

6-2-1954

## Correspondence, John C. Stennis, June 2-7, 1954

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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

Vicksburg, Mississippi

June 2, 1954

RECEIVED

JUN 7 1954

WASHINGTON

Senator John C. Stennis  
Senate Office Building  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator:

The hammer has fallen! The dire consequences of the Supreme Court decision are beyond comprehension at the present time. As you so aptly said, the justices abandoned their role of judges and took upon themselves the responsibilities of "social engineers".

It is easy to say that public education in Mississippi has been set back "twenty-five years", "fifty years", or any number of years we want to name, but we cannot determine this thing so accurately. We can say that an insistence upon compliance with the court decision any time in the near future will wreck the public school system in the South.

This decision has breathed new life into private schools. People who are financially able to do so will send their children to private schools in ever increasing numbers. With this transfer of children will go the interest and money of our most substantial people. Certainly, the best teachers will follow along. Where will this leave the public school? It will be left with the Negroes and those whites who will be forced to accept something for their children that they do not want. This is a gloomy prospect for those of us who have devoted a lifetime to building a decent school system for our people.

This decision is wholly unfair to the Negro himself. Laws, court decisions, misguided zeal for the "underprivileged" are not going to change folkways or make compatible a relationship that is entirely incompatible.

The Supreme Court is not going to pay for the buildings that must be constructed, or pay for financing an educational program. Financing all of this is still the obligation of the states and local districts. Are the Negroes, who are not even in charge of the governmental machinery, going to do the financing? To ask the question is to answer it.

Senator John C. Stennis  
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Confirmation of what I am suggesting has already begun to appear. I know of no community, including my own, which had made plans to improve Negro schools, that has not halted such planning. The Negro will be the chief sufferer. He cannot build and finance a school system and the whites are not going to do it for him.

The question is, "What are we going to do"? Certainly, I have no patent remedy. Regardless of what we think of the decision of the court, or what we think of the justices, their ruling is, theoretically, the law of the land. We do not wink at the decisions of the Supreme Court. I do not think either that intemperate speech is going to help the situation. I think we can insist upon the wisdom of our positions, we can resort to to every technical legal device known to a desperate people, we can defy the court and bring on a generation of litigation, but in the end, we probably will lose. So it seems to me that our best hope is an amicable adjustment between Negroes and whites that will continue for a generation, at least, our segregated schools. This should be done at the top level. Now is the time for real statesmanship.

I still believe that we have influence with our Negroes. It is possible that we have not cultivated them as we should. Through this neglect we have allowed the radicals to move in with disastrous consequences. It may be too late to repair the damage, but we can at least try.

I should certainly like to have your thinking in this matter. If you are in Mississippi any time soon I should appreciate the opportunity to talk with you.

Always with highest esteem and warmest personal regards,  
I am

Sincerely,



HVC:h1k

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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

June 7, 1954

31  
Segregation

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Vicksburg, Mississippi

Dear [REDACTED]

I believe yours is the best letter I have had regarding the school segregation question. It is just chuck-full of common-sense, down-to-earth reasoning. I think you have come nearer than anyone else in hitting the nail on the head in pointing to a way out - that is, through the leadership of our own negroes. We shall make a grave mistake if we take a negative, do-nothing attitude, but rather I think we should build up on the local, public opinion which exists now with both races for separate schools in an affirmative program of constructive leadership. If we do not take the lead, then our negroes will be led by others. All they want now is the good faith promise for better schools.

While I was at home last week I met with the Kemper County School Board, and I urged them to take the lead along this line. I was also one a national hook-up yesterday and I made these very points on the Man Of The Week TV program.

I have also written special letters to Jimmie Ewing, Bob Morrow and Tom Tubb, West Point, when I saw that they were members of the Committee.

Let me hear from you at any time. With very best wishes and again commending you for your fine attitude and reasoning,  
I am

Your friend,

John Stennis  
United States Senator

Enc.