

EDUCATION IN DESEGREGATION: COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF THE
DESEGREGATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN MISSISSIPPI

by
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ABSTRACT

EDWARD ELAM MILLER IV: Education in Desegregation: Comparative Case Study of the Desegregation of Public Schools in Mississippi
(Under the direction of Dr. Melissa Bass)

It has been over 65 years since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was decided, however, with the massive number of Mississippi schools that remain segregated¹, one is led to believe that in Mississippi *with deliberate speed* actually means *never at all*. While a bit of a crude exaggeration, it begins to unpack a lot of truth. The inability for some communities to successfully desegregate their schools can be rooted in decisions that were made around their first attempts at desegregation. In October 1969, the courts mandated that “all deliberate speed” was no longer constitutionally permissible in *Alexander v. Holmes Board of Education*. The decisions and actions made between that October and before the schools had to reopen from winter break in January 1970 have had a lasting impact on the demographic makeup of the schools today. This research comparatively examines the cases of desegregation in both Oxford and Clarksdale, Mississippi.

Both Oxford and Clarksdale had to stop assigning students to schools based on race. However, Oxford was able to eventually create integrated public schools, while Clarksdale was not. Seeking an answer to why this occurred, this study concludes that Oxford’s city leadership and community efforts to promote public education paved the way to an ultimately successful desegregation of its schools.

¹ Groeger, Lena, Annie Waldman, and David Eads. "Miseducation." ProPublica. October 16, 2018. Accessed January 20, 2019. <https://projects.propublica.org/miseducation/>.

In contrast Clarksdale's inability to integrate their schools is rooted in fractured community leadership, the development of segregation academies and committees designed to promote them, and impact of the districts and attendance zones being drawn along geographic barriers that divide the city by race. Today, Clarksdale continues to confront its struggle with desegregation as its schools lack diversity and have been unable to integrate.

Although before desegregation, schools in both cities were comparable in many ways, differences in community support, leadership, and impacts of segregation academies have led to stark differences between the school districts.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.” - Chief Justice Earl Warren May 17th 1954

It has been over 65 years since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, however, with the massive number of Mississippi schools that remain segregated², one is led to believe that in Mississippi *with deliberate speed* actually means *never at all*. While this is a bit of a crude exaggeration, it begins to unpack a lot of truth. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruled that state laws establishing racial segregation in schools is unconstitutional and, following its predecessor, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka II*, it was clarified that districts must end the practice with all deliberate speed. This event started a fifteen year battle in the state of Mississippi, a battle I argue is still taking place today. Mississippi used virtually every legal and legislative strategy to delay the implementation of the ruling³. City and school district leaders across the state knew about the ruling, but believed there was no need to plan as it would never happen in Mississippi⁴.

² Eckes, Suzanne E. "The Perceived Barriers to Integration in the Mississippi Delta." *The Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 2 (2005): 159-73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034541>.

³ Adams, Natalie G., and James Harold Adams. *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. Jackson: (University Press of Mississippi, 2018), 2288.

⁴ Adams and Adams. *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. (2018).

This belief by city leaders came to a sudden stop in October 1969, when the Supreme Court ruled in *Alexander v. Holmes Board of Education* that all deliberate speed was no longer constitutionally allowed. “Under explicit holdings of this Court the obligation of every school district is to terminate dual school systems at once and to operate now and hereafter only unitary schools.” Oxford, Clarksdale, and 31 other Mississippi districts had to be desegregated before the end of Christmas break⁵.

With little to no guidance from the state or the federal government, the local superintendents, principals, teachers, students, business leaders, and various other members of each community were left with hundreds of decisions that had to be made in order to open as a functioning desegregated schools before break was over⁶. By comparing the various decisions made by community members in Clarksdale and Oxford, I hope to gain insight on what has led one city to successful integration, while the other remains segregated today.

The purpose of this research is to study how Oxford was able to integrate its schools and Clarksdale was not. Many cities in Mississippi have schools that have remained segregated to this day⁷. This may occur due to a number of factors including district gerrymandering along racial and class lines, or segregation academies that act as a class and race magnet, leaving the technically desegregated public schools predominantly not integrated. One might be surprised to find some academies offer the same level of

⁵ Donnell Harrell (Former Clarksdale Municipal School District Superintendent), interviewed by Elam Miller, Clarksdale, MS, July 30, 2018.

⁶ Adams and Adams. *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. (2018).

⁷ Eckes "The Perceived Barriers to Integration in the Mississippi Delta." *The Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 2 (2005).

academic opportunity as the public schools, yet still attract white and upperclass students despite having tuition costs⁸. My research seeks to find out how decisions made at the start of desegregation have affected these schools today.

The purpose of this thesis shall be accomplished throughout the following chapters. The next chapter is the literature review, which grounds my research in a larger academic study while helping shape my methodology. In the methodology chapter, I outline my initial research plan. After this, the results chapter contains all data points gathered from the implementation of the plan. My largest chapter is the discussion chapter. This is where I highlight the key findings and interpret the information I provided in the previous chapter. My Conclusion chapter is where I will discuss the questions this research has raised and directions for future research.

⁸ Eckes "The Perceived Barriers to Integration in the Mississippi Delta." *The Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 2 (2005).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

My research and review of related studies began with the hope of better understanding the perpetuation of segregated schools. Through searching various databases, it became clear that recent research is heavily focused on vouchers and segregation in large urban areas. In an effort to find research most similar to my thesis, I determined three relevant categories: the presence and perception of private schools and how that impacts public schools, how school demographics impact parent choice, and lastly, a specific look into the various factors that impact school choice in Mississippi both today and throughout the history of school integration.

Prior to my research, through conversation, I learned that students who attended private schools did so because they believed the public schools were lower performing. Sarah and Christopher Lubienski challenged this as they examined the impact of private schools. Specifically, in “The Public School Advantage,” (2013) they found “Private schools have higher scores not because they are better institutions but because their students largely come from more privileged backgrounds that offer greater educational support.”⁹ While accounting for background the study showed gains in achievement at public institutions were as great, and often times greater, than the gains in achievement at the private school.¹⁰ This article not only dispels a myth, but is relevant to my own

⁹ Lubienski, Christopher A., and Sarah Theule Lubienski. *The Public School Advantage Why Public Schools Outperform Private Schools*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2014.

¹⁰ Lubienski and Lubienski, *The Public School Advantage Why Public Schools Outperform Private Schools*. (2014).

research by allowing me to confidently focus more on the societal aspects that impact school choice.

Ellen Goldring and Kristie J. Rowley examine the parent choice process in “Parent Preferences and Parent Choices, The Public-Private Decision about School Choice” (2006), focusing on the decision making process of parents whose children already attended a public elementary school. Not surprisingly, the study found that where there are no vouchers or other financial support to attend private schools, income is a main factor in determining consideration of a private school.¹¹ However, among parents who chose to send their children to a private school, the study showed that parents largely weren’t *pushed* away from the public school or dissatisfied with them. Instead, parents who could afford it were being *pulled* by the private schools and the perception that they have better parent involvement and communication.¹² Further, these results are particularly related to my research as the study examined parents in Nashville, Tennessee, a city in the south. While this research focused on the decision to leave public schools, my research will focus on what has led parents to make their initial schooling decision in towns that are scarred by a historically segregated past.

Dick Carpenter and Krista Kafer examine the historical impacts and tendencies of school choice decisions in the United States in “A History of Private School Choice” (2012). “Taking as its approach an examination of program creation, prominent school

¹¹ Goldring, Ellen, and Kristie J. Rowley. *Parent Preferences and Parent Choices, The Public-Private Decision about School Choice*. Accessed November 24, 2018.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.506.7014&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

¹² Goldring and Rowley, *Parent Preferences and Parent Choices, The Public-Private Decision about School Choice*, (November 24, 2018).

choice court cases, and school choice research, the article finds that the evolution of choice has been an iterative process in which legislatures and courts have established constitutionally acceptable structures and procedures of choice.” In regards to my research, without the courts, it is clear that many school districts in Mississippi might have never desegregated. This research is particularly useful due to its similar methodology to my own. Furthermore, it creates a better understanding of the background of school choice, while also giving insight into how other research has framed the historical analysis. Despite the similarities, my research focuses on a more specific area with unique racial issues.

Despite its vastly differing methodology and scope, looking deeper into how race and socioeconomic status impacts school choice, research by Steven Glazerman and Dallas Dotter in “Market Signals: Evidence on the Determinants and Consequences of School Choice from a Citywide Lottery” (2016) uncovered two results that are specifically related to my research. Through the use of rank ordered lists on school choice from more than 22,000 parents the research concluded that in general white parents do not send their children to schools where they will be a minority and confirmed the hypothesis that many white parents want “carefully curated integration, the kind that exposes white children to some peers of color but not too many.”¹³ This conclusion shows the realities of the impact demographics play in school choice. The research is

¹³ Glazerman, Steven, and Dallas Dotter. “Market Signals: Evidence on the Determinants and Consequences of School Choice From a Citywide Lottery.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 39, no. 4 (December 2017): 593–619. doi:10.3102/0162373717702964.

directly related to my own and is something to be aware of as Clarksdale has a significantly higher minority population by percentage than Oxford does today.

