

“Hoorah for Integration!”



The Adoption of the 1955 Better Schools Amendment

*By D. Keith Lough**

Dark skies over Oklahoma City threatened a festive ceremony prepared for the inauguration of the state's newly elected governor, Raymond Dancel Gary, on January 10, 1955. An overnight snow cancelled the morning parade, scheduled to include thirty-five high school marching bands. The day began cold and blustery, but by noon the sun shone through the overcast and warmed the more than five thousand supporters who braved the

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT

brisk weather to witness Gary (1908–93) accept responsibility as the fifteenth governor of Oklahoma.¹ The constituency expected the new executive to dispel the atmosphere of economic and social problems threatening the state's progress.²

Administrators, teachers, and citizens concerned with public education believed that compliance with the United States Supreme Court decision to end school discrimination in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) posed the greatest obstacle for Oklahoma in 1955. Integration's effect on racial tensions and the teaching process remained uncertain. Schools stood to lose \$8 million in revenue if the courts declared the state's segregated funding law unconstitutional.³

Soon after his inauguration Governor Gary proposed an amendment to the Oklahoma Constitution. In his view, a new method of financing could solve both the economic problem of paying for education and resolve the social concern of "mixing races."⁴ He proposed to overturn the century-old finance law that kept the races apart in the state's educational system. His idea was to end the separate county tax levy that paid for the African American schools and to place all of the school money in a common fund.

Although such a revision of the constitution would open an avenue for desegregation, the adoption of a "Better Schools Amendment" by the legislature in March 1955, and the approval of State Question 368 by the voters the following month, did not reflect a change in the way whites viewed blacks.⁵ Oklahomans who voted for the reform conscientiously disregarded their racial differences to support legislation that Gary promised would improve education for their children through better funding.⁶

The adoption of the proposal by a southern state gained national recognition in periodicals and magazines. The *Black Dispatch*, an African American newspaper in Oklahoma City, reported that Oklahoma's tranquil acceptance of integrated public schools displayed "one of the strangest stands taken to date by a southern state."⁷ Notoriety continued into the 1960s as Gary toured the South to promote peaceful desegregation.⁸

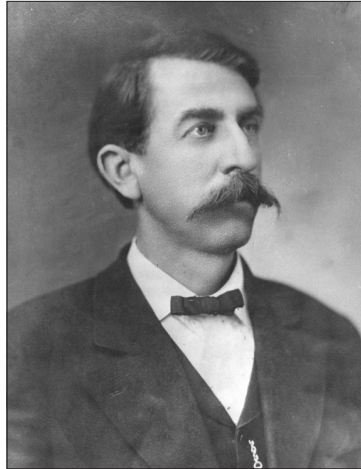
Although the passage of the Better Schools Amendment indicated that by the mid-1950s opposition to integration had softened, opinions expressed by segregationists, as well as state legislators' schemes to sidestep the Court's mandate, reflected the bigotry historically espoused by many Oklahomans. "Integration will not work anywhere, not even in Heaven where the Lord would not have it nor in hell where you've already got it," wrote a constituent in a letter to

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Gary.⁹ The antagonism expressed in these words illustrated the strength of the beliefs that many Oklahomans still embraced before and after the amendment's adoption in 1955.¹⁰

Proponents of segregation considered the mixing of races a fundamental moral issue based on the "Creator's" command for humankind to reproduce "after its kind."¹¹ Advocates taught that an ancient, universal flood had deluged the earth to "destroy the mongrels," that is, people who were racially blended.¹² In the biblical narrative, Ham, a son of Noah and a survivor of the flood, had received the curse of being "branded Black" and taken to Africa to live apart from his family.¹³ A fear of "mongrelizing" the white race impelled segregationists to believe that if blacks and whites schooled together, they would eventually intermarry and profane the fundamental law of creation.¹⁴

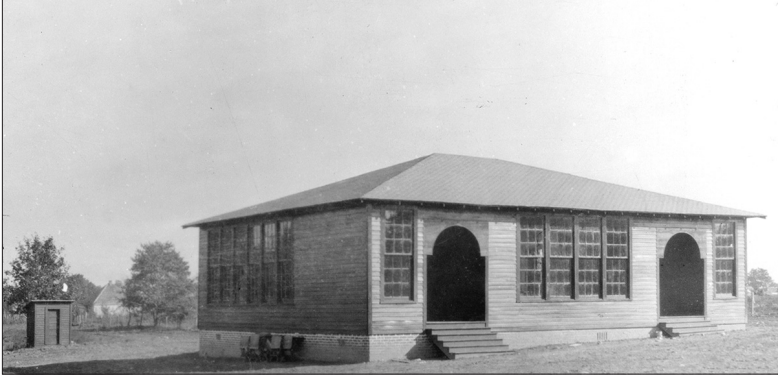
*William H.
"Alfalfa Bill"
Murray (OHS
photo).*



