Hayes Grove, she attended Fayette County Training school from 1941 to 1942. She did not graduate but married and moved to Memphis in 1944 where she received her diploma from Booker T. Washington’s adult night school. “As soon as I got a chance, I left Fayette County and did not return there to live because it was a rural agricultural community and that did not suit my fancy.”⁵⁷⁹

Charlie Walton was born in 1930. Like his parents and grandparents, he was born and raised on Ames Plantation located in Fayette County. Beginning in 1936, he attended the one-room “Old Jones” school from grades one through four. From 1940 to 1944, he attended the two-room “New Jones” school for grades five through eight. Walton looked forward to attending school because he and other children who lived on the plantation enjoyed “walking together each day to and from the school.” All the parents, black and white, who lived on the plantation, stressed the importance of education to their children and promoted regular school attendance. These values were also reinforced by the leaders of the Jones CME Church. Since religion was an important social and cultural aspect of community, bible literacy was stressed in the school and reinforced in the church. Therefore, each day, special emphasis was placed on reading and writing at each grade level.⁵⁸⁰

Walton recalled that Dr. Ford, a male black teacher, taught reading and math during evening classes. “When Dr. Ford took over the class, he made sure that discipline

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Charlie Walton, interviewed by author, Memphis, Tennessee, 23 March 2009.

was strictly enforced.” When a child was disciplined for acting out at school, parents reinforced the punishment at home. Students understood that they were expected to put forward a serious effort in school. The majority of the young men who lived and worked on Ames, completed the eighth grade before being hired as full-time employees. The white students whose parents lived on the plantation, were transported by bus to the all-white school in Grand Junction.⁵⁸¹

Bobbie Pugh Walton, the wife of Charlie Walton, was born in 1931 on Ames where her family had lived and worked for more than 100 years. From 1937 to 1945, she walked three miles twice a day to attend “Old Jones” and “New Jones” schools. “The girls and boys were taught the same lessons in reading, writing, and arithmetic.” Girls were required to perform basic chores like stoking the fire, cleaning the board, and assisting the teachers. Walton believed that her teachers were dedicated to educating their students. In addition to the basic curriculum, teachers instilled the value of good citizenship, responsibility, and moral character. After finishing the eighth grade, she attended the black high school in Somerville. She recalled how happy she was to ride the bus to Somerville rather than the long walks she had made to attend the “Jones” schools. The curriculum for girls at the Somerville Training School consisted of math, reading, writing, basic English, science, and home economics. Her most profound memory of the training school was of the principal, John Kolheim, who “encouraged us to believe in ourselves and to always give our best effort no matter what the assigned task is.”⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Bobbie Walton, interviewed by author, Memphis, TN. March 23, 2009. Fayette County School Records, Fayette County School Board, Somerville, Tennessee.

Fayette County, Tennessee began its equalization and consolidation efforts in 1938 when there were seventy black elementary schools in the county.⁵⁸³ By 1948, the number of black elementary schools in the county had not decreased. Of the seventy black elementary schools in the county, there were thirty-four one-teacher schools, twenty-eight two-teacher schools, and six schools with more than three teachers. While consolidation efforts were slow, black teacher training and salary gaps between black and white teachers improved significantly.⁵⁸⁴

By 1950, rural black education in the South gradually improved as increased equalization efforts addressed issues such as overcrowding, poor teacher training, dilapidated buildings, and the lack of transportation. Consolidation of one-room elementary schools into two-room schools also increased the average daily attendance rates and reduced high failure rates which had been characteristic of rural black one-room schools during the 1930s and 1940s. Increasingly, the use of the one-room school as the primary place of learning for blacks in the rural South was being reduced. After *Brown*, black teacher training gradually improved throughout the South. Additionally, school accessibility improved as more counties used more funds to consolidate rural black one-room schools into two- or three-room schools. By 1952, as a result of equalization, a higher number of rural black children were attending two- and four-year high schools. Both Marshall County and Fayette County provided facilities for blacks to receive two or four additional years of education beyond grade school.

⁵⁸³ State of Tennessee. *Annual Report of the Department of Education for the Scholastic Year Ending June 30, 1939*, table XIII, 106.

⁵⁸⁴ State of Tennessee. *Annual Statistical Report Tennessee Department of Education for the Scholastic Year Ending June 30, 1949*, 104.

In Bolivar County, efforts to improve black elementary education began in 1945 when the School Board initiated a school consolidation plan to reduce the number of black schools from 134 to 78.⁵⁸⁵ By 1948, the number of black schools in Bolivar County had been reduced to 101. There were sixty-two one-teacher schools, thirty two-teacher schools, one six-teacher schools, three seven-teacher schools, and two schools in Cleveland and Mound Bayou with more than fourteen teachers.⁵⁸⁶ By 1953, the number of black one-teacher schools had been drastically reduced in Bolivar County. During this period, the average daily attendance rate increased as publically funded transportation was provided for black students. In 1953, the number of black elementary schools in Bolivar County decreased to sixty-seven. Of the sixty-seven, there were thirty one-teacher types, twenty two-teacher type, six three-teacher type, one four-teacher type, and ten with more than six teachers.⁵⁸⁷ Additionally, from 1947 to 1953, the total percentage of Bolivar County black students attending one room schools was reduced from 61 % to 31%. The majority of the one-teacher schools that closed in Bolivar County were previously housed in churches located on or near plantations or large family farms where black tenants lived.

The NAACPs fight for school desegregation gained momentum from 1948 through 1954 as more judges in federal courts presided over segregation cases in states north of the Mason-Dixie Line. A pattern developed whereby federal judges ruled in favor of arguments that challenged the constitutionality of the separate-but-equal doctrine

⁵⁸⁵ Bolivar County Schools Board, 1945 School Redistribution Map, Sillers Papers, Box 3, Folder 8.

⁵⁸⁶ A. H Ramsey, "A Study of Bolivar County Schools: 1953-54," Sillers Papers, Box 60, Folder 12.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-b.

and racial segregation in public venues. The plaintiffs argued that separate facilities often meant accepting unequal facilities which were inferior in quality when compared to those made available to whites. In the South, this inequality was often manifested by inferior black schools in districts that maintained a dual school system.

As more blacks migrated to cities in the North, Northeast, and Midwest, legally enforced discrimination in housing, public schools, and other public venues became key issues facing minority populations. In these urban areas, old Jim Crow laws that enforced racially-based housing, compulsory school segregation codes, and statutes denying minority groups equal access were increasingly being challenged in state and federal courts. However, there were additional tensions growing within these new communities where blacks migrated. These tensions were created by a set of factors that produced more de facto school segregation in northern, eastern, and mid-western cities as more and more blacks moved into segregated inner-city communities after they left the South.⁵⁸⁸ The concept of neighborhood or residential schools increased the likelihood that black children would still be attending racially segregated schools when they moved outside of the South.⁵⁸⁹

The vast majority of the students who migrated from the South came to these congested urban black communities having previously attended one-room segregated schools in the South. Black migrants who had completed their eighth grade education had better success finding and maintaining jobs when they reached the urban centers of

⁵⁸⁸ Chicago Historical Society, Encyclopedia of Chicago, Christopher Manning, "African Americans," <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org> (accessed 20 March 2011).

