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AUTHOR Baker, Scott  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores paradoxes of southern school and university segregation, analyzing how National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) litigation and local African American activism altered southern public education. The paradoxes first surfaced in the 1940s, when the constitutionality of separate and unequal salary schedules for black and white teachers was challenged. Though NAACP-sponsored litigation forced changes, other types of discrimination surfaced (e.g., salaries based on test scores). The constitutionality of segregation in higher education was challenged in the 1930s-40s, but this created a new racial order in education where access was increasingly shaped by class. As black students won educational rights, university authorities adopted new requirements limiting their access. States began requiring students to pass standardized tests, which hindered lower class black students and permitted token numbers of middle class black students. Significant numbers of black students attended schools with whites by the 1970s, but tracking recreated segregation. New social and economic opportunities widened class divisions in southern black communities. Many urban black institutions lost vitality and potency as they became segregated by class and race. (SM)

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**A PARADIGM OF PARADOX:  
RACE, CLASS, AND DESEGREGATION IN  
THE SOUTH**

**DR. SCOTT BAKER  
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY  
WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA**

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## **A Paradigm of Paradox: Race, Class, and Desegregation in the South**

This paper explores the paradoxes of school and university desegregation in the modern American South. Although scholars have lavished attention on the legal and political dimensions of desegregation, we know surprisingly little about the educational and institutional arrangements that replaced the southern system of segregated caste education. Schools, colleges, and universities were a key battleground in the struggle for racial equality, but the history of educational desegregation has not been well studied. What is needed is not another look at the law or politics of desegregation, but careful analysis of how NAACP litigation and local African American activism altered southern public education, and the contradictory effects these changes have had on African Americans.

White educational authorities responded to NAACP demands for educational equality and access by creating a new system of racial inequality in southern education that offered broader opportunities for advantaged African Americans, but did little for most blacks. The outlines of this new racial order emerged in the 1940s when the NAACP challenged caste restrictions in teacher pay.

Litigation forced school boards to eliminate separate and unequal salary schedules for white and black teachers. However, educational authorities responded by adopting the National Teacher Examinations and using them to limit equalization and faculty desegregation. Litigation and local activism also ended the exclusion of African American students from southern state universities, but during the 1940s and 1950s, university authorities adopted new admission requirements, the most durable of which relied upon standardized tests to keep desegregation at token levels. Persistent legal and political pressure forced whites to desegregate schools, but during the early 1970s, school officials used testing and tracking to recreate within schools much of the segregation that had once existed between them. The institutionalization of these new, more rational, legally defensible, and durable restrictions limited access to advantaged African Americans.

More rational restrictions on educational access divided blacks along class lines and shaped a paradoxical educational landscape that offered greater opportunities for middle-class African Americans without fundamentally altering the isolation of most blacks. As increasing numbers of middle-class African Americans left southern cities, historically black institutions lost vitality as they

became segregated by class as well as race. By the 1970s, public schools in southern urban areas that had once enrolled African Americans of all social classes now served only poor students. Southern higher education also became increasingly segregated by class as well as race. This new system of racial inequality in southern education has widened opportunity for advantaged African Americans without fundamentally enhancing the educational opportunities available to most blacks.

These paradoxes first became apparent in the 1940s, when the NAACP and local black activists challenged the constitutionality of separate and unequal salary schedules for white and black teachers. The first systematic attack on caste arrangements in southern education, the salary equalization campaign involved over 50 cases in every southern state. Litigation and local activism forced school boards to eliminate the caste restrictions that prevented the best African American teacher from earning as much as the worst white. But educational authorities in South Carolina and other southern states responded by adopting the National Teacher Examinations, (NTE) and using test scores to determine salaries. The elimination of some caste barriers heightened class distinctions in the black community, offering benefits to elites without fundamentally

changing the savage inequalities in southern public education or the relative position of most African Americans. In southern cities black teachers, who attended private schools and colleges, earned NTE scores and salaries that equaled or exceeded those of whites. But most African American teachers constrained by economic and educational discrimination earned scores well below those of most whites. The history of the salary equalization campaign is significant because it offers an early indication of the new more rational and legally defensible forms of discrimination based on class as well as race that replaced caste arrangements.