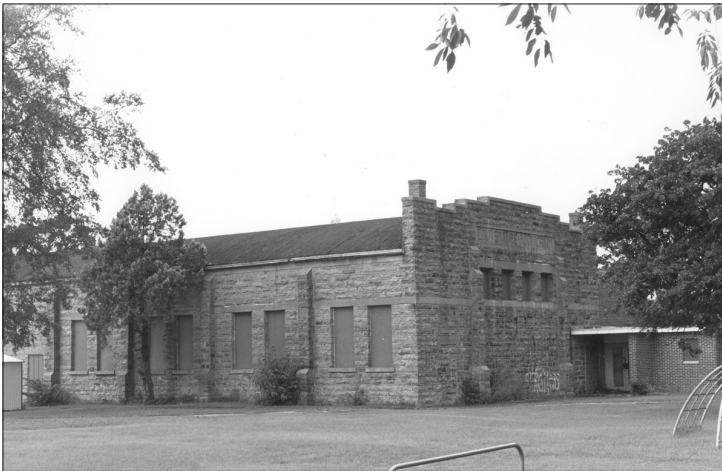
Oklahomans had historically gone to great lengths to secure the separation of races. The president of the 1906 Oklahoma Constitutional Convention, William H. "Alfalfa Bill" Murray (1869–1956), had encouraged the delegates toward segregation. In his opening address to the representatives he called for provisions disallowing marriages between whites and blacks, establishing segregated schools, and distinguishing waiting rooms at transportation facilities. He concluded his thoughts about African Americans by encouraging an educational program to help blacks understand their role as an "integral but separate element of the society."¹⁵

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT

The 1907 Oklahoma Constitution underscored and affirmed that Murray's prejudicial convictions were widely held. The new instrument of government mandated the maintenance of separate schools for white and black children. It also defined "colored children" as "children of African descent." The state's basic law considered all others to be "white" children.¹⁶



Top: Rosenwald School (separate), at Poteau, Oklahoma (Photo courtesy Franklin Library, Fisk University).



Above: L'Ouverture School gymnasium, at McAlester, Oklahoma, in 1983. L'Ouverture was a separate school in a predominantly urban area (SHPO/Bryan C. Brown photo).

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

The Constitutional Convention's delegates devised a method for financing education that secured the division of whites and blacks. The law "levied separate taxes for the two school systems." A district-wide ad valorem tax funded white schools, and a countywide four-mill levy on property value supported black institutions. These provisions made Oklahoma the only state to incorporate segregated public education in its constitution.¹⁷

Oklahomans also maintained the social segregation of the races. Most of the separation that took place occurred by custom, by tradition, and by Jim Crow law. Statutory regulations did not exist for "separate eating facilities, toilets, movies, sports events, and similar activities," yet whites denied African Americans access to those amenities. However, state law forbade the mixing of races while fishing, boating, or swimming and denied the legality of marriages between whites and blacks. Violators faced fines and imprisonment. Telephone booths and public transportation fell under ordinances for segregation; railroad enterprises, bus companies, and streetcar owners maintained separate but equal facilities.¹⁸

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) claimed that the federal housing program perpetuated segregation in the United States, even into the 1950s. Builders participating in the government system often constructed homes in secluded areas of cities to ensure the separation of races. Financing methods made it unaffordable for blacks to leave such a neighborhood once they had settled there.¹⁹

Over the first half of the century both Tulsa and Oklahoma City extended the federal discrimination, passing city ordinances that prohibited whites and blacks from living in the same block. Laws segregated schools in those neighborhoods by establishing boundaries for the sections of town occupied by blacks; Tulsa's Greenwood and Oklahoma City's "Deep Deuce," or Second Street, therefore developed.²⁰ Oklahoma City effectively used housing policies to keep races separate in city schools until 1965, when Federal District Judge Luther L. Bohanon (1902–2003) ordered school administrators to develop a plan for the complete integration of students and faculty.²¹

Other attempts to forestall or avoid completely the Supreme Court's 1954 mandate for integration betrayed a viewpoint that persisted during the 1950s. In many instances Oklahoma segregationists followed the lead of the nation, but the state created its own distinctive evasions to the desegregation ruling as well.

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT



Two separate schools at Lima, Oklahoma. The Rosenwald School is on the left (OHS photo).



