"Past the Boiling Point:"

Protests, Politics, and the Riot at Lamar High School.

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In the small town of Lamar, South Carolina, with a population of less than 2000 residents, tensions surrounding a controversial court ruling and its demand for school segregation peaked during the early months of 1970. On January 19, 1970, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that students and teachers from two different counties – Greenville and Darlington – had to integrate their facilities by the beginning of February of that same year. As part of the Darlington County School District, Lamar Elementary and Lamar High School faced this court ordered integration with intense opposition. As the deadline for integration approached, parents angrily removed their children from the schools. When this boycott failed to reverse the segregation plan, the local residents of Lamar began to protest on school grounds. It was during one of these rallies that protestors, feeling frustrated and helpless, turned to violence to express their concerns.

On the morning of March 3, 1970, three school busses, carrying African American students, approached Lamar High School and a crowd of approximately 200 protestors.[1] Unlike previous days of demonstrations, however, this morning ended in violence. While the students escaped with minor bruises, the damage was profound. The protesters damaged public property: in a matter of ten minutes, they shattered the windows of the three school buses, dismantled their engines, and overturned the buses onto their sides. More importantly, however, the protestors damaged the already strained relationship of parents, school officials, and government officials all forced to work with one another in order to implement the integration plan.[2]

Almost immediately, word reached the press and the riot at Lamar High School made front-page news – not only in Darlington County and adjacent areas, but also in state and

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[1] "An Account of the Incident at Lamar Schools, Tuesday Morning March 3, 1970," William D. Workman, Jr. Paper Collection, The South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina: Box 28, "Lamar, SC" folder, pp. 1-2.

[2] Ibid.

national newspapers and magazines. In addition to recounting the events of the riot, some newspapers also connected a speech delivered by Albert Watson, a Republican candidate for governor and a proponent of "freedom of choice," to Darlington County residents who were desperate to preserve the dual school system currently in place. Newspapers like the Greenville *News*, the New York *Times*, and national magazines like *Newsweek* and *Esquire*, either directly criticized Watson or reported on individuals who criticized his role in the violent outburst at Lamar High School. In fact, many national newspapers and magazines connected Watson's speech to the people of Darlington, and the South's intolerant ways as the main causes for the riot at Lamar High School.[3]

Even though racial stereotypes and intolerance certainly played a role in the riot of March 3, 1970, there were other factors, often overlooked, that allowed people to justify their actions. While the press was quick to place the blame for the riot upon Watson, other individuals and policies also played an equal role in causing the violence at Lamar. The main problems resided with the government and those who served in it. More specifically, the inconsistent political promises and influences from elected officials – both Republican and Democrat – and the controversial integration plan all helped to cause the riots at Lamar High School.

The fight for school integration in South Carolina lasted many years – well before the riot at Lamar occurred – and those who supported school integration often found assistance in the federal government. After the end of Reconstruction, South Carolina public schools, often citing the Supreme Court decisions in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, systematically implemented dual school systems all over the state. The philosophy of "separate but equal" school systems existed legally

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[3] William Chaze, "Watson Under Daily Attack For Speech at Lamar," Columbia *State*, March 7, 1970, The John Carl West Paper Collection, The South Carolina Political Collections, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina: Box 22, "Watson, Albert" folder; Jon Nordheimer, "Racial Theme Dominates South Carolina Campaign," New York *Times*, October 24, 1970: 13; William F. McIwain, "On the Overturning of Two School Buses in Lamar, S.C.," *Esquire*, January 1977: 99;

in the United States until 1954 when the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy* with their ruling in the *Brown v. Board* case. The unanimous ruling, which stated that "separate but equal" was "inherently unequal," reenergized the quest for a unitary school system.[4]

At the same time that proponents of school integration were mobilizing to fight "separate but equal," Governor Byrnes of South Carolina was campaigning for increased tax revenues in order to improve the state's schools. The dual school system had created blatant inequalities for youth in the state – without a drastic plan, many South Carolina officials feared that the federal government would force the state to integrate its schools. As part of the "equalization movement," the plan developed to avoid school integration, Byrnes and others attempted to repair and to build new schools for white and African American students so that "separate but equal" would indeed appear to be providing an adequate educational experience for all members of South Carolina.[5] While this movement helped the dual school system to remain intact through much of South Carolina during the remainder of the 1950s and into the 1960s, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially ended school segregation, and any other form of segregation in public locations.[6]

However, dual school systems still existed throughout the South even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Through "freedom of choice" integration plans, parents, at the school's discretion, selected what school their children attended. Working together, parents and local school districts perpetuated the dual school system: most parents placed their children into single-race schools and most local schools allowed this practice to continue. Therefore, it only

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[4] *Brown v. Board of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955).