⁵⁸⁹ Alex Poinsett, "Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia and other Northern Cities Face Court Suits Against Limiting Race Mixing of Pupils: School Segregation Up North," *Ebony*, June 1962, 89-119.

the North, Midwest, and East. “The migration rate for 5-8 schooling group was nearly three times as large as the 0-4 groups, but the earnings differential was only twice as large.”⁵⁹⁰ These figures indicated that the grade school education most black migrants received prior to their exodus from the South was beneficial. With this basic education, they were literate, more employable, and better candidates for low skilled nonfarm-related jobs in urban cities in the North or smaller urban towns in the South. Generally, blacks with a grade school education tended to leave the South at a higher rate than those who had not completed the eighth grade.⁵⁹¹ Education levels for black men were directly related to potential migration, employment, and income in the North and South as it related to non-agricultural jobs.⁵⁹²

Brown v Board of Education was the first serious attempt to remedy the problem of one-and-two-room schools in the Mid South and Lower South; therefore proving to have an impact on rural black one-and-two-room schools. The decision facilitated the implementation of the consolidation-equalization movement in the Mid South and Mississippi Delta. This movement would lead to the building of more rural black high schools, increased teacher pay, and the demise of the one-room school as the primary educational institutional for blacks.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹⁰ Margo, 118.

⁵⁹¹ Paul Frymer, *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 54-76.

⁵⁹² Margo, 112.

⁵⁹³ Bolton, *Hardest Deal of All*, 61.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion: Brown v. Board of Education and the Demise of Rural Black One-Room Schools

Even before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the foundation for dismantling segregation in the United States had been strategically formulated. As part of its Cold War anti-communism campaign, President Harry Truman's administration began to actively investigate and examine the negative effects that the separate-but-equal doctrine had on America domestically and internationally. On December 5, 1946, Truman established a fifteen-member Committee on Civil Rights to investigate the status of civil rights and make recommendations for the "adoption and establishment of legislation or otherwise and more adequate and effective means and procedures for the protection of civil rights of the people of the United States." In December 1947, the committee submitted a 178-page report, "To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights." Within the opening paragraphs of the report, the committee stated some obvious truths:

This report deals with serious civil rights violations in all sections of the country. Much of it has to do with limitations on civil rights in our southern states. To a great extent this reflects reality; many of the most sensational and serious violations of civil rights have taken place in the South. There are understandable historical reasons for this. Among the most obvious is the fact that the greater proportion of our largest, most visible minority group -- the Negroes -- live in the South.

In addition to this seeming stress on the problems of one region, many of our illustrations relate to the members of various minority groups, with particular emphasis upon Negroes. The reasons are obvious; these minorities have often had their civil rights abridged. Moreover, the unjust basis for these abridgements stands out sharply because of the distinctiveness of the groups. To place this apparent emphasis in its proper

perspective one need only recall the history of bigotry and discrimination.⁵⁹⁴

The presidential committee found that the separate-but-equal doctrine had failed in several aspects. First, it disregarded “the equalitarian spirit of the American heritage” because it designated one group as superior to another. Secondly, separation had resulted in “inequality” rather than equality.” And thirdly, separate-but-equal had “institutionalized segregation and kept groups apart despite indisputable evidence that normal contacts among these groups tend to promote social harmony.” Among their recommendations, they included the enactment of an anti-lynching act, an end to the poll tax as a voting prerequisite, an end to segregation and discrimination in all branches of the military, statutes to protect against discrimination in election primaries, and educational laws prohibiting discrimination in public and private institutions. Ultimately, the committee found “no adequate defense for segregation.” It recommended “the elimination of segregation, based on race, color, creed, or national origin, from American life.”⁵⁹⁵

By 1950, black and white progressive-minded educators in Mississippi united to demand a statewide comprehensive equalization program to improve black school facilities throughout the state. For African Americans equalization translated into an all-out effort to eliminate the thousands of dilapidated segregated one-room schools scattered throughout their rural communities. In rural and urban white communities modern multi-classroom facilities were the norm for whites throughout the state of Mississippi.

⁵⁹⁴ Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, “To Secure These Rights: The Report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights,” <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/civilrights/srights4.htm#139> (accessed 25 May 2011).

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Additionally, the use of one-room facilities to educate white Mississippians had been virtually eliminated. In the fall of 1950, three white education organizations—the state PTA, the State Department of Education, and the Mississippi Education Association—joined the black Mississippi Association of Teachers in Colored Schools to create the biracial Mississippi Citizens Council on Education (MCCE). Their mission was to investigate the widely discussed equalization question. Among other actions, the MCCE tried to gauge public opinion by sending out twenty thousand questionnaires to black and white citizens around the state. The survey results demonstrated, among other things, that seventy-five percent of the more than sixteen thousand respondents (many undoubtedly teachers and parents) believed that the state should provide “equivalent school facilities” to black and white children. MCCE’s recommendations, presented to the governor and legislature before the opening of the 1952 session, called for a massive equalization of school facilities, teachers’ salaries, and curriculum funds, as well as a major consolidation program. The total cost of full consolidation-equalization, exclusive of the building campaign, was estimated at \$34 million annually. Building needs would require an initial outlay of another \$144 million.⁵⁹⁶

In the early 1950s, the policies adopted by the Truman administration to ultimately eliminate segregation were gradually showing signs of success. The findings of the Committee on Civil Rights and Truman’s recognition of these findings later served as a warning to the Eisenhower Administration and southern states that Jim Crow and the

⁵⁹⁶ J.M. Tubbs to George W. Stricklin, January 24, 1953, Vol. 246, RG 50, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Mississippi Citizens’ Council on Education, “A Report on the Organizational Meeting Held in Jackson October 9, 1950,” Box 3. “Questionnaire Results,” 1951, Box 1. See Bolton, “Mississippi’s School Equalization Program, 1945-1954,” 806.

status quo of racial segregation was in jeopardy.⁵⁹⁷ Throughout the South, rural black schools were symbols of institutionalized racism, specifically in the Upper South, Mid-South and Mississippi Delta. Efforts to prove that separate-but-equal was unconstitutional began by focusing on the inequalities that existed between black and white educational opportunities in the South and urban cities in the North and East. Racial segregation, inferior schools, and unequal funding which began in countless numbers of segregated one-room schools built during Reconstruction had been allowed to become a staple of black education. In the vast majority of cases that came before the Supreme Court challenging dual education systems, the court found and ruled that black schools within dual systems were unequal. These findings were a direct challenge to the “states rights arguments” launched by southern states that enforced Jim Crow laws and racial segregation practices in all public spaces. By 1952, due to efforts of the NAACP, state and local governments in the South were taking steps to gradually implement measures to equalize black and white schools. Many southern states initiated these efforts in an attempt to stall or prevent the possibility of desegregated schools. On the other hand, federal lawmakers in the Eisenhower Department of Justice followed the practices of the Truman Department of Justice and worked behind the scenes pressing the issue of ending segregation in schools altogether.⁵⁹⁸

