The Desegregation of Schools in Thibodaux, Louisiana: 1954-1970

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The Desegregation of Schools in Thibodaux, Louisiana: 1954-1970

A Thesis

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in partial fulfillment of the
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Master of Arts
in
History

by

Shelby Thibodaux

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Abstract

The study of school systems in Thibodaux, the seat of Lafourche Parish, adds to research on school desegregation in Southern rural communities. This thesis highlights the untold story of the Black community's resistance to segregation in Thibodaux and efforts by white officials to maintain a segregated school system. Black resistance included a petition filed in 1955 and the Edward Hill v. Lafourche Parish School Board (1967) case. Partial integration began in 1966, but the parish did not establish a unitary system until the 1968-1969 school year. This research focuses on the Lafourche Parish public school system from first through twelfth grades. This thesis investigates the process of desegregating schools in Thibodaux from 1954 to 1970 by analyzing the Lafourche Parish School Board records, court case records, newspapers, and oral history interviews.
Introduction

A well-known image of the New Orleans Civil Rights Movement is Ruby Bridges entering William Frantz Elementary School in 1960. Activism and legal challenges in New Orleans pushed officials to desegregate schools, setting the foundation for similar suits in the state. Just as in the school system in New Orleans, local activism pushed officials across the state to desegregate schools. The rural narrative of the desegregation of schools is less extensive than that of urban areas. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) created a controversy in the Lafourche Parish School System, leading Black parents in the parish seat of Thibodaux to gather and petition to force the desegregation of schools. Although this activism in 1955 saw little immediate success, a conversation began on integrating local schools.

This thesis followed the Black community's commitment throughout the 1950s and 1960s to achieve equal educational opportunities. The success of the Civil Rights Movement within the rural city of Thibodaux lay solely within the Black community. The Lafourche Parish School Board (LPSB) openly supported segregationist policies and aided in measures to ensure a segregated system. The LPSB and governmental authorities who represented Lafourche Parish voiced their opinions and worked hard to preserve a segregated school system. Due to the persistence of the local Black community, with help from the Louisiana and local chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the LPSB was forced to create a desegregation plan. The rural narrative of the desegregation of schools is less extensive than that of urban areas. This study of this rural sugar parish adds to the growing field of research into the Civil Rights Movement in rural communities. Sources used in this thesis included school board records, court case records, NAACP papers, newspapers, and oral history interviews. This thesis highlights the Black community in Thibodaux and the experiences of two
Black men who were born and raised in this city. Through oral history interviews, Thomas Turner III and Burnell Tolbert shared their experiences of integrating into a previously all-white school.

Local school board officials excused their denial to desegregate the school system based on state laws. From 1955 to 1964, LPSB members labored to maintain and support a segregated school system. Local Black community members launched organized resistance against the segregated school system in 1955. In 1965, five Black men, with help from the NAACP, joined a fight that would permanently transform the school system. The *Edward Hill v. Lafourche Parish School Board* (1967) forced the school board to implement “freedom of choice” in different stages. “Freedom of choice” allowed parents and students to choose the school that they attended. Race could not be a factor in denying the choice of school. “Freedom of choice” as a method of desegregation relied solely on the Black community and did not accomplish meaningful integration. The *Hill* case's final revisions came in 1968 when “freedom of choice” was deemed constitutionally unacceptable by the United States Supreme Court. The Eastern District Judge of Louisiana then required that the LPSB create a plan for a unitary school system. Final desegregation plans consisted of reconstructing the school system based on grades, not geographic location which eliminated the dual school system. The 1968-1969 school year, the first year of a unitary system, unfolded without significant racial incidents, but tensions increased the next school year. Black and white Thibodaux High School (THS) students engaged in a fight in January 1970 due to the increase in racial tensions.

Lafourche Parish was the first parish in Louisiana to establish a unitary system because desegregation plans consisted of school assignments based on grade level, not geographic location. This method eliminated the dual school system that the parish previously established.
and maintained for decades. When the parish finally established a unitary school system, local officials praised themselves for their “voluntary” method of desegregation. Yet, in fact, school board officials continuously denied any Black-led efforts for an integrated school system until legally forced to integrate.

The success of the Civil Rights Movement within the rural city of Thibodaux lay solely within the Black community. This thesis followed the Black community's commitment throughout the 1950s and 1960s to achieve equal educational opportunities. Black community members launched organized resistance against the segregated school system in 1955. The LPSB and governmental authorities who represented Lafourche Parish voiced their opinions and worked hard to preserve a segregated school system. The LPSB members praised themselves for their efforts to desegregate. In 1965, five Black men, with help from the NAACP, joined a fight that would permanently transform the school system.

**History of Lafourche Parish and Thibodaux**

Lafourche Parish is a rural sugar parish in southeastern Louisiana. In 1807 Lafourche Interior Parish became one of the nineteen civil parishes. Since the establishment of the parish, communities centered along Bayou Lafourche and other waterways due to easy access to transportation. Bayou Lafourche runs throughout the parish, starting in Donaldsonville and emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. Lafourche Parish was comprised of eleven wards from the 1950s through the 1960s. Thibodaux, Lockport, and Larose were the only incorporated cities. Other unincorporated towns in Lafourche along the Bayou include Raceland, Cut Off, Galliano, Golden Meadow, Leeville, and Port Fourchon.¹ The original culture and language of the parish

included French. When small farms condensed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, slave labor was introduced to this region. The economy of the upper and central portions of the parish mainly consists of agriculture, while the southern part previously consisted of seafood and fishing. From 1930 the economy in the southern part of the parish switched to oil and gas. The parish has a strong sense of community due to parishioners' ability to trace their ancestors to the parish’s early settlement.²

Figure 1: Map of Lafourche Parish

²Theriot, Images of America: Lafourche Parish.
The Black population and proportion in the parish decreased over time. Similar to other plantation parishes, Lafourche’s Black population decreased due to World War I and II. This was due to the new opportunities of the war industries. These new areas did not have high instances of racial violence. Due to World War I, the Black population decreased from 7,973 to 5,888 from 1910-1920. From 1940 to 1950 the Black population decreased from 5,635 to 5,243. In 1950, the parish’s total population was 42,209, and the white population was approximately 86.4%. In 1960, the population increased to 55,381, and the white population increased to 87.8%. For the 1960 census, Lafourche was one of the five parishes with the fewest non-white residents. The 1970 population of Lafourche Parish totaled 68,941 citizens. The Black population decreased by 1970 to 11.5%. From 1950 to 1970, the parish's population increased by 63.3%. During this time, the overall white population increased at a high rate, which caused the proportion of the Black population in the parish to decrease.

Thibodaux is approximately sixty miles southwest of New Orleans and holds the title of parish seat of Lafourche. Thibodaux was incorporated in 1830 and named after the original settler, Henry Schuyler Thibodaux. The economy of Thibodaux revolved around the sugar industry. In the 1950 census, 7,730 citizens lived within the limits of Thibodaux. By 1960, the population had increased to 13,403. In 1970, the population had risen to 14,925, of which 20.8% were Black or other races. From 1950 to 1970, the population within the city increased by 93.1%. Thibodaux remained the city with the highest Black population in Lafourche Parish.

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5Theriot, Images of America: Lafourche Parish.
to the increase in population, the number of schools and total student body within the Thibodaux region increased over time.

Thibodaux historically had a history of racial violence. In total Lafourche Parish had fifty-two reported lynchings.\(^8\) The first reported lynching occurred in 1877 when a Black man accused of assaulting a thirteen-year-old girl was taken from prison and hung in Thibodaux.\(^9\) A mass lynching of African Americans occurred in 1887 during an event known as the Thibodaux Massacre. During harvest season, Black cane workers organized under the Knights of Labor. After two white militants were shot, white men went around the city shooting organizers and Black people who were accused of participating. The city of Thibodaux had a history of deadly retaliations against African Americans who openly organized for equal rights.\(^10\)

During the 1950s to 1970s, student enrollment in the Lafourche Parish School System increased yearly. During the school year 1954-1955, the Lafourche Parish School System had 8,406 white students and 1,289 Black students.\(^11\) Within this school year, 2,769 of the white students and 968 Black students attended schools in Thibodaux. By the 1969-1970 school year, 17,457 students were a part of the Lafourche Parish School System, an increase of 80.1% over the beginning of desegregation fourteen years earlier. The school board reorganized several times affecting both Black and white schools. Historically white Thibodaux High School (THS) also split to add a Thibodaux Junior High into the system. Later, in the 1960s, the LPSB reconstructed schools because of the Hill decision.\(^12\) This study followed public schools listed in the school directory with a Thibodaux address.

