Equalization Schools in Georgia's African-American Communities, 1951-1970

by

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In the decades after World War II, several states in the Deep South built new schools for African Americans in an attempt to maintain two racially segregated school systems.[1] As it fiercely resisted racial integration, the state of Georgia built hundreds of black schools, more than any other state.[2] The Georgia Department of Education established new statewide curricula for teachers and students and formed guidelines for architects and builders, who designed and constructed hundreds of International Style schools throughout Georgia. The state's campaign to modernize its schools, both black and white, resulted in some of the first modern schools constructed in rural communities across Georgia.

The rise of modern African-American schools in Georgia in the 1950s strengthened black communities throughout the state. Parents and students have described the schools as a source of pride. Teachers, who held some of the best-paying jobs for blacks in rural Georgia, could then support black businesses in the community. The auditoriums, large enough to seat an entire community, provided space for student plays and band concerts. In the 1960s and 1970s, when school systems across Georgia eventually desegregated, many of the newly built black schools were closed and vacated after only a decade or two of service. Black communities that relied on the schools as important social institutions were devastated by their loss.

Georgia Schools before World War II

Following Reconstruction, schools systems in Georgia maintained racially segregated public school systems in which black schools suffered from inadequate funding. Local school boards allocated funds on an unequal basis, often illegally skirting the United States Supreme Court decision, Plessy v. Ferguson. The 1896 Plessy ruling required that all public accommodations must be separate and equal. Black schools almost always had insufficient facilities.[3] Black children, excluded from white school systems, attended school in church basements, lodge halls, and run-down shanty schools with leaky roofs and drafty walls and windows (Figure 1). These schools were poorly equipped,

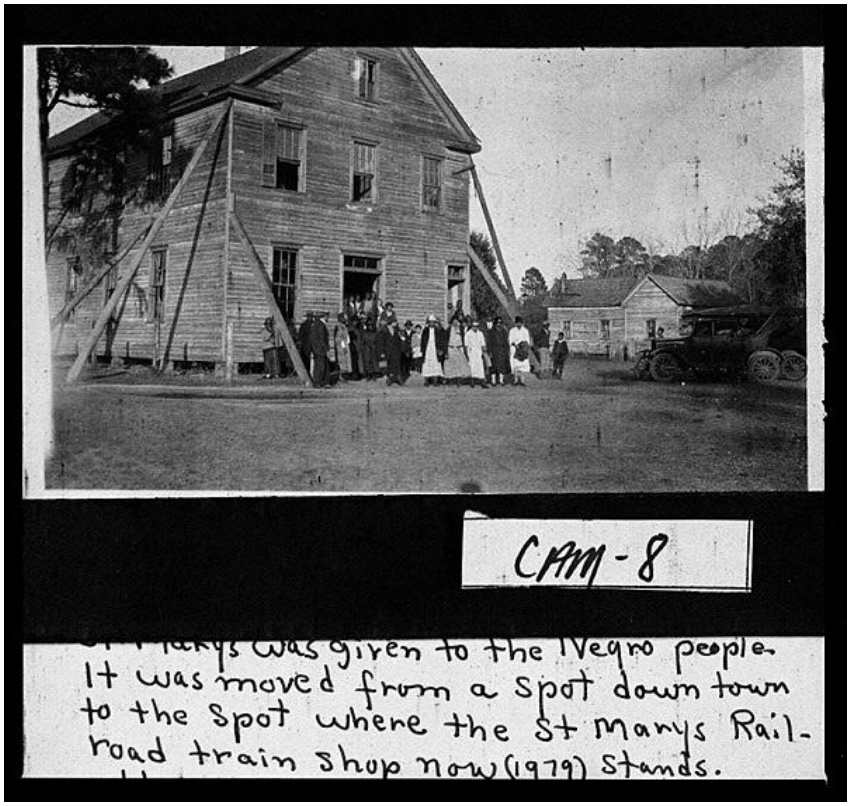

Figure 1. First school for African-American children in St. Marys, Georgia in circa 1920-1923. Courtesy of the Georgia Division of Archives and History, Vanishing Georgia collection.

overcrowded, and led by teachers who were paid less than their white counterparts. In 1946, a grand jury reported the poor conditions of black schools in the Atlanta suburb of DeKalb County, Georgia:

> While most of the white schools are reasonably well housed and the children equipped with books and supplies, the black school buildings and equipment are either borrowed church buildings or poorly constructed buildings in out-of-the-way places, which colored people have paid for with their own collections. Your Committee found that these children were huddled around defective stoves, travel as much as five miles without bus transportation and, in many cases, without lunch.[4]

Northern philanthropists led efforts to reform black education in the South during the Jim Crow era. The Rosenwald Fund, among the most influential school reform programs, advocated extending the school term for black students, increasing compensation received by black educators, subsidizing transportation for black students, and supporting the development of libraries.[5] Rosenwald's primary effort was to provide standardized plans for improved black schools and matching funds to build them (Figure 2). These schools, which ranged in size from one- to seven-teacher school buildings, featured large, well-lit classrooms, industrial rooms, and sanitary privies. Between 1912 and 1932, the Rosenwald Fund contributed to more than 5,000 schools in 15 Southern states, so that by 1928 one in five rural schools for African-American students in the South was a Rosenwald school.

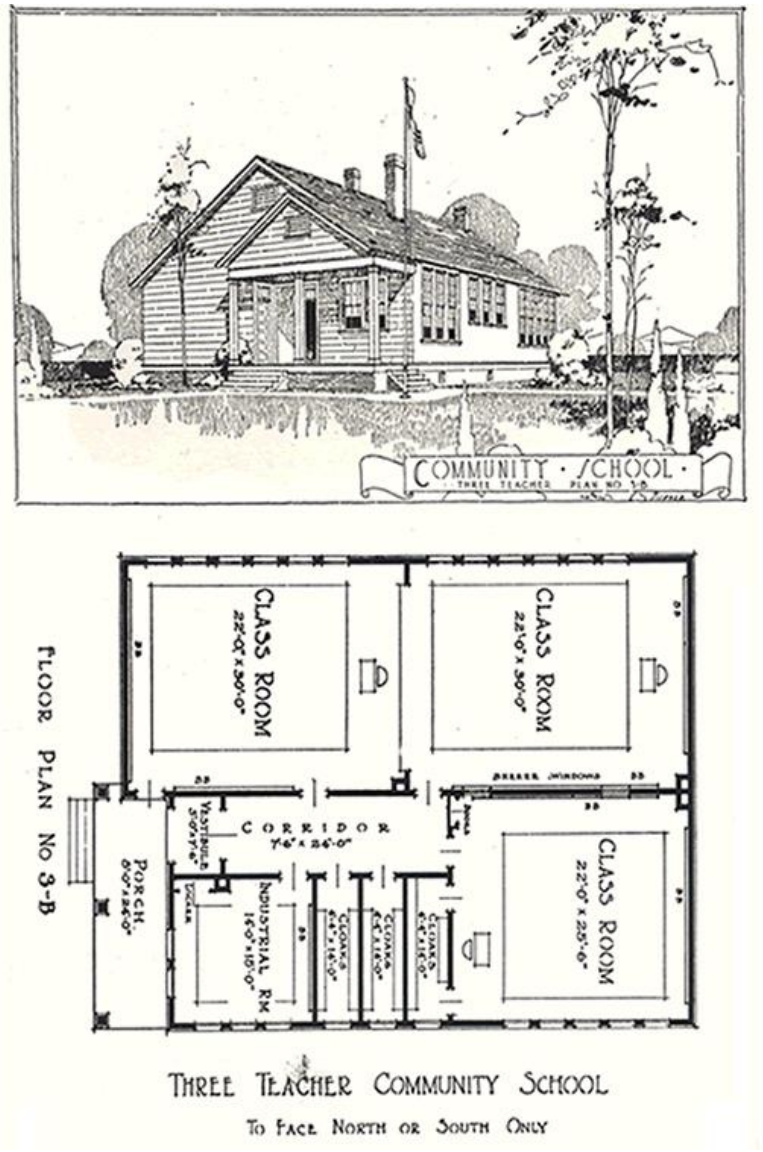

Figure 2. The Three Teacher Community School was among the many school plans produced by the Rosenwald Fund. Courtesy of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Rosenwald Initiative http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/southern-region/rosenwald-schools/school-buildings.html (accessed September 19, 2010).

