

Clinical Technique, Tacit Resistance: Progressive Education Experimentation in the Jim Crow South

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Around 1940, the Southern Association Study in Secondary Schools and Colleges and the Secondary School Study of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes implemented cooperative educational experimentation in the American South. This was a progressive education method for improving schools exemplified in the national Eight-Year Study. The research detailed here reconstructs the work of the two southern studies as it occurred in tandem and in connection with the Eight-Year Study and the General Education Board. The white Southern Study utilized the progressive cooperative study as a clinical technique largely divorced from democratic ideals. The black Secondary School Study leveraged the progressive cooperative study as a means to democratize African American education in the South. The findings reported here confirm and complement conclusions in the historiography of African American education, extend historical perspectives on the Eight-Year Study, and contribute to an understanding of how progressive education was interpreted and translated into practice.

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, two large-scale school improvement projects occurred in the American South: the Southern Association Study in Secondary Schools and Colleges (also called the Southern Study), which involved thirty-three white high schools; and the Secondary School Study of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes (also known as the Secondary School Study), which involved seventeen black high schools. These projects sought to implement in the South cooperative educational experimentation, a progressive education practice exemplified in the Eight-Year Study. This study, sponsored by the Progressive Education Association (PEA) during the 1930s, was a national curriculum reform

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effort that utilized a localized, participatory, problem-solving approach to school improvement. Although William A. Robinson, the director of the black Secondary School Study, wanted the work of the white and black cooperative studies to be regarded “as one story of the region,” the two studies published separate reports. While the Secondary School Study report acknowledged assistance from the white Southern Study, the latter did not even mention its regional counterpart.¹

Examining the two southern cooperative studies can contribute to historical understanding of progressive education in three ways. First, while previous research typically focused on the Secondary School Study, this paper describes that study and the Southern Study in tandem as they occurred. It presents them as regional expressions of a quintessential progressive education approach to reform that was underwritten by the General Education Board (GEB), which had supported school improvement in the South for decades. Second, historians have found that despite the inequality of educational opportunity in the Jim Crow South, African American educators sought to promote equality and even political opportunity by seeking academic excellence in black schools. The present research confirms these findings and suggests that the aim of the Secondary School Study’s leadership—to promote democratic forms of living for black educators and students—can be understood as an additional vehicle for resisting white supremacy and black disenfranchisement. Third, given the substantive staff involvement from the Eight-Year Study in the two southern studies, the findings reported here suggest that a more robust understanding of the Eight-Year Study is warranted.

Intersecting Historiographical Contexts

Three historiographical streams converge in the two southern studies: analyses of the southern studies themselves, of African American education, and of the Eight-Year Study and cooperative educational experimentation.

Although historians initially acknowledged the Southern Study and the Secondary School Study, despite their scope, they have a limited presence in contemporary history of education and curriculum history scholarship,² with the exception of a few studies that focus

¹W. A. Robinson to F. C. Jenkins, Sept. 8, 1942, folder 4090, box 391, series 1.3, General Education Board (hereafter cited as GEB Records), Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

²W. Carson Ryan, J. Minor Gwynn, and Arnold K. King, eds., *Secondary Education in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946); Edgar W. Knight,

on the Secondary School Study.³ Most recently, Craig Kridel placed his reconstruction of the Secondary School Study in the context of cooperative studies of the 1930s, indicated its connection with the Eight-Year Study, and, in a nuanced analysis, identified both progressive and accommodationist practices in participating schools.⁴ This paper aims to complement this body of research by providing a comprehensive account of the dynamics of progressive education reform in both black and white high schools in the South.

The Secondary School Study should also be understood in the context of the historiography of the education of African Americans. Historians have found that, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, northern philanthropists tended to support educational programs for southern blacks that provided forms of industrial education that would fit blacks into the existing industrial economy.

Fifty Years of American Education: A Historical Review and Critical Appraisal (New York: Ronald Press, 1952), 113; Stuart Grayson Noble, *A History of American Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1954), 458; Edward A. Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School, 1920–1940* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), 266; Henry A. Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South from 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner, *American Education: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Knopf, 1962); Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reform* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893–1958* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); and Daniel Tanner and Laurel Tanner, *History of the School Curriculum* (New York: Macmillan, 1990).