\(^9\)“Speedy Retribution” The Times-Picayune, April 8, 1877, 10. This newspaper article is apart of the Equal Justice Initiative’s database on lynchings.
\(^10\)For further reading on the Thibodaux Massacre see The Thibodaux Massacre: Racial Violence and the 1887 Sugar Cane Labor Strike by John DeSantis.
\(^11\)“Lafourche Schools Bulge With Record Enrollment” The Lafourche Comet, September 9, 1954.
C.M. Washington was the primary Black school in Thibodaux. The school’s name derived from a woman who brought educational opportunities to the Black community in Thibodaux. Cordelia Mathews Washington's desire for an education started at a young age. She became the first African American Thibodaux native to obtain a Bachelor's degree, which she received from Straight College of New Orleans in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{13} She desired to educate Black children, and in 1902 The Negro Corporation Training School opened in Thibodaux. Parents in Terrebonne and Assumption Parishes sent their children to live with friends and relatives to attend this school. Superintendent Robert O. Moncla renamed The Negro Corporation Training School to C.M. Washington.\textsuperscript{14}

The lack of Black political power is one factor that explains the relative lack of Black schools, underfunding, and the poor condition of facilities assigned to Black communities. This absence allowed the segregated system in Thibodaux to persist until 1966. As reflected in the pages of The \textit{Times-Picayune}, Lafourche reflected the rest of the Solid South and in 1960, remained a primarily Democratic parish with only twelve registered Republicans.\textsuperscript{15} The parish saw low voter registration and participation from registered voters. During the Democratic primary in 1959, only 63.1\% of voters went to the polls, ranking at the bottom of the state.\textsuperscript{16} In 1960, the parish had 22,197 white voters and 2,039 Black voters. Black voter registration statewide increased in 1960, especially in Lafourche Parish. Statewide, parishes saw an increase in Black voters while white registration decreased. White voter registration decreased in May 1960, while Black registration increased by thirty-seven voters due to the purging of inactive voters.

\textsuperscript{13}Biography of Cordelia Mathews Washington a part of the LPSB Meeting Minute Records on April 3, 2019. This document is housed on Board Doc.
\textsuperscript{15}“Voter Registration in Louisiana by Parish, Race, and Party” The \textit{Times-Picayune}, October 30, 1960, 20.
Lafourche Parish had the most purged voters, losing 2,767 voters. In 1963, the parish had 24,232 white voters registered and only 2,076 Black voters. Lafourche Parish had little voter turnout for elections in the late 1950s to early 1960s.

Lafourche Parish had a high amount of illiterate voters, which had a major impact on the amount eligible white and Black voters. The *Times-Picayune* also published statistical information on the parish's literacy rate. The number of illiterate registered voters in 1960 was 2,339, of which the number of “colored” illiterate voters was 280.

In 1960, State Senator Albert Otto Rappelet of Galliano spoke out against the disenfranchisement of illiterate voters. A new “voter registration bill” voted on in the 1960 November election would allow new literacy requirements for newly registered voters. Rappelet contended that the number of illiterate voters was not due to lack of interest but Lafourche Parish's lack of education opportunities. The people he represented consisted of “farmers, fishermen, and those who make a living off of nature,” he wrote, and his vote “would be discrimination against my people.”

**Historiography**

Historians have defined the difference between integration and desegregation to understand the lasting effects of the Civil Rights Movement. Chafe describes integration as the maximum racial interaction, whereas desegregation is the minimum effort given into this interaction. Lassiter analyzes the Black community’s opinion on the definition of these terms. He states that the Black community did not accept assumptions that the closing of Black schools,
the elimination of Black faculty, and the transportation of Black students meant that these actions fulfilled the definition of desegregation.23

Many Black people faced retaliation because of their civil rights efforts. Fairclough argues that even white citizens could not openly support the Brown decision because of fear of retaliation from their peers. Black people who were a part of the NAACP or supported those who were active in the organization faced retaliation. Violent threats were targeted at these people, and some were even terminated from their jobs.24 Looking at rural southwest Mississippi, Crosby’s argument is similar to that of Fairclough’s in that African Americans did not voice their opinion on Brown due to fear of retaliation.25 Within Claiborne County, South Carolina association with the NAACP could lead to a Black person's job termination or violent threats against them. Not only did the threats affect the Black community’s safety, but also their voting rights. The white community excluded Black voters from the Democratic primaries despite this being unconstitutional. Families that led desegregation efforts faced harassment, name-calling, threatening phone calls, and menacing visitors. Black NAACP leaders experienced potentially deadly harassment due to their involvement in integration efforts.26

Lynchings had been a form of social control that affected those who challenged white supremacy.27 Several factors affected the amount of lynchings that occurred during a certain period. The state of the economy, especially during the Great Depression, affected the amount of

24John Dittmer, Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press. 1995.)
26Crosby, A Little Taste of Freedom, 163.
lynchings. During this time of economic decline, the number of lynchings decreased. The exodus of the southern Black population decreased the rate of lynchings due to the lessened need for white racial supremacy. In the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans used racial violence as a method for reform.\(^{28}\)

Louisiana's resistance to the desegregation of schools started immediately after the filing of the *Brown* case, while the Supreme Court decided to look at similar cases in Kansas and South Carolina.\(^{29}\) Following the *Brown* decision, Louisiana Governor Robert Kennon vowed to maintain a segregated school system. The Louisiana State Legislature protected segregation with numerous bills passed by the end of 1954. Act 555, in particular, withheld funding and called for the loss of accreditation if schools desegregated. Act 556 established a pupil placement law that prohibited cross-race assignment. State NAACP members A.P. Tureaud and Robert Carter argued the unconstitutionality of Acts 555 and 556 based on the *Brown* decision. Although resistance happened throughout the state, the first significant example in terms of schools happened in New Orleans. The state legislature maintained a segregated society in Louisiana, and local school board officials used these laws to maintain segregated institutions within the different parishes.\(^{30}\)

Most research done in Louisiana focuses on urban spaces like New Orleans. Overall, the examination of rural communities regarding school desegregation increased in recent years. De Jong’s *A Different Day* highlights changes within Black political activism, writing that the Black community actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement in pre-World War II America, but in the form of informal resistance. Local and statewide NAACP chapters faced challenges during

their civil rights fight. Often, the notion is that African Americans waited to fight for equality until the national civil rights organization participated in their rural efforts. Local activism increased when the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) aided in efforts, but this organization did not start civil rights efforts. 31

After the Brown decision, the Black community had legal backing to continue the fight for the integration of schools, but white political officials lacked a time frame for implementation. The lack of time frame given to the school board caused a ripple effect for the years of integration. Although African Americans had this legal backing, resistance from the white community continued. White resistance to Black activism showed in different ways throughout this period. Many Black students faced verbal attacks by white protesters and even some cases of violent attacks on school buildings. Following the Brown decision, cities nationwide began to face the integration challenge. 32 Louisville, Kentucky's reaction to integration was less extreme, despite its integration process starting earlier than New Orleans and Little Rock, Arkansas. Black students entered once-white schools in 1956, only about a year after the Brown II decision. 33 Different cities saw some success in desegregating schools, but school boards complicated the issue. School board officials abused their powers by denying parental requests to transfer their children. 34

White communities resisted desegregation all over the country. Acts of violence or threats were present in Little Rock, Lufkin, Texas, New Orleans, and Louisville. White locals reacted to the integration of schools in many different ways. In many cases, whites protested in an aggressive and threatening fashion.

Local officials maintained segregated societies throughout the early to mid-nineteenth century in America. Many historians used spatial analysis of cities and policies to show segregated societies. Communities were significantly affected by local officials’ attempts to segregate schools. New Orleans officials maintained a segregated school system, which maintained and created segregated societies. Northern cities were not immune to this purposely maintained motive. Racial gerrymandering, the establishment of selective school bus routes, and the building of new schools in school districts ensured racially homogeneous societies in the North and South. Douglas, Patterson, and Stern claim that the segregation of schools maintained segregated societies. White elites and educators resisted desegregation by gerrymandering the school attendance line. The preservation of a segregated society based on class and race became the goal. Poor Black and white citizens merged due to rezoning. The effect of segregated schools extended beyond school dynamics.

Past beliefs of Southern exceptionalism hindered historians’ research into the northern Civil Rights Movement. An overall examination of the northern Civil Rights Movement started in the 1960s with the increase in the Black Power movement, Martin Luther King’s attempt to

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“bring the movement North,” New York City school strikes, the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party, and the battle against court-mandated busing in Boston. In the North, de facto segregation created and maintained a segregated society. Delmont argued that the news media is to blame for the narrative that de facto segregation is unique to the South. Several factors, such as the drawing of school district lines, the creation of school bus routes, and the creation of new schools, maintained a segregated society in the North. Sugrue argues that creating a segregated society was public policy and private behavior. Also, northern Black citizens lived in a non-discriminatory legal system, but public policies reinforced segregated societies.

“Freedom of choice,” implemented in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, allowed students to pick the school they wanted to attend. “Freedom of choice,” sometimes referred to as “one-way integration,” saw few white students opting to attend a majority-Black school. This new plan put the burden of integration of Black parents or guardians. Overall, this method did not alter the dual school system within the county. Crosby, K’Meyer, and Chafe argue that school board officials who implemented this plan appeared to abide by federal mandates while maintaining control over the situation. White resistance denied the transfer of students or made it difficult for students to attend the requested schools. School board officials required specific

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41Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*.
43Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*.
qualifications for the transfer of students. As time progressed, eligible students did not wish to transfer.\(^46\)

*Petitioning for Change*

The Supreme Court Case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and *Brown II* in 1955 gave parents in Lafourche Parish the legal backing to fight for the integration of schools. The reaction of the white community within the parish was to preserve a segregated system. Newspaper records promote the Black community’s opposition to integration, despite clear evidence of their desire for integrated facilities. In July of 1955 forty-eight Black people in Lafourche Parish petitioned the LPSB to desegregate the parish’s school facilities. The LPSB cited new Louisiana laws as their reason for denying the petition, clearly avoiding the *Brown* decisions.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling created legal backing for African Americans to resist segregated school systems. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) had established a “separate but equal” ruling, but *Brown* overturned it. The original *Brown* case consisted of five cases in Kansas, South Carolina, Washington D.C., Virginia, and Delaware.\(^47\) The initial cases started to be filed in 1950 with the case in Clarendon County, South Carolina. In May 1955, the *Brown II* decision added the phrase “with all deliberate speed” to please Southern officials. With this phrase, school officials had time to plan how to integrate schools. *Brown II* gave African Americans legal support to fight segregation while giving white officials the ability to delay efforts.\(^48\)

The initial reaction of many white political leaders in Louisiana to the *Brown* decision centered on their fear of a racially heterogeneous society and an overreach of national

\(^{48}\)Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*. 