[5] Rebekah Dobrasko, "Upholding 'Separate but Equal:' South Carolina's School Equalization Program, 1951 – 1955," MA Thesis, University of South Carolina (2005): 1 – 13. Byrnes was Governor from 1951 to 1955.

[6] Congress, *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, 88th Cong., 1964, H. R. 7152, http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/laws/majorlaw/civilr19.htm

seemed natural for the parents and schools of Darlington County to embrace "freedom of choice" as their official response to the federal court's demands for school integration.

The media attributed the creation and growth of Darlington's "choice" movement to Jeryl Best, a local business owner. He formed "Citizens for Choice" and used the group to promote protest over the federal court order. While Best stated that the main reason for the parent group was to, "maintain quality education in our public schools for all white and Negro children in Darlington County," the group primarily focused on maintaining the current dual, segregated school system.[7] Supporting "freedom of choice," a system that "worked" in other places in both the North and the South, became the group's main objective.

Through the group, white parents were able to discuss the issue and, more importantly, were able to mobilize and to create strategies for fighting the integration process. While initially the membership of "Citizens" consisted of Best and a few friends, the group ballooned to include 8000 members by the end of February 1970.[8] Clearly, the prospect of "choice" seemed just as attractive to the citizens of Darlington County. Journalist William McIlwain reaffirmed this idea of mass popular support for the "choice" system when he credited Best and his organization as the "dominant voice of education in Lamar" and maintained that the group gathered more support and popularity as the deadline for school integration in Lamar passed.[9] Believing so strongly in the prospect of "choice," members of the "Citizens for Choice" believed so strongly boycotted local schools and openly protested the court order; also, it was one of these rallies that led to the eruption of violence.

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[7] "Not Fighting Integration... We're Fighting for Freedom," *The Hartsville Messenger*, February 12, 1970: 1-A.

[8] Ibid.

[9] McIlwain, "Overturning of Two School Buses," 99.

Explaining the events that unfolded at Lamar High School has not occurred beyond recounting the basic timeline and emphasizing the relationship between Watson and the "freedom of choice" movement in Darlington County. In fact, some sources consider Watson to be the most significant cause of the riot that occurred at Lamar High School – a verdict that was neither confusing nor unbelievable to anyone who followed political events during the 1960s. As a politician, Watson was no stranger to controversy. In fact, by the start of his gubernatorial campaign in 1970, he owed his very political existence both to his ability to make outrageous statements and to his risky defection from one political party to another. This controversial approach to politics eventually led modern writers in particular to label Watson as a bigot and a racist; and, more importantly, to place blame on Watson for inspiring an agitated audience in Lamar to turn to violence on the morning on March 3, 1970.

Well before the riot at Lamar, Watson entered the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1962. Championing fiscal responsibility for the state and personal rights for the individual, Watson started his political career as a "socially conservative" Democrat.[10] Even in the earliest parts of his career, he was known more for what he opposed than what he supported; he actively campaigned against many of the organizations and grassroots efforts the Democratic Party promoted during the decade. Labor unions, poverty programs, and even Democratic based lobbying groups all received the criticism of the newly elected representative. In addition to these issues, Billy Hawthorn wrote, Watson also "fought forced racial integration and usurpation of rights" on the local and state levels of government – a stance that would later interest "freedom of choice" organizers in Lamar.[11]

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[10] Billy B. Hathorn, "The Changing Politics of Race: Congressman Albert William Watson and the South Carolina Republican Party, 1965 – 1970," *South Carolina Historical Magazine 89* (1988): 228.

[11] Ibid, 228 –231.