Douglass High School, a separate school located at 600 N. High in Oklahoma City (OHS photo, Hillerman Collection).

As integration threatened Oklahoma's social structure, another pressing issue for citizens involved the rising cost of public education. Education received revenue from three sources—federal aid, state appropriations, and local taxes. As the economy emerged from the Great Depression and World War II, the money for schools proved inadequate for growth.²²

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Urban areas suffered the pains of rapid expansion from 1920 to 1950 as a population shift from rural to urban caused Tulsa and Oklahoma City to grow by nearly 50 percent. The Tulsa school district increased from an average daily attendance of 36,805 in 1950 to 52,965 in 1957, adding 2,020 new students each year. Oklahoma City encountered similar problems. Administrators in the cities struggled to balance budgets and maintain overcrowded buildings, as rural school populations declined and per capita costs increased.²³

A country-to-city shift coincided with an agrarian-to-industrial change in the state's economy. Oklahomans' income in the mid-1950s dropped below the regional and national averages, reducing the amount of income tax collected, while undervalued property withered the ad valorem tax receipts. These revenue sources supported city and county governments and, in particular, school districts.²⁴

*Governor
Raymond D.
Gary (OHS
photo).*



Insufficiently subsidized institutions of learning struggled to keep pace with the state's population and economic changes. Money for construction lagged behind the growth of urban schools as expenditures for students continued to climb. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling further complicated the financial situation by threatening the legality of the method for funding education in Oklahoma. The anticipated loss of revenue from the levy for separate schools would force the integrated districts to rely entirely on the tax for white institutions.²⁵

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT

Morally obligated, Gary believed, both as the people's chief representative and as a "Christian," he promised to comply with the Supreme Court ruling in the *Brown* case. He told voters that integration was "not a choice, but the law." Any school board that defied the court order consequently faced the loss of state financial aid for its district.²⁶

Fourteen years in the Oklahoma Senate had shaped Gary into an experienced politician who knew how to get support for his programs. In 1947 he had worked on legislation to help reduce the high costs of education through school consolidation. His bill, when enacted, forced schools unable to maintain fifteen students to combine with a nearby district. However, many separate schools that failed to meet the requirements remained open, because of laws against racial mixing. Combining schools failed to save money in situations involving African Americans until the 1955 amendment allowed larger white districts to annex black institutions, thus reducing the number of facilities and staff used for education.²⁷

Governor Gary saw the funding problem as an opportunity to comply with the federal mandate to desegregate in an environment of cooperation; however, he feared firm resistance to integration without an accompanying school fiscal package. Gary could not satisfy Oklahomans unless the end of separate education offered better opportunities for their children.²⁸

Between the election in November 1954 and his inauguration in January 1955, the governor-elect worked closely with legislators, educational organizations, and school administrators to formulate an amendment aimed at desegregation but focused on finance.²⁹ The Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) had developed a legislative proposal in 1954 that reflected many of Gary's ideas. The organization recommended property appraisal adjustments to increase ad valorem collections and a change in the homestead exemption policy to create a broader tax base. The cornerstone of the OEA plan raised the millage limit on ad valorem taxes from four mills to five mills on the dollar.³⁰ Gary agreed with the need for improvements in valuation practices but opposed increased taxes. In a speech to a joint session of both houses of the legislature on January 11, 1955, Gary outlined the measures he wanted. His reforms included ideas from the OEA and from the superintendents of the Tulsa and Oklahoma City school districts. The suggestions ranged from a compromise on the higher millage issue and bonded debt limit to a building allotment for higher education.³¹

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

The legislature argued House Joint Resolution 504 for three months in a debate that included strong words and physical confrontations.³² Most of the opposition came in the House by antisegregationists who recognized the amendment's probable effect on separate schools. Guy K. Horton (1912–80), representing Jackson County, voiced strong opposition to the Better Schools Amendment during debate. Considered a “bombastic orator” by his colleagues, Horton possessed great knowledge and a keen wit. Drawing from an extensive understanding of historical figures, Horton embellished his addresses to the House.³³ “You’re just cutting the guts out of segregation and paving the way for [de]segregation,” he shouted in an impassioned speech against the proposal. He accused representatives of voting against their consciences just to please the governor.³⁴ J. D. McCarty (1916–81), representing Oklahoma County, disapproved of the way the politicians used the education of children to gain support for ambivalent legislation.³⁵