The practice of paying comparably trained and experienced African American teachers less than whites was a cornerstone of the southern system of caste education and an ideal target for NAACP legal attacks. School officials claimed that black teachers deserved to be paid less because they were not as well trained as whites, but Robert A. Margo has shown that more than 80 percent of this salary differential was the result of wage discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

NAACP sponsored litigation forced southern school boards to eliminate caste salary schedules, but left the door open to new

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Margo, *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950* (Chicago, 1990), 62.

kinds of discrimination. Federal court decisions in Maryland, Virginia, Florida, and South Carolina enjoined the school board from discriminating against African American teachers on the basis of “race and color.” But these rulings did not require boards to equalize salaries. School officials were not prohibited from exercising what one judge called “their judgement as to the respective amounts to be paid to individual teachers based on individual qualifications, capacities, and abilities.”<sup>2</sup>

As the struggle for salary equalization shifted from the courtroom to the boardroom, white political and educational leaders searched for ways to evade equalization. Unable to pay African Americans less because of their race, school officials turned to the testing and measurement specialist Ben Wood, who had recently constructed the NTE. After the courts declared separate and unequal pay scales unconstitutional, letters poured into Wood’s office as southern school officials scurried to create new methods of determining teacher pay. Wood persuaded school officials in Tulsa, Houston, Montgomery, Birmingham, Greenville, Raleigh, Miami, and Tampa to adopt the NTE, but his greatest success came in South

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<sup>2</sup> Duvall v. Seignious, unpublished consent decree, J. Waites Waring Papers, box 110-27, Moorland Spingarn Library, Howard University, Washington D.C.

Carolina where he convinced educational authorities to adopt a statewide salary system that based teacher pay on NTE scores. In South Carolina, as in other southern states, the NTE appealed to political and educational leaders because it provided an ostensibly objective basis for claims that African American teachers were not as good as whites. Wood tirelessly promoted the NTE in the state. He convinced educational authorities to adopt his salary plan and establish a system of “merit certification” that based pay on “impartial and objective” examinations. When some members of the state legislature worried that blacks might outperform whites, Wood reassured them that on previous administrations of the NTE “the average score of blacks was at the lower fifth percentile of whites.”<sup>3</sup>

While southern black educators warned the NAACP that the NTE would circumvent salary equalization, the association’s legal staff urged African Americans take the exams. Middle-class blacks like Thurgood Marshall and Horace Mann Bond were less concerned with the biases of standardized tests than with the discrimination inherent in caste restrictions. Although Bond had once opposed

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<sup>3</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944), 320; Ben Wood, Memo to the National Committee, 22 January 1942, file 143, reel 18, Ben D. Wood Papers, Educational Testing Service Archives, Princeton, N.J.; Ben Wood to D.W. Robinson, 18 March 1941, file 149, reel 18, Wood papers.



standardized tests, William B. Thomas has shown that by the 1930s he had come “to accept standardized tests as legitimate measures of mental ability and as mechanisms of class distinction within the black community.” To Marshall, Bond and other members of the black bourgeoisie, standardized tests and class differentiation were certainly preferable to caste restrictions. Marshall told the NAACP’s legal staff that “we should not fight the proposal to give examinations to teachers.”<sup>4</sup>

In April of 1945 the South Carolina General Assembly adopted a new salary system that based pay in part on NTE scores. By 1947, almost all of the state’s 13,000 teachers had taken the NTE. In Charleston, 15 percent of the city’s African American teachers – almost all of whom graduated from private school - earned “A’s” on the test, and following Wood’s advice, local leaders publicized these exceptions to legitimize the new system. Although five times as many whites as blacks were in the highest salary range in Charleston, when Wilmot Fraser, a private school graduate, became the highest

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<sup>4</sup> E. Horace Fitchett to Leon Ransom, 20 March 1941, box II-B-180, NAACP Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; William B. Thomas, “Black Intellectuals, Intelligence Testing in the 1930’s, and the Sociology of Knowledge,” *Teachers College Record* 85 (Spring 1984): 496; Thurgood Marshall to Walter White, 28 July 1941, box II-B-176, NAACP Papers.

paid principal in the city in 1947, the *Charleston News and Courier* published a profile of him to show what Wood called “the absence of discrimination.”<sup>5</sup>

