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The Preservation of Segregation:
The Philosophical Necessity of White Academies in Mississippi

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The Legal Education Advisory Committee

In May 1954, the Supreme Court's ruling on *Brown vs. The Board of Education* changed the face of education across the nation. This did not have an immediate impact on Mississippi's movement towards desegregation, which was so "deliberate" as to be imperceptible. The Legal Education Advisory Committee was established by the state legislature that same year. Their goal: to maintain segregation. In 1954 alone, they were successful in passing more than forty statutes to that end (Kinsey, 2000).

The State Sovereignty Commission

Two years later, James P. Coleman ran for governor on a platform of school segregation. He won. One of his first acts was to create the State Sovereignty Commission. "The Sovereignty Commission was composed of twelve appointed members, including state lawmakers and members appointed by the governor. Ex-officio members included the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the House of Representatives and the attorney general. The commission was budgeted \$250,000, which it used to develop a network of investigators, spies, and informants to keep the state aware of those the state felt threatened Mississippi's segregated society" (Kinsey, 2000). The Commission had a strong influence on the media. It also used a network of spies to infiltrate and generate files on liberal groups like the NAACP and the Mississippi Progressive Voter's League (Katagiri, 2001). Both groups were 'proven' to be Socialist.

The Commission's literature used phrases like "the Southern way of life" in order to avoid legal confrontation with the NAACP. In 1960, Ross Barnett became governor.

One of his top priorities was to strengthen the State Sovereignty Commission. The expanded Commission provided money for Citizen's Councils. Unlike his predecessor, who saw the Commission's role as investigative and covert, Barnett envisioned the Commission's role as evangelical, bringing the good news of segregation to the world (Hopkins, 2002). Under his leadership, the Commission worked on carrying the manipulative, pro-segregationist "Message from Mississippi" to the northern states through high-profile speakers, a tactic meant to bolster public relations. Barnett also compiled a list of 'subversives,' those being defined as individuals active in, or even sympathetic to, the struggle for civil rights (Katagiri, 2001). Years went by and the governorship changed hands. As the civil rights movement gained momentum, the State Sovereignty Commission's activities, many of which were legally questionable investigations, were curtailed. Perhaps in order to gain legitimacy, the group began to address members of pro-violent white supremacy groups such as the KKK as 'agitators' just as much as it labeled anti-war demonstrators and black nationalists as 'subversives.' In 1973, William Waller killed the Commission. After 21 years in court, the group's records were unsealed and made open to the public in 1998 (Hopkins, 2002).

THE CCC

Increasing pressure from the federal government forced Mississippians to be creative in order to avoid integration. White Citizen's Councils were founded in order to generate local and state funds for the foundation of private academies. The very first was founded on July 11th, 1954, in Indianola by Robert Patterson, who is still active in what is now called the Council of Conservative Citizens, or the CCC. Within a year, there were

253 Citizen's Councils all over the nation. Like the Sovereignty Commission, the Citizen's Councils distinguished themselves from more violent, 'lower-class' supremacy groups such as the KKK. The Councils used rhetoric in order to obliquely purport a blatantly racist agenda: keeping white children safe (read: separate) from black ones.

In the widely popular tract *Black Monday*, Mississippi State Supreme Court Justice Thomas P. Brady wrote, "Whenever and wherever the white man has drunk the cup of black hemlock, whenever and wherever his blood has been infused with the blood of the negro, the white man, his intellect and culture have died." Many of Brady's readers were state representatives, attorneys, local bank presidents and prominent farmers, leading historian Robert Hart to observe that "most membership lists read like a Chamber of Commerce" (*Anti-defamation League*, 2005).

The existing CCC is a direct descendant of the original Councils. The message is the same, and the group relies heavily on fear tactics, focusing on anti-white 'hate crimes' and the negative effects of inter-racial dating, which threatens to turn the US population into a "slimy brown mass of glop" (*ADL*, 2005). Among one of the most popular speakers and an honorary member was Mississippi's own Senate majority leader Trent Lott, whose column appears in the group's newspaper, *The Citizen's Informer*. According to the CCC, 34 of its members are also members of the Mississippi State Legislature.