The Rosenwald Fund relied on the local support of county school superintendents who saw the fund as a way to augment scarce county and state funds. Superintendents negotiated among black citizens, local school boards, and state departments of education for donations of land and construction funds.[6] The Cusseta Industrial High School in west Georgia was typical of Rosenwald funding arrangements. The school, completed in 1930, was built at a

cost of $2,973 with local taxpayers contributing $1,973, blacks $250, and the Rosenwald Fund $750. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Rosenwald Fund contributed to 259 schools in 103 counties in Georgia. Rosenwald schools were some of the most technologically advanced schools available to black students in Georgia after World War II when the state government initiated the first statewide reform of black schools.[7]

Georgia Builds Modern Schools

In 1949, Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge initiated the Minimum Foundation Program for Education. This comprehensive legislation sought to eliminate geographic, class, and, eventually, racial disparities in education through improved curricula, better training for teachers, and a uniform nine-month school term. In 1951, Talmadge pushed through the state's first sales tax of three percent, which was dedicated to new school construction.[8] By 1955, Georgia had spent nearly $275 million on public schools, more than almost any other Southern state. Georgia spent five times more on schools than Mississippi and eight times more than Alabama. By the time Talmadge left office in 1954, 53 percent of the state's budget went to education.[9]

The Minimum Foundation Program for Education enabled the state to build hundreds of new, modern schools for African Americans to equalize the disparities between white and black schools, as mandated under Plessy. The

state intended that these new schools, now called equalization schools, would sustain two racially segregated school systems.[10] In the decade between 1952 and 1962, the state built roughly 1,200 schools, 700 for whites and 500 for blacks. The governor's plan replaced over 3,000 small, poorly built black schools (Figure 3) with larger, better equipped consolidated elementary and high schools (Figure 4). The plan called for at least one new black high school in each of

Figure 3. Map locating the state's many small, poorly built black schools in 1941-1943. From Georgia Department of Education, *Annual Reports of the Department of Education to the General Assembly of the State of Georgia*, (1952), 7 and 37, Record Group 12-2-29, Box 10, Georgia Division of Archives and History.

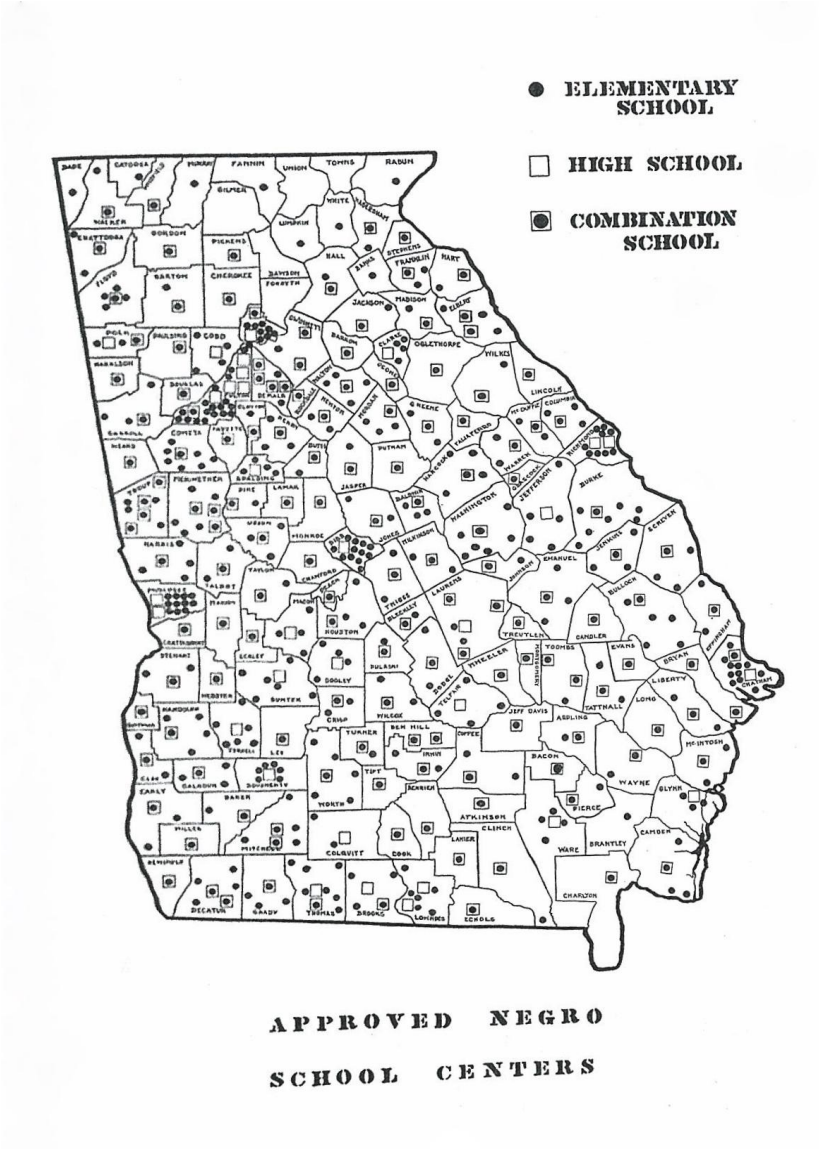

Figure 4. The 1952 plan by the Georgia Department of Education to replace small black schools with larger and more modern consolidated schools. From Georgia Department of Education, *Annual Reports of the Department of Education to the General Assembly of the State of Georgia*, (1952), 7 and 37, Record Group 12-2-29, Box 10, Georgia Division of Archives and History.

Georgia's 159 counties.[11] The John Lewis School in Ellaville, for example, completed in 1957, replaced Schley County's eleven black schools, including nine one-room schools. By 1956, the total number of black schools statewide was consolidated to 1,058, with many of the small, outdated schools replaced with modern buildings.[12]

The State School Building Authority managed the construction of new schools in Georgia in cooperation with local school districts and the State Board of Education. The state legislature established the authority in 1951 as an independent corporation that would issue bonds and build schools throughout the state. Spending priorities were established by the State Board of Education, which developed a formula for allocating funds to local school systems, based on a space allotment per student at $7.50 per square foot plus ten percent for architect's fees and contingencies.[13] Its frugality led the department to boast, "There are no 'educational palaces' in Georgia, but there are scores of functional, up-to-date school buildings."[14]

The State School Building Authority adopted design standards for classrooms and other school facilities and it established requirements for types of construction, fire safety, lighting, and sanitation.[15] In 1952, the *New York Times* reported that Georgia's "model-type southern schoolhouse," comprised a "brick-faced, concrete-block structure, roofed with steel, asphalt, and gravel, partitioned with pastel-shaded concrete-block walls, and floored with concrete."[16] State officials were especially impressed by the half-a-dozen modern elementary schools that had recently been built in the growing Atlanta suburb of DeKalb County. Designed by Atlanta-area architects, these schools, including Medlock, Leslie J. Steele, and Toney elementary schools were models of cost-effective modern design. Toney Elementary School (Figure 5), designed by Bothwell and Nash, is L-shaped with an administrative wing with offices, clinic, library, and

Figure 5. Toney Elementary School in DeKalb County, 1953, served as a model for modern schools built throughout Georgia. Courtesy of the Pullen Library, Georgia State University.

restrooms and a classroom wing with twenty-two classrooms and a cafeteria. Toney, completed in 1953, as well as Medlock and Steele, were built with cost-effective concrete-block walls, steel-framed windows, and steel roof framing. These schools were designed to accommodate growth and in many DeKalb schools the architects returned to build additional classrooms.

