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Letter from John C. Stennis, March 24, 1954

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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

May 24, 1954

Mr. B. B. Sadler
Union, Mississippi

Dear Mr. Sadler:

I appreciate your letter of May 21st and know exactly how you feel. I feel the same way, only more so because I have been working with this problem for more than two years. I have realized what might happen and I have tried to prepare the way as best I could for more understanding in the minds of Senators of other areas of the country whose understanding and help we might need in our efforts to pull through this problem. I also have been here and have tried to battle against the currents of public opinion and the currents of government which are set up by this other crowd which includes all kinds of pressure groups outside the colored world, along with the NAACP. They are all alligned together.

When the blow came, I was confronted with the question: What shall I say? Something that may win me a passing favor in Mississippi, or something that may make our course understood better and get the ear of some of the minds here that might be in a position to help us? My short statement was made deliberately and with an eye to the future and was one which certainly did not represent all of my feelings or my ideas about the situation. I might call your attention to the fact that sometimes inflammatory statements here force your friends here to desert you when they otherwise might be able to remain with you and do you some good at a critical moment. Not being here in the mill day after day, it is hard to understand that situation, but it is very true.

The day after this Decision, Senator Daniel of Texas, a very fine lawyer indeed and who, as Attorney General of Texas, argued the Texas Case before the Supreme Court three years ago when they forced the admission of a negro student, told me he was going to review the authorities to show up the Court in their legal reasoning, but that he was going to take a conciliatory approach in his argument on the floor. He said that this was the only way that he could get any attention in the East and West and the North. I agreed with him that it was wise for him to take that course and I told him that I would ask some questions and make some comments. This is reflected by a marked copy of the Record for that day in question.

You will note that in my brief remarks I was highly critical of the Court, but I said that in spite of that, we were willing to work on the problem in a constructive way but we might be forced to abolish our public school system. I could have gone much further and could have said some of the things we would do to avoid this Decision forcing our children in with the negroes; but it would only have hurt our cause throughout the nation - and severely so. Incidentally,

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JUN 8 1954

WASHINGTON

June 6, 1954

Hon. John C. Stennis
Washington, D.C.

My dear Senator:

Today I listened to your discussion of segregation in the Southern schools. You are very right in what you have to say concerning racial differences. I teach in a high school where many Negro youngsters attend. Some are very good students; others are stupid; those that are stupid are a minority.

Discipline is a terrific problem. A teacher dare not put a hand on one. The white youngsters profit by the situation and the teacher has a very rough time of it. We have a policeman close at hand at all times.

So there is a huge psychological problem, for these youngsters branded by a sense of inferiority carry a "chip on the shoulder" and are difficult. Maybe no child should be born with this stigma? I pity the teachers who will have half white and half colored youngsters in their classes.

Should you have the two races together, I suggest there be colored teachers for colored kids and that all the hardship of this "reconstruction agony" be not put upon teachers!

In another generation, or so, having the
two races in one class room may work out
all right. The white youngsters do very well
and have a sincere regard for the Negro
Colored "kids". They are far ahead of us of
an older generation in accepting all races as
equal.

I am glad to hear Southern leaders
express themselves.

Yours truly,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted address line 1]

[Redacted address line 2]