By the early 1950s, the NAACP through a series of legal cases had provided the courts with ample evidence to show that social, economic and racial inequalities followed blacks as they left the South in search of justice and equality. The same patterns of

⁵⁹⁷ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 250-251.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 754.

segregation existed in the urban Upper South, Mid-South, North, Midwest and East. Residential segregation in urban cities such as Memphis, St. Louis and Chicago produced segregated neighborhoods and racially segregated neighborhoods produced racially segregated schools.⁵⁹⁹ In cities like Chicago, blacks experienced residential discrimination that forced them to live in underdeveloped areas near urban industrial and manufacturing centers within the inner city. “The great wave of immigration in the wake of the two World Wars has increased the city’s Negro population from 30,150 in 1900 to 492,267 in 1950, when it accounted for 13.6 per cent of the total. More than 90 per cent of these Negroes are jammed into eleven square miles of the South Side of Chicago.”⁶⁰⁰ Due to racial attitudes and housing discrimination, by 1950 these residential boundaries had remained rigidly set for a half century.⁶⁰¹

The black migrants who had attended the one-room schools of the South faced segregation laws and acts of housing and educational discrimination similar to those they experienced living on or in close proximity to the plantations of the Lower South, Mid-South, and Mississippi Delta.⁶⁰² “Having established the virtual impossibility of equal but separate schools, the NAACP entered the decisive phase of its legal campaign to gain equal educational opportunities for Negroes.”⁶⁰³ *Brown v. Board of Education*, which

⁵⁹⁹ Arnold R. Hirsch, *The Making of the Second Ghetto Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Gloria B. Melton, “Blacks in Memphis, Tennessee, 1920-1955 A Historical Study,” (PhD. Diss., Washington State University, 1982), 337-339. “Warned by Whites Not to Move in,” 18 April 1953, *Tri-State Defender*.

⁶⁰⁰ Ashmore, 77.

⁶⁰¹ Wayne McMillen, “Public Housing in Chicago, 1946,” *The Social Service Review* 20, no. 2 (June 1946): 150-164.

⁶⁰² Rogers, 20-21.

⁶⁰³ Bullock, 231.

actually began at the state level in 1949, was five combined U.S. District Court cases from across the country that challenged the separate-but-equal doctrine as a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.⁶⁰⁴ The combined cases included *Bolling v. Sharpe* (Washington D.C.), *Briggs v. Elliott* (South Carolina), *Brown v. Board of Topeka, Kansas*, *Davis v. Prince William County* (Virginia), and *Gephart v. Belton* (Delaware). The *Briggs v. Elliott* case in South Carolina was the only case that originated in the Deep South. However, in each case the lower courts had included a dissent to the majority ruling that recommended an end to school segregation.⁶⁰⁵ Many of the plaintiffs in the *Briggs v. Elliott* case were fired from their jobs, had their homes burned to the ground, were forced to leave the state altogether due to relentless intimidation by white elected officials. Each state court had found that the inequalities between white and black schools were manifested by the conditions that existed in rural black schools located within each district.⁶⁰⁶ Therefore, resolving some of the long standing problems and conditions associated with these schools was a point of reference for black citizens, the NAACP, and judges when the case was presented in the Supreme Court.⁶⁰⁷ While the NAACP appealed to the Supreme Court on October 1, 1951, the case was not presented before the judges until December 9, 1952.

⁶⁰⁴ National Archives at Atlanta. *Briggs v. Elliot*, <http://www.archives.gov.southeast/education/resources-by-state/briggs-v-elliott.html> (accessed 25 May 2011).

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁶ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice*. Detailed field reports describing inequalities between black and white schools in each case are outlined in *Bolling v. Sharpe*, 521-522; *Briggs v. Elliott*, 302-306; *Brown v. Board of Topeka Kansas*, 400-424; *Davis v. Prince Edwards County*, 478-507; *Gephart v. Belton*, 442-450.

⁶⁰⁷ Kluger, 330-332.

In anticipation of *Brown*, Mississippi and Tennessee increased consolidation of black schools believing that this measure would translate into equalization and thereby influence the Supreme Court's decision. The consolidation-equalization plans would merge smaller independent rural black one-room schools into larger elementary centers or schools. During an Extraordinary Session in 1953, Mississippi legislators enacted House Bill 3 that included the adoption of a set of standards which they believed would establish a set of minimum foundation laws to govern each county's school equalization programs.⁶⁰⁸ In Section 5, Chapter 13 of the Bill, each county was required to conduct a survey of white and black schools within their respective districts and submit a proposal or plan to consolidate schools that provided adequate facilities for both (black and white) school systems. They were also required to submit an estimation of cost for new facilities and a tax reduction and building plan to the State Educational Finance Commission.⁶⁰⁹

While white political and educational leaders focused on consolidation, blacks in Mississippi worked toward true equalization that would extend beyond the classroom. In 1951, T.R.M. Howard founded the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL), a grassroots organization that addressed issues such as education and economic development in the Mississippi Delta and Mid-South. During its annual meetings in Mound Bayou, the RCNL attracted thousands of blacks from the Mississippi Delta, the Mid-South and West Tennessee. In May 1954, just ten days before the *Brown* decision was rendered, the NAACP chief legal counsel spoke at the annual meeting to explain what steps or actions the NAACP would take to implement the anticipated Supreme

⁶⁰⁸ Mississippi State Law, "House Bill 3, Extraordinary Session 1953." Mississippi State Constitution.

⁶⁰⁹ Mississippi State Law, "House Bill 3, Extraordinary Session 1953, Section 5, Chapter 13."

Court decision. The crowd's enthusiasm and size "overwhelmed" Marshall who stated that: "This is an unbelievable crowd! You couldn't get such a crowd in New York to meet and talk on integration. Only in the South is this possible, because here is where the fight is. The weak ones have moved on to Detroit and Chicago while the real ones have remained to fight."⁶¹⁰

When the *Brown* decision was handed down on May 17, 1954, it had an immediate impact on the viability of one-room schools as the primary venue for black rural education in the Mid-South and Mississippi Delta.⁶¹¹ When the decision was reached, the majority of white students in Tennessee and Mississippi were attending modern and in some instances newly-constructed consolidated schools. On the other hand, most black students in rural Mississippi and Western Tennessee were still receiving their basic elementary education in underfunded, segregated one-and-two-room schools. In fact, one-room schools were still the centerpiece of rural black education throughout the Lower South.⁶¹² Additionally, black schools in the rural Lower South were still primarily located in geographically isolated segregated neighborhoods where racial interactions between blacks and whites were rare events.

Immediately after the *Brown* decision, white southerners in the Upper and Lower South began a relentless campaign to maintain racial segregation in schools delaying or

⁶¹⁰ "We'll Fight Bias to the Finish Line," *Tri-State Defender*, Memphis Tennessee 15 May 1954; "Round Table Discussion at Mound Bayou," *Tri-State Defender*, Memphis, Tennessee 22 May 1954; Green, 192, 340.

⁶¹¹ Don Shoemaker, *With All Deliberate Speed: Segregation in Southern Schools* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 6-7.