The E. Rivers School in Atlanta, designed by the Atlanta firm Stevens and Wilkinson in 1949, among the first modern schools in the state and served as a model for subsequent school designs funded by the State School Building

Authority.[17] The school's E-shaped plan featured three single-loaded classroom blocks and a 600-seat auditorium that stemmed from the main administrative wing (Figure 6). Classrooms were lit by steel-framed windows, panels of glass

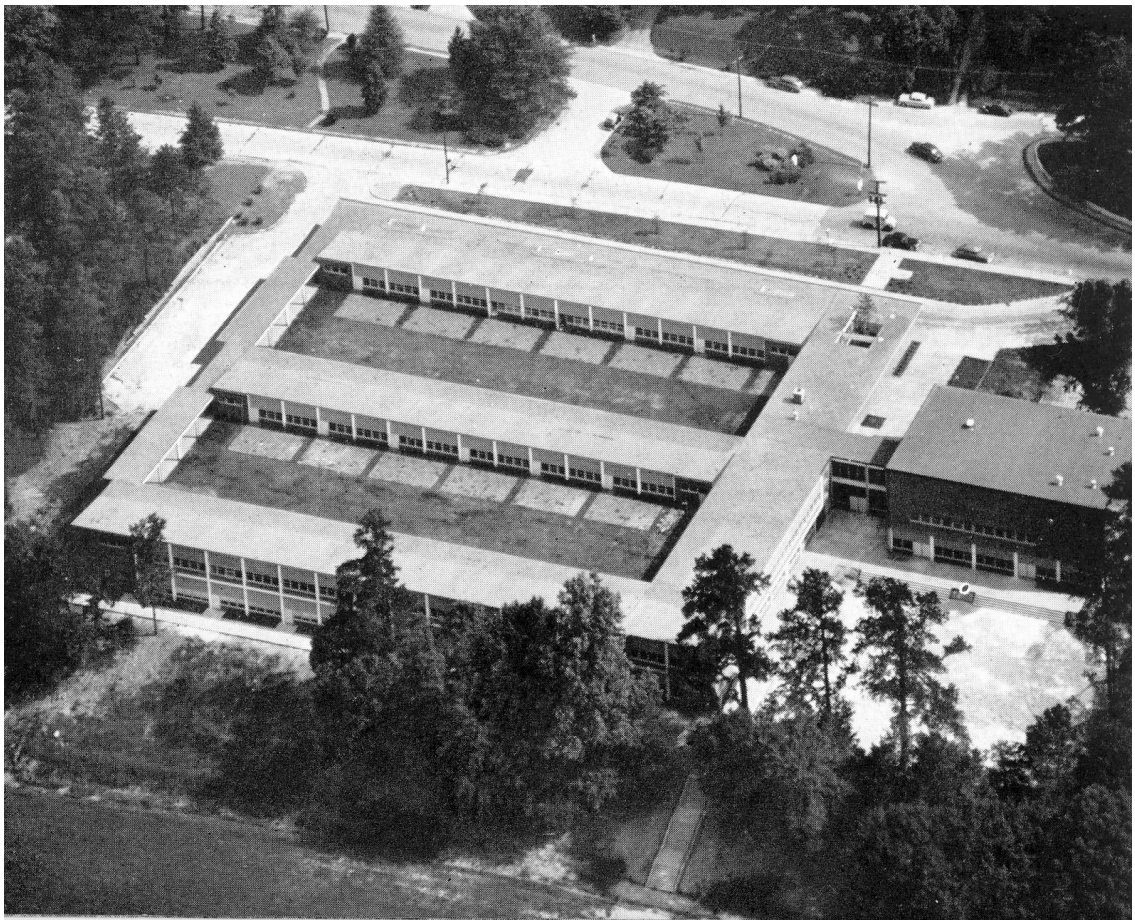

Figure 6. Aerial view of E. Rivers School in Atlanta, 1949. From *Stevens and Wilkinson, Selected Works* (Atlanta), [1958], 78.

block, and fluorescent lights. The architects, through the use of standardized structural details and multi-use concrete forms (Figure 7), designed the school for $8.82 per square foot. This cost was significantly less than Fulton County's

Figure 7. Modern building materials and technology reduced costs at E. Rivers School. From *Stevens and Wilkinson, Selected Works* (Atlanta), [1958], 83.

average of $9.30 and Atlanta's average of $12 to $14, but exceeded $7.50 per square foot, which the State School Building Authority later required to receive grants under the Minimum Foundation Program for Education.[18]

The E. Rivers School, like nearly all of Georgia's new schools, was designed in the International Style. The style's clean lines, lack of ornament, and

emphasis on modern materials and technology enabled schools to be built quickly and less expensively than traditional wood-frame or masonry buildings. Moreover, in adopting the International Style, the State School Building Authority made an aesthetic break from previous generations of small, inadequate schools. The state relied on the International Style, which appeared new and forward looking, to build a statewide system of schools that it hoped would embody the future of education in Georgia.

Stevens and Wilkinson believed the E. Rivers School would receive an "awful lot of criticism from local people. We thought they expected Greek columns. Well, they're just crazy about the school. They won't say if they like the outside, but they think it's wonderful on the inside."[19] By the mid-1950s, school districts across Georgia had embraced the International Style for both white and black schools. In most counties there was almost no architectural distinction between white and black schools, with high-style schools and plain examples built for both races.

The State School Building Authority allowed local school districts the option of using its stock plans or hiring an architect whose design was required to conform to the state's design specifications. Most school districts developed site-specific plans with an architect, an expense they factored into the cost of construction.[20] School districts throughout the state hired architects, including the rural firms of Edward Vason Jones in Albany and Johns and Associates in

Gainesville. The Atlanta firms of Finch Alexander Barnes Rothschild and Paschal, also known as FABRAP, designed fifteen schools, Cuttino and Associates designed nearly fifty schools, and Bodin and Lamberson designed one-hundred schools, mostly in the Atlanta area and in north Georgia.

The Atlanta firm of Stevens and Wilkinson received commissions for 150 public schools in twenty-six counties statewide, more commissions than any other firm during this period.[21] Between 1952 and 1957, the firm completed large and small commissions that ranged in size from a single school building to comprehensive plans to rebuild entire county school systems. In 1952 and 1957, Washington County commissioned the firm to design thirteen schools, including seven black schools. Rural Baldwin, Calhoun, Chattooga, Dooly, Rabun, Sumter, and Union counties commissioned five or more schools from the firm. Stevens and Wilkinson returned to many school districts to design additions, annexes, gymnasiums, cafeterias, and new heating and lighting plans.[22]

New schools, both white and black, included classrooms, administrative areas, restrooms, a library, and a cafeteria. Auditoriums and gymnasiums, which were not part of the standard plan, could be funded with dollar-for-dollar matching grants after the basic requirements had been met. Small schools comprised a single block of classrooms and a cafeteria (Figure 8). Sometimes called a cafetorium, the cafeteria was a multipurpose space that combined the functions of a cafeteria and an auditorium. Auditoriums and gymnasiums were

Figure 8. Harrison High School in West Point, Georgia, 1956, is a small L-shaped school with a classroom wing and an auditorium. From *Stevens and Wilkinson, Selected Works* (Atlanta), [1958], 113.

sometimes built as freestanding structures that could be entered through a breezeway for evening activities when school was closed.