On March 9, 1955, senators and representatives agreed on House Joint Resolution 504, presented to the voters in a referendum the next month as State Question 368.³⁶ The array of eight elements within the amendment obscured a county tax that replaced the funding for African American institutions, the key to the end of segregation in Oklahoma. The amended paragraph deleted the four-mill impost for black schools and the district-wide levy for whites and initiated a four-mill assessment on the dollar valuation of all taxable property in the county. The assessor would allocate appropriations to the new integrated districts based on average daily attendance.³⁷

The measure proposed a revised school finance code that set higher millage limits on building and emergency levies and raised the bonded debt ceiling for supplemental facility maintenance funds. Furthermore, the proposal allowed board members, rather than district voters, to approve the annual fifteen-mill levy necessary for schools to remain viable. The bill provided job security for faculty members, superintendents, and principals through a new provision allowing the extension of contracts “one year beyond the current fiscal year.”³⁸ A new section created the School Building Equalization Fund, an attempt to utilize money received from royalties and rent on state land set aside for education. The last paragraph authorized a \$15 million bond issue for building construction and repair at institutions of higher learning and mental hospitals.³⁹

Proponents emphasized that the change would not guarantee integration, but in reality the amended finance procedure would effectually eliminate the separate school system.⁴⁰ Under the new

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT

law, segregated institutions would face annexation, either because their enrollment fell below the number required in the 1947 legislation or because counties could not afford to support both white and black facilities under the modified funding formula.⁴¹

Advocates for the legislation campaigned vigorously for its adoption. The Tulsa Parent-Teacher Association organized parades, and members went door to door encouraging Tulsans to vote for the amendment. Merchants provided prizes in “get-out-the-vote” rallies, as endorsements came from civic clubs and chambers of commerce. Legislators and school administrators held town meetings to explain the state question’s provisions.⁴²

Governor Gary dedicated the month of March 1955 to promoting the resolution. He made television appearances, wrote newspaper articles, and spoke before civic groups around the state. He asked reporters to de-emphasize the segregation issue, and he wrote every school board member in the state reminding them of the penalties for disregarding the Supreme Court order to integrate public schools. In his weekly newspaper column he warned that failure of the bill meant reduction in teaching staff, overcrowded classrooms, and a shortened school year.⁴³

In rural counties supporters made efforts to educate the voters about the proposal. Ads in county newspapers explained the measure, and school administrators and representatives hosted meetings in their districts to answer questions about the legislation. The campaign used an all-out effort to dispel any confusion about the new funding stipulations but took care to avoid mentioning desegregation.⁴⁴

Editors of the *Oklahoma Eagle* and the *Black Dispatch*, both African American newspapers, urged black voters to support the Better Schools Amendment, asserting that the adoption of State Question 368 would mean the difference between the passive integration of public schools and a twenty-year setback for equality in education if Oklahomans did not pass the measure. Black leaders around the state backed the bill as a solution to discrimination against students. They realized that the end of separate funding meant a balanced distribution of educational money, and equal appropriations afforded greater opportunities for black students to achieve their academic potential. An approach similar to the campaign used by white supporters informed black voters throughout the state about the legislation. Town meetings with school administrators, newspaper editorials, and promotional prizes rallied people to accept the constitutional changes.⁴⁵

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

The hard work paid off for the advocates of State Question 368. In a special election on April 4, 1955, Oklahomans decided for the stipulations in the Better Schools Amendment by a three-to-one margin. Newspapers predicted a light turnout, because the ballot contained only one issue,⁴⁶ but the election drew more than 304,000 registered voters, about half the number participating in the 1954 gubernatorial election.⁴⁷ Seventy of seventy-seven counties voted for adoption. Six western counties and Love County in Little Dixie, the part of the state holding more closely to southern values, rejected the measure.⁴⁸

The constitutional revision affected western Oklahoma differently than other areas of the state. A scarcity of African American residents in the northwestern counties eliminated the need for the four-mill levy to support separate schools; therefore, the countywide ad valorem assessment required by the new law amounted to a tax increase for the counties without black children to educate. Dissenters also argued that since average daily attendance formed the basis for distribution of money collected from the duty, institutions with high valuation and low average daily attendance would lose revenue to the larger schools that already received more money. Indeed, the situation subjected smaller schools to eventual consolidation.⁴⁹

Western Oklahoma owned the resources to fund education without assistance from the state. No schools in Texas County qualified for state-sponsored financial aid in 1954, because income from local revenue exceeded state minimum limits. In contrast, Gary projected that eastern districts could support their institutions of learning for only half of the school year without legislative appropriations.⁵⁰

Because state aid and the tax collections for separate schools provided little or no money to schools in the northwestern region, administrators in the west campaigned against the Better Schools Amendment. The tally indicated that residents of the Panhandle counties actively opposed the measure. Only 117 Texas County residents had voted in the 1954 elections for the annual millage to support schools, but one year later the State Question 368 brought out nearly three thousand electors, 832 for the reform and 2,136 against.⁵¹

