

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

A HISTORY OF BLACK PUBLIC EDUCATION IN OKLAHOMA

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A HISTORY OF BLACK PUBLIC EDUCATION
IN OKLAHOMA

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TO
ALICE JOINER

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L.B.C.

CHAPTER I

A HISTORY OF BLACK PUBLIC EDUCATION IN OKLAHOMA

Introduction

The stage was set for the education of black children in Oklahoma in the early days prior to official statehood. Some "haphazard" attempts were made at providing some basic education long before statehood, chiefly by The Five Civilized Tribes. The fact that the education provided was basic and haphazard was not so startling at this point because conditions were the same for the Indian children.

After the forced migration of the Indians to the Indian Territory was completed, the missionaries again attempted to establish schools. The leaders of The Five Civilized Tribes recognized the need for schools and each tribe developed one or more. Some of the schools became famous as centers of learning among the tribes. The education of the slaves was about on the same level as when the Indians lived in their eastern homes. A few were permitted to attend the tribal schools but there is no record of any large attendance The granting of citizenship to the Negroes by the treaties of 1866 made it possible for former slaves to receive the same education as was provided for the Indian children. However, compared to modern standards, the schools were very poor.¹

The opening of the "Unassigned Lands" for settlement brought a new influence into Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Organic Act, signed by President Benjamin Harrison, May 2, 1890, provided a form of government for the Oklahoma Territory that set aside sections 16 and 36 for the

¹Gene Aldrich, Black Heritage of Oklahoma (Edmond, Oklahoma: Thompson Book and Supply Co., 1973), p. 34.

benefit of schools.

In 1891 the First Territorial Legislature gave counties the right to decide whether they should provide mixed or separate schools for Negro children. A majority of the counties decided to have separate schools.

From the advent of the Organic Act until the Supreme Court decision in 1954, segregated schools were a reality in Oklahoma. The Constitutional Convention, meeting during the winter and spring of 1907, met with little opposition in adopting legislation providing for separate schools. March 5, 1907, the members of the Constitutional Convention opened the business of the day by adoption of Article XIII, Sec. 3.

Separate schools for white and colored children with like accommodations shall be provided by the legislature and impartially maintained. The term "colored children" used in this section shall be construed to mean children of African descent. The term "white children" shall include all other children.²

There was some opposition to this legislation from the blacks in Oklahoma at that time; however, their voices were politically too weak to be heard. Thus, the pattern for the education of black children was established in Oklahoma.

The letter of the law was not followed in that the separate schools were definitely not impartially maintained as provided by the legislature. Possibly, in the early days of separate education, there might have been equality in the maintenance of the separate schools; however, as time passed, there existed a paramount, visible discrepancy between the schools. This discrepancy was so great that many an observer could see that there were in fact two systems of education in Oklahoma, one tremendously inferior to the other.

²Oklahoma State Constitution, Art. XIII, Sec. 3.

The manner in which black schools were funded doomed them at the very outset. Black schools were supported exclusively by the counties in which they were located, receiving very little additional support until the late 1940's.

Black schools were left to the supervision of the county superintendents and were highly dependent upon the attitude of the individuals holding those offices as to the manner in which they would exist. In rare instances, black schools fared respectably and this was usually found to be in well-populated counties where there were relatively few black schools.

The Supreme Court decision of 1954 was not a guarantee that the educational lot of the black child in Oklahoma would improve substantially. The words, "all deliberate speed," were taken by Oklahoma leaders to mean as you see fit. The desegregation process statewide was slow to develop. In those areas outside the larger cities, a pattern was seen to be taking place. Black teachers were being dismissed in large numbers. For a five year period, beginning with the 1955-56 school year, there was a consistent decline in the number of black teachers in Oklahoma. In 1956, State Superintendent Oliver Hodge made the following report:

During the past biennium, the separate school program in Oklahoma has been abandoned because of the Supreme Court decision abolishing legal segregation. Integration of the races in our schools is not complete, but it is proceeding in a satisfactory manner and without unpleasant community incidents. All schools in a district now are maintained as a single administrative unit.³

Possibly, the state superintendent did not take into consideration

³Oliver Hodge, Twenty-sixth Biennial Report (State Department of Education, Oklahoma, 1956), p. 27.

the difficulties encountered by black teachers in holding their jobs. However, by 1960 the state superintendent expressed more of an awareness to the pressing plight of the black teacher.

The worst thing about this entire program in Oklahoma is that 360 Negro teachers have lost their positions because of integration. We have very few Negro teachers employed in the schools that have been integrated. It is true in these cases, in practically every instance, that there have been far more white children involved than Negro children; but the boards of education seem to be reluctant to employ Negro teachers in these instances.⁴

Although the state superintendent expressed a concern relative to the problem, he did not provide a probable solution.

Black teachers were not the only ones to suffer with the coming of desegregation. All black people felt the effects of the legislated change. Black children often were faced with the fact that they had to be bused to their "new" schools because, more often than not, the black schools were closed. This fact was true in the smaller towns throughout Oklahoma. In the larger towns and cities, economics did not permit wholesale closing of schools and shifting attendance areas because the numbers were too great. Black parents suffered along with their children during the long, difficult adjustment period. The writer was made aware of instances of undue harassment of black adults by employers because their children were enrolled in schools with the children of the employer. Many jobs were possibly lost due to the desegregation, but this cannot be substantiated as fact. One particular reason for lack of substantiation was that other "excuses" were given as the cause for dismissals. In all probability, black children suffered more than any other group of blacks.

⁴Letter from Oliver Hodge to Lori Verhelle, March 4, 1960.

There were definite advances made in the educational opportunities for black children in Oklahoma. The desired level whereby the black child could compete favorably with his white counterpart in all aspects of life, dependent upon an adequate educational background, was not reached. Several variables united to make this fact a reality. Educators in the state were not in agreement as to how to deal with the problem; but a number of them realized that the mere mixing of black and white bodies in a classroom or a faculty lounge did not adequately accomplish integration nor necessarily provide desegregation. Before the desegregation process can be completed and the integration process can be activated, the minds of all persons involved must be attuned to both processes and work positively toward those ends.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze the efforts made to educate black children in the schools of Oklahoma. The period of concentration was from 1830 until 1976.

Limitations of the Study

This study was concerned with the education of black children in Oklahoma from 1830 until 1976. Comparatively speaking, few records were kept officially concerning the education of black children. Only after 1920 was there a section set aside for separate schools in the State Superintendent's Biennial Report on Education.

Research studies were found relating to some aspects of the educational opportunities for black children as early as 1919; however, the information contained in those studies was covered to a greater degree in other references used in this study. Some related studies

conducted by black researchers within the past twenty years (1955-1976) include: "The Origin, Development, and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," by Willa A. Strong;⁵ "The Historical Development of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers: A Study in Social Change, 1893-1958," by Evelyn R. Strong;⁶ "A Comparative Study of Langston University Freshmen Who Graduated From Desegregated High Schools and Those From Predominantly Negro Schools," by Elmyra R. Davis;⁷ and "Analysis of Policies and Practices in Selected Oklahoma Urban High Schools Which Indicate A Commitment To or Violation of Human Rights," by Melvin R. Todd.⁸ Other related research was primarily made by white researchers. A listing of these studies is reported in Chapter II.

The study was dependent upon the availability of supportive published, unpublished, printed, and recorded documents. There was also a heavy reliance upon primary sources of information supplied by personal interviews of individuals who, in fact, lived the history that was studied.

⁵Willa A. Strong, "The Origin, Development, and Current Status of the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs" (Ed.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1957).

⁶Evelyn R. Strong, "The Historical Development of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers: A Study in Social Change, 1893-1959" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1961).

⁷Elmyra R. Davis, "A Comparative Study of Langston University Freshmen Who Graduated From Desegregated High Schools and Those From Predominantly Negro Schools" (Ed.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1970).

⁸Melvin R. Todd, "An Analysis of Policies and Practices in Selected Oklahoma Urban High Schools Which Indicate a Commitment To or Violation of Human Rights" (Ed.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1973).

Information relative to the problems encountered in many small towns in Oklahoma was not included due to the lack of records or reports substantiating any such problems. The paramount obstacle considered in those instances was that of "no problem."

Due to the intensity and the considerable amount of information that was concentrated into this research effort, related theses from other states were not utilized as they might have been had the circumstances been otherwise.

Definition of Terms

Black, Negro, Colored was defined in this writing to mean any person of African descent dwelling within the United States of America during the period of time covered in this study. The terms will be used interchangeably according to the era under discussion.

Slave was the term used for a person of African descent who was held in servitude by another person.

Separate, Colored, Negro School was any school established for the primary attendance of persons of African descent.

Segregation was the complete separation of the races in the various functions relative to day-to-day functions in all aspects of life unless specifically indicated.

Desegregation was the abolishing laws and practices permitting the separation of races.

Integration was the removal of legal and social barriers imposing segregation upon racial groups.

Jim Crow Legislation was legislation that prohibited and restricted the actions and rights of persons of African descent in the

United States.

Method and Procedure of the Study

After initially reviewing the literature and researching the availability of primary resource persons, the decision was made to conduct the study utilizing the historical method of research, since it could best be suited to the descriptive analysis employed in the study. Although topics were divided into chapters, chronological perspective was employed to depict the origin and development of A History of Black Education in Oklahoma.

The gathering of data was performed basically in five steps: 1. Published printed matter, locally and nationally, as investigated and used to provide related data not necessarily limited to the education of black children in Oklahoma. 2. Unpublished printed matter, primarily dissertations and these written at institutions of higher learning, were researched and those related to the study were used as references. 3. In rare instances, references were made to unpublished theses and dissertations written at institutions of higher learning outside the state of Oklahoma. 4. Interviews were conducted with primary resource persons who could provide information relative to the specific topic at hand. 5. Occasional personal notes taken from formal lectures and university classes that related to events which occurred during periods of time covered by the study.

Because of the contemporary nature of a large portion of the study, the interview method was relied upon heavily for much of the information. Further reliability was dependent upon documented sources such as published materials and public documents. Black educators who lived

during a large portion of the era covered in the study were sought for interviews. Except for those in poor health, all persons sought for interview were cooperative.

The research of printed materials was conducted in public city libraries, public school libraries, college and university libraries, and the Oklahoma State Library. Research was also conducted in the Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, private collections, and personal collections.

The data were initially compiled and placed in chronological order according to topic of discussion. After the initial compilation was completed, further research and study were conducted to provide additional detailed information. In addition, the study was checked for questions of authenticity and reliability.

The Introduction presents the problem, methods of investigation, initial review of the literature, sources of data and notes of related studies.

An extensive analysis of the literature is provided in Chapter II.

Early educational opportunities for blacks in Oklahoma is portrayed in Chapter III, including the participation of blacks in the early exploration of Oklahoma. In addition, this chapter covers the Indian schools, Mission schools, and the advent of "separate schools" in Oklahoma.

Chapter IV deals with the circumstances of black public education after November 16, 1907. This chapter identifies related national and state legislation, and the actual organizational procedure for separate schools.

Chapter V provides an analysis of the various methods utilized to provide funds for the support of black schools. Consideration was given to state, county, local, and private funding.

The operational process of the administration and instruction in black schools in Oklahoma is described in Chapter VI. Black professional organizations that played important roles in the education of black children in Oklahoma are also given consideration.

In Chapter VII the contemporary aspects of black public education in Oklahoma are investigated. The problems that were prevalent from 1954 on through the 1960's and into the first half of the 1970's are dealt with in detail.

Chapter VIII consists of a summary, including the writer's conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions were drawn from the findings of the study. The recommendations are meant to reflect changes that would enhance improvement in the educational opportunities of black children in Oklahoma.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much beneficial information related to the study was obtained from unpublished dissertations and theses available in various libraries. In some instances the documents were not available in any of the libraries, but the writer was fortunate to locate them through even more reliable sources--their authors. Publications and textbooks written in and about Oklahoma were researched, and those covering topics related to the study were relied upon to substantiate the writer's findings.

Gene Aldrich, in his Black Heritage of Oklahoma,⁹ provided a general summary of black people in Oklahoma from the state's origin. Aldrich wrote about the various phases of life including politics, education, sports, religion, and society in general. The book did not provide an in-depth study in any particular area but furnished relevant information.

Willa A. Strong's "The Origin, Development, and Current Status of Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women's Clubs,"¹⁰ and Evelyn R. Strong's "The Historical Development of the Oklahoma Association of Negro

⁹Aldrich.

¹⁰Willa A. Strong.

Teachers,"¹¹ were efforts of black women who conducted extensive research into the social, political, religious, and educational life of black people in Oklahoma. They attempted to trace the cultural progress of blacks in Oklahoma from its origin until the termination period of their studies.

Melvin R. Todd conducted a study that dealt with the more humanistic aspect of the student in the urban high school. Consideration was given to the minority student and to the culturally deprived. There was concern expressed for the manner in which the rights of students were violated by school administrators and teachers. Todd's study was entitled "Analysis of Policies and Practices in Selected Oklahoma Urban High Schools Which Indicate A Commitment To or Violation of Human Rights."¹²

"A Comparative Study of Langston University Freshmen Who Graduated From Desegregated High Schools and Those From Predominantly Negro Schools"¹³ was a study conducted by Elmyra R. Davis, a faculty member of the staff of Langston University. The study was involved with the comparative academic success of college freshmen from the two types of schools that were found in Oklahoma prior to 1969, the predominantly black school and the desegregated high school. Davis concluded that the women from both types of schools scored higher than the men. There was no significant difference among the men.

¹¹Evelyn R. Strong.

¹²Todd.

¹³Davis.

Kay M. Teall's Black History of Oklahoma: A Resource Book,¹⁴ a supplementary text for Oklahoma history classes taught in the Oklahoma Public School System, was a viable resource in substantiating facts, dates, and events.

Dagley's "The Negro in Oklahoma"¹⁵ was a study of blacks in Oklahoma from the early territorial days up to 1926. The study contained a considerable amount of logistical information that was quite useful.

"The History of Education in Eastern Oklahoma From 1898-1915,"¹⁶ by Jackson, vividly described the attempts of education made by and for The Five Civilized Tribes. In the description provided, there was considerable information relative to the education of blacks in eastern Oklahoma during the period of time covered by Jackson's study.

Hatcher's "The Development of Legal Controls in Racial Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma"¹⁷ presented some political aspects of segregation in Oklahoma.

Moses F. Miller's study, entitled "A History of the Negro Oklahoma Interscholastic Athletic Association,"¹⁸ traced the progress of organized sports in Oklahoma from Territorial days to 1948.

¹⁴Kay M. Teall, Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971).

¹⁵Wallace Dagley, "The Negro in Oklahoma" (Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1926).

¹⁶Joe C. Jackson, "The History of Education in Eastern Oklahoma From 1898-1915" (Ed.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1950).

¹⁷Ollie Everett Hatcher, "The Development of Legal Controls in Racial Segregation in the Public Schools of Oklahoma" (Ed.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1954), p. 105.

¹⁸Moses F. Miller, "A History of the Negro Oklahoma Interscholastic Athletic Association" (Master's thesis, University of New Mexico, 1949).

Spears' study dealt primarily with the aspects of segregation in higher education, but "Social Forces in the Admittance of Negroes to the University of Oklahoma"¹⁹ did have direct bearing upon the overall educational picture of black students in Oklahoma. The Spears' study indicated that much research had been conducted in the realm of legislation and financing. The study pointed out the social acceptance of segregated education in Oklahoma, and while not attempting to justify the practice, did not condemn it.

See and Know Oklahoma,²⁰ by R. G. Miller, included an account of the desegregation process in Oklahoma City during the first half of the 1960's.

Where Miller's work terminated, Stewart's Born Grown²¹ took over and reported on desegregation into the 1970's.

Other Historical data were readily available through the utilization of Oklahoma history textbooks, such as Harlow's Harlow's Oklahoma History,²² Dale's Oklahoma, the Story of a State,²³ McReynolds' Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State,²⁴ and Montgomery's The Growth of

¹⁹Earnestine Beatrice Spears, "Social Forces in the Admittance of Negroes to the University of Oklahoma" (Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1951).

²⁰R. G. Miller, See and Know Oklahoma (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: The Oklahoma Publishing Company, 1965).

²¹Roy P. Stewart, Born Grown (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Fidelity National Bank, 1974).

²²Victor E. Harlow, Harlow's Oklahoma History (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1967).

²³Everett Edward Dale, Oklahoma, the Story of a State (Evanston, Illinois: Harper and Row, 1963).

²⁴Edward C. McReynolds, Oklahoma: A History of the Sooner State (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954).

Oklahoma.²⁵

Without these materials, A History of Black Public Education in Oklahoma would have been virtually impossible to compile.

The writer did not attempt to make any comparison with other states or regions within the United States; therefore, the primary concentration of literature was restricted to Oklahoma publications.

²⁵T. T. Montgomery et al., The Growth of Oklahoma, rev. ed. (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Economy Company Publishers, 1953).

CHAPTER III

EARLY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR BLACKS IN OKLAHOMA

Although educational opportunities were limited for blacks during the early days of Oklahoma, some opportunities for education did exist. Gradually, blacks began to recognize the importance of even those bits of sketchy, sporadic educational experiences.

Early Exploration

A black child attending a separate school in Oklahoma would be unlikely to find in his study of Oklahoma history any mention of blacks among the de Sotos, the Balboas, and the Coronados that traversed back and forth across the New World in search of fabled riches. Deeper investigation into historical data did indicate, however, that blacks were involved in the early explorations of the United States, including Oklahoma.²⁶ If the discovery and charting of new lands were considered of educational value to white explorers, then it was of educational value to the black explorers who accompanied them.

One of the most important men in the early exploration of Oklahoma never saw Oklahoma himself. The man was Estevanico--sometimes called Estevan or Stephen. Estevanico was a black man, and while much is known about the last years of his life and his death, little is known about his birth or his early years. He may have been an African who came or was brought to Spain in his

²⁶Harlow, pp. 30-33.

youth; perhaps he was Spanish by birth, the son of some of the many Africans then living in Spain. . . History records him as the slave of Andres Dorantes, a Spanish explorer who came to the New World as a member of the Narvaez party, which set out from Spain in June, 1527, with five ships and six hundred men, to explore and settle the lands between Florida and Mexico.²⁷

It was shown by examination of historical data that, beginning in the nineteenth century, blacks not only accompanied expeditions, but they were also encountered at trading posts.

The most extensive United States exploration of Oklahoma was made by the Stephen H. Long Expedition. Major Long explored portions of Oklahoma on two different occasions. In 1817 he was ordered by the War Department to select a site on the Arkansas River for a military post . . .²⁸

On this mission with Long was a botanist and geologist named Edwin James, who kept a journal of their travels. Notes in the journal indicated that there were blacks living among those members of The Five Civilized Tribes who had already migrated from the southeastern states.²⁹

Most explorers who visited Oklahoma in the early years did not write about the people who made up their parties, but there were periodic references by writers that black people were a part of these explorations. Accounts of Bernard de la Harpe, the French explorer in Oklahoma, mentions "savages" included in his party. The writers, Thomas Nuttal, Charles Latrobe, and George Catlin, referred to the presence of blacks in Oklahoma during the early nineteenth century.³⁰

Indian Schools

Oklahoma history textbooks told of The Five Civilized Tribes

²⁷Ibid., p. 35.

²⁸McReynolds, pp. 65-70. ²⁹Ibid., pp. 35-36.

³⁰Dale, pp. 74-94.

being removed to Oklahoma, beginning in 1817 when a few Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks came voluntarily. Historical documents suggest that few Seminoles were known to have come without resisting. Each of these tribes was reported to have included blacks, often as slaves, and, in many instances, as free men and women.

The life styles of the various tribes differed, and the manner in which they treated their slaves differed also.

Slaves took various forms among the different tribes and with individual members of the tribes. Among the full bloods, slaves exercised many privileges, and in many instances, their condition of servitude was hardly discernable, while among mixed bloods, they were required to be slaves in all manner of work. . .

The Chickasaws established themselves in a position comparable to the idle rich. Hence, the slaves they brought were more for personal gain. The Choctaws of mixed blood opened up extensive plantations and grew wealthy from the cultivation of cotton with their large number of slaves. The full Choctaws depended upon their stock for a livelihood and found slave labor of little value to them.

Among most Indians the Negro slave's life of relative freedom and absence of severe labor was a favorable contrast with that of the plantation slave of the deep south, which accounted for the Indian slave being regarded as badly spoiled. . .

By 1890 there were four distinct social groups in the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations: the white noncitizen, the whites who had intermarried and by virtue of that intermarriage were citizens, the full bloods, and the Negro freedmen, who although in a deplorable condition, were thrifty and inclined to hold themselves aloof from other Negroes. . .

The Creeks and the Seminoles were said to be kindest to their slaves. The Seminoles adopted slaves and freedmen, and gave them equal rights to land annuities, and included them in every phase of the tribal life. Intermarriage was acceptable and found to occur quite frequently. The Seminoles and the blacks that lived among them were not too impressed with education. Very little emphasis was placed upon education and in comparison with blacks outside the Seminole tribe, the Seminole blacks fared poorly.³¹

More provisions for education were made among the Creeks:

In 1873 the Creeks maintained five schools for black children. The average attendance was thirty. Negro children also attended

³¹Wyatt F. Jeltz, "The Relations of Negroes and Choctaw Indians," Journal of Negro History, XXXIII (January, 1948): 25-35.

the schools organized for Indian children. Although the buildings were crude and the teachers incompetent, the efforts spent on the schools at this time were not entirely wasted. The Negroes secured a glimpse of how an education could improve their lot and the more ambitious insisted that their children attend the schools for the few months they were in session. Since most of the Negroes were farmers and the old idea prevailed that a farmer did not need a formal education, large numbers of the Negro children were kept at home to work in the fields instead of attending school.³²

. . . White traders introduced firearms, trade goods, horses, cattle, hogs and chickens and frequently took Cherokee wives. These marriages gave rise to mixed-blood families . . . which played significant roles in Cherokee affairs in the East and later in Oklahoma. The sons and daughters of these marriages, more like their fathers than their mothers, adopted the white man's manner of living, including the development of vast estates, ranches, businesses, and plantations in the Cherokee Nation, and many became slaveholders.³³

Cherokee and Creek slaves were involved in a major slave uprising in Oklahoma against the Cherokees in 1842 at Webbers Falls, located near where the North Canadian River empties into the Arkansas River in north-eastern Oklahoma.³⁴

The Cherokee 'upper-class' placed a high value upon education. This fact was emphasized by the number of academies and mission schools that were located within the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation.³⁵

Mission Schools

Mission schools in the Indian Territory helped the Indian masters and their slaves. The mission school taught cleanliness, health, and the truth about God. Blacks, whites, and Indians often attended the same school. Records of mission schools for the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and the

³²Aldrich, pp. 34-35.

³³Harlow, p. 60.

³⁴Teall, pp. 38-39.

³⁵Aldrich, pp. 15-35.

Choctaw were more readily available than for the Creeks and the Seminoles. As previously noted, the Seminoles were allegedly not in favor of formal education of any kind. Mission schools were usually sponsored and staffed by religious organizations. Various denominations had missions established in Indian Territory at one time or another. More prevalent sponsors were the Baptists, the Moravians, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Congregationalists. With few exceptions, these sponsors were approved by the United States government. Supervision and financial assistance by the United States government was at a minimum.³⁶

Dwight Mission . . . established in 1821, was moved into the new Cherokee Nation eight years later by Reverend C. Washburn to a place that was called Wicksville. . . Fairfield was established in 1829; Park Hill in 1836; and Old Baptist Mission established in 1839 were three of the more outstanding missions of the missions in the Cherokee Nation.

First among the missions of the Choctaws in Oklahoma was Wheelock . . . founded near the site of Millerton in 1832. The oldest church building now standing in the state was erected there in native stone in 1843. Asbury Mission was established by the Methodists in 1847 near the Southeastern border of the Creek Nation; Goodwater Choctaw Mission established near the Red River southwest of Doaksville in 1837; Spencer Academy established in 1841; Armstrong Academy near the site of Bokchito in 1845.

The Chickasaws opened a Manual Training School for Boys near Tishomingo in 1851; Wapanucka Academy, northwest of Boggy Depot, opened in 1852, and Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Girls, built in 1852, were religious and educational centers of importance.³⁷

Tullahasee Mission was originally built for the Creeks, but after 1880 the school was turned over to the blacks who lived in the Creek Nation. From a report made by the superintendent, John P. Lawton, the following information was gained by Teall:

The school was opened on the 14th of November (1883), a majority of the children selected by the trustees have presented themselves, have been enrolled, and are being taught.

³⁶ibid.

³⁷McReynolds, pp. 75-76.

Those in charge of the school have had the usual trouble that always attends the opening of a new school; still, there is a prospect for a good school. The trustees have had much trouble in selecting the pupils from the great number presenting themselves, but they have done their duty faithfully.

In regard to the financial condition of the school, I beg leave to state that I have partly furnished the house, with the means provided, buying those things most needed. There are, however, many things needed for the comfort of the teachers and the scholars. Especially would I speak of a bell, beds, and bedding. I would state, also, that there has been no stock purchased for the farm, except a span of horses; no farming implements, except a wagon.

The house leaks badly and will have to be repaired soon or the plastering will fall . . .

It has been suggested, by the friends of the school, that some changes in rooms should be made to make it convenient for both sexes. I think so myself.

Thus it will be seen, that there is an imperative need for repair and changes; for purchase of stock and farming implements, for a bell and a little more furniture . . .³⁸

This early, rudimentary attempt at providing some education exclusively for black children was one of the first schools that could be identified by name. The apologetic tone of Mr. Lawton's request for assistance in building repairs was almost a prophesy of the manner in which black school principals in a large number of separate schools were to deal with their administrative superiors in years to come (prior to 1954, and in some instances, as late as 1964).

Although facilities and instructional personnel were limited, it would appear that from the beginning blacks were concerned about education and its benefits. However, the black child who sought an education was faced with much difficulty.

The early schools attended by the blacks were work-oriented. Discipline was strictly enforced and the conditions according to the standards of 1976 would be inferior.

In 1883, the Baptist Home Mission Society opened a school called

³⁸Teall, p. 88.