Larger schools featured multiple classroom blocks built around landscaped courtyards. Eastview Elementary School in Americus, designed by Stevens and Wilkinson, featured four classroom blocks with steel-framed windows and flat roofs (Figure 9). Covered breezeways protected the south

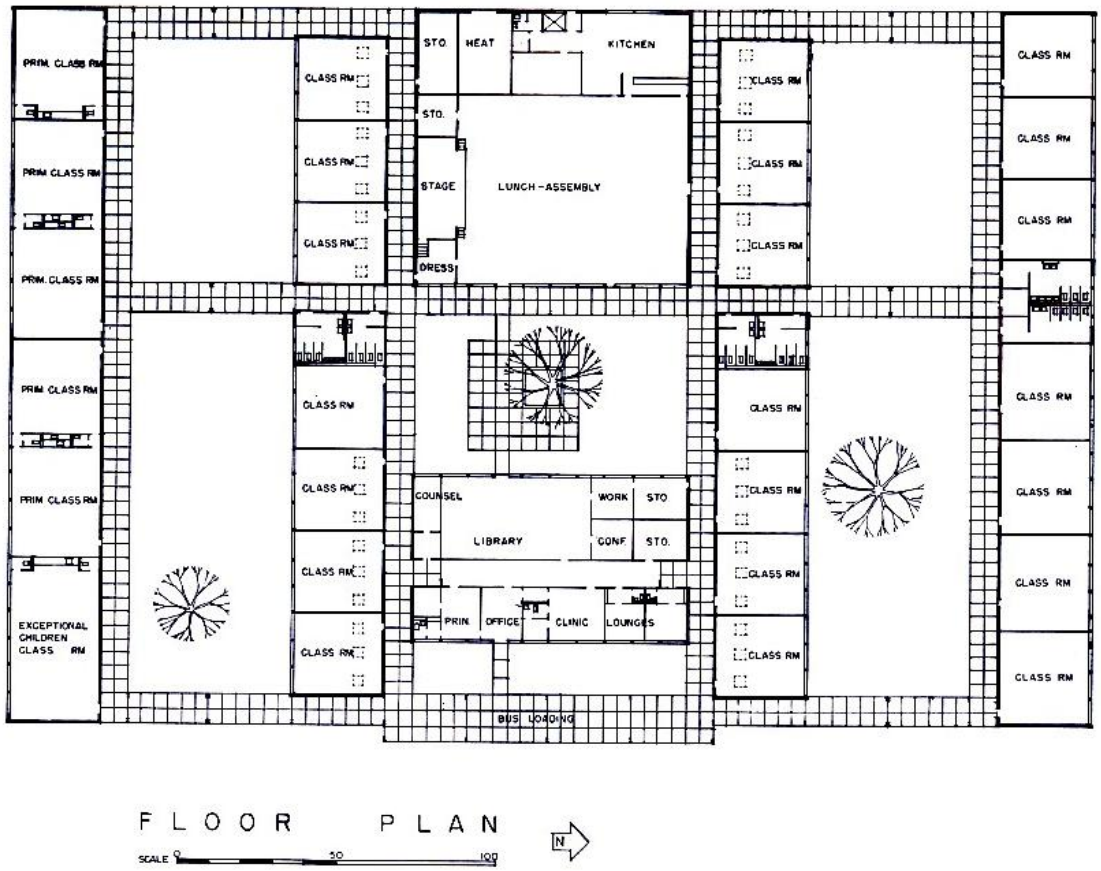

Figure 9. Plan of Eastview Elementary School in Americus, Georgia, 1956. From *Stevens and Wilkinson, Selected Works* (Atlanta), [1958], 107.

Georgia students from sun and rain as they made their way to the cafeteria and as they arrived and departed by bus. The architects reduced building costs by using standardized construction methods, such as welded-steel frames, concrete-block walls, brick veneer, and pre-cast roof decks. Costs were further reduced by the elimination of ornament.[23] The architects dispensed with traditional interior finishes, such as plaster walls and wood trim, in favor of exposed steel roof framing and painted concrete-block walls.

Eastview classrooms were flooded with natural light that streamed through skylights, clerestory windows, and glass-curtain walls, reducing the need for fluorescent lamps (Figure 10). Stevens and Wilkinson used glass-curtain walls to brighten corridors and to transform libraries and cafeterias in crystalline pavilions (Figure 11).

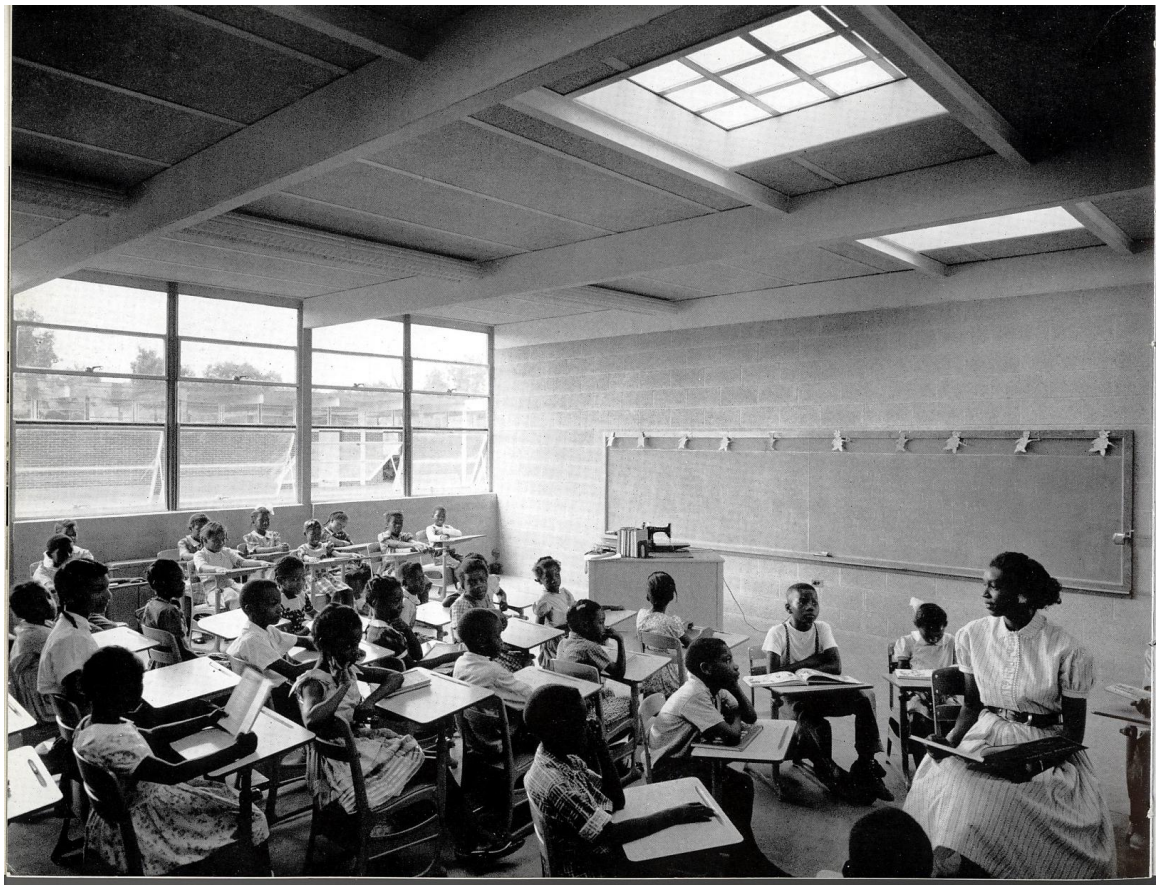

Figure 10. Metal windows and skylights brighten classrooms at Eastview Elementary School. From *Stevens and Wilkinson, Selected Works* (Atlanta), [1958], 106.