The Oklahoma Farm Bureau and the Parents and Citizens League led the opposition in Love County. Full-page advertisements in the *Marietta Monitor* admonished voters to turn down the revision. The arguments centered on the inequality of the homestead exemption,

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT

poor fiscal management by the school districts, and segregation. Antagonists raised the segregation matter in a statement asserting that the proposed law forced blacks into white schools without consideration for the desires of either race. Opponents convinced residents that, if adopted, the measure guaranteed the “greatest tax raise in the history of Oklahoma” and that proponents “have always used school children as a blind” to get support for legislation. A final argument compared the “fine” salary of a teacher to the wages of a farmer, challenging the educators’ request for a raise at the expense of agrarians. The amendment failed by a two-to-one vote in Love County.⁵²

African Americans quickly realized that the landslide victory for the Better Schools Amendment did not guarantee the end of discrimination in Oklahoma.⁵³ Elected on a segregationist platform, Bill Shipley,⁵⁴ Okmulgee County representative and chair of the House education committee, argued that his constituents, both white and black, would prefer to go to schools of their own choice. Leading the delegation to oppose the Better Schools Amendment, he initiated a bill seeking to bypass the federal desegregation mandate. His House Bill 964, when enacted in May 1955, consolidated the finances of the former separate schools and the other schools in a district to comply with the Supreme Court’s decision. Nevertheless, the new law allowed students to relocate to a school of their choice. Open transfer let white students move out of a district that consisted of predominantly black students and permitted the transfer of African Americans to a mainly all-black school. The legislation virtually circumvented the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.⁵⁵

The reluctance to add black teachers from the abandoned separate schools to the faculties of the integrated schools also revealed that bias still existed. School board members in Okmulgee favored full integration of pupils but refused to accept African American teachers, the position taken by most school boards. By 1959 only ten black educators taught in integrated schools; nearly 350 lost their jobs. The State Board of Education declined to intervene to force schools to accept black instructors.⁵⁶

“A single fist fight was the only violence that occurred when we integrated our schools,” boasted Gary.⁵⁷ Several factors contributed to the peaceful transition to desegregation. The Shipley legislation prevented some confrontations by allowing students to transfer to a school of their choice,⁵⁸ the governor prepared citizens for the inevitable consolidation of white and black institutions through the ef-

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA



A funeral for Jim Crow, August 28, 1963 (OHS photo).

fective campaign for better schools, and Gary speculated that the Indian heritage of Oklahomans helped them empathize with the racial prejudice against African Americans.⁵⁹

Although integration may have started quietly, tensions grew on the racially mixed campuses through the decade of the 1960s. A football coach at Beggs, Oklahoma, faced forfeiture of a game when black players staged a walkout over disputes with white athletes.⁶⁰ Young black students threatened with beatings stayed home from school as white teachers refused to intervene on behalf of African Americans. Hostility between pupils at Fox, Oklahoma, gained national attention in 1967.⁶¹ Peaceful integration had turned irritable.

Segregation remained at the core of public life in Oklahoma. Whites attempted to maintain the social order that had existed since statehood. Through the laws they applied, both statutory and Jim Crow, they revealed the prejudicial feelings they harbored to-

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT

ward African Americans and integration. Rural towns such as Lindsay and Marlow posted signs at their city limits warning blacks to be out of town before sundown.⁶² Swimming pools remained off limits, eating establishments still refused service, and churches continued to be separate, even as blacks protested.

Governor Gary told a story that illustrated the position taken by supporters of the Better Schools Amendment. When Chickasha fell behind in an important football game, the coach decided to put an African American player into the contest, although parents and fans made it clear they wanted a segregated team. The black athlete possessed great skill as a running back and scored the winning touchdown. An excited fan stood and shouted, "Hoorah for integration!"⁶³

Gary considered the passage of the Better Schools Amendment his greatest administrative achievement.⁶⁴ After the state adoption of the referendum, several districts quickly desegregated and took advantage of the new financing formula. Poteau, a town near the Arkansas border, surprised Oklahomans when its school board initiated integration.⁶⁵ By July 1955 at least seventeen communities had followed the Court's decree to end discrimination in schools.⁶⁶

Governor Raymond D. Gary demonstrated great political skill in maneuvering the bill through the legislature and in selling the amendment to a white citizenry that had taken strong measures to secure the separation of races. By concealing the integration of common schools within financial reforms, the chief executive managed to convince a racially biased constituency to set aside prejudice and embrace the promise of a healthier school system. While bias remained a part of the white ideology, Oklahomans showed a propensity to disregard their differences when the stakes demanded tolerance. Perhaps the practice of using education as a means to secure adoption of controversial legislation was the real legacy of Gary's administration.