If his political views were not enough to alienate other Democrats, Watson's political relationships with powerful and successful Republicans gave colleagues in the Democratic Party the material needed to marginalize him and his damaging views. Even before his successful entry into the South Carolina State House of Representatives, Watson actively campaigned for Republican presidents running for office, and his support of them continued until he left the Democratic Party in 1965.[12] It was his support of Barry Goldwater in 1964 that finally caused his resignation from the Democratic Party. Annoyed both by Watson's inability to support major Democratic candidates and by his incompatible ideologies, Democrats in 1964 overlooked Watson when assigning committee membership, essentially ignoring what little seniority he had from his previous term. Offended by this move, Watson resigned from his position in the House, left the Democratic Party for the growing Republican Party, and gained back his House seat as a Republican through a special election – all in the year of 1965.[13]

As a Republican, Watson continued to advocate individuals' rights and, like his Democrat-turned-Republican colleague Thurmond, he adamantly opposed state imposed integration, particularly in education. While Watson joined Thurmond in supporting Nixon in the 1968 presidential election for various political reasons, one of the strongest appeals to Nixon was the presidential candidate's belief in and support of "freedom of choice" programs as a way to implement school integration. In addition to Watson's undeniable support of "choice" programs, his selection as the Republican candidacy for governor in 1970 made him an ideal

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[12] Watson supported Republican candidate Richard Nixon instead of Democratic candidate John Kennedy in 1960; Republican Barry Goldwater instead of Democrat Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

[13] Ibid.

representative to promote the concerns of worried parents and students of Lamar who were upset over the impending school integration process.[14]

Even though organizers in Lamar invited various politicians to address the crowd at a rally supporting "freedom of choice," only Watson attended. Catering to an audience of 2500 locals, Watson proclaimed that every parent had the ultimate right to decide what happened to their child, and this right extended to choosing whichever school the parent desired their child to attend.[15] He also urged the people to continue with the ongoing boycott of the schools. In his speech, he cited three main reasons for the boycott: first, he and many other people believed that the reason for the integration – the federal court order – contradicted the will of the people; consequently, Watson proclaimed that government should repair this discrepancy in some way. Second, Watson argued that the change in the racial atmosphere of the school presented serious safety issues for all students; third, emphasizing the first reason, he stated that the people's resolve was strong enough to demand a "freedom of choice" program and, simply, they would not accept any other implementation plans.[16] Watson truly believed that "choice" was not only a viable option: it was the *only* option.

While the people of Lamar were quite receptive to Watson's message, many other listeners – both in the state and on the national level, concluded that his solutions were not helpful in any way. In fact, Watson's statements on stopping school integration, in addition to other campaign strategies, led many later authors to believe that Watson not only was responsible for inciting the Lamar Riot, but also was running a highly racist and divisive

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[14] Ibid. 231 – 232. The South Carolina Republican Party selected Watson as their candidate not through a primary, but through voting at the state convention. This was done because Watson faced opposition from another candidate, Arthur Ravenel, Jr., who did not support "freedom of choice" as strongly as Watson supported it.

[15] "Watson Voices Support for 'Choice Position,'" Columbia *State*, February 23, 1970.

[16] Ibid.

campaign aimed at the fears and discriminatory mentalities of the majority white voter.[17] While his overall impact on inciting the Lamar riots is questionable, he was one political source the people of Lamar looked to for support in ending the forced integration plan.

Watson was not the only member of the Republican Party to support the people of Lamar in their struggle for "freedom of choice." Thurmond, a far more popular and powerful Republican politician, also made similar arguments against the court-ordered integration plan. The senator saw the impact the court decisions were making on people, like those in Lamar, and used his high status position to make critical remarks about state and federal courts and their ability to shape law and society. In fact, Thurmond often compared the judicial decisions to tyranny and demanded that the courts, especially the Supreme Court, remove themselves from the legislator's issues.[18] Responding to court imposed sanctions like those in Lamar, Thurmond declared that the court rulings neither were respecting the popular opinions of the people nor were creating a reasonable solution when it came to school integration. The senator proclaimed that any court mandated school integration program forced upon the people of South Carolina would eventually fail and then the local school district would once again retain control of their own domain.[19]

Such statements only fueled the resentment of Lamar citizens and other concerned people in the local area. By vilifying the judicial system through comparing its function to the actions

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[17] Nordheimer, "Racial Theme Dominates," 13. Nordheimer claimed that Watson was not the only racist member in his campaign who had a talent for starting riots; he wrote that two of Watson's staff workers also used racially motivated fears and threats to incite riots and disobedience. In particular, Nordheimer documented an incident where two staff members "incited a riot" among a group of students after taking photographs of both black and white youth.