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government power. Louisiana Congressman F. Edward Hebert stated that the decision set race relations back fifty years. Other political leaders argued that the Supreme Court overstepped its power. Due to the vagueness of Brown II state and local governments had the power to decide whether or not to integrate, and they took advantage of this power. Many white parents feared for their school-aged children, believing that Black children's deficiencies would hinder their children's academics.

Several articles in The Lafourche Comet addressed the Brown decision, but none specifically addressed the school system in Lafourche. The Lafourche Comet published two articles, titled “Segregation Ruling Effect Analyzed” and “Ruling Said Threat to Negros.” The Brown decision “was specific in determination but hypothetical in argumentation.” The editorial board opined the judgment deemed the ruling unconstitutional and in violation of the law of southern states, but the authors contended the method to eliminate segregation remained unknown. The courts did not specifically address the constitutionality of Louisiana segregation laws, they added. Presumably, if the old laws were deemed unconstitutional, they noted that hopefully, the law would be replaced by another law to maintain segregation. Such a change would please the five percent of the population that demands equality for African Americans, as well as the ninety percent of people who want the best for the population through similar methods, the columnist wrote. The articles also pushed the narrative that the Brown decision negatively impacted the Black community. Integration in the North and East was unsuccessful, mainly due to the lack of jobs for Black teachers, the pieces contended. Segregated southern states such as Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida hired and paid high salaries to Black

teachers. The author added that his account of interviewing Black people in the South showed that they wanted “separate but equal” facilities. In summary, these articles contended that, like white citizens, the majority of the Black community opposed integration, so local officials needed to take action to preserve segregation.\textsuperscript{53}

The 1954-1955 school year saw a record number of white students in the Lafourche Parish School System, but Black student enrollment decreased. Lafourche Parish’s white student enrollment increased overall by 381, but Black student enrollment decreased by five students.\textsuperscript{54} In 1954, Thibodaux had three Black schools: C.M. Washington Elementary, C.M. Washington High School, and Greenwood Elementary. Yet in July of 1954, the school board closed down Lafourche Elementary School which had only seventy-one Black first through fifth-grade students and four teachers. These individuals, custodians, and cooks, were transferred to C.M. Washington High School.\textsuperscript{55}

The \textit{Brown II} decision gave the Black community hope for a change to the system, but the newly amended State Constitution allowed the LPSB to deny the petition. Soon after the \textit{Brown II} decision, the Black community in Thibodaux began to resist a separate school system based on the \textit{Brown} ruling. In the wake of \textit{Brown}, the Louisiana legislature amended the Louisiana Constitution to confirm all elementary and secondary schools remain segregated. Voters approved these amendments in November of 1954. The revisions to the state constitution meant that local officials could not enforce the \textit{Brown} decision, allowing segregation to continue in the school system. Although the \textit{Brown II} decision allowed segregationists not to act, Black parents demanded action immediately following the decision.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53}“Ruling Said Threat to Negros” \textit{The Lafourche Comet}, July 8, 1954.
\textsuperscript{54}“Lafourche Schools Bulge with Record Enrollment” \textit{The Lafourche Comet}, September 9, 1954, 1.
\textsuperscript{55}LPSB Meeting Minutes, July 7, 1954, Book Number 7, School Board Meeting Minutes, Thibodaux, 57.
\textsuperscript{56}Constitution of the State of Louisiana, 1954, L.R.S. 17:81.1.
Parents organized under the leadership of the Lafourche Chapter of The NAACP and filed a petition with the school board calling for immediate desegregation. The Black community drafted this petition on July 25th, 1955. Forty-eight Black parents or family members of school-aged children called upon the LPSB to reorganize the school system on a nondiscriminatory basis. A sense of community created this petition. In a 2023 oral history interview, Thomas Turner III explained his father's involvement: “There was a group of people who felt as though things weren’t going right in the system, and he was part of that group, and they decided to go on and file the petition for the integration of schools, and he was one of those people.”

The petitioners relied heavily on the rhetoric of the Brown and Brown II decisions for the legal backing of the petition. Like Thomas Turner II, individuals who signed the petition put forward this rationale: “The May 31 decision of the Supreme Court, to us, means that the time for delay, evasion or procrastination is past.” The LPSB was required under Brown and Brown II to immediately eliminate segregation in public schools by permitting students to attend any school, according to the petitioners. With aid from NAACP legal assistance, these parents understood the legality behind the situation and challenged the specific terminology in Brown. The petition also demands “good faith compliance at the earliest practicable date,” a phrase that directly quotes from Brown II 1955. If the school board refused to open schools on a non-discriminatory basis, “The NAACP is authorized to secure counsel for us when and where necessary and said counsel may appear…to represent us.” The counsel’s authorization was “to appear in all courts to represent us and protect our rights and interests in the use and enjoyment

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57Thomas Turner III, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 10, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [3:56].
58LPSB Minutes, 3 August 1955, 108.
59LPSB Minutes, 3 August 1955, 107.
of the public schools of the community and state.” Although this petition did not achieve its original goal, its creation represented an unprecedented change in the parish’s race relations.

Due to the close proximity of the petitioners’ addresses, a sense of community was strong. This area sits less than 1.5 miles from C.M. Washington and has an area of 1.1 square miles. The 1950 census is the primary source of information gathered about the petitioners. Census data notes a person’s marital status, along with the members of their household. Petitioner census data reveal single parents, grandparents, siblings, and adopted parents desired for their children to have better education opportunities. These individuals worked long hours in their working-class careers. (see Appendix 1 for a complete list of all petitioners)

One petitioner, in particular, would resist the segregated school system throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In 1955, Thomas Turner II was a thirty-year-old delivery driver for a drug store and spent time working as a janitor. His wife, Rosella, worked as a cook. The couple had eight children attending Lafourche Parish schools. Turner II persistently petitioned the segregated school system until 1965. He signed the petition in 1955 and later became a plaintiff in the Hill case.

Three of the petitioners were single mothers who took time away from their long work weeks to protest segregation. Thirty-four-year-old Olevia Moore was the mother of two daughters of elementary age. She worked an average of forty-two hours as a house cleaner. Another single mother, forty-four-year-old Victoria Taylor, had four children, Edward Jr., Clarence, Dorothy, and George. Thirty-year-old Irma Williams had five sons whose ages ranged from seven to twelve. She worked as a private domestic servant cleaning houses.

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60LPSB Minutes, 3 August 1955, 107.
61This was determined by mapping the petitioner’s addresses using Google Earth.
62The two jobs listed are based on 1950 Census records, and an interview with Thomas Turner III.
63Thomas Turner III, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 10, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [1:33].
Together, forty-eight parents, grandparents, and family members resisted the segregated school system in hopes of providing better opportunities for their school-aged students within the community. One petitioner, Elena Winston, was twenty-five years old and born in the Philippines. Her husband, John, was listed as “Negro,” and worked as a painter at a garage. Her two children, also listed as “Negro,” were under the age of seven, John Jr. and Eudny. The diverse group of petitioners included forty-six-year-old Albert Dorsey, who worked at a sugar refinery and fought for the rights of his adopted daughter, Dolores. Olivia Goff was a fifty-two-year-old woman with two listed grandchildren. Although twenty-four-year-old Delores Stream did not have children listed, her younger brother fell into the school-aged category. Fifty-nine-year-old Florence Anderson had six grandchildren, with only five of school-aged. Despite his lack of school-aged children, sixty-three-year-old NAACP President Royal Patterson was among the petitioners. He worked as a chauffeur and yard man in a private home. These parents, grandparents, and family members became the first to resist a segregated school system.

On August 3, 1955, the LPSB held its regular meeting in Thibodaux and unanimously denied the petition. After the board secretary read the petition, board members discussed the matter. LPSB President Robert Dolese formally denied the petition. Following the denial of the petition, Superintendent R.O. Moncla stated, “The children are to be assigned to schools that they have customarily been attending.” A student assignment occurred when Moncla issued a Student Assignment Certificate for the 1955-1956 school year. Superintendent Moncla authorized a racially separate professional development Teachers’ Institute on August 29, 1955. On August 30, the 1955-1956 school year would start as it had done in the past: segregated.  

Superintendent Moncla based his decision on the 1954 amendment to the state constitution, “Each local public school board shall serve in a policy-making capacity in the best

64LPSB Minutes, 3 August 1955, 109.
interests of all students enrolled in schools under the board's jurisdiction. When establishing board policies, each board shall prioritize student achievement, financial efficiency, and workforce development on a local, regional, and statewide basis."\(^{65}\) Superintendent Moncla told newspapers, “The board can't take any action with the state laws as it is now.”\(^{66}\) School board officials denied this petition based on what they believed was best for the students of Lafourche Parish. Moncla believed that based on this law, the local school board was empowered to decide what was best for all students enrolled in the school. Ultimately, Moncla argued, segregated school facilities were the best decision for Lafourche Parish students.

