

"DIMENSIONS OF DEMOCRACY
IN EDUCATION"

by

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Educators, and Guests.

You know, I know, we all know that this problem of helping democracy to breathe life into education does not just concern those of us here in Texas. Our whole nation is involved. Our whole country must deal with those issues that prevent liberty from entering the classroom, and thus prevent education itself from being whole, complete, and the positive force in our culture that it can be if given the opportunity. It was the Greek Philosopher, Aristotle, who once said that "the foundation of every state is the education of its youth." And this is true. Our nation is founded on a bedrock of potential greatness --- waiting to be freed from the shackles of disunity, conflict, and confusion that are put together by an incomplete education.

The year, 1964, will be a landmark in the history of American education. It was ten years ago this Spring that the Supreme Court handed down its most recent historical ruling. Twenty five years ago that same Court rendered its first vital decision in education. And one hundred years ago, the very first elementary school for freedmen was opened in the South. Our convention comes now at the turning of a very important page in the book of democracy. We would be wise to choose our words with care, to give deep consideration to what we say, because we are writing the first lines of Volume II, the second century, of the progress towards full and complete educational opportunities.

Let me, first of all, go back to the beginning and trace some of the paths that education has taken. It was in 1864, during the worst part of the Civil War, that our history book begins. The first records of formal Negro education begin with the establishment of three elementary schools for freedmen somewhere in the South. There were only a few, with very limited facilities, and probably no textbooks of any kind. They were under extreme pressure, and even the teachers could do little more than read and write. Sometimes secret, and sometimes failing to meet for long periods at a time, these elementary schools persisted for many decades. After the War, and through 1868, a handful of colleges for Negroes were set up throughout the Southern States. At most, there was a dozen of these schools, and they depended for their continued existence on Northern philanthropy and church organizations. The states gave only scant financial aid, and every school of any type faced very difficult years for over three generations.

The winter of 1868 and 1869 lasted for a long, long time. It dragged on for seventy years during which time there was no progress, no change, and very little improvement. While the rest of American education outgrew McGuffey's Readers, our schools grew into discarded readers and textbooks. During this period there was virtually no state financing of Negro education. There was only generous, but entirely inadequate, funds from private Northern sources.

It was a long, long winter. But beneath the icy antagonisms, the wintry turmoil, and the blanket of injustice, currents were running deep. Tides were at work, and are working today, to erode away the undemocratic foundations of the past. The American conscience had been hibernating, but like a giant bear, once it woke nothing could silence or hinder it in its forward progress. Slowly at first, and then more rapidly, it would lumber on seeking the food and subsistence that would quiet its long hunger. And like a giant bear, it would be impatient with tokens and bad faith. It would not be stilled until it had tasted deep into the well of freedom. I think that the great bear began to wake up twenty five years ago when the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the States must provide equal educational facilities within their boundaries. State financing of Negro education became the law of the land. It could not come overnight, however. The bear does not wake up from his deep slumber immediately. Southern States implemented the High Court's Decision by providing the dual educational system that we know so well today: separate "but equal" schools.

Then, after World War II, the doctrine of separate but equal became a topic of some concern to the nation. Noted professional people, educators, and public opinion in most states began to question whether separate facilities could ever be equal.

What is the problem with separate educational facilities? Let me take a few minutes here to tell you about a national study that was conducted by a group of very distinguished social scientists --- from such high powered schools as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and from the University of Michigan, the University of California --- who studied the problem objectively, and put out a long report on how separate facilities in education affect children in White and Negro communities. This is the same report that was read eagerly during the Winter of 1953 by the President and members of the Supreme Court of the United States. I think you might be interested in some of the findings also.

First of all, what was the effect of segregated educational facilities on white children? This group of social scientists found that these children learned to compare themselves unrealistically with Negro children --- not in the more basic standards of actual personal ability and achievement, but as arbitrary, absolute judgments. Negro children were to be thought of, not as human beings, but as objects of mistrust, suspicion, and spite. The learning of these attitudes fostered confusion, conflict, and moral cynicism among the white children. They were confused because they heard their parents discuss the brotherhood of man on one hand, and condemn all Negroes without a fair trial on the other. Many were in conflict because they just couldn't really believe that Negro children weren't human beings after all. It was easy for many of them to be morally cynical, because the principles of fair play were being taught to them by the same persons who, by supporting racial segregation, seemed to be behaving in a prejudiced and discriminating manner. And what personal choice does such a child have as to the manner in which his conflicts, confusions, and cynicism can be resolved? The child cannot help being hostile to Negroes, just as he cannot help having deep feelings of personal guilt. This distinguished group of scientists felt that while the white student was learning to read and write in his separate school, he was also learning to never be capable of understanding many of his fellow human beings who could

be conveniently grouped into categories of race, religion, or any other handy topic of derision. They were taught, indirectly, that bad labels could be substituted for clear thinking.