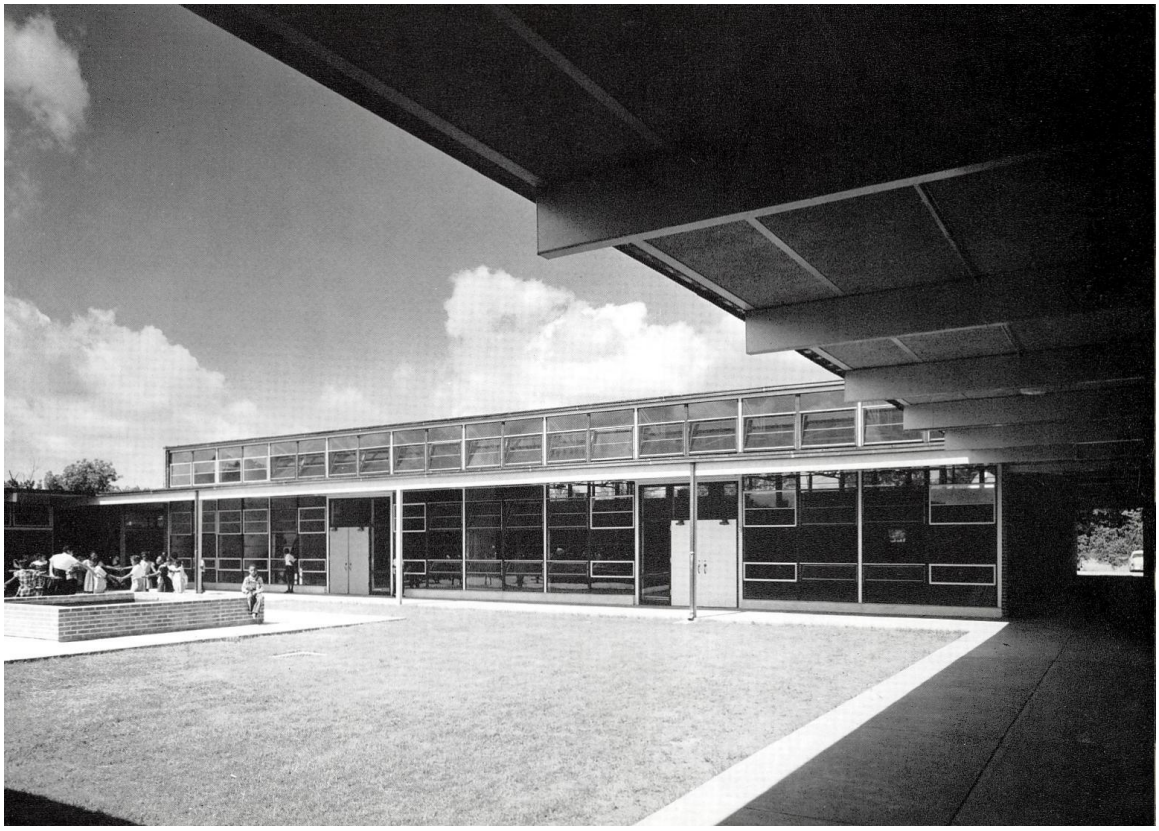

Figure 11. A glass-curtain wall at Eastview Elementary School filled the cafeteria with natural light. From *Stevens and Wilkinson, Selected Works* (Atlanta), [1958], 105.

Steel-framed windows were built as curtain walls in the majority of equalization schools across the state to provide classrooms with lighting and ventilation. Large expanses of metal-framed windows distinguished Georgia's new schools as modern even though the only choice in school windows was steel-framed or the more expensive aluminum-framed windows. In 1949, the Commission on American School Buildings considered only metal-framed windows as it promoted bilateral and multilateral lighting for the "modern school program." Light from multiple sources rather a single source, the administrators

believed, “tends to distribute more evenly than the natural light coming into a room,” such as “clerestory light above dropped corridor roofs, high window sash opening on lighted or open corridors, windows on two or three sides of a classroom . . . and skylights over classrooms.”[24]

The largest equalization schools were built for over forty teachers and hundreds of students. Carver Heights Elementary School in Columbus supported thirty-eight teachers in seven parallel classroom blocks.[25] The Vienna High and Industrial School, which included classrooms for twenty-three teachers, was the largest building in Vienna, larger than the county courthouse or any block of downtown commercial buildings in the south Georgia town (Figure 12). Designed by Stevens and Wilkinson and completed in 1959, the school included separate buildings for the gymnasium, cafeteria, vocational shop, and the classroom building. Glass-curtain walls span its east and west elevations and form the walls of its two interior courtyards (Figure 13). The courtyards served as gardens and outdoor classrooms and provided daylight to the 400-foot-long main corridors and smaller cross-corridors.

During the peak of school construction, DeKalb County in the Atlanta metropolitan area dedicated ten new elementary schools and three new high schools on the same day in December 1955.[26] DeKalb’s new schools provided classrooms for more than 12,000 students. Five of these schools were black

Figure 12. Vienna High and Industrial School in Vienna, Georgia, 1959, was among the largest equalization schools in the state. Photo by James R. Lockhart, 2008. Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Figure 13. Interior courtyards at Vienna High served as outdoor classrooms and provided light to interior rooms and corridors. Photo by Charlie Miller, 2010. Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

schools intended to replace what the county identified as “colored schools . . . in extremely poor condition.”[27] In a second mass dedication ceremony in October 1958, DeKalb County opened sixteen more schools.

DeKalb needed these new schools to support its burgeoning suburban population in an area that had been mostly farmland before World War II. By 1940, DeKalb, unique among Georgia counties, had a large industrial sector and more than half its population lived within Atlanta’s city limits on the county’s western edge. In the 1950s, DeKalb’s increasing population—spurred by new transplants to the Atlanta metropolitan area, white flight from city to suburbs, and a rising birthrate—resulted in one of the largest school systems in the state. In 1952, the county estimated that seventy-five new students arrived at its schools every Monday.[28] DeKalb struggled to keep up with growth by building on average more than five schools each year for twenty years.[29]

African Americans Embrace Their Modern Schools

In the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans throughout the state embraced their new equalization schools. They were staffed with professionally trained black teachers who taught an improved academic curriculum. Students enjoyed classrooms, libraries, and science labs, which were substantially upgraded from the facilities found in previous generations of black schools.

In many rural counties, equalization schools were among the first modern buildings, but for some black students the school's architectural style mattered less than the basic amenities they included, such as cafeterias serving hot lunches and having central heat and flush toilets. In north Georgia, E. E. Butler High School in Gainesville (Figure 14) impressed guidance counselor Charles