Lafourche Parish was one of five parishes where the Louisiana NAACP helped Black residents petition to desegregate public schools. Others, including East Baton Rouge, Orleans, Caddo, and Jefferson parishes, called for the immediate integration of schools. The school boards in each of these parishes except Jefferson, acted on the petitions–the NAACP had not received information on the petition in Jefferson Parish by the time this source was created. The description for Lafourche Parish is the only instance that mentions the reason for the denial.\(^{67}\)

Newspaper articles about the petition not only exposed the petitioners’ home addresses, this source also provided further explanations for the denial of the petition. The *Lafourche Comet* published all forty-eight petitioners' names as part of the official proceedings of the LPSB. Official LPSB meeting minutes were published monthly in the *Lafourche Comet*. Since the home addresses were a part of the minutes, the *Lafourche Comet* published these records.\(^{68}\) Newspaper records and personal accounts report no violent attacks against the petitioners despite the

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\(^{66}\)NAACP, Desegregation of Schools Branch Action- Louisiana 1954-55, Other NAACP Activity, 2, ProQuest History Vault.
\(^{67}\)NAACP, Desegregation of Schools Branch Action- Louisiana 1954-55, Other NAACP Activity, 2, ProQuest History Vault.
publication of their names and addresses. Newspaper records show the perspective of certain Black men and LPSB officials. The *Times-Picayune* published an article on August 2, 1955, indicating the Superintendent's response before the school board meeting. This article came out two days before the official publisher of LPSB meeting minutes (The *Lafourche Comet*) commented on the issue. Superintendent Moncla said the LPSB probably would ignore a petition by “48 Negros” demanding school integration due to the current state laws. Louisiana set aside about $100,000 for school boards to defend suits for school integration if the Black community should persist in efforts to desegregate. Superintendent Moncla stated that “facilities for Negro school children in Lafourche parish were on a par with the white facilities.” Newspaper records show the overall consensus of the LPSB and their efforts to protect a segregated system.

According to white newspaper reports, a few prominent Lafourche Parish Black leaders responded negatively to the petition. Superintendent Moncla recalled a conversation with Thomas Shanklin, the president of the Negro Parent Teacher Association. According to Moncla, Shanklin believed that the petition did not represent the views of a majority of the “Negro” people in the city. Superintendent Moncla stated that Shanklin informed him that the previous Lafourche Parish NAACP President, Paul Hill, felt the matter was too controversial for him to continue to be president. Meanwhile, Lloyd Wallace, the principal of the all-Black Kent Hadly School, fifteen minutes south of Thibodaux, acknowledged that he did not participate in drafting the petition. Although the validity of these claims is unclear, the objection of these three men said more about the white reaction than the dominant perspectives among the parish’s African

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69This belief is based on instances of violence against Black activists throughout the country. See page 2-3 of Richard Kluger *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education*, Chapter 2 and 4 in Charles Payne *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, For instance on retaliation against petition immediately following the *Brown* decision see pages 46-47 of John Dittmer *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, For more into the violence in Louisiana see Chapter 7 in Greta de Jong *A Different Day*.


71Raceland is a town in Lafourche parish, fifteen miles south of Thibodaux along Bayou Lafourche. There are a total of three schools in the town. Kent Hadly which is the only black school has grades first through sixth grade.
Americans. Local newspapers pushed a narrative in which prominent African Americans opposed integration to justify the decisions of the LPSB. 72

In contrast, local officials failed to comment on segregation within the town and education system in the months following Brown. In 1954, Leonard Toups became the mayor of Thibodaux. Toups started his career in education, first as a teacher and then as a principal, and later elected state representative. 73 The Leonard and Belle Toups’ Collection at Nicholls State University contained no documents or references to the Brown decision. Archival records are not complete collections of records of a set time, and this collection does not state any removed items. 74 Toups and the two other 1954 mayoral candidates did not reference their efforts to maintain segregation in their printed addresses to voters. The Black community did not overtly resist segregation within Thibodaux, immediately following Brown. Since the overwhelming majority of eligible voters for this election are white, Toups and the other candidates did not have to address potential efforts to maintain this segregated society. The integration issue within the city did not appear to be urgent to the white community since there were no attempts to protest segregation. 75

At the national level, U.S. Senator Allen Ellender, a native of Terrebonne parish, set the tone for local politics by openly opposing school integration. He received over 60% of the vote in Lafourche Parish during the 1954 U.S. Democratic Primary, two years before adding his name to the Southern Manifesto, which strongly opposed integrated schools. 76 Among the other

73Leonard J. and Belle L. Toups Papers, MS.00133, Archives and Special Collections, Ellender Memorial Library, Nicholls State University, Thibodaux, La..
74See Trouillot’s Silencing The Past: Power and The Production of History and Chapter 1 in Stoler’s Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense. Although both books look at a different time period and area of study the examination is within the archives. Stoler recognizes within her research the political sides of archives, which alters social facts into qualified knowledge.
76“Ellender Renominated; Lead May Top 100,000” The Times-Picayune, July 28, 1954, 1.
signees was James H. Morrison, a U.S. House of Representative member representing Thibodaux. The Southern Manifesto directly attacked the Brown decision and the misuse of judicial power mandating integrated schools. The Southern Manifesto argued that the U.S. Constitution and the Fourteenth Amendment did not address education, which allowed states to control the education system within their boundaries. Within this manifesto, the writers stated their opposition to the desegregation of schools, which should be protested “by any lawful means.” The different races lived in harmony before the Brown decision, and the integration of schools would destroy this “amicable” relationship. Ellender supported segregated school systems and the power of the people to resist integration.

Six years later, residents in Lafourche Parish overwhelmingly supported Ellender for reelection to the senate. Ellender received over 80% of the general election vote. To gain support for the upcoming election, Ellender published an article in The Times-Picayune in which he argued against bills that denied local self-government in many fields. He believed that local officials had the right to determine the fate of their school systems. In the 1956 and 1960 Louisiana senatorial elections, Lafourche Parish overwhelmingly supported Senator Ellender. White residents in Lafourche Parish elected officials who openly opposed the integration of schools.

Another shift in school facilities happened before the 1957-1958 school year, affecting only Black schools. Historically, Black C.M. Washington School was split into an elementary and high school. Over this period, Greenwood, another historically Black school serving grades first to sixth, closed its doors. C.M. Washington absorbed these students into its facility. From

77“Declaration of Constitutional Principles” Howard Smith, Chairman of House Rules Committee to HR, March 12, 1956.
this point, C.M. Washington Elementary and High Schools were the only all-Black schools in Thibodaux

The Lafourche Parish School Board’s Efforts to Maintain a Segregated System

From 1955 until 1960, the LPSB members actively participated in efforts to maintain segregated schools at both state and local levels. These efforts were a reaction to the integration of schools in Arkansas and New Orleans. Due to fear of integration, different members joined other parish school board members to either propose legislation to maintain a segregated school system or to close newly integrated schools. Following the denial of the petition and the relative quiet that followed, Lafourche Parish was not “threatened” immediately with integration, but LPSB members aided in efforts to stop further integration.

On November 3, 1957, the Louisiana School Boards Association (LSBA) met with representatives from each parish to maintain a segregated school system in the state. The LSBA meeting was in reaction to the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. LPSB member Frank Gouaux's attendance shows Lafourche Parish’s involvement. He attended the meeting on behalf of the LPSB and then reported to the school board on the general objective of the meeting.\(^80\) In this meeting, state school board members proposed legislation allowing the governor to eliminate integrated schools when the time came. New legal cases that challenged school segregation in Baton Rouge and New Orleans caused a sense of urgency within the white education community. Louisiana State Senator William Rainach of Kentwood, chair of the committee, was a primary supporter of this legislation. The beginning of integration in the state’s northern neighbor created fear within Louisiana's education system. A LPSB member participated in efforts to create legislation to preserve a segregated school system.\(^81\)

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\(^{80}\) LPSB Minutes, 4 December 1957, 349.

\(^{81}\) “Step Is Taken Against Mixing” The *Times-Picayune*. 

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In 1959, LPSB continued to pledge for the continuation of a segregated system within the parish due to events in Little Rock, Arkansas. The United States Supreme Court Case *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958) ruled that the U.S. Constitution overruled any state law that prevented desegregation.82 During the school board meeting on January 7, 1959, the board accepted a mandate from the Louisiana Legislature to continue to operate the schools “with its established policy of segregating white and Negro children, and maintaining separate schools, taught by teachers of the respective races, and with equal, modern and proper educational facilities in fact for the children of all races.83 This quick mention of the LPSB’s support of the state’s segregation laws showed that their priority lay strictly in the preservation of a segregated school system. Although the threat of integrating schools was not in Lafourche, members voted to maintain a segregated school system within the parish.

