

PHASES OF DESEGREGATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION
IN THE SOUTH SINCE 1954

Introduction

You will recall, I am sure, that Dr. Preston Valien from Fisk University in his discussion on Social Trends in the Public Schools went into the historical background of desegregation, citing cases which led up to the 1954 and 1955 decisions of the United States Supreme Court outlawing segregation in the public schools. He indicated that these decisions were the continuation of a trend that began in higher education as early as 1935.

I will not, therefore, repeat what has already been presented; but will confine my remarks to such phases of desegregation as State administrative policies toward it; enrollments, attitudes of white students and faculty, the status of Negro students, and the effect of desegregation on public institutions for Negroes.

Developments as interesting and parallel are occurring in private institutions in the South, but time does not permit the inclusion of that story.

State Administrative Policies

In the seventeen states and the District of Columbia, formerly practicing segregation in higher education, administrative policy toward desegregation ranges from acceptance of it at all/^{class}levels to rejection at all class levels. In the five contiguous states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina, segregation in public higher education remains intact. Alabama, under federal court order, accepted one graduate student, only to expel her later. Florida is under federal court order to admit a Negro student to a professional school. Of two court cases that were pending in Georgia, one has been dismissed because the student involved enrolled at a northern university.

In South Carolina, there are on file two applications for admission from Negro students, but no student as yet has filed a law suit for admittance.

In Mississippi, the same person has applied twice to the State University, but no court case has been instituted.

Then there is the group of states, including the District of Columbia, eight in all, that had, as of January, 1957, adopted a policy of desegregation in all public institutions of higher learning at all levels--Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Oklahoma and West Virginia, some of them without court action. Negroes have enrolled at some of the institutions in these states. None has applied for entry to others; and some white students have enrolled at institutions formerly maintained for Negroes.

In a third group of states, partial desegregation has taken place--in Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia, all through federal court orders.

Texas began admitting Negro students for graduate work in 1950 and at the undergraduate level in the fall of 1956. Seventeen of its forty-five institutions accept students of both races.

Tennessee in 1955 adopted a five-year desegregation program, but this plan was labeled "delaying tactics" by a Federal Court in 1957. Negro graduate students only are enrolled in three predominantly white institutions, which accepted them in 1952.

Four of Virginia's nine predominantly white schools have desegregated at the graduate and undergraduate levels. The State's policy is to admit Negro students only when courses are not offered at the Virginia State College, the only state-supported college for Negroes. The University admitted Negroes to its graduate school in 1950 and to undergraduate courses in 1955. Its desegregation policy does not extend to the Negro institution, to which white students have applied.

North Carolina University System Trustees have interpreted the United States Supreme Court decision as applicable to all institutions that are part of

the consolidated University. Both graduates and undergraduates are enrolled at four of its institutions. It opened its university in 1951.

Louisiana State University opened its graduate schools to Negroes in 1950 and its undergraduate classes in 1955. By 1956, 400 Negro students were enrolled in four of seven institutions. This state is the first one to attempt a policy of resegregation. In 1956, the state legislature adopted measures designed not only to prevent the enrollment of additional Negro students in any of its white state schools, but to eliminate those who had already enrolled. But a federal court order issued in January, 1957, prevented the four institutions from carrying out the Legislature's order.

Enrollment

In 1956, it was estimated that 110 formerly all-white tax-supported colleges and universities of the 208 such schools in the South admitted Negro students either in practice or in principle. The actual number enrolled during regular sessions is estimated to be about 2,000, with several thousands more enrolled during summer sessions.

Dr. Guy B. Johnson of the University of North Carolina in a study made of 22 state-supported institutions stated that while enrollment was found to be increasing in most of the institutions, no great increase in enrollment could be expected due to restrictions on admissions, which limit enrollment mainly to graduate, professional or specialized training, and which hold off any drastic desegregation on the undergraduate level as long as possible. The University of Louisville and Kansas City University, where most of the Negro students are undergraduates, are the exceptions. In addition, these institutions feel they have no obligation to enroll out-of-state Negro students. Another reason why there will not be any great increase of enrollment is the fact that Negro colleges have an advantage over white colleges due to certain "social advantages," Dr. Johnson thinks.

Attitudes of White Students and Faculties

Student Attitudes. Since May 17, 1954, and previously, a number of polls and surveys have been made of student opinion. Most of them have indicated a liberal attitude toward the admission of Negro students to white institutions.

Even an opinion poll made by the Board of Control of the University of Florida for the specific purpose of delaying desegregation at the University, showed that 77.8 per cent of the students polled favored desegregation immediately or after periods of preparation; and only 21.04 per cent was opposed to it "under any circumstances."

In July, 1955, a group of religious organizations on the campus of this same university petitioned the State Board of Control to end segregation immediately; and in 1956, 425 students sought by petition the admittance for graduate work of a Negro missionary.

