

DESEGREGATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Amanda King, M.Ed.

The University of Southern Mississippi

HISTORY OF DESEGREGATION IN THE UNITED STATES

To understand the history of segregation, it is important to understand the different legislative acts that were created to maintain segregation, legislative acts that were created to desegregate, and how each act has impacted higher education. Desegregation can be divided into three different time periods:

Separate but equal (19th and 20th Century)

14th Amendment: The equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment provided litigation foundation that would significantly support desegregation cases.

Morrill Act of 1890: The second phase of the Morrill Act established funding specifically for African American institutions, prohibited discrimination against African Americans or institutions would not receive federal funding, began the process for separate but equal in each state, and laid the foundation for historically black land grant institutions. This act increased the gap between segregation and desegregation.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896): This case affirmed segregation; however, it was not based upon education but played a major role in education desegregation, and incorporated the separate but equal doctrine.

Separate is inherently unequal (1930's – early 1960's)

Sweatt v. Painter (1950): This case ruled against the separate but equal doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* and the laid groundwork for *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*.

Brown V. Board of Education (1954): This landmark case declared segregation of white and black schools was unconstitutional and overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* decision, which allowed for segregation. *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* concluded that "separate education facilities are inherently unequal."



Dismantling dual systems (1964 – current)

Civil Rights Act of 1964: This act was created to eliminate discrimination and segregation by President Truman. Title VI of the Civil Rights stated that institutions could lose their federal funding; however, this did not stop most of the southern states from continued operation of segregated school systems.

Adams v. Richardson (1972): This case tested the issue of how long before funds would be terminated by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. All states responded to the orders except Louisiana and Mississippi.

United States v. Fordice (1992): The Supreme Court claimed that state officials in Mississippi had failed to dismantle this dual system in violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- *In United States v. Fordice (1992)*, also known as the *Ayers Settlement Case*, the Supreme Court ordered implementation of new admissions criteria that standardized requirements at all eight public universities beginning fall of 1996.
- Prior to the Ayers Settlement Case, public four year universities in Mississippi required all applicants for undergraduate admission to submit ACT (American College Testing) scores.
- Each institution had their own minimum set of ACT scores they would accept for admission.
- Mississippi State University, University of Mississippi, and The University of Southern Mississippi required at least a 15 on the ACT.
- The average ACT score among black students was 7 and average for white students was 18.
- The new admission criteria for the eight public universities in the state that would grant admission to applicants who met the following:
 - 1) GPA of at least 3.20 in a designated core curriculum
 - 2) GPA of at least 2.50 in the core curriculum or class rank in the top 50% and an Enhanced Act score of at least 16; or
 - 3) GPA of at least 2.0 in the core curriculum and an Enhanced ACT score of at least 18

SUMMER DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAM

- Students who do not meet full freshman requirements would have the option to take a screening test, as a part of a screening process.
- Students who are not successful in the screening process can participate in a summer remedial program or currently known as the Summer Developmental Program at any of the four year public universities.
- The developmental programs were instituted to concentrate on high school subjects that are applicable to success in first-year college courses, provide intensive support for under-prepared students applying to public institutions, and foster success for students in remediation in their freshman year through graduation.
- Currently, students who participate in the summer developmental program are provided intentional academic support during the nine week summer program and through the following fall and spring semester.
- Students are enrolled in twelve hours of courses consisting of Beginning Algebra, Beginning English, Beginning Reading and Learning Strategies.
- Once the year long academic support program has concluded, students are released into their cohort with no further academic support.

CONCLUSIONS

- Students who do not meet full admission requirements and who participate in the Summer Developmental Program have grade point averages below 2.0 and/or ACT scores below 18, both are proven retention issues.
- Students are not provided intentional academic support after their first three semesters at a university.
- Is the program that was initially set forth by *United States v. Fordice (1992)* functioning the way they intended it almost 20 years ago or does the program need modification?
- Further research will be conducted to determine if students participating in the developmental program at The University of Southern Mississippi makes a significant difference in retention and graduation of this population. Results will confirm or deny if modifications need to be performed to the Summer Developmental Program.