⁶¹² For detailed estimates of the number of one-room schools in Tennessee and Mississippi, see "State of Tennessee. Annual Report Tennessee Department of Education for the Scholastic Year Ending June 30, 1954," and "State of Mississippi: Mississippi Department of Education Statistical Data on Schools Sessions 1953-1954."

circumventing the integration of public schools.⁶¹³ They viewed segregation as one of their basic civil rights. Convinced that the masses of black people were intellectually and morally inferior to whites, their initial arguments against desegregation reflected their fears and apprehension. They regarded integration as a civil, political and moral issue. “Convinced that ‘social equality’ would bring interracial marriage in its train, they regarded with horror the prospect of black men teaching white girls.”⁶¹⁴ White southerners decided that they would have to resist efforts to desegregate schools at several levels including the courts and at the state and local governmental level. The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision was the catalyst that initially provided southern states the legal precedent to enact segregation laws at the state and local level.⁶¹⁵ After *Plessy* was struck down, whites were prepared to return to their local and state courts to challenge the validity of *Brown* by working closely with representatives and leaders of their respective governments to prevent any further encroachments upon their existing social order.⁶¹⁶ Further, the majority of southern blacks in the Upper and Lower South were still politically disenfranchised at both the state, federal, and local levels. “Whites still controlled the entire system of state and local government. It seemed a fair bet that, if forced to adopt unitary school systems, they would take advantage of the resulting efficiency savings to reduce the number of black teachers.”⁶¹⁷

⁶¹³ Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle For Black Equality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 23-29.

⁶¹⁴ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 367.

⁶¹⁵ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 105-106.

⁶¹⁶ Fairclough, *Better Days Coming*, 220.

⁶¹⁷ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 368.

By 1950, segregation was rigidly enforced as the preferred social order in the Upper and Lower South. In Caswell County, North Carolina, whites continued to insist that legally sanctioned racial segregation in public places and spaces remained the acceptable etiquette when the races interacted socially. Blacks and whites in this rural community lived in relatively close proximity to each other. “Negro farms and white farms were often located side by side, and Negroes and whites knew each other and conversed in familiar ways. Their children sometimes played together while they were young.”⁶¹⁸ Churches and schools were not excluded from this policy of keeping the races separated when they interacted with each other in the public domain. “They attended separate churches on Sunday and separate schools on Monday. Though they had always objected to the treatment, that’s the way it had been for as long as most of them could remember.”⁶¹⁹

In the late 1940s, the Yanceyville Colored High School extended a county-wide invitation to Caswell County residents to hear their award-winning glee club in concert. The invitation, which appeared in the local newspaper, provided instructions concerning the segregated seating arrangements for this bi-racial event. The news article read, “Tentative plans are to rope off three sides of the square to accommodate the crowd expected. A special place will be reserved for the colored people who attend.”⁶²⁰ Blacks in Caswell County were actively involved in the decision-making process as it related to the day-to-day operation of their schools. However, because they lacked political power due to their disfranchisement, African Americans in Caswell and other North Carolina

⁶¹⁸ Walker, *Their Highest Potential* , 180.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., 182.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 180-181.

counties were relegated to a position of second-class citizenship. While the Caswell County Training School (Yanceyville Colored High School) had been modernized, the remaining one-and-two-teacher schools were in serious need of repair. In December 1952, the county's newly established local chapter of the NAACP began to focus on the conditions that existed within the smaller one-and-two-room black schools to show that in matters of public education blacks within the county were treated as second-class citizens.

In May 1953, the Caswell County local NAACP chapter concluded: "The heavy load for one teacher, heating, recreation, water, and the long distance children have to walk was creating a 'very discriminatory condition which is very serious.' They sent their report before the NAACP special counsel, Mr. Thurgood Marshall, to advise [them] what to do."⁶²¹ These actions taken by the NAACP marked the beginning of a sixteen-year relationship between the county's parents, teachers, and community leaders. They united to attack the discriminatory policies of the local school board as it related to funding and supporting black public schools at the same level as white schools. Additionally, the long term goal of the NAACP was to dissolve the county's existing segregated dual education system altogether.

Whites in the Upper and Lower South viewed the *Brown* decision as an obstacle that prevented them from maintaining a legal system of segregation within their schools. Delay tactics were implemented by all-white school boards who adamantly opposed the decision that required them to take steps to desegregate elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools. Delores Aldridge found that

⁶²¹ Ibid., 182.

Immediately after the second *Brown* Decision in 1955, the border states of the Old South began to desegregate. By June of 1959, West Virginia had integrated 47 of its 55 school districts while Kentucky had integrated 123 out of 215 school districts. However, in the Deep South (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia), progress was minimal. In June 1959, 19 out of 1581 in that area, or 1.2 percent were integrated.⁶²²

Throughout the Upper and Lower South, White resistance to desegregation began prior to the *Brown* decision as state and local governments began to embrace the concept of equalization through consolidation as a means to avoid court-ordered desegregation.

During the early 1950s, North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction raced to further consolidate black one-and-two-room schools.⁶²³ As in other southern states, white political and education officials in North Carolina, Mississippi, and Tennessee decided that the *Brown* decision and school desegregation was not the path they wanted to pursue. Therefore, efforts to delay the implementation of *Brown* or overturn the decision took center-stage as state and county elected officials banded together to pursue political and judicial loop-holes that provided legal justifications to ignore federal mandates outlined in the decision. The federal government took steps to penalize southern states that did not demonstrate a good faith effort to desegregate their schools. For example, in Mississippi, the threat of losing funding of military bases was used to encourage state officials to increase equalization efforts. Federal officials believed these measures would ensure that states in the Lower South continued to work diligently to desegregate their schools.

⁶²² Delores Aldridge, "Litigation and Education of Blacks: A Look at the Supreme Court," *The Journal of Negro Education* 47, 1(Winter 1978), 100.

⁶²³ Walker, 183.

Additionally, a number of white massive resistance organizations formed or were revitalized in the Upper South, Mid-South, and Mississippi Delta. The actions of the Citizens Councils, which formed in July 1954, and the revitalized Ku Klux Klan were specifically designed to prevent school desegregation at any cost. “While no southerner ... [could] predict with any degree of certainty the ultimate outcome of the segregation struggle, it seems clear ... that a large number of the white South’s leaders were sufficiently perceptive to realize that a genuine social and political revolution was in the making.”⁶²⁴

These types of perceptions and actions showed that maintaining an inferior educational system and disenfranchisement for blacks were integral aspects of a systematic effort by whites in the South to undermine their civil rights. Segregated schools were an essential element of Jim Crowism and one-room schools were the primary venue where blacks received inferior educations. Jim Crow was a legal system that identified blacks as targets of *de jure* and *de facto* repression; therefore, legalizing dual segregated education was a means of controlling the economic, political, and social mobility of an entire race while championing the supposed superiority and privilege of another race.⁶²⁵ The inferior one-room schools and their poorly trained teachers served as a cornerstone or foundation for the entire system of Jim Crow and white supremacy in the Upper South, Mid-South, and Mississippi Delta.⁶²⁶ The *Brown* decision was the first

⁶²⁴ Francis M. Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (New York: George Braziller, 1973), 29.

⁶²⁵ Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 218-220.