Similar research on the demographics of school choice by Gregorio Caetano and Vikram Maheshri also found that a tipping point is present in regard to how many minorities can be present at a public school before many white parents will opt out in Los Angeles schools.¹⁴ Their research, “School Segregation and the Identification of Tipping Behavior” (2016) uses a quantitative approach, however, by comparing the demographics of Clarksdale and Oxford I was able to determine if a demographic tipping point may be a cause of the lack of integration in Clarksdale.

*Choosing Homes, Choosing Schools*¹⁵ by Annette Lareau is an in depth study exploring how household location impacts school choice and vice-versa. Specifically, it explores what role school concerns play in the preferences of white and minority parents for particular neighborhoods. “There is a complex relationship between education, neighborhood social networks, and larger patterns of inequality.”¹⁶ Lareau draws on interviews with parents in three suburban neighborhoods to analyze school-choice decisions, a method similar to my own research. The research concluded that middle and upper class parents do not rely on active research, such as school tours or test scores. Instead, their decision-making is largely informal and passive, with most simply trusting

¹⁴ Caetano, Gregorio, and Vikram Maheshri. "School Segregation and the Identification of Tipping Behavior." *Journal of Public Economics*, 148 (2017): 115-35. doi:10.1016/j.jpubeco.2017.02.009.

¹⁵ Ewing, Eve L. "Choosing Homes, Choosing Schools: Residential Segregation and the Search for a Good School." Edited by Annette Lareau and Kimberly Goyette . New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2014. 328. *Harvard Educational Review* 85, no. 2 (2015): 279-293.

¹⁶ Ewing "Choosing Homes, Choosing Schools: Residential Segregation and the Search for a Good School." *Harvard Educational Review* 85, no. 2 (2015): 279-293.

advice from friends and others in their network. Similar to my research, this study aimed to show the impact social pressures from neighbors and networks have in deciding where parents send their children to school, however without the specific complications of Mississippi.

Suzanne E. Eckes was able to account for the complexities of Mississippi in her article, "The Perceived Barrier to Integration in the Mississippi Delta" (2005). Similar to my research, she focused on "identifying the barriers to educational integration in one Mississippi town."¹⁷ However, instead of giving a historical overview, her research focuses on the experience of the 2000s. Her work proves even more relevant as she addresses how de facto segregation in Mississippi Delta schools is vastly different than it is in the rest of the country, something previous articles reviewed have neglected. By interviewing more than 40 individuals, her research shows many white students "attend private academies that do not offer a greater educational opportunities than the predominantly black public schools."¹⁸ The article concluded the perceptions of safety, better academics, and lack of extracurricular opportunities are excuses, realized or not, used to mask the underlying racism involved in school choice. This conclusion is very similar to that of Sarah and Christopher Lubienski, previously discussed. I find Eckes's research especially relevant as it highlights white parents' choosing private schools over public schools, despite the private schools not being able to claim academic superiority.

¹⁷ Eckes, Suzanne E. "The Perceived Barriers to Integration in the Mississippi Delta." *The Journal of Negro Education* 74, no. 2 (2005): 159-73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034541>.

¹⁸ Eckes, *The Journal of Negro Education* (2005).

Immediately following the court ordered desegregation of schools in 1968, Robert L. Crain traveled across the United States to research the decisions made by communities in 15 different cities, seeking to compare and contrast decisions made in varying locations. In his book, the *Politics of School Integration*¹⁹, Crain looks at 8 northern and 7 southern cities. In comparison to other studies, this research is the earliest. It determines that there were few structures in place to help either northern or southern cities to easily desegregate. Furthermore, the book provides insight on how the South faced particular problems among communities, school boards, and school administrations. Its focus on identifying policy windows related to integration proved insightful. Its most relevant conclusion is the importance of garnering cross sector support from community and organizations alike²⁰.

William Bagwell reaches similar conclusions in his book, *School Desegregation in the Carolinas: Two Case Studies*²¹. Bagwell sought to uncover the specific intergroup relations that occurred between communities and desegregation decision makers and how that compared between two cities. The research concludes that certain similar factors do exist: specifically the factors of the social scene of each town played a greater role in successful desegregation than the overall social scene of the state²². Bagwell also concludes that a community's drive to preserve the public school system while achieving

¹⁹ Crain, Robert L. *The Politics of School Integration: Comparative Case Studies*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing, 1968.

²⁰ Crain, *The Politics of School Integration: Comparative Case Studies*. 1968.

²¹ Bagwell, William. "School Desegregation in the Carolinas: Two Case Studies." *The Journal of Southern History* 39, no. 1 (1973): 142. doi:10.2307/2206829.

²² Bagwell, William. "School Desegregation in the Carolinas: Two Case Studies." 1973.

integration was a greater indicator of success than measuring a state's commitment to helping integrate schools.

Increasing in specificity, Kenneth T. Andrews researched the creation of segregation academies in *Movement-Countermovement Dynamics and the Emergence of New Institutions: The Case of "White Flight" Schools in Mississippi*. Through its similarity in providing an analytic history of civil-rights and school-desegregation conflicts in Mississippi, I find this research to be especially relevant. The study concludes with three key findings relevant to my own: the formation of private schools occurs as a response to desegregation when there is a credible threat that desegregation will be implemented (implicitly signaling the "success" of the movement); when blacks have the demonstrated organizational capacity to make claims and voice protest within newly desegregated schools based on the legacy of prior mobilization; and when whites have the organizational and resource capacity to resist desegregation.²³ While this article discusses private school impact, it lacks any information on the countermovements of African Americans that took place. Despite this, the information it provides is extremely relevant to my study.

African American countermovements are specifically highlighted in "White Privilege, Black Burden: Lost Opportunities and Deceptive Narratives in School

²³ Andrews, Kenneth T. "Movement-Countermovement Dynamics and the Emergence of New Institutions: The Case of "White Flight" Schools in Mississippi." *Social Forces* 80, no. 3 (2002): 911-36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3086461>.

Desegregation in Claiborne County, Mississippi”²⁴. These countermovements include protests and pushes in direct opposition to the protests against integration. This article shows, at least for one Mississippi county, that the steps taken by both school and county leaders during school integration are directly correlated with student achievement today²⁵. This article relates to my research through its historical reflection through interviews. As stated in the conclusion, the value of this study is the hope that it can be used by the community to realistically engage with the community’s history to make it possible for both black and white to shift focus from a divided past to a shared future. Perhaps the most useful finding of this research is the comparison of achievement of students who attended the briefly integrated high school to the achievement of students who attended the segregated high school²⁶. This input data is useful in determining the success of students who integrated their public schools.

Through this review of the related literature, I have identified several important factors which contribute to the perpetuation of school segregation. First, the presence of private schools can both positively and negatively impact the surrounding public schools, and contrary to popular belief, public schools outperform or perform as well as private when demographics are accounted for. Additionally, the presence of a demographic tipping point and how that impacts school choice was highlighted in several articles.

²⁴ Crosby, Emilye. "White Privilege, Black Burden: Lost Opportunities and Deceptive Narratives in School Desegregation in Claiborne County, Mississippi." *The Oral History Review* 39, no. 2 (2012): 258-85. <http://www.jstor.org.umiss.idm.oclc.org/stable/41811721>.

²⁵ Crosby, Emilye. "White Privilege, Black Burden: Lost Opportunities and Deceptive Narratives in School Desegregation in Claiborne County, Mississippi." *The Oral History Review* 39, no. 2 (2012): 258-85. <http://www.jstor.org.umiss.idm.oclc.org/stable/41811721>.

²⁶ Crosby, *The Oral History Review* 39, no. 2 (2012)

Lastly, many authors identified societal pressures as often the biggest factor in the decision making process when cost is not under consideration. Drawing on this literature review, the focus of my research will be on comparing the desegregation of schools in two similar cities in order to highlight how the initial decisions made by community members following the *Alexander v. Holmes Board of Education* decision in 1969 continue to impact the schools today.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In line with my research goals, I conducted my research using qualitative methods. I focused my examination on comparatively analyzing two cities: Oxford and Clarksdale, Mississippi. In order to achieve this goal, I sought interviews from different people involved in education in these cities. Specifically, through the related research, I determined interviews with the following would be pertinent to my study: students and parents of students who went to school in either city, private and public school faculty, and city leaders. I then used the content from the interviews to gain insight and serve as a guide to finding other related sources as to why Clarksdale public schools and Oxford public schools vary so drastically today.

My research began with the process of selecting the Mississippi cities I would compare. Using related research as my guide, I wanted to find two cities with districts that were similar in size and demographics at the start of desegregation in Mississippi, yet vary drastically today.

I first selected a sample of 10 districts across the state of Mississippi to analyze. In order to better understand the nature of the districts, I used census data to find the total number of white and black people between ages 5-17 in the counties these cities belong to. I then found data from “Kids Count” that shows the total number of white and black students enrolled in the public school districts. Then I took the total number of white and black students in the school district and subtracted it from the total number of white and

black students in the county. This showed me the number of school aged children not enrolled in a public school in each area. After using this information to narrow the districts down to two I wanted to study, I then used *PrivateSchoolReview.com*²⁷ to find the private schools located in each county. I looked at the demographics of the private schools through the information provided through the various schools' websites. Since the most recent census was in 2010 and in that time Clarksdale's population has declined while Oxford's has grown, I instead used ProPublica's *Miseducation Database*²⁸.