The use of the NTE to determine salaries increased class differentiation in Charleston’s already class-conscious black community. The difference between what the highest and lowest paid African American teacher earned widened considerably under the new salary plan. Under the old separate and unequal pay scales, the highest paid black teacher earned \$800, only \$200 more than the lowest paid teacher. Under the new system, teachers like Viola Duvall, who had graduated from private schools and colleges, made more than twice as much as the lowest paid black teacher. The results of the salary campaign offer an early indication of how the elimination of caste restrictions heightened the importance of class within black communities offering higher pay to African American elites, without altering the subordinate position of most African American teachers. Just as separate and unequal salary schedules

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<sup>5</sup> George Peabody College for Teachers, *The Public Schools of South Carolina: A Report* (Nashville, 1949), 36; Charleston Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books, 18 March 1948, Office of Records and Archives, Charleston County School District, Charleston, S.C.; Ben Wood to D.W. Robinson, 24 March 1941, file 149, reel 18, Wood Papers; *Charleston News and Courier* 5 September 1947.

were a cornerstone of the caste system, the NTE became a key component of a new racial order in education that was used to maintain salary differentials and limit the presence of African American teachers in desegregated schools during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>6</sup>

Attempts to equalize teacher's salaries were hampered by wide disparities in the educational opportunities available to whites and blacks, and in the 1930s and 1940s, the NAACP and African American students challenged the constitutionality of segregation in higher education. While the NAACP's victories in *Gaines*, *Sweatt*, and *McLaurin* paved the way for the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* decision, the most significant educational outcomes were the construction of separate and unequal graduate and professional schools for blacks and the institutionalization of new restrictions on the admission of black students to white universities and the professions. In higher education, as in teacher salaries, African American challenges and white responses defined a new racial order in education where access was increasingly shaped by class.

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<sup>6</sup> Charleston Board of School Commissioners, Minute Books, 18 March 1948.

Although African Americans won the legal right to graduate and professional education, most blacks realized that right in separate and unequal institutions that were created in response to NAACP litigation and African American activism. During the 1930s and 1940s, African American students and the NAACP challenged caste restrictions that blocked access to graduate programs and the professions. In 1938, the Supreme Court ruled in *Missouri ex. rel. Gaines v. Canada* that the constitutionality of segregation rested upon “the equality of privileges which the laws give to the separated groups.” Educational authorities in Missouri and other southern states responded by establishing separate graduate and professional programs for African Americans that Thurgood Marshall called “monuments to the perpetuation of segregation.” Between 1942 and 1950 educational and political leaders established African American graduate and professional programs in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. While the Court’s 1950 ruling in *Sweatt v. Painter* suggested that there could be no separate equality, graduate and professional education continued to develop along separate and unequal lines. In most southern states, funding for separate graduate and professional education rose sharply as educational authorities tried to entice black

students into African American universities. By 1954, 16 historically black institutions offered graduate programs.<sup>7</sup>

As black students began to graduate from separate law schools, educational and political leaders established new barriers to the professions. Before the first class of African American students graduated from a separate law school at South Carolina State College in 1950, all graduates of the University of South Carolina Law School had a “diploma privilege” that assured their admission to the bar. In 1950, when black graduates became eligible, the state began requiring that all prospective lawyers pass the bar exam before they could practice law in South Carolina, a policy that was adopted by other southern states.<sup>8</sup>

The NAACP desegregated graduate and professional schools in 12 of 17 southern states by 1952, but university authorities responded by adopting new admission requirements that limited access to advantaged African Americans. After Virgil Hawkins

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<sup>7</sup> *Missouri ex. rel. Gaines v. Canada*, 305 U.S. 337 (1938); Marshall quoted in Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill, 1987), 106; Butler A. Jones, “Law and Social Change,” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1955), 318; *Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629, (1950); United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Equal Protection of the Laws in Public Higher Education* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 69-149; Gerald David Jaynes and Robin M. Williams, Jr. eds., *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society*, (Washington, D.C., 1989), 177.

