

Speech made at the County Court House, April 15, 1954 at 7 p. m.
during candidacy for the Macon County Board of Education, by
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DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION IN MACON COUNTY

Friends and Fellow Citizens: The first question that was asked me upon the announcement of my candidacy for membership on our County Board of Education was, "Why are you seeking the office? I consider this a very appropriate question and it should be answered fully and frankly. I intend to do this.

The second question was, "Are you going through with it?" That is, "Are you really going to conduct a campaign for the office like other candidates?" There was a third question, "Do you plan to serve if you are elected?" I shall dispose of questions two and three by saying that my campaign opened officially on Sunday, March 14; and my presence here in the County Court House answers question two. As to question three, I certainly do plan to serve on the Board and to serve as effectively and as cooperatively as I possibly can. Of course, I cannot serve unless the voters see fit to elect me.

I think you would be interested in another comment. There are some who have said, "We think it very brave of you to run for office; but, of course, you know you cannot win." To be perfectly frank, these people are not interested in my qualifications, they are not interested in the fact that I can serve efficiently if elected. They can see only one thing--I am a Negro woman.

I do not believe that such persons speak for the citizens of Macon County. I do believe that there are persons within every community in Macon County who will vote for me because they know

I am qualified.

I shall, therefore, present to you something of my qualifications and also the principles for which I stand in seeking election.

I am proud of the fact that I am a native Southerner, born in that very beautiful city, Savannah, Georgia. My elementary and secondary education were obtained in Atlanta. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree from Howard University, located in Washington, D. C., and the Master of Arts degree from Columbia University, New York City. I have spent a year of study at the University of Chicago in the fields of sociology and history, particularly as they relate to the history and problems of the South. From time to time, I have taken summer courses in other universities.

I have had teaching experience from the graded school through college and my thirty-three years in educational work have been divided between teaching, administration and research. Having lived in this county most of the time since 1923, I have had an opportunity through the years to know the condition of many of the schools and to become acquainted with the problems of pupils, of teachers, of administrators and of parents. I have studied reports made on the county's schools and know conditions from first hand information. I have seen the best schools and I have seen some of the worst. I have been to schools that were almost inaccessible in rainy weather, and know that there is very little in them to inspire children to become good citizens even when the weather is good.

For years, I have felt something should be done about our inadequate schools; and personally I have always wanted to make some type

of constructive contribution toward improving them. I am convinced that membership on the Macon County Board of Education will give me an opportunity to fulfill what I consider to be an obligation.

As a member, I can be of service to the Board in ways it has not previously considered; for I am deeply interested in the education of every child and in all of the schools and I can and will bring valuable points of view to the Board's deliberations. In the times that are ahead of us, public officials will need the cooperation of all of its well-meaning citizens.

Each of us in this county is a guardian of the democratic way of life. I not only believe in the democratic way of life, but I am willing to give it an opportunity to operate. I am sure there are no individuals or groups in our county who, if questioned, would admit that they do not believe in American democracy. And yet, for a long time, there have been those who consciously or unconsciously have reserved for themselves more privileges and obligations than they are willing to allow others of their fellow citizens. They have thus denied to all of the people of the county the benefits that cooperation can bring to all phases of our county life.

I have no political record on which to stand, but I do believe in democracy as set forth in our fundamental documents--the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights. And, I will adhere to these principles if I am elected to the County Board of Education.

I Believe in the Practice As Well As the Theory
of Democracy.

As you no doubt are aware, the County Board of Education, according to the law, administers all affairs connected with public

instruction. Its responsibility extends to the physical plant, to personnel, to the handling of the school funds and to the administering of the curriculum. Its functions are broad and inclusive. Representative of all of the people of the county, it is expected to act in the interest of all of the children of the people under its jurisdiction. As presently constituted, our County School Board is undemocratic, because it is representative of only one segment of our people, but it adminⁱsters school affairs for the total population. My election to the Board would remedy this situation.

Although the election of a Negro to public office would be something unique in Macon County, it is not unique in other places. In a number of Southern States--Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Missouri--such elections have been taking place for years. Just within the past few months, in Atlanta, Georgia, President Rufus E. Clement of Atlanta University became a member of that city's School Board, elected by both Negro and white citizens; and, he was welcomed by the Board's other members. Indeed, he could hardly have been elected had only Negroes voted for him. But because of his unquestionable qualifications, both Negro and white electors voted him into office.

This South of ours is undergoing ^{great changes -} great population changes, great economic changes and great political changes. These changes are affecting our attitudes ^{as well as} and our values. In Macon County, we have a wonderful opportunity to get into the mainstream of our progressive South and to set an example for those places that are not as far advanced in their democratic thinking as we are. Cooperation to us is not new. In many aspects of our life, it has been going on for years; although many of our people do not realize this fact. Actually, our

entire community life revolves around cooperation.

A community, and we say this is the Macon County community, is concerned primarily with harmony among groups within it, with their adjustment to each other in a way that will make for solidarity and accommodation. A real community attempts to develop a working arrangement that will resolve conflicts and make consistent progress possible.* I am certain that all elements of our people want Macon County to keep on making consistent progress. And those of us who have been here during the past twenty-five, thirty or more years, know just how much progress has been made. There are certain phases of our life, however, in which time seems to have stood still. One is official representation on our County Board of Education.

Some 25,771 of Macon County's 30,561 population up to this date have had no voice in the administration of their school system. Cooperation would recognize that this large number of persons, *g too,* are as much concerned about school problems as are the 4,777 who are represented. That this situation should be remedied, I am sure all fair-minded citizens will agree. Macon County can and should take the lead in letting the world know that as Americans we know what real democracy is; and that we know how to live according to its principles. Our County will discover that when it utilizes the services of all of its citizens for the common good, we will all benefit. Is Macon County brave enough to accept this challenge of democracy? I am of the opinion that it is.

