Mississippi’s Equalization Schools: Modernism and Segregation

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The Road to Inequality, 1910 -1940

Monument Negro School (c.1915), Warren County

Bovina Negro School (c.1920), Warren County

Palestine White School (1917), Hinds County

Oakley White School (1917), Hinds County
“The present wrecks of log-cabins and bush harbors, where many of the schools are now taught, must be replaced by comfortable, decent homes.”

Booker T. Washington, 1884
Rosenwald Schools in Mississippi (1919-1932)

Building Program
- 557 school buildings
- 58 teacher’s homes
- 18 vocational buildings
  633 Total

Participation
- 1730 teachers
- 77,850 students

Contributions
Blacks: $859,688
Whites: $323,143
Taxation: $1,128,673
Rosenwald Fund: $539,917
Total: $2,851,421

Survival
- 15 Rosenwald schools
- 4 Rosenwald teachers’ houses
Prentiss Institute (1926)
Jefferson Davis County

Cost: $8,500
Negroes: $4,000.00
Whites: $1,500.00
Public: $1,500.00
Rosenwald: $1,500.00
“old building” at Pearl River County Training School, Poplarville

“new building” [Rosenwald] at Pearl River County Training School

A revolution in rural school architecture.

Secondary Buildings
- Teacher’s Houses
- Vocational Buildings
- Privies
“We had no state school building plans in Mississippi until after we were furnished with ours from the Rosenwald Fund. Then the State Legislature appropriated a small amount of money to the Department of Education for plans for the white schools. The State Supervisor went to Nashville, Tennessee, and with Doctor Dresslar made some drawings from which blue prints have been made for white schools. There is very little difference between the plans of the State and the Rosenwald plans. So you see, after all, all of it is a result of the Rosenwald building program.”

(Bura Hilbun, State Dept. of Education, 1925)
Newton County Training School (1930), Newton County

Bay Springs School (1925), Forrest County

Vernon Dahmer

Medgar Evers
### “Separate but Equal”
**Mississippi Department of Education**
**1934 report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negro Schools</th>
<th>White Schools</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rural Consolidated Schools</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>959</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brick Buildings</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>653</td>
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<td>Campuses “with improvements”</td>
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<td>454</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers Homes</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>577</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of School Days</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>123</td>
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NEW DEAL SCHOOLS

Columbia High School (1937), Marion County

Carrie Stern Elementary School (1939)
Greenville

Bowmar Elementary School (1939)
Vicksburg
“We have made desperate attempts to get the WPA to come down out of the clouds and abide on the ground where our problems are and help us build some schoolhouses for our colored people in Mississippi. But each time we have come up against unknown and insuperable obstacles. We cannot tell whether our plan has been blocked by our representatives in Congress or authorities in Mississippi.”


“In many counties, particularly in rural areas, negro children are forced to attend school in mere shacks or in church houses” (1931 Mississippi Department of Education bulletin)
It was a four mile walk each way everyday, and there were no school buses, at least not for the black school children. The whites had school buses, but the blacks couldn't ride them.

James Meredith, Oral History, 1984
Growing Inequality

Tippo schools, Tallahatchie County
Post WWII Equalization Program

- Goal: “Equalize” black and white school facilities in order to maintain segregation
- First program, 1946-1952
- Second, ambitious program, 1954-1962
- Approx. $100 million dollars spent on new buildings, 1946-1962

Comparison of State Spending (black and white schools)

Equalization Period I (1946-1954)
- Negro school projects: 430/ 54% funds
- White school projects: 362/ 46% funds

Equalization Period II (1955-1962)
- Negro school projects: 315/ 66% funds
- White school projects: 305/ 35% funds
Braden Elementary School (White), Natchez
1949, R.W. Naef, archt.

Nora Davis Elementary School (Negro), Laurel
(1948, Chris Risher, archt.)
“Modern”=International Style

- Post-WWI reaction against tradition and “historicism”
- Popularized in the U.S. by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock in their exhibit at MoMA “The International Style” (1932).
- Interplay of volume and line (Cubist)
- “Regularity rather than axial symmetry as the ordering design”
- No “arbitrary” applied decoration, structural honesty

Quotes from The International Style, by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock
• Steel and concrete construction
• Window walls
• Colorful panels
• Flat roofs
• Emphasis on volume and line rather than ornament
• Brise soleil (sun breakers)
Alexander High School (Negro) (1956)
Brookhaven

Morrison Elementary School (1958), Jackson

Greer High School (Negro) (1959), Leake County
Travillion Elementary & High School
Gymnasium-Auditorium
(1955)
Hattiesburg
Gentry High School (Negro)
Indianola
1952, Jones & Haas, architects

Total Cost: $350,000
Equalization Fund: $49,000
Local Bonds: $301,000
Isable Elementary School (Negro) (1951), Jackson

Coleman High School (1950), Greenville

Lanier High School (Negro) (1954), Jackson

Tipton Street School (1950), Kosciusko

EQUALIZATION SCHOOLS (1946-1954)
Black Schools in 1949
- One-classroom: 60%
- Two-classrooms: 22%
- Three-classrooms: 6.5%
Equalization *Phase 2* (1954-c.1962)

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Comparison of State Spending (black and white schools)

Clarion-Ledger (Jackson, Miss.), Jan. 24, 1954
Oak Park Vocational School [Rosenwald]
1928, Laurel
--13 classrooms and auditorium

Total Cost = $1 million
$600,000 Equalization Fund
$400,000 Local Bonds

--27 classrooms, auditorium, gymnasium, cafeteria, two libraries, three science labs, vocational classroom, etc.
Burglund High School, McComb
1958, Jones & Haas, architects

Total Cost: $410,000
Equalization Fund: $336,000
Local Bonds: $74,000
Burglund High School Walkout
October 1961
Source: Associated Press
"Many of the cries that are now heard echoing throughout the United States by white southerners, for more time to equalize schools, were never heard before the 1954 Supreme Court Decision, declaring segregation unconstitutional. Mississippi started its ambitious equalization program after May 17, 1954 in an effort to get around the Supreme Court Decision. However, the $120,000,000 program is too little, and it has come too late. Negroes in Mississippi want for their children the quality of education that will help make them top scientists, top diplomats, and top engineers of tomorrow, and it cannot be done under the so-called "separate but equal" doctrine.

Medgar W. Evers, May 31, 1959

"Evers, Medgar (1954-1979)“ subject file at MDAH archives.
In many areas of Mississippi today one may ride down our beautiful highways and marvel at some of the school buildings being constructed, but as you get nearer the deception becomes clearer. Then upon entering, the almost complete emptiness of the school’s facilities will dawn on you that you have had a mirage.

Quoted in The Autobiography of Medgar Evers, p. 100-101
“The school has the striking resemblance of an auction barn. It is inadequate to provide for each child the maximum educational opportunity that this day and age demand.”

Medgar Evers, NAACP press release, Oct. 27, 1958

Canton Jr-Sr High School, Canton
1958, Jones & Haas, architects
The Architecture of White Supremacy

Worth Preserving?

The Architecture of Black Agency
Former students fight to save old Gulfport high school from demolition

GULFPORT, MS (WLOX) - Some residents in Gulfport are in an uproar over plans to tear down an old high school building. They met Monday night, hoping to get the city to step in and spare the building from being bulldozed.

The old 33rd Avenue High School opened in 1954. It was the only black high school in Gulfport. It closed because of school integration in the Mississippi Delta.
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