³Cynthia Gibson Hardy, "A Historical Review of the Secondary School Study of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes, 1940–1946" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1977); Ronald K. Goodenow, "The Progressive Educator, Race, and Ethnicity in the Depression Years: An Overview," *History of Education Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (Winter 1975), 379; Ronald K. Goodenow, "Separate and Unequal Progressive Education: A Southern Case Study," in *Education and the Rise of the New South*, ed. Ronald K. Goodenow and Arthur O. White (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1981), 207; Melanie Carter, "From Jim Crow to Inclusion: An Historical Analysis of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes, 1934–1965" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1996), 139; and Sharon Gay Pierson, *Laboratory of Learning: HBCU Laboratory Schools and Alabama State College Lab High in the Era of Jim Crow* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 71, 76–77.

⁴Craig Kridel, *Progressive Education in Black High Schools: The Secondary School Study, 1940–1946* (Columbia: Museum of Education, University of South Carolina, 2015), vii, 9, 10, 11, 15, 99; Craig Kridel, "Progressive Education in the Black High School: The General Education Board's Black High School Study, 1940–1948," Research Report for the Rockefeller Archive Center, 2013, <http://rockarch.org/publications/resrep/kridel2.pdf>; and Craig Kridel, "Explorations and Responsibilities: Advocacy Research and the Black High School Study, 1940–1948," *Professing Education* 9, no. 2 (2014), 4–11.

Referring to schools that provided only industrial training, James Anderson maintained that the “intended purpose of these schools was to make black children think and feel that traditional, high-quality academic education was incongruent with their station in life.”⁵ Joan Malczewski argued that northern foundations effectively were engaging in a form of state-building. Such northern philanthropic efforts sought to appease southern whites, who opposed any kind of educational advancement for blacks, by supporting education for blacks that was within the horizon of acceptance for whites. This included preempting white criticism of support for black education by simultaneously supporting the development of education for southern whites.⁶

Historians have also demonstrated that African American educators pursued academic excellence even as the prospect that schools, never mind the wider society, would be integrated seemed impossibly remote, and considered such efforts an act of resistance in and of itself. Anderson found that, contrary to the industrial education agenda that northern philanthropists had for southern black schools, black high schools often provided instruction in traditional academic, college preparatory subjects. Subsequent research on African American schooling in North Carolina, Philadelphia, and Georgia similarly found commitment to providing black students opportunities to pursue academic excellence. As James Leloudis concluded in the case of North Carolina, African American educators “searched the crevices of white supremacy for every opportunity for black power and self-determination,” which included offering literary studies alongside industrial training. As a result of such findings, Leloudis concluded that black schools “served as vital bridges between the freedom struggles of the late nineteenth century and those of the mid-twentieth.”⁷

⁵James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 147.

⁶Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss Jr., *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902–1930* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 7, 9, 11; and Joan Malczewski, *Building a New Educational State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁷Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 134, 198–99; Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 35–36; Sarah Caroline Thuesen, *Greater than Equal: African American Struggles for Schools and Citizenship in North Carolina, 1919–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 51, 73, 76, 86–87; Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900–1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 181; Patrice Preston-Grimes, “Teaching Democracy Before Brown: Civic Education in Georgia’s African American Schools, 1930–1954,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 35,

This paper demonstrates that the work of the Secondary School Study reflected not only these earlier findings, but also a commitment to using education reform as an opportunity to engage black teachers and students in democratic forms of living.

As regional iterations of the national Eight-Year Study, the two southern studies should be understood in relation not only to the Eight-Year Study, but also as examples of cooperative educational experimentation prevalent during the 1930s and the 1940s. With the exception of Kridel's work, contemporary historians tend to overlook the widespread cooperative educational experiments of the 1930s, at best treating the Eight-Year Study as a stand-alone initiative. And although some historians present sympathetic representations of the Eight-Year Study,⁸ most tend to treat it with more contempt than sympathy by, for example, dismissively depicting its core curriculum programs,⁹ soft-pedaling the study's results,¹⁰ affording it little attention,¹¹ or simply ignoring it.¹² They characterized the study's improvement procedure as a production model and the work in the participating schools as "child-centered."¹³ This paper suggests that, given the Eight-Year Study's assistance to the two southern studies, the Eight-Year Study must be understood in connection to the southern studies.

no. 1 (Winter 2007), 9–31; Patrice Preston-Grimes, "Fulfilling the Promise: African American Educators Teach for Democracy in Jim Crow's South," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 35–52; and James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 181, 200, 228.

⁸ Cremin, *Transformation of the School*, 250, 333, 343; Tanner and Tanner, *History of the School Curriculum*, 227–35; and Craig A. Kridel and Robert V. Bullough Jr., *Stories of the Eight-Year Study: Reexamining Secondary Education in America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

⁹ Krug, *Shaping of the American High School*, 266–67; Edward A. Krug, *Curriculum Planning* (New York: Harper, 1950), 264–65, 282–83; Kliebard, *Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 219; and Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 243.