[18] William E. Mahoney, "McNair to Appeal Case to President," Columbia *Record*, January 21, 1970. The Robert McNair Political Scrapbook, South Carolina State Archives and History Center, Columbia, South Carolina. Any subsequent newspaper article cited in this paper without page numbers originated in the McNair Scrapbook.

[19] Ibid.

of ruthless dictators and by discounting the court's ability to make effective programs for the future, Thurmond gave hope to the people of Lamar when they needed it most. Thurmond showed, with statements like these, that he was not afraid to oppose any court that attempted to impose their judicial power for purposes that contradicted the sentiment of the populace. Also, if their senator was able both to criticize openly the federal court and to dismiss easily the court's final decisions, so too could the people most directly affected by the federal court and its decision to integrate schools. While Watson directly challenged the people of Lamar to fight for their own choices, Thurmond indirectly permitted the people of Lamar to do the same.

Strom was one of many southern Republicans to criticize the court's intervention into the school integration process. Other opponents to this cause extended well out of the southern states. Much like Watson and Thurmond, Nixon, having won election to the presidency just two years earlier, mirrored many of the same policies that his southern, Republican colleagues adhered to. For example, he was one of the most vocal proponents of "freedom of choice." In addition to "choice," the president opposed busing as a means to integrate schools and, "abhorred the withholding of federal funds to achieve 'racial balance.'"[20]

With these views, the people of Lamar had a vested interest in Nixon. If the president shared many of the concerns that they did, surely he would stop the court imposed integration plan. Journalist William F. McIlwain reported that a small portion of the Lamar High School student body wrote to Nixon in the early months of 1970, asking for assistance in the escalating problem of school integration at Lamar High School.[21] In their letter, the students cited the

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[20] Marian Wright Edelman, "Southern School Desegregation, 1954 – 1973: A Judicial – Political Overview," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 407* (1973): 39. Nixon's support of the "choice" system does alter during the span of his political career. Edelman, a lawyer and activist, wrote that while initially Nixon favored the program as a legitimate way to implement integration, the president eventually only offered his support of "choice" when, "It was not a subterfuge for continued segregation."

[21] McIlwain, "Overturning of Two School Buses," 98.

promises Nixon made to the people of South Carolina to protect "freedom of choice" plans and to allow local governing bodies to make the decisions that would impact their own daily lives – promises made to the people of Lamar and other areas in exchange for electing Nixon to the presidency.[22] The students also expressed their disappointment in President Nixon for not doing more to *at least* slow the process of school integration during the first months of 1970.[23] Clearly, Republican officials like Watson, Thurmond, and Nixon all provided the people of Lamar with hope in the continuation of "freedom of choice" programs in their local schools.

Much like their political opponents, the top Democratic leaders in South Carolina also helped both to alienate the people of Lamar further from the federal government and to perpetuate the peoples' hopes and belief in "choice" schools as the only possible way to integrate their local schools. One primary example of a Democrat catering to parents' desires was Democratic governor Robert McNair, who faced the riot and its buildup first hand as the governor. In Governor McNair's attempts to remain diplomatic and neutral concerning the court-ordered integration, his rhetoric and actions showed his inclination to blame the federal government for this inconvenience and to request aid from President Nixon and other government agencies, two actions that his Republican colleagues also performed.

On the one hand, the governor remained committed to resolving the dispute over school integration in a peaceful and legal manner without dismantling the public school system.[24] McNair realized that the current dual system in Greenville and Darlington counties were nearing termination and that any other segregated school districts in South Carolina would have the same

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Levona Page, "McNair Wants Nation to Listen to South Carolina's Case," Columbia *State*, January 7, 1970. Governors in other southern states were meeting during this time period to discuss the option of closing their states' public school systems in order to avoid the integration process.

fate.[25] Thus, while trying to keep peace within the state, the governor also had the difficult task of preparing the people for the upcoming change. It was particularly difficult for McNair because he believed, "The people haven't fully understood that this [court-ordered integration process] is a taste of what is going to be almost statewide in September."[26] Consequently, McNair wanted the citizens not only of Greenville and Darlington, but also of the entire state to know that this court order was not an isolated incident, but a continuation of the inevitable dismantling of segregated schools.

