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Editorial Comment

WHY NEGROES ARE OPPOSED TO SEGREGATED REGIONAL SCHOOLS

On December 13, 1948, it was announced in the daily press that the Regional Council for Education, meeting in conjunction with the Southern Governors' Conference in Savannah, Georgia, had approved plans and allocated funds to begin regional cooperation in graduate and professional education in the South. This action, the result of a number of preparatory conferences, was taken to meet a threefold problem faced by the South. *First*, as is true in many states of the Union, as well as in adjoining states in the same region, there are a number of duplications in plant, equipment and personnel which could be greatly reduced, if not eliminated, by greater cooperation among the higher institutions in the same states or in the several states comprising the region. *Second*, in addition to this "normal" duplication there is the abnormal duplication resulting from the policy and practice of racial segregation which theoretically requires the establishment of two "separate-but-equal" systems of schools, thereby further intensifying the "normal" problem. *Third*, there has been and is inadequate provision of certain grad-

uate and professional facilities, for both racial groups, because of the inability, in most cases, (and the inadvisability, in others) of the individual states to provide adequate educational services in certain areas such as forestry, veterinary medicine, and the like.

This recent news release is the announcement of the fact that the South through the Southern Governors' Conference has taken the first concrete step in the direction of meeting these problems on a regional basis. The Regional Council for Education, with former Governor Millard F. Caldwell of Florida, as chairman; Clyde A. Erwin, State Superintendent of Education in North Carolina, as vice-chairman; and H. C. Byrd, President of the University of Maryland as secretary-treasurer, has been set up to work out ways and means of providing certain graduate and professional education on a regional basis.

Unfortunately, the Southern Governors' Conference and the Council itself have decided that such regional cooperation will be set up and administered on a segregated basis. Thus, regional services will be provided for

Negroes and whites separately. It is this segregated aspect of the plan to which Negroes object, and with greater unanimity than I have noted in some time. In an effort to ascertain the reasons for this near unanimity of opposition against segregated regional cooperation in higher education, I have made some extensive inquiries, and have found that the bases of this opposition are not only sound but persuasive.

The first phase of this opposition appeared at the Hearings, held on March 12 and 13, 1948, by a sub-committee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, on S. J. Res. 191. This resolution embodied the request of the governors of 14 Southern states for "the consent of Congress to a compact entered into between the Southern States at Tallahassee, Florida, on February 8, 1948."¹ In addition to a number of telegrams and letters, representatives of some ten or twelve organizations appeared in opposition to the granting of Congressional consent to this compact, because it contemplated the setting up of segregated regional educational services. No one was opposed to the compact on any other grounds. All of the opposition was centered around the segregation aspect. It was argued that Congressional consent was not necessary to do what was contemplated under the compact, since the State of Virginia and the Meharry Medical College had had such an agreement for four years, and the State University of West Virginia and the University of Virginia

had also had a similar contract for an equally long time. Thus it was insisted that the main purpose (if not purpose, certainly the effect) of this request was to obtain the implicit consent of Congress to the policy of separate schools, thereby giving aid and comfort to the proponents of segregation when that issue came before the U. S. Supreme Court.

Apparently this argument was partially persuasive with the Senate Committee because it recommended that the compact be approved with the following amendment: "Provided, That the consent of Congress to this compact shall not in any way be construed as an endorsement of segregation in education."² However, when the Compact reached the Senate, some senators thought that the Committee's amendment did not go far enough, and thus a further amendment was proposed prohibiting the establishment of segregated schools or services under the Compact. The Senate after several hours of debate, effected a compromise between denying assent to the compact altogether, and approving it with an amendment prohibiting segregated schools, by sending it back to the Committee—thus killing any chance of further consideration by the 80th Congress.

In addition to the organizations (the majority of which were Negro) which appeared in opposition to S. J. Res. 191, several organizations have recently reiterated their opposition in resolutions passed at their annual meetings. Just to mention a few: The

¹Hearings before a Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eightieth Congress, Second Session, on S. J. Res. 191.

²Report to Accompany S. J. Res. 191. Senate. Report No. 1126. Eightieth Congress, 2d Session.