According to the website, the ProPublica database is "based on civil rights data released by the U.S. Department of Education used to examine racial disparities in educational opportunities and school discipline."²⁹ It includes information on more than 96,000 individual public and charter schools and 17,000 districts to see how they compare with their counterparts. I was able to use this database to find the total number of students as well as the percentage of non white students for both Clarksdale and Oxford. I then multiplied the percentage of non-white students by the number of total students and was able to calculate the number of non-white students in the school districts.

I then used *PrivateSchoolReview.com*³⁰ to get demographic data on the number of students who attend the segregation academy in Clarksdale, Lee Academy, and the

²⁷ "Lee Academy Profile (2018-19) | Clarksdale, MS." Private School Review. Accessed January 20, 2019. <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/lee-academy-profile/38614>.

²⁸ Groeger, Lena, Annie Waldman, and David Eads. "Miseducation." ProPublica. October 16, 2018. Accessed January 20, 2019. <https://projects.propublica.org/miseducation/>.

²⁹ Groeger, Waldman, and Eads. "Miseducation." ProPublica. 2018.

³⁰ "Lee Academy Profile (2018-19) | Clarksdale, MS." Private School Review. Accessed January 20, 2019. <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/lee-academy-profile/38614>.

private school in Oxford, Regents Academy, which is the city's largest private school and uses the same building as the original segregation academy in Oxford. Just as the previous calculation, I was able to acquire demographic information and calculate the total number of non-white students in the same way.

While this data is limited as it does not account for students who are homeschooled or attend one of the several much smaller private schools, having both of these data points allowed me to estimate the total number of students who would either attend public school in Clarksdale or Oxford or attend the segregation academy or private school.

This research along with various other factors including: my experience of hearing stories about “the divided town” of Clarksdale from both friends and research articles and Oxford's similar size to Clarksdale during its initial desegregation, proximity to me, and lastly the stark difference in demographics between the two city's public schools today, led me to selecting these cities as my cases of comparison.

After selecting the cities I would be comparing I then sought to gain insight on how and why these districts are made up the way they are. I decided that interviewing the people who were directly impacted and experienced school desegregation would be the best method to gain insight on what happened. Through the use of similar research, advice from my advisor Dr. Melissa Bass, and using *A Short Introduction to Social Research* by Matt Henn, Mark Weinstein and Nick Foard, I created a number of

questions that would help me lead semi-structured interviews. The questions used in the interviews are listed below.

Current Parents

1. Where are your children enrolled in school?
2. Have your kids always been in that sector? If there was a change why?
3. What are your reasons for sending your child to the current school they are enrolled in?
4. What do you think the primary influences are on parents in deciding where to send kids to school?
5. What do you think is different with your child's experience compared to the private/public experience?
6. How do parents gauge the safety/academics/experience of the schools in this county?
7. When you were deciding where to live, how much did schools influence where you chose to live?
8. What would have to happen for you to send your child to the public school district?

Private School Faculty

1. What factors went into creating the demographics of the schools in the district we see today?

2. What are the most important factors to parents in deciding where to send their kids to school? What do you think is the most important?

3. How does your school's academic performance compare to the public school district's performance in this county?

4. How has your school been affected by the depopulation? What about the depopulation of white people?

5. Can you tell me more about how and why the school was founded? What is the effect of that history today? Does that make it harder to recruit African American students? Are white parents reluctant to send their kids to the school because of its history?

6. What is different at your school for parents, students, teachers, and administrators from the public schools? How do you gauge that indicator?

7. How is your school affected by the public schools in the area?

Public School Faculty

1. What factors went into creating the demographics of the schools in the district we see today?

2. What are the most important factors to parents in deciding where to send their kids to school? What do you think is the most important? Why do you think some parents say your school is less safe than a private school?

3. How does your school's academic performance compare to the public school district's performance in this county?

4. How are public schools affected by private schools today?
5. Do you have any thoughts on some districts being primarily black while others are primarily white? What effect do you think that has on the public schools in the area?
6. How does the structure of the school districts within the county affect integration? Do you feel as though a different system would help integrate the schools better? What are the pros and cons of the current system and what would be the pros and cons of different? Ex: Oxford?
7. What would the benefits of a more integrated public school system be? What might be the drawbacks?
8. If parents did not have a private school option, how would that affect the public school districts?
9. Does the school try to actively recruit parents that could afford to send their student's elsewhere? Why, why not? Would it be something you're interested in? Or a waste of time?
10. Do you have kids? Where do they go to school?

City Leaders

1. Can you tell me more about the history of the town in regards to schools?
2. This is your school make up, how did we get here?
3. Did desegregation significantly alter the school population?

4. Do you have any thoughts on some districts being primarily black while others are primarily white? What effect do you think that this has on the public schools in the area?

5. Has your community been affected by the depopulation(or increase)? If so what has that looked like? What effect has that had on the schools?

6. How does the structure of the school districts within the county affect integration? Do you feel as though a different system would help integrate the schools better? What are the pros and cons of the current system and what would be the pros and cons of different? Ex: Oxford?

People Who Experienced

1. What do you remember specifically about integration?

2. What do you remember about your parents decision? Did you change schools?

3. How different is the district today from when you were in school?

4. If you had kids, where did you send them to school? Or if you had kids today, where would you send them to school? Do you feel like others in the community would share this sentiment?

5. Do you think the community has made progress in regards to desegregation since you were in school?

6. What has improved or gotten worse in regards to education since you were in school?

Before I could make contact with my potential interviews, I first sought IRB approval through the University of Mississippi process. This included a plan on how I would get in contact with people I would be interviewing and the list of questions that I intended to ask.

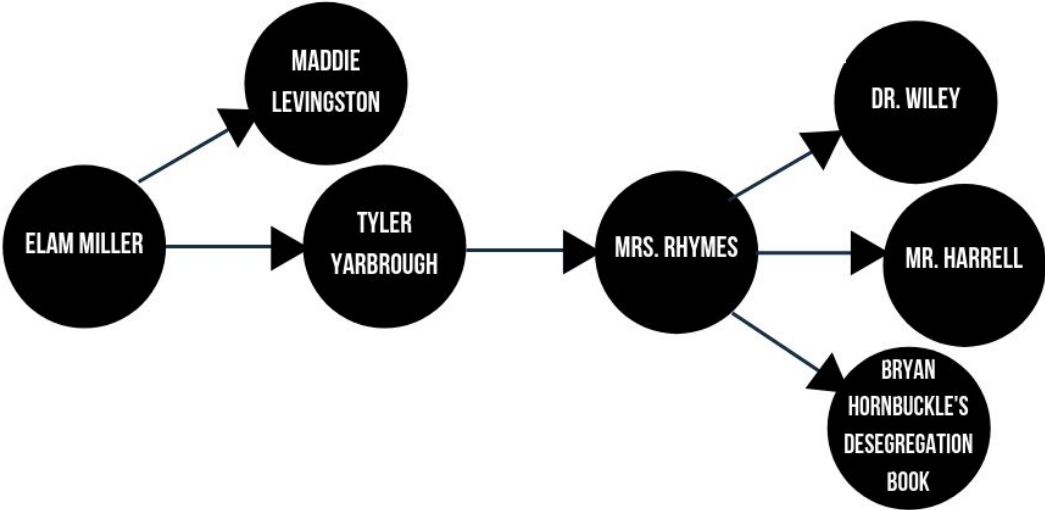
In order to get in contact with potential interviewees, my plan was to begin with personal relationships and online databases and then use snowball sampling, which would allow me to get in contact with even more people. In order to initially reach out to people, my plan was to send an email with the following message:

Hello, my name is Elam Miller and I am a Public Policy Leadership major in the Honors College at the University of Mississippi. I am writing my thesis on desegregation of Mississippi schools. Specifically, I am comparing counties that were and were not able to effectively integrate their public schools. Furthermore, I am exploring how our district demographics are perpetuated today. I am wondering if you are willing to participate in this study by answering questions regarding education in Mississippi in an interview. Please either call me back at 615-796-0877 or email me at emille1@go.olemiss.edu if you would like to participate. Subjects will let me know if they want to participate by calling me back if I call them or emailing me back if I email them. Interviews will take place in local coffee shops, restaurants, or over the phone. Not in schools.

For information on Clarksdale, I began with college student friend Tyler Yarbrough because he is involved in the community and attended Clarksdale High School. I also selected Maddie Levingston as she attended Lee Academy in Clarksdale. For information on Oxford, I began with three different people. I chose Dion Kevin, a previous Student Body President at the University of Mississippi, because of his connections to the community and because he attended Oxford High School. I selected Dr. Andy Mullins because he is an expert on education in the state of Mississippi and has connections across the state. Lastly, I selected Nate McManus as he attended Regents School of Oxford. From there, as previously mentioned, I used the snowball sampling method to get in touch with other people to interview. This is summarized in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2. Additionally, information on who I interviewed, why they were interviewed and where they were interviewed can be found in Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4 for Clarksdale and Oxford respectively.

