

NEXT STEPS IN THE SOUTH

**Answers
to
Current
Questions**

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THE SCHOOL DECISION AND THE SOUTH

On May 17, 1954, a long period of waiting came to an end. The Supreme Court of the United States spoke the decisive words in a constitutional debate that has stretched across one hundred years of American history. A unanimous court restated the far-reaching question, "Does segregation of children in public schools solely because of race, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities?" — and replied, "We believe that it does."

There were, in reality, two questions before the court. The first involved a legal and moral principle — Is racial segregation in the public schools compatible with the ideals of our democracy as expressed in the United States Constitution? This the Court answered with a clear and unequivocal "No." In the words of the chief justice, "To separate (Negro pupils) from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone . . . ; in the field of public education the doctrine 'separate but equal' has no place."

Many Southerners shared the view that this answer was inevitable. As one Southern daily put it: "No citizen, fitted by character and intelligence to sit as a Justice of the Supreme Court, and sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States could have decided this question other than in the way it was decided." Even those to whom the decision was distasteful could hardly ignore the fact that it invigorated the cause of democracy throughout the world. For millions of non-white people in other lands it was the most telling evidence yet of the vitality and promise of American leadership in the free world.

But apart from the principle of segregation, there is also segregation in practice, and to this the answer is not simple. Through generations in the South segregation rooted itself deeply in law, in institutions, in customs, and — more important — in the minds and emotions of Southern people. During the last fifteen years, the uprooting has begun in many areas of public life. But the Supreme Court wisely recognized that segregation could not be eradicated from the public schools at a stroke; that skill, and planning for adjustment would be needed.

Many areas, however, are adjusting quickly and easily. Before the decision, segregation in public schools was required in 17 states and the District of Columbia. Two years after the decision, more than 350 school districts in nine of the 17 states had desegregated their public schools. Schools in the nation's capital also were opened to all.

At the end of the two year period, complete resistance continued in only eight states. If nine states can begin adjusting to a changing world and a more democratic society, there should be hope for the eight others. Adjustment in the resisting states will be harder, but eventually the necessary changes will come. In the words of one noted Southern editor, white and Negro citizens have important business together.

Is the Court decision a sharp break with the past?

No. In a very real sense it is a logical outgrowth of the trend in race relations since the end of World War II. In the past ten years or so, racial practices have changed tremendously in the South. Segregation has been gradually but steadily losing ground. Negroes have emerged as voting citizens and, increasingly, as successful candidates for public office. In all but a few Southern states, Negro students have been admitted to state universities. Negro and white Southerners ride unconcernedly together on interstate trains and airplanes. The two races serve side by side in the Armed Forces, many of them at Southern Army camps. And schools now are integrated at military installations even in the South.

Many changes have been initiated by court decisions and executive orders, but many more have been voluntarily introduced. Private colleges, professional baseball teams, public libraries — these are some of the institutions in the South that have begun lowering the color bar in recent years. Since the 1954 decision, instances of desegregation have increased.

The Supreme Court's rulings, like the many events before them, herald no instant or universal changes in racial patterns, but only redefine the goal which our people, white and Negro, are committed to seek in the way of democracy.

What progress has been made toward desegregation?

As pointed out before, public school desegregation has been accomplished to some degree in nine of the 17 Southern states formerly enforcing segregation. Since the school decision, the Supreme Court also has ruled out segregation in public parks and on golf courses, and the number of integrated recreational facilities in the South is slowly growing. Golf courses opened on an integrated basis since the decision include Atlanta, Georgia; Nashville, Tennessee; and Asheboro, High Point, and Thomasville, North Carolina. All state parks in Kentucky and parks in Knoxville, Tennessee, now operate on an integrated basis.

An order from the Interstate Commerce Commission has resulted in the desegregation of railroad waiting rooms in some cities.

Although the ultimate goal of a completely desegregated South is a long way off, individual incidents of progress toward that goal since the Court's school decision are far too numerous to be listed here.

Has desegregation resulted only from legal action?

No. And this is true for cases involving public schools, higher education, and many other fields. As reported, more than 350 school districts integrated within two years after the Court decision. The majority of these schools did so without legal action. More schools are planning integration as soon as a workable plan can be put into action. In areas where local authorities show "good faith" and move with "deliberate speed," legal action is unnecessary.

Did the Court order immediate, sweeping changes?