⁶²⁶ “White hostility to black schools stubbornly persisted. Many planters believed that schools weakened their ability to retain blacks as sharecroppers and laborers. White southerners continued to be suspicious of black teachers, and educated blacks in general, especially if they refused to adjure their loyalty to the Republican Party. Whites everywhere believed that they were massively subsidizing black

significant attack against dual education which was used to reinforce the racially stratified social order of the South, Jim Crow, and institutionalized segregation that produced the deplorable conditions existing in rural black one-room schools.⁶²⁷

In July 1954, Governor White and the Mississippi Educational Advisory Committee met with approximately ninety black leaders from across the state to present an equalization plan that would maintain separate schools. Blacks unanimously decided “not to endorse any program of legal or voluntary segregation” and called for an immediate implementation of the *Brown* decision. Speaking for the delegation, T.R.M. Howard of the Regional Council of Negro Leadership stated:

We have not come to circumvent or bypass the decision of the United States Supreme Court. It is a humane decision. We have come to help chart the way for mutual understanding so that the public school in Mississippi may be saved within the spirit and framework of the Supreme Court decision. We believe that it is morally and legally wrong for those who have sworn to uphold the laws of our land to talk about abolishing the public school system in order to evade the law of our land.

Once Governor White realized that he could not convince the black leaders to accept voluntary segregation, he abruptly ended the meeting.⁶²⁸

Subsequently in August 1954, Mississippi state legislators, the Legal Educational Advisory Committee, and education officials met to discuss possible strategies that could be used to circumvent the decision and prevent school desegregation. During the

schools, and they strongly supported proposals to divide taxes by race -- on the premise that black schools would wither away if they depended upon black property owners alone. Although the Redeemers did not abolish the public schools, therefore, they slashed expenditures on public education. They also sought to blunt the influence of black teachers by limiting their numbers, training, and pay.” Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 57.

⁶²⁷ Transcript of Meeting of Mississippi Legal Educational Advisory Committee and School Officials. 12 August 1954. George Washington Owen Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 3, Folder 10.

⁶²⁸ Transcript of Meeting of Legal Educational Advisory Committee and Negro Leaders, 30 July 1954, Sillers Papers, Box 21, Folder 15.

meeting, House Speaker Walter Sillers explained the urgent nature of the meeting: “This is as the Governor stated, one of the most important meetings, I expect, the people of Mississippi has held since Reconstruction days.”⁶²⁹ He introduced several constitutional amendments to change the state’s constitution to allow legal justification to abolish the entire school system rather than submit to school desegregation. The proposed legislation included language specifying that the authority to dissolve Mississippi’s public schools was under the purview of the state legislature. The two subsections of Section 213-B read:

(a) Regardless of any provisions of Article 8, or any other provisions of this Constitution to the contrary, the Legislature shall be and is hereby authorized and empowered by a two-thirds (2/3rds) vote of those present and voting in each House, to abolish, and may authorize the counties and school districts to abolish, the public schools in this State and enact suitable legislation to effect the same.

(b) In the event the legislature shall abolish, or authorize the abolition of, the public schools in the state, then the Legislature shall be in and is hereby authorized and empowered to enact suitable legislation to dispose of school buildings, land and other school property by lease, sale or otherwise.⁶³⁰

The Mississippi legislature and black leaders were obviously working to obtain two totally different outcomes. The legislature decided that consolidation-equalization would be the best strategy to offset arguments challenging the validity of racially segregated schools. On the other hand, black leaders viewed consolidation-equalization as a maneuver to circumvent the Supreme Court decision. “Recognizing that education is largely a public institution and under the administration of elected officials, Negroes

⁶²⁹ Transcript of Meeting of Mississippi Legal Educational Advisory Committee and School Officials. 12 August 1954. George Washington Owen Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 3, Folder 10.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 4.

moved against barriers to their citizenship in the field of suffrage rights.”⁶³¹ Therefore, since the *Brown v. Board* court case is recognized as being one of the signal events that began the modern Civil Rights era, it is safe to argue that very few black teachers in Mississippi were early pioneers of the movement.

School consolidation-equalization became the preferred strategy of state legislators and local school boards in Mississippi and Tennessee to evade their immediate desegregation. These consolidation-equalization efforts would lead to the elimination and demise of the one-room school as the dominant educational venue for rural black schools in the Mid-South and the Mississippi Delta. In Tennessee by 1955, the number of black one-room schools in Fayette County had been reduced to twenty-five.⁶³² In Bolivar County, a similar pattern was taking place as the number of one-room schools was reduced from seventy-six in 1944 to twenty-six in 1954.⁶³³ However in Marshall County, Mississippi, consolidation of the ninety-two black schools did not begin until 1954.⁶³⁴

Following the *Brown* decision, black tenants, day laborers, sharecroppers, small independent farm owners, and a cross-section of black professionals in the Upper South, Mid-South, and Mississippi Delta, began to organize to ensure that the decision would be

⁶³¹ Bullock, 219.

⁶³² State of Tennessee, *Annual Report Tennessee Department of Education for Scholastic Years, 1947 and 1955*.

⁶³³ A.H. Ramsey, Report on Bolivar County Schools, 23 August 1954, Sillers Papers, Box 60, Folder 12; Mississippi State Department of Education, Statistical Data, 1957-1958, 21.

⁶³⁴ Lela K. Hale, “Making the Connection: An Oral History of Mary Reid School and Potts Camp Attendance Center in Marshall County Mississippi” (PhD. Diss., University of Mississippi, 2009), 59.

implemented in their schools.⁶³⁵ Because of their political vulnerability, black teachers in Mississippi were in constant fear of losing their jobs as a result of white political retaliation.⁶³⁶ The Citizens' Council implemented an economic backlash against black tenants, sharecroppers, and small independent farmers in the Mississippi Delta. T.R.M. Howard contacted the Memphis chapter of the NAACP for assistance in dealing with the economic boycotts initiated by the Delta Council and other white merchants. In September 1954, Memphian Dr. J. E. Walker, president of the Memphis-based Tri-State Bank, and Roy Wilkins, NAACP National Executive Secretary, met with 2,000 members of the RCNL and announced that a \$1 million dollar fund had been established at the bank. These funds would be used to provide loans to the black farmers, tenants and sharecroppers not only in the Mississippi Delta but also in Fayette County.⁶³⁷

In Mississippi, as consolidation of black schools increased, more rural black elementary one-room schools were consolidated into two, three, and seven-room school types. Schools for blacks and whites remained rigidly segregated from 1954-1963.⁶³⁸ Mississippi legislators believed that if they equalized the black and white schools within the individual counties they could maintain the separate-but-equal philosophy that they

⁶³⁵ Green, 184.

⁶³⁶ For a comprehensive examination of the impact that desegregation had on black teachers and their job security, see Newsfilm, F177, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Educational Resource Center, reel 15; Racism and the Desegregation Process," December 1970, Facts on Film, July 1970-June 1971 Supplement; Bobby Gene Copper, "The Effects of Desegregation on Black Elementary and Secondary Teachers in Mississippi, 1970-1973" (Ed.D. diss., University of Mississippi, 1978), 104-106. See Bolton, *The Hardest Deal of All*, 211, 266.