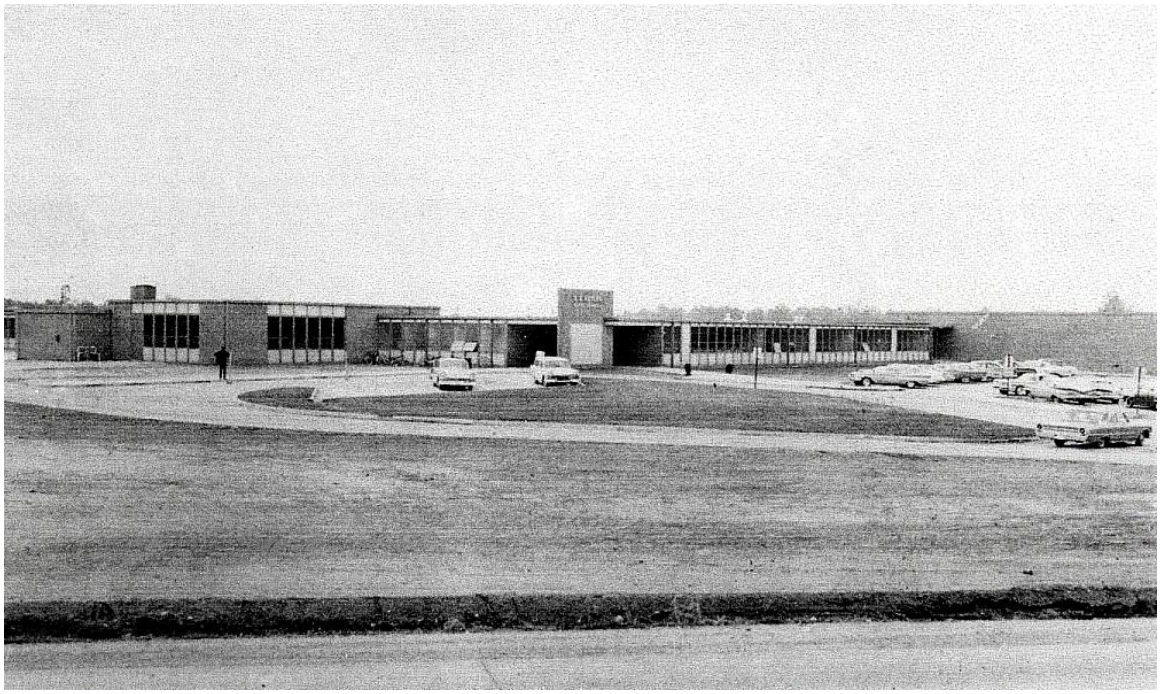

Figure 14. African Americans in Gainesville, Georgia, celebrated the opening of E. E. Butler High School in 1962. Courtesy of the Fair Street Elementary School.

Morrow when it opened in 1962: "The physical plant itself was something to be proud of because it truly was the latest thing—state of the art . . . no corners were cut; it was first class all the way."[30]

Sports and other extracurricular activities ensured that these schools were woven into community life (Figure 15). E. E. Butler was, according to a former teacher, “the center of the community. . . . Most of your activities centered around the school, and the school was basically open for at least eighteen hours a day because you had the sports activities and then you had the club activities.” [31]

Figure 15. Sports and other extracurricular activities ensured that E. E. Butler High School remained the center of community life in the 1960s. Courtesy Fair Street Elementary School.

Black businesses closed on game nights and the neighborhood turned out for the Butler Tigers. The marching band brought fans to their feet when it played during halftime and drew cheering crowds when it marched down Main Street past businesses where black patronage was not always welcome.

Equalization schools trained future leaders in student government councils and hosted club activities, including clubs for business, science, industrial arts, and chapters of New Homemakers of America and New Farmers of America.[32] Drama clubs and chorus performed special programs for the community (Figure 16) and parents returned to school for adult education classes, such as home economics and interior decorating (Figure 17).

Figure 16. The chorus at R. L. Cousins High School in Douglasville, Georgia, performed a program on Indian culture in 1962. Courtesy of the Douglas County Historical Society.

Figure 17. An adult class in home economics and interior decorating at R. L. Cousins High School in 1962. Courtesy of the Douglas County Historical Society.

The state of Georgia built equalization schools in the hope that blacks would accept segregation in exchange for improved school facilities. Equalization schools were an improvement over earlier black schools, but they were not equal to white schools. Day-to-day operations were underfunded and many schools were overcrowded from the first day of class. The interiors were filled with secondhand desks and used textbooks passed down from white schools. Sports also suffered because equalization schools seldom had sufficient athletic facilities. The Vienna High and Industrial School played football games at the white high school stadium on days it was not used by the home team. Lacking basic equipment, the track team at E. E. Butler jumped over chairs in practice because the school did not own proper hurdles.[33]

Geography represented another inequity for equalization schools, which were often located at the margins of a school district. There were no state funds available for site acquisition and development, which was considered the responsibility of local boards of education. Rural school districts, which may not have previously operated any black schools, sought inexpensive or donated property in black communities. Black schools were sometimes built a block or two from railroad lines and the attendant industrial plants and warehouses. In other cases, they were built at the far end of black neighborhoods. D. F. Douglass High School, built on a bluff above the Flint River, was the westernmost building in Montezuma. In Ellaville and Good Hope, black schools were built on inexpensive farmland beyond the city limits. Schools in Americus and Carrollton were built on lots crowded in by cemeteries. Trinity High School in the black Beacon Hill neighborhood in Decatur was sited on ground so low it flooded during moderate rainstorms.

Georgia Desegregates its Public Schools

Brown v. Board of Education, a decision handed down by the United States Supreme Court in 1954, dismantled the legal basis for racial segregation in schools. But it came with no timetable for implementation. Southern states exploited this ambiguity in their efforts to resist racial integration and, between 1954 and 1964, Southern states passed more than 450 laws to circumvent the court's decision. Known as massive resistance, this movement centered on

school segregation but also resurrected emblems of the Confederacy to preserve the so-called “Southern way of life.”[34]

In November 1954, Georgia voters approved an amendment to the state constitution that allowed the governor, then Herman Talmadge, to close down the public school system to avoid integration. Approved six months after the Brown ruling, the law, which was never invoked, provided vouchers for students to attend private schools and permitted the state to withhold funds from any school that allowed white and black children to attend school together.

The state of Georgia, through its equalization schools, attempted to improve black schools but not so much as to upset the status quo among whites. State officials mostly intended to demonstrate to the federal courts that Georgia was in step with the “separate but equal” doctrine, which it had vigorously denied for the previous half century. By 1960, however, it was clear to state leaders in Georgia that massive resistance and modern black schools were not going to put off racial integration.

In 1959, a U.S. District Court judge ruled that Atlanta’s segregated public school system was unconstitutional, and two years later the city began the process of desegregating its schools. The violent protests seen in other cities across the South were avoided in Atlanta, although many white families quietly moved to the suburbs rather than face integrated public schools. By the mid-

1960s, several formerly white schools in Atlanta had become predominantly black. Kirkwood Elementary School re-segregated on the first day of integration in January 1965 when Kirkwood's white faculty and students were transferred to area white schools and were replaced with black teachers and 500 black students. In 1973, the consensus of the federal district court, the Atlanta Public School System, and community leaders was that racially integrated schools in Atlanta were no longer possible because there "simply were not enough whites" left "to go around."[35]

In response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, public school systems in rural Georgia adopted "freedom of choice" plans that allowed students to choose the schools they wished to attend with the result that few black students in any district, facing physical and verbal abuse, elected to attend a white school and almost no white students attended black schools. In Thomasville, city leaders encouraged a few black teachers and students to voluntarily attend white schools to lay the groundwork for future desegregation.[36] This effort did not include white teachers or students attending black schools. The "freedom of choice" plan adopted by Webster County was more typical of the state's rural school systems. In 1969-1970, the south Georgia county's 654 students were taught at two campuses: white elementary students attended Webster Elementary in Preston; black students, who comprised eighty percent of students in the school system, attended Lowery two miles away. Contrary to the goals of "freedom of choice" plans, the county assigned students to schools so that five black students, less

than one percent of blacks in the school system, attended Webster alongside 129 white students; but no white students attended Lowery, which continued to operate as an all-black school.[37] In 1968, the federal courts ruled that "freedom of choice" plans were unconstitutional because they preserved dual race-based school systems.[38] In the 1969-1970 school year, the last eighty-one public school systems in Georgia, facing the loss of federal funds, integrated their schools.