Secondly, what was the effect of separate educational facilities on Negro children? They learned their curriculum also. But there was education of a different kind as well. They grew up knowing that they are almost always segregated and kept apart from others who are treated with more respect by the society as a whole. What choice does such a child have as to the manner in which his feelings can be resolved? Once again, there is very little choice. There will be feelings of inferiority and some sense of personal humiliation. It will become very easy for these children, as they grow older, to see hostility and rejection even when they may not exist. But even those children who are strong, and who can cope with ordinary expressions of prejudice by regarding their tormenters as evil or misguided, will find it almost impossible to do the same with symbols of authority, the full force and authority of the State, the school, or school board. Separate educational facilities, according to this group of social scientists, somehow impress very deeply on young Negro children the fact that they are different, without the full blessing of the government under which they live, and not at all equal. As always, an educational system that has one dimension of democracy missing cannot do a good job in teaching democracy to its students. An eagle with one wing will never lead its baby eagles out of the nest.

During the winter of 1953-1954, the Supreme Court Justices hammered out a document which recognized, that of all the functions of state and local governments, education must rank first. It is the single most important reason in the twentieth century for having local government, and it should provide the very foundation of good citizenship. There could be no other reason for compulsory school attendance laws, and the massive expenditures for education which the States make each year. If the young American eagles were ever to learn how to fly, their procreators must also be able to fly on two wings. The eagle must be allowed to use both wings.

It was finally on May 17, 1954, that the Supreme Court spoke out once again in what will become another landmark of our century. Let me read you the last few lines of their official Decision, which is our principal topic here today:

"To separate Negro children 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... . We conclude that in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

The Supreme Court's Decision echoed what had become a national concern. They cited how education forges a child's future, and consequently how important it is immediately:

"Education is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment.

In these days, it is doubtful that any child may be reasonably expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms."

The position of the Supreme Court in the Spring of 1954, ten years ago, was briefly this: if children are expected to become responsible members of society, then they must not only learn about the ways of the community, they must also have the opportunity to participate in that community. And segregation does not make this possible.

What has happened since that Decision? While the Court had set forth the basic principles for future education in the United States in its first Decision, they remained largely words on paper for the next whole year. Then, on May 31, 1955, the Court spelled out the rules for putting these principles into practice --- thus giving teeth to a fine Ruling. What they said then has pretty much determined how much progress towards desegregation would take place in the next nine years. The responsibility for implementing the Decision was placed in the hands of the U. S. District Courts throughout the nation. The key words in the Court's instructions to the lower Districts were those of "good faith, practical flexibility, prompt and reasonable start, deliberate speed, and equitable principles."

The Supreme Court, in its just interpretation of the Constitution, was also wise. While it had ruled that segregation could not be the law anywhere in the land, they also permitted communities to work out their own solutions in accordance with local conditions --- as long as their plan was in good faith. We have different conditions here in Texas than they do in Alabama and Georgia, and the people in Missouri have a different atmosphere for integration than do those in Florida. Without the flexibility which the High Court gave to their interpretation, there might not have been integration anywhere in the South today. With it, there has been rapid progress in at least some areas, and massive wholesale and continued resistance virtually nowhere. In November, 1960, desegregation in public education penetrated into the Deep South for the first time.

For a few moments, now, I would like to review some of the events and progress of the past few years. I want to talk about some of the areas in which encouraging steps have been taken towards school desegregation, and about some of the facts which indicate that the future course of desegregation in years to come will be complete. But before I do that, I want to mention some of the ways in which the decision of the Supreme Court has been resisted, about some of the hurdles that have been thrown in front of the forward progress towards democracy in education.

First of all, there has been economic pressure. In Orangeburg, South Carolina, for example, the merchants refused to sell to Negroes when a plan for desegregation had been drawn up. Banks refused to give loans. But the merchants, in turn, were boycotted by Negro citizens and students from two local colleges. There have been many examples like this throughout the South. It is clear that Negroes will not be the only ones to suffer from such reprisals. It is also equally clear that economic measures will not preserve segregated educational facilities forever.