¹⁰ Krug, *Shaping of the American High School*, 260; Kliebard, *Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 222; Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 243; and Ravitch, *Left Back*, 281–82.

¹¹ Jürgen Herbst, *The Once and Future School: Three Hundred and Fifty Years of American Secondary Education* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 160–61; Ravitch, *Left Back*, 281–82; and Reese, *America's Public Schools*, 308.

¹² Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985); and David L. Angus and Jeffrey E. Mirel, *The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890–1995* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).

¹³ Kliebard, *Struggle for the American Curriculum*, 221; and Urban and Wagoner, *American Education*, 242.

Historical Contexts

During the 1930s and 1940s, social and economic conditions in the South did not support a robust system of education. The region remained the most rural section of the country and, despite some industry, its economy was predominantly agricultural. Journalist John Egerton observed, “Compared to Americans in the East, the Midwest, and the West, Southerners in 1940 were still the poorest, the sickest, the worst housed and clothed and fed, the most violent, the least educated, the least skilled, the most lacking in latitude and power.”¹⁴ Unemployment among whites, and especially among blacks, was high. Though blacks had been migrating out of the region for decades, in 1945 more than two-thirds of blacks in the US lived in the South; in 1945, about 70 percent of southern blacks lived in poverty.¹⁵

Any educational work in the American South during the 1930s and 1940s occurred under the heel of the Jim Crow ideology of de jure segregation, white supremacy, and racial subordination. Major “elements” of southern culture, including an agrarian social order, the importance of traditional culture, and a caste system based upon racial hatred, engendered an inherent mistrust of “progress” and of progressive efforts for change. Although southern educators had begun to embrace selected aspects of progressive education in the 1920s in attempts to modernize school systems, notably through developing statewide curriculum programs, the wider social and political reality nevertheless induced apprehension among white educators toward progressive education.¹⁶

Moreover, the constant threat of white violence that black southerners faced is difficult to overstate. Although “social, interracial violence” in the US had never been limited to the South, historically it was most prevalent there. White riot violence occurred against individual blacks and black communities, and although the number of lynchings declined during the 1930s and 1940s, most occurred in the

¹⁴John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 206.

¹⁵David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18–19; and James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 23.

¹⁶John Hardin Best, “Education in the Forming of the South,” in *Essays in Twentieth-Century Southern Education*, ed. Wayne J. Urban (New York: Garland, 1999), 3–18; Ronald K. Goodenow, “Paradox in Progressive Educational Reform: The South and the Education of Blacks in the Depression Years,” *Phylon* 39, no. 1 (March 1978), 50; and Doak S. Campbell and Milton W. Carothers, “State-wide Curriculum Revision and the Development of Workshops for Teachers,” *The High School Journal* 28, no. 3 (May 1945), 155–64.

South, with its victims more often black than white. Southern blacks faced an almost daily threat of violence from whites for baseless motives and rarely with any consequences for white assailants. During World War II, interracial violence occurred at military camps around the country, but mostly in the South. The end of the war brought a rash of racial violence in the South. Coupled with southern whites' mistrust of "progress," this prevailing politically hostile and pathologically violent climate makes the endeavors of some of the white, but especially of the black, educators who participated in these progressive school reform projects, remarkable.¹⁷

Although the educational condition at this time for southern whites overall did not compare favorably to the quality of education available in most other parts of the country, conditions in African American schools in the South were relatively and absolutely atrocious. Compared to other regions, per-pupil expenditures were low for southern whites, and even lower for southern blacks.¹⁸ A contemporary analysis concluded that in 1943–44 "high schools for white pupils are enrolling only 53.2 per cent of the expected number [of white adolescents] and the segregated [black] schools only 26.8 per cent" of black adolescents. Completion rates were similarly low.¹⁹ Recent historical analyses have documented deplorable conditions in African American schools in the South during the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰ Such conditions presented often insurmountable obstacles, not only to achieving the kinds of academic excellence for African American students that their teachers frequently sought, but also even to simply implementing new state curricula.

The 1920s and 1930s comprised an era of curriculum innovation in secondary education in the United States. To accommodate the

¹⁷Allen D. Grimshaw, "Lawlessness and Violence in America and Their Special Manifestations in Changing Negro-White Relationships," in *Racial Violence in the United States*, ed. Allen D. Grimshaw (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 15, 26–27; Jesse Parkhurst Guzman, "Lynching," in Grimshaw, *Racial Violence in the United States*, 56–59; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Laura Wexler, *Fire in a Canebreak: The Last Mass Lynching in America* (New York: Scribner, 2003); Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 365–66.