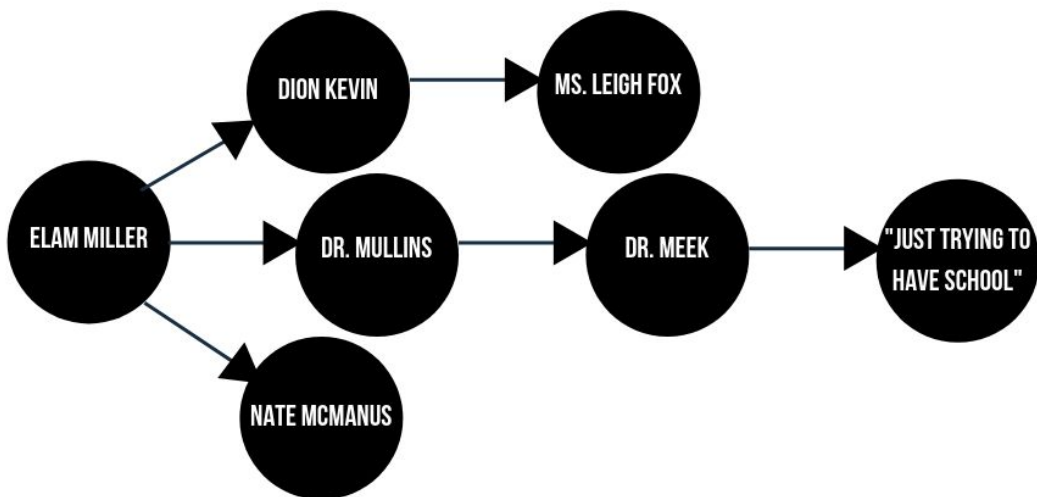
FIGURE 3.1

CLARKSDALE SNOWBALL SAMPLING



(Elam Miller, 2019)

FIGURE 3.2
OXFORD SNOWBALL SAMPLING



(Elam Miller, 2019)

FIGURE 3.3

CLARKSDALE INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

NAME	REASON FOR SELECTION	INTERVIEW LOCATION
Ms. Maddie Levingston	Recent Graduate of Lee Academy	University of Mississippi
Mr. Tyler Yarborough	Recent Graduate of Clarksdale High School	University of Mississippi
Mrs. Josephine Rhymes	Clarksdale Teacher During Desegregation	Coffee Shop, Clarksdale
Dr. Jimmy Wiley	Founding Member of Clarksdale Biracial Committee and President of NAACP	In his home, Clarksdale
Mr. Donnell Harrell	One of the First African American Superintendent of the Clarksdale Municipal School District	Clarksdale McDonald's Restaurant

(Elam Miller,

2019)

FIGURE 3.4

OXFORD INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

NAME	REASON FOR SELECTION	INTERVIEW LOCATION
Dr. Andy Mullins	Founder of Mississippi Teacher Corp and Former Special Assistant to MS Governor William Winter	University of Mississippi
Dr. Ed Meek	Parent and Oxford Community Leader During Desegregation	In his Office, Oxford
Mr. Dion Kevin	2014 Oxford High School Graduate	University of Mississippi
Ms. Fox	Student in Oxford During Desegregation	In accordance with her son and telephone communication
Mr. Nate McManus	2015 Graduate of Regents Academy	Over the telephone

(Elam Miller,

2019)

I then collected the research from these interviews through the use of an audio recording device while simultaneously using a notebook to note the timing of important parts of the interview. Following the guidance of my interviews, if necessary, I would then supplement the discussion and points provided with information from various scholarly articles and newspapers. I used my interviews to help inform my search for this information.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

CLARKSDALE

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Following the methodology to calculate the total number of students that would either attend public school in Clarksdale or attend the segregation academy, the results of Clarksdale's relevant demographic data is highlighted in Figure 4.1. I provide more information on the demographic makeup of each individual school in the Clarksdale Municipal School District in Figure 4.2. Furthermore, I was also able to use the Miseducation Database³¹ to extract racial disparity numbers for the Clarksdale Municipal School District. This information is presented in Figure 4.3.

While limited as it does not account for students who are homeschooled or attend other smaller private schools, the data in Figure 4.1 shows approximately how-many students in Clarksdale today that would attend either public school or Lee Academy, data which is useful in determining the scope of the research as it shows Clarksdale Municipal School district has very few white students, while Lee Academy only has 17 non-white students.

³¹ Groeger, Lena, Annie Waldman, and David Eads. "Miseducation." ProPublica. October 16, 2018. Accessed January 20, 2019. <https://projects.propublica.org/miseducation/>.

FIGURE 4.1

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF STUDENTS IN CLARKSDALE, MS 2019

	Total Students	Non White Students
Clarksdale Municipal School District	2,580	2528.4 ³²
Lee Academy	395	17 ³³
Combined	2975	2545.4

(Miseducation Database 2019 & ProPublica 2019)

FIGURE 4.2

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF STUDENTS IN CLARKSDALE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BY SCHOOL 2019

	NON WHITE STUDENT PERCENTAGE
BOOKER T WASHINGTON INTERN. STUDIES	100%
CLARKSDALE HIGH SCHOOL	99%
GEO H OLIVER VISUAL/PERF. ARTS	100%
HEIDELBERG SCHOOL MATH & SCIENCE	97%
JEROME W. STAMPLEY 9TH GRADE ACADEMY	100%
KIRKPATRICK HEALTH /WELLNESS	90%
OAKHURST INTERMEDIATE ACADEMY	97%
W.A. HIGGINS MIDDLE SCHOOL ACADEMY	99%

³² Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

³³ "Lee Academy Profile (2018-19) | Clarksdale, MS." Private School Review (January 20, 2019).

FIGURE 4.3

RACIAL DISPARITY DATA POINTS FOR CLARKSDALE MUNICIPAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

	NON WHITE STUDENT PERCENTILE
AP COURSE COMPOSITION	96%
OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSION COMPOSITION	95%
EXPULSION COMPOSITION	100%

(Miseducation Database, 2019)³

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The qualitative results for Clarkdale are presented in the form of highlighted quotes from interviews with the respondents. While the snowball sampling method yielded relevant contacts, I was unable to find a source for every category I had hoped to fill. Figure 4.4 below lists the name and reason for selection for each person interviewed. Several of the interviews informed me of previous research, scholarly articles, and newspaper articles on the subject matter. The most important, relevant details and quotes from the interviews are presented in chronological order.

³⁴Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

³⁵ Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

FIGURE 4.4

CLARKSDALE INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

NAME	REASON FOR SELECTION	INTERVIEW LOCATION
Ms. Maddie Levingston	Recent Graduate of Lee Academy	University of Mississippi
Mr. Tyler Yarborough	Recent Graduate of Clarksdale High School	University of Mississippi
Mrs. Josephine Rhymes	Clarksdale Teacher During Desegregation	Coffee Shop, Clarksdale
Dr. Jimmy Wiley	Founding Member of Clarksdale Biracial Committee and President of NAACP	In his home, Clarksdale
Mr. Donnell Harrell	One of the First African American Superintendent of the Clarksdale Municipal School District	Clarksdale McDonald's Restaurant

(Elam Miller,

2019)

The first interview I held was with Maddie Levingston. She is a recent graduate of Lee Academy. In my interview with Maddie, she informed me her family decided for her to not go to Clarksdale High primarily because they perceived it as unsafe. She

elaborated on the decision by stating that the academics at Clarksdale High are subpar and that her family thought she would receive a much better education at Lee Academy.³⁶

The second interview was with Tyler Yarbrough, a recent graduate of Clarksdale High. Tyler informed me that attending Lee Academy was never a consideration for him and his family. He said that wasn't only because it was a segregation academy, but because they didn't believe it to offer a better education than Clarksdale High. In his opinion, Clarksdale High provides far more opportunities for academics, athletics, and community involvement. When I asked him about the safety of schools, a concern that had been raised in some of the articles in the literature review, he claimed to think Clarksdale High is extremely safe.

Tyler explained that even if he wanted to attend Lee Academy and his parents wanted to afford its tuition, he didn't think his parents would have let him go. "It would be embarrassing in my community for my parents to have a kid that went to Lee Academy."³⁷ In addition to offering his perspective the most important result of Tyler's interview was he got me in touch with Mrs. Rhymes, a former teacher during desegregation.

My interview with Mrs. Rhymes was very insightful as she was a teacher at W.A. Higgins High in Clarksdale, which was the all black high school prior to desegregation. Furthermore, when the schools desegregated, she was one of the few African American

³⁶ Maddie Levingston (Recent Graduate of Lee Academy), interviewed by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, June 2, 2018.

³⁷ Tyler Yarbrough (2017 Graduate of Clarksdale High School), interviewed by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, June 11, 2018.

teachers able to keep their job. She became the first French teacher at the newly integrated Clarksdale High.

In my interview with Mrs. Rhymes, she tended to guide the conversation and spoke less to my specific questions and more to her experience of the desegregation. She also tended to steer the conversation to a discussion on how most blacks in the community did not want the schools to integrate whatsoever. She claimed, “While Higgins did have less resources and our faculty were paid much less than Clarksdale Separate High School, Higgins did have a much nicer building than Clarksdale. Our building was new and Clarksdale’s was far outdated in comparison.”³⁸ Following our discussion, Mrs. Rhymes showed me an article where she was featured discussing desegregation in Clarksdale. This research was conducted by Bryan Hornbuckle at the University of Mississippi and is titled “Desegregation: How It Happened in Clarksdale, Mississippi.”³⁹ This became a great source for my thesis. Mrs. Rhymes pointed out the specific part where she is cited, highlighted in the block quote below.