There has also, regrettably, been violence. During 1955 there were 52 cases of violence attributable to the efforts resulting from the Supreme Court Decision in 12 Southern States, including three murders. No arrests have yet been made in any of these cases. Up through 1959 the total had risen to 530 instances of violence and intimidation attributable to increased tension because of the Decision. Arrests were made in 32 of these cases. Through 1963, there was violence in connection with school desegregation in places like New Orleans and the University of Georgia, and many others that we have heard and know about. During this period, 245 new instances were recorded in the 12 Southern States. Two facts stand out in the midst of all this violence: the number of incidents has been on the increase in recent years, and so has the number of arrests. Violence comes from the uneducated, from the half-educated. It comes from the children of the segregated system who grew up confused, not knowing how they can be racists and christians at the same time. Violence is the last resort of the segregationist who recognizes that things are not going in his favor. It comes from panic, and as it increases we may be confident that the day of integration is drawing near. There have even been assassinations by people who know only how to use bad labels and violence, instead of clear thinking.

Another method that has been resorted to by those who seek to inhibit the implementation of the Court's Decision has been political. Some have considered the abolition of public schools. This method has been attempted in parts of Arkansas and Virginia. But the courts have ruled that a state cannot close one school or a portion of a school and allow other schools in the state to remain open. This leaves the alternative of an entire state without public schools, or some desegregation. Many different types of so-called "private" schools have been tried throughout the South, but lawyers generally agree that this action will be unconstitutional if they are financed in any way, directly or indirectly, by the State. It was a Federal Court which prevented the turning over of the Central High School physical plant in Little Rock to a private school group. Prince Edward County in Virginia closed its public schools in 1959 and established private schools for its white students only. They operated entirely on private funds for one year, and then were financed by the State. This case is now in the federal courts, and its outcome is almost certain. No such private schools can be maintained by public funds. Another type of political action has been the proposal not to support desegregated schools with funds. This was declared unconstitutional in 1960. There has also been coercive measures, generally aimed at teachers who are members of the NAACP. Several of these cases are now in the courts, and the rulings will almost certainly be against those who seek to force and pressure.

The chief political weapon of many southern states, however, has been a new application of the pupil-assignment laws. In one sense, this is encouraging --- since this type of action cannot delay integration. At the extreme, it will serve only to minimize the total effect of desegregation. In another sense, however, it is very frustrating because it is legal unless grossly misused. The method varies from state to state, but generally it is based on some very intangible factor, such as "character, health, or welfare." It has been struck down as being unconstitutional in Virginia and Louisiana, where it was used on a wholesale basis and without pretense. But if those who oppose integration use this method cautiously, they can achieve a partial

realization of their desires: they can have their educational system integrate only as far as is absolutely necessary, without going any further. It has been generally admitted that pupil assignment tests within any particular school to determine learning levels has merit. And for this reason, misuse of this principle will be difficult to bring out into the open. It has just been since the Supreme Court Decision that these tests have been used for the general admission of students to a particular school plant.

Now that we have examined some of the negative aspects of the last ten years, let me turn to the more positive facts on which we can place our confidence. We have chosen for our convention theme this year the topic: "Dimensions of Democracy in Education." It is a good subject, but how much is it hope rather than reality? How many of our great expectations will turn out to be actual experiences? How far will liberty travel in its road to the classroom? It is time that we take a long, careful, deliberate look at what has actually happened in the last ten years of our lives. It is time that we take an inventory of democratic education in America today.

At the time of the Supreme Court Decision in 1954, there were 17 states which had policies of segregation in their public schools. By 1957, five of these states reversed their long-standing customs and adopted school desegregation as a matter of official policy. These states, Maryland, Missouri, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and West Virginia, moved at different speeds in implementing their new decision. Some progressed more rapidly than others. But every one demonstrated "good faith" and equitable principles in initiating programs of desegregation.

West Virginia moved very rapidly in its program. The local school boards had the backing of state officials in following the Supreme Court's Decision, so that during the 1956-1957 school year only three small counties adjacent to the State of Virginia retained school segregation. As one newspaper in Charleston stated, "Segregation is about over in the Mountain State."

Missouri also moved quickly. The state had a good foundation on which to build an efficient and effective desegregation program since the color barrier had been falling there for many years. Private schools in St. Louis had been desegregated since 1947, seven years prior to the Supreme Court Decision. By 1956, 85 percent of Missouri's Negro school children were attending desegregated schools.