Private Education

A spokesman for the CCC, Bill Lord writes that "private education is for families willing to sacrifice in order to educate their children in an atmosphere free of social experiments and who want to associate with persons of like persuasion."

The key catch-phrases here are “social experiments,” meaning integration, and “like persuasion,” meaning white. Although most private schools claim to espouse a non-discrimination policy publicly, their nominal integration (one or two scholarships per school) is merely cosmetic, effectively allowing academies to preserve their non-profit tax-exempt statuses. Recently a good deal of legislature has been introduced regarding the concept of vouchers. Sometimes called scholarships, vouchers are basically income-tax credits designed to make private education more affordable to those wealthy enough to be paying an income-tax in the first place. Supporters of this legislature argue that it is unfair to make parents who send their children to private schools ‘pay twice’ for education. From 1997 to the present, there have been numerous bills introduced that were basically ways of subsidizing private education and alleviating this ‘double-tax,’ but an overwhelming majority of those bills were killed by the democratic (aka “dixiecratic”) majority legislature (Heritage Foundation, 2005).

Private schools (or white academies) are most popular in black majority school districts. Over 80% of black students in Mississippi attend segregated schools. Traditionally, though the majority of public school students are black, most Public School Administrators and Board members are white. These members protect the interests of the white communities, not the interests of the public schools. Whites that act as school board members often send their children to white academies, even being active in both

the private and the public schools. Essentially, this is a form of sabotage—white board members aren't there to improve the public schools, they are focused on keeping public education cheap for taxpayers, thus compensating for the necessary expense of private education (Lambright, 2001). Many believe that the inadequacies of the public school system are entirely deliberate, and that the majority of school boards actually desire to retain a low standard of education. Public schools in the Delta, especially, suffer from lack of books, materials, and teachers, but it's questionable as to whether these things are even a priority.

Delta school boards have a habit of operating with tightly controlled agendas, inconvenient meeting schedules, and invisible budget processes. School board members often serve at the behest of white residents whose children attend the private academies. In some schools, student discipline is unusually harsh and is used as a way to keep parents and civic activists in line, as well. A child who exercises too much initiative or displays too much curiosity might be beaten or suspended as a "troublemaker." Parents and teachers who hold unauthorized meetings or otherwise challenge the status quo can be threatened with job loss and retribution against family members (Null, 2004).

Are the boards in place to improve the schools or to keep them inexpensive for the white gentry? Mississippi has come a long way, but racially, it remains the least progressive state in the union. There is a large cultural, economic, and educational disparity between black and white. The private prison system is the fastest growing industry in the state, and its inmates are predominately black. Like third world sweatshops, the prison system relies on cheap labor to allow competitive pricing and higher profit margins (Katagiri, 2001). Arguably, better schools would keep young blacks out of prison, and that would be bad for business.

Whether or not this is the case, one can see the trouble that the state's whites went through to avoid integration. The presupposition of racial superiority does not allow for an egalitarian approach to the educational system. This alone—the idea that integration is threatening to the “Southern way of life” and the preservation of cultural identity—is indicative of a major philosophical gap between Mississippi and the rest of the union.

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Segregationist Strategies Circumventing Federal Edicts:

- 1) The Legal Education Advisory Committee (1954)—founded to pass legislation counter to the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. the Board of Education* ruling.
- 2) The State Sovereignty Commission (1956)—initially modeled after the FBI in order to undermine the civil rights struggle through investigation and propaganda.
- 3) The Conservative Citizen's Council (1954)—founded to privatize education for whites through the generation of local and state funds. Today, a bastion of neo-conservatism.
- 3) White Academies—the state's original educational system, they became a necessary expenditure in the face of enforced integration, booming in predominately black districts.