On other hand, McNair approached the inevitable desegregation process not with full support and creative means to facilitate the transition, but with blame for the federal government and with few suggestions for local school officials looking desperately for answers. While McNair never officially supported "freedom of choice" programs as did most of his other colleagues, he also never claimed that the integration process would work. In fact, the governor stated that adhering to the deadline set by the Fourth Circuit Court would be "virtually impossible to meet" for the people of the two school districts.[27] If the governor, an elected official responsible for the educational development and welfare of South Carolina's children, deemed the plan "virtually impossible," how could the people of Lamar willingly embrace such a doomed plan? With such rhetoric, McNair only helped to solidify and intensify the movement against school integration in Lamar.

In addition to the emerging sense of helplessness, Governor McNair also focused his attention on blaming others for the "virtually impossible" court order. He helped to popularize the idea that there was a "double standard" when it came to school integration; the governor

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] "McNair, Thurmond Ask Nixon for More Time," Columbia *State*, January 22, 1970.

claimed that the nation's attention exaggerated problems in southern schools far too frequently and often ignored similar problems with schools and de facto segregation in the north.[28] Just like his Republican colleagues Thurmond and Nixon, McNair's attitudes helped to increase the bitterness the people of Lamar felt towards the federal government. The Fourth Circuit Court forced undesired social change upon the people of Lamar while other federal courts ignored school's lack of integration. With such negative language and lack of direction, the people of Lamar really had few ways to approach this court order except with doubt, suspicion, and anger.

Despite these emotions, however, the people of Lamar hoped that someone would overturn or at least delay the integration process. Much like Thurmond, Governor McNair called upon the support of federal powers like Richard Nixon who supported "freedom of choice" and the rights of states to decide how and when to integrate their schools. In addition to Nixon, the governor, who desired to extend the February deadline, also petitioned the Justice Department.[29] After intense negotiations, however, McNair was unable to convince the department to grant him and the Darlington School District an extension. Nixon also proved to be ineffective in granting the state more time.

After negotiations with the Justice Department and Nixon ended, Governor McNair had officially exhausted all possible options for delaying the February deadline to integrate. At the beginning of January 1970 Governor McNair informed the people of South Carolina that school integration was inevitable; in the middle portion of January McNair helplessly proclaimed that the upcoming integration deadline was "virtually impossible to meet;" by the end of January McNair submitted to the court ruling. Admitting this submission, McNair stated that the Justice Department, in their refusal to extend the deadline, "left little hope for the two affected school

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[28] Page, "Listen to Case."

[29] William E. Mahoney, "Justice Department Crushes Hope of Mixing Delay," Columbia *Record*, January 29, 1970.

districts."[30] However, from reviewing the words and actions of the governor himself, McNair eliminated just as much of Lamar's hope as any other federal source eliminated hope of Lamar residents.

McNair was not the only Democrat promoting the hope for a delay in school integration. Unlike the governor, Democratic Lieutenant Governor John West did have a plan for the school integration process of Greenville and Darlington School Districts: a plan of "freedom of choice" (which closely matched the integration strategy of President Nixon). Running against Watson in the 1970 gubernatorial election, West focused a large portion of his political campaign on improving education in the state. The Lieutenant Governor claimed that "quality of education" was one of his top priorities if elected governor. In order to implement policies that would improve public schools, West needed schools to have a defined and effective structure already in place. West believed that integrating schools would only decrease the structure of the public school system (if not completely destroy it) and their abilities to teach children.[31]

Consequently, West actively created his education plan to include "freedom of choice." The Lieutenant Governor argued that a "choice" program was, "the best possible plan to save our schools and I promise you that I will continue to do everything I can to see that we get it."[32] This statement contrasted with the vague promises of his current boss, Governor McNair. It provided false hope to the people of Lamar: the federal court ordered the Darlington County School District to follow a specific integration plan, which did not include the "choice" option for parents. The Lieutenant Governor would need to overstep the court order, in a legal manner, in

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Hathorn, "Changing Politics," 234.

[32] "West Joins Campaign: Criticizes School Order," Columbia *State*, February 24, 1970: 1A.

order to fulfill his integration plan. Promising the possibility of "choice" but having no legal way to ensure it, West misled the people he claimed to be defending.

The words and actions of not only Watson, but also his Republican and Democratic colleagues impacted the way the people of Darlington County approached the impending integration order. Jeryl Best and his neighbors mobilized around "freedom of choice" partly because of its success in other Southern states, partly because "choice" programs allowed the parents to have control over the educational decisions impacting their children, and partly because political officials like Nixon, Watson, West, and others advocated "choice" as a legitimate means to the integration implementation dispute.