Oklahoma had segregated schools until the summer of 1955. School Boards were advised then that after the next session in 1955-1956, state funds would no longer be provided for the extra expense of maintaining separate Negro schools. The pace was very rapid during that one year, and by 1957 only 14 percent of the schools had not been desegregated.

Maryland has moved steadily, although perhaps more slowly, towards desegregation since 1955. While the policy of state officials has been one of good faith in carrying out the Supreme Court Decision, some areas of the state are still having difficulties today -- ten years later. Baltimore, for example, desegregated its public schools almost immediately. However resistance built up, until September of 1955 when it threatened to flair up in violence and

picketing. A firm policy by school and law enforcement officials ended the demonstrations, however, and only periodically is the issue raised. Desegregation is a fact now in most portions of the State.

In Kentucky, the official state policy of carrying out the Court's Ruling came into occasional difficulty in several instances. Mobs harassed students in Clay and Strugis and a school in Henderson was boycotted. Protection was provided for Negro students by the National Guard. Although some Kentucky schools are still being harassed by resistance groups, the firm policy of state officials is assuring Negro children of equal educational facilities.

Of the twelve remaining southern states that had policies of school segregation when the Supreme Court met in 1954, five have experienced mixed degrees of success. These five states, Arkansas, Delaware, Tennessee, North Carolina, and our own Texas, have seen many extreme contrasts. Just as there is no longer a "solid" South, because of geographical, economic, and cultural diversity, individual states are "divided" as to how they accept the Supreme Court Decision. All of the 17 states that had an original policy of segregation vary in their internal racial attitudes, but only these five have not actually settled on racial policies that could be imposed statewide. Different areas in these states have moved in opposite directions.

Arkansas has been a state with extremes. Even before famous Little Rock, the state had experienced both peaceful, rapid desegregation as well as bitter, difficult resistance. The communities of Fayetteville and Charleston enrolled Negroes in formerly white schools almost immediately after the Supreme Court Decision. There was little adverse reaction. However, when the community of Hoxie desegregated the white high school, the school board was subjected to extreme pressures by pro-segregationist groups.

Almost everyone is familiar with some of the major events at Central High School in Little Rock. Briefly, a Federal Court approved a plan of desegregation submitted by the school board. But when school opened, Governor Orval Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guardsmen and prevented Negro children from entering Central High School. At the direction of a Federal Court, the Governor withdrew the troops. But the damage had been done. Tempers had built up to such a pitch that a mob gathered around the school and at least one Negro was physically attacked. President Eisenhower then sent United States troops to Little Rock to enforce the Court order. The Negro children continued at Central High School for the remainder of the year, after which the school was closed for 12 months. It was reopened by Federal Court Order, and then the school board, because of local pressure, began to control desegregation by pupil assignment. Negro students, however, are still attending Central High, and many have become graduates since the world-famous crisis a few years ago. But Little Rock is not too significant in itself. It is important, however, because it caused two changes in the progress towards democracy in education. First of all, the crisis slowed up voluntary action toward desegregation by school boards, since it was the original plan submitted by the Little Rock school board in good faith that had caused all the ruckus. Secondly, it has spurred court action by Negroes attempting to break down segregation in schools. Both effects have been felt nationally.

Delaware is divided by a canal into a northern, industrial area and a southern, agricultural area. Here the northern counties have experienced virtually no problems in desegregating, while the southern counties have had

no end of problems. Overall, however, about 60 percent of the state's Negro school children have the benefit of desegregated classrooms.

Tennessee is another state in which progress has been widely varied. Clinton experienced violent pro-segregationist flare-ups for some time. Clinton High School has remained desegregated in spite of the fact that most of the original school was destroyed by a bomb. The Nashville school board launched a limited desegregation plan, and the city was promptly hit by mob action and violence. Local police handled the situation, and although the school board has not been firm in its policy, it is continuing to adhere to the policy set forth by the Federal Court. Other Tennessee communities are cautiously following Nashville's policy towards desegregation.

Four years ago, there were three North Carolina cities that moved towards limited desegregation. These cities, notably Charlotte, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem, enrolled a few Negroes in formerly all-white schools under the state's pupil assignment law. Other North Carolina cities have since followed this precedent, and "token desegregation," as the program has come to be called, is spreading slowly. This plan as practiced by North Carolina was designed to minimize the extent of desegregation, to lessen the chance of violence, and to keep North Carolina in the column of "progressive" states in the eyes of the nation. Public school desegregation has been voluntary in the State, but under the pupil assignment law, the state's school systems will be plagued with court cases for a long time to come.