No. In the May 31, 1955, decision, the Court took into account the wide range of community conditions, acknowledging that "full implementation of these constitutional principles may require solution of varied local problems." The Court made it clear, however, that the "vitality of these constitutional principles cannot be allowed to yield simply because of disagreement with them."

The meaning of the implementation ruling is contained in the key phrases "equitable principles," "good faith compliance," "practical flexibility," "prompt and reasonable start," and "deliberate speed." All these phrases indicate that, although the Court is firm as to the constitutional principles involved, it allows a community to work out a solution in accordance with local conditions as long as the plan is in "good faith."

Did the decision "set back" race relations?

This is an assertion heard often in the South since the decision, but it has little real validity. True, the decision and reactions to it have created tension and unrest in parts of the South. But formerly, "racial harmony" had been based on the unprotesting acceptance by Negroes of inferior status. The healthier pattern which is emerging is based on mutual respect and equal treatment of all persons instead of the paternalism of the past. The fact that a substantial amount of desegregation has taken place in the South since the decision indicates that a large part of the South is beginning to experience truly democratic race relations.

Can the decision be ignored or nullified?

Not indefinitely. It is true that popular fear of desegregation is being exploited in the deep South states by politicians and the Klan-like White Citizens Councils; but it also is clear that with legal segregation out, resistance tactics eventually will fail.

Interposition and the private school plan are the foremost weapons of pro-segregationists. Interposition, according to leading authorities, has no legal force and so is useless. Virginia is one of the states which has passed an interposition resolution; and since that time, Char-

lottesville, and Arlington County, Virginia, have been ordered to integrate schools without delay. If the courts do not recognize interposition, how can this plan nullify the decision?

And again, the ultimate question about the private school plan is: Will it hold up in Court? Such authorities on constitutional law as Dean Robert A. Leflar of the University of Arkansas Law School and Dean John T. Fey of the George Washington University Law School have studied the question. Their findings indicate that private school plans, like other devices for circumventing the law, will ultimately be declared unconstitutional. The question is, how big a price — in terms of public funds, educational opportunity, and good citizenship — are the people of the deep South willing to pay in order to delay the inevitable?

Is there a "solid South"?

No. Contrary to popular belief, the South is not all of a piece, even in racial attitudes. In geography, in economy, in history, in tradition — even in speech — there are various "souths." In some parts of the region the two races have grown into new, more democratic relationships comparatively quickly and easily. In other parts, the old ways persist for a long time after law and custom have changed elsewhere in the South.

A glance at the map inserted in the front of this booklet will provide an important key to the variations in Southern race relations. The darkly shaded counties across the deep South, where Negroes make up 50 per cent or more of the population, have come to be known as the "black belt." There, slavery and plantation agriculture left their heaviest stamp on racial attitudes and practices. And there, as might be expected, resistance to changes in racial patterns is greatest.

If one were to make a green mark on a map of the South for each example of desegregation, school or otherwise, which has taken place since the Court decision, the deep South would be surrounded by green dots. The area with the fewest green dots would correspond roughly with the "black belt."

The density of the Negro population is no absolute yardstick. Many other factors are important: urbanization, the quality of local leadership, economic and political arrangements, and the mixture of memory and habit which gives a community its unique traditions. But the Negro-white ratio is a handy index to the adjustment, psychological as well as practical, required by the Supreme Court's decision. As Southerners nurtured on legend and folklore, we can benefit from a clear-sighted view of the South as a region of great and growing diversity. It is particularly useful to recognize that almost half of the counties in the South have 10 per cent or less Negro population; that only one-fifth of Southern counties have 40 per cent or more. This Negro-white ratio is important in banishing the idea of a "solid South."

What have church groups said?

The overwhelming majority of religious leaders and official church bodies greeted the decision in the spirit of this statement by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission: "... we urge Christian statesmen and leaders in our churches to use their leadership in positive thought and planning to the end that this crisis in our national history shall not be made the occasion for new and bitter prejudices, but a movement toward a united nation embodying and proclaiming a democracy that will commend freedom to all peoples."

Since the decision, all major church bodies have passed resolutions praising the decision; and many, after being attacked by segregationists, have reaffirmed their faith in the decision.

Various individual church leaders and ministers have also called for "good faith compliance." Some pastors have surrendered their pulpits rather than suppress or renounce their conviction that segregation is un-Christian.

Has integration worked in higher education?