Racial integration of public schools in Georgia resulted in upheaval across the state. Though Brown was decided sixteen years earlier, many whites continued to fight for segregated schools until 1970 and were unprepared for the eventuality of integrated schools. Desegregation was difficult and contentious in every school district and sometimes resulted in violence. In the small town of Cusseta, hours before the bell on the first day of the first integrated school year, arsonists destroyed the town's only school. Within a week, an African-American church was burned to the ground and a tear gas bomb was thrown at a black family's home, in an effort to intimidate blacks in Cusseta from registering for school.[39]

In response to racial desegregation, whites in large numbers left public school systems. In cities and rural counties, white parents formed segregated private academies to avoid racially integrated schools. Between 1967 and 1970, the number of students enrolled in private primary and secondary academies in

Georgia increased fivefold to more than 50,000. Private academies developed into alternative school systems that decreased communitywide participation in public schools. They reduced the number of white students in public schools, especially in counties in south Georgia with majority African-American populations.[40] Americus, in its first year of racially integrated schools, lost much of its white enrollment to newly formed private academies.[41] In nearby Montezuma, whites left the public schools in such large numbers that the black D. F. Douglass High School remained an entirely black school after desegregation in 1970.[42]

African Americans Lose Control of Their Schools

In rural school districts across the state, the process of desegregation exacerbated divisions between white and black communities. Racial animosity surfaced when parents and students perceived they had little control over changes they were being forced to accept. The interests of black communities were often ignored as white school boards accommodated white parents and students by reducing black high schools to middle schools, or closing black schools altogether in favor of white high schools. Douglass High School in Thomasville was reduced to a middle school when Thomasville integrated its public school system in 1970. Excelsior High School in Rochelle was made a middle school when Wilcox County integrated its schools that same year.

Another result of racial integration was that fewer black administrators and teachers were retained in newly desegregated school districts. Principals and teachers were traditionally leaders in the black community.[43] They were college-educated professionals with degrees from black colleges, such as Clark and Morris Brown colleges in Atlanta, Fort Valley State College in Fort Valley, Georgia, and the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Frederick D. Harrold, principal of the John Lewis School in Ellaville from 1936 to 1969, received his bachelor's degree from Morris Brown and later attended New York University and Columbia University.

Principal was the highest position that a black administrator could achieve during segregation. Some black principals were retained as assistant principals in integrated schools, some returned to the classroom, or some were forced out. The principal of Douglass High School in Thomasville was demoted to assistant principal of the white high school and, in Rochelle, the principal of Excelsior High School was made principal of the high school for only one year. Ulysses S. Bias, principal of E. E. Butler, left Gainesville rather than serve as assistant principal in the integrated high school.[44] David Thomas, who taught at Butler and was later principal at Vienna High School, earned his certificate in administration, only to find administrative positions in newly integrated schools difficult to come by. The state "zapped the black principals right quick," explained Thomas. "Over a period of years they almost washed the state clean of black administrators" and "they

didn't want to make any more. . . . The time of integration was the demise of black administrators in the state of Georgia."[45]

Black teachers sometimes found there were not enough classrooms available in desegregated school systems. In Rochelle, only ten of Excelsior's fifty black teachers were retained when Wilcox County desegregated its schools in 1970. The Gainesville City School District was constantly fighting charges that it unfairly dismissed African-American teachers. In the 1966-1967 school year, Gainesville schools employed 115 white and 70 African-American teachers, but in the 1970-1971 school year, the system employed only 22 black teachers, a decrease of 68 percent. The district's hiring practices were even more discriminatory; between 1968 and 1971, the school system hired ninety-nine white and only three black teachers, prompting the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare to advise the school system that "an active recruiting and hiring program is essential to repair the erosion of Negroes in your faculty and staff . . ."[46] Without jobs in the classroom, many teachers moved to new towns to find teaching jobs or chose different professions.

In small communities the integration of public schools resulted in the decline of the black middle class and reduced the overall prosperity of the black community. In rural Georgia, where most black employment was limited to manual labor and domestic help, teachers and principals held some of the highest paying jobs available to African Americans. "We didn't have lawyers,

bankers, architects," explained David Thomas, former principal of Vienna High School. "The most prosperous jobs [for African Americans] in small communities were teachers."[47] With their higher salaries, administrators and teachers supported black businesses and churches, which relied on their weekly donations.[48]

Black communities were further devastated by the closing of equalization schools in favor of white schools. Equalization schools were built to support two school systems, but racial integration resulted in communities having more schools than needed. Faced with the choice, most counties closed their black schools rather than have white children travel to a black neighborhood to attend a formerly black school. DeKalb County closed its eight black schools between 1967 and 1970, less than fifteen years after the groundbreaking and ribbon-cutting ceremonies.[49] The Gainesville Board of Education closed E. E. Butler High School in 1969, just seven years after it opened. The city's black students were bused to the smaller Gainesville High School, which had been built in 1920. "By their actions," writes Winfred A. Pitts, "the white community was, in effect, saying to the black community: Your pride and joy [E. E. Butler] is unacceptable to us. We would rather use our old, dilapidated buildings than go to a new school in the middle of 'nigger town.'"[50]

Black parents and students fought to save their schools with marches, protests, and boycotts. In Glascock County, African-American parents approved

a resolution that read: "We go on record as favoring separate schools for the white and colored races and especially request that our schools be kept separate from the whites and that our children be taught by colored teachers in keeping with the traditions that existed in Glascock County throughout all these years."[51] In April 1969, when DeKalb County announced the closing of Hamilton High School, black students walked out of school to join their parents in a protest march to the county courthouse.[52] "It was everything to us," a former student remarked. "It was the center of the community, its heart and soul."[53]

Blacks had little influence in the process of desegregation, and many black schools were removed from county school systems as white school boards simply closed and vacated schools built for African Americans. The Gainesville City School District mostly ignored the will of the black community when it closed E. E. Butler. "To me it was not equitable," said Linda Hutchens, a 1966 graduate, "we were not consulted; we had very little input. . . . I was in favor of desegregation, but I thought that it would have been more equitable had they used both schools."[54] Former Butler teacher Nathaniel Shelton explained the sense of resignation within the black community: "They [African Americans] didn't like it. Most of them did not want Butler to be closed, but they also knew that was probably what was going to be done anyway. That was the way things usually happened, and they figured that's the way it would be."[55]

The Martin Elementary School in Bronwood operated for only sixteen years before it was closed in 1970 (Figures 18-19). When completed in 1956, the south Georgia school was a dramatic improvement over the earlier substandard schools for blacks in rural Terrell County. The Martin school taught kindergarten through eighth grade and included Bronwood's only library. When the county school board closed the Martin school, Bronwood's students were bused ten miles to a former white elementary school in the next town.

Figure 18. Martin Elementary School in Bronwood, Georgia, was built in 1956 and closed during desegregation in 1970. Photo by James R. Lockhart in 2008. Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Figure 19. The auditorium at the Martin Elementary School held school functions and community events. Photo by James R. Lockhart in 2008. Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

Entire campuses, such as Main High School in Rome, were closed as a result of desegregation. Student enrollment at Main, the only public school for African Americans in Rome, had increased after World War II. Between 1955 and 1963, the school district, determined to maintain racially segregated schools, built six new buildings on the Main High School campus, including a gymnasium, high school, high school annex, elementary school, and two elementary school annexes (Figure 20). But in 1969, when Rome desegregated its public schools, the school district closed Main High School, with its campus of new buildings, and divided its students among the city's previously white high schools.[56]

Figure 20. Main High School in Rome, Georgia, with its campus of modern buildings, was closed and vacated when the city's schools were desegregated in 1969. Photo by James R. Lockhart in 2000. Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

The closing of equalization schools, such as the Martin Elementary School and Main High School, devastated African-American communities. Residents were stripped of the independence and control that came with operating their own schools. Moreover, communities had organized around their schools; their closing resulted in the loss of social and cultural cohesiveness. When the Martin school closed, the black community in Bronwood lost a place to hold school functions and it lost an important institutional organization that planned and coordinated social events in the community. More significantly, without a school, the black community had fewer reasons to gather throughout the year. Main

High School in Rome was the hub of the black community and without it community life was substantially diminished. [57]

Memory was also lost as black schools closed and their students merged into existing white schools, losing many of the activities and artifacts that recalled the history of their schools. Black students lost their school colors, mascots, school songs, newspapers, and yearbooks (Figure 21).[58] A former student of Main High School in Rome described integration as “a way of getting rid of your heritage and being put into somebody else’s heritage.” [59]

Figure 21. Coronation of the homecoming queen at R. L. Cousins High School in Douglasville, Georgia, in 1962. Courtesy of the Douglas County Historical Society.