Conference of Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges which met in Washington in October, 1948, reaffirmed its opposition to segregated regional schools and appointed a committee to study the question and recommend such action as seemed necessary. The Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes which met in Wilmington, N. C., December 8-10, 1948, not only reaffirmed its opposition to segregated regional schools and services, but "resolved that this Association . . . will refuse to cooperate in this endeavor as long as the principle and practice of racial segregation are adhered to." Moreover, numerous Negro educators in the South have declined to serve on the study committees which have been set up by the Council to explore certain problems connected with the project. They have refused to stultify or prostitute themselves by cooperating in an enterprise which they feel is both unconstitutional and inconsiderate, if not unjust; and by cooperating on a level which is so far removed from policy-making as to be futile so far as affecting policy is concerned. Thus, it would appear that most of the opposition is persistent and calculated; rather than sporadic and misinformed.

In the first place, in my analysis of the opposition, I have been impressed by the fact that an overwhelming majority of Negroes and many Southern white people have come to the conclusion that you cannot have "separate but equal" educational provisions even in theory, and that least of all is it possible in the graduate and professional fields. They agree wholly with the conclu-

sion of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, that the very act of segregation is per se an act of discrimination. Thus, they are opposed to segregated regional educational services because they are inherently discriminatory, and therefore patently unconstitutional. Moreover, it is noted that nowhere in the country can one produce a single example where "separate but equal" educational opportunity is provided by public funds. In each of the 17 states which require segregation by law, there is at least one state-supported Negro college. In no one of these instances is the Negro college equal to the comparable public higher institution for white students. Accordingly, Negroes conclude that these states are either unable or unwilling to provide "separate but equal" educational opportunity, and they do not see how separate regional schools will give them any more equality.

In the second place, it is the further contention of those who oppose segregated regional schools that not only is it impossible to provide "separate but equal" educational opportunity in principle, but what is more important, segregated regional graduate and professional programs are unnecessary in practice, and represent a backward step in the educational progress of the South. A dozen or more instances are cited where integrated education is taking place in the South, with everyone the better off for the experience. Moreover, white Southern educators and students, particularly in the graduate and professional fields, have indicated in numerous polls and in other ways that not only is there but little

opposition to the admission of Negroes to the universities now attended almost exclusively by white students, but that the most economical thing to do is to provide for such integration. This is particularly true of the states in the upper South. Negroes are therefore opposed to any plan to extend inevitably inferior segregated education across state lines, because (1) it is unconstitutional; (2) it will make more difficult resort to the courts to get redress; and (3) it will impede the present trend toward integration.

In the third place, it is maintained that even if it were possible to have "separate but equal" regional graduate and professional schools in theory, they would not only be uneconomical but unattainable in actual practice. As an example of the uneconomical aspect of segregated regional schools, a recent action of the Council is instructive. It has been proposed that the Alabama Polytechnic Institute at Auburn, Alabama, and the University of Georgia at Athens, Georgia provide training in veterinary medicine for white students in the Southeastern states; and that Tuskegee Institute, also in Alabama, provide veterinary medical training for the Negroes in the 17 Southern states. At a conference held on this question by the Council on October 6, 1948, it was reported that: "Representatives from all three schools stated that they face major problems in securing adequate staff and adequate clinical material. . . . An additional difficulty is the fact that API and Tuskegee must draw on the same geographic area for clin-

ical material."³ Here you not only have unnecessary duplication of facilities at API and Tuskegee, but even more important, you have direct competition for clinical material which is essential for the efficient operation of both. (In such competition it is clear that the Negro school at Tuskegee is likely to suffer more, as is usually the case.) To say the least, this is an example of uneconomical duplication which is inherent and inevitable in the practice of maintaining separate schools, and results in poorer education for both racial groups.