Evangel Mission in what is now Muskogee. This school existed until 1891 when it became an orphanage for black children.³⁹

The blacks among the Chickasaws and Choctaws were concerned about the education of their children and expressed this concern through a petition to the Secretary of Interior in 1882. There appeared to be some educational opportunities provided under the auspices of the Baptist Missionary Board. The blacks among the Chickasaws and Choctaws were predominately Methodists and opposed their children being taught by teachers of the Baptist faith. Their petition was recognized by the Congress of the United States which responded by voting them \$10,000 for the support of schools for blacks in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations.⁴⁰

The schools attended by the children of the Negro freedmen could not be compared with the schools of today; however, they did not differ widely from schools for the Indians. White children living in Indian Territory had to attend the schools provided for the Indian children; or, if their parents were sufficiently affluent, they were sent East to attend school. The main point to consider here is that though the attainment of any form or semblance of education was at best quite difficult for blacks during the early days of Oklahoma, they were still able to recognize a need and realize potential benefits from pursuing the process.⁴¹

Separate Schools Before Statehood

The western half of Oklahoma was officially opened for white

³⁹Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁰Jackson, pp. 202-221.

⁴¹Aldrich, pp. 33-34.

settlement on April 22, 1889. It took only a short time for the settlers to realize that strong government was necessary if they were to survive and prosper. Congress, paying heed to the delegates of a convention held in Guthrie in 1890, passed the Oklahoma Organic Act. President Benjamin Harrison signed the document May 2, 1890. The act reorganized Indian Territory and established a territorial government for Oklahoma Territory. (Indian Territory covered the eastern half of present day Oklahoma.) This statute served as a constitution for Oklahoma Territory for seventeen years. It provided for a governor, a territorial secretary, an attorney, and three district judges who also constituted a territorial supreme court.⁴²

The territorial governor was assigned the task of forming the Territorial Legislature under the guidelines provided by the Organic Act. By July, 1890, he was able to issue a call for the first session of the recently elected legislature, which met on August 27, 1890. The session lasted 120 days and before its close, a system of public education was established providing for elementary schools and high schools for towns and townships. The First Territorial Legislature gave the various counties the option to decide whether they wanted mixed schools or separate schools for the races. A majority of the counties chose to have separate schools. In some counties blacks were permitted to attend school with whites; in other counties, even though there were no separate schools provided for them, they were not permitted to attend the white schools.⁴³

In 1897 the Territorial Legislature passed a new education law

⁴²Harlow, pp. 318-332. ⁴³Ibid.

which stated: "It shall hereafter be unlawful for any white child to attend a colored school or for a colored child to attend a white school . . ."44

Early legislation also stated that the majority school and the minority school should have equal facilities and the same length of school year. The law was so written as to allow for some procrastination by the various boards of education.

When separate schools are established as provided in this act, the term shall be the same in each school year and shall be provided with equal school facilities: Provided, that where school boards have provided separate school buildings and teachers for the education of colored children in their respective districts, where no special school has been established as now provided by law, said school boards shall have the right to maintain said separate school until said separate schools have been established as provided in this act.⁴⁵

In several of the southern states, provision had been made for separate schools as soon as they began to emerge from the era of Reconstruction. A large majority of the white citizens of Oklahoma Territory were southerners, so it was only natural that their views toward separate schools would be the same as the prevalent views in the states from whence they came.⁴⁶

West Virginia, in 1863, was the first southern state to make provisions in its constitution for "equal though separate" education of blacks. Even prior to 1863 the District of Columbia set aside 10 percent

⁴⁴Session Laws of Oklahoma-1897. Chap. 34, Art. 1, Sec. 9, p. 262.

⁴⁵Session Laws of Oklahoma-1897. Chap. 34, Sec. 8, p. 267.

⁴⁶Harlow, pp. 328-332.

of the taxes paid by blacks for the support of black schools.⁴⁷

The question of the public support of Negro education was tied up with the status of the Negro in the nation. The legal status of the Negro in the nation was finally decided by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which established the citizenship rights of the Negro.⁴⁸

The passage of these amendments to the constitution was made possible by the Reconstruction. For some years following the Reconstruction, black schools were reportedly maintained on an equal basis with white schools. A number of factors were at work. First to be considered was the voting power of blacks who supported candidates promising educational privileges. There was also the unwritten agreement between the North and South that in depriving blacks of political rights, blacks would still enjoy educational rights which would prepare them for citizenship. Bond put it this way:

If the South pleaded that Negroes were unfit for citizenship, if Henry Grady, as its representative, asked for tolerance on the part of the North for its treatment of Negroes, the North was willing to acquiesce if assured that conditions would not be allowed totally to revert to antebellum strictures upon the mobility or education of the Negro. If the Negro was not yet ready for citizenship, it was implied that the South should prepare him for his gradual assumption of the role. If Southern states, immediately upon the end of Reconstruction had deprived the Negro not only of citizenship rights but also of educational privileges, it is doubtful whether the North would have shown the same compliance which it did exhibit. In the same way, then, that Southern candidates advised their supporters to avoid riots, brawls, and other disturbances which might give some Northern Republican a chance to "wave the bloody shirt," the leaders of the conservative regime pledged themselves and their parties to a continued participation of the Negro in educational privileges, while they

⁴⁷W. E. B. Dubois, The Common School and the Negro American (Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Company, Division of Kraus-Thompson Organization, Ltd., 1901), pp. 38-70.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

quietly but firmly stripped him of his political power.⁴⁹

Blacks that came to Oklahoma before 1889 were possibly able to take advantage of only a few of the rights and privileges that had temporarily been extended to their kindred lot who remained in the south. Oklahoma was considered a Border Territory and like the Border States, probably did not feel the effects of the Reconstruction as heavily as did the Southern State proper. The direct information obtained by the blacks in Indian Territory as to the status of blacks in the south was probably limited in quantity. With the opening of Oklahoma Territory in 1889, blacks migrating from the south brought with them different views concerning education and its value.

During a period lasting approximately twenty years, from 1890 to 1910, blacks migrated to Oklahoma from the south in large numbers. Many of these black settlers were lured into the state with the promise of a Black State.

Many of these early settlers from Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Southeast Missouri had come on invitation from the young Negro pioneer, Edward McCabe, assistant auditor to Oklahoma Territory from 1890 until the day prior to statehood. This remarkable young Negro lawyer, who had been the twice-elected state auditor of Kansas before coming to Oklahoma, was a prominent figure in the early territorial political scene.⁵⁰

McCabe established the Langston Herald in 1891. He used this newspaper in his attempt to lure black pioneers to Oklahoma Territory. McCabe was an unusual man. In 1890 he had already founded Langston City, Oklahoma Territory, naming it for John Mercer Langston of Virginia.

⁴⁹Horace M. Bond, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1934), pp. 82-83.

⁵⁰Aldrich, pp. 35-37.

Langston was an individual worthy of note. He was possibly the first black elected to a public office in the United States when he was elected Township Clerk of Brownhelm, Ohio in 1855. Later, during the Civil War, he recruited black troops for the Union Army. He was an attorney, a college professor, a college president, and a United States Congressman. He accomplished much during his lifetime in spite of the fact that he was born a slave.⁵¹ His accomplishments most likely inspired McCabe to name the town he founded in Langston's honor. McCabe was fortunate in that he had a large number of prospects from which to select.

A threefold increase in Negro population in Oklahoma occurred from 1900 to 1910. The ratio of Negro and white citizens born outside of Oklahoma in 1910 was 66.6 percent for Negroes and 71.5 for whites. Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Tennessee were the former homes of approximately 5 percent of Oklahoma Negroes.⁵²

The influx of blacks from various southern states had an obvious effect upon education in Oklahoma, especially in eastern Oklahoma, during the Territorial period. During the first decade of the twentieth century, black schools were established in Muskogee, Eufaula, Checotah, Tulsa, Wagoner, and Okmulgee. The advent of schools for blacks produced positive results. Dagley stated that illiteracy among blacks in Oklahoma dropped from 35 percent in 1900 to 17.77 percent in 1910.⁵³ This increase in literacy has to be considered surprising when consideration is given to the fact that the increase was accomplished through the use of three or four textbooks for a maximum term of three months in a sod or log cabin

⁵¹Encyclopedia International, 1973 ed., s.v. "Langston, John Mercer," by Julius J. Marke.

⁵²Willia A. Strong, p. 23.

⁵³Dagley, pp. 80-102.

with crudely improvised furniture.

It might be well at this point to regress and update the situation pertaining to the education of blacks among the Indians. Thought must be given to the fact that Indian Territory was considered a separate territory from Oklahoma Territory until statehood was granted in 1907.

There was cause for alarm by black people in Oklahoma Territory and in Indian Territory relative to education opportunities. Separate but equal was not a reality in either of the Territories. Black citizens, especially in the larger towns, actively protested the conditions of the segregated black schools. At one point a delegation was sent to Washington to voice protest; however, the protests were overshadowed by a series of political moves with which the black citizens were unable to successfully compete. The Territorial Legislature was determined to lay the preliminary groundwork for statehood. Most likely it was aware of the precedent established by West Virginia in 1863 in passing "separate but equal" legislation. The Territorial Legislature probably felt that it was on solid ground, because by this time the United States Congress had practically replaced all Reconstructionists' legislators.⁵⁴

Research indicated that a majority of the black schools traced in Oklahoma Territory were located in towns and cities. In March, 1891, the first black school was opened in Oklahoma City.

A two room house at the corner of California and Harvey Streets was used and J. D. Randolph was the teacher. The first term lasted only four months, but it was agreed by the school board to extend it to seven months, beginning the following year. Mr. Randolph stayed on as principal for several years and the school was moved and expanded several times, first to the 300 block on West California. Then a two story frame building was built in the 400 block and named Douglass. [The first high school graduation from Douglass

⁵⁴Aldrich, pp. 33-37.

took place in the spring of 1903 and the school burned that September, apparently set fire to by persons unknown and never caught. A building erected in 1894 was taken over by the school board and its name changed to Douglass.] By November of 1908, enrollment had increased to 581 and two additional buildings were added.⁵⁵

Before statehood, black schools in Oklahoma Territory were primarily concentrated in an area that was referred to as the Unassigned Lands. This region included portions of the present six counties of Logan, Oklahoma, Cleveland, Canadian, Kingfisher, and Payne. Guthrie, the leading Territorial City, established a black school in 1891 followed by Kingfisher in 1892. By 1893 there were several separate schools in rural areas throughout the Territory and in towns surrounding Oklahoma City: Edmond, Choctaw, El Reno, Lincoln, Township, Guthrie, and Kingfisher.⁵⁶

In eastern Oklahoma, otherwise referred to as Indian Territory, the education of black children was primarily under the control of The Five Civilized Tribes. After 1889, some changes were notable in Indian Territory. A decline in education opportunities was the rule rather than the exception among The Five Civilized Tribes. As federal control became more and more prevalent, concern for the education of black children appeared to decline. According to the reports of the federal Indian inspector of schools, the number of blacks enrolled in public schools in the Cherokee Nation declined from a high of 127 in 1902 to none reported in 1907 prior to statehood.⁵⁷

The fact that these were schools attended by Cherokees and whites

⁵⁵Teall, pp. 185-86. ⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Indian Inspector Report (Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, 1907), pp. 31-85.

must be considered. Perhaps the actions of the Territorial Legislature in western Oklahoma had some effect upon the eastern portion. In western Oklahoma certain restraints were placed upon the education of the black child through the establishment of a segregated school system. With this fact in mind, it should be realized that there were rudimentary provisions for the education of black children in the Cherokee Nation between the years 1889 and 1907. However, less consideration was given the education of blacks in the written reports that are presently ascertainable. There was some written evidence of a Colored High School located near Tahlequah. The reports studied indicated that this school was poorly kept and inferior to schools for white children in the territory. "The Colored High School was closed just before statehood with the buildings being sold at public auction and the land leased to individual farmers in the area."⁵⁸

Generally speaking, schools in the Creek Nation were deplorable during the Territorial era. Corruption permeated throughout the Nation's school system. Charges of incompetency were often reported. Officials were accused of having secured their position through political chicanery and bribery. Their successes were attributed to their ability to get along with others rather than their educational expertise. The superintendents of the boarding schools were all chosen on a patronage basis and such patronage was at its worst among the Negro schools. The superintendents of such institutions were often illiterate and the henchmen of

⁵⁸y. A. Travis, "Life in the Cherokee Nation, A Decade After The Civil War," Chronicles of Oklahoma, IV (March 1926): 24.

some Negro politicians.⁵⁹ Attendance was irregular throughout the Nation. Many times parents were said to have taken their children out of schools in order for them to work in the cotton fields. This practice was still utilized throughout Oklahoma, primarily by blacks, until the 1950's.

An interesting point discovered in studying the Creek Nation is the fact that more white and black children took advantage of the educational opportunities provided than did the Indian children. The Creeks were said to have felt that if they ignored the schools by not sending their children, they could eventually return to their old way of life. Creek Documents showed that there were twenty-one Negro schools in the Creek Nation in 1900.⁶⁰

Educational apathy was not the case of all blacks in the Creek Nation.

These conditions in the two schools are similar. . . . Each has passed the limit of seventy pupils . . . and still more are desirous of attending. . . . Both of these schools are in Negro settlements where people are thickly clustered⁶¹

These two schools were of the variety referred to as neighborhood schools supported by the tribe. There were subscription schools in the Creek Nation attended by the children of those who could afford the rate. Obviously, very few black children could afford to pay subscription. Due to the lack of personal wealth, black parents depended primarily upon the neighborhood schools for whatever education their children obtained.

Ordinarily, Negro families were large and their communities

⁵⁹Angie Debo, The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians (Norman, Oklahoma: Norman Press, 1941), p. 532.

⁶⁰Report filed in the Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Alice Robertson to Benedict, January 28, 1901.

⁶¹Ibid.

were compact. It was also easy to secure Negro teachers, for there were few jobs of other types open to educated people of their race. In fact, many educated Negroes from the States came to live among the Creeks, for here racial barriers were less formidable.⁶²

Thus, Robertson explained the availability of black teachers in the Creek Nation prior to 1907. With other jobs unavailable, it was only natural that educated blacks turned to teaching for a livelihood. It would appear that those who were forced into teaching took their occupation seriously. From 1900 until 1907, Summer Normal Institutes were held at selected locations within the Creek Nations, and black teachers' attendance was relatively high. Those institutes were described best as training schools for teachers. Teachers gathered each summer and discussed mutual problems and methods for dealing with them.

It was not until 1880 that the Seminoles as a Nation showed an appreciable interest in education. The apathetic approach to education by the Seminoles witnessed prior to 1889 did not greatly improve after 1889. In 1880 the tribe assumed the obligation of aiding the Methodist Episcopal Church South and in financing the Female Academy that the church had opened about two miles west of Sasakawa.

By 1889 the Seminole Nation was paying the entire expense of operating Mekukey except for teachers' salaries. In 1892 the Nation constructed new buildings for both the Male and Female Academies at an expense of about \$60,000 each . . . an outlay that practically left the Nation in bankruptcy.⁶³

Education was not popular in the Seminole Nation. This was demonstrated by the fact that by 1896 only four day-schools were reported

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Letter from Beck to Benedict, July 15, 1902, Indian Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society. (George Beck was the supervisor of the Chickasaw Schools; John D. Benedict was general superintendent of schools with The Five Civilized Tribes.)

in the Nation. Without exception, the day-school teachers were reported to be exceedingly poorly qualified, with many of them lacking in good common education. Due to the high level of integration into the Seminole Tribe by blacks, and in accordance with a treaty written and approved in March of 1866, black freedmen were to share equally with the Indians in all tribal benefits. This policy permitted blacks to share in all school funds and to generally exercise other rights as citizens. Because the Seminoles were not strongly inclined toward racial segregation, both races attended the day-schools and a number of blacks attended the academies. After 1904, when federal control was exercised more strongly, schools became somewhat racially identified. In 1904, the day-schools set aside for blacks were located at Tidmore and Wewoka. By 1906 there were four schools in the Seminole Nation for black children. They were located at Wewoka, Tidmore, Bethlehem, and Macedona. Enrollment of these four locations was approximately 272.⁶⁴

In 1898, when the federal government entered the field of Indian education, it found the tribal schools of the Choctaw Nation to be well established. Blacks living in the Choctaw Nation as freedmen were omitted from the educational process. Because they could not profit from the coal and asphalt royalty funds, as did the Indians of the Nation, they did not benefit from the education resulting from the same royalties.

Needless to say, this situation worked an extreme hardship on the freedmen as they were not permitted to attend schools established for Indians, and since there was no legal way they could set up institutions of their own, most of their children were growing up in ignorance, a

⁶⁴Joe C. Jackson, pp. 60-86.

situation that continued until Congress acted. After the federal appropriation in 1904, seventy-eight day-schools for blacks were established and maintained. The combined enrollment of these seventy-eight schools was reported to be 4,034. These day-schools were made possible by combining tribal funds with those provided through congressional appropriations. In 1907 there were reportedly public schools for blacks in Atoka, Coalgate, McAlester, and Canadian Counties. These public schools differed from the day-schools in that they offered courses considered to be on the high school level.⁶⁵

History of the Choctaw Nation revealed the large number of private and denomination schools that existed prior to statehood. Still only one such school, which was established near Valiant in McCurtain County, existed for the black children. The school was Oak Hill Academy. Oak Hill Academy continued under supervision of the Presbyterian board after statehood. By 1912, free tuition was offered, an industrial department was added, the high school program was broadened, and the general requirements were raised to meet those of similar institutions elsewhere.⁶⁶

With the possible exception of the Cherokees and Creeks, Negro education was more readily available in the Choctaw Nation than in the other areas. While they did not meet them socially and did not adopt them into the tribes, the Choctaws were concerned about the educational welfare of the freedmen.⁶⁷

Yet, the most outstanding school for blacks in the Choctaw Nation was a private school financed by a church organization, sometimes supplemented by private donations. (Records were unavailable to indicate that any funds were contributed by the Choctaw Nation.)

⁶⁵Indian Inspector Report (Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, 1900), p. 85.

⁶⁶Joe C. Jackson, pp. 60-85. ⁶⁷Ibid.

By 1900, Normal Institutes were established during the summer to provide training for teachers. It was not until 1907 that a summer Normal Institute was held for black teachers in the Nation. The Institute was held in what was referred to as South McAlester. It was attended by fifty-five teachers and had a faculty of three instructors.⁶⁸

The fate of blacks living among the Chickasaws in regard to education was somewhat similar to those living among the Choctaws during the Territorial Era, 1889-1907. Blacks were not permitted to share in the funds provided by the asphalt and coal royalties. Reports of neighborhood schools did not show any black enrollment as late as 1906, nor did they indicate that there had ever been any black enrollment.⁶⁹

The Congressional Appropriations of 1904 led to the establishment of black schools for the first time in the Chickasaw Nation. Through these appropriations, twelve day-schools for blacks were established showing an overall enrollment of 739.

Within the Nation, only Ardmore, Chickasha, Purcell and Wynnewood provided any form of consistent educational opportunities for blacks prior to 1907.⁷⁰

Records and reports were often lost or destroyed and when they were available they were quite often incomplete or fragmented to the point of unreliability. However, those items of information that were found were valuable and they provided some information needed to provide insight as to how the educational process worked, or failed to work, for black people who lived in Indian Territory during territorial days. In all of the Five Nations, some attempt was made at providing educational

⁶⁸Ibid. ⁶⁹Ibid. ⁷⁰Ibid.

opportunities for black children. This document did not lend itself to comparing the education of black children with that of the Indians and whites in the Territory.

CHAPTER IV

BLACK PUBLIC EDUCATION AFTER STATEHOOD

Article XIII, Section 3 of the Constitution of Oklahoma reads as follows:

Separate schools for white and colored children with like accommodations shall be provided by the legislature and impartially maintained. The term "colored children" as used in this section shall be construed to mean children of African descent. The term "white children" shall include all other children.⁷¹

This constitutional provision established the pattern for black public education in Oklahoma for many years. In Oklahoma there were not only separate schools but also separate phone booths, water fountains, rest rooms and waiting rooms. The pattern of segregation was established, and it began to crumble only after 1954. This does not mean that all segregationist practices ceased after 1954, but rather that this date marked the beginning of a complex desegregation process that is still in existence.

The Enabling Act

June 16, 1906, Theodore Roosevelt, President of the United States, signed the bill that laid the groundwork for Oklahoma to become a state. This bill was commonly referred to as the Enabling Act. More specifically, the Enabling Act provided that Indian Territory and Oklahoma be combined to form one state and that a constitutional convention be held

⁷¹Oklahoma Statutes, 1961, p. 113.

consisting of 112 delegates. Fifty-five delegates were to be elected from each of the territories and two from the Osage Reservation.

Single-member districts were to be the rule in all elections except those of the Osage Reservation, where both were to be elected at-large. In Oklahoma Territory the governor, secretary and Chief Justice had the joint responsibility of defining the districts. In the Indian Territory the function was performed by a committee made up of the Indian Commissioner and two federal Judges designated by the President. It was provided in the law that "all male persons over the age of twenty-one years who are citizens of the United States or who are members of any Indian nation or tribe in said Indian Territory and Oklahoma, and who have resided within the limits of proposed state for at least six months next preceding the election," should be eligible to vote for members of the constitutional convention. All persons who are qualified to vote were also eligible to serve as delegates. Guthrie, the capitol of Oklahoma Territory, was to remain temporary capitol of the state until 1913, but in the intervening years the legislature was not to appropriate "public moneys of the state" for building a state capitol. . . . The Convention was required to provide a republican form of government, to establish religious liberty, to prohibit polygamous marriages, to exclude intoxicants from the Osage Reservation and Indian Territory for twenty-one years, and to assume for the state all debts of Oklahoma Territory. The Convention was to establish a system of public schools, to accept the provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and to submit the completed constitution to a vote of the people of Oklahoma. The new state was to send five members to the lower house of the United States Congress until the next regular apportionment act, as provided in the federal constitution. The sum of \$5,000,000 was appropriated for Oklahoma schools in lieu of sections sixteen and thirty-six in the townships of Indian Territory, where there was no public land to reserve for public education.⁷²

The Enabling Act, just as the Organic Act that preceded it, contained provisions for public education. The Congress of the United States did not specify the manner in which the educational system would be established. The construction of the system of public education was left to the designs of the Constitutional Convention provided for in the Enabling Act.

⁷²McReynolds, pp. 314-15.

The Constitutional Convention

On November 6, 1906, elections were held for delegates to the Constitutional Convention. Twelve of the men elected were registered as Republicans, one an Independent, and ninety-nine were Democrats. One might have assumed by the very nature of party affiliations of the majority of the delegates that they would be somewhat pro-segregation. The memory of the Civil War still lingered in the minds of many. This, coupled with the terrible Reconstruction years that followed, possibly left a bitter taste in the mouths of the Democrats toward anything mindful of the political party blamed for the most destructive war thus far known to the comparatively young nation.⁷³

The thirteen Republican delegates attending the Constitutional Convention were led by Henry R. Asp, Republican Chairman. . . . The Republicans were unsympathetic with the Democratic program and participated very little in preparing the constitution which was adopted.⁷⁴

The Convention convened November 20, 1906, in the Guthrie City Hall and remained in session until July, 1907. William H. Murray, an attorney from Tishomingo, was elected president of the convention. He was reported to have indicated that he was going to see to it that Oklahoma had a state constitution that provided for every emergency that would occur in the history of any people. It was his opinion that if such a basic law could be written, it would never need to be amended. With this objective in mind, the president of the convention wore out three gavels during the nearly nine months that the convention was in session.⁷⁵

⁷³Harlow, p. 399. ⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Copied from the Transcripts of the Sessions of the Constitutional Convention, 1906-1907, Archives, State Library of Oklahoma.

William H. Murray had definite ideas as to the place of blacks within the framework of society. He did not hesitate to voice his feelings at the convention on the issue of blacks in Oklahoma and later wrote and published a book concerning "the place" of the black.⁷⁶

In his inaugural address to the Constitutional Convention, Murray expressed himself:

We should adopt a provision prohibiting the mixed marriages of Negroes with other races in this State, and provide for separate schools and give the Legislature power to separate them in waiting rooms and on passenger coaches, and all other institutions in the State. We have no desire to do the Negro injustice. We shall protect him in his real rights. No one can entirely be said to educate him or civilize another. We must provide means for the advancement of the Negro race and accept him as God gave him to us and use him for the good of society. As a rule they are failures as lawyers, doctors and in other professions. He must be taught in the line of his own sphere, as porters, bootblacks and barbers and in many lines of agriculture, horticulture and mechanics in which he is an adept, but it is an entirely false notion that the Negro can rise to the equal citizen to grapple with public questions. The more they are taught in the line of industry the less will be the number of dope fiends, crap shooters and irresponsible hordes of worthless Negroes around our cities and towns. I am a descendant of an ex-slave-holder, reared in a community where freedmen were in the majority. I know their traits and in some things I appreciate them as an integral part of the State. I know them from "A" to "Z". I have represented them in the courts, worked them on my farm and know them thoroughly. I appreciate the old-time ex-slave, the old darky--and they are the salt of their race--who comes to me talking softly in that humble spirit which should characterize their actions and dealings with white men, and when they thus come they can get any favor from me. I doubt the propriety of teaching him in his public schools to run for office or train him for professions, but his training should be equal so far as the appropriations of funds are concerned to that of any other race, but he should be taught agriculture, mechanics and industries that would make of him a being serviceable to society. At the same time let us provide in the Constitution that he shall have equal rights before the Courts of the county, that he shall have whatever is due him but teach him that he must lean upon himself, rise by his own exertions, hew out his own destiny as an

⁷⁶William H. Murray, The Negro's Place in Call of Race (Tishomingo, Oklahoma: Murray Publishing Co., 1948).

integral but separate element of the society of the State of Oklahoma.⁷⁷

Murray was not alone in his feelings concerning the rights of blacks. When the subject of Jim Crow legislation came up during the convention, there were numerous lengthy debates as to how to word the section so that it would be acceptable to President Theodore Roosevelt. The debates began early on the morning of February 20, 1907, and did not terminate until late in the evening of February 24, 1907. "According to the transcripts of the Constitutional Convention . . . it be best and prudent to deal with the Jim Crow Rule by legislation to the Constitution after statehood has occurred.⁷⁸

Murray had to allow for some weaknesses in his original objective of formulating an unamendable constitution. Though legislation would not necessarily be an outright amendment, it was a limiting influence upon the writers of the constitution. Possibly (in this way of thinking) the results would be worthy of restrictions. Based upon previous occurrences, the delegates were not willing to come into direct confrontation with the strong-willed President of the United States; so, in the end, they refrained from including Jim Crow doctrine in the original text of the Constitution of Oklahoma.⁷⁹

The Provisions of The Constitution of Oklahoma

Despite his strong opposition to the Constitution of Oklahoma, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed Oklahoma the forty-sixth state

⁷⁷Transcripts of Constitutional Convention, Archives, State Library of Oklahoma.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹McReynolds, pp. 316-17.