⁶³⁷ Green, 194. From 1954-1964, the Memphis chapter of the NAACP and other black leaders within the city continued to support grassroots black activism in the Mississippi Delta and the Mid-South.

⁶³⁸ U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW), Administration of Public Laws 81-874 and 81-815: Eleventh Annual Report; U.S. Department HEW, Administration of Public Laws 81-874 and 81-815: *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education* (Washington D.C. Government Printing Office, 1963. See Bolton, *Hardest Deal of All*, 90-91.

had used based on the 1897 *Plessey v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision. Of all states in the Lower South, the Mississippi State Legislature reaction to *Brown* was perhaps the most radical to say the least. One of the legislature's most radical reactions to the threat of school desegregation was the establishment of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission in 1956, which became the state's official watchdog of segregation.⁶³⁹

In Marshall and Bolivar counties, white backlash over the *Brown* decision created an atmosphere of panic and anxiety among whites as they began to increasingly use intimidation to control the level of organized resistance to segregation within the black community. S. Emory Rogers' noted that, "Over the era of 'Massive Resistance' to *Brown* and other civil rights laws that lasted from 1954 through the late 1960s in Mississippi, the Citizens' Councils, state and local officials, and a revitalized Ku Klux Klan mounted a campaign of 'legal and extralegal terror' against black activists."⁶⁴⁰ These acts of intimidations served as a catalyst for ushering in the early stages of the Civil Rights Movement. If the saying 'actions speak louder than words' has any merit, the reaction of southern whites to efforts to equalize black and white education illustrate that segregated schools had always been a tool used by them to keep blacks suppressed.

In their staunch adherence to *Plessey v. Ferguson*, state courts throughout the Lower South provided the legal foundation for a system of dual education. Separate-but-equal also provided the legal justification that denied blacks their basic voting rights provided in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments.⁶⁴¹ According to historian Sarah

⁶³⁹ James Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 8.

⁶⁴⁰ Neil McMillen, *The Citizen's Council* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 115.

⁶⁴¹ James L. Roark et. al., *The American Promise: A History of the United States Vol. 1 to 1877* (Bedford: St. Martin, 2009), 396-399.

Rowe-Sims, from 1956-1977, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was given the power and authority to “do and perform any and all acts and things deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi, and her sister states from a perceived encroachment thereon by the Federal Government or any branch, department, or agency thereof; to resist the usurpation of the rights and powers reserved to this state and our sister states by the federal government or any other branch, department, or agency thereof.”⁶⁴² The agency was created to lead the efforts of the state of Mississippi to defy the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court Decision which mandated that segregated schools were unconstitutional. James P. Coleman, Governor of Mississippi from 1956-1960, served as chairman of the agency. The other officers included the president of the Mississippi Senate as vice-chairman, the Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives, and the State Attorney General. The Commission was funded by tax dollars and was recognized as a state agency. Sims found that, “For seventeen years, from 1956-1973, the commission spied on civil rights workers, acted as a clearinghouse for information on civil rights activities and legislation from around the nation, funneled money to pro-segregation causes, and distributed right wing propaganda.”⁶⁴³

In Bolivar County and throughout the Mississippi Delta from 1954 to the 1960s, massive resistance to the *Brown* decision and other federally enforced civil rights laws by the Citizen’s Council, the Ku Klux Klan, and local county officials launched a campaign of terror against black activists.⁶⁴⁴ Men like T.R.M. Howard were subjected to economic

⁶⁴² Mississippi Historical Society, Mississippi History Now: An Online publication of the Mississippi Historical Society, Sarah Rowe-Sims, “The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: An Agency History,” <http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/index> (accessed June 26, 2010).

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Rogers, 115.

isolation and intimidation from business leaders and white elected officials at the state and local level. According to Kim Lacy Rogers, “This combination of state measures and economic and political coercion drove the state NAACP organization underground, and extralegal violence and terrorism frightened many African Americans into a grim silence on issues such as political rights and voting.”⁶⁴⁵ In 1955 Howard left the state rather than face economic ruin as a result of harassment from various local and state government agencies.

The equalization program was hampered in Bolivar County and the Mississippi Delta due to the indifference to desegregation exemplified by a significant portion of the black middle-class. According to Amzie Moore of Cleveland, President of Bolivar County’s NAACP, “teachers, ministers, and businessmen who lived in their own small and comfortable world in the segregated state were not interested in the freedom of the common Negro in Mississippi.”⁶⁴⁶ Moore believed that black teachers adopted this position because of several factors that included but were not limited to the following factors:

Schoolteachers, as state employees, were forbidden to participate in civil rights activities. Additionally, black schoolteachers realized that their teaching positions and privileges within the segregated system would, in all likelihood, be threatened if school integration became a reality. Many knew that their qualifications might not match those of white teachers whose education had been better funded, equipped, and supplied by state institutions.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁶ Rogers, 115.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 115-116.

Black school consolidation and equalization proceeded slowly in Bolivar County and the Mississippi Delta because of the level of ambivalence on the part of the black middle-class. Conservative black school teachers did not fully embrace the *Brown* decision which advocated desegregation as a remedy for inequalities that existed within the dual education system. Ironically, these attitudes helped to preserve the importance of one-room schools in Bolivar County until the 1960s when court-ordered desegregation forced the closing of the remaining one-, two- and three-room schools in the state.

Due to increased industrialization and outmigration of blacks within Marshall County, the 1954 *Brown* decision had an immediate impact on rural black one-room schools and the composition of the county's dual education system. After the *Brown* decision, Mississippi used the data collected from previous educational surveys to establish and launch a statewide consolidation-equalization program. Data from these surveys showed that the dramatic decrease in the number of one-room schools could be attributed to outmigration of blacks to Memphis and other urban areas. Due to Marshall County's close geographic proximity to Memphis, blacks were increasingly relocating to that area for industrial jobs from 1950-1970. Those who did not migrate attempted to survive on the meager incomes paid to agricultural laborers during a time when agriculture was on the decline.⁶⁴⁸ This coincided with the collapse of cotton agriculture during the early 1950s. Therefore, the level of white resistance to *Brown* was not as dramatic in Marshall County as it had been in Bolivar and Fayette Counties. The economic instability that resulted from the collapse of cotton was the primary concern of black and white Marshall County residents in 1954. In *Schools and the Formation of*

⁶⁴⁸ U.S Agricultural Census, 1960; Callejo-Perez, 36.

Black Identity During the Civil Rights Movement, David Marcos Callejo-Perez stated: “The population decrease shows the slow migration of Blacks leaving the county for a growing Memphis after the Second World War. The county was also extremely rural, although it became more urbanized by 1970, coinciding with the decline of cotton and the rise of poverty in the city of Holly Springs.”⁶⁴⁹

When the *Brown* decision was handed down by the Supreme Court, there were 15,850 blacks living in the rural areas of Marshall County. This represented 70% of the entire population of 25,106 within the entire county.⁶⁵⁰ Of the 6,250 eligible school-age children, 5,325 were enrolled in Marshall County’s dual elementary and secondary education system. Blacks represented approximately 75% of the county’s total school-aged population. There were seven white public schools operating within the county: four were grades 1-12 and three with grades 1-8. There were 93 black public schools. Of these, there were sixty-three education centers serving grades 1-8, of which fifty-one were one-room schools, ten were two-teacher schools, one was a three-teacher school, and one was a five-teacher school. There were no black public high schools. From 1948 to 1954, thirteen one-room schools had been closed due to the decrease in the county’s rural black population.⁶⁵¹

According to Watson Anderson Jr., many of the small independently-owned black farms were sold during the 1950s and 1960s as older landowners died and their children sold the land to move to the North and West. He added that often the children of the

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁵⁰ U.S. Census, 1960.