In addition, a graduate student at the University of Florida extended an invitation to Negro students at Florida A. & M. University to attend a party given by the Student International Club, despite the fact he was informed such action would violate the university's regulations. This student was subsequently dropped.

At the University of Miami, a survey made among 400 students showed 78 per cent thought Negro students should be admitted, while 11.4 per cent said they would leave the University rather than attend classes with them. Eighty per cent favored permitting Negroes to eat in the school's cafeteria; 81 per cent would permit them to participate in all campus activities; 81 per cent would permit them to sit in the regular student section of the Orange Bowl; 87 per cent would permit them to play on the football team; and 88 per cent would favor permitting them to be graduated in the regular ceremony with white students.

Desegregation at the college and university level has caused violence and threats of violence in only about four cases, but in only one of these were students reportedly involved. This was at the University of Alabama; and it is

thought to be doubtful if students there would have shown any violent reaction had they not been urged to do so by persons not directly connected with the University.

In other ways, white students have indicated their attitude toward desegregation. The students of Lamar State College of Technology in Texas on October 2, 1954, drew up a petition against anti-integration picketing, which urged the pickets to leave the school.

The Student Council of the University of Louisville, Kentucky, declared its opposition to university use or lease of facilities where the owners exclude any student because of his race, creed or color. For just getting a meal in some communities surrounding universities and colleges is often an acute problem for Negro students because of unfavorable community reaction to desegregation.

Faculty Attitudes. Faculty members have not been very vocal on the matter of desegregation, but a few have spoken out forthrightly. Where State or institution policy is definitely against desegregation, freedom to express an opinion means the loss of employment. Nevertheless, some college professors have voluntarily resigned rather than conform to university policy; and some have been discharged for disagreeing with it. A member of the faculty of the University of Alabama, where several professors resigned because of the Autherine Lucy Case, recently expressed his opinion in an issue of the Yale Review. He discussed the situation as a dilemma which faces those who disagree with prevailing policy, stating that he personally believes that the universities of the South...should of their own initiative begin to open their academic communities to qualified Negroes. He wrote that he is by no means alone in this conviction. "It is widely held among the faculties of the colleges in question," he stated.

The Status of Negro Students

Once admitted, reports show that student treatment differs according to the administrative policy of the state and that of the institution.

In a state like West Virginia, where desegregation is a reality, the colleges and universities make a special effort to integrate Negro enrollees into every phase of their activities. But in most institutions they are accepted as equals in all activities of a purely educational nature, but are excluded from those that are in any way social.

Some pioneering students, you may recall, like Professor George W. McLaurin at the University of Oklahoma and Silas Hunt at the University of Arkansas, were segregated everywhere, including the classroom. Hunt at first was not even permitted in the classroom with white students, but professors taught him alone in quarters apart in the basement, and he went to the house where he roomed for meals. Restrictions against discrimination by state institutions were removed when McLaurin appealed to the Supreme Court for relief and when the court ruled that once a school admits a Negro student, it must accord him the same rights as it does any other student.

Nevertheless, two Negro undergraduates enrolled recently at the University of North Carolina were given living quarters in a special wing of a dormitory and assigned private rooms. Two other rooms in their section were left empty. The usual pattern is to assign three students to a room.

At Louisiana State University, Negro students may live in campus dormitories but not share rooms with whites. A survey at the University of Texas found that only eleven of 141 housing units were willing to admit Negroes. North Texas State College admitted two women to a dormitory, breaking a tradition of segregation. Graduate white and Negro men have lived in the same dormitory at the University of Texas for several years, and one Negro girl lived at a religious group's rooming house with whites, but the general policy is not to provide housing for

women, if it can possibly be prevented.

Social lines are drawn just as tightly on Southern college and university campuses as they are in public life generally. The first Negro student admitted to the Virginia Polytechnic Institute felt called on to announce publicly in the college paper that he would not attend an important class dance, because he knew that many of his classmates were worried thinking he might participate. His letter states that "...Rather than be the cause of embarrassment...I would like to make public my decision not to attend," this dance. But, he said, "I hope very much in the near future letters like this will not have to be written." The editor of the paper added his own note to the effect that students and administration could "breathe a sigh of relief from being spared a difficult situation or face the realization that the same situation would be with them from then on."

And at the University of Texas College of Fine Arts this spring, the leading female role in the opera Dido and Aeneas was taken away by the College from a young Negro music major, with the outstanding soprano voice, because certain legislators objected to having a Negro girl play a romantic role opposite a white male. This, despite the fact that she had been cast for the role in the fall and had already learned the part.

Merging and Closing of Colleges

In addition to its many other evils, it is well known that segregation is not only an expensive proposition but an inefficient one. Another trend resulting from desegregation is the merging and closing of colleges. Now in its initial stage, we are likely to see public institutions which depended for their existence on segregation alone, go out of existence.