November 16, 1907. President Roosevelt was recorded by history as being openly critical of the state's lengthy basic law, which was roughly ten times longer than the original Constitution of the United States. He felt that the constitution contained much material that might well have been left to the determination of later legislatures of Oklahoma.⁸⁰

Although the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was to be incorporated into the constitution, in 1910 an amendment was added to the state constitution requiring voters to pass a literacy test unless their grandfathers had previously been able to qualify as voters in any state or in any Indian tribe. This virtually stripped from the black populace of Oklahoma the right of the ballot, for a great majority of the blacks of voting age in Oklahoma were children or grandchildren of former slaves who never had had the right to vote in their former states.⁸¹

A delegation of concerned blacks went to Washington, D.C., to warn President Roosevelt that such a clause was forthcoming as soon as statehood was a reality, but their pleas were not heeded; and so it was⁸²

Article XIII of the constitution dealt solely with education. In Section 3 of Article XIII, the provision was made for separate schools for white and black children, and the term colored was defined.

Article I and Article XIII were two articles in the original text of the Oklahoma Constitution that included provisions for or mention of black schools. Later to come, in the form of amendments and state

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Oklahoma Statutes, 1910, Constitution of Oklahoma, Article III, Section 4a.

⁸²Related by Prof. S. L. Hargrove, Social Studies Professor, Langston University, 1954.

adopted laws, were other documented guidelines pertaining to the education of blacks.

. . . The first law was broad in scope and purpose. It required the complete segregation of, and equal facilities for, the white and Negro races in schools maintained by either public or private agencies. It gave legal interpretation and meaning to the constitutional provisions for administering education on a segregated basis.⁸³

It was unlawful for a teacher to teach in an institution that enrolled both black and white students for instructional purposes:

It shall be unlawful for any person, corporation or association of persons to maintain or operate any college, school or institution in this state where persons of the white and colored races are both received as pupils for instruction, and any person or corporation who shall maintain any such college, school or institution in violation hereof, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof, shall be fined not less than one hundred dollars nor more than five hundred dollars, and each day such school, college or institution shall be open and maintained, shall be deemed a separate offense.⁸⁴

. . . A special session of the legislature held in 1913 defined the term "separate school."⁸⁵

Under this legislation the minority school was presumed to be the separate school, but in reality, the black school was commonly referred to as the separate school. The county superintendent was appointed by law as the official empowered to govern the separate schools. By 1913 the pattern of a separate school system set aside for blacks had been sufficiently established. From that point the legislature passed statutes dealing with taxes, finances, and funding regarding separate schools.⁸⁶ The financing of black schools was discussed in another section. The

⁸³Hatcher, p. 105.

⁸⁴Oklahoma Statutes, 1907-1908, Chap. 77, Art. X, Sec. 6, pp. 695.

⁸⁵Hatcher, p. 107.

⁸⁶Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1913, C. 219, Art. 3.

separate school legislation was repealed in 1965, and five years later, in April of 1970, the legislature passed an emergency measure prohibiting segregation.⁸⁷

An Act relating to public school education; prohibiting segregation, discrimination, transfer, transportation, and assignment on account of race, creed, color or national origin in connection with the education of the children of this state.⁸⁸

With this law recorded in the books, all legal support for segregated education in Oklahoma was removed.

Separate Schools After Statehood

Although separate schools by law did not automatically mean schools for blacks, the general assumption was to that effect. By law, separate schools were defined as those schools attended by the minority race in a particular district. There were some districts in Oklahoma where black people were in a majority. However, the investigator has assumed that whenever separate schools are mentioned, schools attended only by blacks were involved unless otherwise defined.

It shall hereafter be the duty of all county superintendents of public instruction to contract with and employ all the teachers for the separate, or minority schools now maintaining or hereafter to be established in their respective counties. . . . The county superintendent of public instruction alone shall have power to prescribe rules and regulations for the government of said separate or minority schools.⁸⁹

Separate schools located in independent districts were administered by the local boards of education, making it a simple matter to establish a system of separate schools for blacks because they were the minority race in Oklahoma. Rural schools, or schools defined as dependent schools,

⁸⁷Oklahoma Statutes, 1970, p. 1669. ⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1911, Chap. 98, Sec. 1-2, p. 210.

were controlled by the County Superintendent of Instruction and supported primarily through county funds.⁹⁰

Whatever the legal implications, separate schools were a fact of life in Oklahoma, and an attempt to provide educational opportunities in any other way would have been in violation of state law. Under the separate school system, the environment for education became narrowly restricted.⁹¹ A majority of cultural, recreational, educational, and economic resources were withheld from black people and their children. Only when those things could be provided in the black community, through whatever means possible, did they benefit black children.

Separation of educational facilities in Oklahoma also served to separate white and black teachers. Legislation made it unlawful for them to be together in any public or private educational institution within the state for the purpose of teaching or learning.⁹² Stated another way:

One effect of this legislation was to keep the teachers apart, not only in the schools, but also, for many years, in their voluntary groups organized for purposes of professional communication and for professional self-improvement.⁹³

The stage was set, and black educators in Oklahoma were assigned the task of providing some semblance of education for the black children of Oklahoma without proper financial, moral, or even spiritual support. Black schools were left to fend for themselves after being provided a minimal amount of financial funding. "Separate but Equal" was a term

⁹⁰Hatcher, p. 108.

⁹¹Interview with C. A. Jackson, Okmulgee, Oklahoma, August 17, 1974.

⁹²Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1907-1908, Chap. 77, Art. VII, Sec. II, p. 678.

⁹³Evelyn R. Strong, p. 67.

lost in the rhetoric of the lawmakers of the First Legislature. With rare exceptions, separate schools were not nearly as well facilitated, staffed, or constructed as the schools attended by whites. There was no pretense made to this effect. Weary from teaching with outdated materials, outdated textbooks and shoddy equipment that would not be replaced, they still exhorted the value of obtaining an education to the black children that came to them for knowledge.⁹⁴

Despite innumerable restrictions and limitations placed on the separate school by lawmakers and society, some accomplishments were achieved. Black children did obtain an education within the black schools that enabled them to advance beyond the level of common laborers.

At the beginning of statehood there were several separate schools in operation throughout the state. With some disappointment at the Jim Crow legislation relative to education, these schools embarked upon a trail of progress and failures that did not end for more than half a century.

In 1907, there were separate schools in Oklahoma City, Muskogee, Guthrie, Shawnee, Enid, Ardmore, McAlester, Chickasha, Tulsa, Lawton, El Reno, Boley, Nowata, Sapulpa, and Hennessey. These were not the only separate schools operating in Oklahoma in 1907, but they were the ones serving the largest concentrations of black children.⁹⁵ "Black enrollment in 1908 totaled 20,803, of which 10,337 were males and 10,466 were females."⁹⁶ The total white enrollment for 1908 was 297,075, approximately

⁹⁴Interview with Mrs. A. J. Joiner, Frederick, Oklahoma, July 21, 1974.

⁹⁵State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1908, pp. 110-15.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 182.

ten times the black enrollment.

Also, in 1908, the state superintendent reported that there were 645 black teachers employed in schools located in eighteen counties. The remainder of the counties reported no black children enrolled in public schools. There were some counties that had no black population, therefore there was no black enrollment. Other counties had not provided schools for black children at that time. There were counties that did not feel it necessary to report information regarding black children. State Superintendent E. D. Cameron, in his 1908 report, expressed a desire to provide "a school in reach of every child of every color in the state."⁹⁷

By 1912 black enrollment had increased to 35,380 in schools located in sixty-four counties. This total was still less than 10 percent of the white enrollment which had grown to 447,462 in seventy-five counties. In 1914, State Superintendent R. H. Wilson admitted that "adequate records for separate schools were not kept prior to 1914." However, the report did show that 37,358 of the 45,773 black children of school age were enrolled in public schools. With the exception of the aforementioned locales, a large number of the separate schools were located in the rural areas prior to 1950. For example, in 1914, of the black teachers employed in Oklahoma, 366 taught in rural areas. These rural schools were frequently one and two-teacher schools, supported by the county, and directly under the supervision of the county superintendent.⁹⁸

By 1917 there were 105 graded separate schools scattered over

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 6. ⁹⁸Ibid., p. 426.

Oklahoma, ranging from the two-teacher type of institution to buildings housing five or more teachers. During the 1919-20 school term, there were 41,269 blacks enrolled in elementary schools and 1,192 enrolled in grades 9-12. The state census showed there to be 604 black school buildings in Oklahoma: 422 in the country, 121 more or less in cities, 28 in small towns, and the remainder consolidated.⁹⁹

The year 1920 was a decisive year for State Superintendent R. H. Wilson. It was during this year's report that he included a section solely concerned with separate schools. "The Negro scholastics in the state, in January, 1920, were 49,336, which is 7.3 percent of the total enumeration of the state."¹⁰⁰ During 1920, it was discovered that a majority of the blacks enrolled in the schools in Oklahoma were found in fifteen counties; twenty-seven counties had less than one hundred children enrolled and thirteen counties showed no black children enrolled in their schools.¹⁰¹

Black schools sought accreditation. The year 1920 found that ten black schools had achieved that goal: Boley, Chickasha Lincoln, Guthrie Faver, Idabel Colored, Luther Colored, Muskogee Colored, Nowata Colored, Oklahoma City Douglass, and Tulsa Colored.¹⁰² The reporting official described the recognized black school simply with the term "colored."

The "colored school" was usually found outside the city limits of the smaller towns throughout Oklahoma. In other instances, the "colored school" was a secluded, run-down building, miles from the

⁹⁹Oklahoma State Census, 1920, Oklahoma State Library.

¹⁰⁰State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1920.

¹⁰¹Ibid. ¹⁰²Ibid.

nearest town. These two types of schools had some elements in common. They were usually staffed by one or two teachers, and where there were two teachers, it was not uncommon for them to be man and wife. Usually the black student body passed one or more white schools enroute to the "colored school."

Black children usually were from one to four grades behind in their studies. If there was any transportation provided, it was a school bus discarded by the white school in the district because it was no longer considered fit for service. These schools usually taught grades one through eight. If a black child did manage to complete the eighth grade, it was quite likely that there was no high school available for him to further his education. Normally, there was one separate school in a county that provided high school opportunities. Some districts did provide run-down school buses to transport children from neighboring districts which did not have a separate high school. Meanwhile, throughout Oklahoma there were consolidated school districts that were for white children only. These schools were usually within walking distance of many of the black children who had to ride buses for distances as far as fifty miles one way in order to get to a school. On days when the weather was extremely bad, it was not unusual for a bus load of children to arrive at school after noon, half frozen, and often wet. During the course of a day such as this, half-empty buses carrying white children would drive past a broken-down bus loaded with black children and make no offer of assistance.¹⁰³

Seldom did the districts cross county lines, but there were

¹⁰³Interview with Lewis Burton, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 8, 1974.

instances in which black students were transferred across county lines to attend separate schools. One example that the writer recalls occurred in Tillman and Jackson counties in southwestern Oklahoma. The only separate school in Jackson County was located in Altus, the county seat. Black children who lived near the Tillman County line had to provide their own transportation because they were considered to be out of the transportation range of the Altus buses.

An arrangement was worked out between the two county superintendents by which a bus from Tipton separate school that normally transported children from the Red River area would cross the river and pick up those Jackson County students who were out of range of the Altus school transportation system. A financial arrangement was made between the two county school districts, since these were both schools that came under the auspices of the respective county superintendents.¹⁰⁴

Separate schools located in towns and cities were assigned to the local school boards for supervision, but the county superintendent was still primarily responsible for their supervision. The general feeling was that the city boards and superintendents could relieve the county superintendents of some of their load and add efficiency to the operation of the separate schools located within the limits of the towns and cities. The county superintendents were kept quite busy supervising the county schools in the rural areas, the consolidated districts, the union schools, and the rural separate schools.

The writer recalls that the visit of the county superintendent to a rural separate school was an occasion for celebration. Programs were

¹⁰⁴Joiner.

prepared and exhibits were displayed. These exhibits were rarely of academic nature but rather those relative to skills in crafts, agriculture, homemaking, and general handy-work. The county superintendent usually made a short speech making references to Booker T. Washington, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln, whose portraits were usually visible in the separate schools of pre-1960 Oklahoma. After the speech, the county superintendent would award prizes, take a few selected items (allegedly to place in competition with other county schools), and take his leave until next school year. The usual aftermath was that nothing was heard from the "entries" taken.

The separate schools in the town and cities should have fared well under the "dual" supervision of local and county school authorities. Normally, however, this was not the case. Usually the black principal was caught in the middle and was fearful of being accused of playing the city against the county. Consequently, his school lacked or suffered at the mercy of whichever official found it convenient to provide some menial assistance. At other times, the principal was confused as to whom he should turn for whatever he needed because the lines of communication were not clearly drawn as to where one authority ended and the other began. In such cases, the principal often made do with what he had, placing more pressures on his staff to provide a meaningful education for their pupils.¹⁰⁵

By 1921, the state superintendent reported that the number of black teachers in Oklahoma had increased to 976. The salaries of the black teacher ranged on the average of \$600 to \$1,000 less than those of

¹⁰⁵Interview with Ira D. Hall, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 16, 1974.

white teachers.¹⁰⁶

By 1929, the number of black teachers had increased to 1,427, while black public school enrollment had decreased to 31,836. The impending depression may have been partially responsible for the marked drop in enrollment.¹⁰⁷

During the late 20's and through the 30's and 40's, a number of philanthropical organizations assisted separate schools in Oklahoma. This aid led to more teachers, better facilities, more transportation, and improved curriculum.¹⁰⁸

The drop in overall enrollment did not prevent the separate schools in Oklahoma from recognizing some progress. In 1930, there were twenty-seven schools that had received accreditation.

Those receiving accreditation were Anadarko Lincoln, Ardmore Douglass, Bartiesville Douglass, Beggs Wheatley, Boynton, Boley, Chandler Douglass, Chickasha Lincoln, Claremore Lincoln, Clearview Douglass, Crescent Douglass, Cushing B. T. Washington, Guthrie Faver, Hennessy Dunbar, Kingfisher Douglass, Langston, Lawton Douglass, Luther Washington, Muskogee Manual, Oklahoma City Douglas, Rentiesville, Sapulpa B. T. Washington, Shawnee Dunbar, Tulsa B. T. Washington, Weiston Dunbar, and Wewoka Douglass.¹⁰⁹

There was no intent here to indicate a brighter picture than actually existed. Even though the number of separate schools in Oklahoma that had obtained accreditation by the State Department of Education had increased, there was possibly some question concerning the authenticity of some of the ratings.

The manner in which separate schools were inspected and evaluated was questionable and sometimes devious. Sometimes the inspector accepted a written report from the district or

¹⁰⁶State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1922, p. 43.

¹⁰⁷Joiner. ¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1930, p. 38.

county superintendent signed by the principal and based his rating of accreditation solely upon the material and information furnished therein. Other times, the inspector had some personal grudge against the principal that was no way connected with the offerings of the school. Sources cannot be identified, but there were rumors of "paid for" accreditations, when actually the school was far below par. The accreditations could sometimes be considered a joke.¹¹⁰

This information was not meant to belittle the efforts of the black educators employed in the schools throughout Oklahoma. They were, as a general rule, conscientious, hard-working individuals concerned with the betterment of their race. Education was the way out of darkness, and they were determined to provide the education.¹¹¹

In 1932, State Superintendent John Vaughan reported 592 black schools located in 62 counties. He saw a need to provide specifically for transfer and transportation of pupils from sparsely settled districts when such would prove economical; authorize the employment of visiting teachers to do the type of work as the Jeanes Teachers and also act as attendance officers; make definite provisions for securing the necessary school buildings.¹¹²

The State Superintendent's Report for 1934 showed that an additional eighteen schools had achieved accreditation status.

Added to the list were Arcadia Dunbar, Atoka Dunbar, Bristow Lincoln, Colbert Shoemake, Dover B. T. Washington, El Reno B. T. Washington, Enid B. T. Washington, Fort Gibson Lincoln, Idabel Slater-Rosenwald, Lenepah Douglass, McAlester L'Overture, Okmulgee Dunbar, Perry Blaine, Ponca City Attucks, Sand Springs Washington, Taft Moton, Taft Orphans Home, and Watonga Separate.¹¹³

During the 1930's, the black schools sought a more worthy identity than simply separate or colored school. The black educators and the black community leaders sought and succeeded in naming black separate

¹¹⁰Burton.

¹¹¹Interview with Lillian Jones, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, August 25, 1973.

¹¹²State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1932, pp. 78-80.

¹¹³ibid., 1934, p. 93.

schools after noted black personalities of the era. Usually the personage was of national note, accounting for the numerous Booker T. Washington's, Dunbar's, Carver's, Attuck's, and Douglass' schools found throughout Oklahoma. One famous white personality was honored quite frequently--naturally, this was Abraham Lincoln. The practice of identifying a school with an individual having achieved a certain amount of success and acclaim was aimed at the building pride and desire in the black youth of the era. The names were possibly more meaningful and inspiring than the "colored" school.¹¹⁴

Compared to today's standards, conditions in the separate schools left much to be desired. With few exceptions, the course offerings were the basic education courses. Few educational "frills" were included, aside from vocal music and athletics. Education was considered a serious business. Possibly this attitude was taken by black educators because of the obstacles their pupils would have to overcome in order to cope with the problems that would face them after their school years were completed. Another concern of black educators was the shortened school terms that were held by many separate schools in Oklahoma. As a rule, the schools began their school year in the latter part of July and continued until the first week in September, after which they would shut down for cotton harvest. In order to complete the minimum requirements of school days, the separate schools would have to reconvene near the third week in November. This would have worked out fine except for the fact that many black children did not return to school until after Christmas, depending upon the economic condition of the family and/or the number of children

¹¹⁴Related by O. E. Kennedy in a speech, May 25, 1969.

within the family. Consequently, many black children missed two to three months of schooling each year.

The aforementioned sessions or school terms were a way of life in separate schools in Oklahoma within some districts as late as 1965. The primary basis for split-session was economically conceived. "King Cotton" was a major crop in Oklahoma and prior to the perfection of the cotton stripper, human "strippers" were depended upon to harvest the cotton. Farmers were able to take advantage of the labor of the school-aged youths, and the black families needed the financial aid that they gained through the labor of their children.¹¹⁵

During the mid 40's, separate schools began to add some "frills" to their curriculums. The Dewey influence evidently affected some black educators because curriculums improved and some innovative techniques were introduced. There came the realization that all pupils could not learn at the same rate even though they were the same age. The teachers worked harder at simplifying their offerings to meet the needs of the children. This was a form of individualization.¹¹⁶

The adoption of more acceptable teaching techniques, coupled with improved curriculums, resulted in additional progress in some separate schools. By 1946 there were 95 state accredited separate schools and six schools accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.¹¹⁷

Accreditation by the North Central Association was a dream held by

¹¹⁵Interview with John Sadberry, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 10, 1974.

¹¹⁶C. A. Jackson.

¹¹⁷State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1946, p. 11.

many of the black principals during the 1950's and early 1960's. This goal was unattainable for a majority of black principals due to the lack of support by the superintendents and local school boards. There was no attempt made at upgrading the schools to the point whereby they could qualify for the most prestigious level of accreditation.

The white superintendents were quite satisfied as long as the school passed the state requirements and offered the state required units of credit, no more, no less. The superintendents were said to be primarily concerned with staying out of trouble with the State Department of Education.

Black teachers utilized their training and resourcefulness in providing educational opportunities that were not otherwise provided. They spent their own time and money and through their efforts, black children were exposed to learning experiences that they ordinarily would not have had.

District festivals and contests were organized to provide arenas for competition and for exhibiting the talents and skills of the black children of Oklahoma. These events gradually gained popularity, and eventually the "white press" gave them coverage.¹¹⁸

Black coaches over the state came together and organized an athletic association and divided the state into districts and conferences based on the size and location of the competing member schools. They held clinics and workshops inviting coaches from the black colleges to come and speak to them.

The college coaches from Langston and the numerous schools in Texas and some from Louisiana and Arkansas would gladly accept an opportunity to participate in a clinic in Oklahoma. They realized that there were a large number of potential college stars attending school in the eighty or more schools that competed in the Oklahoma Negro Athletic Association. Out-of-state coaches realized that Langston could not possibly accommodate the available athletes, so they would work in clinics just for the cost of traveling expenses. In this manner they could make contact with the black high school coaches and recruit potential college athletes.¹¹⁹

Eventually, the black coaches began to exchange ideas with white

¹¹⁸C. A. Jackson.

¹¹⁹Interview with Alphonso Pyle, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, July 7, 1974.

coaches over the state, and as early as 1950, it was not uncommon for black athletic teams and white athletic teams to scrimmage one another. These were not contests of record, but they did indicate that sportsmanship was not limited to one race or another but rather a reciprocal element that could be abused by either race. The Board of Education in Frederick prohibited interracial scrimmages in 1949, but it had no control over the unsupervised interracial games that took place on the playgrounds after school and on weekends.¹²⁰

Athletics was a leading activity by which many black children discovered that there were things of which they had never dreamed happening within the white schools. They heard of extracurricular activities which caused them to want the same. They went back to their teachers and principals and asked questions.

For years, black educators avoided comparing their facilities, equipment, buildings, curricula, and objectives with those of the white schools, lest their disadvantaged black children became even more discouraged than they already were.

During the latter 40's and into the 50's, separate schools began to compete scholastically with one another. They held debates; oratorical contests; overall, academic, interscholastic contests; band festivals; chorus festivals; agricultural-related exhibits and contests; industrial arts fairs; and other type activities that exhibited the talents and skills of black youth.¹²¹

The guiding light and center for the aforementioned activities was the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. The seat or headquarters of the grand finale for the events and activities was Langston University.¹²²

¹²⁰Joiner.

¹²¹Interview with Thomas Watkins, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 10, 1974.

¹²²Interview with Dr. F. D. Moon, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 12, 1974.

The limited success and slow progress achieved by the separate schools was probably due to the number of obstacles they had to overcome. During the 1920's, the white schools were not greatly superior to the separate schools but from 1930 onward, the black schools seemed to make only minimal progress. Very few innovations were made relative to the facilities; the buildings, in many instances, should have been condemned. They were improperly maintained. Only the largest four or five schools could boast of a bona fide library.¹²³ Outdated textbooks were the rule. Outdated textbooks were purchased by suppliers and sold to black children at the original price.¹²⁴ The writer compared his book list with that of a white student in the same grade level and found that his books (which cost several dollars more) were the same ones that had been in use in his school since he had entered kindergarten/first grade, and none of the white child's books were the same as his.

Free textbooks were introduced in Oklahoma in 1948, but as late as 1950, this writer and schoolmates still had to purchase their textbooks. There was a positive indication, however, in that the textbooks purchased were now the same as those provided free for the white children.

After statehood, black schools were able to exist and succeed, and though they were "separate and unequal," they did show steady improvement. Black educators were accustomed to adversity and they prepared themselves to fight it. Prior to 1953, there were 1,639 black teachers in Oklahoma. Of that number, 171 held Master's degrees; 1,355 held Bachelor's degrees, and ninety from 90-120 college hours. "Percentage

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴C. A. Jackson.

wise, black teachers were said to have been more highly qualified than white teachers."¹²⁵

When the Supreme Court rendered its landmark decision on May 17, 1954, black educators were not certain as to how the decision would affect them. There was doubt and scepticism throughout the state among blacks as well as whites. Members of both races were hoping for the status quo to be maintained. Many black educators believed that if the Supreme Court Decision of May 17, 1954, became an actuality in Oklahoma, some of them would become instantly unemployed.¹²⁶

¹²⁵Comments by O. E. Kennedy, Frederick, Oklahoma, July 28, 1959.

¹²⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER V

FINANCING BLACK SCHOOLS

Inadequate financial support was a common problem among black schools throughout the state of Oklahoma. This problem existed as long as there existed a separate school system. Where white schools might solve their monetary problems by means of bond elections, separate schools had no such resort. Only through the legislature did the black schools receive aid.

The lawmakers of Oklahoma devised a complicated administrative and taxing system which would serve two separated school systems. The legislature made the county the governmental taxing unit for the support of separate schools and placed them under the jurisdiction of the county superintendent for administrative purposes. County commissioners made an annual estimate of the amount of money needed to finance the operation of separate schools and levied tax, not exceeding two mills. Without this restriction, separate schools might have had a broader tax base than did the white, district-operated, schools. Theoretically, there was supposed to be no difference in the amount of financial support received by the separate schools and the white schools. In actuality, due to the human factor involved, the separate schools did not get their equal shares of the available revenue. Their shares were not based upon need but possibly upon the whims of the county commissioners.¹²⁷

¹²⁷Ha11.

In 1921 legislation was enacted that added one mill to the permissible levy which could be made by excise boards on all taxable property of counties for support of the separate schools. In years to come this provision provided hundreds of thousands of dollars at the disposal of the separate schools. Somehow, between the years of 1908 and 1921, some particular past legislation was apparently forgotten. The tax ceiling for levies for separate schools had been set for not more than two mills. However, the county separate schools were funded as though the one mill was accepted as the sole means of raising revenue for the maintenance of separate schools. In fact, the State Supreme Court ruled that a levy of more than one mill could not be made by a county for the support of separate schools. This was a costly assumption, for during the period from statehood until 1921, the general condition of the separate schools was reported to be deplorable. Some counties were not even using all of the one mill levy for the support of separate schools.¹²⁸

In the year 1919, a poll was taken of the sixty-odd counties containing colored schools to discover what was being done in the way of supporting them; and it developed that of this number, only five counties were levying the full one mill for the support of these schools. Many counties having several colored schools were levying a half mill or less.