There were only a few things the teachers did not like about the separate high schools: inadequate supplies; salaries considerably less than the white teachers in the school district; and Higgins High's low budget priority as compared to Clarksdale High. (She) listed many minuses they experienced which were associated with the integration of schools: lost authority; less

³⁸ Josephine Rhymes (Former Clarksdale High Teacher), interviewed by Elam Miller, Clarksdale, MS, July 30, 2018.

³⁹ Hornbuckle, Brian K. *Desegregation: How It Happened in Clarksdale, Mississippi*. Accessed February 02, 2019. <https://bkh.public.iastate.edu/teaching/deseg.pdf>.

input in decisions; changed methods of discipline; the family atmosphere they had experienced at Higgins died; school traditions changed; and the students lost the opportunity to be involved in clubs and organizations which were popular at Higgins. (She) was hard pressed to come up with positive aspects of integration. (She) deemed newer textbooks, better transportation, and increased salaries as pluses.⁴⁰

Using the snowball sampling methodology, Mrs. Rhymes recommended that I reach out to Dr. Jimmy Wiley and Mr. Donnell Harrell.

Immediately after my interview with Mrs. Rhymes I was able to drive to Dr. Wiley's home where he invited me in to sit. Through my interview I learned he was not only the president of the Clarksdale NAACP chapter, but also a founding member of the Clarksdale Biracial committee. While we were able to discuss some other topics, his membership on the Biracial committee took up most of the time. The committee was formed by the local government to advise the school board on how to make decisions that were fair to both white and black. It was heavily focused on the actual implementation of desegregating the schools, not so much on rallying the town around the idea. He informed me that while the committee had some success early on, the committee didn't stand a chance at preventing the white flight to Lee Academy the year following the integration at Clarksdale High.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Hornbuckle, *Desegregation: How It Happened in Clarksdale, Mississippi*.

⁴¹ Dr. Jimmy Wiley (President of the NAACP), interviewed by Elam Miller, Clarksdale, MS, July 30, 2018.

After my interview with Dr. Wiley concluded, I was able to get in touch with Mr. Donnell Harrell. Mr. Harrell was not only one of the first African American superintendents of the desegregated Clarksdale Municipal School District, but also principal at an elementary school and a teacher at Higgins High, the all black public school, when the desegregation occurred. In my interview Mr. Harrell focused on how divided the town was at the time. He explained to me that the town has physical boundaries which also serve as societal boundaries. “No white person wants to be seen on the black side of town and no black person wants to be seen on the white side of town.”⁴² He described how many white students remained at Clarksdale High as it was in the white side of town, but that almost no white students attended the new Higgins Jr High as it was in the black side of town. He continued to tell me he believes that the town is still largely separate today based on those very same geographic boundaries.⁴³ He expounded upon how much neither side of the community truly wanted desegregation to happen the rushed way it did. When I asked him about the perception of Lee Academy and if he had considered sending his kids there or knew of anyone in the African American community who had, he expressed that there was and is an intense pressure felt in the African American community. “You want your

⁴² Donnell Harrell (Former Clarksdale Municipal School District Superintendent), interviewed by Elam Miller, Clarksdale, MS, July 30, 2018.

⁴³ Donnell Harrell, July 30, 2018.

neighbor to know that your kids are going to the schools where the black kids are.

It's part of that culture and just the way it is.”⁴⁴

OXFORD

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Following the methodology to calculate the approximate number of students who would either attend public school in Oxford or attend the private academy, the results of Oxford's relevant demographic data is highlighted in Figure 4.5. I have provided more information on the demographic makeup of each individual school in the Oxford School District in Figure 4.6. Furthermore, I was also able to use the Miseducation Database to extract racial disparity numbers for the Oxford School District. This information is presented in Figure 4.7.

While this data is limited as it does not account for students who are homeschooled or attend one of the smaller private schools, the data in Figure 4.5 estimates the number of students in Oxford today who would attend either public school or Regents Academy.

⁴⁴ Donnell Harrell, July 30, 2018.

FIGURE 4.5

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF STUDENTS IN OXFORD, MS 2019

	Total Students	Non White Students
Oxford School District	4,247	1,996.9 ⁴⁵
Regents (on the grounds of College Hill Academy)	233	2.33 ⁴⁶
Combined	4,480	1,999.23

(Miseducation Database 2019 & ProPublica 2019)

⁴⁵ Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

⁴⁶ "Regents School Of Oxford Profile (2018-19) | Oxford, MS." Private School Review. Accessed December 15, 2018. <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/regents-school-of-oxford-profile>.

FIGURE 4.6

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF STUDENTS IN OXFORD SCHOOL DISTRICT BY SCHOOL 2019

	NONWHITE STUDENT PERCENTAGE
BRAMLETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	44%
DELLA DAVIDSON ELEMENTARY	52%
OXFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	51%
OXFORD HIGH SCHOOL	44%
OXFORD INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL	43%
OXFORD LEARNING CENTER	80%
OXFORD MIDDLE SCHOOL	47%
SCOTT CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER	52%

(Miseducation Database 2019)⁴⁷

FIGURE 4.7

RACIAL DISPARITY DATA POINTS FOR OFORD SCHOOL DISTRICT

	NONWHITE STUDENT PERCENTILE
AP COURSE COMPOSITION	22%
OUT OF SCHOOL SUSPENSION COMPOSITION	84%
EXPULSION COMPOSITION	100%

⁴⁷Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The snowball sampling method proved more difficult for Oxford and I was unable to find a source from every category I listed in my methodology. However, I was able to interview a range of people; Figure 4.8 lists both the name and reason for selection of each person interviewed. Additionally, some of those interviewed informed me of additional research, scholarly articles, and newspaper articles on the subject. The most important, relevant details and quotes from the interviews are presented in chronological order.

FIGURE 4.8

OXFORD INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

NAME	REASON FOR SELECTION	INTERVIEW LOCATION
Dr. Andy Mullins	Founder of Mississippi Teacher Corp and Former Special Assistant to MS Governor William Winter	University of Mississippi
Dr. Ed Meek	Parent and Oxford Community Leader During Desegregation	In his Office, Oxford
Mr. Dion Kevin	2014 Oxford High School Graduate	University of Mississippi
Ms. Leigh Fox	Student in Oxford During Desegregation	Over the telephone
Mr. Nate McManus	2015 Graduate of Regents	Over the telephone

⁴⁸ Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

	Academy	
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(Elam Miller,

2019)

My first interview was with Dr. Andy Mullins on August 2, 2018. A key highlight from our discussion was the role leadership played in preventing the College Hill segregation academy from fully taking off. When I asked Dr. Mullins about the role of leadership in Oxford, he suggested that I speak with Dr. Ed Meek. He informed me that Dr. Meek was a leader on the Oxford Civic Council, which was designed to highlight the importance of public schools in Oxford.⁴⁹ Dr. Mullins also suggested that I look into “The Toughest Job,” a documentary on William Winter as it contains information on the desegregation of Mississippi schools.

My interview with Dr. Meek was extremely insightful on what took place in Oxford in the days leading up to desegregation. Dr. Meek first informed me that College Hill Academy, which is now Regents Academy, was almost successful. Dr. Meek stated there was a time when he and his wife were the only two people they knew who wanted to keep their children in the public school system.⁵⁰ He stated while in some cases people were making the decision to leave the schools from a place of prejudice, he also believes some were concerned that, due to the fewer resources in the black schools, African American students might be far behind the white students, compromising their children’s

⁴⁹ Dr. Andy Mullins (Founder of Mississippi Teacher Corp and Former Special Assistant to MS Governor William Winter), interview by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 2, 2018.

⁵⁰ Ed Meek (Local Oxford Businessman during integration and attended Emmett Till Trial), interviewed by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 14, 2018.

education. He then explained his role in the Oxford Civic Council. He believes it was the main difference in how Oxford was able to integrate and Clarksdale was not. He believes one of the council's greatest accomplishments was a town hall meeting that brought both black and white members of the community together in a peaceful manner to have their voices heard and questions answered regarding the change. According to Dr. Meek, the event was well attended by nearly 1,500 people, both black and white.⁵¹ Lastly, Dr. Meek suggested I read "Just Trying to Have School," a book with more information on Oxford's desegregation, including an in depth interview with himself.

Through networking with my peers, I was able to connect with Mr. Dion Kevin, a recent graduate of Oxford High School. In my interview with Dion, I focused on trying to better understand the experience of students in the district today. Dion, who identifies as white, pointed out that he felt he had a diverse experience at Oxford. However, he also noted that the diversity he experienced was primarily through athletics. He claimed that in his high level courses, most other students were white.⁵² Near the end of the interview I asked Dion if he had any contacts of people who were in school in Oxford during desegregation, and he was able to point me to Ms. Fox.