It is even more instructive to observe that "separate but equal" graduate work, for example, is unattainable in actual practice. While the Council has not made specific proposals concerning graduate education, any unbiased examination of the practical possibilities of segregated regional graduate work, as far as Negroes are concerned, reveals that it would be practically impossible to establish even *one* regional graduate school for Negroes which could equal any one of several in state universities for white students in the South at the present time. (And I might add parenthetically that it would be foolish to attempt it.) For example, graduate work is offered in at least one public institution for white students in each of the 17 Southern states in an average of 50 different fields; and graduate work leading to the doctorate is of-

³"Minutes of Representatives from Alabama Polytechnic Institute, the University of Georgia, Tuskegee Institute, and the Regional Council for Education on Regional Services in Veterinary Medicine, Board of Regents Room, 20 Ivy St., Atlanta, Georgia, October 6, 1948."

ferred by at least one public institution for white students in each of 12 states. From the point of view of teachers alone (white and Negro), it would be impossible to staff even *one* regional university for Negroes which would be competent to give graduate work in half of the fields now offered to white students in the average Southern state, to say nothing about providing a program leading to the doctorate which could by any stretch of the imagination be equal to the work now given at the University of Texas, the University of North Carolina, the University of Missouri, or the University of Oklahoma, just to mention a few.

Other examples could be given in other fields but these two are sufficient to illustrate the point that even if it were granted (which it is not) that you could have "separate but equal" graduate and professional work in theory, it is not possible to do so in actual practice. And what is more, the Regional Council for Education being composed of intelligent people must be aware of this fact. Thus, when proposals are made which contemplate setting up segregated regional institutions or services for Negroes, there is no other conclusion to which Negroes can validly come, except that there is no intention on the part of the proponents of this plan to provide Negroes with equal educational opportunities; that this latest move (in addition to whatever benefits which may be gained by white students) is merely another scheme to evade the constitutional mandate that Negroes be given equal educational opportunity; and that the end-effect will be to in-

crease the disparity in the provisions which now obtains.

In view of the persistence of the Regional Council in its plans to set up segregated regional services and in view of its protestations that it is not interested in the extension of segregation, but rather in providing better education for everyone,* it seems desirable to explore this point a step further. Implicit in the arguments of Governor Caldwell and others before the Senate sub-committee which held hearings on S. J. Res. 191 last spring, as well as in the subsequent expositions of the Regional Council, is the following line of reasoning: Regional schools will provide greater educational opportunity than schools supported by the individual states. Since we have separate Negro schools in the Southern states, segregated regional schools will provide greater educational opportunity than the present Negro separate schools in the individual states. Hence, Negroes would be short-sighted to oppose segregated regional schools.

Curiously enough, only a handful of Negro educators have professed to see enough merit in this argument to go along with it, and all of them, admittedly, have ulterior motives in doing so. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of Negroes and their white friends have categorically rejected this proposition for several reasons, of which the following are the most important.⁴

First, it is pointed out that this argument is based upon the invalid as-

⁴I have not discussed the case of Meharry here, although it belongs in the same category, because it is an exceptional instance, and its inclusion would confuse the basic issue.

groes should have equal educational opportunity. It also knows that such opportunity can not be provided under a segregated regional plan; in fact, the Council makes no claim that equal opportunity can or will be provided under its scheme of regional cooperation. Negroes not only reject the position which is implicit in the Council's plan, but resent the "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude that goes along with it. They are pretty certain that it would be shortsighted to "take it" and they feel that there are other alternatives to that of "leave it."

Why are Negroes opposed to segregated regional graduate and professional work? The answer briefly is that they are opposed only to the segregated aspect of it. They have no objection to and see considerable advantage in regional services which are based upon a principle which looks forward to a greater educational future for the South, rather than backward to a decade or more ago. More specifically, Negroes are opposed to segregated regionalism, (1) because they are convinced that equal educational opportunity can not be provided for Negroes under the theory of "separate but equal," and thus they refuse to cooperate in any

plan which is so patently and inherently discriminatory in its very conception. (2) Negroes are convinced by recent events and the present climate of public opinion that segregated graduate and professional work in the South is unnecessary, and constitutes a backward step in the educational progress of the South. (3) Negroes have concluded that even if "separate but equal" educational opportunity were at all possible in theory, it would be definitely uneconomical and actually unattainable in practice. (4) Empirical evidence obtained during the past ten years has convinced Negroes that the old cliché—a half loaf is better than no bread—as far as segregated graduate and professional work is concerned, is fallacious. The extension of grossly inferior graduate and professional work, and particularly at the expense of the undergraduate program, is shortsighted—so much so, that *no* segregated graduate and professional work for the time being is better than what is contemplated. However, Negroes are still hoping that the Regional Council for Education will reconsider its decision and set up regional services on a sound and constructive basis.

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