This revelation formed the basis for agitation which became so rife in 1920 that the legislation was induced to enact in 1921 a law authorizing a two mill levy as a maximum for the separate schools and making it mandatory for the proper support of the separate schools.¹²⁹

During the forties, a series of legislative actions provided additional funds for the support of separate schools. In 1941, the legislature passed the law permitting county-wide bond issues for building

¹²⁸Evelyn R. Strong, p. 240.

¹²⁹Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, The Teachers' Journal, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1924), p. 2.

separate schools. Eventually, the various counties spent a total of \$9,709,960 in this effort. Constitutional amendments were adopted in 1946 and 1948 that raised the ceiling for county-wide ad valorem tax levies in support of separate schools from two to four mills. This made available an additional \$19,000,000. This additional millage was instrumental in the provision of facilities that improved the educational conditions for blacks in Oklahoma from 1945-1954. The separate schools, with few exceptions, were still not equal, but they were greatly improved.¹³⁰

State Aid

State aid to separate schools was considered here to be that aid which was appropriated directly from the Treasury of the State of Oklahoma. The first such aid that profited black schools was provided in 1921.

There is hereby appropriated out of any money in the State Treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of thirty-five thousand (\$35,000.00) dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary for the purpose of aiding, during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1921, the separate schools of the State maintained for the education of colored children.¹³¹

In 1923, other grants were awarded to all schools in Oklahoma that needed additional funding in order to meet minimal standards of education. This aid was supplemental to aid already provided for by law. All aid received by the districts did not come in the form of cash appropriations. In 1947, the Twenty-first Legislature made provisions for a truancy officer. Another example of state aid was the provision of

¹³⁰Evelyn R. Strong, pp. 179-182.

¹³¹Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1921, Chap. 36, Sec. 1, p. 53.

free textbooks after 1948.¹³²

Laws enacted by the state legislature did not always insure impartial distribution of funds to the separate schools. The separate schools that were required to be maintained by constitutional provision was a part and parcel of the state system of free public schools.

There was much separation, but very little equality in evidence relative to financial support of schools. Hatcher describes the situation in this manner:

Judicial approval was given many times to constitutional and statutory provisions in Oklahoma for segregating the White and Negro races for educational purposes. The high court has held consistently the validity of segregation if the dual system of schools was equal in every respect.¹³³

It is possible that other citizens of the state of Oklahoma assumed that the separate and equal educational opportunities were as they were supposed to be. Thousands of black people educated in Oklahoma prior to 1960 could give personal testimony to the contrary.

County Support

Support by counties was the primary base for financial funding of black schools in Oklahoma; however, the counties did not appropriate any additional funds besides those stipulated by the legislature. Legislation passed in 1908, 1921, 1946, and 1948 provided for county levies for the support of black schools. Initial legislation provided for a maximum of two mills per tax unit to be provided for the support of separate schools. However, counties often refused to grant the maximum valuation permitted by law. When challenged, counties were upheld by the state courts and

¹³²State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1948, p. 156.

¹³³Hatcher, p. 121.

usually no more than one mill, and quite often, only one-half mill was provided. In 1921, the legislature reaffirmed the two mill maximum levy. One mill was added in 1946 and one more in 1948, making a total of four mills to be levied by the counties for the support of separate schools.¹³⁴

Local Support

Local support for separate schools was limited. Separate schools located in independent districts were administered by the local boards of education, but the bulk of their financial support was supplied through the county millage provided by state statutes. The State Supreme Court restricted the co-mingling of funds. This action prohibited the utilization of local funds for the support of black schools. The local boards could supervise the schools but were not required by law to give them financial assistance.¹³⁵

Philanthropic Funds

Philanthropic funds proved to be quite helpful in that they were instrumental in the provision of certain facilities that otherwise would not have been available.

One such fund was the Julius Rosenwald Fund. This fund was established for the purpose of providing school buildings for blacks in states where separate schools were maintained. In 1920-21, the Julius Rosenwald Fund supplied \$19,430 to separate schools in Oklahoma in amounts ranging from \$500 to \$1,500. The Julius Rosenwald Fund was created in 1917 and before it ended in 1948, it had been responsible for the construction of more than 5,000 rural schools for black children. The

¹³⁴Evelyn R. Strong, pp. 180-83.

¹³⁵Hatcher, pp. 116-19.

Rosenwald Fund was also used to provide transportation for black children to a consolidated school or a town school when no separate school was available near their residences. The Julius Rosenwald Fund built several libraries in black schools throughout Oklahoma and stocked them with books. Without this fund, many black schools might have never had libraries.¹³⁶

The Jeanes Fund, established in 1907, was established for support of rural black schools. In Oklahoma, during the thirties and forties, the Jeanes Teacher became a common sight throughout rural Oklahoma. This teacher was so named because the salary was paid from money contributed to black rural schools in Oklahoma by the Anna T. Jeanes Fund. The Jeanes Teacher worked with the county superintendents and usually served as a consultant to the teachers in one and two-teacher schools over the state. The Slater Fund, prior to being merged with the Peabody Fund and the Jeanes Fund to form the Southern Education Foundation, was responsible for the construction of rural high schools in Oklahoma. One such school near Idabel was named for John Fox Slater, creator of the Slater Fund. The Southern Education Foundation was created in 1937 from the Slater Fund, the Peabody Fund, the Jeanes Fund, and the Virginia Randolph Fund to cooperate with public and private school officials and others in improving educational and living conditions, with special regard for the needs of the Negro race. Although the exact amount of money contributed by the various funds to aid separate schools in Oklahoma is unknown, Mrs. Joiner is quite certain that black education in Oklahoma would have suffered markedly, more so than it did, without the assistance of these

¹³⁶State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1922, p. 76.

funds. All of the funds mentioned here had great impact upon the black schools in Oklahoma. Without them, the necessities of education might have been omitted in many of the separate schools. All schools in need of such aid were not able to take advantage of the aid. Some county superintendents did not want outside interference even though it meant additional funds for the separate schools.¹³⁷

¹³⁷Information regarding Philanthropic Funds was obtained initially from Mrs. A. J. Joiner through interview, July 21, 1974.

CHAPTER VI

ADMINISTRATION AND INSTRUCTION IN BLACK SCHOOLS

The administration and instruction varied in black schools throughout Oklahoma. They were reported to be good or bad according to time as well as locale. It took black educators longer than white educators to remove themselves from predetermined roles established for all educators. They were expected to be second in moral character to no one save the ministers. They were dictated to in matters of manner of dress, type of living quarters, choice of associates, kind of automobile, and the hours they kept. They were, indeed, the community's teacher wherein they taught.

Administration

The administration of the black school was left primarily in the hands of the black principal. He was left to run the school as he saw fit as long as he did not cross the superintendent or a board member. He was not to "make waves," and if he chose to do so, his days as principal were numbered.¹³⁸

With few exceptions, superintendents and boards of education were content to give the black principal full control in running his school. This was the general rule, especially in the outlying areas of the state. In the cities, circumstances did not always permit this to be true.

During the early years of statehood, black administrators were

¹³⁸Hall.

closely observed to insure that they did not permit their teachers to teach the 'wrong' things. They were discouraged from teaching things that would oppose the society's status quo. Teachers talking against Jim Crow were subject to immediate dismissal.¹³⁹

During the early years of statehood the Ku Klux Klan was quite powerful. Some separate schools mysteriously burned. Some Negro teachers were flogged, especially for teaching the Constitution of the United States.¹⁴⁰

These conditions prevailed until the 1940's, and many teachers made no attempt at teaching more than the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States.¹⁴¹

Black principals were leaders in their communities. They were expected to provide the white leadership with certain information regarding activity inside the black community. White businessmen were often seen in the black principal's office in secret conference. It was not uncommon for the principal to be expected to send persons to do business with certain businessmen who, more often than not, were school board members. Though unsubstantiated, principals were often accused of selling or "dealing" jobs to teachers. Selling jobs was the outright accepting of amounts of cash for teaching employment. "Dealing" was an arrangement set up by principals by which a new teacher could borrow money to purchase furniture, a car, or some similar costly item. The rates or carrying charges would be increased to exceed the normal amount, the excess going to the principal as his fee in the deal. Other instances,

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰William Loren Katz, Eyewitness, the Negro in American History (New York: Pittman Publishing Corporation, 1967), p. 346.

¹⁴¹Kennedy.

unsubstantiated, were where the principal received a commission for seeing to it that the teachers purchased necessary items from only specified stores. Pressure was brought upon the teachers by the principal to comply. Usually, jobs were at a premium and compliance was forthcoming.

Black principals were expected to keep things in line. They were not necessarily expected to be curriculum leaders and scheduling and related activities were pre-established by the superintendent. The principal was to keep down problems and keep down expenses and graciously accept whatever was handed down from the white school.¹⁴²

Obviously, not all school districts intimidated their principals in the manners mentioned. Some principals were expected to be educational leaders and to provide meaningful leadership to the schools in which they worked. Such a man was F. D. Moon.

Moon was almost completely a product of the separate school system of the state: he held knowledge of and interests in the system which dated from territorial days. . . . The beginnings of his career in major leadership among Negro teachers of Oklahoma, as they developed programs . . . toward improvement of educational conditions and facilities for Negroes in Oklahoma, are seen in the fact that when he addressed more than one thousand teachers gathered in the Twenty-First Annual Convention of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, Oklahoma City, February 9, 1929, practically every point covered in his speech was reflected, at the end of the session, in resolutions of the teachers for actions towards legislation for the Negro schools.¹⁴³

F. D. Moon was not the only outstanding black school administrator in Oklahoma, but he epitomized the type of individual who provided meaningful leadership to black education in Oklahoma. In order to provide meaningful leadership, black principals had to have courage to support their convictions and commitments.

It was impractical to attempt to list the black administrators

¹⁴²C. A. Jackson.

¹⁴³Evelyn R. Strong, pp. 121-25.

considered outstanding because invariably some would have been omitted. However, not all black principals were educational leaders. There were the puppets, the businessmen, and the informants. Wherever these types of administrators worked, education suffered. Personal interests overshadowed their desires to upgrade the education lot of their race.¹⁴⁴

Black administrators did not find it necessary to form an organization separate from the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. More often than not, they held the controlling offices within this organization and could communicate by the lines established therein. That there were exchanges of ideas was evidenced by the fact that programs initiated in the larger schools soon found their way into smaller schools throughout the state. Principals spoke to student bodies of other schools, and groups of students were taken by teachers and principals to observe and exchange programs with other schools.¹⁴⁵

Some black principals were alleged to have never returned to school for additional training but this was the exception rather than the rule. Black educators seeking advanced degrees had to leave the state to pursue such goals. In 1935, legislation was enacted to provide out-of-state tuition for graduate training. Although this arrangement was far from suitable, and transportation, books, and room and board had to be provided by the individual, many educators took advantage of this opportunity to attend graduate schools throughout the United States.¹⁴⁶

In 1940, the NAACP had determined that the "out-of-state

¹⁴⁴Ha11.

¹⁴⁵Moon.

¹⁴⁶Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1935, C. 34, Art. 1, pp. 138-39.

tuition" provision was unsatisfactory. Their representative, appearing before a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, had stated that the NAACP "considered the separate school law unfair," and "that they would attempt to get . . . equality of educational facilities of the state," including graduate and professional schools.¹⁴⁷

This pledge by the NAACP led to a fight that concluded May 29, 1949, when the law banning black students from attending white institutions of higher learning was removed. There remained things to be done, for the bill stated that,

. . . where such programs of instruction leading to a particular degree are not given at colleges or institutions of higher education of this State established for and/or used by the colored race; provided further, that said programs of instructions leading to a particular degree shall be given at such colleges or institutions of higher education upon a segregated basis, as defined . . .¹⁴⁸

Although this was not the ultimate goal of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, it did open the door for black administrators to obtain graduate training and secure administrative certification within the state of Oklahoma.

After 1954, the number of black administrators in Oklahoma steadily declined. There were a number of reasons for this decline but they primarily pointed to the initial impact of the 1954 Supreme Court Decision. When the school boards and superintendents throughout Oklahoma realized that desegregation was the law of the land, they began to act. First, they fired the black principals because the schools they administered were usually the first closed. In the smaller districts throughout Oklahoma where formerly there had been one or two black principals,

¹⁴⁷Evelyn R. Strong, p. 169.

¹⁴⁸Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1949, C. 21, Sec. 3, p. 609.

there were now none.¹⁴⁹

The small districts were not the only districts affected negatively relative to black administrators. In Oklahoma City, the number of black secondary principals went from five to four between 1970 and 1976. The Tulsa school system was affected in like manner. Young black teachers, considered to be prime administrative material, possibly did not aspire for administrative positions because these positions did not appear to be obtainable.¹⁵⁰

Instruction

Instruction in black schools in Oklahoma was no better than the resourcefulness of the individual teacher. During the early days of statehood, teachers usually were not college graduates. If they were able to pass the county superintendent's examination, they were certified to teach specified grades. There were generally three types of certificates. A third-class certificate qualified a teacher to instruct the primary grades through the fourth grade; a second-class certificate qualified a teacher to teach through eighth grade; and a first-class certificate qualified a teacher to teach the ninth and tenth grades. High schools were rare except in the larger cities until after 1920, so the demand for college graduates was not very great. The teachers taught, not with the idea of children going to high school and then to college but rather as though their highest grade attained would terminate the

¹⁴⁹Burton.

¹⁵⁰Sadberry.

child's formal education.¹⁵¹

There was only minimum pressure placed upon teachers as to the quality or the quantity of education provided. School was more or less considered by the superintendents to be recess between work periods. Teachers taught strictly by the book, interjecting little of their personal feelings into the subject matter. Although they were not hard pressed to do a good job in their teaching, generally they took pride in what they taught. In the one and two-teacher schools which were common in the thirties and forties, teachers taught four to eight grades of regular class work in one room. In addition to the arithmetic, English grammar, social studies, and reading, the teachers taught homemaking and craft classes, and in some cases, even agriculture. Note that these supplementary classes were classes that would make them better workers for their white employers in the homes and in the fields.¹⁵²

Despite the obvious limitations of such an arrangement of having to teach four to eight grade levels, these teachers did manage to provide learning opportunities for all of their pupils. The terminology for Individualized Instruction had not been formulated, but the process utilized by the pre-1960 black teacher often resembled the concept that has so often been written and spoken about during the seventies. Third grade youngsters quite often studied arithmetic with the sixth grade, read with the first grade, did social studies at grade level, worked with fourth grade grammar, and did handicrafts with the eighth graders. The child was permitted to work at what he could achieve. It was a common

¹⁵¹Interview with Katherine Danna, Duncan, Oklahoma, September 6, 1974.

¹⁵²C. A. Jackson.

belief that the busy child made for a happy teacher. This belief was extended into keeping the child properly challenged.¹⁵³

During the pre-World War II years, teachers in the small rural schools served in other related capacities. The men were quite often bus drivers, custodians, and maintenance men. Usually the men were not adequately paid to perform these extra duties. The women teachers served as cooks, house cleaners, nursemaids, and attendance clerks. The question might have been asked, why a person would take on so much for so little? Either the teachers accepted these responsibilities or they were fired. If they were fired, there would be no school for the black children in the community. On the other hand, if the superintendent really wanted to find a teacher or some teachers, he had not to look far. High school and college trained blacks who sought to be professionals quite often turned to teaching, for other phases of professionalism did not welcome them with open arms. Many potential certified public accountants, doctors, lawyers, scientists, or engineers found themselves teaching school because society would not accept them in their own profession.

Prior to 1950, the rural black schools taught as though the eighth grade would be the highest grade completed by their pupils. They taught things that would help the black children "get along" but did not prepare them for the necessary transition to high school should the opportunity become a reality. Children who entered high school, usually in a strange town, often did so with a great deal of anxiety. Often they would have to be transported by bus or in cars to high schools located in towns ten to twenty miles away. In Frederick, in southwest Oklahoma, it was not uncommon for children to be transported from Davidson, Tipton, and Grandfield. All these towns were in Tillman County; but Davidson, the nearest to Frederick, was eleven miles away, while Grandfield was nearly thirty-five miles away. Children coming from these communities and entering the Frederick school for the first time often reacted as though they were entering any school for the first time.¹⁵⁴

There were many highly competent teachers in the black high schools, but quite often, some of those observed were still learning their profession. Before 1955, the State Department of Education did not closely monitor the areas of certification held by black teachers relative to what they actually taught. It was not uncommon for a person having majored in

¹⁵³Jones.

¹⁵⁴Joiner.

agriculture to find himself teaching world history, a social studies major teaching science, or a business major teaching math and science. This was not mentioned to discredit the teachers but rather to point to permissible inequities that might have curtailed the learning opportunities in those black schools that were guilty of such misconduct. It is possible that a black college freshman may have been taught eleventh and twelfth grade grammar by a person having had general music as a major field of study. Peculiarities such as these might explain the high number of black college entrants relegated to noncredit English courses.¹⁵⁵

Irregularities did exist, but generally black teachers were concerned about their pupils. These dedicated people gave of themselves in numerous ways. Mrs. Alice Joiner said, "I quite often tutored willing students after school, free of charge, in Ardmore, and after I moved to Frederick to teach. Sometimes these sessions would last until midnight." Teachers would also remain long after four o'clock in the afternoon to give of their time to those children who needed extra help. They would drive ^{cars} into rural areas to visit their students and to check on their welfare. This was typical behavior.¹⁵⁶

Black teachers in Oklahoma were paid less than white teachers. This was partially due to the complex financial structure for black schools. For example, in the 1922 Biennial Report, black elementary teachers' average annual salary range was \$1,000 to \$1,080; high school teachers received \$1,125 to \$1,524; and principals' pay was \$1,900.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵Hall.

¹⁵⁶Joiner.

¹⁵⁷State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1922, pp. 94-95.

This was reportedly \$600 to \$1,000 less annually than white educators were paid. Though the pay scales were not equal, black teachers steadily improved with regard to their professional training. As previously reported, by 1950 there were only ninety teachers out of a total of 1,639 who did not hold college degrees.

Black teachers were faced with very serious economic problems for years in addition to being paid lower salaries than white teachers. Whenever school was not in session, black teachers received no pay. When the terms were shortened due to split sessions or simply due to the lack of sufficient funds, black teachers received no pay. They quite often had to seek part-time employment. If no part-time employment was available or feasible, they would have to turn to borrowing from lenders within the district. These loans would put them far in debt and tie them to the district for years. Quite often they could not attend summer school because the split session would interfere.¹⁵⁸

As desegregation slowly became more of a reality, black teachers sought more training, with the belief that additional hours and advanced degrees would give them job security. This did not always prove to be true, as many of them were to find out in 1955.

A constitutional amendment that was supposed to equalize the salaries of all teachers in Oklahoma was passed by the legislature and adopted July 6, 1948. In actuality, local districts found ways to discriminate between the two groups of teachers. One method employed was the theoretical addition of duties, which, in fact, was nonexistent.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸C. A. Jackson.

¹⁵⁹Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1949, Chap. 1A, Title 70, Sec. 5, pp. 597-98.

If advanced training and teacher competency have any correlation, then the study conducted by F. D. Moon in 1955 was an important one.

It has been the usual practice in determining qualifications of teachers to include training and experience as basic standards. Our leading cities and states usually take this into account in determining the salary of a teacher. . . How do white and Negro teachers in Oklahoma compare in relation to these accepted standards? In 1953-54, Oklahoma employed 20,640 teachers . . . 19,104 white and 1,536 Negro teachers. Ninety-two and six-tenths percent of the teachers were white; 7.4 percent of the teachers were Negro. Twenty-five and eight-tenths percent of all white teachers held Master's degrees. Twenty-four and seven-tenths percent of all the Negro teachers held Master's degrees. Seventy-three out of every 100 Negro teachers held Bachelor's degrees. . . The study also revealed that Negro teachers had longer tenure than white teachers.¹⁶⁰

Whether out of dedication, or necessity, or fear, or pride, or concern, or a combination of any or all of these, some black teachers sought to better their methods of instruction. Additional college training was only one example. Black teachers in the separate school at Frederick, Oklahoma, were known to hold "rap sessions" concerning common instructional problems long before the term "rap session" became popular. The principal did not call these sessions, but rather they were called by faculty members and held in the homes of the various teachers. Another attempt at bettering themselves instructionally was the Institutes which were held in the various counties from the early statehood years into the forties.¹⁶¹

Professional Organizations

The primary professional organization for black teachers was the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. The OANT grew out of the Ida. M.

¹⁶⁰F. D. Moon, "Negro and White Teachers in Oklahoma - A Comparison of Qualifications," The Teachers' Journal (July, 1955): 2-3.

¹⁶¹Joiner.

Wells Teachers' Association which was established in 1893.

In December, 1907 . . . sixty-seven teachers of the former "twin territories" met at the Colored Agricultural and Normal University, Langston, to reorganize their fourteen-year-old territorial association into a state educational organization, the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers.¹⁶²

The primary purpose of the OANT was to raise the standards of Negro education in Oklahoma. Close investigation of its records and interviews with former members indicates that it held this purpose throughout the sixty-five years of its existence.

During the early years of statehood, the OANT decided that it must concern itself with the financial problems of the separate schools. This problem was a constantly recurring one throughout the OANT's history. The organization tackled problems such as school attendance of black youth, professionalism of black teachers, school accreditation, problems at Langston University, as well as the overall financial support needed for the separate school system of Oklahoma.

The OANT took an active part in much of the legislation that improved separate schools, as well as the improvement of black teachers' salaries.

In connection with one of their first major efforts, carried on from 1919 to 1921, one mill was added to the permissible levy which could be made by excise boards on all taxable property of counties for support of the separation schools.¹⁶³

The decade of the twenties found OANT generally involved with solving its internal problems and improving its lines of communication. The thirties found the OANT working closely with the Langston University Alumni Association under the leadership of F. D. Moon. One joint venture resulted in the passage of state legislation that broadened opportunities

¹⁶²Evelyn R. Strong, p. 58. ¹⁶³Ibid.

in higher education for black teachers through provision of tuition to out-of-state colleges and universities beginning in 1935.

Members of the OANT considered the forties to be their most fruitful decade. Three constitutional amendments were said to be directly due to the work of the OANT.

On July 2, 1946 and July 6, 1948, two constitutional amendments were passed that gave more than \$18 million to separate schools between 1946 and 1954. A third constitutional amendment adopted on November 5, 1946, brought additional financial support to the black schools of Oklahoma through levies, by counties, of the "Moon Mill," so named because it was F. D. Moon who was said to be solely responsible for its inclusion as one of the "Better School Amendments" in 1944. The OANT directed the bulk of its attention to making preparation for the period of transition from segregation to desegregation. The organization worked hard and long in its attempt to retain employment for black teachers in Oklahoma after 1955. The OANT was completely deactivated by 1958. Members had begun to join the Oklahoma Education Association as early as 1955, with the blessings of the OANT. If numbers are revealing, the OANT had the support of the black teachers of Oklahoma. Records indicated that there were 1,622 black teachers in Oklahoma in 1955. During this same year, the OANT reported a membership of more than 1,500. Black teachers did believe in this organization and saw in it a means of improving their conditions professionally. The OANT was worthy of this faith because it had, in fact, produced viable positive results. Black schools had athletic competition in Oklahoma early in its history as a state, but the competition

was not well organized until the mid-twenties.¹⁶⁴

The high schools existing at that time were Douglas High School of Oklahoma City, Faver High School of Guthrie and Langston High School located on the campus of the Colored Agricultural and Normal University at Langston, Oklahoma. Because of the close proximity of the three schools, a series of baseball games were played among these teams in the spring of 1908. The contests marked the beginning of interscholastic athletic contests in the Negro high schools in the state of Oklahoma.¹⁶⁵

Competition spread to include other sports and the number of schools competing increased as more black schools opened around the state. By 1920, coaches and administrators had become concerned and expressed a need for some regulatory organization to provide control and direction for athletic competition among the various black schools.

At the state teachers' meeting at Tulsa in February, 1926, a special session was called by this group for the purpose of completing the final draft of the constitution for an athletic conference, at which time the constitution was completed and adopted. The officers elected were H. S. Hughes, a teacher at Booker Washington High School, Tulsa, President; W. H. Fort, principal, Dunbar High School, Okmulgee, Vice President; and C. D. Tate, Douglass High School, Ardmore, Secretary-Treasurer. Board of Control members were H. A. Berry of Oklahoma City, J. W. Sanford of Ardmore, and Sam Saddler, Principal of Manual Training High School of Muskogee. The Negro high schools of Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Ardmore, Muskogee, El Reno, Luther, Okmulgee, Boley, Claremore, Nowata, and Sand Springs were the first members of the Association.¹⁶⁶

The organization formed in 1926 was called the Negro Oklahoma Interscholastic Athletic Association. Many of the association's features were similar to those of the Oklahoma High School Athletic Association, the organization that supervised competitive athletics among the white high schools over the state of Oklahoma. The organization played a viable role in the overall scheme of black education in Oklahoma until

¹⁶⁴Sadberry.

¹⁶⁵Moses F. Miller, p. 20. ¹⁶⁶Ibid.

1955 when its control was absorbed by the Oklahoma High School Athletic Association.

An offspring of the Negro Oklahoma Interscholastic Athletic Association was the Negro Coaches' and Officials' Association which was organized in 1945. Placing special emphasis upon the officiating in the various sports, this organization was formulated to improve the quality of athletics in black schools. This organization was disbanded and its members absorbed by the Oklahoma High School Athletic Association.¹⁷⁸

Possibly, there were other professional organizations that made contributions to the overall educational effort aimed at the betterment of the black child, but those named were the organizations that were considered to be foremost in their contributions to this end by black educational leaders.

¹⁶⁷Interview with Moses S. Miller, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, January 13, 1975.

CHAPTER VII

DESEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION

A. Review of Conditions Prior to 1954

As previously stated, education for blacks in Oklahoma was provided in an extremely limited manner from the time of the arrival of The Five Civilized Tribes. The Five Civilized Tribes brought many blacks to Oklahoma. Some of these were slaves of the various tribes. A European visitor to Oklahoma in 1853 told how Indians had learned to keep slaves from observing whites. "But these received from their Indian masters more Christian treatment than among the Christian whites."¹⁶⁸ This can be seen by the provisions which Indians made for the education of Negroes. A few of the Mission Schools included black children along with Indian children. However, there is no record of any large attendance by blacks.¹⁶⁹

The devastation of property and the ensuing poverty which were experienced during and immediately after the Civil War deterred the establishment of schools for some time in the Indian Nation. Making a living and rebuilding homes were top priorities. Little concern was given to education during this period. However, by 1873, in the Creek Nation alone, there were five schools maintained wholly for blacks.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸Katz, p. 6.

¹⁶⁹Aldrich, p. 34. ¹⁷⁰Ibid.

The federal government provided funds for schools for freedmen in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Tribes. The Seminoles maintained a single school system with no distinction as to race.¹⁷¹

The desire on the part of the ex-slaves for education was closely related to their struggle for status as free men and citizens. Thus, education was of vital importance to the newly freed Negro slaves in Oklahoma.¹⁷²

In addition to the schools for blacks financed by The Five Civilized Tribes and those supported by the federal government, subscription schools for Negroes were conducted as far back as 1884. A subscription school was a school where the students paid tuition which maintained the school and paid the teacher. Subscriptions were generally \$1.00 to \$1.50 per month per student. One of these schools was located about ten miles west of Ft. Arbuckle near the Old Doaksville-Ft. Sill Government Trail. Mrs. Minnie Franklin, who was never a slave and who had attended Armstrong Academy in the Choctaw Nation near Boggy Depot, taught in this Negro Subscription School. Another such school for Negroes was located northeast of Purcell in what is now McClain County. Two black men, Pleasant Shoals and Batt DeShears, taught in this school in 1896. A mission school for blacks was established near Gene Autry in 1894. The Reverend Mister Hill, grandfather of Ira D. Hill, was a teacher in this academy.¹⁷³

The opening of the "Unassigned Lands" to settlement gave great

¹⁷¹Dale, p. 406.

¹⁷²E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States, rev. ed. (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), p. 142.

¹⁷³Comments by W. L. Haywood, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. (Deceased)

impetus to education in Oklahoma. The Organic Act of 1890, which provided a form of government for the Oklahoma Territory, set aside sections 16 and 36 for the benefit of schools. This Act provided these sections with some money for education. The Indian Territory had no such lands. To equalize this, Congress gave \$5,000,000 in cash to be added to the permanent school fund.¹⁷⁴

Under the Organic Act, a system of education was established, providing for a Territorial Superintendent of Schools and a County Superintendent in each of the counties. Every county was divided into school districts, usually three or four square miles. Each district had a school board of three members elected by the voters of the district.¹⁷⁵

After Oklahoma Territory was organized, it was governed by a Territorial Governor, appointed by the President of the United States, and a Territorial Legislature, made up of an upper house with thirteen members, and a lower house of twenty-six members. All members of the Territorial Legislature were elected. The very first Territorial Legislature gave attention to schools. In December, 1890, the first school bill was passed. This bill allowed each county to decide for itself whether it would have a separate or an integrated school system. This decision was to be made by a vote of all qualified citizens. If the citizens chose to have separate schools, a special tax was levied to support the minority school. The minority school was to be administered by the county commissioner. A few counties, in order to avoid the special tax, began their public school system in Oklahoma with integrated schools.

¹⁷⁴Montgomery et al., p. 197.

¹⁷⁵Dale, pp. 409-10.

These early settlers were mindful of the great need for public education. They were, on the whole, far from being wealthy. It was expedient to limit the amount of money spent on education. They took full advantage of the lands set aside for schools by the Organic Act. However, funds were still lacking. Thus, the early schools in Oklahoma were generally less than adequate. The terms were often short and there was little education available above the eighth grade. Nearly all the schools were one-teacher, with all eight grades in one room. On the whole, however, blacks were often denied even this limited education. Yet, Negro schools were slowly being established. In 1891, the first Negro school was opened in Oklahoma City. The first term lasted four months. J. D. Randolph was the teacher. The school was housed in an old two-room house on California Street. Between 1891 and 1907, Negro schools were established in Muskogee, Eufaula, Checotah, Tulsa, and Wagoner. In fact, the United States Commissioner of Education reported three Negro high schools in Oklahoma by 1907.¹⁷⁶

Institutions of higher learning were provided for whites during the final decade of the nineteenth century. Three schools were established. Respectively, they were The University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, and Oklahoma Normal School at Edmond, Oklahoma.¹⁷⁷

The Normal School at Edmond had direct bearing upon the provision of higher education for blacks in Oklahoma because it was a land-grant college and there were definite federal provisions set aside for such

¹⁷⁶Commissioner of Education Reports, 1907.

¹⁷⁷Harlow, p. 332.

institutions.¹⁷³

For Oklahoma Territory, it meant that blacks would be admitted to the Normal School at Edmond or a separate school had to be built. "In the summer of 1896, the Association delegated its County Normal Committee to ascertain the availability of facilities of the Territorial Normal School at Edmond . . ."¹⁷⁹

A series of evasive tactics were enacted that doomed the project. A considerable amount of good was derived from this effort, for in 1897 the legislature met and passed a bill to establish the Colored Agricultural and Normal School at Langston. This was the first provision made for higher education for blacks in Oklahoma.

By 1897, the Democrats and the Populists had gained enough strength in the legislature to pass another school bill. This bill stated that: "It shall hereafter be unlawful for any white child to attend a colored school and for any colored child to attend a white school." The law also stated that the majority and the minority school should have equal facilities and the same length school year.¹⁸⁰ Despite this law, there continued to be a few integrated schools. Generally, these schools were located in districts with few black children. Another law was passed in 1897. It stated that if there were as many as eight black children between six and twenty-six years of age living in a school district, the district should either provide a school for them or pay

¹⁷⁸Teall, p. 187.

¹⁷⁹Evelyn R. Strong, pp. 52-53.

¹⁸⁰Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1897, Chap. 34, Sec. 9, p. 262.

their expenses to attend school in another district.¹⁸¹ Citizens who did not want to spend the extra money frequently ignored the law. Separate schools continued to be built; however, a few black children were made to attend school in an adjoining district.¹⁸²

The Oklahoma Territorial Legislature changed the school laws again in 1901. One change prohibited white teachers from teaching Negro children and established penalties for this violation. It also increased from eight to ten the number of colored students a district was required to have before setting up a separate school. Financing of separate schools was also changed. A special property tax was initiated in addition to regular taxes. This law, with very few changes, was in effect until statehood.¹⁸³

Serious efforts for statehood were being made. In fact, serious efforts had previously been made to make Oklahoma an all Indian state, even prior to the Civil War. As early as 1859, the Asbury Mission Conference met at North Fork Town in the Creek Nation, near present-day Eufaula, and recommended that an Indian state be developed among The Five Civilized Tribes. However nothing came of this. So, in 1867, a second inter-tribal meeting was held which also recommended the creation of an Indian state. A Resolution of Willingness to become a state was drawn up and presented to the President of the United States. Nothing was accomplished by this. When the national census was taken in 1890, the combined population of the Twin Territories was about 790,000, with 400,000 persons

¹⁸¹Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1897, Chap. 34, Art. 1, Sec. 1,
p. 266.

¹⁸²Haywood.

¹⁸³Session Laws of Oklahoma, 1897, Chap. 34, Sec. 4, p. 267.

living in Oklahoma Territory and over 390,000 in Indian Territory. Efforts began at this time to make the Twin Territories into a single state. This was thought to be politically the most expedient plan as the Indian Territory was a territory in name only with no real territorial organization.¹⁸⁴

On March 3, 1893, Congress passed an act introduced by Senator Henry B. Dawes of Massachusetts. This act established the Dawes Commission to investigate and correct enrollments of the Five Civilized Tribes. Senator Dawes was appointed Chairman of this Commission by the President, Grover Cleveland. The Commissioners were instructed to deal with The Five Civilized Tribes for the surrender of land titles, to make land allotments based on revised Indian rolls, and to start training classes for citizenship and statehood. When the news of the Commissioners' work became known, there was a wild rush of "squatters" into Indian Territory, hoping to be able to get their names on the tribal rolls. Thus, the first job of the Commission was to control the landless and lawless drifters. At one time, the squatters outnumbered the Indians. After the Commission was able to control the squatters, their work progressed slowly. The Indians refused for nearly two years to have any dealings with the Commissioners. Finally, United States courts were set up with federal judges appointed by these courts and they ordered that the making of rolls and the allotting of lands begin at once.¹⁸⁵ After this, Indians still sought to establish an Indian state with the State of Sequoyah as the proposed name.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴McReynolds, pp. 213-17. ¹⁸⁵Ibid.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 224-25.

On June, 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Enabling Act. This Act provided that the territories be admitted as a single state. It also provided that a Constitutional Convention should meet at Guthrie to draw up a state constitution. Fifty-five delegates were to be selected from Oklahoma Territory, fifty-five from Indian Territory, and two from the Osage Reservation. William H. Murray was elected president of the convention. Murray was an intermarried citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and had represented that tribe at the Sequoyah Convention. Murray's philosophy of the inherent inferiority of Negroes is evident in the Constitution which established separate schools for whites and Negroes.¹⁸⁷

Article XIII, Section 3, states:

Separate schools for white and colored children with like accommodations shall be provided by the legislature and impartially maintained. The term "colored children" used in this section shall be construed to mean children of African descent. The term "white children" shall include all other children.¹⁸⁸

This constitutional provision set the pattern of segregation in Oklahoma for many years. Oklahoma went so far as to have not only separate schools but separate phone booths, water fountains, rest rooms, and waiting rooms.¹⁸⁹

Blacks bitterly opposed segregation as expressed in the State Constitution. Delegations were sent to Washington to attempt to prevent Congress from adopting the Constitution, but their efforts failed. Despite the efforts of Negroes, President Theodore Roosevelt signed the

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

¹⁸⁸Oklahoma Statutes, 1961, p. 113.

¹⁸⁹Katz, p. 341.

Constitution, and Oklahoma became a state on November 16, 1907.

Article XIII, Section 5, of the State Constitution states that:

The supervision of instruction in the public schools shall be vested in a Board of Education, whose powers and duties shall be prescribed by law. The superintendent of Public Instruction shall be president of the Board . . .¹⁹⁰

The State Department of Education, headed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, determines the plans and policies for public education. The first man named Superintendent and who helped lay the foundation of the state school system was E. D. Cameron.¹⁹¹

Section 6 of Article XIII provided for a uniform system of textbooks for the common schools of the state.¹⁹²

On May 5, 1908, the Oklahoma State Legislature passed House Bill No. 365. House Bill No. 365 was quite clear on the matter of segregation. White and black children were to be educated in separate schools. The faculty was to be the same race as the students. It would be a misdemeanor to maintain an integrated school, whether private or public, and it was punishable by a fine of \$100.00 to \$500.00 a day. If a teacher taught in an integrated school, he was subject to a fine of \$10.00 to \$50.00 per day. Attending an integrated school subjected the student to a fine of \$5.00 to \$20.00 per day. Each day was considered as a separate offense.¹⁹³

In 1908, there were 20,803 Negro students enrolled in the public schools in Oklahoma and there were 297,075 white students. According to the Oklahoma Historical Society's records, there were 645 black teachers

¹⁹⁰Oklahoma Statutes, 1907-1908, Article XIII, Sec. 5, p. 127.

¹⁹¹Harlow, p. 517.

¹⁹²Oklahoma Statutes, 1941, p. 86.

¹⁹³Montgomery, p. 264.

for the same year. Eighteen of the seventy-five counties had no black children enrolled in their public school system. E. D. Cameron, State Superintendent, expressed the desire to "have a school in reach of every child of color in the state." He never realized this desire. Although a few blacks lived in those eighteen counties, there were legally no schools available for them to attend.¹⁹⁴

By 1912, however, there were 35,380 black children enrolled in sixty-four of the seventy-six counties. That same year, there were 447,462 white students enrolled. There were 45,773 black children of school age in Oklahoma in 1914. But, of that number, only 37,358 were enrolled in school. There were some 898 black teachers in Oklahoma by 1914.¹⁹⁵

It was extremely difficult to present valid statistics of early separate schools in Oklahoma. This was noted by State Superintendent R. H. Wilson, in 1914. He reported that: "Adequate records were not kept for separate schools prior to 1914," and he gave no indication that he would attempt to keep such records in the future.¹⁹⁶

Each school district was obligated by law to provide separate schools for black children. Educational provisions for black children were far inferior to that provided for white children. Per capita spent on white children was twelve to eighteen times as much as that spent on Negro children.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1908, p. 181.

¹⁹⁵State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1914, Table No. 1.

¹⁹⁶Ibid.

¹⁹⁷Frazier, p. 218.

In the cities and in the larger towns, there were a few school buildings for Negroes which were fairly well built and equipped, while in the rural areas, the conditions were extremely poor. Primarily, this was a direct result of two things: (1) limited amounts of tax monies available; and, (2) the lack of interest in the public school.¹⁹⁸

Separate schools were financed by the Excise Board of the county, levying a tax of one mill on all taxable property, as long as the total levy for county purposes was within the limits set by the Constitution. Consequently, if the total levy exceeded the limits set by the Constitution, there could be no mill levy. Without the levy there could have been no separate school provided.¹⁹⁹ The county superintendent, along with the local board of education, administered the separate school. Teachers were employed by the county superintendent. Separate schools became, in fact, county schools. According to State Superintendent R. H. Wilson, if there were more legal white voters in a district, mattering not that the majority of the children were black, the local board of education should be white.²⁰⁰

Some of the very early rural public schools for Negroes were taught for the first few years in sod houses, dugouts, log cabins, or small unpainted buildings made of rough lumber. These were nearly always one-room schools, housing grades one through eight. Students walked to school.²⁰¹ Some walked as far as two to four miles. It was not unusual to pass one or more white schools to get to the separate school.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸Haywood.

¹⁹⁹Aldrich, p. 37.

²⁰⁰State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1914, pp. 8-10.

²⁰¹Haywood.

²⁰²Dale, p. 410.

Lunches were carried in tin pails. The students sat on rough, homemade benches.²⁰³ In most schools, maps, charts, and even blackboards were lacking. There were few textbooks in any of the schools in Oklahoma, and virtually none in the separate schools. In fact, it was not uncommon to find only three or four textbooks in the separate school. Even with the state supposedly furnishing textbooks, most of those found in the separate school were given to that school when the white school got new texts. S. L. Hargrove remembered seeing United States History textbooks with the text of the Constitution removed from them. Negroes and/or colored folks were not to be taught that they had certain rights.²⁰⁴

Some of the very early Negro teachers had little more than an eighth grade education. Some, however, were graduates of one of the Indian academies. A few Negro teachers came to Oklahoma from the eastern part of the United States and were very well educated.²⁰⁵

All teachers had to be certified. However, certificates could be obtained by making application to the county superintendent or by taking an examination at the Normal Institute for Teachers. When the Normal was not in session, a teacher would get a temporary certificate until the examination was held. The examinations were held once every quarter. There were three kinds of certificates issued: a third-grade certificate which lasted for one year; a second-grade certificate which lasted for two years; or, a first-grade certificate which lasted for three years. The granting of these certificates by grades was based primarily on the score made on the examination. For a first-grade certificate, one had to make a grade of 90, be twenty years of age and have had twelve months

²⁰³Hargrove. ²⁰⁴Ibid. ²⁰⁵Ibid.

experience; for a second-grade certificate, one had to make 80 percent, be twenty years of age, and have had three months experience; for a third-grade certificate, one had to be sixteen years of age and no experience was necessary. There was also one stipulation: a county institute had to be held annually for teachers.²⁰⁶

During this period in Oklahoma's history, the Ku Klux Klan was quite powerful. Some separate schools mysteriously burned. Some Negro teachers were flogged for teaching the Constitution of the United States. In an effort to escape persecution and to prove that they could manage their own affairs, Negroes formed their own towns and established some majority schools. Taft, Boley, and Langston were examples of this. Even this effort did not insure either protection or adequate schools. In 1923 alone, Klan floggings in Oklahoma numbered 2,500.²⁰⁷

Separate schools were not only unequal in structure and materials, but separate school teachers were paid less than white school teachers. Negro teachers were paid approximately \$25.00 per month, while white teachers were being paid \$55.00 per month. The term "approximately" is used because the pay of Negro teachers varied from county to county, depending, in part, on the money available for the separate school within a given county. Qualifications were not the determining factor in the differences in salary, only race.²⁰⁸

Since all hotels and other public accommodations were also segregated, black teachers had no choice but to either live within the community where they worked or "board-around" with the patrons of the school district.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶Evelyn R. Strong, pp. 43-45.

²⁰⁷Katz, pp. 346, 397.

²⁰⁸Haywood.

²⁰⁹Moon.

The length of the school term varied greatly in the separate school. Generally, however, the school term for Negro children was one-third to two-thirds as long as the term for white children.²¹⁰ In Oklahoma City and in Tulsa, the school term was anywhere from four to six months, depending upon the amount of money given to the separate school and the yield of the crops to be harvested. Nearly all schools were in session during the months of December, January, and February. But, most rural schools closed in March so that the students could help their parents get the crops planted. If weather conditions were ideal so that all crops could be "laid-by" by July 1st, school reopened during the months of July and August. Such ideal weather conditions did not annually prevail. If it rained a great deal in May or June and the crops could not be plowed and hoed by July 1st, school was only held in August. In September, some crops were ready to be harvested so school was dismissed until December. If funds "ran out," a month would be taken from one or both sessions. No accounting was given to the black school or community about the amount of the total allocation for separate schools. Consequently, no explanation was given for funds "running-out."²¹¹

Dr. Haywood, whose wife was a teacher in the public schools in Oklahoma during this period, remembers the superintendent telling the principal of one separate school that all of the money had been spent for that year and that the separate school could not have a summer session. When teachers did not work, they did not get paid. So the teachers were not paid for that summer session, and the black students had no summer

²¹⁰Frazier, p. 218.

²¹¹Moon.

session which limited that school year to the three winter months.²¹² If the teacher happened to be a woman, the larger boys in the separate school had the responsibility for going to the school early to start the fire. If the teacher was a man, it was his responsibility to get to school early to start a fire so that the building would be heated by the time that the students arrived. Larger boys were also given the task of bringing the school's daily water supply from either the "well" or the "spring." Water was generally brought to the school in a tin bucket and all students drank from a common cup, dipper, or a gourd which had been cut, cleaned out, and dried.²¹³

Before a student could complete the eighth grade, the county superintendent came to the school and administered an examination. Students who passed the test were given a certificate, and if financially able he could attend a high school or a normal school. High schools and/or normal schools were usually located in the cities or towns. Generally, rural students had to leave home and move to the nearest town to secure further training, as the distance to the high school was usually too great to make the trip daily. Unless one had relatives living in the town, the parents had to pay room and board for a student to attend high school. Not only was this a great hardship on the family financially, but it had a total economic effect, as one less laborer was available. Consequently, only the more affluent blacks attended high school and/or normal school.²¹⁴

The county examinations deserve some further comment. After the

²¹²Joiner.

²¹³Hargrove. ²¹⁴Ibid.

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²¹²Joiner.

²¹³Hargrove. ²¹⁴Ibid.

county superintendent administered the test, it was taken to his office to be graded. As a rule, the tests were never returned to the school. One had only the superintendent's word as to whether or not a student passed or failed. A letter was rarely sent to the principal of the separate school, rather to the local superintendent and/or the local board of education. The local superintendent would tell the principal the names of those who passed. One principal remembers being severely reprimanded because all of his eighth grade students passed the test. James J. West, now deceased, made mention of the fact that generally the number which passed in the separate school was to be kept quite small. Any student who failed the test had to repeat the eighth grade. It was common to see young adults in the eighth grade.²¹⁵

The curriculum of these early schools was based primarily on the 3 R's: Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic. Civics was encouraged but had to be taught so that the colored students remained "in their places." Sewing and cooking classes were required or mandated. This was necessary so that colored students would become efficient servants. The more innovative teachers included personal hygiene and advanced math and grammar in the curriculum. But these courses had to be taught without the knowledge of the superintendent. The common practice during this period was to hand down from the superintendent's office courses of study that were formulated and constructed to meet the needs of second-class citizenship. Little thought was given to the needs and the concerns of children of the minority group. Later, the blame for this was unfairly placed upon the Negro principal. If he wanted the opportunity to work with his people,

²¹⁵Comments by James J. West, Jr., Ponca City, Oklahoma.
(Deceased)

he had to accept the curriculum handed down to him. This subservience did as much as anything to help the Negro child feel inferior. Almost daily, he came into contact with white students. He knew that they studied courses different from the ones which he studied. This practice continued for many years. One exception to this practice was Douglass High School in Oklahoma City. In 1934-35, a new building was constructed at Fifth and High Streets. It opened with a curriculum specifically designed to meet the needs of the Negro children of its community. The curriculum was worked out with Dr. Ambrose Caliver of the United States Office of Education and the principal and faculty of the school.²¹⁶

In the early separate schools, the rod was not spared, and a student repeated a grade until he mastered it. Some boys and girls were fifteen or sixteen years of age and were still in the second or third grade.²¹⁷ The vast majority of Negroes in Oklahoma during this period lived on farms. Some who had been slaves of Indians had been given farms after the Civil War. Many Negroes came to Oklahoma during the "Runs" and settled on farms. Others had come into the state and purchased farms. There were other Negroes who rented farms. Moreover, some Negroes worked on farms owned by whites. The landlord furnished all of the seed and necessary equipment and the Negro "share-cropper" furnished all of the labor. All of the crops which he produced were divided equally with the landlord. Sharecroppers' children generally received even less education than did other Negroes in Oklahoma. Actually, the landlord decided,

²¹⁶Parrish L. Goodwin, "The Professional Relationship of the Principal to the City Superintendent," Southwestern Journal (Winter, 1966): 10-19.

²¹⁷Moon.

based on the needs of the farm, how much schooling these children received. It was generally a bare minimum because attendance was limited by labor requirements.²¹⁸

The principal of a separate school was usually both principal and teacher. As other teachers, generally one or two, were added, the principal usually continued his teaching role. In fact, even in the large consolidated schools, principals usually taught. This did not pose the problems which might be imagined, as both the local and the county administration was controlled by the superintendents. So, the black principal was really a head teacher. He did, however, become the "hatchet man" when he could not control a teacher. Then he was given the authority to fire the teacher. Teachers could be fired for such offenses as: (1) not purchasing food and clothing at a certain white store in town, (2) teaching the Bill of Rights of the Constitution, (3) not paying the local superintendent for a job, (4) lack of participation in the churches of the community, (5) teaching black students that they were equal to white students, and any other act which the local superintendent considered as a threat to the status quo.²¹⁹

One Negro teacher remembers that when she was hired by the local superintendent she was told: "I am not concerned with your teaching them anything; I demand that you keep them quiet."²²⁰

Because of glaring inequities in the dual educational system, countless lawsuits were brought by black parents and school patrons in an attempt to get those limited rights guaranteed by law.

²¹⁸Ibid.

²¹⁹Hargrove.

²²⁰Statement by Mayme Jones Threatt, Luther, Oklahoma (retired teacher).

In 1917, there were 105 graded separate schools in Oklahoma ranging from one teacher to five teachers.²²¹ However, some additional help was provided for separate schools by the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act. This Act provided for vocational agriculture and vocational home economics in rural areas and for vocational and trade schools in urban areas. By the 1934-35 school term, there were 260,826 pupils enrolled in federally aided vocational courses in the eighteen states with separate school systems. Although Negroes constituted 21 percent of the population of these states, there were only 73,428 Negro pupils of 16 percent of the total school population. This 16 percent enjoyed less than 10 percent of the total expenditures under the Smith-Hughes Act. So, there were inequities in the distribution of these federal funds. However, it must be pointed out that this help, though unequally divided, did much to improve the separate secondary school of the south.²²²

For the year 1918, there were no available statistics for Negro schools in Oklahoma. However,

By 1919, there were 41,269 Negro children enrolled in the elementary schools of Oklahoma. There were only 1,192 enrolled in grades 9 through 12. The value of schools for blacks was \$1,236,300, while for whites, the value of schools was \$31,307,249. The per capita expenditure for white students was \$62.48 compared with \$29.06 for Negro students. In 1919, however, one mill levy was added to the permissible levy. This levy, though small, did add to funds for Negro education.²²³

In 1920, there were 604 black schoolhouses, 422 of which were rural; 121 more or less were in cities; 28 were in small towns; the balance were consolidated or union graded. The same year, there were

²²¹State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1918, pp. 23-26.

²²²Frazier, p. 439.

²²³State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1922, pp. 42-43.

445 black principals, teachers, and supervisors. There were ten accredited black high schools in Oklahoma: Boley, Lincoln of Chickasha, Faver in Guthrie, Idabel Colored, Luther Colored (Washington), Muskogee Colored, Nowata Colored, Oklahoma City Douglass and Tulsa Colored.²²⁴

Inequities in the dual educational system can vividly be pointed out by the value of library holdings. In the black schools, the value of libraries was \$5,641.18. In white schools the value of libraries was \$292,478.02.²²⁵

Because of such gross inequities, concerned black and white citizens of Oklahoma City organized the first biracial committee in December, 1920. This committee, however, had little real effect, except that lines of communication and understanding began to be opened and explored.²²⁶

The year 1921 was a significant one for Negro education in Oklahoma. In 1921, the Legislature appropriated \$25,000 for separate schools as the first special grant-in-aid from the state for weak schools. It was also the first time that state aid was voted for school districts unable to maintain a full term of instruction. Although the appropriation was far from adequate, it was desperately needed and did help.²²⁷

The eleventh Negro high school was accredited in 1921. It was the Negro school in Redbird.²²⁸

In 1921, several great philanthropic foundations began to give aid to Negro education in Oklahoma. (1) The Peabody Fund was established in 1867 through a gift of \$1,000,000 by George Peabody. It aided in establishing common schools for Negroes. The trustees of the fund had certain notions concerning race relations, since the fund made the

²²⁴Ibid.

²²⁵Evelyn R. Strong, p. 81. ²²⁶Ibid.

²²⁷State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1922, pp. 42-43.