Ms. Fox, who is white and was in high school during desegregation, explained that it was a strange experience. She elaborated by explaining that her parents allowed her to decide whether or not she wanted to change schools. She decided to go to College

⁵¹ Ed Meek, August 14, 2018.

⁵² Dion Kevin (2014 Graduate of Oxford High School), interview by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 18, 2018.

Hill Academy not because she was trying to escape integration but simply because all her friends were going there.⁵³

My final interview on Oxford was with Mr. Nate McManus. Nate was a 2015 graduate of Regents Academy in Oxford. When I asked about his high school experience, he explained how Regents is a very small community, much different from Oxford High School. When I asked about his parents' reason for sending him to Regents instead of Oxford, he claimed that the decision was entirely made based on his and his parents' religious beliefs.⁵⁴ They wanted him to receive a strong foundation in the Christian faith, which Regents, as a Christian school, could provide. He held the decision had nothing to do with the demographics of Oxford High School.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the success of snowball sampling as a method to find new interviewees, I was unable to find interviewees for each of my categories that I listed in my methodology section. Specifically the study lacked interviews from current parents of students, and private school faculty. Given the lack of interviews from each category, my conclusions are provisional. I would suggest future researchers spend more time collecting interviews.

Furthermore, the sample is also limited by its biases. Despite having a diverse set of interviewees from Clarksdale, the Oxford sample includes only white interviewees,

⁵³ Leigh Fox (Student in Oxford During Desegregation), phone interview with Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 19, 2018.

⁵⁴ Nate McManus (2015 Graduate of Regents High School) interview with Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 21, 2018.

limiting the perspective offered. However, *Just Trying to Have School* provided additional information and insight from its diverse array of interviews to supplement my study. Future research could improve on this limitation by spending an extended period of time finding interviewees.

As highlighted in the above limitations, the study was limited by time constraints. While the study took place over a two and a half year period, much of that time was taken by finding the interviews. As previously mentioned, this longitudinal research would be further improved if it was able to take place over an even more extended amount of time.

Lack of prior research on the topic was also a limitation. Despite there being ample research on school desegregation, there is a lack of research devoted specifically to desegregation of both Oxford and Clarksdale, or even in Mississippi. Furthermore, there is also a lack of research on the impact of segregation academies in Mississippi and how some were able to succeed while others failed. This limited the majority of the study to first hand interviews with people who experienced the integration of schools in either city, or recently attended school there.

Lastly, with both towns having a population of under 20,000 people at the time of desegregation, and with it taking place nearly 50 years ago, the study is limited by a lack of available interviewees who experienced the desegregation. Furthermore, due to age, it was difficult for some of the interviewees to remember clearly what happened. This could be improved by finding interviewees who were young during the time of school

integration or having access to a yearbook from the schools that would aid in finding more candidates.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

After years of research, numerous books read, and several interviews conducted, I can offer my best answers to the questions “Why was Oxford able to successfully integrate their public schools and Clarksdale was not?”

Starting years before desegregation, Clarksdale was a disjointed town, racially separated by geographic boundaries, and lacking the leadership and the willingness to come together that would have allowed for successful school integration. These problems proved to be insurmountable for the town and ultimately led to the vast majority of white students leaving public schools in Clarksdale to move to the private Lee Academy, which still holds today.

Oxford, on the other hand, was able to successfully integrate its schools, largely due to its community leadership. It is particularly interesting that due to the large support of biracial local business and community leaders, the segregation academy in Oxford never saw much success. Central High closed, and Oxford High is still integrated today.

In this discussion chapter, Section 1 will focus on the community climate and the various views and opinions of locals on the state of the school system prior to desegregation. Next, in Section 2, I will highlight the clear contrast between the lack of community support for school desegregation in Clarksdale and the large support it had in

Oxford. Lastly, in Section 3, I will discuss where the districts are today and how the steps taken during desegregation are still impacting both cities.

SECTION 1

Prior to the final mandate to desegregate schools in Clarksdale, it was clear the schools had suffered from a lack of leadership crisis. In the early 1960s, Clarksdale city and county schools consolidated. According to Hornbuckle, the consolidation primarily impacted the white junior and senior high school students and was “entirely in consideration of academic improvement (albeit for the white students only).”⁵⁵ With the city of Clarksdale’s white high school having a more than 30 year old building that lacked updates, the merger with Coahoma County would provide new buildings and resources. Clarksdale-Coahoma High School officially opened on September 10, 1962.

According to Dr. Ellard, former superintendent of Clarksdale Municipal School District who is featured in Hornbuckle’s article, “probably no other school district in the state offered a more successful secondary school program than Clarksdale-Coahoma High School during the years of its existence between 1962 and 1965.”⁵⁶ This success, however, was short lived as the president of the city school board officially dissolved the relationship with the county when it became apparent that the city was eventually going to have to deal with desegregation. “By abandoning the contract between the two school

⁵⁵ Hornbuckle, *Desegregation: How It Happened in Clarksdale, Mississippi*.

⁵⁶ Hornbuckle, *Desegregation: How It Happened in Clarksdale, Mississippi*.

districts, the county thought the city school district was trying to protect their own schools and felt the city was letting them down by not staying to fight with the county district against school desegregation.”⁵⁷ This event is the first major example of the disorganization and lack of leadership within the schools in Clarksdale. This especially highlights that the city and county schools already had issues that would be exacerbated once any real desegregation plans were attempted.

In some regards, the schools in Oxford were facing similar pre-desegregation issues. One was that the town had a difficult time filling racial quotas for white teachers at the black high school. According to Natalie and James Adams, authors of *Just Trying to Have School*, this led to the town becoming heavily dependent on recent white college graduates such as Cyndie Harrison and other inexperienced white teachers who were told they had no choice but to teach in the all black Central High School.

The authors argue that the assignment of Cyndie Harrison and others like her an all black high school is an early example of one of these three significant findings of the 1970 National Education Association Task Force which was created to monitor desegregation in Mississippi:

1. Consistently, school officials transfer the most highly qualified blacks [teachers] to formerly all-white schools, while replacing them in the formerly all-black schools with the least qualified whites in training and experience.
2. Black teachers are assigned to such subjects as Physical Education, Social Studies, Home

⁵⁷ Hornbuckle, *Desegregation: How It Happened in Clarksdale, Mississippi*.

Economics, and Shop, while white teachers are assigned Language Arts, Math, and Science ... Apparently, the subject assignment of black teachers is based less upon their qualifications than upon the particular racial taboo of each white community. 3. In some districts, it was reported, white teachers are asked to transfer and are given the option to refuse, whereas black teachers are told their alternative is dismissal.⁵⁸

This is consistent with the report cited above. Given Cyndie Harrison's account of the working conditions at Central High School. Ms. Harrison recalled that Central High School was in bad repair:

The worn, musty-smelling furniture; no air conditioning, no ceiling fans; torn blinds, wooden floors that bounced; a teacher's lounge with one couch and no chairs. She wandered into the library and was horrified to find that many of the shelves were totally empty. The holdings were scant, and in a high school library, she found elementary-aged books such as Brim's Boat and Maurice Sendak's picture book *A Is for Alligator*.⁵⁹

Both Oxford and Clarksdale had major issues to address leading up to the desegregation of their schools. For Clarksdale, there was a lack of consistency that was

⁵⁸ Adams, Natalie G., and James Harold Adams. *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. Jackson: (University Press of Mississippi, 2018), 2288.

⁵⁹ Adams and Adams, *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. (2018), 2277.

growing even in the all white schools, not to mention the inequalities between the white schools and the black schools. On the other hand, Oxford's district didn't want a "diverse faculty" pre-desegregation. They wanted white teachers in the black schools and failed to provide equal resources for the all black Central High School. As previously mentioned, while it was normal for many schools to face similar challenges to Oxford, the internal issues that Clarksdale faced were out of the ordinary.

SECTION 2.

As mentioned in Section 1, the infrastructure of Oxford's all-black Central High School was horrific when compared to Oxford High, the all white school. The same cannot be said for Clarksdale. According to my interview with Mrs. Rhymes, the all-black Higgins High School was in far better condition than the all-white Clarksdale High. "While Higgins did have less resources and our faculty were paid much less than Clarksdale Seperate High School, Higgins did have a much nicer building than Clarksdale. Our building was new and Clarksdale's was far outdated in comparison".⁶⁰

Mrs. Rhymes made it clear that many people in the African American community did not want the schools to integrate in Clarksdale. As Bryan Hornbuckle noted in his article, Mrs. Rhymes saw more cons of Clarksdale's desegregation than pros, specifically the loss of authority, input, infrastructure, and community.

⁶⁰ Josephine Rhymes, July 30, 2018.

There were only a few things the teachers did not like about the separate high schools: inadequate supplies; salaries considerably less than the white teachers in the school district; and Higgins High's low budget priority as compared to Clarksdale High. (She) listed many minuses they experienced which were associated with the integration of schools: lost authority; less input in decisions; changed methods of discipline; the family atmosphere they had experienced at Higgins died; school traditions changed; and the students lost the opportunity to be involved in clubs and organizations which were popular at Higgins. (She) was hard pressed to come up with positive aspects of integration. They [teachers] deemed newer textbooks, better transportation, and increased salaries as pluses.⁶¹

The lack of support within the African American population for desegregation was not exclusive to adults. Mr. Donnell Harrell expressed that in many ways there was a pressure felt in the African American community. “You want your neighbor to know that your kids are going to the schools where the black kids are. It’s part of that culture and just the way it is.”⁶² My interview with recent Clarksdale High graduate Tyler Yarbrough showed how Mr. Harrell’s perspective is still true today; he described how it would be embarrassing in his community for him to go to Lee Academy.”⁶³

⁶¹ Hornbuckle, *Desegregation: How It Happened in Clarksdale, Mississippi*.