⁶⁵¹ Marshall County Board of Education, *Marshall County Survey of Schools, 1948-1954* (Holly Springs Mississippi, March 31, 1955), 9-12.

landowners sold the land for far less than it was worth. Since many were eager to move as far away from the South, farming, and racism, as they could, they sold the property and left their native homes for good.⁶⁵² Whereas land represented status and independence for their parents, they viewed the sale of the land as a means of escape from a life of hard work, low pay, and Jim Crow.

The policies of the Marshall County School board towards black education were based on maintaining racial segregation within its districts. They openly espoused the tenets of white supremacy and black inferiority as the natural order of the universe. In a 1956 Survey of Marshall County Schools, the board enclosed a statement of their philosophy of dual education:

The attempt has been made to impose upon the Negro the white man's culture. This imposition did not come from the white man who knew the Negro but from the white man who did not the Negro and from members of the Negro race who mistook the white man's apparent 'superiority' as being something that he could obtain by studying the same books and practicing the same manners as the white man. The development of the Negro has been remarkable but taken as a whole the Negro as found in the Mississippi Delta and in twelve or fifteen counties in Mississippi, in which he constitutes 50% or more of the total population, has not reached the development in transition that causes him to be willing to undergo the self-discipline, application and trust in future benefits that is incumbent upon many of the white man's ways, particularly his education.⁶⁵³

This was the philosophy that guided Mississippi's statewide consolidation-equalization efforts from 1954-1964. In 1956 the median income for the county was \$580 compared to the state's median income of \$1,198 and the national median income of \$3,073.⁶⁵⁴ The collapse of the cotton agricultural industry had a devastating effect on the county's

⁶⁵² Watson Anderson, Interview by author.

⁶⁵³ Marshall County Board of Education, *1956 Survey of Education*, 42.

⁶⁵⁴ U.S. Census, 1960. See Callejo-Perez, 33.

economy, especially among black independent farmers and tenants. David Marcos Perez found that before 1950 a high percentage of the farmers in the county were black. That number began to decrease as blacks moved into construction, machine operation, and food preparation and distribution.⁶⁵⁵ Between 1950 and 1960 the average education for black males in Marshall County increased from five to seven years as additional black teachers were hired.⁶⁵⁶

The outward migration patterns of blacks that occurred in Marshall County and Bolivar County did not reach Fayette County until the 1970s. Farm mechanization arrived in Fayette County at a much later date and proceeded at a much slower pace. Farm mechanization did not begin in Fayette County until 1947 when the first mechanical cotton picker was delivered to William B. Cowan of La Grange on November 3, 1947.⁶⁵⁷ Cotton and corn remained the chief crops in Fayette County until 1970 when soybeans became the primary crop. From 1950 to 1970, farm mechanization increased and cotton and corn cultivation decreased. Soybeans became the primary staple crop because it required less maintenance and labor. This led to a reduced need for manual labor and the size of the average farm changed because soybeans could be harvested by mechanized pickers. Dorothy Morton found that “as the size of the farms was undergoing a change, so was the type of product being grown. In 1935 corn was planted to 63,670 acres and cotton to 60,138. In 1978 only 11,740 acres were planted to corn and 26,411 to cotton, while 109,624 were planted to soybeans.⁶⁵⁸ These changes to the

⁶⁵⁵ Callejo-Perez, 38.

⁶⁵⁶ U.S. Census, 1960 and 1970. See Marcos Callejo, 43-44.

⁶⁵⁷ Morton, 36.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

agricultural system within the county directly affected black tenants and sharecroppers as their importance as a source of labor was compromised by increased farm mechanization and a reduced reliance on cotton and corn cultivation. Many of the former Fayette County black migrants who came to Memphis during this period viewed *Brown* as an opportunity to remedy the inadequacies they had experienced while attending one- and two-room schools in dual education systems in rural west Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas.⁶⁵⁹

In 1959, black farmers, tenants and sharecroppers in Fayette County and neighboring Haywood County began to unite and organize county-wide voter registration drives. In spite of their sizeable population advantage, the majority of blacks in both counties were disenfranchised because they had been barred from registering since the end of Reconstruction. In *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, Laurie Green found:

In Fayette County, the third poorest county in the United States, African Americans made up roughly three-quarters of the 28,500 residents with the vast majority working as sharecroppers or tenant farmers. In neighboring Haywood County, just to the north, African Americans comprised a little less than two-thirds of the population, with a somewhat larger proportion owning their own land.⁶⁶⁰

James Estes, a black Memphis attorney and a member of the NAACP, had been actively helping members of the Mt. Zion Church register to vote and form a voter's league in the county.⁶⁶¹

During the time of registering blacks to vote in Fayette County, the case of Burton Dodson became an important issue in that county. Dodson, a former resident of Fayette

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶⁶⁰ Green, 226-227.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

County, had been a fugitive for more than eighteen years after a deputy was shot and killed on his property in 1941. The deputy, who was a part of a mob that stormed his farm after he had fought with a white farmer, was caught in the crossfire and died of his wounds. Burton Dodson escaped and fled to East St. Louis, Illinois, where he lived until he was discovered and brought back to Fayette County to face charges of murder in 1959.⁶⁶² James Estes was hired to represent Burton Dodson which was quite an unusual event in Fayette County.

According to Robert Hamburger, “people in Fayette County knew that the only way a black man got into the courthouse was either as a doomed defendant or a janitor. A black lawyer appearing to defend a black man was unheard of.”⁶⁶³ Estes used this opportunity during the jury selection process to highlight the fact that no blacks were on the jury because blacks were barred from registering to vote in Fayette County. During the trial, John McFerren and Harpman Jameson were encouraged to see Estes, a black man, stand in a Fayette County courtroom and argue a case for an accused black man. Estes was able to show that there were inconsistencies in the accusers’ stories. However, since there no blacks on the jury, Dodson was convicted of second-degree murder by an all-white jury and sentenced to twenty years in prison. Estes made a point of highlighting the fact that at the time of the trial in 1959, there were no blacks on the jury when blacks accounted for 16, 927 (68.9%) of the approximately 28,500 residents of the county. Dodson’s twenty-year sentence was later commuted to ten years.⁶⁶⁴ However, blacks

⁶⁶² Hamburger, 4.

⁶⁶³ Ibid, 4.