In addition to collectively sharing the same ideals as their elected officials, individual people also made statements that resembled the opinions of West, Watson, and the others. For example, one unidentified person, describing the riot at Lamar, claimed that there were long-term causes that led to the outburst of violence on March third. This long-time resident of Lamar believed that the federal government had forced the people of Darlington County, "past the boiling point."[33] The crowds' reliance on violence, claimed this anonymous individual, was far more than a form of racist resistance: it was aggression against the, "establishment whose callous oppression they had been driven to hate and despise."[34] People like this unidentified witness illustrated just how pervasive and popular the sentiments against an "obtrusive" federal government were: random people, entire groups, and even elected officials all attempted to attribute the blame and responsibility of the riot upon the federal government.

Compounding on the unfulfilled promises and the lack of practical solutions offered by elected officials, the actual integration plan and implementation of schools in Darlington County

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[33] Untitled Account of Events at Lamar, Workman Paper Collection: Box 28, "Lamar, SC" folder, p. 2.

[34] Ibid.

also contributed to the violent outburst at Lamar High School. On February 3, 1970 the Fourth Circuit Court selected the specific integration plan from a series of choices offered by the Darlington School District and the federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW).[35] Unfortunately for the people of Lamar and for the school district, the court chose an integration plan created exclusively by HEW without local citizens' input.[36] Therefore, the parents of children who attended classes in one of the schools in Darlington County had no medium to provide their suggestions or concerns over the impending integration; they merely had to accept a plan created by a federal agency.

The specific integration plan divided the county into "non-racial attendance areas" that required children in each particular zone to attend the closest school located in that attendance area.[37] Since HEW, and not the Darlington School District, created the integration plan, the local school district attempted to minimize all controversy in its implementation. School officials assured the public that the integration plan would require no additional busing in order to be implemented successfully.[38] Even though citizens appreciated that the district would not utilize busing, the integration plan had already increased the fears and anger of local parents and other members of the community.

These zones, created by HEW, presented white parents and students with their worst fears: the zoning integration plan forced poorer white children who lived on the "wrong side of

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[35] Stanley v. Darlington County School District, Civil Action No. 4:62-7749-22, United States District Court, Florence Division, School of Law, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, http://www.law.sc.edu/dsc/is0222.htm: Background section

[36] Ibid. In previous court battles, the Fourth Circuit Court ordered the school district to work with HEW to create a legitimate integration process – one that effectively dispersed students of both races within the existing county schools. When Darling County officials refused to submit a plan that did not include "freedom of choice," HEW created a plan without the input of the school district.

[37] Ginny Carroll, "Darlington Schools to be Zoned," Columbia *State*, February 4, 1970: 1A.

[38] "Neighborhood School Plan 'Seems Likely'," *Hartsville Messenger*, January 29, 1970: 1A.

town" to attend a former black school with black students.[39] This fear was more than just a threat; it quickly became the reality for the people of Lamar. The HEW integration plan, according to reporter Ginny Carroll, formed several schools where African American students were in the majority. Two particular schools in the district were Lamar Elementary and High Schools.[40] Without the option of contributing to the plan directly, the parents of Lamar schools now faced the prospect of sending their children to schools that they did not desire their children to attend.

Most of the local population – black and white, rich and poor, political and apolitical – rejected HEW's plan from its inception. The first cries of opposition came from school and government officials. Benny R. Greer, the school district's attorney, continued to argue for a "choice" option; he believed that the county school district could implement a "choice" integration plan that would create a unitary school system.[41] Arthur Stanley, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP), found support not only from other African American residents, but also from poor white citizens when he claimed that the school zoning favored rich, white citizens because, as he believed, the integration plan made no substantial changes for the elite and where their children went to school.[42] How could a plan that incorporated segregation based upon class and also prevented either direct or indirect collaboration with the people of Lamar ever satisfy the already disgruntled and disillusioned people of the community? Simply, the criticisms held by many

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[39] McIlwain, "Overturning of Two School Buses," 98.

[40] Carroll, "Zoned," 1A.

[41] Ibid.

[42] McIlwain, "Overturning of Two School Buses," 103.

members of the community only further alienated the citizens of Lamar from embracing the HEW-created integration plan.