⁶² Donnell Harrell (Former Clarksdale Municipal School District Superintendent), interviewed by Elam Miller, Clarksdale, MS, July 30, 2018.

⁶³ Tyler Yarbrough (2017 Graduate of Clarksdale High School), interviewed by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, June 11, 2018.

In January 1970, when it became apparent that the schools would be required to desegregate, Clarksdale's white mayor and city officials released a statement stressing the importance of public education and unified support from both the black and white communities.

The implementation of this plan involved many difficulties for both the black and white communities, as well as our school administration. As never before, the people of this city must unite in a determination that these difficulties be resolved. There is no alternative if the city of Clarksdale is to survive and grow into a prosperous community ... We urge all school parents and students associated with the Clarksdale public school system to maintain and demonstrate a high degree of intelligence and loyalty to the concept of public education.⁶⁴

Unfortunately, his call to action resulted in little to no change; the vast majority of white people strongly opposed this call to action. As highlighted later in this section, if the mayor had been able to garner support for the ideals set out in his statement, perhaps Clarksdale might be integrated today.

Following the mayor's call to action, an anti school desegregation group named The Silent Majority of Coahoma County, organized a march of 1,500 white citizens through downtown Clarksdale protesting the court order. Lack of support from both the white and black community plagued Clarksdale's attempt at desegregation from the

⁶⁴ Adams and Adams, *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. (2018), 3988.

beginning, while groups like The Silent Majority of Coahoma County worked to make matters even worse.

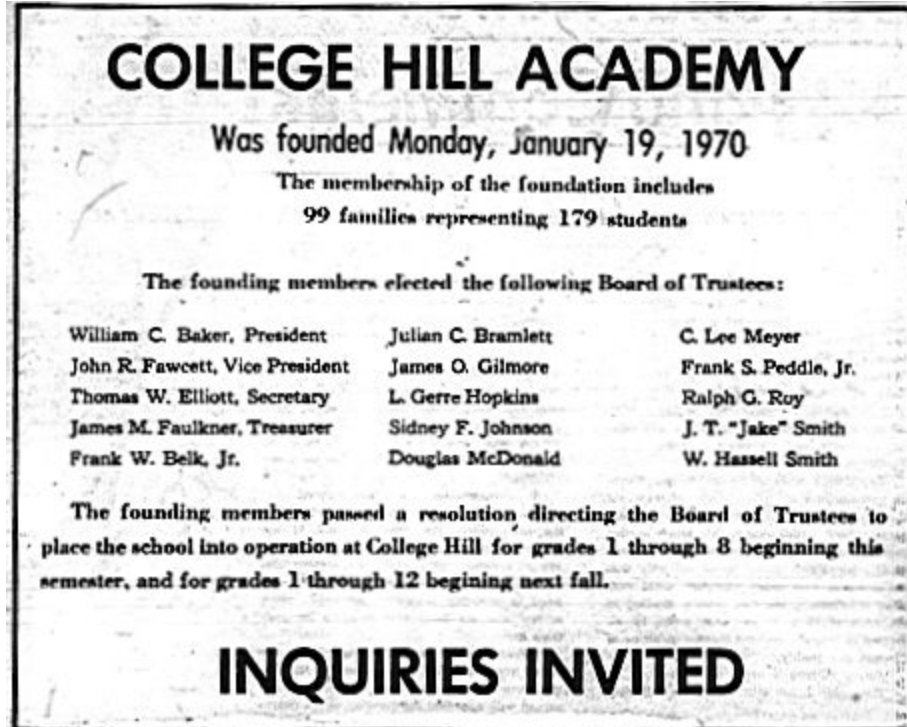
Initially, Oxford was in a similar situation to Clarksdale. Many students didn't want to leave their alma mater behind, and most white parents were planning to move their children to the newly formed segregation academy, College Hill.

Local businessman Ed Meek, stated while in some cases it was apparent people were making the decision to leave the public schools from a place of prejudice, he also believes some were concerned that, due to a lack of resources, African American students might be far behind the white students and hold them back. For current students at the time like Ms. Fox, continuing to attend school with their friends who were transferring to College Hill was their priority⁶⁵. This shows that at societal pressures were at play in Oxford similarly to how Mr. Harrell explained in Clarksdale.

Dr. Meek continued to claim that there was a time when he and his wife were the only two people they knew who wanted to keep their children in the public school system.⁶⁶ The creation of the segregation academy can be noted in the ad below from the January 1970 Oxford Eagle Newspaper.

⁶⁵ Leigh Fox (Student in Oxford During Desegregation), phone interview with Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 19, 2018.

⁶⁶ Ed Meek (Local Oxford Businessman during integration and attended Emmett Till Trial), interviewed by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 14, 2018.



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Meek explained that he and his wife recognized the importance of public schools to towns, so he worked to become a founding member of the Oxford Civic Council. According to Dr. Andy Mullins, the Oxford Civic Council campaigned on the importance of public schools in Oxford.⁶⁸ This Council was comprised of local business and University of Mississippi leaders from both the black and white communities and, unlike The Silent Majority of Coahoma County, this group’s purpose was to unite the black and white members of the community to preserve the public school system in Oxford.

According to Natalie and Harold Adams, The Oxford Civic Council adopted the following resolution at City Hall in order to show their commitment to public education.

⁶⁷ “College Hill Academy.” *The Oxford Eagle*, January 1970.

⁶⁸ Dr. Andy Mullins (Founder of Mississippi Teacher Corp and Former Special Assistant to MS Governor William Winter), interview by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 2, 2018.

“[W]e do hereby affirm our belief in free public education and pledge our support to the retention of public schools in general and, specifically, to improving the quality of education in the Oxford Municipal Separate School District.”⁶⁹

In what had started as a “Hail Mary Attempt” of saving the schools, soon turned into a real movement. *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi* notes that shortly after the resolution was passed it was endorsed by mayor, the aldermen, members of the local clergy, several PTA presidents, the president (and four board members) of the Oxford Municipal School Board and the Oxford-Lafayette County Chamber of Commerce.

These images on the next two pages from the January 1970 Oxford Eagle Newspaper highlight the strategic methods the council took to show support for the schools from a broad base of community leaders, both black and white.

⁶⁹ Adams and Adams, *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. (2018), 4336.

A Statement of Faith in the Public Schools

We, the undersigned ministers serving in the Oxford-University community, affirm our confidence in and our support for the school board, administration, and faculty of the Oxford public schools. We are committed to the public school system because we feel that it offers the best means of assuring quality education for all the children of our community. We believe that our local system has the potential for serving as a model for many others to study and emulate if present community interest can be directed into constructive channels.

As religiously motivated men we are thus primarily concerned with appealing to the consciences of the people of this community. We, therefore, appeal to the political, business, and professional leadership of our community to use their influence to support and strengthen our public schools. We appeal to the youth of Oxford, black and white alike, to respond to this challenge to make public education work effectively for the benefit of all. We appeal to parents to support their children's efforts to work harmoniously with one another.

The days ahead are important ones for our community. We face them confidently and hopefully. We trust the good sense of our young people. We recognize the dedication of our local public school leadership. We know the concern of all parents. We have the faith to believe that God will lead us.

*J. W. Carroll
Wayne Coleman
David Elliott
David Hicks
Wayne Johnson
Joseph A. Koury
H. M. Morse Jr.*

*George R. Muse
Jack Oates III
Denton O'Dell
W. N. Redmond
Charles Reichel
Paul Roaten
Nolan Shepard
Stanley Smathers*

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⁷⁰ "A Statement of Good Faith in the Public Schools." *The Oxford Eagle*, January 1970.

WE SUPPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS!