<sup>8</sup> *Richardson v. McFadden*, 540 F. 2d. 744 (1976) at 747.

applied for admission to the University of Florida Law School in 1949, university officials began requiring a minimum score on an entrance exam. In Georgia, university officials required that applicants to the state's law school submit standardized test scores after Horace Ward sought admission in 1951. These more rational barriers on African American access to white universities heightened class divisions in southern black communities and helped define a new racial order in higher education based on class as well as race. Like the African American teachers whose class background and education prepared them to outperform whites on the NTE, most of the 200 African American students who attended desegregated graduate and professional schools in the South by 1950 were from middle-class backgrounds.<sup>9</sup>

While the *Brown* decision seemed to offer African Americans new educational opportunities, those opportunities were limited by more rational and legally defensible restrictions on African American access. While much of the historical work on desegregation has focused on massive resistance to school and university desegregation, what deserves scrutiny is not the blatant

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<sup>9</sup> *Equal Protection*, 78, 90, 94; *Hunt v. Arnold*, Civ. No. 5781, (N.D.Ga. 1959); *New York Times*, 27 October 1950, 28.

defiance that collapsed but the more rational and legally defensible evasions that endured. In the late 1950s, as before, the most durable resistance came not in the courts or in politics but within educational institutions. School officials responded to *Brown* by broadening testing and tracking within schools, requiring that undergraduate applicants to southern colleges submit standardized test scores, and expanding use of the National Teacher Examinations. The institutionalization of more rational, legally defensible, and durable restrictions in the late 1950s, a decade before the courts required widespread desegregation, kept college, faculty, and school desegregation at token levels and limited access to middle-class blacks. While courts swept away the paraphernalia of massive resistance in the 1960s, these more rational restrictions continued to govern educational arrangements.<sup>10</sup>

Southern school officials used standardized tests to rationalize restrictions that could no longer be based on race. While test use throughout the United States grew during the 1950s, the wave of testing that swept the South after *Brown* was clearly a response to desegregation. In 1955 and 1956, white and black

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<sup>10</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* 347 U.S. 483 (1954); Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge, 1995).

students in Washington, D.C., Charleston, Atlanta, Louisville, St. Louis, Charlotte, and New Orleans were tested, and state-wide testing took place in Texas, Virginia, and Florida. In several southern states, pupil placement laws included provisions for the assignment of students on the basis of their test scores. Passed in August of 1955, Alabama's student assignment law, like those in ten other southern states, did not mention race. Instead it listed 16 factors, including "the scholastic aptitude and relative intelligence or mental energy of the pupil," that school authorities could use to assign pupils. The NAACP challenged placement laws that were clearly designed to circumvent desegregation, but it did not question the use of tests. The courts upheld these laws because they provided for "the admission of qualified pupils upon a basis of individual merit without regard to race or color." After the Supreme Court upheld Alabama's placement law in 1957, the *New York Times* noted that the decision demonstrated how desegregation could be "held to a very small percentage for a long time."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn: A History of Race and Education in the United States* (New York, 1977), 98; *Race Relations Law Reporter* 6 1955,(913-915); *Shuttlesworth v. Birmingham Board of Education* 162 F.2d 372 (1958) at 384; *New York Times*, December 30, 1958.



Testing and tracking limited access to token numbers of middle-class blacks. In Baltimore, St. Louis, New Orleans, Louisville and elsewhere, tests rationalized restrictions that had once rested on race. In Washington, school superintendent Carl Hansen created a track system that separated students largely on the basis of IQ scores. Hansen claimed that tracking expanded educational opportunity, but one effect of tracking was to recreate within schools much of the racial segregation that had once existed between them. The college preparatory track in 1956 was 87 percent white and 13 percent black, while the basic track was 89 percent black and 11 percent white. Research by Howard University professor Elias Blake showed that class shaped access to the tracks. In one senior high school where the median family income of students was \$10,374, 92.2 percent of the students were assigned to the top tracks. At another, where median family income was \$3,872 only 15.2 percent of the students were assigned to the top tracks. While tracking enjoyed substantial support among Washington's African American middle-class, black activists challenged it. Julius Hobson, president of the local branch of CORE, charged that the track system was "a cunning and ingenious system of discrimination based on a new supremacy theory."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Raymond Wolters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School*