While some criticized the integration plan, others used its impending implementation as part of their argument for local leadership to do everything in their power to stop the plan. For example, John P. Gardner, a prominent attorney in Darlington County, wrote to gubernatorial candidate West in hopes that the governor would continue to advocate openly for "freedom of choice," and begin to create an official plan to combat the HEW plan.[43] Unlike many other people at the time, Gardner was not openly opposed to school integration; in fact, he believed that it was a necessary step for the state to take in order for South Carolina to improve educational and social relationships with the nation and each other.[44] However, Gardner believed that certain social forces and educational liabilities limited the effectiveness of any integration plan that would occur during the early months of 1970.

First and foremost, Gardner believed that the increasing hostility of the community and that the commonly held belief that, "the average white person simply is not going to permit his child to attend schools in Negro areas," would prevent the HEW plan from working in Darlington County.[45] Secondly, Gardner expressed great concern for the educational welfare of the children of Darlington County. He claimed that implementing the integration plan compromised the children's right to learn in a supportive and structured environment; with so much controversy and opposition towards HEW and its integration plan, Gardner feared that children, with the encouragement of their parents, would forgo their educational development

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[43] John P. Gardner, letter to John West, February 24, 1970, The West Paper Collection. Gardner believed in finding a solution to this problem so deeply that he, himself, considered running for local office to assist with the integration issue.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

and continue to boycott the school district.[46] For individuals like Gardner, the impending school integration allowed the federal government to attack the Southern "way of life." More importantly, it also victimized the most helpless and innocent members of the society – the children.

Unlike West, Governor McNair publicly shared the fears of Gardner, particularly with his concern for children and their educational rights. The governor voiced his concerns by questioning the timing of the integration plan. The ruling of the Fourth Circuit Court ordered the Darlington School District to integrate by February 9, and then extended the deadline to February 17. McNair responded to this deadline with confusion; he asked why the court did not allow the integration process to occur at the beginning of the school year, as opposed to the court's order to interrupt the current semester.[47]

In addition to government officials and local citizens, prominent school officials objected to the timing of the integration implementation. The State Superintendent of South Carolina Schools, Cyril Busbee, claimed that the timing of the court order "would be disruptive" for faculty and students of schools in Darlington County.[48] For many people, whether they were linked to the Darlington School district through employment, through their children, or through their constituents, the integration plan developed by HEW provided numerous problems that they were able neither to compromise over nor to combat. By leaving the people of Lamar and Darlington County out of planning of the integration process, HEW and the federal government only fueled the resentment that many in the county felt towards the "northern aggressors." It was

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[46] Ibid.

[47] "School Action Pondered by McNair," Charleston *Evening Post*, January 21, 1970.

[48] Ibid.

this increasing anger and frustration that finally exploded in violence at Lamar High School on March 3, 1970.

To many people, the event at Lamar in early 1970 symbolized just how intolerant and divided the nation still remained when it came to race relations and promoting equality for all; to others, the Lamar riot was just another example of the "tyrannical" ways of the federal government and its quest to dominate the lives of everyone under it. Regardless of which particular position individuals sided with, everyone in South Carolina felt the impact of the riot. After Lamar, legislators, particularly West, campaigned even more for improvements to education and safety. In fact, the event at Lamar became one of the key issues debated in the 1970 gubernatorial election. The negative press Watson generated, in addition to other campaign issues, helped lietenant governor West narrowly defeat his Republican opponent in the November election. This defeat sent Watson quietly into obscurity. The Republican Representative resonated with audiences not for his previous political contributions, but for his racist campaign strategies, which included his close association with the violence at Lamar.

After analyzing the political background and ideologies of Watson, it is easy to see why so many people placed blame upon him and those who supported him. Newspapers like the New York *Times* and the Columbia *State* published articles linking Watson to the violence that occurred in Lamar because he foolishly was willing to promote the "freedom of choice" option to a desperate audience in Lamar. For this, Watson certainly did contribute to the cause of the riot. However, his political colleagues, through explicit and indirect ways, also promoted the riot by upholding the possibility of "choice" integration just as Watson upheld them. Unfortunately for Watson, many of his main colleagues either lacked the controversial political history that haunted his own career or relied on the dominant state Democratic Party to uphold and to support

the viewpoints of Democratic candidates. While others blamed Watson for inciting a riot, he – alone – was not the only individual or agency responsible for the violent outburst at Lamar High School.

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