

Jerry De Muth
1943 West Chase Ave.
Chicago, Illinois 60626

August 1970

That white Mississippians would still rather have poor or no education than integrated education remains clear.

After the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court school desegregation ruling the state threw out its compulsory school attendance law, thus becoming the only state in the union where school attendance is not required. Georgia Governor Lester Maddox, however, recently proposed that his state do the same thing.

Now faced with a massive school integration order, whites have turned almost totally toward all-white private schools, no matter how inferior the facilities may be.

In the 30 districts ordered integrated, 100 new private schools have opened since the order. More than 175 private schools had already been in operation throughout the state before then. The schools are meeting in private homes, church basements, temporary buildings, factories and in some instances public school buildings, with little or no library, laboratory or other facilities. Mississippi, like other Southern states, has no educational standards that private schools must meet in order to operate.

In Yazoo City, 500 whites now attend Manchester Academy with classes spread between the town's Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

In Hattiesburg, 1,000 whites are enrolled in one private school and in Amite County nearly all of the 900 ~~white~~ white students from one school have registered at either of two nearby private schools. In Holmes County, where there are three private schools, a fourth is being planned and in Wilkinson County virtually all of the county's 800 white students stayed away from the public schools, staying home or attending ^{one} of the three new private schools instead.

In the state capital of Jackson, even though the city's schools were not included in the court order, enrollment in private schools operated by the White Citizens' Council jumped from 500 to more than 3,000 in the past month. By the end of the last school year the Jackson-based Citizens' Council was operating more than 150 all-white private schools for more than 9,000 students in four Southern states, including 52 in Mississippi. Last fall the council started 15 more in Mississippi alone.

"What we're going to wind up with eventually," said one state legislator, "is private schools for the white kids and a state subsidized system for the niggers."

Some whites who can't afford private schools--although some private schools are free to those who can't afford to pay tuition--are simply keeping their children home.

"I'll put them out of school," said Will T. Franklin, a Yazoo City upholsterer, "before I'd send them to a nigger school."

Similarly a Durant resident declared, "I ain't sending my kids to that nigger school. I'll keep them home."

Governor John Bell Williams has pledged himself to establishing a private school system as a "workable alternative" to public schools although the state can hardly afford this form of dual school system--that private schools will only be more inferior than most of the state's public schools. Public school bond campaigns have been halted in the face of the court order and in Jackson citizens soundly defeated a \$7,000,000 bond issue. State aid to public schools will also decrease with the decline in enrollment.

Nevertheless Governor Williams has suggested that public schools let private schools use their facilities and that the state provide aid to private schools or provide tax credit to persons who donate to private schools.

A state law passed last September which provides \$200 annual payments to students in private schools has been challenged in federal court and a temporary restraining order has been issued halting the law's use until its constitutionality can be determined.

The federal government however is aiding such private all-white schools. Individuals contributing to these schools may deduct their contributions from their federal income tax, even though the schools discriminate. Under the U.S. Internal Revenue Code of 1954 a private school may receive tax benefits merely if it presents a valid educational program and is open to a "substantial" part of the community.

But more direct federal aid was given to one all-white private school in Holmes County. The school is housed in a new building constructed in part by persons hired under a federally financed Office of Economic Opportunity training program.