The NAACP desegregated public colleges in every southern state by 1963, but university officials adopted new admission requirements that blocked access for all but token numbers of middle-class African Americans. In the late 1940s, university officials began requiring that applicants to graduate and professional schools submit standardized test scores. In Louisiana, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and Mississippi, this practice was extended to undergraduate schools in the late 1950s. State officials in Louisiana “tightened admission requirements,” in response to desegregation suits. After African Americans sought admission to state universities in Georgia and Florida, regents began requiring that all applicants to the university system complete intelligence and aptitude tests. Educational officials in South Carolina signed a six-year contract with the Educational Testing Service in 1955 to supply “a series of aptitude tests for the measurement of applicants for college admission.” Officials at the University of Mississippi at Oxford required that applicants submit ACT scores after the court ordered James Meredith’s admission. Following the pattern established in university admissions in the late 1940s, many of the

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*Desegregation* (Knoxville, 1984), 18-38; Elias Blake, Jr. “The Track System in Washington, D.C.,” *Integrated Education* 3(April-May 1965):31.

African Americans who did gain access to southern public colleges including Harvey Gantt in South Carolina and Hamilton Holmes and Charlayne Hunter in Georgia came from middle-class families. In higher education, as in primary and secondary schools, class was becoming an increasingly important arbiter of access, even as race remained significant.<sup>13</sup>

In teaching, as in higher education, testing also produced tokenism. *Brown* raised the specter not only of student desegregation but of faculty desegregation as well. Racial extremists vowed to fire African American teachers if faculties were desegregated, but moderate educational and political leaders rationalized the process. By 1959, teachers and principals in Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Raleigh, Charleston, Atlanta, Louisville, Miami, Montgomery, New Orleans, Nashville, St. Louis, Tulsa, and Dallas were encouraged or required to take the NTE. The adoption of the NTE in the urban South foreshadowed broader statewide reliance on the exams. By the early 1960s, the exams were required or widely used in Delaware, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina,

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<sup>13</sup> *Equal Protection*, 71, 92, 112-113; Educational Testing Service, *Annual Report, 1955-1956* (Princeton, N.J., 1956), 73; *Ayers v. Allain* 893 F. 2D 732 (1990) at 735; Walter J. Fraser, Jr. *Charleston! Charleston!* (Columbia, 1989), 414; Calvin Trillin, *An Education in Georgia* (Athens, 1991), 20.

Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, and Texas. Judges in North Carolina, viewed “it as more than coincidental, that the written testing of teacher applicants coincided” with desegregation. The decision to adopt the NTE, the court found, “reflected the legislative awareness that the day might be coming when some [black] teachers would be teaching white pupils.” Well before the courts signaled their impatience with tokenism, educational authorities adopted a legally defensible and rational means of limiting the presence of black teachers in desegregated schools.<sup>14</sup>

Although relentless political and legal pressure forced widespread desegregation of southern schools by the early 1970s, educational policies and practices that had been institutionalized in the 1940s and 1950s created a paradoxical educational landscape that broadened opportunities for advantaged African Americans and heightened the isolation of most blacks. Enforcement of federal anti-discrimination laws opened new economic opportunities for middle class blacks who used better jobs and higher incomes to move to the suburbs. The movement of affluent blacks out of southern cities

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<sup>14</sup> Educational Testing Service, *School Systems Using Tests Prepared by Educational Testing Service, 1959*, NTE History File, Educational Testing Service Archives, Princeton: N.J.; Educational Testing Service, *Annual Report, 1959-1960* (Princeton: N.J., 1960), 34-6, 58-59; *United States v. North Carolina* 400 F. Supp 343, (1975) at 348.

drained much of the vitality and potency from historically black schools and colleges that became increasingly segregated by class as well as race. Significant numbers of African Americans attended school with whites by the early 1970s, but tracking recreated within most schools and colleges much of the segregation that had once existed between them. African American representation in gifted and talented programs, advanced placement courses, and flagship universities remained at token levels. This isolation was compounded by the small numbers of black teachers in desegregated schools whose presence was limited by increased teacher testing. While many African Americans wondered if the educational benefits they realized in desegregated schools, colleges, and universities were worth the price, longitudinal studies show that desegregation fueled the advancement of advantaged African Americans.

New social and economic opportunities widened class divisions in southern black communities. Enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 changed hiring and promotion practices, helped college educated blacks from higher socioeconomic backgrounds secure better jobs, and pushed the percentage of southern blacks who held professional, managerial, and technical jobs to 20 percent in 1970, twice what it had been a decade before.