The state's campaign to build new schools in Georgia in the 1950s, the largest statewide effort undertaken to improve schools, resulted in hundreds of modern African-American schools. In 1949, when the Georgia legislature approved the Minimum Foundations Program in Education, the state sought to improve educational opportunities for all children in Georgia, black and white. Within a few years, the reform program had become the primary means for the state to convince the federal courts of the validity of the "separate, but equal" doctrine. The state constructed over 1,000 new, modern schools across Georgia, including 500 schools for blacks, which appeared as modern as the schools built for white students. Though funding for black education continued to lag behind that spent on whites, equalization schools were a vast improvement over previous black schools. The state, in building new, modern schools, created the illusion of equality, and for two decades blacks built communities around their schools. But school boards, acting in compliance with desegregation mandates, closed or marginalized many of these schools, their students assigned to formerly white schools. Equalization schools, which had provided black communities with a measure of control since the early 1950s, had by 1970 become another casualty of white dominance over black institutions in the last days of Jim Crow in the South.

Endnotes

[1] Portions of this essay were presented at the annual meeting of the Vernacular Architecture Forum in Washington, D.C., in 2010.

[2] See Jennifer V. Opager Baughn, "Education, Segregation, and Modernization: Mississippi's School Equalization Building Program, 1946-1961," ARRIS 16 (2005): 37-55; Charles C. Bolton, "Mississippi's School Equalization Program, 1945-1954: 'A Last Gasp to Try to Maintain a Segregated Educational System,'" The Journal of Southern History 61 (November 2000): 781-814; and Rebekah Dobrasko, "Equalization Schools in South Carolina, 1951-1959," February 2008. State Historic Preservation Office, South Carolina Division of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[3] See George D. Strayer, N. L. Engelhardt, and E. S. Evenden, Report of the Survey of the Public School System of Atlanta, Georgia: School Year 1921-1922 (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1922); and Ray and Associates, Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in Georgia, 1868-1971 (National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 2005). On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia

[4] DeKalb News Era, February 28, 1946.

[5] Mary S. Hoffschwelle, The Rosenwald Schools of the American South (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 2006), 128-131.

[6] Ibid., 221.

[7] Jeanne Cyriaque, Keith Hebert, and Steven Moffson, Rosenwald Schools in Georgia, 1912-1937 (National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 2009): 12. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

[8] Thomas V. O'Brien, "Georgia's Response to Brown v. Board of Education: The Rise and Fall of Massive Resistance, 1949-1961." (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Atlanta, Georgia, 1993), 3.

[9] Ibid., 18. State funds for schools were supplemented by federal funds and local bond issues. Georgia Department of Education, Annual Reports of the Department of Education to the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, (1954), 7 and 37, Record Group 12-2-29, Box 10, Georgia Division of Archives and History, Morrow, Georgia.

[10] Neither "equalization" nor "equalize" appear in annual reports of the Department of Education to describe new schools for African Americans.

[11] Annual Reports of the Department of Education (1952): 84-89.

[12] Oscar H. Joiner, ed., A History of Public Education in Georgia, 1734-1976 (Columbia, S.C.: R.L. Bryan Company, 1979), 417.

[13] Ibid., 416-417.

[14] Annual Reports of the Department of Education (1958): 7.

[15] Annual Reports of the Department of Education (1954): 37; Annual Reports of the Department of Education (1959): 24.

[16] "New Type Bond Set for Bow this Week," New York Times, September 7, 1952, 1.

[17] "Better School for the South," Architectural Forum 94 (April 1951): 161-163; In 1952, Stevens and Wilkinson received the American Institute of Architects' South Atlantic District Citation for the design of E. Rivers School.

[18] "Better School," 162; and Stevens and Wilkinson, Selected Works (Atlanta), [1958], 96.

[19] "Better School," 162.

[20] Annual Reports of the Department of Education (1952): 22.

[21] "Finch Alexander Barnes Rothschild and Pascal: Architects, Engineers, Interior Designers." Promotional brochure [n.d]; and "Personal Qualifications—David S. Cuttino, Jr., [n.d.], Georgia Architects Files. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

[22] Preston Standish Stevens, Building a Firm: The Story of Stevens and Wilkinson, Architects, Engineers, Planners Inc. (Atlanta), [1979], 36; "Stevens and Wilkinson Education Projects," Unpublished project list, 1951-1969 on file at Stevens and Wilkinson, Atlanta, Georgia.

[23] Stevens and Wilkinson, Selected Works, 96

[24] American School Buildings: Twenty-Seventh Yearbook. (Washington, D.C.: American Association of School Administrators, 1949), 227-228; Glass-curtain walls often produced classrooms that were too hot in summer and too cold in winter. This was apparent to the principal at E. Rivers School in 1951 and is the reason that so few glass-curtain walls survive mid-twentieth-century schools in Georgia. "Better School," 162.

[25] Designed by Atlanta architect Richard L. Aeck and completed in 1954.

[26] Sidney B. Horne, "Quarter Century of Education in the DeKalb School System, 1947-1972." (Decatur, Georgia: DeKalb County School System, 1972), 40-42, 47, and 52.

[27] Ibid., 18.

[28] Ibid., 32.

[29] Ibid., 167-178.

[30] Winfed E. Pitts, A Victory of Sorts: Desegregation in a Southern Community (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2003), 129-130.

[31] Ibid., 130. Also see Vanessa Siddle Walker, Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Black Leadership in the Segregated South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

[32] The African-American New Farmers of America merged with Future Farmers of America in 1965.

[33] Greg Allen. Interview with author. Gainesville, Ga., January 15, 2010; African Americans in some school districts interpreted the substantial renovations to prepare former black schools for integration as tacit acknowledgement of the inadequacy of black school facilities. See Pitts, 173.

[34] Jeff Roche, Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia. (Athens, Georgia.: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 29-30.

[35] Alton Hornsby, Jr., "Black Public Education in Atlanta, Georgia, 1954-1973: From Segregation to Segregation," The Journal of Negro History 76 (Winter-Autumn 1991): 31, 38-40.

[36] Jack Hadley. Telephone interview with author. April 13, 2009.

[37] U.S. v. The Board of Education of Webster County, Georgia, et. al., 439 F. 2nd 59 (1970).

[38] Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, 391 U.S. 430 (1968).

[39] "Arson Suspected in Cusseta Blaze," Columbus Ledger, August 30, 1969, 2; "Cusseta Residents Scared; Suspect Arson Caused Fires," Columbus Ledger, August 31, 1969, 1; and "Tear Gas Bomb Tossed into Cusseta Dwelling," Columbus Ledger, September 1, 1969, 1.

[40] Anthony M. Champagne, "The Segregation Academy and the Law," The Journal of Negro Education 42 (Winter 1973): 59.

[41] William Bailey Williford, Americus Through the Years: The Story of A Georgia Town and Its People, 1832-1975 (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1975), 401-402.

[42] Mazerina Allen. Interview with author. Montezuma, Georgia, June 25, 2010.

[43] Hadley interview.

[44] David Thomas. Interview with author. Vienna, Georgia, July 13, 2010.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Pitts, 164-165.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Horne, 167-169.

[50] Pitts, 171.

[51] "Negroes in Georgia Favor Segregation," The Washington Post, May 19, 1954, 7.

[52] "Amid the Battle, School Flourished," Atlanta Journal-Constitution, May 16, 2004, 1.

[53] "Historic Hamilton High, Community Seeks State Marker for Cultural Landmark," Champion Free Press, July 27, 2007, 1.

[54] Pitts, 170.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Steven Moffson, Main High School (National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, 1999): 11-12. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

[57] Rufus Turner. Interview with author. Rome, Georgia, January 26, 2010.

[58] Pitts, 178.

[59] Turner interview.