

SOCIAL CAPITAL, SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND EDUCATION IN  
WEST ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT

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SOCIAL CAPITAL, SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND EDUCATION  
IN WEST ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT

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SOCIAL CAPITAL, SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND EDUCATION  
IN WEST ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT

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## VITA

Joshua Phillip Adams, son of Phil and Chris Adams, was born on October 13, 1978, in Opelika, Alabama. After graduating from Lee-Scott Academy in Auburn, Alabama in 1997, he entered The University of Mississippi in Oxford. Josh graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology in May 2002. After studying foreign language in Granada, Spain and living in Austin, Texas for one year, he returned to Auburn University for graduate school in August 2002.

THESIS ABSTRACT

SOCIAL CAPITAL, SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND EDUCATION  
IN WEST ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT

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The 12 counties constituting Alabama's Black Belt region are characterized, generally, by persistent poverty, poorly funded education systems, and racial stratification. Fifty-one years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, education in Alabama's Black Belt counties continues to be highly segregated between white private academies and public school systems where African American parents send their children. I examine the educational structures, experiences and racial interactions in three contiguous Black Belt counties using a case study approach. Through the conceptual framework of social capital, I explore the historical and persistent phenomenon of school segregation and the relationship between public and private schools. Findings indicate the legacy of school desegregation and the maintenance of "dual school systems" in west Alabama's Black

Belt may be eroding in communities but continues nonetheless to adversely affect educational opportunity resulting in community disconnection along racial line.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Alabama has a long, well documented history of racial turmoil with regard to the institution of education. Perhaps no state embodied the ideology of “white resistance” to *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (1954) more than the “Heart of Dixie.” Governor George Wallace’s symbolic last stand in the schoolhouse door at the University of Alabama in 1963, captured the position many white Alabamians would take concerning court-ordered school desegregation as he led the charge with vigor

Let us rise to the call for freedom-loving blood that is in us and send our answer to the tyranny that clanks its chains upon the South. In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever (American Experience 2000).

Forty-two years later, “race” and “education” remain inextricably linked across the state. This study specifically explores school desegregation in a twelve county region known as the ‘Black Belt.’ In most counties of Alabama’s impoverished Black Belt, “race and education” are virtually the same issue illustrated by *de facto* segregated educational structures for white and black children. Since school desegregation was mandated in the late 1960’s, in Alabama’s twelve county Black Belt region it is common for white students to attend private “segregation academies,” leaving public schools with enrollments that are almost exclusively African American.

In conducting school desegregation research the literature suggests researchers have been too concerned with the effects (grades, enrollment qualities, student/staff

ratios) of integration and have failed to ask why these effects have occurred (Prager, Longshore and Seeman 1986). Jeffrey Prager, the senior editor and sociologist on a book of publications devoted entirely to the subject of *School Desegregation Research*, furthermore, suggests social scientists have been too focused on micro-settings (classrooms/schools) rather than on wider structural or cultural conditions of the community-school situation (1986:6). The central intent of this thesis is to address this need.

### **Research Objective**

The study was guided by one overarching objective and three research tasks:

**Objective:** Explore the historical and present day relationship between public and private schools and the legacy of desegregation in selected counties of Alabama's Black Belt.

**Task 1:** Review literature on school desegregation while examining the connections between schools, social capital, and community development.

**Task 2:** Document formation of social capital related to the educational situations (structures) in selected Alabama Black Belt counties.

**Task 3:** Analyze opportunities and contexts to rural and community development associated with contemporary educational situations (structures) in selected Alabama Black Belt counties.

This study examines three distinct educational situations in three Black Belt counties. The *de facto* "dual school system" situation has persisted into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has been identified as a source of community and economic strain in the predominately rural region (Bailey and Faupel 1993; Norton 2001). The central question

raised in this study is how does racial segregation in education inhibit rural community development as indicated by the perceptions and attitudes of educators and residents of the Black Belt?

The answer to this simple question is anything but simple, and that is because some school districts in this region have successfully desegregated their public school systems since the 1960s, others have made significant steps towards school desegregation, and elsewhere private academies are besieged by economic and other pressures. In short, Alabama's Black Belt is a region in the throes of change, where one can reasonably speak of positive prospects for change. The status of public schools and education generally will be central to determining how far and how fast change will occur (Matthews 1996; 2003). Is the "line drawn in the dust" of 1963 indelible for some of Alabama's Black Belt schools and communities?

### **Education and Rural Development in the Black Belt**

The role of local schools in rural communities is cited as critical in building attractive, sustainable communities and economies (Lyson 2005; Woods, Doeksen and St. Clair 2005; Barkley, Henry and Li 2005). Moreover, communities and families are linked through social capital to the educational achievement and opportunity of students both in and outside of the classroom (Israel, Beaulieu and Hartless 2001; Beaulieu and Israel 2005). Despite criticisms of conceptual ambiguity, social capital has been generally defined and accepted as the "norms and networks that facilitate collective action" (Woolcock 2001:10). Social capital is fundamentally about capacity building at the individual and community level. The concept was initially conceived in the context of

education and communities but now encompasses a wide-range of phenomena and academic disciplines (Hanifan 1920; Bourdieu and Passeron 1970; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Barkley Henri and Li (2005) examined 15 southern states based on educational indicators of human capital and once again reinforced conventional wisdom that educated labor is critical to future economic development (10). The continued racial segregation of children in the Black Belt through the maintenance of dual school systems can be seen to fragment scarce educational resources, perpetuate class/race boundaries, and diminish the opportunity for meaningful, emotional, reliable school-community connections in which L. J. Hanifan (1920) first based the concept of social capital.

Alabama's Black Belt region is the most impoverished region per capita in the state. The concept of "Rural Economic Development" is a focal point for academics and policy makers when considering the life conditions of Alabama's Black Belt. The state legislature and public universities of Alabama, when discussing how to bring jobs and "economic growth" to the impoverished region, promote fiercely competitive strategies. Many argue for county consolidation, while others promote state entities to oversee the industrial revival and recruitment for Black Belt counties. In short, "economic approaches" are abundant. Nexton Marshall, Director at the Alabama Development Office (ADO), the state's primary industrial development entity, indicated in an interview that prospective investors, when looking at places in Alabama, want the presence of three things in no particular order: (1) existing structures (generally closed manufacturing plants), (2) transportation arteries to distribute their products, and (3) quality public schools to maintain, attract and build the workforce needed to sustain development. In a geographically isolated region historically based on an agricultural economy, and a

legacy of racial segregation in education, the criteria laid out by Mr. Marshall seem daunting. Harris and Worthen (2003), call for the need for studies that “depart from the economy-centered approach by using historical analyses to understand the dynamics and legacies of racism and plantation agriculture.... and the intertwined nature of racism and political economy” (34). The persistent economic suffering of African Americans in the Black Belt is much more than a matter of income. The social, political and cultural realms of the economic disparities for Alabama’s poorest people are rooted in “historically embedded [social] structures” (Harris and Worthen 2003). This research examines the social structural phenomenon of dual school systems with this notion in mind and departs from the rhetoric of rural economic development.

In discussing the role of education on rural community development, we first must define what is meant by education and community. A rather narrow view of the institution explains the function of education simply as it relates to the mass production of competent workers for a competitive, global free market. Conversely, a broad, educationalist view shows the role of the school as an “opportunity structure” where young citizens acquire important work skills and, most importantly, learn values of democracy, human rights and community that contribute to the greater good (Flora and Flora 2004; Spring 1999). In the case of the Black Belt, both perspectives are useful and should be considered in tandem. Persistent economic hardship and a legacy of racial polarization and cultural mistrust make it difficult to separate an emphasis on sound work-skills from the values of equality and social justice. On the other hand, should we ever, under any situation, attempt to understand labor based work-skills as separate from those social skills that make for successful professionals and productive community

members? This research suggests we should not. Indeed, school-community relations are critically important to the future welfare of Alabama's Black Belt and, arguably, can be described as the crux of consistently poor social investments in inter-community relationships since the integration of public schools began in 1965. However, rural development in the Black Belt is essentially a community process that involves a new, broad understanding of educational and economic enhancement. As Beaulieu and Israel (2004:44) have clearly shown, "the academic success of young people is not a singular product of what happens in schools."

### **The Shift Towards Community Development**

The late Rural Sociologist Kenneth P. Wilkinson explains the idea of community concisely as "a structure of relationships created and molded by the place-oriented social interactions that occur as people in a locality meet their daily needs together and express their common interests in the local territory" (Wilkinson cited in Zakeri 2000:1). Wilkinson's attention to the structured interaction process of community development is important because it is often too easy to equate the idea of community solely to a geographic conception. In the socio-cultural context of Alabama's Black Belt, black and white residents certainly share a common territory (county), but in fact effectively live in two separate communities. Education is a process that provides the physical structure of the school which, like the church and town hall, provides citizens the opportunity to convene and deliberate difficult decisions that build public legitimacy and, hence, community (Matthews 2003:216-217). When community loyalty is split in rural communities between public and private school systems, the social networks that may



facilitate deliberation are limited or divided and the possibility for collective action diminishes. Using an interactional approach to understanding community and community development allows an analysis that is less based on geography and more focused on how “place” is socially constructed. Human interaction is the foundation of all communities (Flora et al. 2004). The lack of interaction among a majority of white and black parents and students in the educational structure of Alabama’s Black Belt can be viewed as a fundamental barrier to community development in Alabama’s Black Belt. In reference to the importance of interaction amongst people of different background or demographics for progress John Stuart Mill suggests:

It is hardly possible to overrate the value. . . of placing human beings in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar. . . Such communication has always been. . . one of the primary sources of progress (1909).

There is a symbiotic relationship between schools and rural communities that can provide both emotional and economic support for parents and children in sparsely populated areas through meaningful social networks sustained by collective aspirations for the educational advancement of parents for their children (Goetz and Rupasingha 2005; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). What, then, are the impacts on schools and communities in nonmetropolitan counties characterized by racially segregated educational structures? How might the concept of social capital help explain the maintenance and effect of dual school systems in counties desperate for human and economic resources? Can social capital be invested in education to facilitate collective action that is also exclusive? This study argues that Alabama’s Black Belt schools and communities provide such an example.

The remainder of this Introduction provides a discussion of the Black Belt and the some of the challenges facing the region's schools and communities, chapter two begins with an overview of social capital, the conceptual framework guiding this research in the contexts of education/school desegregation and community development. This study will show that social capital can take various forms. Special attention is given to some of the less celebrated, negative forms social capital can take. Chapter 3 contains a discussion of methodology and the comparative case study approach used to collect data. Chapter 4 focuses on the lingering legacy of *Brown v. the Board* (1954) and the historical problem of racial segregation in education in Alabama and the Black Belt. The thesis then moves to the three case studies. The educational structures, experiences, perceptions, and racial interactions within public and private schools of Sumter, Hale and Marengo counties are examined and compared. In the concluding chapter, the role local schools play in predominately rural, Deep South, counties is discussed and analyzed in the context of the formation of social capital and school desegregation.

### **The Black Belt**

The contemporary southern United States is both the largest geographic region and rural region in the country. The South's Black Belt region forms a crescent stretching through parts of Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas and is comprised of approximately 623 counties (Wimberley and Morris 1996:3). The region was first called the Black Belt at the turn of the 20th century by Booker T. Washington, himself a resident, to describe the fertile farming soil that inspired a slave trade and established a region of "black" people

who still occupy the area (Wimberley and Morris 1996:1). W.E.B. Dubois (1903:79), while traveling through the region for the first time wrote: “for now approach the Black Belt, that strange land of shadows, at which even slaves paled in the past, and whence come now only faint and half intelligible murmurs to the world beyond.” Today the term is generally “used wholly in a political sense” or rather demographically – to refer to those counties in which the black population outnumbers the white (Washington 1905:68). Approximately 200 of the 623 Black Belt counties, identified by Wimberley and Morris (1997), hold African American majority populations (Institute for Rural Health Research 2004). The southern Black Belt holds the largest African American population in the country. While over 13 % of the United States is African American, the Black Belt gives residence to 45 % of the nation’s total black population (Wimberley and Morris 1997). The region contains 79 % of the nonmetropolitan African American population and 90 % of poor rural African Americans (Wimberley and Morris 1997; Harris and Worthen 2003). The United States Department of Agriculture (2004) has identified almost all counties in the Black Belt as high poverty counties.

An analysis of the region conducted by the Southern Rural Development Center in 1996 indicated the Black Belt’s quality of life conditions remain some of the worst in our nation. Within the South, it is the Black Belt’s counties that contain most of the region’s poverty, low levels of education, and unemployment (Swanson, Harris, Skees and Williamson 1995). Furthermore, the Black Belt matches any other region in persons who have not finished high school and challenges the other U. S. regions in unemployment” (Wimberley and Morris 1996:2). While an insignificant percent of the United States’ poor whites live in the Black Belt, more than 90 % of the country’s black

rural poor live there (Mccoll 1999). “Within the Black Belt the deeply rooted connection between poverty of place and poverty of people is clear” (Worthen and Harris 2003:34). As this study shows, the contributions of segregated educational systems in creating this “place” should not be underestimated.

### **Alabama’s Black Belt**

Alabama’s “Black Belt” has been variously defined throughout the state’s history. The number of Alabama counties comprising the Black Belt varies in the literature according to which definition the author or researcher utilizes. Hollingsworth (1993), noted that operationally defining and delineating the term has been difficult due to competing approaches based on 1) the region (counties) of the state with a particularly dark soil coloration left by a prehistoric lake bed, and 2) the term’s employment in a demographic sense to refer to Alabama counties in which the African American population constitutes more than 50 % of the total population. The first approach, based on soil coloration, was utilized by the Alabama Development Office (ADO) in the 1990’s and determined 16 counties met the criteria. These counties stretched from the Georgia-Alabama border to Mississippi in the South-central part of the state. V. O. Key, a southern political scientist, was the first to use the demographic approach in defining the Black Belt and found 14 Alabama counties met the criteria in 1940 (Key 1949 cited in Hollingsworth 1993:3). With less emphasis and attention given to Alabama’s cotton production in the past half century, political scientists, sociologists and demographers have increasingly employed a definition of Alabama’s Black Belt based on the racial composition of counties (Hollingsworth 1998:3).

Of course, physiographic and demographic approaches to defining Alabama's Black Belt coincide in so far as the "black soil," fertile for cotton production, provided the impetus for a slave trade that started in 1721 when the French ship *Africane* sailed into Mobile Harbor with over 100 slaves. Indeed, the Alabama counties with the highest percentage of African Americans in 2005 still correspond directly to the counties with the highest cotton production and slave labor from 1850-1880 (Hollingsworth 1993:4). Plantation economies no longer characterize Black Belt counties in Alabama, yet the demographic legacy of slavery persists.

Alabama counties with black majorities numbered 22 in 1880. In 2000, only 10 counties in Alabama had such numbers (Center for Demographic Research 2003). Because this research focuses on the Black Belt and the racial compositions of school systems in K-12 education, it is relevant to note that 16 counties in Alabama have African American majorities for the total school age population (5 – 17 years old) as of the school year of 1999-2000 (Center for Demographic Research 2005). Alabama has a total of 16 counties with such racial demographics – they include: Macon (88.9%), Greene (88.4%), Bullock (86%), Sumter (83.9%), Lowndes (82.9%), Wilcox (82.7%), Perry (80.2%), Dallas (72.7%), Hale (67.4%), Marengo (62.3%), Barbour (55.7%), Conecuh (55.6%), Pickens (54.5%), Choctaw (53.4%), Clarke (53.4%) and Butler (50%) (Center for Demographic Research 2005). Of these counties, 15 are *nonmetropolitan* and 12 are located in the traditional, physiographic definition of the region. These dozen counties stretching through the central part of the state, constitute the most accurate definition of the "Black Belt" of Alabama (Bullock, Choctaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Pickens, Perry, Sumter, Wilcox). Alabama's Black Belt is thus defined by

physiographic and demographic characteristics. However, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is likely to lead researchers, policy makers, community activists and residents of the Black Belt to focus on counties in which more than half of the population is African American and to place little emphasis on soil coloration. For this reason, the 16 county definition (mentioned above) of the impoverished region based on the racial composition of school-aged children is foreshadowing.

### **Why Alabama's Black Belt?**

Of the 4.5 million people living in Alabama's 67 counties, approximately 220,000 (5 %) reside in the 12 counties of the Black Belt. Alabama's focus on rural community development in the impoverished region has gained considerable attention in the past decade due to obvious and persistent poverty in the area. Of the 12 counties, 11 have per capita incomes under \$20,000 (Center for Demographic Research 2005). While United States unemployment averages 4.8 % and Alabama 5.9% in 2002, the Black Belt has an average unemployment rate of 10% (Center for Demographic Research 2003). Between 1990 and 2000, the United States Census (2000) shows that the region averaged a net migration of -7.2 % (Center for Demographic Research 2003). Alabama's Black Belt has the largest percentage of children living in single-parent families at 50.5%, which is more than 20% higher than both the state and national average (Center for Demographic Research 2004). Pull any economic indicator from the state census and the region consistently ranks at the bottom. The region has the lowest level of educated adults and young people in the state (Center for Demographic Research 2005).

Many legislators, academics, community activists and residents agree a comprehensive, strategic plan addressing the fundamental “Quality of Life” needs for the people of the Black Belt is an imperative. A myriad of commissions and task forces have emerged since 1994 providing a surplus of public scrutiny with limited results in the opinions of most respondents in this study. Indeed, much to the dismay of its rural inhabitants, outsiders have continually referred to the Black Belt as “Alabama’s Third World.” While the claim may be statistically significant, the rejection of the label by many Black Belt dwellers is evidence that community/regional pride still exists despite economic hardship. In fact, the Capital Survey Research Center for the Alabama Education Association in 2003 phoned 593 adults in 12 Black Belt counties and found 71% of residents considered the Black Belt a “pretty good” or “very good” place to live (2003). However, “more than three-quarters of the people said they were “very” or “somewhat” dissatisfied with jobs in their county” (Capital Survey Research Center 2003: 6). Does the legacy of school desegregation and dual school systems play a role in this dissatisfaction?

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter delineates the theoretical framework of social capital, including a discussion of the concept's origin in the field of education. First, I address some of the conceptual and methodological confusion and criticism of social capital. I describe in detail the intrinsic relationship between social capital and education through a literature review of two harbingers of the increasingly popular term. Next, school desegregation and the logic of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) are explained in relation to the theory of social capital. I then lay out some of the often-overlooked negative manifestations of social capital in the context of race and education in Alabama's Black Belt. Lastly, I discuss three forms of social capital that aid in analytical social research.

### **Social Capital and Education**

Though rarely mentioned in popular discourse, the roots of the concept of social capital are grounded in the social institution of education. From its earliest stages of development, social capital has been used to refer to resources embedded in social relations (Lin 2001), and, specifically, in the context of those resources tied to the social process of education (Hanifan 1920; Bourdieu 1986; Loury 1977; Coleman 1988). Lyda Judson Hanifan, an educational reformer and rural school superintendent in West Virginia's Appalachian region, first coined the term "social capital" to illustrate the invaluable social resources necessary for community viability and educational success:



In the use of the phrase “social capital” no reference is made here to the usual acceptance of the term “capital,” except in a figurative sense. We do not refer to real estate or to personal property or to cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of people; namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among individuals and families who make up a social unit -- the rural community, whose logical center in most cases is the school (1920:78).

French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu continued in the tradition of Hanifan’s conceptualization of social capital in the context of education and expanded the scope of the concept to include class reproduction. Bourdieu (1986) focused on the relationship of social capital to economic capital and in the reproduction culture and status:

Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (1986:243).

Bourdieu defines social capital specifically as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital” (1986: 248-249). In this sense, the concept is not recognized as a panacea for community problems. Instead, Bourdieu recognizes social capital through a “Marxian theory of objective class and a Weberian analysis of status groups and politics” (Schmidt 2002:16; Lin 2001). In other words, Bourdieu’s explanation of the concept recognizes issues of power reproduction and status attainment in social investments or relationships.

A fourth form of capital recognized by Bourdieu is that of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is the recognition and internalization of the economic and cultural capital holdings of a group (class) that tends to reinforce the power relations constituting

the structure of social space (Bourdieu 1986). “Social positions and the division of economic, cultural and social resources in general are legitimized with the help of symbolic capital” (Siisiainen 2000:2). White community leaders in some of Alabama’s Black Belt Counties invested their “economic, cultural and social capital holdings” and transported the white half of the dual school system into one kindergarten through twelfth grade private school in a desperate attempt to secure racial homogeneity for future generations. Privatization institutionalized the social and economic power of the white population in the form of segregation academies. The creation of these exclusive, new schools can be seen as an attempt by the white-establishment in the Black Belt to salvage the honor and prestige, or symbolic capital accumulated by way of the harsh legacies of slavery and the Jim Crow South. State sponsored dual school systems had, until 1963-1969, served as the social apparatus used by the white communities in the Black Belt to reproduce class and culture in counties where white people were in the minority by ratios of 3 and 4:1. Bourdieu’s incorporation of symbolic capital as a component of social capital helps us understand that racial stratification in Alabama’s Black Belt schools is fixed into larger issues of conflict, class, power and culture.

Coleman’s contribution to the theory of social capital and to the desegregation of American public schools is notable. As a result of the “Coleman Report,” officially called “Equality of Educational Opportunity” (1966), Coleman argued that socially disadvantaged black students profited from schooling in “racially mixed” classrooms and that school resources (money and equipment) had little to do with educational achievement. As a result, massive busing efforts were launched to bring disadvantaged black youth into integrated, affluent schools. This led, in part, to what is known as “white

flight” from the public schools. White and black communities in Alabama’s Black Belt counties resisted busing campaigns, and by 1975, Coleman concluded that the efforts had failed. Coleman has consistently been proven to be correct in his analysis of the positive effect disadvantaged children experience when placed in affluent, integrated schools (Orefield and Li 2005).