²²⁸Ibid.

provision that Negro schools should receive two-thirds of the allotment made to the white schools. (2) The John F. Slater Fund was established in 1882 through a gift of \$1,000,000 by John F. Slater of Norwich, Connecticut. At first, it was devoted to private schools offering higher education and to vocational work in public schools. It changed, however, due to the influence of Booker T. Washington on industrial education. It also provided for teacher training for graduates of the poor rural Negro elementary schools. (3) The Jeanes Fund was created in 1905 through a gift of some \$200,000 by Miss Anna T. Jeanes, a Quaker woman of Philadelphia. Miss Jeanes wanted to aid the little country schools. The first purpose of the fund was to employ a "Jeanes" teacher who would be stationed in a demonstration school in the county. Under a new plan, however, the "Jeanes" Teacher became a supervisor of the Negro schools in the county. In 1929, there were 313 Jeanes supervisors in 311 counties in the South. (4) The Julius Rosenwald Fund helped build schools in the South by supplementing the contributions of counties and individuals in rural communities.²²⁹ (5) The Daniel Hand Fund originated in 1888. It designated its income for use in education of Negro people. (6) The Phelps-Stokes Fund, instituted in 1909, was given partly for the educational improvement of Negroes. The Peabody, Slater, and Jeanes Funds combined with the Virginia Randolph and Rosenwald Funds to form the Southern Education Foundation and exerted influence in the development of Negro educational leadership throughout the entire period of the history of education of Oklahoma, particularly in the area of teacher

²²⁹Frazier, pp. 429-436.

preparation, buildings and libraries.²³⁰ Probably the greatest impact in Oklahoma was made by the Rosenwald Fund. This fund aided in the building of separate schools, in the development of library collections, and in the transportation of Negro school children. Each of the other funds, however, was used to some degree for separate schools in Oklahoma. Despite the stimulation and the substantial financial assistance provided by philanthropic funds for the education of the Negro, the educational facilities for Negro children remained much inferior to those designated for the whites.²³¹

In the area of secondary schools, the provisions of Negro children were even more inferior than provisions for Negro elementary children. Inequalities persisted in the ratio of students to teacher. Negro teachers averaged 7.5 more pupils than white teachers. Probably the greatest inequality was in the salary of white and Negro teachers. On an average, Negro teachers were paid one-third to one-half less than white teachers.²³² Salary ranges in Oklahoma were as follows: \$1,000 to \$1,080 annually for elementary teachers; \$1,125 to \$1,524 annually for secondary teachers; \$1,900 annually for principals. This averaged \$600 to \$1,000 less than for whites.²³³

In 1923, Jacob J. Jones, Jr. filed a suit in Muskogee in an attempt to equalize the financing of separate schools. There were about one-third as many Negro children as there were white children in the public schools of Muskogee. The budget for the separate school was less

²³⁰Evelyn R. Strong, p. 26.

²³¹Frazier, pp. 429-436. ²³²Ibid., p. 436.

²³³State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1922, pp. 25-30.

than one-tenth of the budget for the majority of white schools. The suit alleged that the amount allotted by the Board of Education for the support and maintenance of the separate school was inadequate and entirely disproportionate to the amount allotted for the support and maintenance of the white school. The suit also charged that the Board of Education discriminated against the Negro schools in that they had closed their Negro schools for lack of funds but had ample funds with which to run the white schools for the full term of nine months. Consequently, the Negro children would lose their chance for promotion and would therefore repeat their grades the next year. The petition charged that aside from financial difficulties, the Negro students were housed in dilapidated, antiquated, and unsanitary buildings with squalid unkept grounds. The entire value of the buildings was approximately \$100,000, while the whites had the most modern and the most elaborate conveniences for educational advantages with a plant valued at more than \$1,000,000. The teachers, being the poorest paid anywhere, received about one-third the salary of the white teachers; this caused a lack of competent and qualified teachers. Attention was also called to the fact that each teacher in the separate school in Muskogee had about seventy pupils in class, while the white grade teacher had only about thirty students assigned to a teacher. The petition claimed discrimination by the Board of Education and asked that the Board be ordered to reopen the schools and that the treasurer of the Board be prevented from spending the money on hand unless it was to be equally divided among black and white children.²³⁴ This case finally reached the Supreme Court of Oklahoma

²³⁴C. A. Jackson.

which ruled in favor of the defendants.

There were other instances where the problems were taken to court. Ira Hall recalled an incident that occurred in Lima, Oklahoma, during the 1920's. (Lima is now New Lima, Oklahoma.)

The County Superintendent attempted to arbitrarily appoint two members to the all-black school board that had already been legally elected. Upon the board's refusal to permit this action, the County Superintendent designated the black school the separate school and delegated the minority white school as the district school. This action meant that the white minority school could demand the majority of the funds. The black citizens took their case to the State Supreme Court and won a decision based on laws that were already on the books.²³⁵

Despite the many discriminatory practices, some progress could be seen in the growth and development of the separate school. One major factor was the annexation and consolidation of school districts. Title 70, Section 890.1 of the Oklahoma Statutes gave rural school districts permission to unite to form a high school.²³⁶ Blacks who were previously denied the opportunity to attend high school now enjoyed this right. Transportation was provided and blacks could live at home and attend high school. In 1942, Washington High School in Luther, Oklahoma, was the largest separate consolidated school in the state. There were some sixteen teachers with an enrollment of 900. Even though this gave a teaching load of some fifty-six students, it did provide educational experiences previously denied the blacks in that area.²³⁷

In 1932, the general educational board began allotting funds to the State Department of Education for payment of salary and traveling

²³⁵Hall.

²³⁶Oklahoma Statutes, 1941, p. 2,377.

²³⁷Hargrove.

expenses of rural school supervisors or State Agents for Negro Schools. State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Vaughn, saw a need for legislation to provide specifically for transfer and transportation of pupils from sparsely settled districts when such would prove economical; to authorize the employment of visiting teachers to do the type of work as the Jeanes teachers and also to act as attendance officers; and to make definite and adequate provisions for securing the necessary school buildings. Although Vaughn made the suggestion, the legislature did not take action on it.

As late as 1932, there were 592 black schools in 62 counties still using the Slater, Jeanes and Rosenwald funds to supplement Negro schools.

Salaries continued to be unequal. In 1933, white teachers were paid \$918.00, while Negro teachers' salaries averaged \$773.00.

By 1934, there were 45 black accredited high schools in 29 counties in Oklahoma.²³⁸

Oklahoma continued to maintain its legal walls of segregation in the face of tremendous pressure for equalizing educational opportunities. Negro students, in increasing numbers, were seeking admission to state schools of higher learning for study in fields not offered at Langston.

In 1936, there were 55,922 Negro school-age children in Oklahoma. Of that number, 49,521 were enrolled in school with an average daily attendance of 36,194, or 73 percent of the enrollment. A. L. Crable, State Superintendent of Instruction, showed in his annual report that Negroes attended school better than the over-all combined attendance of whites, in spite of their many problems.²³⁹ By 1938, the average daily attendance for Negroes had increased to 76.7 percent of the total

²³⁸State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1934, pp. 88-89.

²³⁹Ibid., 1936, pp. 97-114.

enrollment.

The legislature passed House Bill 283 in 1941 in an effort to assist separate public schools. This bill gave permission to counties to issue separate school improvement bonds. Also, in 1941, the Senate passed Bill 14 which increased the amount available from the general levy by two mills. These bills helped improve the lot of the separate school, but they were so far below the white schools that the bill could not bridge this gap. In his 1943-44 report, A. L. Crable stated the following:

The school buildings and equipment provided for the Negro children range from a few among the best to many of the poorest in the state. The program of providing buildings and equipment for separate schools need a solution, probably through legislation, making available for those purposes a larger portion of the local revenue derived from the county levy of two mills in counties having many Negro schools.²⁴⁰

The Oklahoma City Branch of the NAACP began an investigation of the differences in salary scales for Negro and white teachers. Their concern originated with a report made by the Superintendent of the Oklahoma City Public Schools, H. E. Wrinkle, that listed the average salary for a white teacher as \$1,640.92; while for the Negro teacher, the average salary was \$1,347.66. It was not until 1947, however, that a case was filed by the NAACP with the United States District Court to equalize teacher salaries. Emma Lee Freeman, twelve year instructor at Douglass High School, Oklahoma City, filed the brief asking the Oklahoma City School Board to pay her the same salary as a white teacher doing the identical class work with the identical training. On October 17, 1948, the federal judge ruled that Oklahoma's school boards must give

²⁴⁰Ibid., 1942, p. 22.

Negro and white teachers equal pay. The Freeman case was dismissed after pay scales were equalized. However, her attorney, Amos T. Hall, asked for the rulings as a guide in future cases.²⁴¹

In 1945, the legislature amended Section 9, Article X, which provided that,

. . . upon certification of need by the governing board, an additional levy of not to exceed one mill on the dollar valuation on any property within the county shall be levied by the Excise Board, the proceeds derived hereafter to be used exclusively for the purchase of equipment, acquisition of sites, and erection of buildings for separate schools for white and Negro children.²⁴²

In 1946, there were ninety-five black high schools accredited by the state. One out of five of these was accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.²⁴³

Negroes, more and more, began seeking ways of obtaining higher education in Oklahoma. In fact, the main object was to break down the policy of segregation in education. With a decrease in funds for attending graduate school outside of the state, great pressure was brought to bear on the state to provide equal educational opportunities for all of its citizens.²⁴⁴

In 1948, Negroes decided to make an all-out attempt to break down segregation in education. Ada Lois Sipuel applied for admission to the Oklahoma University Law School. Amos T. Hall, a Tulsa attorney, represented her. She was denied admission on the basis that to do so would be to disobey the laws of Oklahoma. A suit was filed in Cleveland County

²⁴¹Sadberry.

²⁴²State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1946, p. 29.

²⁴³Ibid.

²⁴⁴Moon.

District Court. This court ruled against Miss Sipuel. The case was then appealed to the Oklahoma State Supreme Court. The State Supreme Court affirmed the ruling of the lower court. An appeal was made to the United States Supreme Court. In January, 1948, the United States Supreme Court ordered the state of Oklahoma to immediately provide instruction for Negroes equal to that given to white students. State authorities straightway set up the Langston University School of Law at the State Capitol. This school had only three professors. Miss Sipuel refused to attend this school on the grounds that it was a "Jim Crow" school and did not offer training equal to that provided by the Law School at the University of Oklahoma. Miss Sipuel again applied for admission to the latter, but was denied.²⁴⁵

Early in 1948, a committee of deans from the Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College and from the University of Oklahoma was appointed to determine the possibilities of establishing graduate facilities for Negroes in Oklahoma. The committee reported that to meet the graduate needs for Negroes at Langston University would necessitate the establishment of fifty to sixty graduate departments at a cost of \$12,000,000. This committee suggested that it would be extremely difficult to recruit competent graduate faculty members. Finally, the committee recommended that qualified black applicants be admitted to Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College and to the University of Oklahoma for graduate work.

Finding a final solution to the problem was the responsibility of the Regents of Higher Education who had asked the deans to make the report. The Regents recommended that blacks be allowed to attend the

²⁴⁵Sadberry.

state universities. On May 28, 1949, a bill was passed by the legislature lifting the forty-two year old ban on Negroes from attending white universities; but, attendance was still on a segregated basis. It required separate classrooms for Negro and white students and only permitted Negroes to attend when the State Negro College did not offer the work desired.²⁴⁶

George W. McLaurin entered the University of Oklahoma in June, 1948. All of his classes were held in one room, Room 104. In all other campus facilities, he was similarly segregated. He was assigned special seats in both the library and the cafeteria. McLaurin filed suit in Federal District Court protesting the segregated facilities. He alleged that the required isolation created mental discomfiture, which made study difficult. He also cited the prescribed regulations as a badge of inferiority which adversely affected his relationship with his fellow students and his instructors. The court held that such treatment did not violate the provisions of the 14th Amendment. McLaurin took his case to the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme Court held that a Negro must receive the same treatment as students of other races. Many spoke of this decision as a complete victory. In 1949, twenty-six Negroes applied for admission to the University for the summer term. They were admitted, but railings were erected in the classrooms to separate the Negroes from the other students.²⁴⁷

It was 1951 before such barriers were removed in the classrooms. This was the beginning. The removal of this barrier was a step toward eventual integration in the schools of Oklahoma.

A change relative to finances occurred in 1948. The state constitution was amended in July, 1948, to provide for one mill on the dollar valuation on property in the county to be levied by the Excise Board for unrestricted purposes of the separate school. Also, in 1948, general statewide distribution of free textbooks went into effect. This did not necessarily apply to all separate schools. As late as 1954,

²⁴⁶Aldrich, pp. 39-40. ²⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 45-47.

blacks in some districts still had to purchase textbooks.²⁴⁸

Oklahoma expended \$167.03 per pupil in the public schools in 1949; only thirteen states invested less. The national average of expenditures per pupil was \$30.00 higher than that of Oklahoma. From 1944 to 1949, Oklahoma's expenditures per pupil rose by 73 percent, while the national average for the same period rose approximately 58 percent. Another hopeful sign was that Oklahoma's percentage of the total budget for education was 1.93 percent while the national average was 1.53 percent.²⁴⁹

In 1950, 9,485 blacks over 25 years of age had completed four years of high school, while 218,290 whites over 25 years of age had completed four years of high school. There were 1,639 black teachers and administrators in Oklahoma. Of that number, 171 held Master's degrees, 1,355 held Bachelor's degrees, and 90 had from 90 to 120 college hours.²⁵⁰

There was a slight decrease in black teachers and administrators in Oklahoma in 1952. Whereas there were 1,639 in 1950, there were only 1,610 in 1952. The breakdown was as follows: nine superintendents at an average salary of \$4,936.00; 94 high school principals with an average salary of \$4,095.71; four junior high principals with an average salary of \$3,296.62; 466 high school teachers with an average salary of \$3,301.86; 52 junior high school teachers whose salaries averaged \$3,301.86; and 902 elementary teachers with an average salary of \$2,948.03.²⁵¹

Starting salary for a teacher with a B.A. degree and no experience was \$250.00 per month for ten months in Chickashaw for the school year

²⁴⁸Joiner.

²⁴⁹McReynolds, pp. 417-420.

²⁵⁰State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1950, pp. 280-84.

²⁵¹Ibid., 1952, p. 422.

1952-53.²⁵²

In 1953, the twenty-fourth Legislature appropriated \$39,515,000 per year for school aid and made additional funds of more than \$3,000,000 available for elementary schools.²⁵³

B. Effects of the 1954 Supreme Court
Decision in Oklahoma

From its beginning, and under state law typical of southern oriented states, Oklahoma had segregated schools for white and blacks until the landmark 1954 United States Supreme Court Decision. The United States Supreme Court, in the case of Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, on May 17, 1954, handed down a far-reaching and important decision: "We conclude that in the field of education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."²⁵⁴

With this decision, the legal fight for taking action against segregation and inequality of opportunity had been won. The task remained, however, to see that the law of the land was carried out as set forth by the Court with all deliberate speed.

Oklahoma public schools took no action toward desegregation in the year following the decision on May 17, 1954. To be sure, there were many meetings held and some planning done; but, everywhere there was the attitude of waiting until the Supreme Court tells us what to do.²⁵⁵

²⁵²Jones.

²⁵³State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1954, p. 255.

²⁵⁴Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, 347 U.S. 483, 74 S. Ct. 686, 98 L. Ed. 873 (Kan. 1954).

²⁵⁵F. D. Moon, "Summary of Address made before the National Association of Secondary Principals, Chicago, 1956" (copied from Dr. Moon's personal collection).

Following the May 17, 1954 decision, Oklahoma, still exercising considerable caution and fear, began gradual implementation. The governor of Oklahoma, Raymond Gary, stated publicly that Oklahoma would obey the law of the land as set forth by the Supreme Court, but indicated that in "Little Dixie" (the southern counties of Oklahoma) considerable time might be needed to secure compliance.²⁵⁶

Thus, it may be concluded that the immediate effects of the 1954 Supreme Court Decision in Oklahoma were minimal. However, the state is still experiencing changes due to the long-range effects of this landmark decision as of 1976.

One immediate effect which was found upon close inspection was that where integration did take place, the black schools were usually the schools which were closed and the blacks integrated, or desegregated, into the previously white school. The sociological and psychological effects of the destruction of the black school need further study, as it had a drastic effect on the black community. In many communities, the only thing upon which blacks could look with pride was their schools. When the school ceased to exist, in many instances, pride in the local community suffered.

Another immediate effect of the 1954 Supreme Court Decision was the loss of jobs by Negro teachers. Although black children were allowed to attend the white school, few black teachers in the rural areas of Oklahoma were accepted as teachers.²⁵⁷

Probably the most important far-reaching effect was that it was

²⁵⁶Letter from Oliver Hodge to Lori Verhelle, March 4, 1960.

²⁵⁷Burton.

the beginning of a new way of life for the people of Oklahoma. Folkways and mores gradually changed. People began to be accepted for what they were rather than rejected on the basis of the color of their skin. With the racial mixing of students in public schools, students began to participate in the sports programs, in the bands, on debate teams, and in all other areas of school life. This carried over into all other phases of life.²⁵⁸

All of these changes did not take place in 1954. All had not completely taken place in 1976. But, the 1954 decision of the United States Supreme Court was the beginning of a series of changes.

C. A Decade Later: 1954-1964

In 1955, Perry School System began its school year with a single educational system. Perry also kept one black teacher on the staff.

All Negro teachers were not nearly as fortunate as the one in Perry. In a letter to a Miss Lori Verhelle, State Superintendent Oliver Hodge, states, "The worst thing about this entire program in Oklahoma is that some 320 Negro teachers have lost their positions because of integration." Hodge continued by saying that very few Negro teachers were employed in the schools which had been integrated. He concluded by stating, "It is true, in these cases, in practically every instance, there have been far more Negro children involved than white children, but the boards of education seem to be reluctant to employ Negro teachers."²⁵⁹

Leaders of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers were

²⁵⁸Information obtained from the Files of the Consultative Center For Human Relations, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

²⁵⁹Hodge.

concerned about the number of Negro teachers dismissed from their jobs after 1955, allegedly due to desegregation. At one time, in 1955, the Association of Negro Teachers considered plans for a discriminatory suit against some local boards for the dismissal of Negro teachers where integration had taken place. H. C. Whitlow, chairman of the OANT's Integration Committee, announced that the Association would not begin legal proceedings until their attorney, Amos T. Hall of Tulsa, conferred further with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The NAACP sent two research men into the state to investigate Negro teacher dismissals.²⁶⁰

In 1955, the OANT voted to merge with the Oklahoma Education Association. However, the complete merger took place over a three year period. Between 1955 and 1958, most Negro teachers became members of the Oklahoma Education Association. In 1955, there were 1,679 Negro teachers in Oklahoma. There were also 363 schools of 312 school districts where Negro pupils were eligible to attend school.²⁶¹

During the 1955 legislative session, an amendment abolishing segregated school finances was initiated. It was voted on and approved April 5, 1955 by a vote of 231,097 to 73,021. Although the amendment did not abolish segregation in the public schools of Oklahoma, it did begin to prepare the state financially to comply with the decision of the Supreme Court.²⁶²

Boynton's Wheatley High School, one of the earlier schools to

²⁶⁰Jones.

²⁶¹State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1956, pp. 340-358.

²⁶²Ibid., pp. 9-10.

desegregate, held its last graduation exercise for black high school students in 1956. Thereafter, the black senior high school students attended the previously all-white Boynton High School. Boynton was a small rural town of some 530 people, about half black and half white. Farm students, however, attended the Boynton High School. Consequently, it was a comparatively large consolidated school. The separate school building continued to function as a separate elementary school until 1967. Since that time, the building has remained vacant. In 1974, farmers offered to purchase the previously black school as a barn in which to store hay. This greatly upset the blacks of Boynton. Mrs. Amos Daniels Yerger, a former teacher and principal at Wheatley for some thirty-five years, decided that something much more useful could be made of the building than a barn. She began to contact alumni of Wheatley. With their help, she and other blacks of Boynton were able to purchase the building for a community center. Mrs. Yerger said, "We're doing it not for the black people of Boynton but for all citizens of our community, black and white." Many of the former separate schools remained closed and were allowed to deteriorate.²⁶³

In 1956, Prentice Gantt, the first black ever to play varsity football for the University of Oklahoma, enrolled at the University of Oklahoma as a freshman. Although a brilliant football player at Douglass High School in Oklahoma City and the captain of the team, he was not recruited by the University. Gantt was the recipient of the Oklahoma City Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association's academic scholarship. The University of Oklahoma football team at that time was an

²⁶³The Oklahoma Journal (March 10, 1975).

all-white squad. Yet, Gantt tried out for the freshman team. This act of Gantt's signified the end of the all-white University of Oklahoma football team and the beginning of a sensational sports career for Gantt. After his freshman year, Gantt was awarded an athletic scholarship for the next three years. Although reluctant to discuss his problems as the first black player on an all-white team, Gantt did say that at first he was very apprehensive, wondering if his teammates would accept him, not so much as a black, but as a contributing member of the team. Gantt was accepted because he proved himself to be a gentleman as well as an athlete.²⁶⁴

After college Gantt spent one year with the Cleveland Browns and then moved to the St. Louis Cardinals Professional team. He played seven years for the Cardinals and was the team's number one ground gainer in 1967. During the "off seasons," Gantt worked with the Oklahoma City Public Schools serving as a television teacher at the Broadcasting Center and also as a consultant in the Cultural Resources Program. Currently, Gantt is Assistant Football Coach at the University of Missouri.

While in high school, Gantt was a member of the National Honor Society, and while at the University of Oklahoma he was named to the Academic All-American squad.²⁶⁵

Aside from being a super athlete, Gantt did much to help his teammates and other Oklahomans to understand that blacks can achieve academically, as well as in the area of sports. Perhaps his most important contribution was that he helped many people understand that blacks

²⁶⁴Related by Prentice Gantt, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March, 1968.

²⁶⁵Ibid.

could also be gentlemen.

Matthew McDaniel related an interesting human interest story that concerned Gault:

Gault had broken loose for a long run against the University of Kansas football team; one of the black players from the University of Kansas caught Gault and gave him a bone-crushing tackle. One of the white spectators jumped up and screamed frantically, "Just look what that nigger did to our colored boy."²⁶⁶

Congress passed the first law since Reconstruction to protect the rights of Negroes in 1957. It provided the Attorney General with the power to halt interferences with school desegregation. It also established a Civil Rights Commission to report to the President on the progress being made toward equality.²⁶⁷

By 1958, approximately 7,000 Negro children were attending racially mixed classes in the Oklahoma Public Schools, as reported by Hodge. He also stated that during Oklahoma's fourth year under the gradual integration plan, integration had been carried on without major troubles.

As late as November 28, 1958, protest was still being made against inequities in the dual educational program in Oklahoma. Hodge wrote the following in a letter to a Mr. George Blair:

We have a system of equalization aid in our state program of financing our schools, and the Negro teachers have always qualified and been paid on the same standards as white teachers. . . . I would say that up until about six or eight years ago, the Negro teachers in this state had a higher average salary than the white teachers of the state because there has never been a shortage of Negro teachers and we were always able to get

²⁶⁶Interview with Matthew McDaniels, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, February 21, 1974.

²⁶⁷Katz, pp. 478-489.

the ones with higher qualifications. . . .²⁶⁸

During the 1958-59 school year, the number of Negro students attending racially mixed classes increased by nearly 2,000. The number given was 10,246, or about one-fourth of the total Negro school population. Statistics also pointed out that there were only thirty-three all-Negro high schools, where in 1954, there had been ninety-six. There were only thirteen all-Negro junior high schools and 131 all-Negro elementary schools left in the state.²⁶⁹

A number of desegregation plans were developed. Most black high schools were simply discontinued. A few staff members were integrated into the previously all-white schools. Others were dismissed. Some previously all-black elementary schools were discontinued. In the large cities, districts of attendance were realigned to admit a number of blacks. Transfer programs were set up in some districts. Segregated housing patterns in some cities prevented complete desegregation, as many whites still held to the neighborhood school concept. In the smaller towns and in rural areas the black schools were often closed and all students attended the previously all-white school. However, it was in the smaller towns and in rural areas where integration progressed most rapidly.²⁷⁰

It must be pointed out that the separation of races in the public schools of Oklahoma was slowly fading. Again, this was far more evident in the rural areas than in the larger cities.

²⁶⁸Letter from Oliver Hodge to George Blair, November 28, 1958.

²⁶⁹State Superintendent's Biennial Report, 1960, pp. 33-37.

²⁷⁰Sadberry.

In 1960 there were only eight all-Negro high schools in Oklahoma. Three of these were located in all-Negro communities, while five were in districts where there were two or more high schools. Superintendent Hodge states that by the 1960-61 school year he no longer requested information according to race from local school districts.²⁷¹

Black teachers were still losing their jobs. By the fall of 1961, approximately 394 Negro teachers had lost their positions due to integration in various locations throughout the state.²⁷²

It must be pointed out that these teachers did not, for the most part, remain jobless. They lost their jobs in rural and in small town areas, but many of them were hired by the Oklahoma City System, Tulsa System, Muskogee and Lawton Systems. A few left Oklahoma and went to work in other states. Some were unable to find jobs as teachers and they accepted employment in other areas, others retired.²⁷³

Credit for finding employment for the teachers who had been dismissed went to many persons and groups. Former officers of the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers, the National Education Association, the Oklahoma State Department of Education, school superintendents (both in Oklahoma and throughout the country), colleges for professional and business training, the Urban League of Oklahoma, and many other organizations for social welfare and many concerned citizens brought aid and assistance to displaced teachers. Many people gave unsparingly of themselves to meet the great demands of the social revolution of integration in Oklahoma. Consequently, many displaced teachers were able to find

²⁷¹Hodge.

²⁷²Sadberry. ²⁷³Ibid.

employment.²⁷⁴

While schools in rural areas were being desegregated, slowly but consistently, urban areas were procrastinating to maintain the status quo. Seven years after the historic Supreme Court Decision, the Oklahoma City Public School System was practically as segregated as it had been since statehood. In 1961, Doctor Alfonso L. Dowell, an Oklahoma City Optometrist, filed a suit against the Oklahoma City Public School System. Dr. Dowell lived in a suburban, dependent school district. Students from his district attended the Oklahoma City high schools after they completed the eighth grade. Dr. Dowell contested the assignment of his son, Robert, to Douglass High School. White students from the same district were assigned to Northeast High School. At this time, there were no blacks attending Northeast, and there were no whites attending Douglass. There was an Oklahoma City School Board policy that permitted a student to transfer from his assigned school if a desired course was not offered at the home school. Robert Dowell wanted to enroll in an electronics course which was not offered at Douglass, but which was offered at Northeast. Dowell was denied a transfer, and a federal suit for desegregation against the Oklahoma City Public Schools was filed. The case was taken before Judge Luther Bohanon of the Federal District Court. In 1963, Judge Bohanon ruled that the Oklahoma City Board of Education had not complied with the 1954 Supreme Court decision. He ordered the Oklahoma City Board of Education to prepare a plan to completely desegregate the schools in the system by the Fall term.