Superintendent Woodrow DeFelice, who became Superintendent in 1959, and State Representative Wollen Falgout of Thibodaux differed in their opinions on new legislation to preserve school segregation. DeFelice openly backed Governor Jimmie Davis and other members of the state legislature to keep schools segregated, despite no threats of integration in Lafourche Parish.84 The legislature reviewed twenty-nine bills during the special legislative session beginning on November 4, 1960. Four days later, all twenty-nine bills had passed, which consisted of blocking court orders for the integration of New Orleans schools and strengthening the governor's power to close integrated schools.85 Falgout argued that the closing of schools to stop integration would “throw us into social and economic chaos.” Falgout’s opposition stems

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82 For more information the instance in Little Rock and *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958) see chapter four of Karen Anderson *Little Rock: Race and Resistance at Central High School.*

83 *LPSB Minutes, 7 January 1959, 478.*


from the funds allocated to school districts. His main focus during this session consisted of funds allocated to highways, not the debate on the school system. DeFelice openly supported the preservation of a segregated school system, despite the lack of desegregation efforts within the parish. Falgout argued against these bills due to the economic effects on his community and state-wide.\textsuperscript{86}

The LPSB called a special meeting on Sunday, November 13, 1960, to discuss the closure of schools in response to the integration “crisis” in New Orleans. The sole purpose of this meeting was to vote on whether to declare a school holiday on Monday, November 14, 1960. State Superintendent of Education Shelby Jackson made a statement declaring this holiday, and school board officials unanimously carried it out. The NAACP contended that State Superintendent Jackson's actions violated Judge J. Skelly Wright’s order not to interfere with federally ordered integration.\textsuperscript{87} State Superintendent Jackson called an emergency meeting in Baton Rouge on November 14, which DeFelice and several LPSB members attended. Lafourche Parish complied with the proposed holiday due to the fear of newly desegregated New Orleans schools.\textsuperscript{88}

From 1961 to 1964, the fight over integrating schools in Lafourche Parish went silent in the archival record, but the city of Thibodaux saw collegiate integration efforts. During these three years, LPSB records did not mention anything concerning efforts to preserve a segregated school system, nor is there evidence of new efforts to expedite desegregation. During this inactive period for the Lafourche Parish School System, other instances of desegregation happened in Thibodaux. In September 1963, Francis T. Nicholls State College, for the first time had twenty-one Black students enrolled at its institution. Black students were often met with

\textsuperscript{87}“Jackson Faces Contempt Action For Holiday Edict” The \textit{Times-Picayune}, November 14, 1960. 17.
\textsuperscript{88}“Schools Open Unless Legislature Says No” The \textit{Lafourche Comet}. November 15, 1960, 1.
hostility and racial slurs which came mainly from white students and community members. Black students often met at an oak tree on campus, which became their own sanctuary. Despite a racial slur posted on the tree, these Black students continued to meet at this location. During these three years, the fight for an integrated public school system fell silent; however, the Black community succeeded in their efforts to gain an equal college-level education.89

**Final Efforts: The Edward Hill v. Lafourche Parish School Board (1967) Case**

The last fight for a desegregated school system started in 1965 when five Black men sued the LPSB for their children to have equal educational rights. Despite the LPSB's protests, a district court judge ordered the LPSB to implement “freedom of choice” as a means of desegregating schools. This method of desegregation was solely Black-led, as no white students in the parish chose to attend a previously all-Black school. The final decision of *Edward Hill v. Lafourche Parish School Board* (1967) would only last less than a year when The United States Supreme Court found “freedom of choice” unconditionally acceptable to desegregate a school system. With this decision, the LPSB was ordered to establish a plan for a unitary system. The LPSB accomplished this order by organizing its facilities based on grade level and not geographic location. The first year of a unitary system went rather smoothly, but racial tensions slowly rose. In January of 1970, physical altercations among Black and white students at THS resulted in the shutdown of their facilities. Once students began conversing, tension eased.

The United States District Court in New Orleans presided over the *Edward S. Hill Jr. et al. vs. Lafourche Parish School Board* (1967). Initial contact between A.P. Tureaud, principal attorney for the Louisiana NAACP who successfully fought segregation in New Orleans schools,

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and the LPSB occurred on December 8, 1965. Tureaud sent a letter to LPSB President Dolese and copied Superintendent DeFelice to state that several Black parents had complained about the Lafourche Parish School System’s segregated school system. Tureaud requested that their children be permitted to attend the public schools “without distinction based on their race or color.” The LPSB did not respond, causing Tureaud to file the case on December 13 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern Division of Louisiana in New Orleans. The initial complaint noted the racial segregation of schools for students, teachers, principals, and other personnel. The complaint argued that the school system forced students to continue their education at schools designated Black or white. Discrimination also occurred at Black facilities in “school construction, the formulation of budgets, and the disbursement of school funds… and limit participation in extracurricular activities.” The LPSB constructed primary and secondary schools to maintain a biracial school system. The initial complaint concluded by stating the plaintiffs’ desire for the reconstruction of the Lafourche Parish School System into a unitary non-racial system.

Five Black men sued the LPSB so that their children and others had the opportunity to attend schools in Lafourche Parish without any regard to race. The lead plaintiff was a 37-year-old native of Thibodaux, Edward S. Hill Sr. He had married Audrey Joseph in 1956, and together they had five children. Hill Sr. worked as a clerk in a warehouse. Their listed children, Terry and Edward Jr., attended St. Luke, a Black kindergarten through eighth-grade

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90Amistad Research Center, Tureaud, A. P. (Alexander Pierre), Bibliographical Statement.
91 Correspondence, 1965-1969, Letter From Tureaud to Dolese, 8 December 1955, Folder 17, Box: 40, 339, A.P. Tureaud papers,Amistad Research Center.
94This information was gathered from Edward Hill Sr. and Audrey Joseph’s marriage license and Edward Hill Sr.’s obituary in 2013. The marriage license is a part of the Lafourche Parish Clerk of Court online database. The obituary is from legacy.com.
parochial school in Thibodaux. Edward Jr. was eight, in the fourth grade, while Terry was seven, in the second grade. The list of plaintiffs consisted of parents of school-aged children in Lafourche Parish, except for Thurston Hymel, who was not a parent but filed suit on behalf of others.\(^95\) Reverend Wilbert E. Thomas filed suit for his sons Wilbert Jr. and Frances. Wilbert Jr. attended third grade at C.M. Washington Elementary, while Frances attended first grade at St. Luke. Thomas Turner II, who previously signed the 1955 petition, listed two children, Lorraine and Thomas III, who attended C.M. Washington High School in the ninth and tenth grades. Wilton Duplantis had three children, fifteen-year-old Wilton Jr., fourteen-year-old Daniel, and eight-year-old Mary Duplantis.\(^96\) Every student listed attended schools in Thibodaux.

According to Thomas Turner III, the case arose from a shared interest in the advancement of the Black community in Thibodaux.\(^97\) The plaintiffs argued that the Black facilities were inadequate to teach their children. Turner said that no violent attacks happened to the plaintiffs in the *Hill* case, despite the publication of their addresses in The *Lafourche Comet*. In Louisiana and other places in the South association with the NAACP, or those who fought against segregation, were attacked for their actions.\(^98\)

In the early morning hours on January 12, 1966, individuals broke into C.M. Washington Elementary and High Schools. An attack on the only Black school in Thibodaux occurred less than a month after the filing of the *Hill* case. Suspects entered the high school and burned identification information in the counselor's office. On the elementary side, the suspects entered through a window in the annex area. Intruders damaged items such as a clock, telephone, candy machine, and a fish aquarium. The vandals entered the auditorium and tore down the curtain.


\(^{96}\)“Suit Asks” The *Lafourche Comet*, December 16, 1965, 12.

\(^{97}\)Thomas Turner III, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 10, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [4:09].

\(^{98}\)See footnote 69 for an explanation on violence against Black activists.
Tolbert recalled broken glass and thrown desks at the elementary school. The Hill case was fully underway at the time of the attack on this Black space. Neither the LPSB minutes nor the Hill case records mentioned this attack or the funds allocated to fix the damages. At the time of the attack, the LPSB was already dealing with the Hill case and a case on teacher tenure rights. Despite the attempts to intimidate the Thibodaux Black community, the fight continued for the integration of schools.

Superintendent DeFelice defended the Lafourche Parish School System in response to the lawsuit. He admitted to the biracial school system and the assignment of students based on race but contended that there was no discrimination regarding finances or extracurricular activities. One of the main arguments of the case was that the facilities of C.M. Washington Elementary and High were not equal to those of white schools. Thomas Turner III and Burnell Tolbert attested to the unequal facilities in their interviews. Turner III attended Thibodaux High School (THS) in 1966 and graduated in 1969. He recalled the facilities at C.M. Washington were run down, with old used textbooks compared to his experience at THS. DeFelice denied all allegations in paragraph eight of the complaints, which stated that the district operated a biracial school system. DeFelice also denied that the LPSB maintained dual zone lines or attendance areas based on race.

The LPSB cited the role of a school board as an excuse for their inaction. The school board did not take any action requested from the letter on December 8, 1965, because the school board was unaware of whom Tureaud claimed to represent as clients, DeFelice contended.