The term “social capital” is credited by James Coleman to Glen Loury who noted that minority groups were inherently disadvantaged with regards to the ideal of American meritocracy: “The merit notion that, in a free society, each individual will rise to the level justified by his or her competence conflicts with the observation that no one travels this road entirely alone (Loury 1977: 176 quoted in Portes 1998: 4). According to Coleman: social capital consists of a variety of different components that have two things in common; “they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors... within the structure” (Coleman 1988:98 1990:320). Concerned with assessing the role of social capital in the formation of human capital (knowledge, skills and work competencies), Coleman set out his definition of the concept based on the structural conditions under which it arises:

- 1) Obligations, expectations and trustworthiness of structures
- 2) Information channels
- 3) Norms and effective sanctions
- 4) Closure of social networks
- 5) Multiplex relationships in which individuals are linked by more than one social structure (Coleman 1988; Greeley 1997: 588-589).

Generally, James Coleman uses social capital to “explain differences in individuals’ chances to improve their human capital by staying in school and therefore in

their chances to improve both themselves and society at large” (Wall, Ferrazzi and Schryer 1998: 308). Specifically, Coleman’s explanation of the importance of the “closure of social networks” (interaction amongst all group members) was illustrated by his analysis of public and private Catholic high schools in Chicago (Coleman and Hoffer 1987:222). In *Public and Private Schools: The Impacts of Communities* (1987), Coleman and Hoffer found that unlike public schools, private Catholic schools provided their students with “closure” of the social world in which they found themselves. Children were likely to see classmates and their parents in social settings other than schools, such as in church and the activities surrounding church. This social closure based on “multiplex relationships” amongst parents and students associated with Catholic schools allowed and fostered the creation of sanctions that enforce norms and since all members are in contact with one another and can unite to impose sanctions (such as not dropping out of school) the group can develop a coherent set of obligations and expectations (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Coleman 1988:102). These social obligations and expectations constitute the core of Coleman’s understanding of the mechanisms of social capital in the formation of human capital. Reciprocity expectations and group enforcement of norms help to generate social capital in order to bring about resources such as privileged access to information regarding an educational opportunity (Portes (1998). Alejandro Portes suggests, “... it is important to distinguish between the resources themselves from the ability to obtain them by virtue of membership in a group, a distinction explicit in Bourdieu but obscured in Coleman” (1998:5).

Educational expectations at the community level can play a significant role in persuading children to achieve in addition to that expected at the family level (Israel et al.

2001). The norms enforced in the tightly-knit social networks of the Catholic communities and schools of Chicago provided an educational community for children to depend on, be motivated by, and trust (Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Coleman (1990:300) explains social capital again as a: “set of resources which inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive development of a child or young person.” In short, the social norms and networks that can be created and linked via schools are valuable to the well being of children and communities.

The link between Coleman’s analysis and determination of the importance of closure and the norm enforcing tendencies of private Catholic schools in Chicago communities and the segregation academies of Alabama’s Black Belt counties is perhaps difficult to make at first glance. However, the communities surrounding the Catholic schools of Chicago and the segregation academies of the Black Belt are related in that they both are sustained by certain normative behaviors and expectations based on shared values or beliefs. In both situations, social capital is developed through parental relationships grounded in schools and takes the form of group consensus based on what is deemed “proper or appropriate behavior” (Coleman and Hoffer 1987:222). Inappropriate behavior can be sanctioned because there is a coherent set of expectations and information channels (church and school) to report insubordinates.

Social sanctions are defined as “rewards and punishments for complying with and breaking network norms” (Halpern 2005:12). Used to enforce norms (proper behavior) associated with being Catholic in Chicago or white in the Black Belt, the sanctions used to maintain community boundaries and closure of social networks are notably different. For Catholic communities and schools in Coleman’s study, proper behavior is explained

in relation to explicit religious values and practices. For the white communities and schools in Alabama's Black Belt, appropriate behavior, especially during school desegregation, was and is based on implicit, less institutionalized sociocultural values and traditions of white separatism and supremacy. Inappropriate behavior for whites such as "race-mixing" or giving aid to the "black cause" served as primary acts of social disobedience in Black Belt counties in the early years of school desegregation. As white leaders saw that African Americans were certain to enter their schools, segregation academies were formed in part to keep and consolidate the "whites-only" information channels that had been in place since slavery. The question was how were whites in the Black Belt to keep effective social sanctions and norms for maintaining racial purity and power if their child was to sit in a room eight hours a day with children of another color?

For well over a century, Deep South norms and sanctions governing racial interaction were very much institutionalized in the form of Black Code Laws (Jim Crow). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's sought to put an end to such *de jure* segregation. State sponsored dual school systems principally manifested the high degree of closure necessary to reinforce norms of racial segregation in the Black Belt until *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) finally in Alabama was enforced circa 1969. The prospect of introducing new, non-white families and children into the social networks surrounding white schools in the Black Belt could be compared, in a social rather than legal sense, to the idea of integrating Catholic Schools with Protestant or Jewish children in Chicago. The fear and uncertainty generated by the mandated introduction of African American children into the well-established social structure of the white public schools in the Black Belt was perceived as threatening to the southern racial hierarchy and the

ability to enforce norms of white separatism. The segregation academies of the Black Belt were created in a panic-stricken reaction to accommodate the fear and uncertainty of “local outsiders” of a different race entering the formerly all-white schools. Unlike the latent function of network closure resulting in Coleman’s Catholic schools, the “instant academies” of the South were deliberate in the quest to maintain a high degree of closure needed to perpetuate white power and control (Walden and Cleveland 1971:235; Dollard 1949; Dill and Williams 1992; Duncan 1996). Social capital was, in this sense, disinvested from the public realm of education in Black Belt counties in Alabama through the process of white community/business leaders propping up racially homogenous havens in the form of private schools, and by shaming or sanctioning white community members who did not leave the public schools. Cynthia Duncan (1992; 1996) has discussed in depth the isolating, negative consequences of this kind of institutional disinvestment of social capital by the nonpoor on the poor in rural places.

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) did not use social capital and their idea of “network closure” specifically in relation to conflict and power, but the connection between the deliberate social exclusion and isolation of black families in the Black Belt from white schools and the quest to maintain “norm enforcing” social structures through education can be made. Furthermore, as the emergence of the social capital invested and accumulated in the segregation academies relates to the creation of human capital, education has always been a means of depriving African Americans of competitive resources needed to gain upward mobility in the Deep South (Dollard 1949). Indeed, the plantation communities of the Black Belt were long dependent on cheap, compliant labor

and educational deprivation was the cruel strategy used to perpetuate low cost labor pools (Dollard 1949; Dill and Williams 1992; Cobb 1992).

In summary, we are able to recognize some connections social capital has to the institution of education. L. J. Hanifan initially conceptualized the concept broadly as an emotional resource and extension of the rural school in which community members and children could access support beyond the family-level (1920:79). Pierre Bourdieu's delineation of social capital picks up where Hanifan leaves and illustrates the dynamic nature of social capital formation and transformation to other forms of capital. For Bourdieu, education serves as the primary mechanism for the reproduction of class and culture in modern society (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970). Parents from upper classes specifically use the school as a means to ensure the values and norms associated with their status and position in society are transmitted by placing their children in classrooms with children of similar backgrounds. In the social capital tradition of Bourdieu, the segregation academies born in the 1960's across the Deep South can be described as reactionary social networks motivated by fear and intended to "wall off" African American families and communities from the social, economic and cultural resources and connections embedded in white social structures (Dill and Williams 1992).

James Coleman, like Bourdieu arrived at the concept of social capital out of concerns for the structural barriers disadvantaged youth experience in education (Wall, Ferrazzi and Schryer 1998: 308). Coleman's interpretation of social capital is useful due to his emphasis on the creation of human capital through educational social networks such as the family and community. Like Bourdieu's (1986) use of the concept of



“embodied cultural capital,” the accumulation of human capital is critical to the economic and social well being of individuals and communities.

Since the Coleman Report of 1966, sociologists have emphasized the importance of socioeconomic forces in shaping young people’s aspirations and notion of possibility (Stockard and Mayberry 1992; Wong and Nicotera 2004). Public schools provide a unique opportunity for students from various backgrounds to interact and learn from one another’s social orientations. The racial homogeneity maintained in the Black Belt through *de facto* dual school systems presents a major impediment for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in enhancing their notion of what is possible with respect to educational achievement. As will be discussed next, public/private dual school systems essentially undermine the findings of the Coleman Report and the very purpose of *Brown* (1954).

### **Social Capital and Negative Outcomes**

Contrary to most positive outcome explanations of social capital and the international attention brought by Robert Putnam’s 2000 publication *Bowling Alone*, social capital can take inclusive and exclusive, positive and negative forms regarding “collective action” for the “collective good” (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Portes 1998; Schulman and Anderson 1999). Alejandro Portes and Patricia Landolt, in their 1996 article, “The Downside of Social Capital,” suggests “the same strong ties that help unite members of a group (community) often enable it to exclude outsiders” (3-4). Pierre Bourdieu (1986) emphasized the role of the dominant class in manipulating and controlling “the forms of capital.” The forms of capital “are resources which yield power

and involve the capacity to exercise control over one's own future and that of others" (Bourdieu 1986:241 quoted in Schulman and Anderson 1999:352). Schulman and Anderson (1999), in "The Dark Side of the Force: A Case Study of Restructuring Social Capital" note that "reserves of social capital are unevenly distributed and differentially accessible depending on the social location of the groups and individuals who attempt to appropriate it" (353). In short, group solidarity can be socially constricting internally and externally.

Alejandro Portes (1998) clearly defines four negative consequences of social capital to be discussed and synthesized in the context of dual school systems in the Black Belt: 1) exclusion of outsiders, 2) excess claims on group members, 3) restrictions on individual freedoms and 4) downward leveling norms (15). Exclusion of outsiders occurs as a result of network closure and the prevalence of bounded solidarity in the quest to further the economic position and status of members of the network. Dual school systems in the Black Belt effectively shut out outsiders through social mechanisms of trust based on shared identity and a common struggle.

The second negative effect of social capital, excess claims on group members, emerges as a result of intergroup interactions and competition. When intertwined groups are bound to a normative structure a free-riding problem may arise due to the norms of expectation and reciprocity demanded by less productive members of a group. Separate, racially homogeneous school-communities make it difficult for community members to break from the normative structures governing their actions in a socially competitive setting like the Black Belt. Breaking with the normative structure by rejecting a claim made by a community elder may lead to severe group sanctions.

Thirdly, “community or group participation necessarily creates demands for conformity” (Portes 1998:16). The restrictions on individual freedoms is seemingly inevitable in a small town or rural setting in which social control is easy due to low population density and thus high visibility. Portes (1998) explains this may be a reason the young and independent-minded have always fled from small town life (16). Dense “multiplex relationships,” can be socially constricting due to the fact that an individual cannot escape the network with which he or she is continually in contact (i.e., family, school, church, job, etc.). The social restriction experienced through tightly bound social networks can be characterized by a sense of individual inertia. Strong communities usually connote the strong observance of group norms and hence high social control.

Fourth, Portes notes: “situations exist in which group solidarity is cemented by a common sense of adversity and opposition to mainstream society” (1998:17). The downward leveling of norms refers to the process whereby a group member is discouraged and even reprimanded for achieving beyond the internalized subordinate position and status of the group. For example, group solidarity amongst black residents of the Black Belt may inhibit a child leaving his family and friends to attend the Alabama School for Math and Sciences because the group (racial) identity is based on shared hardship and struggle. The social capital of the group, in other words, is thought to be only conducive in times of adversity not success. Thus the support the child needs to leave the home and community may be absent because the family does not know how to effectively celebrate the prospect of a member leaving. The downward leveling of norms would occur in the form of the child thinking he or she cannot leave his family and friends behind.

Educational structures found in the Black Belt counties in this study provide some illustrations of Portes' understanding of the concept of social capital based on social control. In social situations of intense racial and economic stratification, social capital has the strong potential to be underinvested, disinvested, squandered, unevenly distributed, highly concentrated, used primarily as sanctions and devoid of the phenomenon of widespread "generalized reciprocity and civic engagement" (Putnam 1993; 1995; 2000). While Putnam's work has been monumental in energizing community development dialogue, his understanding of social capital as "volunteerism" or civic activity seems virtually inapplicable, and perhaps even counterproductive when discussing communities in the Black Belt. There is no shortage of civic volunteers or groups in Alabama's poorest region but there is a surplus of social constraint and inertia with respect to crossing racial boundaries in education.

### **Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital for Community Development**

Jan and Cornelia Flora and Susan Fey (2004) and Deepa Narayan (1999) note that social capital takes three forms. *Bonding social capital* reinforces intragroup group norms by way of tight, exclusive networks with a strong emphasis on the continuous identification of insiders and outsiders. In this sense, bonding social capital is related to Coleman's idea of "network closure" as a primary feature of the concept. The segregation academies created to resist federal mandates are sustained, in part, by a sense of common struggle to maintain identity as a culturally traditional racial group and class. At the same time and in a similar way, the completely black public schools shaped by the white-flight also foster strong bonding social capital and a shared sense of struggle. The bonding

social capital inherent in the social structures of the school-communities in the Black Belt is boundary-reinforcing. Bonding social capital is fundamental to the well being of communities, but when tightly bound social groups are not connected to networks in power or to oppressed groups social stratification is reproduced (Narayan 1999:13). The bonding form of social capital concisely articulates Bourdieu's notion of the concept as being embedded in educational social structures and serving as the primary agents of class reproduction.

*Bridging social capital* relates to productive connections to people who are not like you demographically. Bridging social capital is characterized by open and flexible boundaries and social interactions amongst individuals from uncommon socioeconomic, racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds (Flora et al. 2004). School segregation is most certainly a historical and modern example of group disconnection. Xavier de Souza Briggs (2002) has extensively explored the form of social capital as "bridging" racial groups in the United States. "Race bridges" refer to interracial friendships facilitated by organizational structures such as education, the workplace and place of residence (de Souza Briggs 2002). These "race bridges" are essentially crosscutting ties helping to mitigate group conflict, expand information channels and link the poor to networks of opportunity (de Souza Briggs 2002; Coleman 1988; Loury 1977).

The maintenance of dual school systems in Alabama's Black Belt by means of public schools for African American children and private academies for white youth in predominately rural black belt counties can be said to create obstacles to the formation of bridging social capital. Bridging social capital can enable change, but when this is the only type of social capital, outsiders or local elites can establish agendas (Flora et al

2004; Flora 1998). Bridging social capital is best characterized by “crosscutting ties” among horizontal groups not particularly based on a hierarchy of influence or power.

*Linking social capital* is similar to bridging social capital but it involves social connections with people who are specifically in positions of power and influence, including those who live outside the immediate community (Narayan 1999). Linking social capital is especially important for the poor because associations with elite groups and individuals can advance the social agenda of the poor by way of utilizing the prestige and position of those situated at the top end of social and economic hierarchies (Woolcock and Sweetser 2005). Vertical crosscutting ties illustrate this form of social capital, or group relationships based on a recognizable hierarchy of influence. Linking social capital can be understood as the antidote to the class reproductive form of social capital described by Bourdieu (1986). Furthermore, the linking form provides a model and rationale for accessing support from formal institutions such as corporations, local businesses and non-government organizations. Connecting to networks of influence and privilege is critical for the poor (Woolcock and Sweetser 2005). *De facto* dual school systems can be described as ‘kink in the chain’ of linking the Black Belt’s poor to profitable social networks. Of course, one criticism of linking social capital is related to the form’s potential to manifest paternalistic relationships to reinforce traditional socioeconomic hierarchies. Schulman and Anderson’s (1999:354-355) conceptualization of “the paternalistic form of social capital” is based in a “southern social context” and illustrated by norms of beneficence, deference, and patron-client relationships which imbue both workplace and community. In short, the production and distribution of linking social capital need be guarded against the reproduction or expansion of the

traditional class structure in a region such as the Black Belt. Hierarchical (linking) social capital outweighs horizontal (bridging) social capital” (Flora 1998, quoted in Schulman and Anderson 1999:355).

Bridging, bonding and linking social capital are creative conceptual tools for social analysis and policymaking. An understanding of the three types should help combat or anticipate the negative consequences of social capital discussed above. A healthy community or group must utilize all three forms and, in an educational context, a school can serve as a bonding, bridging or linking device or apparatus. Flora and Flora (2003) note that the various forms of social capital can reinforce one another or work against each other (218). Successful community development is predicated upon the confluence of all three forms. Schools usually have well defined strengths and weaknesses, which can be used to bridge, bond or link community members through educational activities and initiatives, which may facilitate collective action across race and class boundaries.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the methods employed in this research. The purpose of this study was to explore the historical and present day relationship between public and private schools and the legacy of desegregation in three school districts. In this chapter, I first explain the general process of conducting school desegregation research through qualitative case study analysis. Next, I describe the process and rationale behind the selection of the counties/school districts in study. A discussion of the process of gaining access to public and private school informants follows. I conclude the chapter with a brief reflection of my experience and impressions of doing research in west Alabama's Black Belt.

#### **Conducting School Desegregation Research**

The general approach taken in this study is that of a qualitative and comparative case study. Case studies, especially qualitative case studies, are prevalent throughout the fields of education and sociology (Merriam 1998:26; Bogdan and Biklen 1982; Yin 1994). "Sociological case studies attend to the [social] constructs of society and socialization in studying educational phenomena" (Merriam 1998:37). This exploratory study is concerned with the social construction of race and the social/educational boundaries maintained to preserve this construction through public and private or "dual school systems" in west Alabama's Black Belt. The findings presented are based on two years (Spring 2003- Spring 2005) of field research in three predominately rural,



contiguous Black Belt counties in west Alabama. The counties were purposely selected to represent distinct school desegregation situations to be explored and compared in the context of social capital formation and community development. Each county experienced varying levels of school segregation in their respective public schools, and has at least one all-white private academy. Public and private school administrators, parents and graduates were approached and interviewed to explore the historical and present day relationship between the system's patrons and the lingering legacy of school desegregation.

The primary research methods used were semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation. Many interviews involved follow up phone and email clarifications. The use of a tape recorder in interviews stifled conversation to the point of silence and sometimes created an uncomfortable disposition in respondents. For this reason, handwritten notes were taken during interviews and reviewed and transcribed immediately afterwards. Follow up phone calls and emails were used to clarify points made during the interview and to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were coded manually based first on descriptions of school-community interactions and then by reoccurring themes found in the responses of particular groups. Groups interviewed fell into four categories:

- 1) Private school associates (employees, parents, general supporters and graduates) (30)
- 2) Public school associates (employees, parents, general supporters and graduates) (36)
- 3) Public and private school associates (experience in both) (10)
- 4) County and State public officials (9)
- 5) Attorneys (6)

Following a scripted interview format proved to be unproductive in relaxing the informant enough to discuss matters of race. Five general questions came to guide most interviews, which were always followed by probing questions:

- 1) When did your community/county come to have a public and private school?
- 2) How would you describe the relationship between public and private schools?
- 3) Does the existence of public and private schools in your county hurt or help community (race) relations?
- 4) What is the greatest misconception about the school system you and your family support?
- 5) Do dual school systems affect the quality of education and community/economic development in your community/county – why/why not?

Interview questions were organized around the intertwined concepts of “social capital and school desegregation.” A total of 91 formal interviews and scores of informal conversations were taken over the course of approximately two years. The qualitative interviews were based on a purposive sample to ensure representation of a diversity of views and educational attitudes. Most interviews lasted approximately one hour and took place in no particular location or setting. Generally, educators were interviewed in a formal educational setting such as offices, libraries, gymnasiums, practice fields and classrooms during and directly after school hours. Parents participating in the study were most commonly interviewed at school functions such as sporting events. However, I made approximately 15 visits to the homes of parents who no longer had children in

school, or who wanted a private, familiar setting to discuss the sensitive issue of race and education in their respective communities. Lawyers and businesspeople were always initially approached and interviewed in their office or place of work. On several occasions the topic of race and education became too uncomfortable to discuss in formal settings such as the workplace and, in this case, a location of the respondent's choice was relied upon to complete the interview process. Frequently, food and drink accompanied the interview process with respondents who wanted to discuss my research topic beyond the usual one-hour format. In these occasions, restaurants and the kitchen tables of respondents provided a forum to finish most interviews and informal conversations.

A qualitative, comparative case study approach to the research issue of racial segregation in education in Alabama's Black Belt was chosen because such methods seek to describe richly what commonly cannot be shown through quantitative "indicators research." The social scientist John Dollard (1949:17), in his hallmark case study *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, gives credence to this rationale:

The method of this research is of necessity adapted to the nature of the material [the nature of race and class in the deep south]. The aim of the study is to grasp and describe the emotional structure, which runs parallel to the formal social structure in the community.

Similar to Dollard's objective, this study is concerned with the emotional connections and disconnections created or destroyed by the educational/social structures in three Black Belt counties.

## **Selection of Counties/School District in Study**

The scope of this research was limited to the educational structures of three contiguous counties in west Alabama's Black Belt. The unit of analysis is the county/school district. I include both the county and school district as the unit of analysis because two of the three research sites are total county school systems (containing no city school systems) and the third is a city school system within a county. The school districts were not selected randomly. The educational structures in the three counties can be thought to occupy a specific position on a continuum based on levels of desegregation in public schools. Sumter County is the most segregated (nearly complete segregation) of the three counties and will be discussed first. Hale County represents moderate segregation and is the intermediate case in study. The last case to be discussed is the Demopolis City School System in Marengo County, which achieved complete school desegregation.