¹⁸Ellis O. Knox, "The Origin and Development of the Negro Separate School," *Journal of Negro Education* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1947), 276.

¹⁹Walter G. Daniel, "Availability of Education for Negroes in the Secondary School," *Journal of Negro Education* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1947), 451.

²⁰Michael Fultz, "African American Teachers in the South, 1890–1940: Powerlessness and the Ironies of Expectations and Protest," *History of Education Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1995), 402, 403, 404.

increasing diversity of the high school population caused by expanding secondary enrollments, the conventional practice of adopting the textbook as the curriculum was supplemented with new approaches to curriculum development, including activity analysis, the project method, planning by objective, and system- and statewide curriculum construction.²¹ One approach to curriculum improvement that emerged at this time was known as the “cooperative educational experiment,” or the “cooperative study,” which Robert Havighurst defined as “a cooperative experiment ... in which a group of schools, colleges, or other agencies work together on a task, sharing responsibility for planning their work, and sharing certain common services such as assistance on problems of curriculum or evaluation.”²² Anywhere from six to ten occurred around the country; the PEA’s Eight-Year Study was the most well known of these initiatives.

Of the approximately thirty secondary schools that participated in the Eight-Year Study, none were in the South, though nearly all other regions of the US were represented. Neither published reports nor archival material about the Eight-Year Study have revealed the reasons for the lack of participation of southern schools. According to Ralph Tyler, however, who directed the evaluation component of the Eight-Year Study, “The Southern Association would have nothing to do with the progressives of the PEA because they were thought to be too radical. So the Southern Association had its own study.”²³ The Southern Study and the Secondary School Study were designed to reproduce in the South what the Eight-Year Study implemented nationally.

Organization of the Southern Studies

The story of the two southern studies effectively began with the establishment of two segregated accrediting agencies for white and black high schools in the South. The Southern Association of Colleges and

²¹Hollis L. Caswell, “Emergence of the Curriculum as a Field of Professional Work and Study,” in *Precedents and Promise in the Curriculum Field*, ed. H. F. Robinson (New York: Teachers College Press, 1966), 1–11; and Arno A. Bellack, “History of Curriculum Thought and Practice,” *Review of Educational Research* 39, no. 3 (June 1969), 283–92.

²²Robert J. Havighurst, “Assistance Given to Cooperative Educational Experiments by Foundations,” *Educational Method* 20, no. 6 (March 1941), 331.

²³See Max McConn, “Freeing the Secondary School for Experimentation,” *Progressive Education* 10, no. 7 (Nov. 1933), 367–72; and Ralph W. Tyler, Carl Tjerandsen and Malca Chall, *Education: Curriculum Development and Evaluation: An Oral History Transcript, 1985–1987* (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, 1987), 64.

Secondary Schools (SACS), known as the Southern Association, was founded in 1895, but did not begin to review black high schools, through a special committee, until 1931. And although the Southern Association would evaluate and “approve” black high schools, it would not designate them “accredited,” thus excluding them from its membership. In response to the Southern Association’s neglect of black schools, in 1934 black educators established the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes (ACSSN) “to develop the colleges and secondary schools for Negroes and to maintain helpful relations between them,” as the association’s constitution stipulated.²⁴

Within a year of its founding in 1935, SACS’s Commission on Curricular Problems and Research had endorsed a cooperative study, appointed Frank C. Jenkins as director, and begun groundwork. During the spring of 1937, it contacted the GEB, which had supported the Eight-Year Study, to express interest in funding the project.²⁵ When K. J. Hoke, chair of the Commission, expressed SACS’s intention to apply for funding, Leo Favrot of the GEB suggested to Hoke that the proposed SACS study include two black high schools from the southern region. According to Favrot, Hoke responded by suggesting that the ACSSN leadership contact him to request including black schools in the white study.²⁶ Although the GEB did not pursue this matter further, it did facilitate communication between the two studies. In May 1937, the GEB appropriated \$10,000 to SACS to support a one-year exploratory study to plan the project and to prepare a grant proposal.²⁷

During the spring and summer of 1937, the Commission invited white secondary schools to apply to participate in the study. Taking a cue from the Eight-Year Study that participating schools should be selected carefully, the Southern Study established thirteen criteria that each applying school should meet. In addition to reviewing the proposed plans that each applying school submitted, Jenkins conducted a site visit at each, accompanied by a member of the state steering committee.²⁸ Ultimately, seventy-eight schools applied and

²⁴Leland Stanford Cozart, *A History of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, 1934–1965* (Charlotte, NC: Heritage Printers, 1967), 9, 12, 6.