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99Burnell Tolbert, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 20, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [21:52].
101Thomas Turner III, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 10, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [16:56].
According to DeFelice the school board required the clients' names, ages, and addresses to take the request seriously. The LPSB used this claim as an excuse to delay efforts. Despite having access to the plaintiffs’ information, they admitted to their segregationist policies. DeFelice claimed that neither he nor the other school board members had the power to make any decisions or change segregationist policies. The LPSB was merely “body politic” and only made educational policy for students in Lafourche Parish. The LPSB claimed that according to state law, they did everything in their power to create policies and a school environment that was in the best interest of all students. The LPSB claimed that Tureaud did not give them time to investigate and study the request before proceeding.\(^{103}\)

On April 26, 1966, Gordon West, the District Judge who presided over the case, required the desegregation of eight grades in Lafourche Parish for the school year 1966-1967 according to a “freedom of choice” plan. This scheme allowed students to pick their school, regardless of race or attendance zone. The 1967-1968 school year would be the first year the school board fully desegregated. The judge ordered that LPSB reorganize from “the bottom and down from the top.” The LPSB agreed to comply with the decision to the “best of its ability and understanding and without reservations.” The members voted to desegregate first through fifth grade and tenth through twelfth grades, effective September 1966.\(^{104}\)

While this “freedom of choice” scheme satisfied Judge Gordon, it did not pass muster at the United States Department of Education. The Lafourche Parish School System did not qualify for federal aid because of the parish’s segregated school system. According to Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, federally funded programs could not discriminate against participants due


to race.\textsuperscript{105} Because it had not complied with anti-discrimination provisions, Lafourche Parish was one of the twenty-six school systems in the state not to receive federal assistance for the upcoming school year. Superintendent DeFelice stated that this lack of funding would not affect school lunch or vocational programs, but problems had the potential to rise with future unidentified programs. The parish was not eligible for the recently released federal funds from the Elementary and Secondary Act, even though the LPSB agreed to participate in the program in April of 1966.\textsuperscript{106}

Problems arose from the parish’s implementation of “freedom of choice.” Every parent, guardian, or student sixteen years or older now could choose the school their child would attend. Parents were required to fill out a “choice form” for the 1966-1967 school year during one of the two windows—between May 9 and 23 or July 15 and August 5, 1966. Parents had to complete this form at the school board office in Thibodaux and were required to participate in a “rigid interview” with Superintendent DeFelice. Wilbert Thomas, Chair of the Lafourche Parish NAACP Education Committee, had concerns over the submission process of choice forms. He believed that DeFelice’s process was “another form of blocking negroes from the school.”\textsuperscript{107} These claims held truth because by May 12th, 1966, only one parent had submitted the form to the school board. The first choice period in the parish’s history saw very few choice forms parish-wide, especially in Thibodaux. By the end of the first choice period, sixty-six applicants filed choice papers in the parish. Four applications were for Thibodaux Lower Elementary, five


\textsuperscript{106}LPSB Minutes, 6 April 1966; “Parish School System Declared Ineligible for Federal Money” The \textit{Lafourche Comet}, February, 24, 1966, 1.

for Thibodaux Upper Elementary, six for W.S. Lafargue, and three for THS. In total, only eighteen students filed for choice for all-white schools in Thibodaux, and none for C.M. Washington.\(^{108}\) “Freedom of choice” did not accomplish meaningful integration due to it solely being Black-led.

The usage of “freedom of choice” as an integration method did not improve after the fall semester. After the first semester of the 1966-1967 school year, students had to meet several requirements to qualify to transfer to another school. Students must pre-register at the desired school. “Freedom of choice” papers required individuals to state their desire to transfer to another school. The superintendent could only deny this choice based on the overcrowding of the chosen school. The second option was to place students at a school nearest to their address. The LPSB notified the students of their school through first-class mail.\(^{109}\)

The first Black students to enter Thibodaux High School (THS) included Gwendolyn Streams, Lorraine Turner, and Thomas Turner III. Gwendolyn and Lorraine were in the eleventh grade, while Thomas was in the tenth. Thomas Turner III’s initial reaction was neutral. His parents, who had led the legal fight against segregation since 1955, told him he would attend THS, so he did so without any complaints. “There was no, I’m not doing that, I don't want to do that,” he said. Turner III’s experience as the only Black male at THS did not affect his education. His parents played a significant role in his ability to stay focused. They continuously fought for all children to receive equal educational opportunities.\(^{110}\)

Gwendolyn Streams and Thomas Turner III felt the impact of integrating the formerly all-white THS. Gwendolyn Streams felt empowered even at a young age. She stated, “I think we

\(^{108}\) 66 Applications Filed for Public School Changes” The Lafourche Comet. May 26, 1966, 1.

\(^{109}\) Contracts, report and misc. material, Folder 22, Box: 40, 469-470, A.P. Tureaud papers, Amistad Research Center.

\(^{110}\) Thomas Turner III, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 10, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [6:43].
all went with a purpose. Even at that age, we laid the groundwork for those who would come behind us.” Streams stated that her experience was “difficult and lonely sometimes.” A shared experience among these individuals was the feeling of isolation.

Turner III experienced similar emotions as he was the only Black male at the school and had no classes with his sister or Streams. These three students shared a bond and often gathered by the flagpole at recess. One day the pole had a note that read “nigger pole,” and meetings stopped after this incident. Both Streams and Turner recalled no violent attacks against the three Black students—just this written act of intimidation. White students often just stared and whispered at the three students. Turner recalled no racial slurs spoken directly at him; instead they gathered and commented about him within their groups. Being the only Black students at THS did not affect their education but impacted their memories associated with integration and THS.

For the 1967-1968 school year every student in grades first through twelfth grade had the opportunity to choose their school, officially accomplishing Judge Gordon’s orders. At the Hill pre-trial conference on July 6, 1967, the plaintiffs and defendants discussed the upcoming complete desegregation of schools, and there were no objections. The 1967-1968 school year started with every student in grades first through twelfth given the choice of their schools. The school board could only deny a student a transfer due to overcrowding. In such a case, Superintendent DeFelice assigned students to the school closest to their residence. The final decision for the Hill case occurred on July 11, 1967, which allowed the parish to desegregate the school system based on “freedom of choice.” As part of this order, the LPSB was required to file

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112 “Local Woman Part of Civil Rights Movement” The Daily Comet.
113 Thomas Turner III, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 10, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [8:25].
a report on the choice forms for the upcoming school year to Tureaud and the Orleans Clerk of Court by August 15. This information included the number of Black and white applications for each school. If the LPSB denied any choice of schools, the LPSB must document the reason.\textsuperscript{114}

Despite having the option to choose any school, some Black students traveled to attend an all-Black school. On September 8, 1967, Superintendent DeFelice reported on the transfer of students after their initial choice. Three sixteen-year-old students from Raceland requested to attend C.M. Washington in Thibodaux instead of Raceland Junior High School, a previously all-white school. The board accepted this request due to the threat of these students dropping out altogether. This requisition was because “it would be a hardship to attend Raceland Junior High School.”\textsuperscript{115} This hardship was due to only fourteen Black students choosing to attend Raceland Junior High, while at C.M. Washington, these students would be among the majority race.

Similar to the racial proportion of students, Black teachers were employed at a lower rate than white teachers. The Lafourche Parish School System filled twenty teaching vacancies since July 13, 1967. Of those teachers hired, only four out of the twenty teachers were Black. Three Black teachers already worked in the parish and were considering transfers. Within the city limits of Thibodaux, a Black industrial arts teacher transferred from C.M. Washington High School to the previously all-white East Thibodaux Junior High School. During the 1967-1968 school year, the LPSB employed seven Black teachers at previously all-white schools. There were five white teachers at C.M. Washington Elementary and High School, which only had Black students. These teachers taught english-reading, physical education, and ROTC instruction. All teachers willingly accepted the transfer upon request of the LPSB, except one white teacher. Paul Lapeyrouse voluntarily went to C.M. Washington High School. Tolbert recalled his former

teacher, Mr. Lapeyrouse, during his interview. This was his first time having a white teacher, but Lapeyrouse made his students comfortable. For many of his students, he was their first white teacher.

The desegregation of schools relied on the Black community since no white student within the parish chose to attend a previously all-Black school. The choice statistics for the 1967-1968 school year showed that no white students opted to attend C.M. Washington Elementary or High School, and 160 Black students chose to attend previously all-white schools. Ninety percent of Black students decided to remain at the previously all Black schools, C.M. Washington Elementary and High School. Similar to other parts of Louisiana, integration relied solely on Black students' choice to attend formerly all-white schools. See Figure 1 for a complete breakdown of choice information. For the 1967-1969 school year, the student-to-teacher ratio did not differ significantly between the predominantly Black and white schools. Choctaw, Chackbay, and St. Charles Elementary School had no Black applicants. According to Superintendent DeFelice, the lack of choice forms was due to the lack of Black population in these areas.