As mentioned above, each county has at least one segregation academy, though the private schools vary in size and prominence. Due to time and money limitations, specific schools in each county were purposely selected to represent similar schools and educational situations in the district and in neighboring Black Belt counties under examination.

## **A Unique Situation: Gaining Access and the Interview Process**

To gain a regional perspective on west Alabama's Black Belt, state school board representatives were interviewed first in the state capital of Montgomery. District and regional representatives provided political insight and "opened doors" by way of phone

calls and emails to public school administrators in the study-counties. In regards to the private schools in this study, I interviewed the director of the Alabama Independent School Association (A. I. S. A) to gain access to leaders of private academies in the Black Belt. Private school headmasters and public school superintendents were approached next to gain access to teachers and community members. As with most school systems in the United States, the leadership structure in both public and private schools in Alabama's Black Belt is rigidly hierarchical and, therefore, "making good" with top school administrators was important. Teachers in both public and private schools were selected for the third phase of interviews, which provided an "on the ground" view of the schools in study.

Moving to the community level and phase three of the interview process, parents were accessed by using snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Sporting events proved to be the most comfortable setting for parents to discuss the relationship between public and private schools in their county. Lastly, to gain an understanding on specific court orders regarding the desegregation of schools circa 1969, lawyers and judges were interviewed using personal and professional contacts. Simultaneously, those working in the legal profession were both the most guarded and the most insightful when it came to discussing race and education in the Black Belt. Floyd Hunter (1953:12) described lawyers in a southern metropolitan area as primary "men of power" in his classic sociological study *Community Power Structure*. This research yielded similar findings. Without the input of attorneys, this study would not have been as productive in explaining opposing views to education in the three Black Belt counties examined.

Public school informants were readily accessible due to outreach networks provided by Auburn University. Gaining access to the private school informants, on the other hand, was no small feat. Throughout this research, I found myself in a rather unique situation. Indeed, my own personal background undoubtedly affected the willingness of headmasters and parents of private school children to openly talk about education in their county. This research was introspective in many ways due to the fact that, after attending a predominately black public school system through the eighth grade, I graduated from a segregation academy in east Alabama. Attending such a school provided a point of reference to discuss the “academy system” of Alabama. The Alabama Independent School Association (A.I.S.A.) was founded in spite of federal and state court orders towards school desegregation and, therefore, does not accept any Title 1 monies. Title 1, or the federal compensatory program, was enacted through the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965. The initiative was part of President Johnson’s Great Society plan to increase federal spending to remedy social problems (Wong and Nicotera 2004:128). By refusing to receive federal and state dollars the association of schools is truly an island unto itself. The private schools only interact with other private schools in the A.I.S.A. (scholarly and sports) and do not report standardized test scores to the public. Knowledge of the closed-off nature of the academy system and the emphasis the association’s supporters place on things such as sports and “state championships” proved to be the difference in my being perceived as less of a threat than the common outsider. The private school supporters and respondents in this study know they are viewed as the bad guys and sometimes as racists by public school affiliates. Private school informants never used the term “segregation academy.”

More often than not, informants from the academies did not want to “talk race” without first learning the specific background of the researcher and study. Again, my personal background as an A.I.S.A. school graduate provided private school informants with enough comfort to speak openly about the oftentimes taboo subject of race relations in the old plantation south. The case studies will show there is camaraderie, an unspoken sense of solidarity amongst A.I.S.A. patrons that functioned as the lubricant needed for the flow of conversation when questions about “the other” were asked. For instance, after establishing myself as a proud graduate of Lee-Scott Academy in Auburn, Alabama, I regularly asked the question: if both public and private school systems seem to be struggling (enrollment, staffing, funding) why don’t white and black leaders and communities pool their resources or figure some way to share learning equipment and materials? The response to this question in many situations came by way of an assumption that I must know as a graduate of an A.I.S.A. school that collaborating with the black community was nearly impossible because 1) the African American leadership did not want help whereas they viewed aid from the white community as interference or “take-over,” and 2) the safety issues of “race-mixing” were too great. Coincidentally, the social and cultural capital I hold by way of graduating from a segregation academy largely facilitated the qualitative fieldwork exploring such schools.

Public school informants, on the other hand, openly discussed issues of race, class and education in the Black Belt with relative ease, but were often shocked or confused when I informed them of where I graduated high school. For example, in an interview with an African American public school employee in Hale County, I explained my primary (public) and secondary (private) background and the informant asked: “well, did

you go because you didn't like black people?" Of course, my response was sincere: "no- I did go to an A.I.S.A. school because I wanted to start on a football and basketball team instead of riding the bench." My answer was relevant, however, to the public-private school issue of the Black Belt because athletics is a central reason many white parents and children attend private schools. This will be discussed more in the following chapters.

### **Measuring Social Capital**

Social capital is difficult to measure because the concept has been consistently criticized due to conceptual ambiguities (Durlauf 1999). Emery Castle (2002: 337) explains a central reason for some of the confusion surrounding the measurement or observation of social capital:

On the one hand, social capital may be assumed to exist simply because a favorable outcome has been observed; on the other, social capital characteristics may be observed and a favorable outcome is assumed to follow. The danger is that the concept will amount to little more than a tautology.

What this study aims to achieve is to explore school desegregation and the maintenance of *de jure* dual school systems through the conceptual lens of social capital. However, as chapter three laid out, the observation of social capital in social situations or settings should not be associated entirely with positive outcomes. Such an approach could indeed lead to criticism of tautology. To the contrary, this study argues that social capital can manifest and perpetuate social (racial) boundaries that lead to negative outcomes regarding education and the collective good of the Black Belt. Viewing social capital this way allows the researcher to recognize that "the same strong ties (connections) that help unite members of a group (community) often enable it to exclude outsiders" (Portes



1998: 3-4). Throughout this research I was looking for social connections and disconnections created through the educational situations in three distinct counties indicated by the attitudes and perceptions of respondents in reaction to the questions listed above and in non-participant observation.

The measurement of social capital usually involves the identification and qualification of trust between groups of people or of particular groups. Trust is difficult to measure because the concept of trust changes as social and cultural context change. People may have high trust in one social situation and none in another situation even though the same groups are involved (Daniel, Schwier and McCalla 2003). In a Deep South/racial context, a good example of this trust differentiation can be found in discussing work relationships versus intimate (dating) relationships amongst whites and blacks. For this reason, I seldom used the term “trust” in this thesis and research. Instead, I looked for the three forms of social capital discussed in chapter three: bonding, bridging and linking, to emerge as themes in the analysis of interview transcripts.

Bonding social capital was recognized by strong use of language such as “us and them” and “they” and “we” and a closed off attitude towards ‘the other’ regarding race, education and community. More often than not, respondents showing strong forms of bonding social capital discussed their community’s or school’s opposition to racial collaboration based on the perception that they were in a hopeless situation with respect to race relations. Bonding social capital is best characterized by attitudes and perceptions based on maintaining intra-racial solidarity through segregated educational and social structure. This group solidarity reinforcing form of social capital was also measured by the degree of interaction that white and black children and parents had in educational

endeavors such as school, athletics, after school student leadership programs and youth-community service projects. Counties and communities that had limited or no inter-racial interaction were said to show strong forms of bonding social capital. This meant that white and black social networks did not overlap.

Bridging social capital was observed and recognized by language that often included that phrase “working together” and less use of “we and they” and “us and them.” Respondents who displayed this crosscutting (horizontal) form of social capital generally had some interaction with the other in an educational setting. These respondents were interested in a collaborative effort towards improving education, but did not always view public schools as the answer. Private school proponents often argued that public schools were a lost cause, but that African Americans were not the reason for their demise. Indeed, bridging social capital, or social connections with people who are demographically dissimilar, was found to exist in one county between public and private high school students. The point here is that social interaction is the central variable in discerning what forms of social capital exist. Social interaction across racial lines in an educational context was identified as bridging social capital. This inter-racial overlap of social networks was generally associated with desegregated public schools.

Linking social capital was identified in social/educational structures and interactions in which the non-poor or professional class (group) was connected to poor social networks through educational means. This crosscutting (vertical) form of social capital was facilitated by desegregated public schools and the absence of exclusively white academies. The support of local businesses for the public schools and public school

foundations (fundraising) was a central indicator of linking social capital. Linking social capital is critical for the poor in geographically isolated areas.

Qualitative research lends itself to deductive reasoning (Patton 2002). The use of the conceptual framework is one way to analyze and describe social situations, perceptions and attitudes. However, this study uses the popular concept in a less popular way. The observation of social capital is not always associated positive outcomes. Social capital can be a polarizing social force functioning to maintain group boundaries and identities. The cases presented in the following chapters make this point among others.

### **A Researcher's Brief Reflections**

“The people of the Black Belt have been studied to death.” Perhaps, no single statement prepared me in conducting research on school desegregation in the Deep South more than this sentiment offered by Lukata Mjumbe, a former Policy Advisor to Congressman Artur Davis (AL-D). Indeed, the Black Belt is not short on task forces, action committees and graduate students analyzing and identifying the problems of the impoverished region. These things are said to suggest that the region is not short of attention or volunteers trying to create change. In the last fifteen years or so, the Black Belt has become a region of interest unparalleled in the state with regards to outreach and research. Perhaps the *Great Social Transformation* characterized by a shift from *gemeinschaft* (community) to *gesellschaft* (associational) societies, and prompted by the industrial revolution and modernization, has conjured nostalgia for a by-gone era of more intimate daily face-to-face interactions, no traffic-jams, unlocked front doors and an overall slow pace of life. Falling in love with the Black Belt's “throw-back way of doing

things” is quite easy. As a twenty-six year old graduate student from the fastest growing, metropolitan county in east Alabama, driving through the quaint (though sometimes dilapidated) courthouse squares and downtown commerce areas of west Alabama’s Black Belt was captivating. Small “mom and pop” diners and breakfast joints became regular stops along the way. I frequently found my self parking in front of locally owned hardware stores in my European hatchback with Macintosh computer sticker, along-side muddy pick up trucks with gun racks - just to see how I was perceived walking in, and to find out how business was run in such a place. In my opinion, Home Depot could benefit by making their franchise managers take a field trip to Greensboro or Demopolis to learn how to accommodate a customer with a smile and refreshing small talk.

In spite of the nostalgia of the communal culture and society of the Black Belt, retail is not a strong suit of the region and the hardware store owners I describe and, moreover, the local public school leaders would like nothing more than to have an inventory and client base like Home Depot does in east Alabama. The central problem with a romanticized view of the impoverished region is that is that it is fleeting. West Alabama’s Black Belt, as one storeowner noted “is a place that you got to be going to in order to find.” In summation, this part of the state is great for research because there is a plethora of social and economic problems to explore. However, researchers (like me) often forget or ignore the reality that theses, dissertations and papers alone will not break the persistent struggle to improve the quality of life for the majority of Black Belt inhabitants who cannot fuel up their hatchback and drive back to a resource-filled metropolitan life. Mr. Mjumbe’s words are haunting: “the people of the Black Belt have been studied to death.” If anything, the two years I spent practicing and employing social

research methods in west Alabama seem to have confirmed this unfortunate truth, and I am left with the question: will this one study make a difference?

#### **IV. SCHOOL DESEGREGATION COMES TO THE BLACK BELT**

This chapter will describe the historic and present day background of school desegregation and dual school systems in Alabama's Black Belt and the social and structural resistance mounted against change. The chapter opens with a brief overview of *Brown v Board*, the landmark Supreme Court ruling that marked the very slow beginning of the end of dual school systems in Alabama and the Deep South. Community/county decision-making during the "critical years" is important in understanding the current school-community connections and disconnections in the three cases in this study. A distinction is made between *de jure* and *de facto* "dual school systems" in the contemporary Black Belt. I conclude the chapter by making the connection between social capital and school desegregation and by considering some of the modern day implications of racial segregation in education for Alabama's Black Belt communities and youth.

##### **Brown v. Board and a Legacy of Defiance**

Over fifty years ago, the Supreme Court ruling of *Oliver L. Brown et. al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka (KS) et. al* (1954) guaranteed minority students the right to attend school with white majorities and over ruled the "separate but equal" ideology of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896). A 1999 publication by Patricia Kusimo summarizes the logic behind the ruling; "The court ruled that not only was such racial segregation harmful but,

to separate Black children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in their community and may affect their hearts and minds in a way likely never to be undone” (2). Segregation is the process of physically separating people by race that was developed by white leaders in the South after the emancipation proclamation. The Brown Decision eradicated laws mandating segregated schools in 17 states and the laws permitting segregated schools in four other states (Kusimo 1999). However, eight states in the Deep South (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia) where blacks constituted 22 % or more of the population, did not truly integrate until the mid 1960’s, when they were pushed by the courts (White 1994, quoted in Kusimo 1999).

While the Brown decision came in 1954, many counties of Alabama (especially in the Black Belt) did not truly desegregate until the school year of 1969-1970 (Walden and Cleveland 1971:234). The slow pace of school desegregation can initially be explained by the 1955 ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education II*. In *Brown II* the Supreme Court ruled that black children need not be immediately admitted to public schools on a racially nondiscriminatory basis, but that individual local school boards should eliminate segregation “with all deliberate speed.” In Alabama and the Deep South, local school boards capitalized on the loose language and interpretation of ‘deliberate speed.’ The ‘wobble room’ of the less celebrated 1955 version of *Brown* bought most counties in Alabama’s Black Belt at least another eight years of racially homogenous education. The doctrine of *Brown II*’s “with all deliberate speed” had essentially been that of a gradual approach characterized by plans that leisurely installed what is referred to as “token integration” in public schools (Nevin and Bills 1976). Nevin and Bills (1976:7) note

during this time period “integration was still a token matter, but in those days [1955-1968] even tokens alarmed the white communities, particularly in more rural areas.” In summation, the *Brown* decisions of 1954 and 1955 increased the social solidarity of the white and black communities of the Black Belt by foreshadowing a national political and cultural conflict in public education. *Audemus Jura Nostra Defendere*, Alabama’s official state motto, which translates as: “We Dare Defend Our Rights,” would indeed be put to test.

### **The Critical Years (1963-1970)**

In researching the historical and present day relationship between public and private schools in the Black Belt and the issue of dual school systems on rural development it became apparent that the perspectives of most respondents were shaped during the decision-making years in which school restructuring and consolidation took place. Specifically, most respondents and residents of the Black Belt referred to public education before and after the school year of 1969-1970. Of course, school desegregation and the political battles surrounding the mandates by the federal government to reorganize schools on the basis of race, is not limited to this school year. Educational and community leadership in each county/school district in this study reacted in distinct ways to the challenges of desegregation and school consolidation. I refer to the decision-making years 1963-1970 as ‘the critical period.’ This time is significant because it marks the beginning of the segregation academy movement and the beginning of a new kind of “dual school system” in which the white students and parents abandoned public schools in favor of newly created and exclusively white academies.



The critical period begins with the little known ruling of *Anthony T. Lee v. Macon County* in 1963, which sought as a class action the admission of thirteen black children into a white high school. The Lee family lived in Tuskegee, home to Booker T. Washington's historic Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University). The political and social impact of *Lee v. Macon* was tremendous. A prominent, eighty-five year-old school desegregation lawyer in west Alabama simply commented: "Lee v. Macon changed everything." A central reason the ruling carried such impact was where the suit was filed in January of 1963, and, moreover, how the ruling was reacted to by George Wallace, leader and chief public proponent of segregation. Macon County is one of two Black Belt counties located in east Alabama. According to 1970 census data, at the time of the ruling no county in Alabama had a black to white ratio greater than Macon County (Census 1970). However, despite outnumbering whites by more than four to one, the system operated a segregated dual school system controlled by a predominately white school board and the ubiquitous Governor George Wallace.

On August 22, 1963, only seven months after the Lee case was filed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Federal District Judge Frank Johnson, Jr. (a law school classmate of Wallace) cited eleven precedents from across the South for immediate school desegregation in Macon County and Tuskegee. The local school board of Macon County reluctantly prepared to consolidate the separate school systems (Jenkins 1968: 24). The mere gesture of capitulation to the federal government by the local school board prompted Wallace to issue an executive order to delay the school's opening by one week and to send Alabama state troopers in to guard Tuskegee High School's doors. After this week delay, the architect of the 'southern

strategy' unequivocally stated, "no child shall be permitted to integrate the public schools of Tuskegee" (Jenkins 1968: 25). Judges promptly nullified his defiant actions, but by the time school opened in Tuskegee, of the 250 white students who had pre-registered to attend only 35 showed up for class (Jenkins 1968: 25). With the use of the tuition-grant – law, a state measure enacted to cover such school desegregation emergencies, approximately 100 of the boycotting students enrolled in a hastily organized school called the Macon Academy and thus Alabama's first segregation academy was born. The tuition grant law was a backhanded maneuver by Wallace and some members of Alabama's legislature to use public funds to subsidize the academy movement. *Lee v. Macon* ultimately led a ruling that found the use of public funds for private schools to be illegal. The state sponsored campaign for segregation academies, however, did not stop.

Ironically, Wallace's defiance of *Lee v. Macon* in 1963 and unconstitutional use of state dollars to avoid school desegregation and direct interference in local school board matters in Tuskegee prompted the beginning of the end of racial segregation in public education in Alabama. Fred Gray, the lead attorney for Anthony Lee, argued that Wallace's interference in state affairs violated *Brown II* because he took the power away from local school boards in meeting the 'with all deliberate speed' guidelines. Gray and the NAACP contended the Governor:

asserted a general control and supervision over all public schools of the state... thereby entitling the court to bring forth a single desegregation order directing state officials to carry out 'the complete reorganization of the public school system on a non-racial basis' (Jenkins 1968: 25).

This appeal by Gray and the lawyers of the NAACP was unprecedented in the Deep South. Up to this point, individual cases from each county and school district had to be filed to achieve school desegregation. Wallace's hubris and recklessness in the face of the

Supreme Court in 1963 would ultimately lead to the end of school segregation. Nevertheless, the segregationist governor increased in popularity among most white Alabamians in the Black Belt. *Lee v. Macon* would languish in federal courts over the next four years,' and in the meantime Wallace and company raised large sums of money and made personal donations to segregation academies across the state (Walden and Cleveland 1972). Ray Jenkins (1968:32), in a *New South* article published by the Southern Regional Council, cites a memo authored by State Superintendent of Education Austin Meadows to all local superintendents in Alabama circa 1965, which captures the *zeitgeist* of the day and the ardent stand the Alabama State Board of Education proposed towards the racial desegregation of public schools during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement:

Segregation is a perfectly good word. It has been practiced down through the ages for good results. The lord set aside or segregated fruit from the apple tree in the Garden of Eden from Adam and Eve, but Eve persuaded Adam to taste the fruit and they were both banished from the Garden of Eden and honest men and women have had to work their living ever since.

Segregation has been used by people of the civilized world for man's greatest advancement. Matrimony, the most sacred of all bonds for men and women, is the highest type of segregation. In matrimony, husband and wife bind themselves to cleave to one another, even to the extent of forsaking all others if necessary. A great ministerial commandment has been the public pronouncement at the wedding ceremony 'What God has joined together let no man put asunder.' Without this bond of segregation, there would be no family unit. One of the Ten Commandments forbids breaking this human bond of segregation. Segregation is the basic principle of culture. The good join together to segregate the bad.

Segregation is one of the principles of survival throughout the animal kingdom. Animals, in many instances, join their own kind to defend themselves by numbers against other animals that would destroy them without such segregated bonds. Birds of a feather truly flock together. Wild geese fly in a 'V' formation, but never join any other flock of birds. The wild eagle mates another eagle and not with any other bird. Red birds mate with red birds, the beautiful blue birds mate with other blue birds, and so on through bird life.

There can be segregation without immoral discrimination against anyone. Integration of all human life and integration of all animal life would destroy humanity and would destroy the animal kingdom. A time of reckoning must come in this United States of

America on the fundamental principles of segregation and non-segregation, which can be achieved without destroying segregation in its true sense.

Before the historic events of “Bloody Sunday” on the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma of 1965, there were 22 counties in Alabama in which less than 10 % of the black voting age population were registered to vote (Landsberg 2003). All of Alabama’s Black Belt counties are included in this figure. Literacy tests and other intimidation tactics had been employed especially throughout the Black Belt to deny black adults the right to vote. In fact, it has been well documented that the number of registered white voters often exceeded the total percentage of white people living in a given Alabama Black Belt county (Landsberg 2003). Following the Voting Rights Act of 1965, black voters turned out in record numbers, and in 1968 black candidates were put on the ballot for the first time locally (Bailey and Faupel 1993:106).

In the spring of 1967 came U. S. District Judge Frank Johnson’s ruling on *Lee v. Macon and* the state-wide appeal for school desegregation. The unprecedented, sweeping state-wide desegregation order covered all 99 of the state’s 118 school districts and placing the burden of school consolidation on the new state superintendent of education, Ernest Stone as opposed to local school boards (Jenkins 1968: 34). School districts that were not in compliance would not receive federal funding allocated to the state. For less than two years white leadership in Alabama, and the clever legal mind of George Wallace, maximized what little wiggle room existed in a paragraph tucked away in the decision that read:

the measure of a freedom of choice plan – or, for that matter, any school plan designed to eliminate discrimination based on race – is whether it is effective. If the plan does not work, then this court, as well as the state of Alabama school officials, is under a constitutional obligation to find some other method to insure that the dual school system of public education is eliminated (Jenkins 1968: 36).

'Freedom of choice' was truly the last hope for whites refusing to attend school with blacks in Alabama. The plan proved to be a failure due to the unwillingness of virtually any white family to move to a predominately black school system (this was not exclusive to the Black Belt). Following the Supreme Court rulings in *Green v County* (1968) and *Alexander v. Holmes* (1969), which ultimately enforced the *Brown* decisions of the 1950's once and for all and ended *de jure* dual school systems, local Alabama school boards and governments could no longer fight individual battles against *Lee v. Macon* (1963 and 1967). The ruling further enraged Wallace and bolstered his push away from public schools and into segregation academies.

