

538-1/2 North Farish Street  
Jackson, Mississippi 39202

December 20, 1966

Parents of Negro Schoolchildren  
Grenada, Mississippi

Dear Parents:

When we came out of Judge Clayton's courtroom on November 8, all of us were optimistic that the problems in the Grenada schools had been settled once and for all, and that the children could finally begin to get a decent education, free from harassment and discrimination. It has not turned out that way. Lawyers from our office spent Friday and Saturday speaking to many of the children still attending the formerly white schools in Grenada. And this is what we found.

The Court's order requires the schools to protect your children "from violence, intimidation, or abuse." Your children tell us that in the last month-and-a-half, they have been subjected to all sorts of violence, intimidation, and abuse:

Every day white students kick and push your children, throw papers and spitballs at them, curse at them and call them names. Often this happens when a teacher is present, but the teacher does nothing to stop it.

One child was so badly injured when a white boy threw a metal object at him that he was hospitalized at Mound Bayou, and may require further treatment.

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White students bring knives, brass knuckles, and other weapons to school. At least one white boy has actually pulled a knife on a Negro child.

Some teachers and other school officials continue to abuse the Negro students by calling them "niggers," and by making other derogatory comments. At least one teacher has explicitly urged the white students to inflict physical harm on the Negro students. Speaking to many of the children still attending the formerly white schools in Grenada, and this is what we found.

The Court order requires the school to treat your children equally, and specifically requires the school to give your children "the right in the classrooms to the unrestricted participation in instruction, recitation and discussion without any feeling of intimidation, discrimination, or mistreatment." Your children tell us that in the last month-and-a-half, teachers have continued to treat them unfairly in the classroom:

Some teachers continue to make the Negro students sit together, in a segregated group.

Some teachers refuse to allow Negro students to recite in class, and ignore them when their hands are raised.

Some teachers grade the Negro students unfairly, giving them low grades even when they do well.

White students bring knives, brass knuckles, and other weapons to school. At least one white boy has actually pulled a knife on a Negro child.

Some teachers and other school officials continue

The Court order requires the school to give your children the same kind of discipline as it gives the white pupils. Your children tell us that in the last month-and-a-half, some of them have been subjected to unfair and unequal disciplinary treatment:

Several Negro students have been suspended because of arguments or fights with white students; the whites were not suspended.

All the Negro children who were suspended from school during the week of October 24, were failed in all their courses for the second six-week period.

Because of the constant harassment and mistreatment they are receiving each day, your children dread having to go to school. Some say they will not return to school after the Christmas vacation. The situation is intolerable, and it grows worse each day.

Many of you, and your children, have asked us whether we can do anything to stop what is going on. The answer is yes, and we are taking immediate legal steps to do so. But this is not a job the lawyers can do alone. We need your help.

Judge Clayton's order not only tells the school what it must do. It also tells the parents and children what they must do. It says that if you have a complaint about the way your child is treated in school, you must first try to speak to the teacher, if there is a teacher involved, and try to solve the problem with him. If you are unsatisfied with what the teacher says or does, you must then try to speak to the principal of the school. If you are unsatisfied with what the principal says or does, you must then bring your problem to Superintendent Wilborn. Judge Clayton has said that "only after all of that has been done," can we come back to his court and complain to him.

Some of the parents have done as Judge Clayton requested. They have gone to school to speak to the teacher, the principal, and to Superintendent Wilborn.

Many other of the parents have not gone to talk to the school officials at all. Others talked to the teacher or to the principal, but were so discouraged by their unfriendliness or lack of cooperation that they gave up before going to see Mr. Wilborn. This was a mistake for two reasons. First, until you try to solve the problems by speaking to the Superintendent, you cannot complain to Judge Clayton. Second, and even more important, we believe that Mr. Wilborn sincerely wants to prevent any further harassment and mistreatment of the Negro students. If you speak to Mr. Wilborn, you may solve the problems, and we can avoid having to go back to court.

There are almost two weeks between now and the end of Christmas vacation. We must make sure that when school starts again on January 3, 1967, there will be no further harassment and mistreatment at the schools. For this reason, we ask that all of you who have not yet gone down to the schools to talk to the school officials do so during these two weeks. If the teachers or principals are away, or will not see you, or do not promise to remedy the problem, then make an appointment to see Mr. Wilborn, and discuss your problem with him.

We know that some of you are reluctant, perhaps even afraid, to go down to the schools. But it is our only hope. Your children have suffered so much over the last four months in their effort to obtain a decent and desegregated education. We urge you to do this little part to help them.

If you run into any problems either now or after the vacation, we urge you to let us know about them. We would also like to hear from each parent who does go down to the schools, so that we can know whether the complaints have been taken care of. You may either call Mrs. Woods at the Bell Flowers Church (226-9868), or you may call us directly in Jackson. Call collect, 948-7301.

We wish you and your families a joyous Christmas and New Year!

Sincerely,

*Paul Brest*

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