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<tr>
<td>East Thibodaux Junior High (W)</td>
<td>7th-9th</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Thibodaux Junior High (W)</td>
<td>7th-9th</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thibodaux High (W)</td>
<td>10th-12th</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.M. Washington High (B)</td>
<td>7th-12th</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Statistical information for choice forms for the 1967-1968. Reproduction of chart submitted to the Clerk of Federal District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana on September 8, 1967. “W” indicated previously all-white schools. “B” indicated previously all-Black schools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>Number of Pupils</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
<th>Pupil-Teacher Ratio</th>
<th>Number of Classrooms</th>
<th>Pupil-Classroom Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chackbay Elementary (W)</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choctaw Elementary (W)</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.S. Lafargue Elementary (W)</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Charles Elementary (W)</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thibodaux Lower Elementary (W)</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thibodaux Upper Elementary (W)</td>
<td>1,024</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.M. Washington Elementary (B)</td>
<td>861</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Thibodaux Junior High (W)</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Thibodaux Junior High (W)</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thibodaux High (W)</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.M. Washington High (B)</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The LPSB’s plan lasted less than a year. On May 27, 1968, the United States Supreme Court Case *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* (1968) declared that “freedom of choice” plans were constitutionally unacceptable. The court decided that “freedom of choice” could not be a step to transition to a unitary system.118 The Lafourche Parish School System is evidence of this claim. According to Figure 2, integration relied solely on the Black community. Based on this case, the final decision in the *Hill* case would no longer be acceptable in the courts. Judge Christenberry required that the LPSB submit a new desegregation plan by July 15, 1968, for “the assignment of all students for the 1968-1969 school year upon the basis of a unitary

118*Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*, 391 US 430 (1968).
system of nonracial geographic attendance zones or a plan for the consolidation of grades, or schools, or both.\textsuperscript{119}

The LPSB’s plan for a unitary system organized schools based on grade levels and not the geographic location. Tureaud and Judge Christenberry accepted the district’s plan for a unitary, non-racial school system on June 25, 1968. This plan called for some white students to attend previously all-Black facilities. The same facilities that were attested not to be equal. Within the Thibodaux area, the LPSB implemented the following plan: All students in the first grade would attend W.S. Lafargue Elementary School. All students in the second grade would attend Thibodaux Lower Elementary. All students in grades third and fourth would attend Thibodaux Upper Elementary School. All students in grades fifth and sixth would attend C.M. Washington Elementary School. All students in the seventh grade would attend C.M. Washington High and Upper Elementary School. Original plans required students in the eighth grade to attend West Thibodaux Junior High and all students in the ninth grade to attend East Thibodaux Junior High. After further consideration of the student population and adequate facilities, plans for the eighth and ninth grades changed on July 22. One-half of students in eighth and ninth grades would attend West Thibodaux Junior High, while the other half would attend East Thibodaux Junior High. All tenth, eleventh, and twelfth-grade students would attend THS. Regarding teachers, the plan was to reassign them on a race-ratio basis, but this record did not have a description of this method. The Thibodaux area only had forty-six Black teachers from grades first through ninth. This plan created a school system in which race was not a factor for students, but white teachers still significantly outnumbered Black teachers. Black students received equal opportunities, but Black teachers did not benefit from this plan.

Several school names were changed as a result of integration, mainly due to the fact that white students attended these facilities. School name changes occurred before the 1968-1969 school year. Five schools in the Thibodaux/Raceland area had name changes, and three of those five were previously all-Black schools. The previously Black schools had their names completely changed: C.M. Washington Elementary School was changed to South Thibodaux Elementary School, and C.M. Washington High and Upper Elementary School was changed to South Thibodaux Junior High School. The previously all-white schools only had part of their name changed: Thibodaux Upper Elementary School became Thibodaux Elementary School. For the Black community in Thibodaux, the changes erased part of their history. Instead of celebrating the advancement of Black education, the LPSB erases its efforts and history with this name change.

*The First Year of A Unitary System*

The first year of a unitary system went without any significant violent instances. In his interview, Burnell Tolbert discussed his own opinion about integration. The new school environment would change school dynamics, mainly for Black students. This change had an effect on extracurricular activities for students. As time progressed, students felt tensions rise among the different races, which eventually led to physical violence.

Burnell Tolbert, an African American student entering eleventh grade in 1968, had a negative response to learning he would attend a newly integrated school. He stated, “I [felt] uncomfortable about it… because we didn't know what to expect.” He later stated his dislike

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120 LPSB Minutes, 1 July 1968, 294.
121 Due to the persistent efforts of the Black community, the name has been changed back to C.M. Washington Elementary School as of 2019.
122 Burnell Tolbert, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 20, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [24:03].
for integration, but despite his attitude, he had to accept it. This would be the first time that he would experience integration. Tolbert was a drummer in the C.M. Washington band, whose music was upbeat and funky, whereas the music at THS was classical. Although several band members at C.M. Washington quit, Tolbert and several of his friends played at THS. C.M. Washington had a fun environment, and the switch to THS changed their school experience.

Tolbert and Turner III agreed that some white teachers tried to be compassionate with their new racially diverse students while others did not. Tolbert stated that some teachers did try to “get it right.” By this, he meant being compassionate in educating Black students. Female teachers also showed more compassionate traits than their male counterparts. Some teachers' expressions gave him the impression that they were disgusted with teaching Black students. At the beginning of complete integration, students at THS stayed in groups with those of their race. As time progressed, students began to gather with other races.

Tolbert discussed the difference in education between C.M. Washington and THS. THS’s resources were newer and better than C.M. Washington's. Tolbert never recalled having a new textbook at C.M. Washington. The education at THS did not include Black history, except for one Black figure, George Washington Carver. The students learned about their heritage, culture, and Black figures at C.M. Washington. Black students did not learn their history at the newly integrated school due to white teachers being the majority of instructors in the Lafourche Parish School System.123

Unlike other cities in the South, the first year of complete integration went without any significant racial violence. As time progressed, Turner III stated he felt the rise in racial tensions at THS. In January of 1970, within the city of Thibodaux, racial tensions escalated to violence.

123Burnell Tolbert, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 20, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [32:50].
On Friday, January 16, 1970, around 11 o’clock, about forty Black and white students engaged in a fight. In his oral history interview, Tolbert recalled the origin of this fight. Exchanges between a Black and white player during a THS basketball game caused tensions to spill into the school day. Tolbert stated that the Black basketball player did not intend for tensions to escalate, “but they did not want us at the school.” The fight began within the school building but soon escalated into the streets. Students who were not attending THS were also involved in the fight. The fight mainly consisted of shoving, punches, and using belts as weapons. Injuries mainly consisted of face and head lacerations and broken noses, but no hospitalization.

Members of the Thibodaux Police Department, Lafourche Parish Sheriff’s Department, the State Police of Troop M, and the Thibodaux Fire Department were at the scene to de-escalate tensions at THS. DeFelice stated that teachers and other staff members controlled the situation, and classes continued that day. These first responder units maintained surveillance around the school community to maintain peace. Law enforcement did not charge the students but took four white and four Black students into custody. This would not be the last instance of racial violence at THS.

On Monday, January 19, parents kept an undescribed makeup of about 260 THS students home from school due to rumors. Racial tensions were still simmering as students exchanged looks and words between classes. Fights occurred in the hallway but were broken up quickly by faculty members and police officers. Due to these continuous acts of violence, THS administrators canceled school for the day. Superintendent DeFelice blamed the rise in racial

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124 Burnell Tolbert, interviewed by Shelby Thibodaux, Thibodaux, Louisiana, October 20, 2023, Nicholls State University Archives, [36:06].
126 LPSB Minutes, 20 January 1970, 408.
127 LPSB Minutes, 4 February 1970, 413.
violence on school desegregation around the state and South.\textsuperscript{131} He suggested these instances were due to the desegregation of schools in Mississippi. The \textit{Daily Comet} covered school integration in Mississippi and quoted Mississippi Governor John Bell Williams: “The moment that we have resisted for 15 years—that we have fought hopefully to avoid; at least to delay—is at hand.”\textsuperscript{132} Mississippi’s initial instances of desegregation saw little to no resistance, but this would change a few days later. There were specific instances of parents' anger at the bussing issues, but none resulted in physical altercations among students. Newspaper outlets showed problems regarding desegregation, but there were no physical instances of violence.\textsuperscript{133}

THS remained closed the week of January 20-23, 1970 to allow various groups to discuss ways to ease racial tensions. During this week, various groups met to resolve problems. DeFelice left the door to his office open on Monday so people could talk freely about their problems.\textsuperscript{134} DeFelice and the LPSB met on Monday with parents, students, and business community representatives. He threatened the seniors with added time, not only on Saturdays but also in June to make up for these canceled class days.\textsuperscript{135} DeFelice later looked to the newly school-formed biracial committee to resolve these issues. On Tuesday, fifteen Black and fifteen white female students met to discuss their issues. Later in the day, the same number of male students met to discuss similar topics.\textsuperscript{136} THS students created a biracial committee to address concerns from both races in an open space. Tolbert was a part of this committee, and he felt as though this decreased tensions. This committee was composed of one Black and white teacher and an equal number of twenty-four Black, white, male, and female students.\textsuperscript{137} During the

\textsuperscript{131}“School Is Dismissed Early After Whites, Blacks Clash” The \textit{Times-Picayune}.
\textsuperscript{132}“Desegregation of Mississippi Public Schools Underway Today” The \textit{Daily Comet}, January 5, 1970, 1.
\textsuperscript{134}“Officials Meet with Students; Try To Solve T.H.S. Problems” The \textit{Daily Comet}, January 20, 1970, 1.
\textsuperscript{135}“Thibodaux High Students to Return to School” The \textit{Times-Picayune}, January 23, 1970, 6.
\textsuperscript{136}LPSB Meeting Minutes, 20 January 1970, 408.
\textsuperscript{137}LPSB Meeting Minutes, 20 January 1970, 408.
roundtable meeting that occurred on Thursday, the committee met with members of the junior and senior classes. The following day, the committees met with members of the sophomore class. These meetings took place in the THS cafeteria and included faculty and administration members.\textsuperscript{138}

After many years of racial tensions brought on by adults in the community, the various meetings held eased racial tensions within the school community. DeFelice stated that besides the meetings, students needed to learn to live with one another despite their differences.\textsuperscript{139} The February LPSB meeting included a time frame for the audience and school board members to ask questions about the incidents. Questions included the atmosphere at THS, the origins of the fight, and the newly formed bi-racial committee.\textsuperscript{140} Racial tensions at THS did diminish. When asked about the committee's success, Tolbert stated that the committee helped ease tensions. The discussion topics included how each race could keep harmony to prevent incidents from happening again. The committee wanted to extend the efforts beyond the committee and into the classroom. Black and white students took control of their school environment to solve problems permanently. Students modeled their distaste for integration based on adults in their community. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, white school leaders showed their distaste for integration by their preservation efforts. Students were first-hand witnesses to many conversations and violent events between races without any avenue to voice their opinions. Students first took physical control of the situation and then began conversing about their issues easing tensions.