The school year of 1968-1969 would be the last year any decisions would be made to stay or retreat from public education in Alabama. By 1970, all school districts in the state had desegregated the formerly all white and black schools and, surprisingly, the process went off with relatively few problems. This marks the end of the critical period because by 1970 all segregation academies that would be formed were already in motion even if they lacked educational necessities like books, qualified teachers, sound facilities and adequate tuition revenue (Walden and Cleveland 1972).

In the end, the fiery years of the Civil Rights Movement and the critical period brought white and black communities in the 11 state Deep South to a "fork in the road." Unlike other "forks" the white leadership on local Black Belt school boards had encountered, this one did not appear to allow traveling "off-road." Fear and uncertainty of the sociocultural changes that would come with school desegregation was pervasive in both white and black communities across Alabama. Indeed, the white-supremacy

provisions buried throughout Alabama's arcane 1901 constitution had largely been expended. Like many counties in the Deep South, "busing" was the real and symbolic issue that absolutely enraged white (and some black) communities in the Black Belt. Many respondents alive during the critical period, black and white, suggested the courts should have taken a gradual approach to integration. However, the fact remains that black and white schools remained "separate and unequal" all the way up to 1969, fifteen years after Brown, and gradual approaches had been exhausted.

### **Understanding Dual School Systems**

The enforcement of school desegregation often is called 'school consolidation or reorganization.' *Brown I and II*, initially sought to merge or consolidate the *de jure* (in principle) or 'state sponsored' dual school systems of the United States. The explicit mandate of *Alexander v. Holmes* (1969) to desegregate 'at once' applied to every school district in the country. The 1969 ruling bucked the 'with all deliberate speed' language of the past 15 years and said that every school district in the South would remain under court order until 'unitary status' was achieved as measured by statistical means. Through the leadership of Wallace and no shortage of public outrage in the Deep South, the shift from *de jure* to *de facto* (in practice) dual school systems resulted in a new dual school system characterized by the sudden emergence of exclusively white segregation academies (Brown and Provizer 1972). The *de facto* all-white schools placed less emphasis on quality education and more on maintaining racial homogeneity in all things educational (academics, sports, school dances, instruction/administration, community support) (Nevin and Bills 1976; Cleveland 1970; Walden and Cleveland 1970).

Important distinctions need to be made between segregation and integration, resegregation and desegregation (Orfeild 2001). The southern apartheid of the days of *Jim Crow* laws was most identifiable by the racially segregated school systems commonly referred to as dual school systems. Throughout this thesis the term “segregation” will be used in discussing the levels of separation, which white and black children attending public and private schools in the Black Belt experience. The word “integration” is used sparingly throughout because while the phenomenon is often used interchangeably with desegregation, racial integration connotes social and cultural matters. Desegregation refers to the legal process of ending systematic racial segregation. In this sense and to be discussed in conclusion, Alabama’s Black Belt schools are far more desegregated than racially integrated. Lastly, the current academic interest in the “resegregation” of public schools in the United States is not particularly relevant to this study and the Black Belt. For most of the 12 counties in Alabama’s Black Belt, public schools never fully desegregated due to massive white-flight to private schools. The only resegregation that occurred in some Black Belt counties was that from *de jure* to *de facto* dual school systems and this was a public to private sector shift. The exodus from public to private school segregation destroyed any semblance of racial desegregation.

### **Private Education and the Segregation Academies of Alabama’s Black Belt**

According to the Center for Demographic Research (2003), 10% of Alabama children attend private school. In Alabama’s 12 Black Belt counties, approximately 11 % of all children attend private school. However, the private school story in the Black Belt is told by the fact that over 60% of white children attend private school compared to less

than 3% of African American children (Institute for Rural Health Research 2004). As Clotfelter (2002) pointed out in his study of “Private Schools, Segregation and Southern States,” since 1960 “the rate at which whites enrolled in private schools tended to rise with the percentage of all students who were nonwhite, increasing sharply in counties (Black Belt) over 60% nonwhite” (3). The first segregation academy appeared in Prince Edward County, Virginia in 1959. The school is still in operation and has actually been integrated by minority-group students. The hard-fought school desegregation case in the county would serve as a last-resort model for southern communities and segregation academies that were willing to resist school desegregation by any means necessary.

There is a critically important distinction to make when discussing private education in the state of Alabama and in most Deep South states. As renowned Alabama historian and Distinguished Professor at Auburn University Wayne Flynt noted in the initial phase of this research: “Chances are if a private school was around in Alabama before 1954 it had little to do with race...but if the school has only been around since ’54 it has everything to do with it (race).” In Alabama, there are private schools independent but affiliated with the Alabama High School Athletic Association. This means these private schools interact with public schools and therefore with African American students and, moreover, predominately black schools. And then there are schools affiliated with the Alabama Independent School Association (A.I.S.A.) that was loosely formed after the ruling of *Lee v. Macon County* 1963 in Tuskegee, Alabama. As a result the segregation academies popped up over night modeled after Macon Academy. A brief history of the A.I.S.A. posted on the association’s website gives the reader the impression that these schools were organized as an impromptu sports league (Alabama Independent School



Association 2005). Athletics are indeed centrally important to the A.I.S.A. schools, but timing unmasks the real impetus behind the creation of the association.

John Herron, in his 1977 study of the growth of private schools in Alabama, showed that from 1967 to 1971 approximately 50,000 white students left the public schools. He goes on to report that “according to State Department data, there were thirty-four private schools operating in 1965 and 109 operating in 1970” – an increase of 220.6% in a five year period” (75). Walden and Cleveland’s study of changes in Alabama’s public schools also took notice of the educational “white flight,” revealing that as the percentage of blacks in attendance at formally all-white schools in a district increased, the percentage of white students leaving the public schools increased correspondingly (1972: 234). Moreover, when black students reached a percentage of the total enrollment over 50 %- 1 out of 5 white students left (Walden and Cleveland 1972: 234). Allen Cleveland’s 1970 dissertation survey of Alabama’s non-sectarian private schools showed the emergence of 65 “instant academies” created in reaction to court-ordered school desegregation between 1969-1971 (Cleveland 1970; Terjen 1971: 70; Walden and Cleveland 1972: 235). Cleveland used 37 quantitative criteria recognized by accrediting associations to measure the quality of the newly formed schools in Alabama and found the institutions grossly inadequate by almost any measurement (Cleveland 1970). By 1972, there were reportedly 140 segregated elementary and secondary private schools in Alabama with most enrollments below 200 students (Walden and Cleveland 1972: 234, 238). Many of these schools operated in make-shift structures like churches, abandoned public school buildings, general stores and even an abandoned bowling alley

as they attempted to raise funds to build a permanent structure (Walden and Cleveland 1972: 238).

Alabama's Black Belt counties with the highest concentration of African Americans all had segregation academies by 1967. In contrast such academies do not exist in the rural counties north of Birmingham, where African American populations are under 10 %. However, the segregation academy is not exclusively a Black Belt phenomenon. The reactionary private schools of the late 1960s and early 1970s also exist in some metropolitan counties located in central and south Alabama.

Only one comprehensive book and analysis has been provided specifically on the emergence of the segregation academy in American education. David Nevin and Robert E. Bills' 1976 publication *The Schools That Fear Built: Segregationist Academies in the South* provides both qualitative and quantitative investigation of the phenomenon. Nevin and Bills (1976: 3) articulate their thesis and issue regarding the reactionary schools:

The question is not the validity of private education as such, but the effect of these schools and the essentially political as opposed to educational motives that lie behind them. The issue obviously is not the right to start such schools but the wisdom of doing so.

The Southern Regional Council also provided insight and investigation to the educational spectacle of the segregation academy in their *New South* series of journals during the Civil Rights Movement and school desegregation in a publication entitled *The South and Her Children: School Desegregation 1970-1971* (Brown and Provizer 1972; Terjen 1972; Terjen 1971). John Egerton, in a 1991 publication entitled *Shades of Grey*, describes the emergence of the segregation academy poignantly:

They were Rebels, a reactionary remnant of latter-day devotees to the Lost Cause. They flew the Confederate flag above their newly built or borrowed classrooms, and sang 'Dixie' with fierce pride, and made soldier's gray and gold or the red and blue of the flag

their school colors. They readily abandoned the public schools and developed these new institutions, as much to show the depth and sincerity of their convictions as to demonstrate their economic power” (237-238).

In 2005, the A.I.S.A. continues to lose and add new schools to their roster. The school association has roughly 70 schools with new parochial schools (Christian) being added yearly. Interestingly, the Black Belt schools that first founded the A.I.S.A. have also been the first to relocate or close. Macon Academy has moved to east Montgomery due to white-flight from Tuskegee. Black Belt counties in Alabama with the highest percentage of African Americans in 1965 (Macon, Lowndes, Greene, Sumter, Wilcox) all have segregation academies with dwindling student enrollments or schools that have shut down.

The private school association still only interacts with schools from the A.I.S.A. but the ‘non-discrimination’ policy, which affords the schools tax-exempt status, is a standard in every Black Belt academy. Notwithstanding the non-discrimination policies, an African American child going to a segregation academy in the Black Belt would likely be intimidated in a similar way that a white child would in a completely black public school in the region. With this said, times are changing and in Greene County (west Alabama Black Belt) black children are enrolling in Warrior Academy (an early segregation academy) through the aid of a Birmingham donor who wants to resolve racial tensions in the region by having white and black children learn in a school where Christianity is part of the school curriculum and culture. Warrior Academy was one of Alabama’s first segregation academies and was in danger of going out of business. The admission of minority students is one way the school is staying open. The move to allow

or, rather, recruit black children from the public school in Greene County is controversial in the rural county.

### **Public Education in Alabama's Black Belt**

Unstable local tax bases and a century old tradition of staunchly “protecting pine trees and prairie land,” remarked one superintendent in the region, characterize the ever-present barriers local school boards and county representatives in Alabama's Black Belt schools face year to year in trying to initiate sustainable improvement of public education. The National Education Association (2005) ranked Alabama 51<sup>st</sup> (Washington D. C. included) in per capita state and local tax revenue on Kindergarten-12th. Alabama voters defeated a recent tax reform initiative proposed by Governor Riley (R) handedly in 2002. The new tax plan would have addressed the overwhelmingly regressive nature of the state tax structure as defined by the antiquated 1901 state constitution, which many academics and policy makers argue protects large, absentee landowners and neglects poor, rural Black Belt inhabitants and, by consequence, county school systems in the region (Thomson 2002). Alabama imposes the highest income tax in the nation on a family of three at the poverty line. Property taxes are lower in Alabama than any other state in the country and are a central means of funding the education system at the state and local level. In fact, many Alabamians, especially in Black Belt counties, pay more tax on their groceries than they do on their homes (Arise Citizen's Policy Project 2005). At the crux of the regressive tax structure issue is the fact that Alabama's constitution does not afford “home rule” or self-government for counties that wish to raise local property taxes or make other county-level decisions (Sumners 2002). Alabama is the only

southern state to deny home rule to county governments (Summers 2005:79). This absence of “local democracy” is especially troubling for poor Black Belt counties who are forced to funnel local education initiatives through the state legislature to ensure a vote.

With the exception of Marengo County’s Demopolis city school system, the 15 school districts in the region rely heavily on state and federal funding because they lack vibrant retail economies to sustain local sales tax bases. Low property values make for an anemic property tax base. Wealthier Alabama school systems, such as Mountain Brook and Vestavia Hills in the Birmingham area, draw more of their funding from these sources. These local sources of revenue equate to what is called a “mills equivalent” number. This number is the total amount of revenue collected locally for public school purposes divided by the value of one regular system mill of ad valorem tax (property tax). The Alabama average is 30.97 mills equivalent. The 15 school districts of the Black Belt average about 20 mills equivalent. Wealthy school districts in the Birmingham area have over 50 mills equivalent. The structural limitations of Alabama’s regressive tax system are an ever-present barrier for the public schools of Alabama’s Black Belt.

All 15 school systems in the 12 county region, with the exception of Demopolis City School System, have at least 70 % of their students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (Title I monies), which is the primary indicator of child poverty and is 20 % more than the state average (Center for Demographic Research 2005). According to Dr. Jack Wise, Research Specialist for the Alabama State Department of Education, there is a 0.79 correlation between African American students and Free and Reduced Cost lunches in the state. School lunches in Alabama cost approximately \$ 1.50 in the public school system.

In the context of national education policy, the robust educational standards mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB 2001), as one Public School Administrator in the Black Belt said, “is going to break our school’s backs.” Teacher recruitment and retention is already a major problem for these “hard to staff” schools due to isolated geography, low salaries and a commonly felt sense of desperation amongst faculty. The “Highly Qualified” teacher standards of the NCLB 2001 Act have forced some teachers back to college, to the Academies, (where NCLB 2001 standards do not apply), or into early retirement. In short, money is tight, expectations are high and children are in need. Inadequate funding and high concentrations of poverty contribute to weak academic performance.

With the exception of Demopolis City Schools, the public school systems in the 12 counties constituting Alabama’s Black Belt are the lowest scoring schools in the state with regards to standardized test scores and college entrance exams (Alabama Department of Education 2005). Public schools in the Black Belt and predominately African American schools in Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile all score in the bottom quintile. However, low outcomes in public education is not, as one state-level educational administrator remarked, “exclusively a black problem in Alabama.” A recent study published by the Manhattan Institute showed that only 62 % of white high school seniors in Alabama graduated high school in the school year 2001-2002, which is the lowest rate in the United States (Greene and Winters 2002:23). The majority of white non-graduates reside in the northern, Appalachian section of the state where, ironically, the battle over school desegregation was a virtual non-issue due to the relatively homogenous racial composition of the region. The significant difference between the

predominately white, rural Appalachian region of north Alabama and the Black Belt are poverty levels amongst families and students as indicated by percent public school students receiving reduced cost lunches (Center for Demographic Research 2005). Only two counties north of Birmingham (Franklin, Winston) have more than 50% of students eligible for Title 1 monies. This stands in contrast to the 8 in 10 children in the Black Belt receiving such financial aid (Center for Demographic Research 2005).

Over thirty years of out-migration from Alabama's Black Belt counties has left behind a population that is more poorly educated and poverty-prone than the rest of the state. Those high-school students who gained or possessed the skills to "get out" and obtain college degrees have not returned to their rural origins. Goetz and Rupasingha (2005) have described the loss of well-educated workers from local (rural) communities to urban areas as the "brain drain" (6). The "brain drain" is further explained by a loss of local resources because the community or town does not see a return on their investment (property/sales taxes) into the education of successful students because the students do not return.

Public education in Alabama's Black Belt counties, like most other places in the United States, mirror the condition of the economies and communities from which they draw support. A legacy of racial segregation in most things social (i.e., church, sports, marriage and dating) and a "color-coded" class structure has led to a public school situation that reflects a divided citizenry in the region. Persistently low standardized test scores and staffing woes reinforce in the minds of many white residents of the Black Belt that "public education is a lost cause." On the other hand, most public school systems continue to make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and are meeting the minimum

requirements of the NCLB Act of 2001. The stigma attached to predominately and completely black schools in the 12 county area is cited as a constant obstruction to positive change by many public educators. Moreover, white residents who send their children to segregated academies, and pay tuition to do so, generally have little interest in increasing funding for local schools.

### **Synthesizing Social Capital and School Desegregation**

The desegregation of public schools in the South's Black Belt is intrinsically linked to the concept of social capital for the reason that the integration of African American children into formerly all white public schools between 1969-71 was an issue of "access" to social and cultural intangibles. Indeed, Chief Justice Warren, in the 1954 ruling of *Brown v. the Board* articulated the central question of racial segregation and learning:

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does (*Brown v. Board of Education* 1954:493).

Just as the theory of social capital is largely based on unquantifiable resources embedded in social relationships, Chief Justice Warren and the Supreme Court found the impacts of segregated schooling was beyond the measurable features of buses, buildings and books or "built capital" (Flora et al. 2004:9). The Brown decision of 1954 was motivated by the finding that negative psychological effects of segregated learning on black children did not emanate from "buildings, curricula, qualifications and salaries of teachers," but rather emerged from the differential social structures and status tied to the very idea of



separating children by race alone (Brown v. Board of Education 1954: 492). The “feeling of inferiority,” amongst black children was thought not to emerge solely from unequal distribution of state and federal dollars, but instead was found to be a consequence of social and cultural deprivations in learning and interaction and community support. In fact, Chief Justice Warren, in delivering the court’s opinion, relied heavily on the rationale of legal precedent’s illustrating the intangible forces of the “Separate but Equal” clause:

“In *Sweatt v. Painter, supra*, in finding that a segregated law school for Negroes could not provide them equal educational opportunities, this Court relied in large part on “those qualities which are incapable of objective measurement but which make for greatness in a law school.” In *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents, supra*, the Court, in requiring that a Negro admitted to a white graduate school be treated like all other students, again resorted to intangible considerations: “... his ability to study, to engage in discussions and exchange views with other students, and, in general, to learn his profession” (Brown v. Board of Education 1954:493).

Without using the term “social capital,” the Supreme Court in 1954 essentially ruled in favor of integrating the United State’s public schools based on the recognition of unevenly distributed resources embedded in the social structures surrounding the institution of education. Schools reproduce social structure and the norms governing these social structures (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970; Bourdieu 1986; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). The segregation of public schools in the Deep South and, moreover, the Black Belt was and is, arguably, the central means of class and power reproduction used by white leadership to secure and reproduce the “southern racial hierarchy” (Spring 1990). The general intent of *Brown* was two fold: 1) to challenge by desegregating the long engrained racial hierarchy of the South by allowing African American children the opportunity to sit and learn in class with white children and gain sociocultural skills relative to language, behavior and aspiration, and 2) to challenge the very communities

resisting this change through the logic of forcing whites to, effectively, vote against their own children when the push for tax initiatives came. Indeed, relative to the rest of the country Deep South schools were entirely “separate and unequal” and therefore school desegregation planned to be followed by sweeping regional tax reform. However, the federal government did not fully figure the role and impact of the segregation academy.

### **School Desegregation and Alabama in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Since the days of Governor Wallace’s symbolic last stand, school desegregation has served as a rallying cry in Alabama politics. At the state level, a 2004 ballot initiative to remove segregationist era language from the 1901 state constitution was narrowly defeated by a margin of less than 1 %. “Amendment 2,” as the initiative was called, had two main objectives. The first objective was removal of the following language from the state constitution: “Separate schools shall be provided for white and colored children, and no child of either race shall be permitted to attend a school of the other race.” The language of the amendment carried no real, legal merit with regards to segregated education in 2004, and proponents of the ballot initiative claimed the measure was intended to move Alabama into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and to at once bury a racist legacy in public education. The second objective of the repeal provision sought the removal of a passage inserted in the 1950s. In 1956, two years after *Brown I*, Alabama’s entirely white, male only legislature added lines (Amendment 111) to the state constitution declaring “no right to public education at public expense.” The 1956 language is largely viewed as an attempt for Alabama to skirt the federal court’s historic ruling mandating school desegregation. Many consider Amendment 111, as a measure taken to ensure

“activist judges” could not force the state to raise taxes based on the equitable right to a public education for all children. Amendment No.2, appeared on 2004 ballots as followed:

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, to repeal portions of Section 256 and Amendment 111 relating to separation of schools by race and repeal portions of Amendment 111 concerning constitutional construction against the right to education, and to repeal Section 259, Amendment 90, and Amendment 109 relating to the poll tax (Office of the Secretary of State of Alabama 2004).

Opponents of the amendment, namely the Alabama Christian Coalition and former Chief Justice Roy Moore, claimed the intent of the initiative was a back-handed, purely political maneuver aimed at raising taxes by cleverly removing language attached to the 1956 amendment that said that Alabama does not guarantee a right to public education. The removal of this part of the 1956 amendment was, as Alabama Christian Coalition President John Giles noted “...a trial lawyer’s dream” intended to raise taxes through “rogue,” activist judges (Roig-Franzia 2004). Giles and Moore each said they did not object to the removal of the passage about separate schools for “white and colored” children, but did however take exception to the removal of Alabama’s right not to guarantee children a public education. Most state newspapers ridiculed this position. Nevertheless, the argument successfully played to Alabama’s age-old fear and antipathy towards federal intervention in state affairs regarding education and taxes despite the fact that the citizenry remains one of the least taxed in the United States. The political formula of mixing taxes (any threat of government control), race and public education in Alabama remains potent over 50 years after the *Brown* decision.

## **The Critical Period of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

A new decision-making ‘critical period’ is emerging in the Black Belt of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In contrast to the overtly hostile, segregationists who led the private school movement in the critical period of the 1960s, the white leaders of some private academies and communities in the Black Belt report feeling the strain and pressure brought on by: 1) declining student enrollments, 2) the enrollment of minority students in formerly all white academies, 3) the success of Demopolis’ fully desegregated public system, and 4) the opening of new private academies without a legacy linked to school segregation in nearby metropolitan areas like Tuscaloosa, Alabama and Meridian, Mississippi. One 75-year-old civic leader and former proponent of segregation policies in education concisely conveyed the troubling situation of Black Belt academies and their corresponding white communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

Its like this, we thought the way the Johnson Administration handled the black movement in the South was wrong...we did not want our schools to be turned upside down and go from being all white to predominately black...I hope you can understand that. Now, today we have a much different situation. The kids who left the public schools in the seventies largely didn’t move back home after college or have moved somewhere where they don’t have to pay tuition to send their kids to school. We have got to figure out a way to attract people [white] back here [Sumter County]. I want to do a magnet school, but the blacks don’t – so what can we do? I will tell you this...no white person is going to send their child to a school where they are 1 of 10 white children in an entire grade...it just won’t happen.