The first college to close because of desegregation was Storer College at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. It was operated by the Baptist but received an annual grant from the State. When this grant was withdrawn, its gifts and endowment were insufficient to keep it open. Its existence had long been a pre-

carious one.

Another casualty was the Lincoln (Missouri) University School of Law, hastily established by the State to circumvent the Supreme Court decision in the Lloyd Gaines Case. It was never "equal" to the Law School of the University of Missouri, and it never should have been created. Its closing was due to the new desegregation policy of the State of Missouri which opened both Lincoln University and the University of Missouri to all students.

Bluefield Institute in West Virginia faces closing or merging because its costs are "the highest per pupil in the state," and the State's order to desegregate in 1954 provided little encouragement to white students to attend it. Its enrollment has never been large, and the few students it had are leaving to attend other colleges.

With the desegregation of its entire public school system, the District of Columbia merged its two formerly separate teachers colleges under a new name. No reports were made that teachers at either the white or Negro institution lost their jobs, as was the case when the Louisville Municipal College and the University of Louisville in Kentucky were merged approximately ten years ago. In the latter case, only one out of eighteen Negro teachers was retained.

In St. Louis, Missouri, desegregation began at the college level, when the student body and faculty of Stowe Teachers College, formerly for Negroes, were transferred to Harris Teachers College, formerly all white. Of about 1,000 students in this college in 1954, 400 were Negroes. Not only is the student body integrated, but the faculty is integrated.

Desegregation and the Public Institutions for Negroes

The Student Body. While white state institutions are admitting Negro students in increasing numbers, a decided beginning in the admission of white students to Negro institutions has been made. At least fourteen such public Negro colleges have desegregated, although the number of white students to the

total number of students enrolled is small.

The same state policy which desegregated white institutions, in accordance with the decision of the United States Supreme Court, operates upon Negro institutions in a similar manner, although all states have not responded to it. When certain states desegregated all of their white institutions, they also desegregated their Negro institutions.

In neither the white nor Negro colleges is it possible to secure the exact number of either race enrolled, because of the stated policy of not identifying students by race on registration records.

Although fourteen formerly all-Negro colleges have been reported as having a policy of desegregation, it is known that about 750 white students are actually in attendance at nine. West Virginia State College leads with a total of 693.

Summary

Numerous methods have been utilized and are being initiated to prevent desegregation and to halt it. Some states and universities have presented arguments of all kinds, have vigorously contested court suits of those wishing to gain entry, have made extensive surveys to prove that parents and students do not wish it, have foretold all kinds of injury to the institutions admitting Negroes, and have stated that desegregation would result in bloodshed.

The officials of colleges and universities have passed regulations requiring rigid examinations and have tightened requirements for admission. Some states threaten to close any college faced with desegregation by cutting off appropriations. Character references from alumni and certificates of eligibility are other methods. Some warn that the existence of Negro colleges is threatened. Picket lines and mob action are other threats.

The latest and a rather ingenious method is the proposal now being made by the State of Virginia. This State wants a new amendment to the Constitution. This amendment would forbid racial segregation in the schools; and when sub-

mitted to the states, if it fails to win the approval of thirty-six states as is required--and the pro-segregationists feel certain it will fail--the effect would be to affirm segregation and thus invalidate the Supreme Court decisions.

Despite all of this, there has been a change from complete segregation "to some degree of integration" of Negroes into the publicly supported institutions of higher learning in the South in all but five States, and this change has taken place in less than ten years, and, but in an insignificant number of cases, it has been orderly and quiet. Negro students entering white colleges and universities in the South are faced with "problems of discrimination, academic competition and morale," but it must be remembered that practically all Negro students who have attended northern and western universities have been faced with these same problems.

Certainly new adjustments have to be made both by Negroes and whites; but as liberalism has spread on campuses in other sections of the country and most of them are making a serious effort to practice the tenets of democracy, so it can spread on southern campuses. "The pioneering phase of desegregation in higher education in the South is already over" and the patterns of integration that are forming foretell that its continuation will be of a constructive nature.

The Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954, opened "the way for any citizen of a state to apply for admission to any public higher institution for which he is academically qualified. Desegregation, however, is bringing higher standards to southern colleges and universities, both Negro and white, and prospective students will find it more difficult to enroll unless they have good academic records. The University of North Carolina reported in 1956 that it had admitted slightly more than a third of 3,000 students who filed application. So the competition just for admittance is keen even between white students seeking admission.

Says an outstanding educator, "The great majority of Negro students

entering southern institutions are graduate and professional students...hence" they "have been mature, serious-minded people who are working toward definite vocational goals. Perhaps this is fortunate because it has made the transition process possible under the most favorable circumstances."

--Jessie Parkhurst Guzman

(Address delivered July 10, 1957,
Summer School Assembly,
Tuskegee Institute, Alabama)