

## Achieving Closure

“Nothing happens until something moves.” One of the greatest scientific minds of the twentieth century, Albert Einstein, uttered these words that still holds true to reality today. Be it good or bad, righteous or evil, a ball has to start rolling for change to occur. As is the case for the school systems in Mississippi today; looking at overall IQ, ACT scores, and SAT scores, Mississippi ranks rather solidly as one of the least intelligent states in the US. This hints at the true stem of racism in the South--economic inequality. Fixing this problem of economic inequality will not only change education in Mississippi, but encourage a betterment for all. Knowledge strikes down ignorance, and, as Pierre Burton said, “Racism is a refuge for the ignorant.”

Looking back at history, education has always been something relatively feared. Knowledge was held away from peasants in medieval times to keep the Catholic Church in power and burnt in the Third Reich to ensure that Hitler maintained power. Similar events occurred in the South after the abolishment of slavery, as African-Americans were continually downtrodden, looked down upon, and feared for what would happen after they became educated. Evidence of this can be clearly seen in events such as Little Rock Nine, the protests at Ole Miss and Georgia, and even Alabama state funding being redirected to private schools because of their predominantly white demographic, such as the Macon and Macon East academies. In all of these situations, an individual or group with power were willing to do anything to keep the balance of power in their favor. The Catholic Church, in the Middle Ages, abused the ignorance of the congregation and extorted them for exorbitant amounts of money. Hitler erased books that opposed his own gains, and even the governors of states in the South opposed the changes for fear of the shifting the balance of power. However, the irony of this lies in the demise of these thoughts as these ideologies brought about their own end. The Catholic Church’s constant abuse of their congregation spurred Martin Luther to break away and form the first Protestant churches. The Third Reich eventually fell and even the South was eternally changed by the actions of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. In each of these events, the repetition of history is clear.

The present day situation reveals a vastly different technological landscape from these examples in the past, but the same social problems permeate our society. Racism and the problems it causes in education is still a deeply prevalent problem in the South today. With events such as the Oxford School District’s recent proposal to establish a separate school for students who qualify for free and reduced lunches, it’s clear that the issue persists today. Even looking at the highest achieving students who attend Oxford High School paints a similar picture. Thirteen students qualified as National Merit Semifinalists at OHS this year, and not one of them is African-American. This evidences the connection between the achievement gap and the socio-economic gap. This, in turn, also correlates to the years of oppression mentioned earlier in the essay. In the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, education became relatively more accessible than before the movement. This creates a “cat and string” effect, where a cat

will spend an entire afternoon chasing a string just out of its reach, but once the string is caught or given to the cat, it loses interest. After something becomes easy to obtain, it loses value and is taken for granted. At first, a middle school education was the most education needed. Then it became a high school education, and now a college education is the norm. The greatest fear of these racists has not yet come to fruition, as although an African American has been elected President, the socio-economic boundaries haven't changed significantly from 60 years ago. Equality has not permeated through our society, and the reason why is education.

Finally, shifting our gaze to the new horizon of the future, solutions are pursued, but the only truth found is that there is no easy fix to this. One possible change would be to divert more money to education on the state level. The budget for education has continually decreased for K-12 education in Mississippi, falling from 17.1% of the state's budget to only 16.2% in five years. This 0.9% difference in funding doesn't seem very large, but amounts to a loss of \$200,700,000 dollars. After we, as a community of Mississippians, realize that we are all in this together, we can finally take the first steps to economic prosperity and making sure that the changes brought about by this realization lead to the end of racism and inequality.