Despite the compilations and resistance to an integrated school system, the Lafourche Parish School System praised themselves on their efforts to establish a voluntary unitary system. In 1970, a common notion regarding the Lafourche Parish school system was that the LPSB

\textsuperscript{138}Thibodaux Seniors To Meet Thursday with Bi-Racial Group” The \textit{Daily Comet}, January 21, 1970, 1.
\textsuperscript{139}School Officials Plan Monday Re-opening at Thibodaux High” The \textit{Daily Comet}, January 22, 1970, 1.
voluntarily established the first unitary system in the state.\textsuperscript{141} Lafourche Parish was the first to establish a unitary school system in the state due to the separation of schools based on grade level, not the location of residence. Other parishes still had a dual system and were undergoing desegregation plans or suits. In 1970, Baton Rouge dealt with a “freedom of choice” suit, while New Orleans operated under a court order for geographic zoning.\textsuperscript{142}

The voluntary part of the title is false. In 1987, DeFelice participated in an oral history interview about his life and career. He contended that most people in Lafourche Parish were unaware that integration happened voluntarily, and he credited himself for this voluntary transition. He explained the process behind this voluntary integration in a staggered manner. DeFelice did not mention the \textit{Hill} case that forced the Lafourche Parish School System into complete integration. Instead, he said that Lafourche Parish was the only parish in the state and South that did not have a certain quota for Black teachers and students at a school. An unnamed “someone” told him that because the LPSB “voluntarily” integrated schools, he would not have to deal with a quota system. He agreed with the interviewer that the integration process in Lafourche Parish went smoothly but did not reference the 1970 THS racial fights, which proved that integration was not a smooth process. DeFelice failed to mention the \textit{Hill} case, which forced segregation, nor the fact that the LPSB had refused on multiple occasions to desegregate the public schools. The LPSB spent fourteen years maintaining a segregated school system until Judge Christenberry forced the LPSB to develop a unitary school system. This method did not stem from the LPSB itself; instead, they had to establish this system. DeFelice praised himself and the LPSB for the “voluntary” method of desegregation without any credit to the five Black men and their families who started this process. Without the Black community and NAACP's

\textsuperscript{141}“Officials Claim No Major Problems in Pupil Busing” The \textit{Times-Picayune}, January 24, 1970, 4.

persistent efforts, the LPSB would have continued to delay efforts. The LPSB did not voluntarily integrate school facilities.\textsuperscript{143}

Conclusion

Despite their claims of voluntary compliance, the truth is that local officials prolonged segregation in the Lafourche Parish School System. The Brown and Brown II decisions impacted school systems nationwide. The LPSB mirrored other school boards' constant efforts to maintain segregated school systems. After Brown, parish school board officials, including Superintendent Moncla, maintained and protected a segregated school system in Thibodaux and Lafourche. Moncla argued that the state law gave power to the school board officials in the parish and was the reason for the denial of the petition to desegregate. Forty-eight parents in Lafourche Parish, mainly Thibodaux, understood the law and their rights in post-Brown and Brown II America. The local and state NAACP chapters aided parents in drafting the petition.

Local newspapers promoted the idea that the Black community opposed integration to confirm their beliefs that a racially separate school system was the best for all students. White-run newspapers claimed that the 1955 petition contradicted the desires of the Black community and claimed three Black officials did not support the petition. Schools did not immediately integrate after the initial Brown decision. However, forty-eight Black parents, grandparents, and guardians petitioned for their school-aged children to integrate into white schools. More Black community members may have joined efforts if not for fear of retaliation and backlash. This petition showed that the Black community wanted to desegregate schools, but instead of highlighting their stories, the white-run newspaper only showed three Black men’s opposition to desegregation. Even though the school board members denied the petition, this was

\textsuperscript{143}Woodrow Joseph DeFelice interview, 1987, Cassette Tape Cabinet: 1, Item: 9. South Louisiana Oral History Collection, MS-00076. Nicholls State University Archives and Special Collections.
the first sign of African Americans fighting for the integration of Lafourche Parish schools using the legal rhetoric of the Brown decisions.

Local officials’ use of power to maintain inequality is common throughout the United States and in the small rural city of Thibodaux. Representatives of the city and school board officials preserved the segregated school system in the parish. School board members attended statewide meetings throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s to help draft legislation to maintain segregation. Due to maintaining a segregated school system, the Lafourche Parish School System maintained a segregated system with the knowledge that the parish would not qualify for much-needed federal funds by 1966.

Members of the Black community within Lafourche Parish, particularly Thibodaux, persistently fought for equal rights within their community. Over fifty-three Black parents, guardians, family, and community members persisted for fourteen years. Due to the persistence of people like Thomas Turner II, he witnessed most of his children having the opportunity to attend a previously all-white school.

In September 1966, schools would partially integrate based on the “freedom of choice” plan. Superintendent DeFelcie made the “freedom of choice” forms so difficult that few parents applied. The LPSB was required only to allow eight grades the opportunity to choose, and they met the minimum requirement. For the 1967-1968 school year, every student had the chance to choose their school. Less than a year later, the United States Supreme Court decided that the “freedom of choice” plan was constitutionally unacceptable. This decision forced the LPSB to provide a plan for a unitary school system.

The 1968-1969 school year was the first year the Lafourche Parish School System was wholly integrated. The plan called for the placement of students to be by grade level, not
geographic location. Yet, racial tensions remained and peaked in January of 1970 at THS, when a fight pitted students and communities against each other along racial lines. However, thanks to the efforts of Black and white students working together, tensions gradually decreased. Students formed a bi-racial committee to examine the concerns of both races and find ways to fix these problems. Due to the *Hill* case, the Lafourche Parish School System became the first parish in Louisiana to operate a unitary school system. If not for the efforts of the five Black plaintiffs, then the parish would not hold this distinction. The Black community in Lafourche Parish overcame many obstacles and denials to achieve equal educational opportunities for future students.
Epilogue

The persistence of the Black community in Thibodaux extends beyond the 1950s and 1960s. The historically significant name that is “C.M. Washington” has been restored as of 2019. In 2008 and 2013 C.M.Washignton Alumni attempted to restore their school’s name, but efforts were denied. During the school board meeting on April 4, 2019, the LPSB unanimously accepted the name change. C.M. Washington Elementary School Panthers is now restored and currently educates students in Thibodaux.\footnote{Julia Arenstam, “School Board Restores Name of Elementary School” Houma Today, April 4, 2019, https://www.houmatoday.com/story/news/2019/04/04/school-board-restores-name-of-elementary-school/5539015007/; LPSB Minutes, 4 April 2019, BoardDocs.}
Appendix 1 - The Petitioners

Samuel Johnson Jr.
Albert Morgan
Hebert J. Bergeron
Oscar Moore
Arthur Briscoe
Albert Dorsey
Ulysses Reed Sr.
Madison Rhodes
Joes Jackson
Andrew Dickerson
Welton Jones
Olivia Goff
Doretta Peterson
Olevia Moore
Victoria Taylor
Delores Streams
Rose Lee Johnson
Josephine Woods
Mrs. Earline J. Streams
Royal L. Patterson- President
Edward C. Young
Bernard L. Jackson Sr.
Thomas Turner Jr.
Lawrence Fleming
Florence Anderson
Alma Rose Richard
Rose Mary Robertson
Mable Johnson
Theola Macy
Ruby Brown
Cordella Johnson
Marie Dunbar
Mrs. Erma R. Young
Elena Winston
Mrs. Ellen Henderson
Mrs. Minty Reed
Freddie Vicks
Irma Williams
Albia Lawrence
Rose Bell Thomas
Dorthy Scott
Doretta Flakes
Nellie W. Johnson
Leona Joseph
Charleston Weber
Archie Alexander-Coxen
Mrs. Victoria Scott
Johny J. Thompson

The list of petitioners is derived from LPSB meeting minutes and NAACP records.
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The Colonel

Thibodaux Chamber of Commerce

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Burnell Tolbert

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Woodrow DeFelice

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Google Maps

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Vita

Shelby Thibodaux graduated Cum Laude from Nicholls State University in May of 2022. She finished with a bachelor's degree in social studies education and a minor in history. She has experience teaching United States history from her residency as an undergrad. She is a lifelong resident of Thibodaux and attended school in Lafourche Parish. Her research interests include public, local, Louisiana, and 20th-century American history.