Yes. In fact, the admission of Negroes to formerly all-white colleges and universities in recent years is one of the most impressive examples of desegregation ever recorded. Since 1935, some 164 accredited colleges and universities in Southern and border states and the District of Columbia have opened their doors to Negroes. In every instance included in this total, the adjustment was made without a single serious incident.

The widely publicized disturbance at the University of Alabama protesting the enrollment of Miss Autherine Lucy was notable not because it was a typical reaction, but because it was unique.

It is also notable that of the 164 formerly white institutions now open to Negroes, 95 have newly desegregated at some level since May 1954.

Does the decision have meaning only for the South?

The legal effects of the decision are felt in the 17 states in and adjoining the South which enforced school segregation by law in 1954. But the spirit of the decision applies with equal force to many places outside the South where school children are largely segregated by custom, housing patterns, and administrative arrangements.

The existence of segregated neighborhoods continues to produce segregated schools in non-Southern cities. In recent years, however, a strong trend toward integration has developed. New Jersey, Indiana, and Illinois have taken steps to root out segregation where it has been practiced in disregard of state laws. And in other states, communities have moved voluntarily to desegregate their schools. This trend is the result of various forces: the war-inspired concern for minority rights; action by Negroes themselves; human relations agencies,

church and civic groups, enlightened school administrators and public officials; and the growing realization that it is often cheaper to integrate than to provide new or improved facilities for Negro pupils. The Supreme Court's school decisions have focused attention on extra-legal segregation in the North and West and have stimulated efforts to eliminate it in many communities.

Do mixed schools lead to mixed marriages?

This is perhaps the most common argument advanced against integrated schools — just as it was advanced against Negro voting in the Democratic primary, integration in higher education, and the other gains in race relations during the last 25 years. Yet there is little evidence to sustain such an argument. Even in states where there has never been legal segregation — in schools or otherwise — intermarriage is extremely rare. In the South, where intermarriage is opposed by both law and custom, integration in schools or other public institutions is hardly likely to change the existing pattern.

The fear of intermarriage is largely irrational, since there can never be a law or a court decision forcing persons to marry against their will. Marriage is and will remain a matter of personal choice, as are all purely social relationships.

Perhaps the most sensible comment ever made on the subject came from a University of South Carolina student who attended a Ku Klux Klan rally out of curiosity. A Klan spokesman raised the age-old question, "Would you want your sister to marry a Negro?" To which the student replied, "She can say no, can't she?"

Will Negro teachers lose their jobs in an integrated school system?

Unquestionably integration will cause some displacement of Negro teachers, as it already has to a limited extent. However, a wholesale discharge of Negro teachers is unlikely for several reasons.

First, there is the inevitable fact that many Negro schools will continue to serve Negro pupils, even in a framework of legal integration. Presumably the faculties of these schools will continue to be staffed primarily by Negro teachers.

Second, it is difficult to see how the present number of Negro teachers would be replaced. More than 70,000 Negroes are teaching in the Southern and border states, and the number of school children is increasing by leaps and bounds. In August of 1956, just before the opening of schools, principals reported a shortage of up to 20 teachers in some schools in the South.

Third, in some Southern states, teachers are protected by state tenure laws. Of course, some states are doing away with tenure laws and some Negro teachers have lost jobs in states which have integrated since the decision. Court cases loom, however. And the outcome of litigation concerning tenure laws is as important to white teachers as it

is to Negroes since, as the Kentucky Council on Human Relations says, "If the tenure laws can be avoided today because of color of skin, then they can be violated tomorrow because of color of eyes or political color."

Finally, the South may show a surprising capacity to adjust to teacher integration. It is nothing new in the South for white children to be placed in the care of Negroes — care that has included as much "instruction" as any teacher-pupil relationship. Substituting a qualified teacher for a trusted, if little-educated servant, is hardly a revolutionary step, as the experience of many desegregating school systems has already demonstrated.

Can children adjust to integrated schools?

There is much truth in the saying that if school integration were left to the children there would be no problem. Children are born without prejudice and only acquire it through constant exposure to the attitudes of grownups. As all previous experience indicates, children of different races adjust to each other quickly and naturally when given half a chance. Most Southerners can find confirmation in their own childhood, when they accepted playmates of the other race without a thought.

However, adults — particularly parents and teachers — often transmit their feelings to the children without realizing it. In this sense, then, the largest part of the adjustment will have to be made not by children, but by their elders.