The percentage of black families who earned more than \$15,000 a year (in constant dollars) increased from four percent in 1960 to 13 percent in 1974. Better jobs and higher incomes allowed middle-class African Americans to leave southern cities and purchase homes in the suburbs. While greater access fueled middle-class advancement, most African Americans, handicapped by decades of exclusion, segregation, and discrimination were unable to take advantage of these opportunities. In 1970, more than one-third of all black families in the South still had incomes below the poverty line. As the psychologist Kenneth B. Clark noted, “recent civil rights victories benefited primarily a small percentage of middle-class” blacks.<sup>15</sup>

Desegregation divided African Americans who could take advantage of these new opportunities from those who could not. By the time the Supreme Court forced southern school officials to

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Nineteenth Census of the United States, 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1972), Vol. I, 356, 459, 1553; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighteenth Census of the United States, 1960* (Washington, D.C., 1962) Vol. I, 719; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the United States: An Historical View, 1790-1978* (Washington, D.C., 1980), 38; William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: American Since World War II* (New York, 1995), 438; John J. Donohue III and James Heckman, “Continuous versus Episodic Change: The Impact of Civil Rights Policy on the Economic Status of Blacks,” *Journal of Economic Literature* Vol. XXIX, (December 1991): 1603-1643; Clark quoted in William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race* (Chicago, 1978), 162.

eliminate dual school systems, most whites and increasing numbers of blacks had left southern cities for the suburbs. Southern blacks had long been divided by class and color, but during the 1970s, these rifts became physical and spatial as the heirs of the black elite that educated its children in private schools and colleges left Atlanta, Charleston, Washington, Richmond, and New Orleans and other southern cities for the advantages and amenities of suburban schools and neighborhoods.<sup>16</sup>

As they did, many urban black institutions lost vitality and potency as they became segregated by class as well as race. At one southern high school the median family income of the entirely black student body was one-half that of blacks in the county, one-third that of suburban whites. In Atlanta, the percentage of students who came from families below the poverty line increased from 10 percent in 1965 to 70 percent in 1975. Black schools had long had to contend with large numbers of poor students, but the loss of the most affluent, involved, and educated black students concentrated impoverished students, magnified the effects of poverty, and overwhelmed teachers. It became increasingly difficult to sustain urban black high

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<sup>16</sup> David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge, 1990), 254.

schools in the South. Articles in one school newspaper lamented a decline “in moral values, academic standards, and athletic achievements.” The school’s principal complained that most students saw “excellence in academic achievement as a sign of weakness.” As the unemployment rate of urban African American teenagers approached 50 percent, few students believed that hard work and good grades would lead to college or good jobs, and the oppositional culture that had once animated these institutions was replaced by one that equated academic achievement with “acting white.”<sup>17</sup>

While race remained significant, class became an increasingly important determinant not simply of where blacks went to school but of the kinds of courses African Americans gained access to. By 1976, 37 percent of all black students in the South attended majority white schools. For most African American students, however, more rational and legally defensible restrictions that had been institutionalized in southern schools in the 1950s and early 1960s were durable obstacles to the best courses, the most demanding teachers, and the most valuable programs. Surveys,

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<sup>17</sup> *Charleston News and Courier*, June 3, 1975; Scott Baker, “Ambiguous Legacies: The NAACP’s Legal Campaign Against Segregation in Charleston, South Carolina, 1935-1975,” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1993), 273-275; Chafe, 441; Amy Stuart Wells and Robert L. Crain, *Stepping Over the Color Line* (New Haven, 1997), 172.



academic studies, court cases, and congressional hearings in the early 1970s invariably found that most African American students in were shunted into classes that “offered little and expected little.”<sup>18</sup>

In the 1970s, as before, the elimination of legal barriers created the greatest opportunity for the most affluent and educated segments of the black population. Middle-class African Americans were more likely to attend desegregated schools and more likely to gain access to the most valuable courses within them. Although three times as many whites as blacks were enrolled in gifted and talented programs in 1978, quantitative studies suggest that African American representation was correlated with income. Kenneth Meier and his colleagues have shown that as the ratio of black to white income rises, the number of black students in gifted and talented programs increases. Class may not have become more important than race, but it is clear that advantaged African Americans realized the most