Some younger white leaders in the academy system see 2005 and beyond the time to change the educational structure of the county/community by, as one 40-year-old farmer and supporter of an academy said,

...bringing in the best and brightest black kids into the private schools...because the public schools are not good in the Black Belt and never will be. It’s not like it used to be in the sixties... black and white people don’t have to use separate drinking

fountains or sit in different parts of the restaurant. We know we [black and white] need to work together to create jobs and a nice place to move back to or move into.

In a somewhat similar way, the old-line Civil Rights leaders of the 1950-1970s have retired or passed ushering in a new crop of African American leaders and a more modern outlook on race and education in the Black Belt. The new public school leaders of predominately and completely black schools in the region reported wanting to engage the same white families who abandoned the public schools forty years ago in a new dialogue based on increasing the quality of education and educational opportunities for all children in the Black Belt. However, the question remains, as an African American school board member noted: “how would I [black school leader] convince my [black] community that now is the time to trust white folks again...I might get run out of town if I did that – who knows?” Another black public school leader noted:

We need the white community to get interested in our public schools again. We will never be able to attract big time industries without the help of the folks with real money [wealth] in this county and lets face it they happen to all be white. I don't know how we [public schools] do that though.

In summation, the critical period of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the state of education in west Alabama's Black Belt is defined by a lack of ideas of how counties and communities back out of the situation created by the decision-making of the critical period of 1963-1970. How does a county start over with respect to the restructuring of public schools (i.e., magnet schools, rezoning for racial balance), the re-integration of white families into public schools, or the massive shift of black children into the academy system? Moreover, who will lead the charge for improved educational opportunities for the collective good and at what expense? Who will sustain a forward-looking perspective during the conflicts that are sure to arise? These are questions consistently posed by

respondents, which make for tough decision-making for white and black educational/community leaders. The critical period of 2005 does not seem to hinge on the 1965 argument of whether or not to desegregate *de jure* educational structure – the question today is how we desegregate a *de facto* social structure.

## **V. CASE STUDY: SUMTER COUNTY, ALABAMA**

Sumter County (population 14,798) is a predominately rural county located in the Black Belt along the Mississippi border in west central Alabama (Figure 1). The Tombigbee River runs along the east border of the county. Sumter County has had a predominately African American population since at least 1860 (Hollingsworth 1993:4). This county was selected as an educational system experiencing nearly complete segregation in its public and private school systems. The African American population constitutes 75% of Sumter County's total population and approximately 99.4% of all students in the public school system are black (Alabama State Department of Education 2005). In the school year of 2003-2004, Sumter County had a total of 4 white and 2624 black children attend the seven schools in the public system. The county has one all-white private academy founded in 1970 with an enrollment of 274 students (K-12) located in York (population 2854) and no city school systems. Sumter County has experienced extensive outmigration for the past half century largely due to the decline in local agriculture production, increasing opportunities for African Americans elsewhere, and several failed attempts to recruit high-wage industry (Faupel, Bailey and Griffin 1991). Sumter County lost 8.5% of its total population from 1990-2000 - more than any of Alabama's 67 counties (Center for Demographic Research 2003). The latest population estimates show this trend has continued with a net loss of 657 people (4.4%) from 2000-2004 (Center for Demographic Research 2003).

Sumter County is one of the poorest counties in Alabama and the county with the poorest quality of life indicators of the three cases in this study. The persistent poverty in the county is puzzling to some state-level industrial recruiters due to the fact that the county has a 1) major interstate, 2) active railway, 3) small airport and 4) the Tenn-Tom waterway. Moreover, Sumter County has the only 4-year university in west Alabama's Black Belt, The University of West Alabama. Notwithstanding these assets, at \$23,176 Sumter County ranks 66 of 67 Alabama counties in median household income (Center for Demographic Research 2003). This corresponds with a family poverty rate of 33% and an unemployment rate of 11.7%, which is twice the state average (Alabama Department of Industrial Relations 2003). The impoverished county has 47% of school-aged children living below the poverty line, which also ranks 66 of 67 Alabama counties.

The top employers in Sumter County include a wood floor company (285 employees), the University of West Alabama (275), and a hazardous waste management company (255). Recently, the Wal-Mart in Livingston, the County's largest retail store, has announced plans to close. The closing will put approximately 50 Sumter Countians back on the job hunt. There is a strong possibility that some of the newly unemployed will simply apply to work at the new 'Super Center' Wal-Mart being built 20 miles away in Demopolis.

### **Sumter Academy**

Despite the existence of the University of West Alabama (UWA) the only 4 year, fully integrated public university in the Black Belt of West Alabama, the public schools in Sumter County have never experienced desegregation beyond the token strategies of



the “desegregation with all deliberate speed” years of the late 1960’s. Sumter Academy was created, like other academies in the region, in 1970 as a haven for white families fleeing the desegregation of Sumter and Livingston High School. Unlike the following cases of Hale and Marengo County, which have a significant number of white students in their public schools, Sumter Academy is the sole in-county alternative to the Sumter County public system for white families and therefore operates as a true modern day segregation academy.

Approximately 65 white students, mainly from the east side of the county, attend the Demopolis City Schools, which were selected to represent the integrated system on the segregation continuum described in the methodology section. Two parents from Sumter County who sent their children to school in Demopolis were interviewed. The decision to send their children to school outside Sumter County was summed up by a mother of two:

We decided to go there because it’s only a twenty-minute drive each way...we would have to drive that far if we lived in Atlanta or Birmingham though...that’s kinda how we look at it. We’d have to pay more (tuition) if we went to Sumter Academy than we spend in gas. It’s a good system and we drive to shop and eat anyway...most people drive there (Demopolis) from Sumter for one reason or another.

Several white children reportedly attend a parochial school in Meridian, Mississippi located 30-40 miles from York and Livingston. The remaining white school aged population attends Sumter Academy or is home-schooled. African American children have also attended school in Demopolis, but not in the same numbers. “Usually the black kids (that go to Demopolis Schools) have parents that had a problem with the principal or teacher at Sumter County public” remarked one public school administrator. The NAACP filed a lawsuit against the city system of Demopolis in 1994 on behalf of Sumter and

Perry County to try and enforce adherence to residency for the white children fleeing the county for the well funded, integrated schools in Demopolis. The lawsuit was rejected due to the “Unitary Status” achieved by the Demopolis schools in 1983.

In 1970, Sumter Academy had an enrollment of 800 students (K-12). The academy was able to “preserve the quality of education” in the 1970s largely due to the number of teachers and administrators who left the public system to protest school consolidation. Today, Sumter Academy has a total of 274 students (K-12). The students who graduated in the 1980s and 1990s generally have not moved back to the county. This was continually cited as a problem by Sumter Academy affiliates. “We have got to figure out a way to keep our kids here,” remarked one educator at Sumter Academy, “the city (York/Livingston) is working on that.”

Sumter Academy is a member school of the Alabama Independent School Association (A. I. S. A.), which means that it does not interact with public schools in athletic or academic related activities. Moreover, the school is not expected to publicly report yearly test scores required to meet the various accreditation entities of the A.I.S.A. This makes difficult objectively comparing public and private schools by academic performance in West Alabama. Sumter Academy does post an average score of 22 on the ACT college entrance exam for the graduating classes of 2003 and 2004. This score can be contrasted to the Sumter County Public system average of 16.5 and an Alabama average score of 20.4 (Alabama Department of Education 2005).

Sumter Academy’s tuition is based on a sliding scale that makes it financially attractive to send more than one child to school there. The starting monthly rate for one child is \$256.00 and \$447.00 for four children. Membership to the private school is a

one-time \$600.00 fee per family. Additional fees for annual registration, books, and science classes, outside maintenance, supplies and drug testing total approximately \$300 dollars. Like all A.I.S.A. schools, teachers and staff are given “breaks” or incentives to send their children to that school. These are the only tangible “benefits” for faculty. The average pay in Black Belt academies is approximately six to ten thousand dollars below that of Alabama’s public school teachers. Teachers at any academy in the Black Belt are increasingly retired from the public system and draw retirement in addition to a private school salary.

Students have received scholarships and aid to attend the school. This is not unusual in academies throughout the Black Belt, where it is often expected that students on scholarship perform either well in the classroom or the playing field in return for aid. No black child has ever received a scholarship to Sumter Academy, but it is unlikely that he or she would want to attend a school created to avoid desegregation. It should not, however, be concluded that Sumter Academy would not admit an African American student. At least two academies in neighboring counties have done so and it is becoming more and more common for segregation academies to allow anyone who can afford to pay tuition or who is “willing to put on a jersey.”

At Sumter Academy, students ranging from 12 to 18 years old can be seen interacting with one another between classes. It is difficult to tell where “middle school” ends and “high school” begins as you watch classes change. The academy in Sumter County is housed in a concrete building with aluminum siding on the roof and gymnasium. The building is set out of view from the road and is given shade by large pine trees. There isn’t a Confederate flag flying at the entrance; nor is there a portrait of

George Wallace. The only indication the school is a segregation academy is found in the homogenous composition of students and faculty.

While touring the halls of Sumter Academy the Headmaster stopped our walk and asked, "I want you to look at these lockers and tell me what you see." I noticed the lockers had no locks; "we take great pride in that here." "That" refers to "an emphasis on morals and values." A Sumter Academy educator commented: "we emphasize a Christian background here...no particular denomination but we do acknowledge that God does exist. The public schools here have good Christian folks in them but they have to deal with laws."

The matter of school prayer is a tangential issue, which fuels the fire for the academies established in the Deep South circa 1965. The point is that "morals and values" are seemingly thought not to exist in the public schools because the "federal government has messed that up too." Some looking at the issue of segregation academies may consider this an excuse to remain separate. Nonetheless, the ability to "worship Jesus openly" is a source of pride for supporters of Black Belt academies.

Another source of pride for Sumter Academy supporters is baseball. While the public school system does not field a baseball team, the academy has a strong team with a coach who "played in the big leagues." As with most coaches in the A.I.S.A. he wears many hats and is involved in other athletic activities. It should be noted that the Headmaster also serves as the Athletic Director. "Doing more with less" is a school anthem in the academy system much as it is in the public schools of the Black Belt. The outfield walls of the baseball and softball (girls) fields are lined with signs from local businesses (banks, supply stores, real estate agencies, and law firms), a clear show of

support from the local business community. Indeed, fundraising is a central feature of any academy in the Black Belt and is a source of meaningful, bonding interaction for parents, children and community members. When new jerseys are needed for the baseball team it usually means it is time for another bake sale or bass fishing tournament. Indeed, boosters are another common theme in the academy system.

Presented with an opportunity to watch several innings of a baseball game against a new A.I.S.A. school started in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the 21<sup>st</sup> century Black Belt segregation academy was brought into perspective. The visiting academy is aptly named “Open Door Christian School” due to its admittance policy and religious emphasis. The Headmaster of Sumter Academy had indicated the academy “played sports with minorities from other A.I.S.A. schools” in an interview a couple of days earlier. This was the only time the students at Sumter Academy came in direct contact with African American students in an educational/athletic setting. “Open Door,” one of many new integrated parochial schools established in the formerly all white private system, represents a symbolic shift of attitude towards both racial diversity and religious Christian centered education. The new school’s baseball team barely had enough people to fill the batting lineup and had a young African American second baseman that could not have been any taller than five feet. Several other young African Americans took to the baseball diamond that day – along with their parents sitting in the stands. The scene was crystallized and brought into a modern day perspective by one Sumter Academy fan: “this might not have happened ten years ago.”

A total of 14 Sumter Academy affiliates were interviewed. Consistently, parents of students at Sumter Academy cited “safety” as the primary reason to send their kids to

private school. A 2002 stabbing at the public high school in Livingston that left a special education student dead legitimated their sentiments to a large degree. This tragic incident is a singular, isolated event that has now given white parents the rationale needed to justify their separation from the public system. Private school supporters also call the quality of education in the public schools into question. The public schools are accused of unprofessional hiring practices and a lack of discipline in the curriculum. Private school respondents consistently made comments such as:

We (private school supporters) know we are seen as the bad guys in this thing (dual school systems). We know that we are seen as the racists and that we are the problem to not attracting industry. But anyone who actually knows Sumter County, and has been here for a while, will tell you that they (black public school supporters) do not want us back in that school even if we wanted to. We (white leadership) even tried to have a magnet school and the black leadership didn't want to because they said whites would replace black teachers. They have control of all the schools and school board and the county really...so I don't think it's as simple as people think...they like things the way they are because they are in power. Nothing is going to change around here unless we can have a school with racial balance... and they don't want that.

Although comments were made by affiliates of the private school that could be considered racist, race was never, even when provoked, cited as the ultimate reason for sending white children to the private school. The poor quality of the public school's education was continually mentioned as the reason for sending kids to either Demopolis City Schools or the local academy. While it is both naïve and irresponsible to suggest that race is not a central motivation for the maintenance of dual school systems in Sumter County, it is not a point respondents wanted to make during interviews. White respondents carefully parsed their words, more so in Sumter County than any county examined. It is probably safe to assume that shying away from "race talk" is a relatively new phenomenon and that racial comments would have been readily made in the earlier

years of the private school's founding. This is interesting considering the county was chosen to represent the site of the educational situation of "nearly complete segregation."

The general perceptions by private school affiliates of the Sumter County Public School System can be summed up by five reoccurring themes found throughout my interviews:

- The white community generally feels the public schools are unsafe, poorly managed and staffed.
- The general belief is that private schools do not prevent job creation – poor public schools do.
- Public school hiring practices are nepotistic and racially biased.
- Public school leadership does not want white kids back in the system.
- The only way white children will come back to public school is if there is a racial balance (50-50) created in a magnet or charter type school.

The overarching theme presented by private school supporters in Sumter Academy is that they should not be blamed for a lack of job creation in the county. Respondents did not take responsibility for the public schools' poor academic performance and did not view the *de facto* segregation as the fault of the academy. The federal government and the Johnson Administration were blamed for creating the current situation of racially segregated schools. The government runs education these days...not communities...we run the academy and that's why we like it," said one private school parent. Parents are indeed very active and engaged at Sumter Academy; whereas they generally feel entitled by the tuition check they write each month to "keep the school in business." Private school respondents did, however, consistently suggest they would like

to go to public school instead of paying tuition each month. The idea of public school is not the problem. Rather, white representation and control in the schools and striking a “racial balance” was identified as the major barrier to the move back to public schools in Sumter County. On the issue of black students enrolling at Sumter Academy, the Headmaster noted: “we haven’t had any blacks qualify but we have had some Orientals.” Black students are said not to want to come to Sumter Academy because “they basically have an academy of their own in the county school system.”

### **Sumter County Public Schools**

Sumter County’s Public System has a total of seven schools which provided an educational setting for 2624 black and 4 white children in the school year of 2004-2005. The system has two high schools located approximately nine miles apart in York and Livingston. While the state average for children eligible for free and reduced cost lunch (an indicator of poverty) was approximately 50.7% per system in the school year of 2003-2004, 85.7% received such aid in Sumter County Schools. Scores from the 2003-2004 Stanford Achievement Test (SAT 10) indicate that 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders attending Sumter County Public Schools did not score above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading, math and language sections (Alabama State Department of Education 2005). This makes Sumter County one of the poorest performing school systems in the Alabama if one judges a school’s success by such indicators. The children of Sumter County Public Schools are amongst the most impoverished students in both Alabama and the United States.



There is stigma attached to the public school system in Sumter County. The black community is very aware of the stigma. Some of the stigma is attached to common and unfortunate stereotypes of predominately black to all-black systems in the Deep South. In the Black Belt, common misconceptions center on the idea that black students and parents do not value education to the degree of their white counterparts. Parents of public school students in Sumter County who were interviewed suggested the desire to have their children achieve in school was significant. The Superintendent of Sumter County Schools is an African American woman with 41 years of service to the Sumter County school system. The Superintendent noted:

There is distrust and misconceptions of the public schools. I remember we had some students down from the University of Alabama doing observations of our schools. They would say 'it's so nice here...the kids are so well behaved...it's not like what they (nonpublic school supporters) said it would be. ' Some of the students apologized on the way out. I think they really enjoyed their experience.

Interview respondents affiliated with the Sumter County School system clearly view education as a serious concern and have taken measures to continually address the system's shortcomings. Perhaps the single most pressing shortfall is that of a weak local tax base. The county system receives a large amount of state and federal subsidies to make up for a local tax base that contributes only 16.5 % to the public system (Center for Demographic Research 2005). Again, this figure is the cumulative of local property and sales tax, fundraisers, donations and concessions. The average local contribution of Alabama counties is 29.1 % (Center for Demographic Research 2005). The maintenance of segregated dual school systems, as Bailey and Faupel (1993:105) have pointed out, does not work in favor of the largely black public schools. Motivating both the white and

black population of Sumter County to support a local tax initiative is a difficult task. The Superintendent commented:

We haven't had any tax initiatives here to address our funding needs. Absentee landowners own most property – if we can get the black community behind us (to raise property taxes) I believe we can get it passed. I believe we can get it passed...I don't expect any support from the private school but they would rather do that than pay more sales tax.

There is no reciprocity or interaction amongst the public and private school administration in Sumter County. However, there are reasons outside the general notion that “the races don't get along.” The only formal opportunity for interaction between the schools comes once a year when public school program coordinators are required to consult with all schools in the county (which they do by phone) as to whether or not they want to apply for participation in any federal programs. A.I.S.A. schools decline because they would then be held accountable to NCLB 2001 standards such as reporting test scores and school finances publicly. Sumter County administrators cited this interaction (phone call) continually as the response to the opening question of my interviews: “So tell me about the relationship between public and private schools in Sumter County.” A laugh and look of bewilderment was usually preceded by statement such as: “There isn't one – we have to call them each year and they say they don't want to participate in any programs.” In a County of only 14,182 people and two school systems, it is notable how little the public school administrators, teachers and parents knew about Sumter Academy. The private school was either a secret or an issue that was stuck in 1975 and had not been looked at since.

I visited the Sumter County Board of Education (BOE) office on several occasions and found the experience to be very informative. The BOE office is covered in

“Embracing Diversity” signs, educational slogans and celebrations of the county school system’s accomplishments. “Building a New Tradition” is the slogan of the board of education in Sumter County. Next to the Superintendent’s office door, on the wall, hang nine or ten pictures of former Superintendents from the system. The spread of faces offer immediate insight into the power shift of the county with respect to race and education. The first seven or eight pictures are of elderly white men dating up to about 1980. The following photographs are of African American faces –the current Superintendent serving as only female on the whole wall. Another glance around the office finds not another white face. All who work in the office are African American. This is an interesting observation considering there is “Diversity” mural that cannot be missed. The emphasis on diversity does not seem contrived, however, rather it seems to be a reminder to all that Sumter County schools are open to anyone, in contrast to the feeling one gets when entering the academy. The Sumter County Public Schools has one white board member, and which is technically approximately fifteen white teachers in the system.

The Superintendent is a seasoned educator and, as mentioned previously, an authentic “crossover” from the days of desegregation. She has largely given up on the idea of “engaging the white community” in coming back to the public schools and has dedicated herself to doing the best with what she has regardless of skin color. She has great sympathy for the four white children in her system and understands that being in such a numerical minority must be a challenge. The Superintendent respects the Headmaster of Sumter Academy as a former co-worker, but is disappointed that the academy is reluctant to participate in any activities such as “National Sports Program.” The schools did interact at an “academic bowl” at UWA several years back that some

leaders of both school systems cited as a “good experience.” I generally ended each interview with top officials at the private and public schools with the same question in each county: “Do you think black and white children need to be together to learn how each other view the community – is it important for academic achievement?” The

Superintendent responds:

Yes, but on the other hand, we as African Americans know that we have to expose our children to successful black professionals. Our (African Americans) nature is to adapt and I don't think not socializing with white children means that they can't set goals. I tell the children what my teachers told me 'you've got to do better – no one is going to give you anything.

Clearly she has thought about or been asked this question and knows that “as long as whites are in the minority, they are not coming back.” When asked directly about the absence of most (all but four) white children in the county system the Superintendent has two responses ready:

From what I'm told...any white families that move here (UWA employees) are pressured out of the public schools (by realtors and white leadership). They are even told to go to Demopolis...and then we bring in industrial developers and they ask us about education and find out that we still have dual school systems and it's an immediate turn off.

On a visit to Livingston High School, directly across from The University of West Alabama, which shares a campus with the largest public school in the county, the opportunity to explore the stigmatized public school was presented. The high school building is brick with a design that matches the university architecture. If someone not from the area was told only to judge the school buildings and setting of the public and private systems in Sumter County with the understanding that one housed all black children and one all white, the general response would likely be that white kids attend

Livingston High School. This is said to suggest that the white community sacrifices modern facilities to have control of a system that is structurally or architecturally inferior.

The principal of Livingston High School is used to having visitors come in and tour her school. Metal detectors secure the doors and once again there are positive slogans on the walls and a value placed on school pride. This is the principal's second year at Livingston High, whereas she was brought in to replace the principal who resigned after the 2002 incident. We take a tour around campus where she shows me the new computers and technology they are installing. Through coordination with the office managers, the principal sounds the bell and students file out of the classrooms after the teachers come out to monitor the transition. Unlike the private school children, they wear school uniforms. The children keep a neat orderly line on the right side of the hall and are periodically called by name and told stop and "figure it out" by the principal. The students drop their bags and either tuck in their shirt or tie their shoes and are sent on their way after a smile or giggle is exchanged with the principal. In many ways, there is more of a "private school" impression yielded in Sumter County's completely black high school. One thing is certain; discipline is, most certainly, not a problem inside the walls of Livingston High School. This is not to suggest that there were not problems before the new principal arrived: "The kids were out of control before I came...but I'm not putting up with anything. It's not my job to be popular. Some parents think I'm too military – but if anything goes wrong I'm the one to blame," she tells me. "I remember the teachers I had that were tough and they were my best teachers," the principal recalls:

I'm the type of person that it doesn't matter that we have a totally black school...it doesn't matter...I expect these children to do exactly just what the white children are

doing down there at that academy. They can perform at that level, obviously they have we have to push. I just believe that...it's my belief.