Are Negroes biologically inferior to white persons?

No. Scientists tell us that all men have the same basic characteristics as their common ancestors, and that the structure of people of all races is the same. We differ only in certain superficial features — such as skin color, hair, shape of eyes, etc. — and these physical variations are found among members of the same race as well as among those of different races. The myth of inborn racial superiority is often based on "blood lines." Science tells us that blood has nothing to do with heredity and that the four different types of human blood exist in all races. In fact, the percentages of blood types for Negro Americans are very close to the percentages for white Americans. No connection has been found between the biological make-up of people and the level of their intelligence or culture.

Is it reasonable to delay integration because Negroes have a higher crime and disease rate?

This objection disregards the whole point of the Supreme Court's decision — that is, Negro school children have the right to be treated as individuals instead of being set apart because of the accident of skin color. The unfairness of the group-achievement approach can be

illustrated in many ways. For example, white Southerners as a group have a higher rate of crime and disease than whites elsewhere. Yet who would suggest that all Southerners should be segregated from their fellow Americans?

Once the blinders of prejudice are removed, the following points are clear:

(1) Crime and disease are largely products of environment, not of race. Slums and poverty breed germs and immorality, whatever racial group may occupy them.

(2) The Supreme Court did not say that every Negro child must be admitted to any school he chooses. It said that a Negro child could not be excluded from a school solely because of his race. Every modern school requires a medical examination before enrolling a pupil; no child with an infectious disease, white or Negro, is or should be enrolled. Children who are diseased, academically retarded, or prone to criminal behavior can be set apart by a school system that wants to do so — provided that race is not the measure.

Does integration inevitably lower academic standards?

The problem here, again, is not racial but socio-economic and educational. Academic standards tend to be lower in communities with poorer environments. Also many Negro pupils lag because of the inferior schooling they have received in segregated school systems. Tests by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization revealed the fact that there is a wide range of intellectual ability within each racial, religious, and national group. In the U. S., the study reports, some groups of Negro recruits from the North were found to be more literate than some groups of whites. A study of children of white Southern mountaineers who had moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, revealed quite an educational gap between them and the city children. It was found, however that although the mountain children lacked the cultural background to facilitate learning, they did have the ability to learn. Such studies have shown that when either group, white or Negro, is placed in a superior economic and educational environment, the average score on mental tests tends to rise; when either group lives in an inferior economic and educational environment, the scores tend to remain low. Dr. Tilman Cothran, chairman of the Department of Sociology at A. M. and N. College at Pine Bluff, Arkansas, contends that integration will tend to raise overall educational standards of the South since it is a matter not of downgrading students who already have high educational standards, but one of upgrading students who have lacked proper educational opportunities.

Do Negroes want desegregation? Nobody can speak for all Negroes, just as no one can speak for all whites, or all Americans, or all people with blue eyes. But certainly

desegregation has strong support among Negroes. Negro teachers' associations, for example, have consistently voted to uphold the Supreme Court decision. It is unlikely that these people would vote for something they didn't want. Negroes, north and south, compose the bulk of the membership of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. These people would hardly support an organization dedicated to integration of the schools if they were not in agreement with its purpose. The innermost demand of the Negro people is recognition of equal human dignity, and opening the schools contributes toward satisfying that need.

Who are the "extremists"?

The general hullabaloo about moderates and extremists only serves to lead thought away from the real purpose of the Supreme Court decree. It is clear that as long as the principle of the Court's decision is rejected, regardless of how calm or "moderate" the tone of rejection, a democratic solution to the problem is impossible. Also, no one who advocates compliance in good faith with the Court's decision can be validly called an "extremist."

How can school planning reflect the views of the whole community?

No one thing can contribute more to harmonious adjustment to the decision than full participation by Negroes in the planning and administration of local school systems. As Dr. Benjamin E. Mays has said, "If one racial group makes all the laws and administers them, holds all the power and administers it, and has all the public money and distributes it, it is too much to expect that group to deal as fairly with the weak, minority, non-participating group as it deals with its own." In the case of schools, able Negro representation on boards of education is a long step toward agreement and mutual confidence between the races.

A growing number of Southern communities has recognized this principle. Among the cities that have elected or appointed Negroes to their school boards in recent years are Nashville and Knoxville, Tennessee; Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Salisbury, and Greensboro, North Carolina; Augusta and Atlanta, Georgia. Following the Supreme Court decision, Gainesville, Georgia, added two Negro members to its school board. In addition, in 1955 West Virginia appointed a Negro, Carl Hairston, as assistant state superintendent of schools.