We Solicit Your Support, Too

THESE PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY
COMMITTED THEIR SUPPORT

H. Dale Abadie
Mr. and Mrs. Jack P. Adams
Mr. and Mrs. John H. Adams
E. R. Alexander
Mr. and Mrs. Ron Alexander

Dr. and Mrs. Hal L. Ballew
Ken Barker
Mrs. Gayle C. Beanland
Mr. and Mrs. Joel Blass
Dr. and Mrs. Lee N. Bolen, Jr.
Dr. and Mrs. Leon Boothe
Mr. and Mrs. Ronald F. Borne
Dr. and Mrs. Roscoe A. Boyer
Dr. and Mrs. E. V. Bramlett
Mr. and Mrs. D. H. Brammer

Fred Brewer
Mr. and Mrs. William L. Broome
Mr. and Mrs. Billy Ross Brown
Mr. and Mrs. Winston Bruce
Dr. and Mrs. Charles D. Cannon
Quentin A. Christian
William M. Champion
Gary Clayton

Dr. and Mrs. W. James Coleman
Dr. and Mrs. John D. Crews
Mr. and Mrs. Bennie Crouch
Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Crow
Mr. and Mrs. Gayle Crow
Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Daniel
Della Reed Davidson
Dr. and Mrs. Marvin Davis
Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Dickerson
Mrs. A. A. Dodge
Dr. and Mrs. Norman J. Doorenbos
Mr. and Mrs. D. Duffy
Rev. and Mrs. David A. Elliott, III

Bob Folk
Mr. and Mrs. Bramlett Garrett
Dr. and Mrs. Frank Gilmore
Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Goolsby
Dr. Parks Grant
Dr. and Mrs. Charles W. Hartman
Mr. and Mrs. Charles C. Hathorne
Dr. and Mrs. James Henderson
John P. Hickenbottom
Mr. and Mrs. David Hicks
Mr. and Mrs. James M. Hollowell
Dr. and Mrs. H. T. Huddleston, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Ivy
Dr. and Mrs. Theodore A. Klingens
Sarah S. Knight
Mrs. Judith A. Koehler
Mr. and Mrs. R. N. Lee
David Levy
Will Lewis

Mr. and Mrs. Will Lewis, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Francis C. Matlock
Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Matthews
Dr. A. M. McCoy
Mr. and Mrs. Joe B. McCaskill
Dr. and Mrs. Douglas C. McClurkin
Mrs. J. Rogers McHenry
J. W. McNeal

Mr. and Mrs. Ed Meek
Dr. and Mrs. Robert Mikeal
Margaret D. Moore
Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Morse, Jr.
Dr. Charles M. Murry
Rev. and Mrs. George Muse
Mr. and Mrs. Carl Nabors
David Neilson, Jr.

Norma Neilson
Mr. and Mrs. Dorey New
Mr. and Mrs. W. F. New
Mr. and Mrs. David S. Newton
Mrs. Cora Norman
Mr. and Mrs. Denton O'Dell
Dr. and Mrs. Henry B. Pace
H. A. Peacock

Dr. John Phay
Mr. and Mrs. Jesse P. Phillips
Dr. and Mrs. John Pilkington
Evelyn J. Price
Dr. Willie Price
Dr. and Mrs. Thomas M. Pullen
Mrs. T. L. Ray

Dr. Katharine Rae
Dr. and Mrs. William R. Reynolds
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas N. Riley
Mr. and Mrs. Donald L. Robertson
Dr. Jerry Robins

Mr. and Mrs. F. Herron Rowland, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Nolan Shepard
Mr. and Mrs. Denton Sims
Rev. and Mrs. Stanley Smathers
Dr. and Mrs. Mickey C. Smith
George W. Stengel
Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Stanford
Mr. and Mrs. William Strickland
Dr. and Mrs. William E. Strickland
Mr. and Mrs. Van C. Temple, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Bob Towery

Heathcote Wales
Dr. and Mrs. Coy Waller
Mr. and Mrs. Howard Waller
Mr. and Mrs. M. H. Waller
Mr. and Mrs. LaVoie Webb
Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Whiteside
Mr. and Mrs. Parham H. Williams, Jr.
Mr. and Mrs. Hamlin L. Williston
Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Winkler
Kenneth L. Wooten

A key accomplishment of the council was hosting town hall meeting that brought both black and white members of the community together to have their voices heard and questions answered regarding the change. According to Dr. Meek, the event was well attended, with nearly 1,500 people, both black and white.⁷² This is in stark contrast to the gathering in Clarksdale hosted by their community leaders, which was to protest desegregation.

It is important to note that Clarksdale did have an effort to generate biracial support through the implementation of a bi-racial advisory committee to the school board. Dr. Wiley, an original member of the committee, informed me that while the committee had some success early on, the committee didn't stand a chance at preventing the white flight to Lee Academy the year following the integration at Clarksdale High.⁷³ His interview shows that there was an overall lack of community interest in changing the schools. Both groups, white and black, wanted to keep their school history, atmosphere, and traditions. The only difference between the groups is black community members also sought more resources and equality.

I believe that the lack of community interest and leadership from Clarksdale is what has led to Clarksdale's modern segregation, while the opposite is true for Oxford.

⁷¹ "We Support Public Schools! We Solicit Your Support, Too." *The Oxford Eagle*, January 1970.

⁷² Ed Meek, August 14, 2018.

⁷³ Dr. Jimmy Wiley, July 30, 2018.

SECTION 3.

While it is true that community leadership played a major role in the desegregation of Oxford schools, the district is not without its skeletons in the closet. In *Just Trying to Have School*, Cyndie Harrison discusses that even after the schools integrated, the African American children that she taught were treated as second class citizens. The newly integrated Oxford schools facilitated this through “ability grouping” or “tracking,” and most of her former students from Central High School were placed in the lowest track, resulting in largely segregated classrooms.⁷⁴ “Ability tracking” to keep students separate was likely used to maintain the public schools by placating parents like Ed Meek’s friends who were concerned with African American students holding back their children.

The impact of both the Civic Council and ability tracking can still be seen today by the demographics of Oxford schools. According to ProPublica’s Miseducation, out of the 4,247 students currently enrolled in the Oxford School District, 53% are white, 36% are black, and 11% are other students of color.⁷⁵ I believe Oxford’s integration, which is not seen in Clarksdale, is largely due to community leadership. However the impact of ability tracking can still be seen as white students are 5.9% more likely to be in an AP course than black students.⁷⁶ Additionally, black students are 6.5% more likely to be suspended than white students and white students are on average 3.2 grades ahead of

⁷⁴ Adams and Adams, *Just Trying to Have School: The Struggle for Desegregation in Mississippi*. (2018), 2569.

⁷⁵ Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

⁷⁶ Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

their black peers.⁷⁷ Lastly, all six of the students expelled this year in Oxford were black.

⁷⁸ As Dion Kevin stated the diversity he experienced was primarily through his athletics, while in his higher level courses, most other students were white.⁷⁹ These massive inequalities are a direct result of strategies like ability tracking that were designed to maintain support for the public schools while - and in fact by - keeping students separate.

Another contributing factor to the continued segregation in Clarksdale is the city's geography. The town is divided into North and South sides by the railroad tracks and East and West by the Sunflower River. According to Hornbuckle:

the school district used these landmarks to divide the city into several elementary zones and two junior/senior high school zones, each in either an entirely black or entirely white part of town. This "plan" for desegregation looked good to someone who did not live in Clarksdale, as evidenced by an April 8, 1965, decision of support rendered by the Honorable Claude F. Clayton.⁸⁰

Former superintendent Donnell Harrell informed me that when the schools desegregated many white students remained at Clarksdale High as it was in the white side of town, but that almost no white students attended Higgins Jr High as it was in the black side of town. He believes that the town is still largely separate today based on those very same

⁷⁷ Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

⁷⁸ Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

⁷⁹ Dion Kevin (2014 Graduate of Oxford High School), interview by Elam Miller, Oxford, MS, August 18, 2018.

⁸⁰ Hornbuckle, *Desegregation: How It Happened in Clarksdale, Mississippi*.

geographic boundaries.⁸¹ I believe that if Clarksdale had a different geography and increased community leadership, we might have had a different outcome in their schools today.

While Clarksdale's lack of leadership impacted the continued segregation of its schools, the ability grouping methods by which Oxford integrated has contributed to racial inequalities in its seemingly desegregated school.

⁸¹ Donnell Harrell, July 30, 2018.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In the 1960s, the two Mississippi communities of Oxford and Clarksdale were similar in more ways than one. However, how each community responded to the immediate court ordered desegregation of schools following *Alexander v. Holmes Board of Education* proved the communities to be very different. The differing experiences of school desegregation varied from one community organizing in support for public schools to the other pushing for a shift to private schools. Differences like these resulted in Oxford's ability to successfully integrate and Clarksdale's inability to do the same. Many contributing factors that began before and during desegregation have led to the current makeup of Oxford and Clarksdale's schools.

While Oxford's school district was able to successfully desegregate, it faced many of its own struggles during the desegregation that are reflective in current statistics today. After the Oxford Civic Council worked to continue integration and uphold the right to a free and good public education, Oxford public schools implemented programs designed to continue segregation within schools and in classrooms through "ability grouping." I believe these tracking programs have facilitated the circumstances for much of the racially-bound statistics in Oxford public schools today relating to AP class diversity, grades, and behavior. Despite its success, it has one of the highest achievement gaps in the state.⁸²

⁸² Groeger, Waldman, and Eads, "Miseducation." ProPublica. (January 20, 2019).

Unlike Oxford, Clarksdale remains segregated today and confronts its own set of obstacles. I assess that the former community leaders of Clarksdale's apathy and the existing geography is what perpetuates the current state of the school district in addition to the white flight to the segregation academy that still exists today, Lee Academy. Despite arguments showing equivalent or more academic, athletic, and community involvement opportunities, many still choose to send their children to Lee Academy, partially contributing to the continued segregation in the Clarksdale school district.

Future research into desegregation in Oxford should be focused on programs that seek to dismantle the racial divides in academic success and behavior in the classroom caused by the ability tracking programs of the desegregation era. As for Clarksdale, a more narrow research path focused on both the social and geographic barriers to integrating schools would be a great continuation of this study, as mindsets and districting patterns are large contributors to the continued segregation in Clarksdale, Mississippi.

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