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<sup>18</sup> Gary Orfield, *The Growth of Segregation in American Schools: Changing Patterns of Separation and Poverty Since 1968* (Alexandria Va., 1993), 11; American Friends Service Committee, *It's Not Over In the South: School Desegregation in Forty-Three Southern Cities Eighteen Years After Brown* (Washington, D.C., 1972); P.R. Morgan and J.M. McPartland, “The Extent of Classroom Segregation within Desegregated Schools,” (ERIC Document Reproduction Service no. ED 210 405; Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity, *Hearings on Equal Educational Opportunity, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., vols. 1-20; McNeal v. Tate County School District* 508 F. 2d 1017 (1975).

significant gains in an educational order where restrictions were rationalized.<sup>19</sup>

In higher education, educational policies and practices adopted in the 1940s and 1950s, shaped a paradoxical educational landscape that offered greater opportunities for affluent African Americans in prestigious white universities but left most African Americans in historically black institutions and community colleges. Increasing numbers of African Americans enrolled in white institutions, but more rational restrictions — the most durable of which relied on standardized tests — kept black enrollment in flagship universities at token levels. By 1968, less than two percent of the black students at 28 of the most prestigious universities in the South were African American. After surveying the standardized test scores of white and black students in North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia, Christopher Jencks and David Reisman concluded that the

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<sup>19</sup> Jomills Henry Braddock II, “The Perpetuation of Segregation Across Levels of Education: A Behavioral Assessment of the Contact Hypothesis,” *Sociology of Education* 53 (July 1980): 180; National Center for Educational Statistics, *The Condition of Education, 1981* (Washington: D.C., 1981), 82; Kenneth J. Meier, Joseph Stewart, Jr., and Robert E. England, *Race, Class and Education* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1989), 98; Jo Mills Henry Braddock II, Robert L. Crain, and James M. McPartland, “A Long-Term View of School Desegregation: Some Recent Studies of Graduates as Adults,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 66 (December 1984): 250-264.

blacks who attended white colleges and universities were the “well-healed and well-educated children” of the middle-class.<sup>20</sup>

While the price of access remained high, the generation of African American students who made desegregation an enduring reality in the 1970s realized durable social and economic benefits. Longitudinal studies show that the African American students who attended traditionally white colleges received an occupational boost. Graduating from a flagship white university increased the likelihood of gaining access to well-paying jobs in corporations and law firms. As David Goldfield argues, “a good deal of the southern economy is honeycombed with a good-ole-boy network that extends back to college days and beyond.”<sup>21</sup>

While the desegregation of prestigious white institutions promoted social and economic mobility for advantaged African Americans, it did little for the black students who remained in inadequately funded black colleges. Despite decades of litigation, southern systems of public higher education remained highly segregated. Historically black colleges and universities, like primary

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (Garden City, N.Y., 1968), 448; John Egerton, *State Universities and Black Americans* (Atlanta, 1969), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Braddock, Crain, and McPartland, 263-264; Goldfield, 267.

and secondary schools, became increasingly segregated by class. African American students at black colleges and universities, Walter Allen has shown, are “disadvantaged relative to students on white campuses, in terms of family socio-economic status and high school academic records.” At historically African American Florida A & M, for example, more than 90 percent of the students enrolled in 1970 came from families with incomes below \$10,000 compared to 51.6 percent of the students at all other four-year institutions in the state. Pressed by the courts to increase the number of students enrolled in white schools, “larger and richer” colleges and universities lured the “best and brightest blacks,” to flagship institutions. One consequence, the historian Vincent Harding notes, was a “brain drain” that robbed African American colleges of “painfully developed strengths that grew and developed in black colleges “in spite of and sometimes because of America’s shameful treatment.”<sup>22</sup>

Instead of thinking of desegregation as a success or failure, it is better to construct new paradigms that emphasize the paradoxical

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<sup>22</sup> Walter R. Allen, Edgar G. Epps, and Nesha Z. Haniff, *College in Black and White* (Albany, 1991), 4; Douglas M. Windham, *Education, Equality, and Income Distribution: A Study of Public Higher Education* (Lexington, Mass, 1970), 46-47; Harding quoted in Egerton, 94.

outcomes of the African American struggle for educational equality  
and access.

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*Amuel Berry Jr.*

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