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## Senator Stennis Civil Rights Correspondence B01F32L03

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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

May 20, 1954

Honorable J. P. Coleman  
Attorney General of Mississippi  
Jackson, Mississippi

Dear Judge:

I think the Education Advisory Committee is an excellent one and I appreciate very much your sending me a copy of the list. The list of men selected by the Governor is outstanding in many ways and I extend my hearty congratulations in their selection.

From what I have picked up here, I believe that there is a good chance that the Court may lay down some fairly liberal ground rules in its final decree, thus making it possible to work out some plans; but at the same time this cannot be relied on. They might make a firm holding or might not give you any definite ground rules at all, but hold it up rather indefinitely in the nature of a matter being in the custody of a Master.

As I see it now, I do not see the benefit to be gained by you coming in as Attorney General because you will then be a party to the decree and be bound more directly by its terms. If the colored people in Mississippi refuse to cooperate, it might take the Court many years at their best to really bring the school districts of the State within their reach.

I cannot help believing that the thing to do is to start at the county level and let the white leaders of each county put it squarely up to the negro leaders that whatever schools the negroes have will have to be provided by local and State taxes, which negroes themselves cannot levy, nor can the NAACP or any other outside agitator, now or in years to come. In return for their cooperation for voluntary separate schools, they could be assured of adequate and equal schoolhouses, faculties and transportation facilities. The responsibility could be put on them. If this plan worked in some counties, but not in others, we could have a county option plan with reference to the abolishment of the public schools.

I shall write you of any further developments along this line from here. With all good wishes, I am

Your friend,

John Stennis  
United States Senator