This decision was appealed. Before the case was finally settled,

²⁷⁴ Moon.

Robert Dowell had completed his four years of study at Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School in Oklahoma City.²⁷⁵

The slow pace of integration of students in the Oklahoma City Public Schools may be closely linked to the findings of James B. Conant. In 1961, he found that it was a common belief among public school educators, both in the North and in the South, that the black student was inherently inferior.²⁷⁶

After Judge Bohanon's initial decision, the Oklahoma City Board of Education outlined a long-range desegregation policy, which the Judge neither approved nor disapproved. He asked that the board appoint a panel of "experts" to study the problem and to plan a policy of complete desegregation. The Judge stated that Oklahoma City must take positive and affirmative steps to eliminate racial segregation in the schools. The board declined to select a panel of experts to plan an implementation of desegregation. A three member team, nominated by Dr. Dowell and his attorney, was appointed by the court. When the team submitted its plan, Judge Bohanon ordered the Oklahoma City Board of Education to implement the plan. This order was appealed to the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver. The Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld Judge Bohanon's decision. The case was carried to the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme Court refused to hear the case.²⁷⁷

While the legal battle was being waged in Oklahoma City, integration in the many public schools of rural areas had become a way of life.

²⁷⁵Stewart, pp. 41-42.

²⁷⁶Thomas Sowell, Black Education, Myths and Tragedies (New York: David McKay, 1972), p. 219.

²⁷⁷Stewart, p. 42.

Black and white students were cooperatively working together in the classrooms, on football, basketball and baseball teams, in choral groups, and on debate teams. Despite the opposition of skeptics who foresaw violence, the vast majority of these students were busily making the adjustments from a segregated to an integrated way of life.²⁷⁸

In 1963, Louella Henderson, a black girl who was a junior at Dunjee High School in Choctaw, was elected president of the Oklahoma Association of Student Librarians. Louella Henderson was the first Negro student to head this integrated state organization.²⁷⁹

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed. Section 402 of this Act directed the Commissioners of the United States Office of Education to conduct a survey concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels. James S. Coleman, a sociologist at John Hopkins University, was eventually commissioned to undertake this task. His study, involving many thousands of workers and interviews, entitled, Equality of Educational Opportunity, proved that equal opportunities did not exist in education for all students. However, the study also pointed out the legal and political problems complicating the elimination of de facto school segregation.²⁸⁰

Desegregation and/or integration of public schools was a complex problem, involving changes in the total culture. Consequently, there

²⁷⁸Moses F. Miller.

²⁷⁹Jones.

²⁸⁰Roscoe Hill and Malcolm Feeley, Affirmative School Integration (Beverly Hills, California: Published in cooperation with the Law and Society Association by Sage Publications, 1968), p. 11.

might have been a reluctance to accept these changes. ". . . most of the integration controversy centered in the cities because of the large numbers of pupils involved and the segregated housing patterns. . ."281

In order to implement the 1954 Supreme Court Decision, many changes took place. Some of these included busing of children and redrawing school attendance boundaries. Other means of desegregation included reducing the grade-span of a school building, pairing of schools, and restricting transfers of students.

Racists, both black and white, were most vocal in their refusal to accept integration in the public schools. Demonstrations were staged. One of the city councilmen in Oklahoma City headed a demonstration in which an old school bus was destroyed to emphasize his opposition to busing. Despite all of this, racial integration in the public schools of Oklahoma was carried out with a minimum of incidents. As of the 1963-64 school term, 190 high schools, 110 junior high schools and 145 elementary schools were integrated.²⁸²

Probably the single, most influential force in the integration of public schools in Oklahoma was the school athletic program. Most local communities had a great deal of pride, especially in their schools. In addition, they usually had great rivalries with adjoining communities. It was vitally important that schools within their communities win in both football and basketball. Many coaches were delighted to have blacks on their teams who were fleet-of-foot or who possessed other skills needed to aid in the developing of a winning team. Most fans within

²⁸¹Aldrich, p. 50.

²⁸²R. G. Miller, p. 7.

these communities, as soon as they got over the initial shock of blacks being on their teams, were equally delighted to have winning teams. So, it was primarily through Sports that many blacks became accepted in integrated schools. Yet, some of these black youths felt that they were greatly accepted on Friday nights but met with hostility on Monday mornings in their academic classes. Black students complained of teachers who either pointedly ignored them in their classes or who sought ways to humiliate them in the presence of their peers. In fact, one black youth, laboring under this kind of situation, complained that his school wanted him to be a "super nigger." The black student-athlete was expected to be equally as proficient in chemistry as he was in football. Yet, he felt no such demands were made on the white athletes.

Discriminatory practices were voiced by many black students during the initial stages of integration in Oklahoma. Black students complained of white students calling them racially derogatory names and stated that nothing was done about this when it was reported to the school authorities. Some black students also told of physical violence by whites about which nothing was done either.²⁸³

In Frederick, blacks were allowed, for some time, to attend Boyd (Negro) High School, but the football players had to report to Frederick High School to play football. Thus, only the super athlete was given an opportunity to play. The average black athlete was not considered. This was an extremely interesting situation in that Frederick Boyd had won the state championship for three years in football in their division. The basketball team was not disturbed. It remained all-black and both the practice sessions and the games were held at the black high school. Thus, the first area of integration in Frederick was the football team.

In other integrated situations, blacks were allowed to attend classes only. They were neither encouraged nor allowed to

²⁸³Interview with Lloyd Logan, Frederick, Oklahoma, July 10, 1974.

participate in such organizations as the Student Council, various clubs or become a member of the debate team. Prejudices were just too deeply ingrained; blacks could run, play, sing, and dance, but they could neither think nor achieve academically.

Another area where blacks were allowed to participate during the early attempts at desegregation was in the area of music. In keeping with the stereotype that "all blacks have rhythm," blacks were allowed to join both the band and the choral groups very early in the integration process.

Despite all of this, a few blacks did achieve academically, and they were often described as "unusual blacks."²⁸⁴

One effective scare tactic used to keep black and white students from developing effective human relations was what some racists referred to as "social integration." This question was asked, debated and answered on mass media as, "Do you want your daughter to date or to marry a colored boy?"²⁸⁵

The first teachers to be assigned in integrated schools said that there were white teachers who refused to either speak to them or to eat with them. White children often did not want to accept black teachers and were frequently outspoken when it came to letting the teacher know how they felt. Other blacks said that their problem was a "paternal" one. Whites went so far to let them know that they were accepted until they felt rather conspicuous by all of the attention given to them. They also complained to indifferent and/or hostile administrators who made no attempt to help them adjust or to solve their problems. Another problem faced by the first black teachers in integrated schools was the hostility of white parents. Many of these parents did not want their children taught by black teachers. Some pretended not to be prejudiced and allowed their children to remain in the black teacher's room, but they constantly

²⁸⁴Joiner.

²⁸⁵Watkins.

reported the black teacher to the principal. This was not only true of black teachers. Later, as white teachers were brought into the previously all-Negro schools, they faced the very same problems.²⁸⁶

This kind of thinking and behavior gave rise to many of our early problems in integration, despite the often found quote, that "Integration in Oklahoma proceeded without incident." There were some incidents, and a few were serious. Another great deterrent to peaceable integration of public schools in Oklahoma was the entire civil rights movement during the late 1950's and throughout the entire 1960's. Beginning with the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1955, and continuing with sit-ins and demonstrations, mass media vividly described each incident. From the nonviolent approach of Martin Luther King, Jr., to the violent appeals of Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown, black youth of the nation were bombarded with the idea of "black power." Encouraged to interpret the violence of dogs, hoses, and clubs being used on blacks who were attempting to exercise their constitutional rights as justification for more violence, black youth in Oklahoma began to become militant and ready and willing to give violence for violence. The impact of mass media's treatment of the civil rights movement coupled with the black's built-in tensions and frustrations of second class citizenship, gave blacks the initiative to fight back, both in the schools and communities of Oklahoma and the rest of the nation. Where before blacks seemed to have had the philosophy of "turning the other cheek," they became militant, and were sometimes inflamed over incidents which previously would have been ignored. This did much to destroy the effective human relations which

²⁸⁶West.

had been developed. To the racists, this was the nature of blacks--violent, unpredictable and unreasonable. To thinking citizens, black and white, here was a problem that needed careful attention. More black teachers were hired because it was felt that they were best able to communicate with militant young blacks. Services of sociologists and psychologists from state universities were utilized. The University of Oklahoma's School of Continuing Education planned Human Relations workshops where requested within the state.²⁸⁷

Other attempts to solve these and other problems were parent-student-teacher groups. These were generally organized as a part of or in conjunction with the Parent-Teacher Student Association. Allegations were presented to the Association and to the administration of various schools where these problems existed. Through cooperative effort, some of these problems were solved. Such groups worked very well in small communities such as Luther, Oklahoma, where most black and white parents previously knew each other and were able to calmly sit down and discuss these problems.²⁸⁸ In other communities, investigations were made by the NAACP and the State Human Rights Commission.²⁸⁹

All problems were not solved. All of these human relations problems may never be solved, but Oklahoma was attempting to work on them. And, by 1964, conditions were much better in the smaller communities than they had been in 1954. However, in Oklahoma City and in Tulsa, very little if any real progress had been made in the area of either

²⁸⁷Katz, pp. 474-480.

²⁸⁸Threatt.

²⁸⁹Interview with William Y. Rose, Chairman, Human Rights Commission, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, June 15, 1973.

integration or race and human relations.

D. 1964 to 1976

During the years 1964 to 1976, the more serious problems of desegregation in the public schools of Oklahoma centered primarily in large cities. The Fox-Tatums controversy was one exception.

Fox, Oklahoma, and Tatums, Oklahoma are two relatively small communities located in southern Carter County. Fox was a predominantly white community. Tatums was one of the few remaining all-black communities in Oklahoma.

The Fox School District was housed in relatively modern facilities. In 1966, the County Superintendent of Schools for Carter County assumed the responsibility for closing the Tatums schools and ordering the Tatums children to attend school at Fox.

The Tatums citizens resisted this order and refused to send their children to the Fox schools. During the 1966-67 school term, only 40 of approximately 160 eligible pupils from Tatums actually enrolled and attended the Fox schools. Assisted by the NAACP, the Tatums patrons appealed to the Oklahoma Supreme Court. The decision of the County Superintendent was upheld and the patrons of Tatums were directed to comply with the decision. Meanwhile, those children who missed the entire 1966-67 school term were permitted to do concentrated make-up work during the summer of 1967. These young people were not penalized. They were permitted to advance to the next higher grade, the grade they would have been eligible for had they attended school during the previous term.²⁹⁰

A potentially explosive situation that gained nationwide publicity was resolved without resorting to violence. According to Merle Watson, Fox's Principal, black students and white students worked together successfully in all phases of school life. All areas of participation

²⁹⁰Interview with Merle Watson, School Principal at Fox, Oklahoma, May 12, 1976.

were open to all students, black and white. The co-curricular activities were open to all students and the level of participation was high. The sports program was highly successful and the coaching staff was integrated. The 1975 football team participated in the State Championship Playoffs.

The black citizens of the Tatums community apparently accepted the Fox school as theirs because Watson reported that events open to the public were well attended by black patrons as well as by white patrons. In 1976 the Fox school was working effectively as a desegregated school system.²⁹¹

The location of the Negro communities in the border cities of the United States tend to conform to the pattern of southern cities, though there are also concentrations of Negroes similar to those in the northern cities. In the border cities, both historic and economic factors have determined the location of Negro communities. Generally, the heavy concentration is near the business and/or industrial districts. Often low-income housing units are also located in or near these districts. Here, housing is usually old and depreciated. Rent is low, especially compared with more adequate housing. Yet the rent in these areas is exorbitantly high for the type of housing available. In addition, the pattern of prejudice prevails, separating the races. Economically and socially, this is the only housing which a large percentage of Negroes can afford.²⁹²

Culturally, Oklahoma was certainly one of these border states, although it was often referred to as a mid-western state. Frazier has aptly described both the characteristics and the location of the black community in Oklahoma City in 1964. At that time, approximately 85 percent of all blacks lived in the northeast area of the city. As late as 1974, in the total northeast area of Oklahoma City there were only two small communities which were integrated, Forest Park and Wildewood.

²⁹¹Interview with L. D. Shannon, Milo, Oklahoma, May 20, 1976.

²⁹²Frazier, pp. 229-240.

Even in these two areas, there existed a sort of token integration. Many whites moved out. This sudden moving when a black moves into an area is described as "white-flight" by sociologists. Generally, those who remained were older white residents and they either had no children or their children were adults and no longer lived at home. There were few white children in these communities. In Wildewood, a middle class community located in "near north" Oklahoma City (bound on the south by Northeast 50th, the north by Northeast 63rd, the west by North Kelley, and the east by North Rhode Island), a neighborhood group was formed whose main purpose was to encourage whites to remain within the neighborhood. Other neighborhoods in Oklahoma City were integrated for short periods of time, such as Creston Hills and the Springlake areas. But "white-flight" reduced these to virtually all-black neighborhoods. Because of this, the problem of integration in Oklahoma City was a more complex one than would have ordinarily been true. Both social and economic factors served to delay integration in the larger cities in Oklahoma.²⁹³

The Economic Opportunity Act passed by Congress in 1964 was designed to give aid and assistance to low income families. One stipulation was that these funds had to be used for all people who qualified regardless of race. Consequently, this act gave great impetus to integration in Oklahoma City. The Office of Economic Opportunity established, as a result of the act, planned programs to assist persons who were in need and to also provide training in skilled trades and the professions. This included both young people and adults. Among the programs offered in which Oklahoma City participated was the Upward Bound project for high school boys and girls who had college potential. As a part of the project, in the summer of 1966, 500 sophomores and juniors were enrolled in an eight weeks training course at five Oklahoma colleges: Southwestern, East Central, Southeastern, Langston, and Oklahoma Baptist University. These students lived in the college

²⁹³Interview with Jessie Rutledge, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 5, 1974.

dormitories. They participated in group discussions and attended classes intended to broaden their cultural interests and prepare them in the essentials of success in college. They also took part in such recreational activities as swimming, bowling and organized games. Books, supplies, medical and dental care, and a spending allowance of \$5.00 per week were provided for each student. A bonus averaging \$40.00 each was given upon completion of the eight weeks program. Total cost for one year for Oklahoma was \$591,929.00.

... The Head Start Child Development Program was another Federal project in which Oklahoma participated. Described as a community action program for young children by the Office of Economic Opportunity, it was designed to promote effective education for pre-school children whose families lacked financial resources to send them to nursery schools or to kindergartens. Oklahoma received over two million dollars for this program.²⁹⁴

These programs did much to give impetus to the desegregation process.

Another significant aid to desegregation in the public schools of Oklahoma City was the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The entire Act aimed at ending discrimination against Negroes and other minority group members. The law provided measures for ensuring equal rights for all Americans to vote, to work, and to use public accommodations and facilities, public education and programs receiving federal funds. It continued the Civil Rights Commission and established a Community Relations Service to help communities settle racial disputes. On July 3, 1964, when President Johnson signed the Act, he said:

It does say that those who are equal before God shall now also be equal in the polling booths, in the classrooms, in the factories, and in the hotels and restaurants and movie theaters and other places that provide service to the public.²⁹⁵

One reason that the 1964 Civil Rights Act was so effective was that it gave the United States Office of Education the power and the obligation to withhold federal funds for education from any school

²⁹⁴McReynolds, pp. 433-35.

²⁹⁵President Lyndon B. Johnson's Civil Rights Speech of 1964, "cited by" Roscoe Hill and Malcolm Feeley, Affirmative School Integration (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1968), p. 127.

district which refused to comply with the district court order to desegregate. It also permitted the office to set up standards for rapid desegregation on its own. Prior to this Act, the "deliberate speed" clause of the Supreme Court's 1954 decision had been more or less ignored by many school districts. The 1964 law hastened the gradual desegregation policy of many districts.

The Oklahoma City School Board, caught in the group designated as "foot-draggers" by Judge Wisdom, was appealing the order of Judge Luther Bohanon at the time when the 1964 Civil Rights Act became law. With all appeals exhausted, Superintendent Bill Lillard was ordered to present the court a desegregation plan based on the recommendations of the three-man panel appointed by Dowell and his attorney for the Fall term.²⁹⁶

The plan submitted by the Oklahoma City School Board called for reorganization of school boundaries, the busing of some pupils from their neighborhood schools, and the reassignment of some teachers. The plan also called for pairing of four seventh to twelfth grade high schools, Harding and Northeast, Classen and Central. Harding and Central became the junior high schools, while Northeast and Classen became the senior high schools. The reason that these four schools were involved was that Northeast and Central had become predominately black. By pairing these schools, the black-white ratio became more equalized.²⁹⁷

The desegregation of teachers in the Oklahoma City Public Schools began on a voluntary basis. Black and white teachers were called to the administration building and asked if they were willing to transfer to either an all-black or to an all-white school. If the teacher refused,

²⁹⁶Stewart, p. 42. ²⁹⁷Ibid.

he or she was not forced to transfer. In 1965, Kennedy Junior High School had its first white teacher assigned. Charles Bilbo, a retired Navy officer who lived in Norman, was one of the first white teachers to be assigned to an all-Negro school and was the first white teacher to teach at Kennedy. With the hiring of Bilbo, new teachers were told that when hired, they would be sent to schools where their race was in the minority.²⁹⁸

Freddye Cudjoe, a black, was hired by the Board of Education as a Human Relations Consultant in 1967. Mrs. Cudjoe's major responsibility was to plan Human Relations Workshops for staff members to help them work effectively with students from other racial and ethnic groups. New teachers and teachers transferred to newly desegregated schools were required to attend these workshops. As desegregation progressed, staff members from schools with specific racial problems were given assistance through these workshops.²⁹⁹

To foster desegregation, the Oklahoma City School System adopted what was known as the "Cluster Plan." This plan was an effort to desegregate the high schools. Four northside schools formed the north cluster with four southside schools forming the south cluster. Each cluster contained one predominately black school. Northeast was in the north cluster and Douglass in the south cluster. Advanced math courses were held at one of the white schools. Students desiring to take advanced math had to enroll in classes at one of the three predominately white schools. Advanced science classes were taught at the black schools.

²⁹⁸Interview with Charles Bilbo, Norman, Oklahoma, July 8, 1974.

²⁹⁹Related by Freddye Cudjoe during a workshop held January 11, 1973 at the Trade Winds East, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Conversely, all of those desiring advanced science classes had to attend Northeast or Douglass, based upon in which section of town they resided. Special time blocks were established so that twice weekly students would have time to board a bus and ride to one of the cluster schools to attend classes. The purpose was to encourage racial mixing at all of the high schools. In addition, the board approved an open transfer policy. Any student attending a school where his race was in the majority could transfer to a school where his race was in the minority.³⁰⁰

The "Cluster Plan" was not successful as implemented. Much of the original plan was deleted or altered. These changes possibly weakened the plan. One reason was that students were not required to take these advanced courses. Another reason that the plan was ineffective was that the students came on the bus, went directly to their classes, left class and returned to their base school. There was no time for students to meet and to know other students. The manner in which the "Cluster Plan" was used created an additional problem. Students were assigned texts from the cluster school, but there was not a designated method of seeing that these books were either returned or paid for. This added to the financial problems that were experienced by the Oklahoma City School District because books had to be purchased to replace those that were lost.³⁰¹

The first desegregation plan for the junior high schools was accomplished by offering special "exchange programs" where black and white students would visit and exchange programs. Prior to the

³⁰⁰Stewart, pp. 43-44.

³⁰¹Moon.

implementation of this plan, teachers from the participating schools in the program were sent to workshops to plan these programs. Federal money was used for these workshops. Kennedy Junior High and Jefferson Junior High Schools were paired for these special programs. Carolyn Kelly, Judy White and Lillian Jones were sent from Kennedy to work with Vinnie Creecy and Hilda Manning from Jefferson. Mary Gaddie, director of the Teacher Corps at Kennedy, and Ralph Ediger, social studies teacher from Moon, served as coordinators and/or facilitators of this workshop under the direction of Freddy Cudjoe. The workshop was held at Fountainhead Lodge, on Lake Eufaula, during one weekend. The over-all theme of this initial attempt was "Understanding Ourselves and Others." Jefferson students would come to Kennedy for a two hour exchange one week, and the next week Kennedy students would go to Jefferson for an equal amount of time. There were six such exchanges. After each exchange, cooperating teachers, members of the Teacher Corps and representatives from the administration, as well as teachers from other junior high schools who were planning such programs, would meet and evaluate the day's activities. At the end of the program, the students, cooperating teachers, members of the Teacher Corps and other staff, wrote an evaluation of the exchange program.³⁰²

The program was interesting and the students seemed to have enjoyed it. These programs offered a great deal more interaction between the students than did the altered version of the "Cluster Plan."

The elementary schools of Oklahoma City began desegregation through what was known as the "open doors" program. Elementary schools

³⁰²Interview with Carolyn Kelly, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, November 16, 1973.

were clustered so that the combined student body was about 20 percent black and about 80 percent white. Special programs were planned and attended by these clustered schools. These programs were planned to give special educational benefits involving cultural resources within the community.

There was one special school which had been integrated for some time, Bryan School. It was the first integrated school and was integrated without pressures of the federal law. Bryan was a school for all physically-handicapped children, regardless of race. Carver Center was opened for high school handicapped children. Oklahoma City received wide recognition for its Special Education programs. It was first in both the state and the nation to develop a secondary curriculum and instructional guide for handicapped students. Thus, students with learning disabilities and perceptual handicaps were greatly aided. There was a total communication program for deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed and otherwise handicapped children who were trainable.³⁰³

Once again, the Oklahoma City Public School System was taken to court. Plaintiffs in the case alleged that all that had been done was not enough. The plaintiffs sought further desegregation. The court appointed a two-member panel to plan for complete desegregation. This panel recommended some modifications in the "cluster plan," suggesting that required courses be added to the plan and that students be required to enroll in these courses. The panel further suggested that the "cluster plan" be extended to junior high schools. Their final recommendation was that the "opening doors" program also be expanded to a

³⁰³Stewart, pp. 44-46.

once-a-week "special interaction centers approach."³⁰⁴

These recommendations did not, as asserted by the plaintiffs, meet desegregation requirements. The NAACP, acting as advisor for Dr. Dowell, asked that it be allowed to bring in an expert to study the problem and to make further recommendations. The court agreed that this was a good idea. The NAACP secured the services of Dr. John Finger. One reason that Finger was selected was that he had previously worked with the NAACP on a desegregation plan for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System in North Carolina. Thus, the current plan of desegregation being implemented in the Oklahoma City Public Schools was known as the "Finger Plan." Dr. Finger made radical changes in the existing plan. For example, in the elementary schools, Finger suggested eighty-to-twenty, white-to-black enrollment ratio. He designated predominately black schools as fifth-year centers, housing the fifth year program for all elementary children within a given cluster. Black students in grades one through four were bused to predominately white schools within the area, again maintaining the eighty-to-twenty, black-white ratio. Teachers in all buildings met the ratio of eighty-to-twenty. Junior high schools became middle schools under the Finger Plan. Students who lived far enough away from the neighborhood school to ride buses would be reassigned to another school. Kennedy Junior High School was the one exception.³⁰⁵ Built in 1964, Kennedy housed some 1,499 black students and one white student. Kennedy was not converted to a middle school but became the ninth grade center for nearby Douglass High School. However, the senior

³⁰⁴Interview with Wayne Chadler, Sr., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, September 19, 1973.

³⁰⁵Stewart, pp. 44-45.

high schools were to be desegregated by an eighty-to-twenty ratio and the other ninth grade students were assigned to senior high schools, with the exception of Dunjee Junior-Senior High School. Because of inequities in facilities, Dunjee was closed. The students who would have attended Dunjee were assigned to Star-Spencer High School and Rogers Middle School.³⁰⁶

The final recommendation was a biracial committee appointed by the court to see to it that the plan was implemented as designed by Dr. Finger and to bring to the attention of the court any problems resulting therefrom. The biracial committee worked hard to perform their assigned tasks. They went into schools where racial disturbances existed and sought to work with both the administration and the students to effect solutions.³⁰⁷ The Finger plan was appealed, but the Tenth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the decision of the lower court.

In 1969, the curriculum department of the Oklahoma City Public Schools planned a four week summer program on the contribution of blacks. In addition to teaching the contributions of blacks to America, successful blacks were flown in to work with the students. This institute was held at Harding, but letters were sent to all student leaders in all of the senior high schools in Oklahoma City. Average daily attendance was about thirty-five. It had been anticipated that participation would be much greater. At any rate, one direct result of the institute was that a black-white panel was formed and visited with youth groups of various white churches for more than a year while encouraging high school

³⁰⁶Jones.

³⁰⁷Chandler.

students to personally work for peaceable integration of the schools. There were eight or ten students who participated in this panel from time to time.³⁰⁸

The presentation was made by four students, two black and two white. After the presentation, young people and adults were given an opportunity to discuss and debate the issues with them.

When the school year began in August, 1972, Oklahoma City opened with 16 fifth-year centers, 11 elementary schools housing kindergarten through fourth year, 11 middle schools, and 9 high schools. Nearly two-thirds of all students were in buildings that they had never previously attended. The Finger Plan received opposition from both blacks and whites. During the 1972-73 school term, private schools were opened and some white students were enrolled in those schools in order to avoid busing. Many blacks met and sent representatives to Board meetings to complain that blacks bore the major impact of busing. Apparently, when the Finger Plan was announced, the majority of people, black and white, were opposed to busing for one reason or another. The primary opposition was from the patrons who complained that the plan required too much busing.³⁰⁹

The implementation of the Finger Plan resulted in some incidents. Nearly all of the high schools and middle schools had some problems. It was difficult, however, to actually distinguish a problem as a race problem or as a routine student problem. Due to historical customs and traditions, the races had been almost completely separated. No group

³⁰⁸Jones.