ENDNOTES

* D. Keith Lough received a B.S. in social studies from Oklahoma Christian University. He teaches social studies for Alex, Oklahoma, Public Schools and is pursuing a master's degree in history at the University of Central Oklahoma. Photo on page 158 was provided by the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division, OHS Collection.

¹ *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City), January 11, 1955.

² Raymond Gary, with Phil Dessauer, "I Say Oklahoma's O.K.!" *Saturday Evening Post*, July 9, 1955, 27, 67-70.

³ *Daily Oklahoman*, January 3, 1955; Raymond Gary, "Governor's Office," *Edmond* (Oklahoma) *Booster*, March 24, 1955; "Desegregating Our School System [editorial],"

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

Black Dispatch (Oklahoma City), January 8, 1955; *Daily Oklahoman*, November 11, 1954.

⁴ *Daily Oklahoman*, December 26, 1954. Gary submitted a weekly column titled "Governor's Office" to newspapers across the state as a forum for government issues.

⁵ Allen Saxe, "The Early Development of State Policy on Desegregation of Public Schools in Oklahoma" (Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1963), 94–95. Saxe concluded that segregationists were too tired from the *Sipuel v. Oklahoma* (1948) and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1950) cases to organize a fight in the courts again. See also Monroe Billington, "Public School Integration in Oklahoma, 1953–1964," *The Historian* 26 (1964): 521–37.

⁶ Raymond Gary [transcript], interview by Rodger Harris, February 2, 1993, Oral History Collection, Research Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 5–6 [hereafter cited as Gary interview, page number]; *Daily Oklahoman*, April 3, 1955.

⁷ *Black Dispatch*, April 16, 1955.

⁸ *New York Times*, April 6, 1955; Raymond Gary, "The South Can Integrate Its Schools," *Look* 27 (March 11, 1959): 19–21; T. H. McDowell to Raymond Gary, June 30, 1955, Folder 9, Box 13, Administrative Subjects File, Papers of Governor Raymond D. Gary, 1955–1959, Governors' Papers, Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma [hereafter cited as RGP]; Charles C. Diggs, Jr. to Raymond Gary, September 12, 1956, RGP; Gary, "The South Can Integrate," 19–21.

⁹ Don A. Smith to Thomas B. Stanley, copy to Raymond Gary, September 8, 1956, Folder 1, Box 107, Raymond Gary Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma [hereafter cited as RGC].

¹⁰ *Daily Oklahoman*, April 3, 1955, December 26, 1954.

¹¹ "Missionary Baptist Assembly Resolution on Segregation," 1955, Folder 9, Box 13, RGP; William H. Murray, *The Negro's Place In Call Of Race* (Tishomingo, Okla.: William H. Murray, 1948), 20.

¹² Judy Gibson to Raymond Gary, April 3, 1955, Folder 1, Box 4, RGP, 2.

¹³ Murray, *The Negro's Place*, 20.

¹⁴ "Missionary Baptist Assembly Resolution on Segregation," RGP.

¹⁵ William H. Murray, "Excerpts from the inaugural address of William H. Murray as President of the Constitutional Convention," in *Black History in Oklahoma: A Resource Book*, comp. Kaye M. Teall (Oklahoma City, Okla.: Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1971), 179.

¹⁶ *The Constitution of the State of Oklahoma Including All Amendments and Revisions as of July 6, 1948*, art. 10, sec. 3, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma; Gibson to Gary, April 3, 1955, RGP, 1.

¹⁷ Gary, "The South Can Integrate," 19; "Desegregating Our School System [editorial]," *Black Dispatch*, January 8, 1955; *Oklahoma Constitution* (1948), art. 10, sec. 9. The term *ad valorem* means "as to value" in Latin, referring to the market value of property.

¹⁸ *Oklahoma Eagle* (Tulsa), April 28, 1955.

¹⁹ *Black Dispatch*, June 4 and 11, 1955.

²⁰ *Oklahoma Eagle*, April 28, 1955.

²¹ *New York Times*, July 12, 1963; *Daily Oklahoman*, August 12, 1965; *Black Dispatch*, August 13, 1965.

²² Victor E. Harlow, *Harlow's Oklahoma History* (Oklahoma City, Okla.: Harlow Publishing Corporation, 1961), 516; *Tulsa (Oklahoma) World*, March 4, 1955; Ann

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT

Hamilton, ed., *Oklahoma Almanac, 49th Edition, 2003, Revised* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Department of Libraries, 2003), 923.

