

## Public vs. Private: Private Schools Win Again

by C. Liegh McInnis

On Friday, August 31, 2001, Jackson Prep made history when it became the first Mississippi private school to play football against a Mississippi public school. Although Jackson Prep lost the battle on the field, private schools all over America won the larger war--to remain separate and unequal while still taking advantage of public school funds. In 1954 *Brown vs. The Board* sent down the ruling that separate but equal is inherently and innately unconstitutional and racist--racist in that it creates and perpetuates a system of dual education where the education of white children are funded at a higher rate than the education of black children. This, and only this, was the reason for a majority push toward integration by black people. The black mass did not want integration to live by white people, shop with white people, or be accepted and/or validated by white people. Integration was merely a means to an end to having the education of black children equally funded with white children. The Supreme Court handed down a ruling that public schools were to integrate with all due speed. Twenty years later, Mississippi was taking its first steps toward educational integration. What happened between those twenty plus years? There were two interesting courses of action taken. The first was the establishment of the Sovereignty Commission by the Mississippi Legislature a few years before the *Brown Ruling*, which was established to spy on and terrorize any group working toward integration, or "race-mixing," especially in the areas of education. Secondly, from 1954 to 1974, more than half of the private schools now in existence were created. There are stories, such as one Mississippi public school being sold to a white citizens group for a dollar or one public school being burned in reaction to *Brown vs. The Board*. I wonder why so many private schools were crated after the *Brown Ruling*? I would like to give you a more specific number of schools established, but the Mississippi Private Schools Association will not release that type of information. I have tried to contact them several times. I wonder why the MPSA does not want to release the dates of establishment of their schools? Is it because they know that the establishment of these schools can be directly traced to the State's wave of counter-action to integration?

Today, we stand on the verge of a new Millennium, and the MPSA wants to cultivate a relationship with Mississippi's public schools. Why? Right now the MPSA feels that it has the best of the intellectual world, especially since it has weeded out all of the negative elements that will bring down the educational level of its program. However, the MPSA is lacking the best of the sports/physical education world, which is an excellent supplement to create a well-rounded curriculum, generate funds for the school, and give student athletes the opportunity to earn college scholarships to defray the cost of college. Until now, private school athletes, especially in the South, have their private school attendance used against them when attempting to gain college athletic scholarships. The competition level is not perceived as high as in the public school programs. Therefore, private academies need to raise their level of competition in order to enhance their students' opportunities of gaining sports scholarships. For if it was truly about fostering good sportsmanship and a sense of fair-play, what need would the private academies have to play public schools. They can foster that among their own leagues. In fact, they could be a better example by asserting that they may not play at the same level of competition as the public schools, but their students are learning the same values with a greater emphasis on character building and not competition. Private schools have separated themselves in every aspect that they can: educational, geographic, economic and social. It just seems quite interesting that after years of segregation, now the private schools come a-knocking. And who is answering the door? Of course, high level public school administrators who have community relations with private schools or who have children attending private schools. This action smacks of the same tom-foolery as when white teachers quit public school jobs during the Christmas break in protest to *Brown vs. The Board*, yet they still received full pay during the spring semester,

even those who went to teach at private schools. Additionally, lingering lawsuits all over the country, including one in a Mississippi school district, are raising serious questions as to whether or not the majority of private schools were funded with public funds. Could this new athletic relationship between the public and private schools be another way of funding private schools with public funds? Is this the new, indirect voucher system? Private schools will benefit from public school athletic budgets merely by playing against public schools. Over time, private school athletic programs will evolve to that of the public schools, but what are the public schools gaining in return. I do not see the MPSA inviting public school children to participate in any of their intellectual/academic programs? It is a symbiotic relationship, at best, where public schools are, once again, the givers, and private schools are, once again, the takers.

Someone will, of course, raise the issue that public colleges play private colleges all the time. The difference, if we are being honest, is that colleges sell their athletic programs as a vehicle to play pro-ball or as a vehicle to gain a professional career in some aspect of sports, especially professional sports. Thus, private colleges have the same if not larger budgets to compete with public schools because college athletics is big money. Do we really want to foster a program where private schools begin fishing for and exploiting black labor from the inner cities for their athletic programs? If anyone thinks that I am being sensational, you should remember that many professional athletes, such as Issiah Thomas and Chris Webber, attended private high schools on scholarships, merely because of their athletic ability. And we all continue to look past the fact that private colleges (in fact most colleges) create double standards for black athletes but ignore "special circumstances" for African Americans who want to attend school merely for academic purposes. For instance, there are all types of waivers and programs to admit student athletes who do not have the appropriate ACT, SAT or high school GPA into colleges. Is this not hypocritical that colleges will not create "special programs" in the same aggressive and "understanding" manner for African Americans who want to be intellectuals, but they will create "special programs" for African Americans who want to be athletes? Do we really want this type of double standard created in our high schools? It seems that this "special" relationship between the public and private schools will only serve to perpetuate this misconception of African American intellect and human worth as merely labor specific. Only time will tell, but one point is clear. There is nothing that the students in the public schools can gain from this relationship, but they will be at risk of losing more funding to programs that are already at risk. Instead of playing ball, public schools are, once again, "gettin' played."

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