⁶⁶⁴ Green, 227.

were determined not to allow this type of incident to occur in Fayette County again. Many of the black residents recalled the lynching that occurred in 1940 when a black farmer, Elbert Williams, was lynched after he tried to register to vote.⁶⁶⁵

This trial marked a turning point for blacks in Fayette County as they banded together to launch a county-wide voter's registration drive which resulted in the Tent City protest that brought national attention to the plight of black farmers, tenants, and sharecroppers in Fayette County. Again white farmers in Fayette County used the same tactics used by white landowners in the Mississippi Delta in 1954 when they attempted to disrupt the efforts of T.R.M. Howard and the RCNL. In 1960 the Memphis chapter of the NAACP galvanized its national membership to support the tenants, sharecroppers, and farmers as credit was denied to them by white merchants.⁶⁶⁶ The struggle for increased black voter registration and black representation on the Fayette County Quarterly Court would continue until 1966 when two blacks were elected to serve on the court.

From 1954-1964, Mississippi and Tennessee adopted aggressive consolidation-equalization plans which merged smaller independent rural black one-room schools into larger elementary centers or schools. The consolidation of black schools in Fayette County proceeded in a timely and efficient manner. However, black residents of the County had been unable to secure any political representation on their local school boards by 1959. In spite of a lack of representation on the elected school board, blacks saw drastic improvements to the quality of elementary and secondary schools. Frankie L. Hunt found that "by January 1, 1959, Fayette County High School, Moscow, Jefferson,

⁶⁶⁵ Hamburger, 33, 66-77.

⁶⁶⁶Minutes of Memphis NAACP Executive Board and branch meetings, June 1960-Feb 1961, Maxine Smith NAACP Collection, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library and Information Center, Memphis, Tennessee.

and Mt. Zion schools received additional building facilities.”⁶⁶⁷ Black residents complained because they believed that the school board accepted the cheapest rather than the best construction bids when it came to improving or building black schools.⁶⁶⁸ In April 1959, the Fayette County School Board continued their efforts to improve black schools when they approached the Quarterly Court seeking permission to issue a bond for \$135,000. The funds would be allocated in the following manner: \$45,000 for additional classrooms; \$69,400 for a gymnasium at a white school, Braden Elementary; and the remaining monies would be used for special education for the Somerville Elementary School and for an additional Vocational Agricultural building at the Fayette County High School.⁶⁶⁹ However, the Fayette County Quarterly Court initially refused and four years later reconsidered the matter on April 15, 1963 when it passed a bond for \$200,000 rather than the \$135, 000 originally requested. Black Somerville Elementary would not receive funds for school improvement until 1965. The funds from the 1963 bond were to be used to build a new \$185,000 gymnasium for the white Fayette County School.⁶⁷⁰ According to Viola McFerren, these types of issues that occurred in the courts within the county helped to fuel the flames of black voting rights activism which swept the county into the Tent City protest which began in 1959.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁷ “Leaders See Progress in Building Program,” *The Fayette County Falcon*, 1 January 1959.

⁶⁶⁸ Hunt, 111.

⁶⁶⁹ “School Board to Offer Extensive Building Program,” *The Fayette County Falcon*, 30 April 1959.

⁶⁷⁰ “1963-64 Budget Set By Court Here Monday,” *The Fayette County Falcon*, 10 April 1963.

⁶⁷¹ Hamburger, 18.

From the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision to 1965, one-room black schools began to close as Fayette County's School Board officials implemented and conducted a comprehensive consolidation-equalization program. Similar to Marshall and Bolivar Counties in Mississippi, Fayette County school officials believed that consolidation-equalization would be a substantial argument to justify their continuance of segregated schools. Pro-choice arguments were now being launched by both sides after new black schools had been constructed and opened. In his *Phase I Report: Fayette County School Needs Assessment, 1976*, educational consultant Sammie Lucas reflected these changes:

During the years following the Brown suit to the year 1965, three new schools were constructed in Fayette County. East Side Elementary School was built in 1962, and additional facilities were completed in 1965. Jefferson Elementary School and La Grange Elementary were constructed in 1964. Between 1954 and 1965 additions were completed at several other schools in Fayette County. Additions to: Bernard Elementary, 1960; Braden Elementary, 1960; Fayette-Ware High School North (Fayette County High School), 1956, 1958, 1959, 1960; Fayette-Ware High School South (Fayette County Training School), 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965; Moscow Elementary, 1958; Oakland Consolidated, 1957, 1962; Oakland Elementary, 1957; Somerville Elementary, 1961; and Springhill Elementary, 1954, 1956, 1963, 1965.⁶⁷²

By 1965 all of the one-room and two-room schools in Fayette County had been closed. One-and-two-room schools were eventually eliminated in all counties in Mississippi by 1972 when court-ordered desegregation was implemented at the local level. Many of the remaining buildings were either abandoned or used to accommodate other special needs students.

According to the Superintendent of Fayette County Schools, Joseph Martin, the black community was not completely in agreement with the closure of the small,

⁶⁷² Sammie Lucas, *Phase I Report: Fayette County Schools Needs Assessment* (Memphis: University of Memphis McWherter Library, 1976), 70-91.

inadequate one-room schools because they were so close to the black churches. They perceived these small buildings as community-based schools.⁶⁷³ Additionally, whites and blacks in Fayette County were about to enter into another phase of the Civil Rights Movement. School desegregation surfaced as an issue in Fayette County due to white and black resistance to the notion of integrated schools.

Legally-enforced segregation in public places and accommodations was a social reality that allowed segregated one-room school houses to evolve and flourish throughout the Lower South, Mid-South, and Mississippi Delta from Reconstruction to 1968. These legally sanctioned racially segregated schools served as the primary source of education for black students in rural counties throughout the thirteen southern states for approximately eighty-eight years. Historian C. Vann Woodward noted that many of the economic, educational, and social problems characteristic to African Americans today initially began during the early phases of Jim Crow when educational, economic, and occupational opportunities were systematically withheld from the Negro in the South.⁶⁷⁴

In the Mid-South and Lower South local and state school boards and civic groups such as the Delta Council and White Citizens Council sought out black allies to partner with them in their efforts to defeat school desegregation efforts. Conservative Black educators at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels were employed and encouraged to become willing and in some instances unwilling allies in the fight to preserve the traditions of the existing social order. In the Mississippi Delta, conservative black educators expressed their reservation about desegregation and voiced their fears

⁶⁷³ Hunt, 114.

⁶⁷⁴ Woodward, 82-87.

that implementation of desegregation and the demise of the dual education system would result in the loss of jobs among black teachers and administrators. Many of these conservative black educators became informants for White Citizens Councils, Delta Council and Sovereignty Commissions located throughout states in the Lower South.

This dissertation drew upon multiple archival and scholarly sources. It also utilized personal interviews to supplement the findings and conclusion reached in this study. The rural black one-room schools located within these particular counties were the primary type of schools millions of black migrants attended from Reconstruction to 1968. The educational problems, shortcomings, or inadequacies characteristic to these black migrants followed them as they left the Lower South and moved to cities such as Memphis, St. Louis, Chicago, Milwaukee, and other urban areas. The perspectives of the last generation of students and teachers who attended or taught in these schools is historically significant because they provide insights that can be gleaned and examined by students and professionals in multiple fields of history and other academic disciplines.

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