³⁰⁹Interview with Omega Burge, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 5, 1974.

really took it upon itself to adequately seek to prepare for the great social revolution of desegregation. Suspicion, distrust, and even hate were taught to blacks and whites. Students were disturbed. Some of them were disturbed because their parents were. Some students were upset because they felt that the newcomers did not belong, and personally wanted to see to it that they did not stay. White students complained of blacks being overly aggressive. Black students complained of both insults and attacks by whites. A small number of students, black and white, were arrested for disturbing the peace. Some of the young people were beyond school age and were arrested for being on school campuses and for taking part in disturbances.

The schools of Oklahoma City, like the schools in other parts of the nation, must compensate for non-school handicaps; the ravages of poverty, limited home and community environments; prejudices and hate; suspicion and distrust. Now, the schools are and must offer leadership in the nation. They must accept this challenge and do something about it. The problem is a complex one with no easy solutions, but the schools must begin to attempt to solve it.³¹⁰

On August 1, 1965, the University of Oklahoma was awarded a grant of \$166,719 by the U.S. Office of Education to establish a Consultative Center of School Desegregation. The center is presently referred to as the Consultative Center for Equal Educational Opportunity. It has been continually refunded since 1965 and is presently refunded until June 30, 1976.

The Consultative Center, as it is commonly referred to, enjoys a unique and vital position in Oklahoma, having gained the professional confidence and trust of the great majority of educators throughout the state.³¹¹

The Consultative Center was a direct result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and during its first ten years of existence it has been

³¹⁰Gertrude Noar, The Teacher and Integration (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1966).

³¹¹Information provided by Dr. Joe Garrison, Director of the Consultative Center for Equal Educational Opportunity, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

highly instrumental in providing technical assistance and training programs to public schools throughout Oklahoma and, in some instances, to surrounding states as well. The Center was designed to aid superintendents, school administrators, and teachers in resolving problems associated with desegregation. The services rendered ranged from desegregation plan designing and assistance in resolving serious racial disturbances and conflict to aid in writing and implementing federal programs in the public school systems.

Although the Consultative Center has been quite contributive in advancing the desegregation process in Oklahoma, it worked tactfully toward this end, utilizing the "soft" approach. Included in the guidelines for the establishment of such centers was the request to advise rather than order or direct. The Consultative Center managed to work within those restrictions and still made considerable impact upon the overall desegregation process in Oklahoma. It was quite difficult to give the Consultative Center all the credit that was due because the involvement in the overall progress of desegregation by that organization was tremendous. Not only was the Center involved with programs in Oklahoma but also in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Missouri as well. The Center worked relentlessly with the larger school districts of Tulsa, Muskogee, Lawton, Enid, Altus, and hundreds of smaller districts over Oklahoma.

The Tulsa School District was caught up in problems quite similar to those previously mentioned relative to the Oklahoma City School District. Housing patterns made it quite difficult for the desegregation process to be self-perpetuating. Between 1954 and 1964, the black population of Tulsa did extend into areas that were previously all white. This movement did not involve enough black families to provide any

semblance of racial balance in the neighborhood schools where the black students enrolled. Meanwhile, white enrollment in black neighborhoods was inadequate for the provision of racial balance. In 1967, Tulsa schools developed a transfer plan that ordered the closing of certain elementary schools and the combining of black and white attendance areas.

In 1968, the policy was amended to permit majority-to-minority transfer. This was a process that permitted a student to transfer from a school where his race was in the majority to one in which he was in the minority. That provision remained in effect in 1976, but that provision alone did not guarantee successful desegregation.

In September, 1969, the boundaries of fifteen schools were altered to increase integration. One change was the pairing of black and white elementary schools. Under this plan, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade students attended the previously all-black schools while the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students attended the previously all-white schools. Both sets of schools continued to provide kindergarten for those children in their own areas.

Another measure designed to achieve an integrated school system in Tulsa was the integration of all teaching staffs in 1968. A few teachers resigned rather than be involuntarily transferred to schools where they would be in the minority. Patrons in some schools charged that their best teachers had been taken and they had been given less competent teachers to replace them.

In 1969 a special committee appointed by the superintendent made an intensive study of the problems related to faculty integration. Implementation of their recommendations relieved many of the tensions of the previous year. In 1970, however, the Tenth U.S. Circuit Court of

Appeals found the school system's plan unacceptable and on August 14, involuntary transfer letters were sent to additional teachers to bring the white/black faculty ratio in each school to approximately 88/12. Most teachers ultimately adjusted to these new situations and faculty integration is no longer a serious problem, the 88/12 ratio being continued in all schools.

Early in the integration process, the Tulsa Public Schools initiated efforts to facilitate the adjustment of all parties concerned to this new socioeducational experience. On January 25, 1967, through a grant under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Tulsa, in cooperation with the University of Oklahoma, established a Consultative Center to deal with the human relations problems incident to desegregation. This program emphasized better preparation of the school staffs relative to the predesegregated period. There was also emphasis placed upon better preparation of the students sent to desegregated schools and the development of an environment of acceptance and understanding at both the sending and the receiving schools. More emphasis was placed upon all these areas to improve conditions that existed prior to 1964.

During the 1969-70 school year, a number of schools organized biracial councils that met regularly to promote communication and understanding among all persons in the school, to serve as a facility for gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information on matters of mutual concern, and to identify and assess educational needs that might be met through the classroom.

One senior high school which was experiencing student unrest was the scene for Project Listen, a two-day session in which students in groups of ten met with an adult from the community and an adult from the

Pupil Personnel and Special Education Services Division of the school system.

In August of 1970, the Department of Human Relations was established to succeed the Consultative Center that was developed in Tulsa in January, 1967. The original objectives of the Human Relations Department were to establish advisory services of school and community personnel, strengthen self-concept of minority students, provide in-service workshops for school personnel involved in the desegregation process, improve school environment, and establish human relations' councils and a volunteer tutorial corps.

Progress toward the integration of the Tulsa Public School was not without some inconvenience and much patient work, but progress was made.³¹²

The staff of the Consultative Center was instrumental in aiding the Muskogee School in formulating a functional desegregation plan. Muskogee, because of the geographical location of students, was confronted with de facto segregation which in turn brought about the existence of a dual school system. The freedom of choice plan designed prior to 1968 did not prove to be successful in achieving desegregation. The Center made recommendations to the Muskogee School Board and administrative officials, and many of the recommendations were accepted. The results of the acceptance was the adoption of a plan that did bring about progress in providing a desegregated school system.

In some instances, black schools found to be inferior were closed

³¹²Information pertaining to Tulsa Public Schools provided by Millard House, Director, Department of Human Relations, Tulsa Public Schools, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

and attendance areas were shifted to the nearest schools. Busing was necessary in cases where the distance to the new school was too great for the children to walk. The most drastic change was the conversion of previously all-black Manual High School to a Mid-High for 9th and 10th grades and the establishing of predominately white Central High School as the high school for grades 11 and 12. A touchy administrative problem was solved by appointing co-principals, using both of the high school principals in a role-sharing capacity. This arrangement was not a permanent one, and as of 1976 the principal of Central High School was a black man, the former principal of Manual High School.

In 1976, Muskogee, like many school systems, was experiencing some resegregation. New housing additions, rapid growth of smaller neighboring communities, development of private schools, and other related factors contributed to the resegregation. Future problems were predicted and probable solutions were developed.³¹³

The Lawton School System responded to the desegregation process somewhat differently from the other larger districts in Oklahoma. The main difference was that the Lawton District initiated their desegregation plan without fanfare or court order. In September of 1967, Lawton took the first major step in desegregating the school system. A freedom of choice plan had been in effect since 1957 but was inadequate. There were not enough voluntary transfers and virtually no white-to-black school transfers.

In 1967, the predominately black Douglass High School was

³¹³Information obtained from Mr. James Christian, Consultant, Consultative Center for Equal Opportunity, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

converted to an elementary school and the elementary attendance areas were shifted. The shifts in elementary attendance areas resulted in the pairing of elementary schools and the gerrymandering of attendance areas. This was not too difficult to attain due to the odd housing patterns of the black population of Lawton. Black citizens lived on the outer edges of the city of Lawton on the south, the east, and north. Realistically, the schools nearest to many of the black students were predominately white. Black children had been transported across town, bypassing white schools to attend black schools. One aspect of the desegregation plan was simply to require these bused students to attend their "neighborhood" schools, thereby providing "built-in" desegregation.

The presence of Ft. Sill, a huge military complex and the world's largest Artillery Center, was possibly a positive factor in the desegregation process of the Lawton Public Schools. A huge amount of federal funds was filtered into the Lawton School System due to the proximity of Ft. Sill. Federal regulations always accompany federal funds, many of which were tied into the desegregation plans of the Lawton Public Schools.

In spite of what appeared to be natural conditions for a desegregated school system, Lawton had its human-relations problems. In 1967 and 1968, the Consultative Center was called upon to work with the staff, the students, and the community of Lawton to ease the burden of desegregation.³¹⁴

Enid was another example of a fairly large school system that used a forceful, if not ideal, plan to desegregate their schools. The

³¹⁴Information obtained from the files of the Consultative Center for Human Relations, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

plan was basically simple. The black high school was closed and the black students were assigned to Enid High School. There were strong feelings of opposition registered in the black community. The resultant unrest caused Enid school administrators to seek help. The help they sought and got was from themselves and the Consultative Center. Programs were developed, geared strongly in the areas of human relations and the understanding of black culture.

The 1969-70 school year began with a workshop, followed by others during the school year. These workshops were aimed at developing a sense of belonging for the black students in their new school environment. Though this was a positive step in the right direction, there remained much to be done; for as late as 1976, charges of racism and discrimination were leveled at the Enid Board of Education by representatives of the NAACP and the black community.³¹⁵

The story of "Black Education in Oklahoma" was closely related to the work and success of the Consultative Center. When school systems throughout Oklahoma finally admitted that they had problems, they looked for help from an outside source. Invariably, the outside source of assistance was the Consultative Center.

There were many communities in Oklahoma that experienced problems in affecting plans of desegregation, far too many to be reported in a research effort such as this. Two communities should be mentioned, the writer feels, because of their proximity to Oklahoma City and because of the difference in degrees of success attained through their desegregation efforts.

³¹⁵Ibid.

Millwood and Crooked Oak are Independent School Districts located within the city limits of Oklahoma City. Millwood, a predominately middle-class community in northeast Oklahoma City, approached the desegregation process positively. There was little, if any, panic or instant "white flight." As black people became more affluent, greater numbers of them moved into the previously all-white Millwood School District. The influx was gradual, and as the black children entered the school they were more readily accepted than might have been imagined. This acceptance was not strictly by chance. Careful planning as well as adequate time for the gradual influx of black students were instrumental to the initial success of the Millwood plan. The Millwood Board of Education was successful in getting the community involved in the school. By 1970, the school district had grown in size, bolstered by a steadily increasing number of blacks, where expansion from eight to twelve grades was necessary. As the district grew, more and more black teachers were added to the staff and desegregation was actually never a severe problem there. Time was spent working to implement viable integration.

The future of Millwood could not be predicted. The system was growing and improving. One fact must be considered, and that was that the system had become predominately black. The question that had to be considered was whether the system might continue to grow and prosper as it became more and more black?³¹⁶

Less than ten miles to the south of Millwood, on South Eastern Avenue, was the Crooked Oak School District. Crooked Oak was a relatively old school district that could be traced back to the days of the last

³¹⁶Interview with Donald Edwards, Principal, Millwood High School, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, July 16, 1975.

"Great Depression." Its initial enrollment was made up primarily of the children of laborers and blue collar workers. The enrollment of the school was virtually all-white until 1967. In 1967, low cost public housing was constructed in several locations within the Crooked Oak School District. Most notable of these housing projects was Hamilton Courts, located just south of Southeast Fifteenth Street, between Eastern Avenue and Sunnyside Road. During 1968, 1969, and 1970, many very poor black families were transplanted to the project after being forced to move from their inadequate housing in near-northeast Oklahoma City.

This sudden influx of blacks into a previously all-white school district caught the district unprepared. The administration and teaching staffs were unable or unwilling to cope with the different needs and values of the deprived black children. The black children were forced into a new situation that they could not understand.

This was a situation that exploded into violence. Fortunately, there were no deaths resulting from the violence, but there were numerous injuries. Disruption of the educational process of the district persisted for some time.

The Consultative Center entered the picture initially in 1968, but its efforts were extended beyond 1972. Human relation workshops and inservice projects were conducted throughout the school year. The unrest was stabilized, and by 1972, students, both black and white, were able to attend school with less apprehension. Peace prevailed within the schools of Crooked Oak but there appeared evidence of a split student body.

In 1972, the more affluent eastern portion of the Crooked Oak District petitioned to de-annex itself from the Crooked Oak District.

If this de-annexation was successful, a great percentage of the financial base would be taken away from the district. After four years of fighting in the courts, the de-annexation was granted and the 1976-77 school year was to begin with a reduced Crooked Oak School District. There was to be a definite financial loss involved in the move; how great the impact would be could not be predicted as of May, 1976.

It is a matter of speculation as to whether the desegregation of the Crooked Oak Schools resulted in the de-annexation of an important segment of the Crooked Oak School District. Often heard in discussions were claims of deterioration of the quality of education in the Crooked Oak Schools. This was a charge frequently lodged when schools were desegregated.³¹⁸ There was some possibility that the Crooked Oak District would be weakened, but to what extent could not be projected.

One major problem in the desegregation process in Oklahoma was what is now being called "resegregation." Resegregation simply meant that formerly all-white southern and border state schools which were integrated had gradually become Negro schools, as whites moved out of the integrated districts. Some southern Negro educators indicated that there were now more Negro segregated schools in the south than before 1954. This backfire of desegregation was particularly evident in such cities as Miami and Oklahoma City. In Oklahoma City, white schools were desegregated but were becoming resegregated by changes in the neighborhood racial make-up as early as 1972.

This problem will be extremely difficult to solve, as the court does not have the power to tell people where they may or may not live.

³¹⁸Interview with Jack Strahorn, former Superintendent of the Crooked Oak School District, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, September 30, 1976.

It appeared, however, that this lack of solution would probably cause more extensive busing. That alternative would not make blacks or whites happy. During the 1974-75 school year, students, patrons, and staff met at Star-Spencer High School to try to decide exactly what could be done about the school becoming predominately black. At this writing, no solution had been reached.³¹⁹

In June, 1976, there remained in Oklahoma six predominately black school districts. Two of those districts, Boley and Taft were independent districts; the remaining four, Langston in Logan County, Grant in Choctaw County, Tom in McCurtain County, and Tullahassee in Wagoner County, were dependent districts. A basic difference is that the independent districts provide high schools and the dependent districts only provide elementary schools.

The Boley School District, one of the two remaining districts containing a high school, is still "alive and well" according to Mrs. Velma Ashley, former superintendent and wife of Mr. L. G. Ashley, current superintendent of the Boley Public Schools.

Mrs. Ashley was reluctant to admit that the Boley School had any problems. She did admit that the district could use more money. This places Boley in the category with a majority of the school districts in Oklahoma. The town of Boley, Oklahoma was an all-black community that drew some of its school enrollment from the surrounding farming community. At times, there was token integration in the schools due to white transient farmers who sometimes lived temporarily on farms near Boley. Mrs. Ashley stated that the number never exceeded four at any given time.

³¹⁹Sadberry.

The course offerings at Boley High School were the courses that were mandatory for state accreditation. There were some additional courses such as Commercial Vocational Education, Vocational Agriculture and Driver's Education. The average enrollment for the high school (9-12) was 111, for grades K-8, 260. Mrs. Ashley described the physical facilities as "adequate, but nothing special."³²⁰

Boley had resisted merging or being consolidated with other school districts. This could have conceivably been done some time ago because Paden, Oklahoma was only six miles away and Okemah, the County Seat, was just twelve miles away. To the citizens of Boley, the idea was unthinkable.

The Boley Public Schools, as did the Taft Public Schools, depended heavily upon state aid. The low county tax base partially attributed to the lack of proper funding of the schools; the remainder of the blame was placed upon available funding provided through bond election.

Mrs. Ashley was reluctant to describe the Boley System as a typical black school district. The success of the graduates of Boley High School who went on to attain further training and education, and the relatively small number of drop-outs were the reasons given for her reluctance.

Whether or not the Boley System could be described as typical did not alter the fact that it had a basic similarity to the other five black school districts. The fact common to all the black school districts was that they were isolated, predominately black communities with enough human and financial resources available to provide a system of education

³²⁰ Interview with Mrs. Velma D. Ashley, Boley, Oklahoma, June 22, 1976.

for the children within their respective communities.

The segregation of the black children that attended schools in the six predominately black school districts possibly could not have been avoided. This did not alter the fact that they, just as segregated white children, were forced to miss a viable portion of their education. The degree of deprivation could not be measured in a study such as this.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Attempts were made at providing some form of education for blacks in Oklahoma in the early Nineteenth Century, more than half a century before statehood. Some blacks were fortunate enough to receive the same crude education that the Indians (with whom lay the responsibility for their being in Oklahoma) received. The majority of the schools in Indian Territory were sponsored by various church affiliated mission groups. These schools were commonly referred to as "Mission Schools."

During Territorial days, the provision of educational opportunity for blacks was left to the governments of The Five Civilized Tribes. The quality of education varied from tribe to tribe, and from locale to locale. Among the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, the number of restrictions increased after federal intervention during the post 1890 years.

In Oklahoma Territory, blacks began to establish schools similar to the white schools in the territory. Territorial legislation stipulated separate schools for blacks; therefore, in those locations where the black population justified the organization of a school, one was usually established.

The Enabling Act provided guidelines for establishing Oklahoma

as a state. This bill did not prohibit segregation in Oklahoma. The delegates to the Constitutional Convention held in Guthrie, Oklahoma, in 1906-1907, were quite aware of this fact; and under the leadership of William H. Murray, they took advantage of the situation. They laid the groundwork for future "Jim Crow" legislation. The constitution for the state of Oklahoma provided for separate schools for the races and even went so far as to define the races relevant to the "colored" race. The first legislature and ensuing legislatures passed other laws to assure the perpetuation of a separate school system. The other basic stipulation was that the schools were to be equal, but down through the years until 1965, when separate school legislation was appealed, only in exceptional cases were the black, separate schools equal to the white schools.

As the black population spread over Oklahoma, more and more black schools were established. They could be judged good or bad according to the circumstances under which they were forced to exist, and depending upon the criteria used for evaluation.

For more than forty years black schools were inadequately financed. The financial support for separate schools was left solely to the counties under the general supervision of the county superintendents. This situation remained static throughout the history of segregated separate schools in Oklahoma.

Some of the black schools were fortunate enough to profit from one or more of the philanthropic funds that became available after 1920, and even though the appropriations obtained from these organizations were less than what was actually needed, conditions were greatly improved in schools in which they were utilized. With few exceptions, these schools

no longer exist. The six remaining black schools profited from the same sources of revenue as did other schools in Oklahoma after 1964.

Administration of black schools was the general task of the county superintendent, but usually the principal was omnipotent in the administrative process. As long as the "boat remained steady" and the status quo remained undisturbed, this omnipotence prevailed. Due to this concept of power, some black principals abdicated their roles as educational leaders and simply became lackies for the existing power structures. Fortunately, this was not true of all black principals in Oklahoma. Some of them proved to be outstanding men, leaders, and educators who played outstanding roles in the educational history of black people in Oklahoma.

Black teachers who taught in Oklahoma prior to 1954 should be commended for their resourcefulness. A great majority of them fought against great odds to provide educational opportunities and experiences for black youths. There was no great pressure from the community to provide any equality of education for black children.

Black teachers realized early the need for unity of purpose and objectives. Due to this realization, a black professional organization was founded even before statehood. This organization thrived and prospered as the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers. For more than fifty years, the OANT involved itself with the problems of black education in Oklahoma. A great deal of impact was felt in problems with which the OANT dealt. Many OANT leaders were also outstanding leaders in the black separate system of education in Oklahoma.

Two other professional organizations sprang from the OANT. The first, established in 1926, was the Negro Oklahoma Interscholastic Athletic Association. This organization was established to regulate

competitive sports among the several black schools in Oklahoma.

Later, in 1945, the Negro Coaches' and Officials' Association was organized to improve the quality of black athletics in Oklahoma. This organization, as did the OANT and the NOIAA, remained quite active until it was absorbed by the white peer organizations after 1955.

The legal fact of desegregation did not reach Oklahoma prior to 1954. As early as 1948, some discussions relative to this problem were held but no progress was made, and possibly, no progress was expected. There were successful court cases involving higher education in Oklahoma, but these few cases of increased educational opportunity for blacks hardly appeared to set a precedent for the majority of the people in Oklahoma. Even after the landmark Supreme Court decision in 1954, Oklahomans were still skeptical and/or apathetic toward the implications of the decision. When the governor of Oklahoma at that time, Raymond Gary, pledged the state to obey the "Law of the Land," the wheels of desegregation began to grind to a creaking start. First to suffer the cost of desegregation were an alarming number of black principals throughout Oklahoma. The principals were either dismissed, fired, or demoted to classroom teachers. One unsubstantiated incident claimed that the principal was offered a job as custodian. Classroom teachers by the score followed the fate of the former black principals. By 1958, nearly 400 black teachers had been released from their jobs due to desegregation. A number of these unemployed teachers were absorbed into the schools of the larger towns and cities in Oklahoma. Other former black teachers sought and obtained employment in professions outside of education. The larger systems were able to employ former principals, with many years of experience, as classroom teachers.

By the time the 1964 Civil Rights Law was passed, Oklahoma was still dragging its feet in regard to having made meaningful advances in its desegregation process. A series of court orders and litigations was sufficient to stir up action across the state. Smaller communities completely desegregated their systems, usually in one of two ways. The communities would close all of the black schools and require the black pupils to attend the nearest schools that enrolled their grade level. Other districts crisscrossed their districts utilizing grade-level buildings. Whatever the process, theoretically, it cannot be said that Oklahoma is presently guilty of having a segregated school system. If, however, one looks at segregation as a state of mind, Oklahoma might not escape guilt so readily.

Conclusions

In 1891, George W. Steele, Territorial Governor, reported that there were 20,085 white and 1,252 black children enrolled in school. It might be interesting to note that the percentages indicated by the enrollment totals have not changed much since 1891. The black enrollment in 1891 was a little above 6 percent. In 1976, the percentage is relatively the same.

The Oklahoma Legislature passed an emergency measure prohibiting segregation in April, 1970, but despite this legislation, segregation is still present in Oklahoma schools. Segregation is alive in the minds of many citizens of the state of Oklahoma. Although times have allegedly changed through the years, the racial bigotry is still so deeply imbedded in the minds of many people that only time and continued effort will bring about meaningful changes.

The concept of desegregation as a physical mixing of the races has taken place in the public schools of Oklahoma although many still violently oppose this practice. Their opposition is evident in both attitudes and behavior. Opponents of desegregated education are, without doubt, a major reason for the "Institutional Racism" that is far too prevalent in school districts all over Oklahoma.

Black children are accepted by the school districts, but often they are not accepted and welcomed by the people who are responsible for their education within the walls of these schools. This lack of acceptance is often covert, and open antagonism is avoided. In fact, contact with the black child in the classroom is quite often avoided. Consequently, the black child, especially the average or the below average child, becomes "turned off" with school. The condition deteriorates and evolves into a self-perpetuating cycle by which teacher and student become "turned off." The end result in this cycle is a disproportionate number of black high school dropouts.

Too many schools exist in which no black teachers are employed. Black educators do not carry sufficient impact in the schools to prevent the mutual turn-off of teachers and black students. There are not enough black educators in administration to positively break the perpetual cycle in which black public school pupils get caught. Too often, their only reason for being in school is that their parents insist that they attend. Despite the outward appearance of progress made in the desegregation process, there is still room for considerable improvement in what actually takes place in the classrooms of the Oklahoma schools. The personal empathy that a black teacher might have used to motivate a black, potential dropout is no longer present.

The providing of opportunity is some progress, but something has been neglected in the process. That many needed changes have taken place is most obvious, but somewhere along the way the black child is being lost.

Black children have faced adversity in their efforts to obtain a viable education ever since black people came to Oklahoma. As educational opportunities improved for white children in Oklahoma, blacks were denied equal opportunities. Even as conditions improved for black children the improvements did not equate their educational opportunities with those of the white children. By 1964, federal and state laws had been enacted that were supposed to have equalized educational opportunities for all children. This might have been the case, but other discrepancies occurred that caused many black children not to take advantage of the opportunities that were now available to them. White educators did not always exhibit a willingness to provide the education for black children as required by law. Through subtle, and less subtle practices, black children were treated as inferior beings. They were expected to be unable to compete with their white peers and many of them succumbed to those expectations. Interest in school waned and the real meaning of education was lost.

Providing equal opportunities for black children to obtain an education in Oklahoma has not been successful in itself. The mere provision of opportunities did not guarantee that all black children would take advantage of the opportunities. In fact, it is apparent that many black children do not allow themselves to be educated. Black children should not have to take all the blame for this. Racist practices and ineffectual programs share in the blame for many blacks losing interest

in school.

Recommendations

The need for a viable education is very real during this period of our history. Educational opportunities, although provided, are not always taken advantage of by our youth. With this thought in mind, the writer submits the following recommendations.

- I. Every effort should be made to eliminate institutional racism from the schools in Oklahoma. Continued studies should be made to decide how best to attack this problem. Colleges and universities should properly instruct prospective teachers and make them aware of behaviors and attitudes that reflect institutional racism. Prospective teachers should be required to take classes or experiences in human relations.
- II. School-community programs should be established that elicit more parental involvement within the education process.
- III. Black teachers should be employed in all the school systems of Oklahoma.
- IV. More black principals and superintendents should be employed and the membership of school boards should include blacks in the school districts of Oklahoma.
- V. A follow-up study to determine the influence of desegregated education on the black student in Oklahoma. There is a great need to determine the percentage of drop-outs in comparison with the educational system prior to 1954 and the percentages of those who entered college in comparison

with those who eventually graduate.

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