Of the remaining seven states that I have not yet discussed, two may be regarded as having moved from a cautious, "wait and see" attitude to one of resistance to the Supreme Court Decision. Since the Court's 1955 Ruling, however, these two states -- Florida and Virginia -- have followed divergent paths.

Florida resisted through 1959, when the first, dubious, example of desegregation took place at the Orchard Villa School in Dade County. This community had 490 Negro children with 8 whites. Since then, however, state officials, fearing violence and massive demonstrations, have adopted the policy of North Carolina with its "token" desegregation program.

The State of Virginia, on the other hand, has swung from a policy of merely passive resistance to that of active, wholesale, resistance to the Supreme Court Decision. Virginia was the first state to defy the federal government and close its schools rather than desegregate. Recently, however, the state has swung back towards more passive resistance, also adopting the North Carolina program of token desegregation. That is the program today.

There are five states that have roots so deep in their history that they must be regarded as the hard-core standouts. In all of the other 12 states that had official policies of segregation at the time of the Supreme Court Decision in 1954, there was either rapid progress being made or else some hope for future progress because there were large numbers of dissenters from official state policy.

The heart of the old plantation system stretches through the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. This is where the planter-aristocracy has its deepest roots. Leaders in this section controlled the Southern political arena in the Civil War days; and although much of the rest of the South felt little loyalty to this cotton-producing

and slave society, the plantation South used its political and economic power to build the solid South of the Confederacy. While there have been great changes in economy and population in the last one hundred years, there has been little political change. Despite population losses to modern cities and a gradual shift to a more industrialized economy, the "black-belt" portions of these hard-core states still retain political control. In many cases, the distribution of seats in the state legislature remains virtually unchanged since the turn of the century. In these five states, the future of desegregation has been exceedingly dim in the past.

The picture, even here, has become somewhat brighter in recent years, however. While pro-segregation groups have mushroomed and the state governments have firmly committed their states to last-ditch stands against desegregation, there have been some signs of progress in the past ten years. Louisiana, for example, declined to utilize last-ditch methods when its legal maneuvers proved powerless against the federal courts. Although only a handful of white children attended a public school with one Negro child in a New Orleans school in 1960-1961, the state and the segregationist elements failed to prevent the beginnings of public school desegregation in the state, meager though these beginnings were.

Georgia is another example where massive resistance apparently has become too great a price to pay for segregation. Following brief rioting at the University of Georgia in 1961 when two Negro students were admitted to the school, the state legislature struck down the state's segregation laws and instituted local option, pupil assignment, and tuition grant plans. This action was an historic reversal for the state which, at one time, was expected to close public schools to forestall desegregation.

The prospect for these hard-core states is that of a long, long process -- with cases being fought out in the courts, system by system. As experiences are gradually accumulated, however, court-ordered desegregation will become increasingly less difficult to obtain. And once a firm foothold is established in these states, then voluntary desegregation will move even more rapidly in other Southern areas.

All that remains now is to ask what the future will bring. At its worst, the movement of democracy within education has an unknown tomorrow. But we do know, as surely as we can know anything about the next day, that the movement towards full desegregation will not be easily forestalled. There are great and powerful forces at work in support of the Supreme Court Justices' conclusion that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place." There are commanding public voices speaking out the great irony of our democracy, which has only a partial education to offer many of its students, only a one-sided viewpoint of our culture to give to its future citizens.

The desegregation process is being pushed in all areas of the United States, and a variety of forces will continue and sustain this push. In the past ten years, successful school desegregation has become a proven fact in many communities that had a tradition of segregation previously. Many, many more are now in the progress of trying desegregation programs. We are now, after ten years, in the middle of a broad transition period that will probably continue for several years yet to come. But all we have to do in order to be confident that the trend will continue, and that no ground will be lost, is to take a brief sampling of the

reasons why the movement must continue and grow. It will continue, if for no better reason, than that it is now clearly and undeniably the law of our land: and no group, no matter how intensive their self-interests, will prevail for long against the weight and power of the United States. Nearly every civic, religious, and social organization in the nation supports the principle of integrated public schools. And certainly the spirit behind the Supreme Court Decision is growing. There is overwhelming evidence that this decision is indeed the turning point for the Negro in American public education.

Of all things, I am certain of this. History will mark it. The year, 1964, was a multiple anniversary in the annals of America's education. It was a time of persistent, quiet, revolution. Marked clearly on the pages of time will be the demand of 20 million United States' Negroes for payment of a promissory note that is now more than a century-old, a document called the Emancipation Proclamation.