A reoccurring theme throughout this study was that African American leaders of “black schools” are almost always placed in a position where they feel obligated to defend the fact that their schools can achieve academically despite having no white faces in classrooms. “Educational progress” or a “successful school” is almost always talked about in the context of the “percent white left in the system.” This is one reason support for all black systems in the Black Belt usually do not extend in any tangible way outside the black community. The Sumter County School System faces challenges unlike the academy and is not tied to resources embedded in the business community, as are private school patrons. The public school is considering school consolidation and the merging of Sumter and Livingston High School as a way to “pool resources” and receive more state and federal dollars.

Discussions of the private school’s role in the community are a “touchy subject for all of the educators interviewed in the Sumter County schools. Respondents were hesitant to answer any question that directly indicted the Academy personnel or students specifically. Respondents interviewed were willing to generalize on the issue of rural development and the structural impediments dual school systems create. The general consensus, amongst public school educators and parents on the academy are:

- Private schools hurt economic development because the support for public schools is weakened by a lack of concern for the school’s success.
- If dual school systems existed for any other reason than race, the situation would be different.

- Sumter Academy has always meant “we don’t want to go to school with you.”
- The quality of education at Sumter Academy is not worth paying for, but most respondents indicated they had never set foot inside the building.
- We don’t need white kids going here but we do need white support.

Unlike the public schools we will discuss in the next two cases, Sumter County’s Public Schools cannot sell “diversity” as a reason to attend school there. Despite clear efforts to show a concern for diversity, the school system and community is stuck somewhere in between “King’s Dream and Plessy’s Nightmare” (Orefield and Lee 2004). The promised land of “integration” has never been actualized and remains a drain on the community’s ability to “bridge” the differences that have long divided the Black Belt. Facilities at the public schools may be superior to those of the private school, but the backing of the collective community remains separate and unequal.

### **The Educational Structure and Interaction of Sumter County**

The decision-making that led to the formation of the segregation academy in 1969 has, in turn, led to an inability of Sumter Countians to act as a cohesive unit in 2005. How does local leadership go about closing the private school, which is a business of its own kind, or reorganizing the public school to achieve the “racial balance” most white residents need to return to the county system? Public and private, black and white people in the county consistently touted the University of West Alabama for being fully integrated and a place of bi-racial interaction. This suggests progress has been made towards the abatement of fear between the whites and African Americans. The issue,

essentially, boils down to one question for black and white Sumter County residents: “who will have control” if the private school did close down? Or, moreover, who would lose control? The fact that this question is posed in terms of control rather than in how to improve the quality of education available to the county’s children underscores the continued relevance of race in Sumter County.



## **VI. CASE STUDY: HALE COUNTY, ALABAMA**

Hale County (population 18, 285) is a Black Belt county located east of Sumter County and to the north of Marengo County (Figure 2). This county was selected to represent the intermediate case and educational structure of “moderate segregation” regarding racial compositions of public and private schools. The African American population constitutes 59% of the total county population and 67% (1,895 of 2,715 students) of the total county school system (Center for Demographic Research 2003; Center for Demographic Research 2005). The predominately rural county also houses one all-white private academy and no municipal (city) systems.

Hale County’s largest employer is a catfish processing plant, which some respondent’s called the “new plantation” of the Black Belt. The unemployment rate is almost 10.7% and 27% of the county lives below the poverty line (Center for Demographic Research 2003). According to Hale County Empowerment and Revitalization (H.E.R.O.), a community outreach organization, there are 1030 families in Hale County living below the poverty line.

Hale County is very much a “north and south” county. The county has the most complex educational structure in this study for three reasons. The north end of the county borders Tuscaloosa County (population 164, 875) and is home to the town of Moundville (population 1,809). Moundville’s close proximity to the city of Tuscaloosa and the University of Alabama has allowed Hale County to grow in population steadily over the

past two decades. Hale County High School and Moundville Elementary are public schools of the county system with predominately white enrollments. The current superintendent of the county public school system is white and was brought in by the local school board from the elementary school and was consistently identified as “top-notch” and a “uniter not a divider.” The public schools in Moundville endured and persevered the most challenging years of desegregation in the 1970’s and generally has not lost kids to the academy. Most respondents indicated the reason the school system was able to resist large-scale white-flight was, unlike in many Black Belt towns, the result of visionary school and community leadership in the early days of court-ordered desegregation, and a white-majority above 60%.

The south end of Hale County has steadily lost population over the past three decades. The town of Newbern (population 231) is home of Sunshine High School, which serves grades kindergarten through twelve and children from southern Hale County. The school is 100% African American. Consistent outmigration out of the southern half of Hale County is likely to force school consolidation.

In the middle of the Hale County is the town of Greensboro (population 2,731). Greensboro operates a legal public “dual school system” characterized by two campuses located approximately two miles apart. The bi-racial county school board created the situation in the late 1960’s to accommodate the federal mandate to desegregate. The agreement reached by the school board was that both Greensboro East and West campuses remain predominately African American enrollments at all times. The campus of Greensboro West has an African American enrollment of approximately 60% but is called the “white school” by county residents despite the fact that “whites” are in the

numerical minority and the school is integrated. Greensboro East campus is 100% African American and is called the “black school.” As will be discussed, the greatest difference in the two campuses is in the varying social perceptions of power, race and culture.

The third and final reason the school system in Hale County is complex is due to the segregation academy located in Greensboro. Besides having a public dual school system in the county seat, the existence of Southern Academy creates an alternative for white students. Unlike Sumter County, the white population is divided in its support between the public and private schools.

### **Southern Academy**

Southern Academy, like Sumter Academy, is an all-white private school founded in 1965 as one of the first schools in the Alabama Private School Association (now A. I. S. A). The Headmaster is a retired public school principal of twenty years. He has worked at Southern for ten years and thoroughly enjoys his job due to the “flexibility and interest” of the school system and parents. All schools in the A.I.S.A. recently were required to seek accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Headmaster has been involved in the process. Simply called “Southern” by Hale Countians, the private school is said to have been “making it on its own since 1965” without the help of private endowments. However, the school is looking for help, as fundraising is a year round process.

Southern has never enrolled a minority student (besides an Asian child from Canada) and currently has 252 white students grades kindergarten through twelve.

Parents interested in the “educational welfare of their children” reportedly founded the private school system. Fear of large numbers of African American children entering the public school system of Greensboro was generated by the notion that the “quality of education would decrease because of lower IQ scores in black children and the attention taken away from white children” remarked a parent of a Southern Academy graduate of the 1970’s.

Educators of the lone private school in Hale County are happy to work in a school where parents are actively engaged and some retired public school teachers claimed they “felt like they died and gone to heaven” when they came to Southern. The greatest misconception of the private school is said to be “that all the kids here are rich and have money.” The current condition of the aluminum-sided private school seems too rundown to deny this misconception. The physical state of Southern Academy is that of a typical Black Belt Academy. The carpet is worn, the computers are dated and the walls could use a new coat of paint. Notwithstanding the weathered appearance of the school, the educators and students are vibrant and active.

Attending a Southern Academy football game provides an inside look at the tight knit group that is a Black Belt private school. As with all schools in the A.I.S.A., sports and the opportunity for lesser-sized and skilled student-athletes (than public schools) to have an opportunity to play or start on the football, basketball or softball team is an attractive feature. At an A.I.S.A. state playoff game, the opportunity to discuss the role of the private school in Hale County was presented in a relaxed setting. Private school informants openly discussed the relationship between the public and private school in Greensboro only after learning that I graduated from and, moreover, had played

football at an A.I.S.A. school in east Alabama's Lee County. As discussed in the methodology section, the credentials that come with graduating from a school founded in the days of segregation could be described as the equivalent of "knowing the secret handshake." This is not said to suggest schools in the A.I.S.A. are hiding something or shun outsiders of the private school system. Rather it is said to make clear the point that the academy supporters are well aware of the negative reputation and stigma attached to the word "academy" in the Black Belt (Bailey and Faupel 1993:105).

Crammed in the under-sized stands, blankets, hot cocoa and candy were shared openly amongst the 150 plus Southern Academy fans that made the hour and a half drive to see a group of 30 boys take the field to try and get one game closer to the state championship. As with Sumter Academy, the Headmaster is also the Defensive Coordinator for the football team and paces the sideline. As we watched the game and Southern Academy take a comfortable lead, there was an opportunity to talk informally to teachers, business people and parents. These informal interviews along with more formal interviews with 16 private school supporters in Hale County yielded the following themes regarding dual school systems in Greensboro:

- The relationship between white parents who choose to send their kids to Southern and those who send their children to Greensboro West ("the white school") is uneasy.
- The relationship between black community members and private school supporters is not a significant issue to Southern Academy supporters.
- If it were not for the existence of Southern Academy there would not be as many white people as there are in Greensboro and Hale County.

- The existence of public and private dual school systems is necessary for professional class parents to stay in Greensboro and to persuade kids to move back after college.
- The public schools do a decent job educating children in Greensboro, but the leadership in the black community of Greensboro East (all black) is too adversarial.

Southern Academy experiences the same types of funding and enrollment challenges as does the academy in Sumter County but does not seem as desperate. A top Southern Academy administrator reports that 90% of graduates go on to college. The owners of the local catfish processing plant, according to private and public affiliates, “keep things going at Southern.” The primary difference in Southern and Sumter Academy is that parents in Hale County who choose to send their children to private school in Greensboro do just that – they “choose.” Most white parents interviewed in Sumter County expressed the desire to have their children attend public school to avoid paying tuition, but also said they would not send their children to public schools because they would be alienated socially due to the racial composition of the system. In contrast, it is common for white students in Hale County to transfer back and forth from public to private and vice versa. This makes competition for white children fierce, albeit beneath the surface of community discourse and life in Greensboro.

## **Hale County Public Schools**

Hale County has a total of nine schools and a career tech school in a system with 3,170 students. The system is 67% African American. The system is one of the 10 poorest school systems in Alabama due to a weak tax base and significant sales tax revenue lost to neighboring towns of Tuscaloosa and Demopolis. There are five high schools, which consistently has been said to be too many. One reason cited by the Superintendent for the high number of schools is that this allows students each year who graduate from the smaller Sunshine or Akron schools to be at the top of the class to receive scholarship money otherwise not available or achievable. Moreover, schools in Hale County seem to be the only “economic development” occurring in the rural towns with less than 1000 residents; removing the schools would effectively create ghost towns in an already haunted locale.

The public system has 75 % of its children receiving free and reduced cost lunches in the school year of 2003-2004 – 25 % above the Alabama state average. (Center for Demographic Research 2005). As discussed, the northern side of the county is home to Moundville’s Hale County High and Moundville Elementary – the highest scoring school in regards to standardized tests and an integrated school with a white majority enrollment. Also in the northern half of the county is the rural town of Akron (population 521). Akron’s schools are called “Community Schools East and West” and have all-black enrollments. The south end of the county supports some the county’s school-aged population with Sunshine High School – also 100 % African American. The smaller African American schools in Hale County were not explored extensively.

The town and county seat of Greensboro grounds the central section of Hale County. Greensboro effectively has three high schools (two public and one private) in a town with only 638 people aged 5-19. As mentioned, this educational situation can be thought of as a “dual school system within a dual school system,” or a “triple school system.” The high number of schools per child makes for a fragmented, complex set of relationships in the educational arena.

Hale County has a legal, modern-day public dual school system. Students who attend Greensboro East Elementary and High School are 100% African American. This half of the dual situation is called “the black school.” On the other half of the situation is Greensboro West Elementary and High School. Greensboro West is 60% African American and is called “the white school” in part because the West campus has always been the school which whites attended. The West campus is also predominately administrated by white educators.

The East and West campuses are located approximately two miles apart and share educational activities with regards to sports and some classes. The band is all black and located at the East campus and football practice is held at “the white school.” The Alabama High School Athletic Association lists Greensboro High as a single entity and therefore black student-athletes at the East campus travel to the West campus for practice and sporting events.

As with all counties in Alabama’s Black Belt, Hale County and Greensboro reached a “fork in the road” between 1963-1969 with regards how the local school board would comply with federal mandates to abolish dual school systems. School desegregation was not a major issue in Moundville due to the white majority population



of the town. However, in Greensboro, where African Americans outnumbered white residents, school desegregation and a 1966 law suit for operating schools segregated by race forced an arrangement evolving from a 1971 consent decree that still governs attendance patterns. Greensboro has what is called a “majority-minority rule” that allows students to move (transfer schools) from an attendance zone where they constitute a racial majority to a school-zone where they are in the racial minority. The arrangement was upheld again in 1982 implicitly for the purposes of maintaining a white critical mass (< 20%) at Greensboro West. Indeed, all senior administrators interviewed seemed to hold out the figure of 20% as the threshold in which a school located in the Black Belt could expect not to lose their white enrollment to flight to the private schools or to a neighboring county. In reviewing racial demographics for the Black Belt only two schools have white enrollments under 20 %. Moreover, there are virtually no schools with white enrollments ranging from 5 – 15 %. The overarching stipulation of the deal made by local lawmakers and the school board was that Greensboro West never be more than 49 % white; both schools in Greensboro must always be majority African American. What this arrangement does is afford white students the option of attending East or West campus regardless of where they live in Greensboro. Similarly, black students living in Greensboro, or in the greater county, can choose to attend the predominately white schools in Moundville. Of course, there are “exemptions” to these rules and the Superintendent of the system clearly acknowledges that the current situation is not the ideal. The educational structure of Hale County is largely decided by the decision of white and black leadership in Greensboro to bypass the “fork in the road.”

There are many facets to the Greensboro educational situation. The dual public school campuses have garnered negative and, sometimes inaccurate media attention in years past. In spite of criticism, the newly appointed superintendent of the Hale County Schools remains optimistic: “we aren’t going to be anti-private school or focus on race and differences all the time...I tell my staff all the time that we are going to put out the best product and just see what happens.” More common than in any other county studied, faculty and staff of the Hale County public system have sent their children to Southern Academy or have some ties to the private school. This situation made for an uncomfortable interview because respondents had competing loyalties and did not want to sound partisan. One public school educator in Greensboro who sent her children to Southern Academy commented: “some people (public associates) say they (children) get a redneck education over at Southern...but going to school there is a matter of socioeconomics and status for whites here in Hale County.” Indeed, a prominent local leader and judge in Hale County estimated that at least 20 % of the white parents who send their children to the West campus could afford private school tuition but are committed to the idea of public school. The superintendent offered his feelings on parents (white and black) who choose to go to school at the integrated West campus: “I have great respect for white and black parents who choose to send their kids to the West campus. They (parents) had the option for racial purity and they chose not to.”

The relationship between affiliates of Greensboro East and West ebbs and flows. Educators and local officials credit student leadership when times are good and parents when times are turbulent. Associates of the all-black East campus cite the fact that all Advanced Placement and the good science classes are offered at “the white school”

classes. Homecoming is celebrated in the fall at the West campus during football season and at Greensboro East during basketball season. With no exceptions, black community members cited the public dual school system in Greensboro as a drain on community affairs. On the other hand, white community members offered analysis of the situation under the stipulation that their identity and occupation be withheld:

I always say that it's funny that it's okay to have completely segregated schools in Sumter County, but it's not okay to have partially integrated schools in Hale County. The fact of the matter is that if you consolidated the Greensboro schools you'd have every white family that knew or could figure out how to leave the system... do just that.

African Americans in Greensboro generally do not know much about Southern Academy other than "it's the place where all the rich kids go that don't want to go to school with blacks." Ironically, the African American respondents affiliated with the East campus viewed the public "the white school" instead of the truly white private school as adversaries. This can probably be explained by simple proximity to the whites at Greensboro West and absolute isolation from Southern Academy. However, black informants were aware of which white families chose to go to public school and those that had no option. A local hardware store clerk and school bus driver commented:

The poor whites end up going to the mixed school (Greensboro West). I got respect for the rich whites who send their children to West because they don't have to...if they wanted they could go to Southern and not see blacks all day except for around town...I don't understand...why wouldn't you send your kids to public schools? It makes it better for all kids – not just some of them.

African Americans consistently referred to whites as "rich" if they attended Southern Academy. This is notable considering the inferior building condition of the private school when compared to any public school in the county. Southern Academy is not a rich school.

In a different way, African Americans associated with Greensboro West viewed the public dual school system as a source of tension in the community. However, they did not see whites as the sole source of the problems like the respondents at the all-black school of Greensboro East. A black mother of a child at Greensboro West described the tension and rationale for sending her child to West:

There's been a black-white power shift in Hale County over the past ten years or so and whites don't want to lose power (local elections)...but they are. You see you have the all-black school folks (East campus) that don't like blacks that go to school with whites at West because they think they are sell-outs and you got whites that go to West that are called sell-outs by the private school folks. It's a mess really...but I don't care because I want what's best for my child and that's him not being around just poor black folks at the East campus. He gets to be around some white folks with money and poor whites and blacks...(laughs).

The major rift in Greensboro exists between the dual public schools in Greensboro because they have come to serve as political conduits used to get out the vote in local and state elections. "Campaign 2000 and Beyond" is the local campaign by the younger, politically savvy African Americans in Hale County to establish black rule in all elected positions. One white respondent explained:

Here in Hale County we've got black and white good ol' boy networks you see...The blacks are pulling out all the tricks (voter fraud/intimidation) the whites used to before the Civil Rights Movement and even still. Whites taught the blacks everything they know about fixin' elections In many ways the blacks benefit from the all-black school existing because it works (functions) kind of like black churches do...When they (blacks) want to spread the word about something they have a way to do it.

An African American woman affiliated with the campaign offered her insight:

Whites in Hale County look out for whites and always have. If we don't start looking out for our kids no one will and that is just the way it is...If the federal government hadn't stepped in when I was a little girl I still wouldn't be able to vote and this is supposed to be the freest country in the world...So that is why we are getting organized.

In summation, public school informants presented six common themes regarding the educational structure and experience in Hale County generally and Greensboro specifically:

- Southern Academy is perceived as the flip side of Greensboro East; an all white system that balances the political and social forces of the all-black system.
- Greensboro West (integrated) is a contradictive situation perceived as a means for maintaining white control/representation in one school and as the epicenter for any real change occurring in the county with regards to race relations.
- The public dual school system fosters intra-racial turbulence primarily - but also contributes to resentment by the all-black school (East) based on the perception of unequal funding created by “the white school” (West).
- The public/private dual school system is viewed as holding the county back with regards to community development because the professional class uses the Academy as a haven or shield for community struggles involving race.
- White Greensboro residents view West as necessary to keep whites coming back from the private school and staying in public school.
- Most black residents view West in the context of 1965-1970 and feel the arrangement is antiquated and in need of consolidation.

The dual schools in Greensboro, on the one hand, can be seen as a creative way to keep white families engaged in the public schools by creating “racial balance” during school desegregation. The schools are equally funded (Alabama Department of Education 2005).

There are white families who send their children to Greensboro West because they believe in the virtue of public education, but these same parents also do not want their child in a school where racially they constitute one quarter of the school. The dual public school systems perpetuate the “line drawn in the dust” dating back to when Greensboro East was the black “Technical School” and West was the true all “white school.” An intra-race division amongst African Americans who view the integrated school (West) as unnecessary and unfair and those who view the school as progress and a matter of fact characterizes the most notable effect of the modern-day public dual school systems in Greensboro. Similarly, white families supporting the West felt looked down upon and socially alienated by the all-white private school associates. The three school-communities in Greensboro are said by most respondents to be separated both objectively and subjectively. Distance separates the school-communities on one level and the quest to maintain power and control of educational processes on another.

### **The Educational Structure and Interaction of Hale County**

Hale County experienced a much publicized voter fraud scandal in the last state representative election and a property tax initiative that, ironically, motivated a former chairman of the public school board member to erect a large “VOTE NO!” sign at the entrance to the county seat of Greensboro. The incidents are related in that the representative who was elected as a result of the alleged voter fraud proposed the amendment. Nevertheless, the current public school leadership supported the tax initiative because it would have addressed funding shortages. The tax initiative failed due to “misinformation and scare tactics” according to public school respondents. Not a single Southern Academy informant interviewed backed the tax initiative. “We already

pay taxes and tuition” was a common reply from Southern Academy affiliates to the question of “why did you not support the property tax increase?”

White supporters/parents of Greensboro West repeatedly commented that the private school was a drain on local economic development and racial cohesion because they felt the academy is not academically superior. Southern Academy was often described as a “social club with books.” In a similar way to parents of the all-black East campus students, white parents of Greensboro West (especially those who could afford to pay private school tuition) resent the mere existence of Southern Academy. Southern Academy supporters, on the other hand, are generally not concerned with public school perceptions of the private system. The higher socioeconomic standing of private school supporters seemingly provides a buffer that eases or deflects concerns of economic and community development in Hale County.

Hale County may be the most “studied” place in Alabama’s Black Belt with college students from neighboring universities coming in and out like gypsies. The above, of course, are generalizations based on 27 interviews taken with Hale County residents over the course of one year. In fact, there is much to be said that is positive and reflective of progress in the rural county. By far, Hale County has more volunteer, non-profit groups and organizations dedicated to change than any county in Alabama’s 12 county Black Belt. Auburn University’s Rural Studio, located in the impoverished southern half of the county, builds houses with existing materials for low-income families in incredibly innovative designs. The Rural Studio has brought international attention and volunteers to the Black Belt county. One volunteer, who quit her job as a lingerie designer for Victoria’s Secret in San Francisco to help the Rural Studio, described her experience in

Hale County as an outsider: “there are cultural perceptions to change here. I think people get it in their heads – they are just not physically able to make that change...every conversation leads back to the civil war or civil rights movement.”