²³ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1955, Seventy-sixth Annual Edition* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1955): 26; *Daily Oklahoman*, January 6, 1955; *Tulsa World*, April 3 and 5, 1955.

²⁴ Gary, "The First Message of the Honorable Raymond Gary to the Joint Session," in *Senate Journal of the 25th Legislature of the State of Oklahoma*, January 11, 1955, Box 8, RGC, 86; *Ibid.*, 82; *Statistical Abstract*, 280. The superintendent of the Porter, Oklahoma, schools wrote concerning one hundred fifty-nine acres of fertile land that sold in his county for thirty-four dollars an acre. The adjoining property assessed at fifteen dollars an acre. He complained that schools needed a just assessment of properties. E. L. Smalley to Raymond Gary, February 7, 1955, Folder 8, Box 3, RGP. Assessors typically set Oklahoma property at 35 percent below value. Frank Pauly, director of research for Tulsa Public Schools, claimed that the value of the assessed property in one county in New York equaled that of the whole state of Oklahoma. Frank R. Pauly to Raymond Gary, December 13, 1954, Folder 5, Box 3, RGP.

²⁵ *Mangum (Oklahoma) Star*, quoted in the *Oklahoma Eagle*, January 6, 1955; Raymond Gary, "Governor's Office," *Edmond Booster*, March 17, 1955; Gary interview, 5; *Daily Oklahoman*, November 11, 1954; Chief Justice Earl Warren, "Segregation Is Unconstitutional," *Oklahoma Teacher* (September 1954): 22–23; Raymond Gary, "Governor's Office," *Edmond Booster*, March 17, 1955; "Desegregating Our School System [editorial]," *Black Dispatch*, January 8, 1955. David Kueter of the Oklahoma Education Association state office provided the *Oklahoma Teacher* article. The constitution divided the school system by race and established separate appropriations for white and black schools. Teaching racially mixed classes constituted a misdemeanor.

²⁶ Gary, "Inaugural Address," in *Senate Journal of the 25th Legislature of the State of Oklahoma*, 68, 70, RGC; Gary interview, 5, 6; Gary, "The South Can Integrate," 21.

²⁷ James C. Milligan and L. David Norris, *The Man on the Second Floor: Raymond D. Gary* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Heritage Association, 1988), 53; Gary interview, 4, 8; *Daily Oklahoman*, October 3, 1946, March 12, 1947; "Desegregating Our School System [editorial]," *Black Dispatch*, January 8, 1955.

²⁸ *Daily Oklahoman*, December 26, 1954; Gary, "The South Can Integrate," 20.

²⁹ *Daily Oklahoman*, December 26, 1954.

³⁰ G. M. Roberts, "OEA's Legislative Goals," *Oklahoma Teacher* (September 1954): 24–26. David Kueter of the Oklahoma Education Association state office provided this article.

³¹ "The First Message of the Honorable Raymond Gary to the Joint Session," 82–83; *Daily Oklahoman*, January 6, 1955; *Tulsa World*, March 1, 1955.

³² *Daily Oklahoman*, February 16, 1955; *Tulsa World*, March 3 and 10, 1955.

³³ Tom Rucker, untitled, undated article, Folder 2, Box H-34, Guy Horton Papers, Guy K. Horton Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

³⁴ *Black Dispatch*, March 12, 1955; *Tulsa World*, March 10, 1955.

³⁵ *Tulsa World*, March 10, 1955.

³⁶ Saxe, "The Early Development of State Policy on Desegregation," 72–73; *Tulsa World*, March 3 and 10, 1955; *Black Dispatch*, March 12, 1955; State Question 368, HJR 504 Folder, Archives Division, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Saxe provides a complete summary of the legislative debate on the resolution.

³⁷ "The First Message of the Honorable Raymond Gary to the Joint Session," 82–83.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

³⁸ *Daily Oklahoman*, April 3, 1955.

³⁹ *Commentary on Engrossed House Joint Resolution No. 504 As Amended by the Senate*, 1955, HJR 504 Folder; *Daily Oklahoman*, April 3, 1955; *Tulsa World*, March 10, 1955; "Better Schools Amendment," *Oklahoma Teacher* (April 1955): 12–13; *Edmond Booster*, March 24, 1955. Opponents argued that the bill contained too many propositions. A 1952 constitutional amendment made it illegal for a proposal to embrace more than one general subject. Hamilton, ed., *Oklahoma Almanac*, 596. Gary answered that the people's vote made the amendment constitutional. Gary interview, 6. Capital for the School Building Equalization Fund came from money received from the lease of public school lands and appropriations from the legislature. The use of capital from property set aside for the purposes of education required another amendment, and an overextended state budget disallowed allocations from the government. The legislature wanted the provision in the constitution in anticipation of the availability of funds.