Of course, race alone should not be the measure of any public servant. As the *Greensboro Daily News* put it:

The *Daily News*, while believing strongly in Negro representation on public agencies and bodies, has not believed that appointment should be made on a racial basis *per se*. First of all should come qualifications, ability to serve in any given capacity, and vision wide enough to transcend any particular bounds in overall service and accountability. What we have contended is that Negro representation could and should be found on this basis.

Can interracial citizens' committees assist desegregation?

In many places this is the best way in which people of the two races can begin immediately to work together on constructive next steps. Since the Supreme Court issued its ruling, a number of interracial committees have been established in the South; and where the committees have been genuinely representative, progress has been made.

As Dr. A. Lee Coleman of the University of Kentucky School of Sociology says, a committee must have genuine determination to meet the real problem if it is to be effective. The principal functions of a committee, as Dr. Coleman sees them, are (1) to secure greater representation of the various groups and elements in the community; (2) to get more of the responsible, respected people of the community to face the issues and share the responsibility for the decisions made; and (3) to help "sell" and carry out the policy that is adopted.

Interracial committees of a private or advisory nature have performed invaluable service in many of the schools that have integrated since the decision, and they will no doubt continue to provide sound leadership in other communities. But they cannot be viewed as substitutes for Negro representation on official policy-making bodies.

What can parents and teachers do through their organizations?

PTAs and teacher organizations, once segregated, are following the lead of schools in their districts and state. For instance, the Kentucky white and Negro PTAs in 1956 voted to merge. White and Negro parents no longer have separate concerns; they have the welfare of their children and the overall quality of their school systems in common. Even though a substantial amount of segregation in fact may continue for a long time to come, the legal framework has changed and, with it, the long-range goal of public schooling in the South. This means that parents, as in the case of Kentucky, should in the interest of their children begin to think and plan together across the lines of race for the best possible public education.

What is true for parents is also true for teachers, with the added fact of common professional interests. The problems and progress of white and Negro teachers have been drawing closer together in recent years. With qualifications, salaries, and working conditions approaching equality, the two teacher groups have begun to look at their profession through the same spectacles. What hurts one hurts the other; what benefits one benefits the other.

One way for parents' and teachers' organizations to start is by setting up joint committees between white and Negro groups. This will provide a common ground on which unity and cooperation can grow at whatever rate the local situation permits.

What is the role of discussion groups?

Joint discussion, fact-finding, and planning by local people of both races are the hallmarks of healthy community change in the South. Discussion groups for these purposes, which have already demonstrated their effectiveness in many Southern communities, are now needed more than ever.

The first objective of such a group should be a frank exchange of opinions. There must be ample opportunity for the members of the group to gain a sympathetic understanding of their respective points-of-view.

Once attitudes and views have been shared, the group can address itself to the facts about the local school system. For example, what are the local effects of state laws and policies? Which schools will likely be affected by the terms of the Supreme Court decision? How many pupils, teachers, and classrooms are involved? How are school-district lines drawn? How is the matter of integration related to such broader educational questions as school financing, transportation, overcrowding, teacher training and supply, curricula, textbooks, and so on?

Armed with the facts, the discussion group is equipped to work constructively with its school superintendent and board of education. Since most people feel strongly about the schools their children attend, education authorities are particularly sensitive to public opinion. So it is especially important for forward-looking citizens to express interest in the problems and progress of their school system. Most school officials will welcome positive criticism, suggestions, and support by people who understand the practical problems faced by the policy-maker and administrator.

Clearly local discussion groups that have reached informed agreement between people of both races can make a most valuable contribution in this time of challenge and adjustment.

Are there other things we can do in our communities?

As church members, we can recognize the special obligation of religious groups to create sound parental attitudes toward school integration. The churches can do more than any other institution to spread awareness that children must not be made to suffer the effects of adult prejudice.

As citizens, we can work for impartial and effective law enforcement in the event of racial tension in the community.

As members of civic groups, service clubs, labor organizations, and the like, we can help bring the policies of our groups in line with the spirit of the Court decision and we can support enlightened action by public officials and help foster a healthy climate of opinion.

As parents, we can urge that our school systems be reshaped to provide the most and the best education to every child, irrespective of race.