The most notable indication of racial and educational steps forward, worthy of a paper of it’s own and germane to this study, is found in a student leadership group known as the Hale B.O.P.P. (Builders Of Positive Partnerships) is a youth leadership initiative that specifically brings 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students from all five high schools and the private school together to work on community issues. This is the only bi-racial interaction for African American students attending the three all-black schools in the county, and for the white children attending the private school. Moreover, the student leadership group represents the only proactive approach to racial reconciliation and community development. Both Headmaster and Superintendent in Hale County praised the group for its vision and approach to bridging race and class divides. “The BOPPS” have a mantra that entails focusing on things all students have in common. Namely, the student leaders focus on the fact they can make their “home community” a better place to live and go to school. Students apply to be part of the Hale B.O.P.P.S. with the expectation that they are college bound and a recognized leader at a high school in the county. The group does everything possible to make sure each member is able to attend college and has scholarship funds at state on community colleges in the surrounding area. The vision of Hale B.O.P.P. is long term – “a grow your own approach” to developing future leaders of Hale County.

Hale County is, simultaneously, the most contentious, divisive county in the three cases examined and the most deliberately progressive. Hale County is changing, but the



change is not packaged neatly, nor is it recognizable at times. Greensboro West can be seen as the epicenter for black and white residents seeking to depart from the days of “separate but equal.” The “lines in the dust” are slowly becoming less obvious. However, Greensboro West is, in fact, part of a legal public school dual system. To the average outsider progress is not the first thing that comes to mind.

## **VII. CASE STUDY: MARENGO COUNTY, ALABAMA**

Marengo County (population 22, 539) is the largest in this study and represents the case experiencing complete desegregation by way of Demopolis City Schools. The county is located on the southern border of Hale County and on the eastern border of Sumter County (Figure 3). The Tombigbee Water Way runs directly through Demopolis and is a major source of economic and community development. Marengo County could have served as the single site for this study due to the fact that it has two city systems; one fully integrated in Demopolis (population 7,450) and one all-black system in the rural county seat of Linden (population 2,424). The county also contains the Marengo County School System, which has three all-black schools and a predominately white school (60%). In addition, there are two Segregation Academies in Marengo County: Marengo Academy located in Linden and West Alabama Preparatory School in Demopolis. The focus of this study was on the city of Demopolis, whose school system has been celebrated for its decision during the critical years to fully desegregate (Waldron 1989). Moreover, the town of Demopolis is the only town in Alabama's Black Belt that is growing in population without the help of a metropolitan area. What happened in Demopolis that did not elsewhere in the Black Belt was the question asked to community members and leaders throughout the interviewing process.

Marengo County stands out when examining Alabama's 12 county Black Belt region. The county has an unemployment rate below the state average at 4.5%; by far the

lowest in the Black Belt. The county's largest employers include two paper products manufacturers (1, 777 employees), a Major League Baseball cap manufacturer (370), and a much-celebrated 100-bed hospital (345). The median family income is the highest in the region at \$35,475 (Center for Demographic Research 2003). Marengo County continues to attract new industries due to an active Chamber of Commerce in Demopolis and a proven public city school system.

### **Demopolis City Schools**

Demopolis has been described as both an "oasis in the desert" and "the last plantation in the Black Belt" by opposing political entities. Marengo County is the only county in Alabama's Black Belt to vote for George W. Bush in the 2000 and 2004 election; the city of Demopolis is described as a "conservative place." Regardless of the labels, the town continues to pull black and white residents and students into the workforce and city school system from surrounding counties. Demopolis and Marengo County have the highest percentage of white residents in the Black Belt at 47 %. The local government in the largest town of Demopolis is predominately white. Many white respondents from Hale and Sumter County attributed the success of school desegregation in Demopolis to the fact that white and African American populations were approximately 50-50 in 1970. The Demopolis City Schools are still evenly balanced with regard to race. In fact, Demopolis High School is the only school where white children constitute a majority of the enrollment; the remaining schools have white enrollments barely less than 50 %. The city school system has approximately 60 % of students receiving free and reduced lunch, which is considerably lower than any other system in

the Black Belt. Demopolis' schools post the highest standardized and college entrance exam-scoring schools in the impoverished region - above the Alabama state average (Alabama State Department of Education 2005).

“People just didn't panic here like they did everywhere else in the Black Belt” was a remark offered by a local hardware store owner. The local leadership in the county in both white and black communities “were not on the extremes” and worked hard to integrate the schools. Demopolis, indeed, had prominent leaders of both races. On the white side of the spectrum stood a mayor who risked political suicide by advocating compliance with public school desegregation and two well-connected lawyers. The lead attorney during school desegregation was a law school student at the University of Alabama with District Judge Frank M. Johnson, who oversaw most desegregation cases in the Black Belt. Nevertheless, the lawyer in Demopolis was not adversarial to a point of fault. “I'd call up Frank and say ‘now you know we can't do all this (desegregate schools) right away...and he would work with me a little” remarked the attorney.

In the county seat of Linden, legendary Civil Rights leader and Reverend Ralph Abernathy led the African American community through the uncertain years of school desegregation. The Linden City School System is all black today and the smallest city school system in Alabama. Efforts to integrate the schools in Linden culminated in the creation of Marengo Academy, which still serves the local white community. Unlike Demopolis, Linden did not have white leaders willing to make the commitment to public schools. When faced with the proverbial “fork in the road” Linden, a predominately white town much smaller than Demopolis, chose, like Sumter County, to take the

direction leading back to where they came from. Demopolis, on the other hand, opted to take the uncharted direction.

The Demopolis City School System is not perfect and leaders in both the white and black community are willing to speak on the issue of racial divisions. A prominent lawyer in the county commented:

There are still two distinct cultures here in Demopolis and we are working on bringing people together, but it takes time...the city government is strong and we have bi-racial representation and interaction, but blacks do not like that they are not better represented in the city (Demopolis) school system...we need to work on that.

Besides having a demographic breakdown of 51 % black and 48 % white, which is ironically reported as being a “white town” in the Black Belt, Demopolis has maintained a strong white presence in the city school system for four reasons: 1) the professional class kept their children in the public schools in the critical period of 1963-1970, 2) whites have always maintained control of the superintendent position and majority of the board of education, and most aspects of the city government 3) the smaller city system, as opposed to a county school system presented a manageable social apparatus for white and black leadership to negotiate and 4) the whites in the city system have maintained high levels of racial homogeneity through the tracking/grouping of curriculum and through separate social functions. In a sense, there is an “invisible academy” built into the city school system that white parents tend to find attractive. Even though Demopolis City Schools are celebrated throughout Alabama and the Black Belt for its educational successes, the public system should not be viewed as a bastion of racial integration.

Until recently, there were two homecoming queens elected in Demopolis - one black and one white. The school no longer sponsors this practice, but whites still do not

attend the homecoming dance after their integrated championship football team leaves the field – nor do whites attend prom. African American respondents, when discussing the Homecoming Dance, generally made comments like that of a young worker at the paper plant:

We really never cared about the white kids not coming to the dance because we sort of looked at it like it was ours and they have theirs in the spring...I guess its because the white daddy's didn't want their little girls dancing with us...but you know its funny cause my mama wouldn't want me dancing with a white girl anyway.

Instead, white students exclusively attend what is called “S. F. I. O.” or Spring Formal Invitation Only. There is also a historically all white girls sorority called “DTD” (Delta Tau Delta) which has been known for hazing and being rather elite. When asked about the social exclusion black students may experience due to the situation a recent white graduate responded: “I guess blacks feel like they have enough with the homecoming dance and prom.”

Attending a Demopolis High football game brings everything into perspective with regards to race while simultaneously being absolutely confounding. The stands are divided like the Red Sea into black and white sections while the integrated football team and band plays and wins consistently on the field. Black and white public school supporters regularly interact and cheer and those (blacks and whites) who happen to be seated in the middle of the stands exchange “high-fives” with fervor. The situation is as if there are “colored and whites-only signs” etched in the consciousness of the elders, which makes for an inevitable but unintended *de facto* segregated seating arrangement.

Demopolis is known increasingly for its ability to attract the best athletes from around the county and in neighboring counties. The “Unitary Status” (recognition of

abolishment of dual school systems) achieved during the Reagan Administration (1984) afforded the school board the opportunity to enact an “open door policy” at the high school and in 1988 at all schools in Demopolis. This means anyone who lives in a county such as Sumter or Hale can attend a 6.5 million dollar high school, an arts and music program, tennis courts, modern science laboratories and higher paid teachers. The superintendent estimates that 20-25 % of the school does not live within the city limits. The High School is state of the art and built on a local bond floated (1 cent sales tax raise) without a local vote. The action passed without a fight from anyone in the town and, moreover, no tax initiative has ever failed in Demopolis. This achievement runs counter to the usual practice of announcing a local tax initiative in a Black Belt county only to have it voted down amidst heavy attack from local landowners and residents.

Demopolis approved what is commonly called “grouping” amongst educators, which allows students to be put into different curriculum and classes based on their “ability level.” Grouping, also called “tracking,” is another social concession made by the African American community in Demopolis. The refusal to allow grouping in other counties is reason some Black Belt segregation academies prospered between 1970 and 1990. A visit to Demopolis High School, where some classes seem overwhelmingly white, sheds light on the phenomenon. The superintendent explained: “grouping allows the (white) students making high scores to stay together and the black children to move up... and we have more blacks moving up each year.”

The public and private school relationship in Demopolis is a virtual non-issue. Public school educators literally refused to discuss the issue of dual school systems on four occasions. The principal of Demopolis High is a white man recruited into the school

from the largest high school in Alabama. When asked what is the relationship between the public and private school here he replied: “look I’m a public school guy...so lets talk about public schools.” Similarly a teacher commented: I’d rather not talk about the private school...but to tell you the truth they are kind of a joke around here.” Nowhere else were informants less willing to discuss the private school than were public school associates in Demopolis. Local officials and leaders made comments like “well it is good to have a choice in town of where to go to school” and commonly selected the politically correct route out of the interview. Instead of criticizing the private school and the dual school system in Demopolis, respondents willingly and surprisingly chose to focus on internal challenges facing the schools. Six themes were reoccurring:

- Demopolis has the best school in the Black Belt but is not perfect – more black leadership is needed at the high school and in central office.
- The social divide regarding race is an issue beneath the surface of state football and baseball championships - an unspoken tension.
- For African Americans, the private school is a non-issue because they have never really been shut out of any educational processes in Demopolis and experienced school desegregation with relative ease.
- For white Demopolis residents, especially those not old enough to remember desegregation, the private school is illogical and a source of humor.
- Dual school systems have had no effect on economic and community development because the professional class largely chose to keep their children in public schools.



- Race relations continue to improve each year as a black middle class is growing and the best and brightest black athletes and students continue to make the drive to Demopolis City Schools.

Demopolis is an exceptional town in a region of underdevelopment and community stagnation. The schools are the life-blood of the town without question. Local industries praised the decision to build the new high school and feel they have a capable skilled workforce and labor pool. Only in Demopolis did I find willingness to admit community shortcomings. Furthermore, the African American community seems to know they are due more recognition and representation in the public school faculty, but they credit the white leadership for not leaving the school for the private school during school desegregation. The social concessions that have been made or accepted to recruit and retain white families in the Demopolis public schools may seem unjust but the community at large for now is willing to settle for the situation as long as there is an unemployment percentage below the state average and new shopping centers are being built.

### **Marengo County Private Schools**

Demopolis City Schools have effectively run the local segregation academy “out of business.” The building of the new high school 13 years ago led to the closing of Demopolis Academy in 2002 and the reopening of the same school as West Alabama Preparatory School, which community residents call “WAP.” Local businessmen who had sentimental attachments to the former segregation academy reportedly bailed the school

out of debt. West Alabama Preparatory School has adopted the new model of the southern academy based on the emphasis on merely having bodies in classrooms – black or white. The school claims to serve those families that want smaller classrooms and more individual attention. The headmaster who has recently left the school for Marengo Academy, which will be discussed next, did not return phone calls. In short, W.A.P.S. is a business or a hobby for some young Demopolis residents who have a private-school orientation to education. The school has approximately 100 students grades kindergarten through 12th grade.

Marengo Academy located in Linden is the all white private school counter balancing the all black public school system. A former local politician characterized the relationship between the two systems: “You wouldn’t know it...but the public and private schools in these parts make for strange bedfellows.” What he was implying was that the white and black leadership in the two schools in Linden was content to have the polarized educational arrangement because it kept white and black hiring and firing practices in a homogeneous state. In Linden, public and private school administrations are both free to engage in nepotistic procedures in staffing schools and maintaining racially homogeneous hierarchies in the parallel educational structures. Of course, this is not a winning situation for the children in either system.

Like all headmasters interviewed, Marengo Academy’s is retired from the Alabama school system and worked in Demopolis as the principal of the high school. He seems to have grown weary of the “budgeting and fundraising” conundrum of the Black Belt segregation academy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: “its (fundraising) is tough...I’ve been here three years and each year seems more difficult.” Marengo Academy is housed by sheet

metal and is basically a one building school like the other academies in this study. The parking lot is not full and unlike the pink brick public school a mile down the road, the structure of the school looks defeated. Times are tough in the city of Linden and at Marengo Academy. Some public school proponents suggest that the existence of the Academy drains the retail economy in Linden even more because private school parents do not have as much disposable income to spend outside their child's education due to private tuition of roughly \$ 275.00 per child paid twelve months a year.

Supporters of the private school in Linden base their loyalty on legacy and the fact that they are second-generation parents of children attending Marengo Academy and they do not want to see a part of their childhood "go out of business." There is really no need to press the Demopolis question about why Linden continues to experience outmigration as Demopolis continues to add on to the 12-field sportsplex and golf course. The local leadership in Linden "was not willing to work with the federal government like they were in Demopolis and to tell you the truth I don't think they knew how" remarked a local white man in his 70's. Demopolis serves as the economic and social hub for Linden residents and many white residents make the 15-mile drive to eat, work, school and play everyday. "Control is and was the issue," remarked the headmaster of Marengo

Academy:

Whites feared losing control of their schools and the people (black and white) in Demopolis were willing to sit down in a room and say of lets make this work.... that just didn't happen here for one reason or another and we have lost a lot of young people...we have lost a lot of talent.

The headmaster of Marengo Academy has since left the school and is fully retired.

Marengo Academy has approximately 300 students kindergarten through twelfth grade.

The private school is still regarded as viable, but enrollments generally decline as students and parents opt for the integrated public school 15 miles down the road.

### **The educational structure and interaction of Marengo County**

Demopolis is officially 104 years old and has always had a reputation for strong public education. This reputation provided the impetus for progress with respect to desegregation. Demopolis truly is what its motto says, the “City of the People.” Unlike the other counties in study, Demopolis is not a town living under and with the vestiges of a federal court order. There is a spirit of collaboration in the educational structure of the Marengo County as a result of the visionary leadership in Demopolis. The three public school systems in Marengo County actually coordinated grant opportunities for one another, pool resources, and buy necessities in bulk. The Demopolis City Schools Foundation, Inc. coordinates all this activity, which is a non-profit organization started by the same lawyer who handled the school desegregation cases of the 1970’s and 1980’s. The foundation has raised well over a million dollars in grants and special projects since 1993. The money goes straight into classrooms for educational equipment, which could not be afforded by traditional means. The foundation recently purchased an old post office, which now serves as a technology station for public and private school students countywide. Moreover, the Demopolis City schools forfeits its transportation dollars to accommodate the challenges of the rural county school system in picking up and dropping off students. Of course, the flip side of this kind gesture is found in the county system not fighting over students and, especially, athletes who want or are enticed to come to Demopolis for school.

In the early moments of school desegregation, the fear and uncertainty palpable in most southern towns provided enough white-flight to warrant the existence of a segregation academy in Demopolis but as one retired black educator said: “once people (white) realized it wasn’t that bad, white enrollment picked back up.” This is not to suggest that the African American community was not just as concerned with school desegregation. Several African American grandmothers described the fear their parents had about them attending school with white children. This is important because too often school desegregation in the Deep South is seen as unnerving exclusively to white communities. Both white and black communities had been socialized for generations to understand education in a racially homogenous context. In Demopolis, strong leadership and well-connected professionals abated the fear of desegregation to a tolerable degree.

The two private schools in Marengo County reveal the current condition of the average segregation academy in the Black Belt in 2005. Private schools in the Black Belt are in their last throes. Demopolis City schools prove that public school desegregation can work in the region. However, the question remains how does a Black Belt community back out of the *de facto* dual school situation. Nowhere in the Black Belt is there a thriving community with one all black public school and one all white private school. The only towns that have growing communities and economies have fully desegregated schools.

The black community in Demopolis is not deferential and should not be perceived as “knowing their place,” but rather the local leaders have taken the process of school desegregation one step at a time. A retired African American teacher and hometown hero had this to say about race and racism in the Black Belt: “when it (racism) is instilled in

you it is like learning algebra the wrong way...it is difficult to unlearn.” Black community members in Demopolis argue that more African Americans should be in Demopolis classrooms because “they know where these (black) children come from and the difficulties they face at home.” Some elder African Americans lament desegregation in a nostalgic way in part because the black community now seems fragmented despite the fact that black people are making more money. The rallying cry for social justice and civil rights has grown to a whisper and, moreover, the black youth seems disconnected from a struggle that only occurred 40 years ago.

The question remains: why did school desegregation work in Demopolis? The town of Demopolis benefited from 1) the relatively large size of the Black Belt town, 2) well-connected local leadership, 3) the relative absence of extreme groups, 4) a well-established reputation for strong public education, and 5) a manageable social apparatus in the form of a city as opposed to rural county school system. Most importantly Demopolis City Schools have a “built in academy” which can be seen a social concession made or accepted by the black community at large. Demopolis is a fully desegregated school system and a beacon of Black Belt pride and progress, but it is in no way a fully integrated community. Church, marriage, nightlife and housing in most ways still resembles that of 1965.

The argument can be made that comparing the Demopolis City School System with the two county systems is “apples and oranges,” but the fact remains that demographically similar towns in Alabama’s Black Belt such as Selma did not experience harmonious school desegregation. Furthermore, Demopolis does not have a

metropolitan area within 50 miles like Sumter County's Meridian, Mississippi and Hale County's Tuscaloosa. Demopolis remains an enigma in many ways.

## VIII. DISCUSSION

The schools and communities of west Alabama's Black Belt are once again at a fork in the road. Latent forms of social and educational mistrust characterize this fork, unlike the one encountered during the Civil Rights Movement and school desegregation. For counties like Sumter and Hale, the options concerning which direction to turn in the 'critical period' of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will not come by way of a reaction to federal or state mandates. The *de facto* social structure that emerged as a result of the segregation academy movement in the Black Belt seems too strong for any formal mechanisms (i.e., law, legislation, policy) to dissolve, penetrate or reverse. If nothing else, the relationship between public and private schools in west Alabama's Black Belt is defined by a reluctant tolerance of the other that perpetuates class and race boundaries through clearly drawn 'lines in the dust.'

The bonding social capital embedded in the social networks created and maintained by segregated schools is explained in part by the separate, but similar struggle to maintain racial and cultural identity for whites and blacks. Portes (1998:17) discusses the negative, exclusive form social capital can take when social groups are solidified by a common sense of adversity and struggle. The southern white-minority group is a sociocultural phenomenon of Black Belt counties and communities. The shared sense of adversity for this group is based on the perception of the structural, cultural and social chaos created by the Civil Rights Movement and school desegregation. In Black Belt



counties, the southern white-minority is constantly aware of the need to keep the *de facto* boundaries that have come to replace *de jure* segregated social structures and institutions. The academy system of some Black Belt counties functions to bolster bonding social capital (for both races) and to exclude outsiders (Portes 1998). If we truly examine the reaction of the general white population in the Black Belt after *Brown* and during the Civil Rights Movement, it is not hard to understand the panic and resulting decision-making by some white leaders in the critical period. Socially and politically, things were about to change in the Black Belt. For well over a century whites had been outnumbered by blacks in the Black Belt, and yet were in control of every facet of county/regional control. Whites constituted a minority of the population but wielded real economic and political power over important domains including public education. For many whites, the prospect of the tides turning with such racial demographics, and a legacy of contempt, oppression and corruption in the minds of the black majority, generated enough fear and uncertainty to prompt white-flight and social disengagement.

In counties like Sumter and Hale, the all-black public school leadership gives many white residents the impression that, as one white community leader in Sumter County said: “they don’t want us back in their schools, because they would lose control of certain things like hiring and firing personnel.” The shared sense of adversity for African Americans in the Black Belt is not difficult to explain. The black majority had been oppressed throughout the Deep South since slavery and throughout *Jim Crow* and the high levels of bonding social capital with this population is easily understood. In a sense, the desegregation of public schools was a victory coupled with defeat for African Americans in the Black Belt. The actual and symbolic disengagement by many whites

into the segregation academies was a sort of slap in the face of the ideals tied to the Civil Rights Movement. In reaction to the white-flight from the public schools, some black leaders are so full of resentment that the idea of collaborating and bridging the racial gaps through educational activities is not appealing. This mistrust and resentment furthers community disconnections in the Black Belt.

The point to be made in discussing the findings of this study is that social capital can be used as a tool to maintain racial segregation and hierarchy. The segregation academies of Alabama's Black Belt serve as "symbolic capital" that reinforces traditional social and economic positions of the white community (Bourdieu 1986). The separate coverage and support in local newspapers and by local businesses of academics and sports by public and private schools serves as a weekly reminder of the racial and structural barriers to positive educational and community change. Bridging social capital is not accumulated and distributed as a result of this divide.