⁴⁰ *Madill (Oklahoma) Record*, March 31, 1955; "Vote For the School Finance Bill April 5 [editorial]," *Black Dispatch*, March 12 and 19, 1955; "Desegregating Our School System [editorial]," *Black Dispatch*, January 8, 1955.

⁴¹ *Daily Oklahoman*, March 12, 1947; "Desegregating Our School System [editorial]," *Black Dispatch*, January 8, 1955.

⁴² *Tulsa World*, April 3 and 5, 1955.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, March 9, 1955; Gary interview, 10; Raymond Gary, "Governor's Office," *Edmond Booster*, March 29, 1955; *Tulsa World*, March 4, 1955.

⁴⁴ *Marietta (Oklahoma) Monitor*, April 1, 1955; *Guymon (Oklahoma) Daily Herald*, April 3, 1955; *Lindsay (Oklahoma) News*, March 25, 1955; *McCurtain Gazette* (Idabel, Oklahoma), April 2, 1955; Saxe, "The Early Development of State Policy on Desegregation," 69. Ads entitled "The School That Isn't There" and "Here's What the Better Schools Amendment Means to You and Your Child" attempted to explain the amendment in simple terms. The ads appeared in newspapers throughout Oklahoma.

⁴⁵ "Don't Sleep On This One! [editorial]," *Oklahoma Eagle*, March 24, 1955; Gary interview, 10–11; Warren, "Segregation is Unconstitutional," 22–23; *Oklahoma Eagle*, March 17, 24, and 31, 1955; "Vote For the School Finance Bill April 5 [editorial]," *Black Dispatch*, March 19, 1955.

⁴⁶ *Daily Oklahoman*, April 3, 1955.

⁴⁷ Hamilton, ed., *Oklahoma Almanac*, 550.

⁴⁸ *Tulsa World*, April 6, 1955; *Daily Oklahoman*, April 6, 1955; *New York Times*, April 6, 1955.

⁴⁹ *Guymon (Oklahoma) Observer*, March 17 and 24, 1955; *Boise City (Oklahoma) News*, March 31, 1955.

⁵⁰ *Tulsa World*, March 4, 1955.

⁵¹ *Guymon Observer*, March 17, 1955.

⁵² *Marietta Monitor*, March 25, 1955, April 1 and 8, 1955.

⁵³ *Black Dispatch*, April 23, 1955, June 4, 1955; *Daily Oklahoman*, May 25, 1955.

⁵⁴ Birth and death dates unknown.

⁵⁵ *Black Dispatch*, April 23, 1955, June 4, 1955; *Daily Oklahoman*, May 25, 1955.

⁵⁶ *Black Dispatch*, June 25, 1955; Gary, "The South Can Integrate," 19.

⁵⁷ Gary, "The South Can Integrate," 19.

⁵⁸ *Black Dispatch*, April 23, 1955, June 4, 1955; *Daily Oklahoman*, May 25, 1955.

⁶⁰ Ron Lewis (Oklahoma teacher and coach for over thirty years), in discussion with the author in November 2004.

⁶¹ *Daily Oklahoman*, January 24, 1967.

BETTER SCHOOLS AMENDMENT

⁶² Norvel Heston (superintendent of the Alex, Oklahoma, Public Schools), in discussion with the author in November 2004.

⁶³ Milligan and Norris, *The Man on the Second Floor*, 85.

⁶⁴ Gary interview, 5; *Tulsa World*, April 3, 1955; Milligan and Norris, *The Man on the Second Floor*, 85; *Daily Oklahoman*, January 1, 1956.

⁶⁵ Birth and death dates unknown. *Poteau (Oklahoma) News*, June 9, 1955; Gary, "The South Can Integrate," 21.

⁶⁶ *Black Dispatch*, July 9, 1955. It should be noted that on May 3, 1966, Oklahomans approved State Question 428, repealing the requirement for separate schools. On September 15, 1970, they rejected State Question 475, which would have prohibited segregation in public schools, but on November 7, 1978, by a vote of 445,037 to 227,421, they approved State Question 526, which removed the segregated school provision from the Oklahoma Constitution. *Oklahoma Almanac, 2007–2008* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Department of Libraries, 2007); *Daily Oklahoman*, November 11, 1978.