I Believe that Public School Funds Should be
Democratically Distributed.

The time has come when we must think of the intrinsic value of all of our children and to see that each receives equably his

* Gist and Halbert -- Urban Sociology, pp. 641 - 642

share of educational opportunity, provided by public funds. In Macon County, according to the most recent annual report of the State Board of Education, we have a total of 6,782 children enrolled in grades from one to twelve. Of this number, 5,818 are Negro children and 964 are white children. In other words, there are ^{approximately} six Negro children for every one white child in the county. However, if one compares the expenditures for education by our County School Board, it will be discovered that proportionately more is expended for the three white schools than is expended proportionately for the fifty-two Negro schools.

Each child is an American citizen. And upon the preparation of each depends the future of our country. Public funds provided for the education of all of the children ~~of the county~~, should be so distributed that not one cent more shall be spent on one than on the other. Each child's education is equally important. Our State, as you probably know, is almost at the bottom in the educational ranking of States; and Macon County is ^{twenty-fifth} ~~25th~~ in expenditures for education among our sixty-seven counties. So you can readily see that no child in our county gets an adequate education. So when funds are not proportionately distributed, many are not getting the benefit even of the small amount ^{they are} ~~he is~~ supposed to receive.

This same principle of equalization under our present laws should extend to every phase of education--to teachers' salaries, to school buildings, to equipment, to every facility and service, to the curriculum, to per pupil value of school plant and to every expenditure that can be compared. The Alabama law calls for uniform schools. If elected to the Board, I shall work for conformity to the law.

the total amount expended is \$882,692 for day schools. Of this amount 75 percent was spent on Negro schools, while 25 percent was spent for white schools. But approximately 94.5 percent of the schools in the county are attended by Negro children and 5.4 percent by white children. On this basis, almost 95 percent of the funds should have been spent on Negro schools and 5 percent on white schools.

I Believe that Citizens' Should be Stimulated
to have more Interest in and to Participate in
the Educational Affairs of our County

Citizens' Committees in other states, not connected with the P. T. A.'s or school Trustee Boards, have long interested themselves in the affairs of the schools in their communities. Educational authorities usually welcome such participation. How many of us know that a special public meeting on the second Tuesday in May of each year is provided, by Alabama law, at which time the public may present to the School Board matters concerning allotment of public funds or other administrative affairs? Or, that the County Board of Education is expected to publish in the County newspaper, in October, an itemized annual report covering conditions, current accomplishments, needs for improvement of the schools and business and financial transactions of the Board? I believe it is the duty of informed people to study such reports and to act intelligently on them.

It is important for us to know some of the other provisions of the law. It states: "It is the duty of the County Board of Education to condemn all buildings that are unsanitary and unfit for use." Do the citizens know how many of our schools are unfit for use? Have we concerned ourselves about them?

The law also requires the Board of Education to carry out a building program, adequate to the present and future needs of the schools in the county. The Board is instructed ^t to make provisions to supply adequate space and sufficient supplies and equipment to enable elementary schools to provide rich and varied experiences, suited to the needs of each individual pupil. It is the citizens' obligation to see that the School Board performs its duty to all of the schools in these respects. This cannot be done unless actual conditions in

our schools are known. Such studies should be made or authorized by the official guardians of education, or by citizen^s' groups working in cooperation with the Board.

If I am elected to the School Board, I shall make the welfare of the fifty-five schools in the County my special concern, such concern to be based on actual^y study.

The Macon County Board of Education is to be commended for the achievements it has made in educational improvements during the past few years, particularly in equalizing length of school term. Improvement also has been made in transportation facilities, in employing more teachers, in teachers' salaries and in other expenditures, ~~for education~~. However, improvement is not enough when democracy is concerned. We as citizens should not be satisfied until each inequality in education in the county has been discontinued.

On January 13 of this year, the State Superintendent of Education reported that it would take \$300,000,000 to bring the schools of the State up to the ideal level. Of this amount, Macon County would need \$3,620,000. Since we have two school system^s, \$3,340,000 of this amount would have to be spent on the Negro schools to bring them up to the ideal, while \$280,000 would go to white schools for the same purpose.

For us as citizens, this report has great significance. It is indicative not only of differentials in school expenditures but it gives us a very good idea of the poor condition of all of our county schools. We cannot afford to sit passively by and permit this condition to continue. We must do something constructive to raise the level of each of our schools. We have too great a stake in them.

Friends and Fellow Citizens, it is time for Christian ethics to operate in the matter of administering the schools in our County. The people of good-will and vision of this community must get together and vote in members of the County Board of Education who will apply Christian codes to public matters. The Board of Education will be no better than the citizens of Macon County wish it to be.

The curriculum of the State of Alabama provides for civic education, so that each child will develop ideals and practices that will prepare him for good citizenship. The best kind of instruction comes from setting the proper example. In our county, we will be setting the proper example when democracy operates in the whole school system beginning with the County Board of Education.

I assure you, I shall work for social justice in education, if elected. Not only that, but I shall encourage the ^{JD} practice of Christian principles as a matter of public as well as personal ethics.

These words, recently uttered by Jonathan Daniels, that distinguished editor of the News and Observer, Raleigh, North Carolina, is most significant for our times. He says, "The real division among men is not based upon color but upon character. And it is the mark of the character of a man that he will not permit the dominance of his prejudices over his faith. It is not required of us that we be always happy in change. It is required that we honor a faith which we would have the world defend. We will be most secure in the world when the least and the last among us walk as his right in dignity and pride. God speed us to that hour."