### **The Black Belt, Segregation and Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – So What?**

So why does school desegregation matter in Alabama's Black Belt? The answer to this question is complex, but can be broken down to three points. However, the overarching theme of this paper and research is based on a simple idea that needs to be understood first: schools are inherently social structures critical to American democracy (The Civil Rights Project 2002). The role of schools can be described as that of a rallying mechanism for students and communities to access. Indeed, local schools in nonmetropolitan areas such as the Black Belt serve as tangible social structures that can be used collectively to network and distribute educational and community resources

building community capacity. Conversely, schools in sparsely populated counties can also create clear social boundaries dividing cultural and economic resources through segregated learning amongst youth and interaction amongst adults. The three points listed below elaborate on the role of schools as critically important social structures for abating class inequality, promoting social justice, and building viable economies in nonmetropolitan areas.

First, school segregation would not matter to the degree that it does in the Black Belt's schools and communities, or the United States, if race were not historically and systematically intertwined with class inequality (Orfield and Lee 2005:5). In short the social construction of race in the United States is bound to a legacy of class inequality and social injustice. As Congressman Artur Davis (D) commented "you go almost anywhere else in the world and 'white' and 'black' doesn't mean what it does here in Alabama." Class inequality by way of racial segregation is perpetuated in part by the inability of minority children to gain cultural, human and social capital necessary to participate and succeed in modern society (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1966; 1988; 1990, Wilson 1987; Jencks 1991; Duncan 1996). White and black children in the Black Belt continue to experience and interpret outdated social, cultural and political symbols of what education and community mean to society. Especially for minority children, this experience contributes directly in limiting the notion of what is possible later on in life and work leading to fatalistic attitudes towards individual mobility (Orfield and Lee 2005:40; Duncan 1996). The community and economic inertia of Alabama's Black Belt is largely associated with residual tensions of the Civil Rights Movement (and Civil War) and fear of most forms of change. Battle lines based on race and power have been drawn

using schools as points of demarcation. In Alabama's most impoverished region, these lines have major consequences for connecting (or failing to connect) poor children to networks of economic prosperity and children of higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, nonpoor children do not learn what life looks like when you are not benefiting from the status quo and often fail to be exposed intimately to issues of social injustice and poverty (Duncan 1996). Through lack of meaningful interracial interaction at an early age, persistent poverty in the Black Belt continues to be reproduced from one generation to the next.

Second, private schools in the Black Belt directly contribute to the racial segregation of school-aged children. The idea of "private education" is not the issue of concern in this paper or in the Black Belt. Rather the problem is specifically based on the social, cultural and political impacts of private schools created for the sole reason of resisting school desegregation. As an African American public school educator in the Black Belt remarked "we wouldn't have a problem with anything if they (segregation academies) were here for any reason other than to be separate from black folks." School desegregation was and is a matter of social justice intended to right some of the institutional wrongs of the America's past. The continued segregation in education in Alabama's Black Belt, while legal, has not allowed the scars of *Jim Crow* to heal, contributing to distrust and furthering racial and community disconnections. Racially segregated schooling and learning is likely to reproduce norms of racial isolation for individuals later on in life fueling the flame of social injustice and inequality (Orfield and Lee 2005).

Third, the stakes on education are high for young residents of the Black Belt due to a legacy of economic underdevelopment directly linked to slavery and apartheid. Children in this persistently poor region of Alabama lack access to adequate educational resources because both funding and other forms of community support are divided between public and private schools. Improved educational opportunity for the goal of increasing the knowledge and skills of young people is essential for rural communities to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Woods, Doeksen and St. Clair 2005). The manufacturing subcommittee of the Black Belt Action Commission of Alabama recently surveyed all Chief Executive Officers (50 individuals) of existing industries in the 12 county region and found perceived weaknesses to include: under prepared workforce, no vocational education, public school system, high illiteracy rate and low skill levels for increasing emerging technology in work equipment.

### **So How Does Social Capital Fit Into All This?**

The conceptual framework of social capital aids in discussing the complexity of school desegregation in Alabama's Black Belt. As we have shown, the interracial and intra-racial interactions and perceptions of community leaders, educators and parents are largely shaped by the educational structure of their respective counties and towns. The social capital embedded in the private schools of the Black Belt reproduces historical class structure and maintains group identity for some white communities (Bourdieu 1986). In Sumter County we see empirical evidence of strong bonding social capital within all-white private school networks and all-black public school networks, which reinforces racial-group identities and boundaries. The nearly complete segregation

experienced by way of exclusively white private schools and completely black public schools fosters network closure that creates a situation excluding outsiders and restricting individual freedoms (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Coleman 1988; Portes 1998).

Community residents who want educational change cannot escape the racial network within which they are embedded due to dense, homogenous multiplex relationships. In this way, social capital can become simply another form of social control. Social capital of the type that generates in-group bonding by those who support private academies generates no positive benefit for the public school system. Indeed, to the contrary, such in-group bonding generates a divide between white and black residents that becomes increasingly difficult to bridge over time. Moreover, the strong bonds that have united and sustained the black community in Sumter County make the prospect of private school parents and children reentering the public school quite intimidating.

In Hale County, the complexity of educational structure yields complex social networks and social capital. With visionary leadership in the public school central office, public education has become the focal point for the bridging form of social capital. Groups of both white and black parents have opposed efforts to desegregate public schools, but other groups of white and black parents have sent their children to a racially mixed school, and the children have responded by organizing the Hale B.O.P.P. This local youth movement would never have begun without the horizontal “race bridges” generated by the desegregated situation of “the mixed school” also known as the “the white school.” Bonds based purely on racial identity are breaking down in favor of a more collective vision, but the process is slow and often painful for those committed to change.

Finally, we come to the “Marengo Model” and specifically to the burgeoning town of Demopolis. The city school system of Demopolis is the premier educational success story of Alabama’s Black Belt. The decision of the white professional class and African American civil rights leadership to work through school desegregation has paid off. As described, the Demopolis school system is not “socially integrated.” Bonding social capital is indeed present. The possibility of the system attaining social integration clearly exists and local leadership is aware of interracial shortfalls. The bridging social capital stored in the fully desegregated city schools has made possible effective linkages beyond the local community. This linking social capital between local leaders and state and industrial leaders outside Marengo County played a critical role in recruiting and retaining industry and jobs for the collective good of the county. African American, civil rights leader and Alabama State Board Representative (District 5) for the Black Belt - Ella Bell had this to say about the role of white professionals in Black Belt public schools:

Sometimes it’s an ugly reality that there is still a difference between my white parents and black parents in the Black Belt calling up Bell South or Coca Cola to secure grant money or give a donation... I need my white parents to be interested in the public schools of the Black Belt even in putting pressures on local school boards to improve.

The presence of bonding, bridging and linking social capital is an anomaly in Alabama’s Black Belt school systems and communities.

As we move from the extreme segregation of Sumter to the moderate segregation of Hale and finally to the complete desegregation of Marengo County so too moves the graduation rates and per capita incomes for African Americans (Center for Demographic Research 2005; Institute for Rural Health Research 2002). As one examines Alabama’s

12 Black Belt counties, the only towns experiencing economic and population growth have desegregated public schools rather than white private schools and black public schools. This correlation is consistent with theories of social capital and empirical findings of other researchers who have worked in the South. We should not be surprised to find that educational, community, and economic development are critical to building community capacity and usually need to occur simultaneously (Duncan 1999; Beaulieu, Israel and Wimberley 2003; Flora et al. 2004). Furthermore, we should not be surprised by the mobilizing force of the “school house” as “The Community Center” in rural places (Hanifan 1920).

The process of community development is just that – a process - and the role of education is a shared experience serving to create and sustain community autonomy, vitality, integration and traditions (Peshkin quoted in Lyson 2005:23). Alabama’s Black Belt communities and leadership largely evaded this ‘process’ during the Civil Rights Movement and chose to maintain the status quo of separate schooling for white and black children through the advent of the Segregation Academy System. Four decades later, it seems the white community’s investment of social and economic capital into private schools yielded limited returns. Perhaps, the only return of the Academy System is a sustained tradition of cultural and racial mistrust that concentrates the social capital of whites and blacks in their respective groups. David Mathews, in his publication *Is There a Public for Our Public School ?*, describes this ‘connection’ succinctly: “It is unlikely that schools will change unless communities change, unless citizens increase their capacity to band together and act together” (1996:5). The Black Belt case studies presented in this research hopefully illustrate this point.



## IX. CONCLUSION

The three cases presented in this study represent educational and community situations being played out all over the Black Belt of the Southeastern United States. The situation is complex and dynamic. The “forks in the road” encountered from 1963-1969 in Alabama forced community leaders black and white to make decisions as to which direction their respective county would take regarding court-ordered school desegregation. Some counties like Sumter chose to replace *de jure* for *de facto* segregated schools. Other counties have seen limited community and economic returns. Other counties like Hale and Marengo chose to move, more or less immediately, towards racial integration in public education.

In many parts of Alabama’s Black Belt, few white children attend public schools. Faced with declining enrollments, the segregation academies are struggling and several have closed, reorganized or relocated. These academies remain resilient, however, because of the intense loyalty and the strength of social capital bonds that link white parents to these schools. The academies in Alabama’s Black Belt are at the center of tight-knit “social clubs” characterized by active parental support, tremendous school spirit, and a “we’re in this struggle together” attitude that reproduces race and class boundaries. This “struggle” is one of dwindling enrollments, brain drain, a sense of isolation, under representation in the local government and ennui. One might think that schools with such community support would not be in a struggle of this nature and,

certainly, would not have trouble persuading children to move back home after college. This is the “Academy Paradox.” A wonderfully familiar, certain and safe environment has been created for white children in the form of an exclusive school, yet the community sees little to no return on this investment of economic and social capital.

For public schools in the Black Belt, the high concentration of poor rural African Americans poses a problem for creating hope and a positive outlook needed to reach out to the white community, which abandoned them forty years ago. The case studies presented in this paper show that the harsh legacy of racism can be dissipated through educational collaboration. This is happening right now, painfully, slowly, but I believe surely. As the benefits of collaboration become increasingly clear, barriers will continue to erode. Over fifty years after *Brown v Board of Education*, parts of Alabama and the South have stagnated because racism has dictated educational policy. The message presented in this thesis is that in some areas this troubling legacy continues, but forces of change are afoot.

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**APPENDIX.**

Figures Cited in Text

Figure 1. Map of Sumter County, Alabama

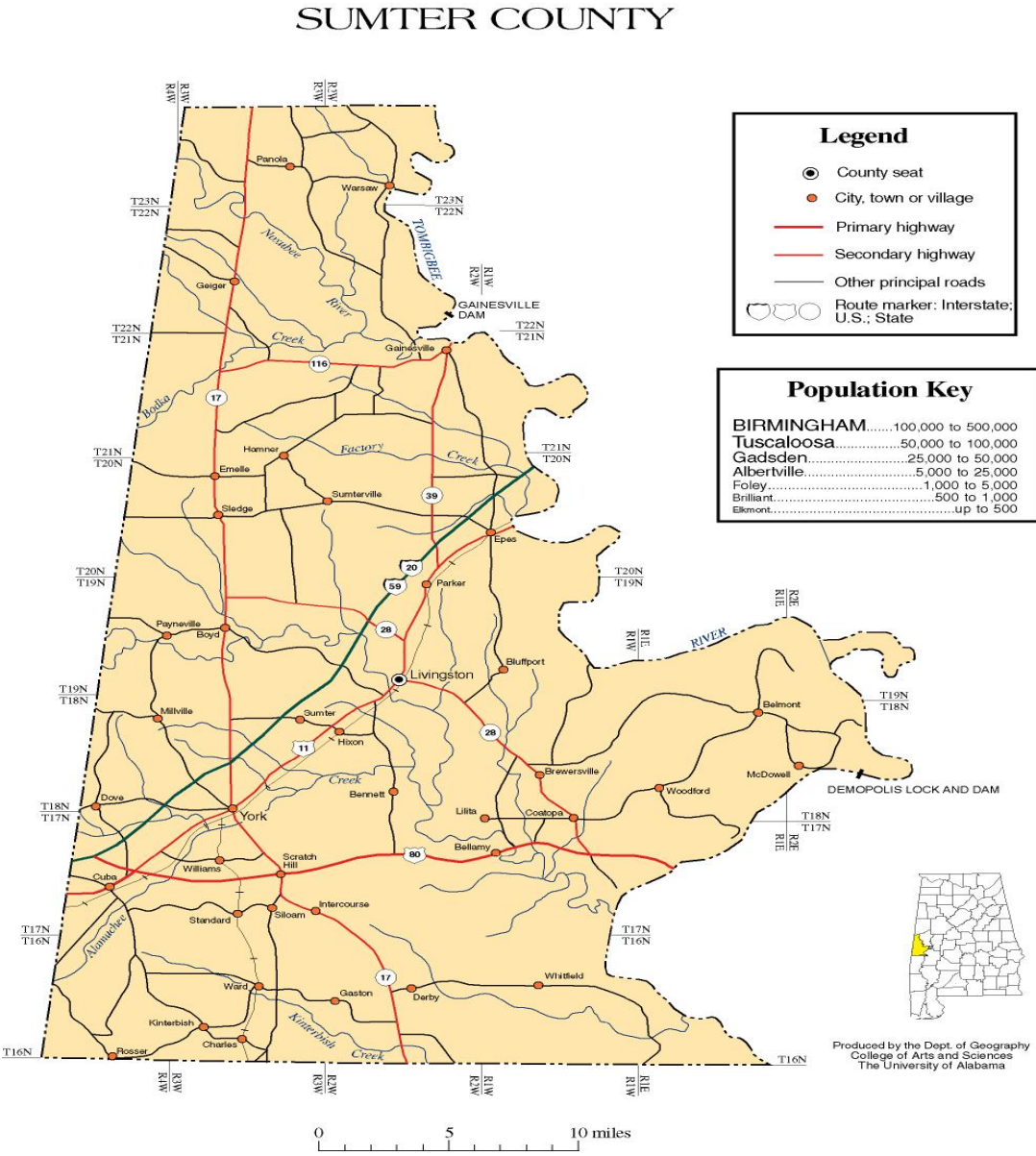


Figure 2. Map of Hale County, Alabama.

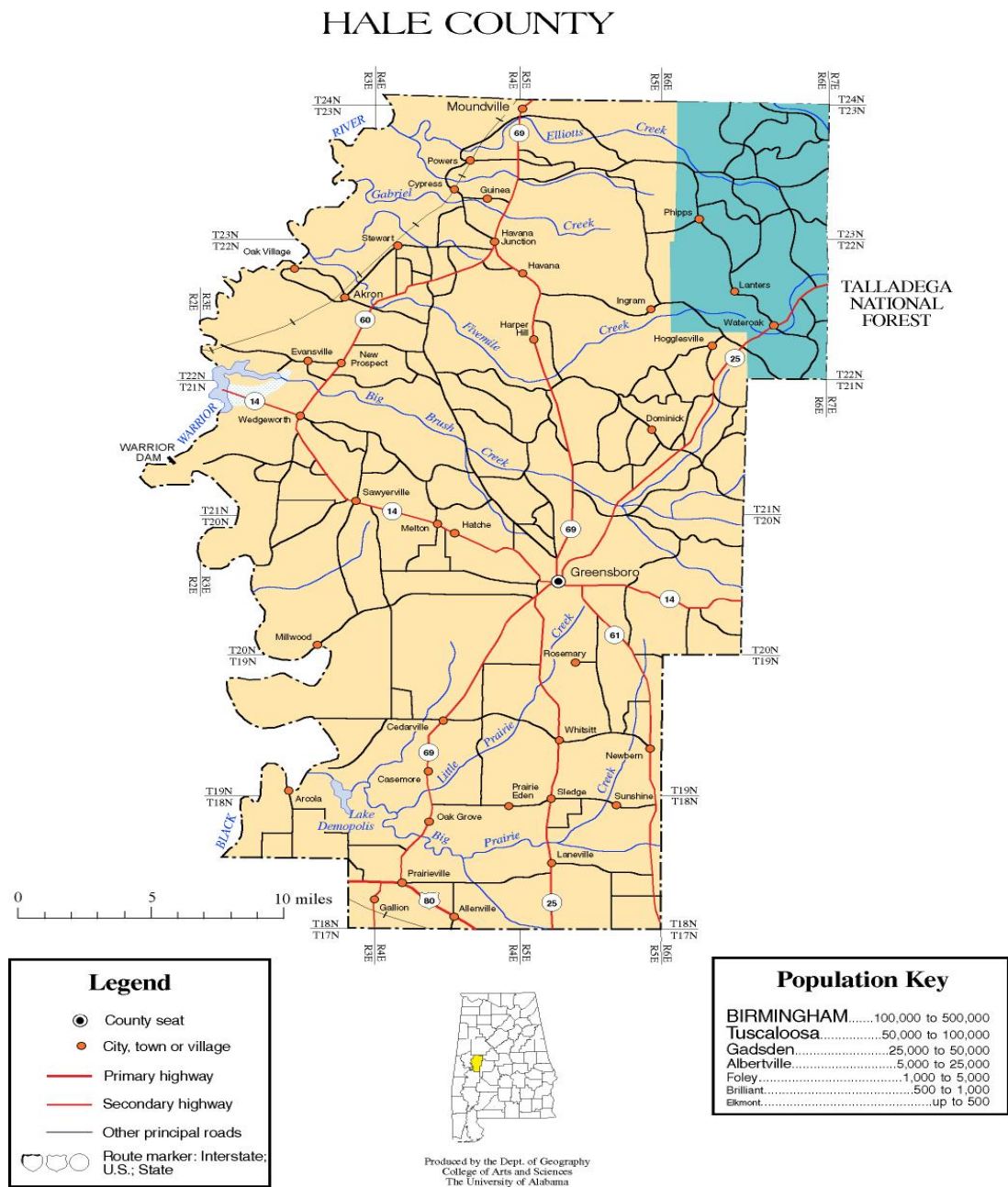
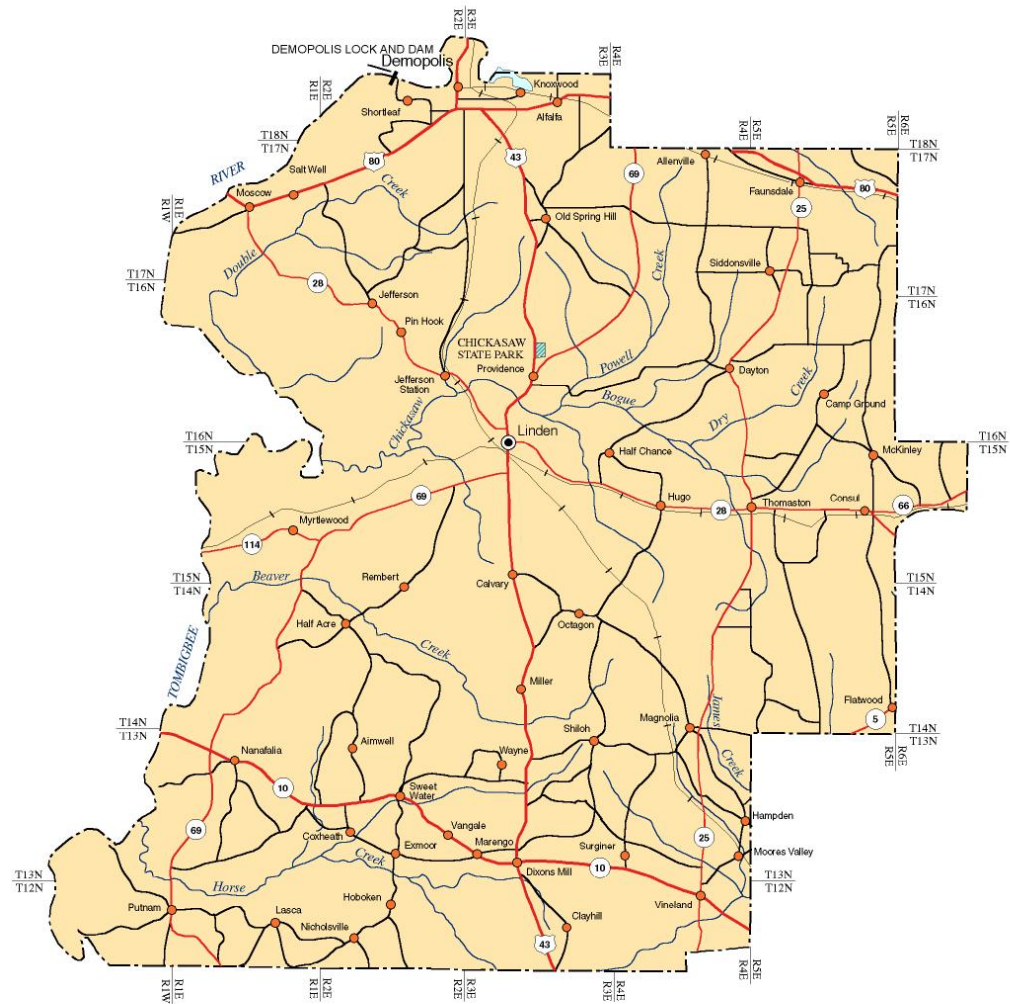


Figure 3. Map of Marengo County, Alabama

## MARENGO COUNTY



0 5 10 miles

**Legend**

- County seat
- City, town or village
- Primary highway
- Secondary highway
- Other principal roads
- Route marker: Interstate, U.S.; State



**Population Key**

BIRMINGHAM	.....100,000 to 500,000
Tuscaloosa	.....50,000 to 100,000
Gadsden	.....25,000 to 50,000
Albertville	.....5,000 to 25,000
Foley	.....1,000 to 5,000
Brilliant	.....500 to 1,000
Elkmont	.....up to 500

Produced by the Dept. of Geography  
College of Arts and Sciences  
The University of Alabama