²⁵L. Frazer Banks, “Report on the Problems and Procedures of the Commission,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (May 1938), 269; and “Minutes of Meetings, Dec. 1–2, 1936, Commission on Curricular Studies and Research,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 1937), 139.

²⁶Leo Favrot to Fred McCuistion, March 5, 1937, folder 4994, box 468, series 1.3, GEB Records.

²⁷Resolution I-3040, Minutes, July 21, 1937, General Education Board, box 26, vol. 1937, 37113, series 3, GEB Records.

²⁸Frank C. Jenkins, “Report on Exploratory Study,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (May 1938), 272.

thirty-three were accepted, three from each state in the southern region (see Appendix A).²⁹

To orient the SACS Commission to the method of a cooperative study, the GEB invited members of the Commission's Executive Committee to a Conference on Secondary Education in the South, held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in October 1937. Eight-Year Study staffers Wilford Aikin, V. T. Thayer, Alice Keliher, and Ralph Tyler described aspects of their work to these southern educators. These presentations impressed upon the SACS representatives the need to select schools carefully; to use evaluation in a participatory, ongoing fashion; to focus on the local needs of teachers and pupils; and to have schools identify their own problems and develop their own solutions.³⁰

On April 7, 1938, the GEB appropriated \$72,000 to SACS to support a cooperative study for three years beginning July 1, 1938. Applying a lesson from the Eight-Year Study about the need for participating schools to begin preparations earlier, Jenkins organized a six-week planning conference at Vanderbilt University during the summer of 1938.³¹ One hundred and forty-three teachers and principals, representing thirty-one schools selected to that point, attended as teams consisting of three teachers and the superintendent or high school principal. Jenkins provided an overview of the study and an orientation to the pending conference activities, and Tyler discussed the evaluation component of the Eight-Year Study.³² Teachers and administrators studied local problems through a variety of group activities.³³

²⁹Frank C. Jenkins, Druzilla C. Kent, Verner M. Sims, Eugene A. Waters, and Southern Association Study in Secondary Schools and Colleges, *Cooperative Study for the Improvement of Education: A Staff Report of the Southern Association Study in Secondary Schools and Colleges* (Birmingham, AL: Commission on Curricular Problems and Research, Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, 1946), 12.

³⁰"Conference on Secondary Education in the South: Summary of Meetings of Conference Called by General Education Board in Atlantic City, NJ, Oct. 7, 8, 9, 1937," *Minutes of the Executive Committee for the Years 1936–1941 Inclusive*, Commission on Curricular Problems and Research, folder 12, box 10, series 1, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Records, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA (hereafter cited as SACS Records).

³¹Frank C. Jenkins, *The Southern Association Study: A Report of the Work with the Thirty-Three Cooperating Secondary Schools* (Nashville, TN: Commission on Curricular Problems and Research of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, 1941), 11.

³²Jenkins et al., *Cooperative Study for the Improvement of Education*, 51.

³³Jenkins, *Southern Association Study*, 15.

When the ACSSN's Commission on Secondary Schools learned in December 1937 that the white Southern Association would possibly embark on an externally funded cooperative study for white high schools, the ACSSN promptly endorsed the participation of black schools in the Southern Study.³⁴ Robinson communicated this commitment to Hoke of SACS, as Hoke had suggested the ACSSN do to Favrot of the GEB. Yet, by July 1938, Robinson had received no reply from Hoke. Favrot's explanation to Robinson for this was "that since participating secondary schools in the Southern experiment now in progress was restricted to actual members of the Association, it was probably impossible for Dr. Hoke's Commission to include Negro secondary schools in that experiment." Favrot conveyed to Robinson, however, that SACS had expressed interest in assisting in a separate study for black high schools.³⁵ Favrot arranged for Robinson to attend the Eight-Year Study summer conference in 1938 at Sarah Lawrence College, which Jenkins, director of the Southern Study, also attended. Through Favrot, Robinson invited Jenkins to a meeting of the Commission on Secondary Schools of the ACSSN at Atlanta University, a black institution, to discuss possible assistance from SACS.³⁶

On November 4, 1938, the ACSSN's Commission on Secondary Schools met at Atlanta University with Jenkins in attendance. The Commission's Executive Committee stated that the Commission was agreeable either to the participation of black schools in the Southern Study or to conducting a separate cooperative study for black high schools. However, "following a communication from an official of the Southern Association to the effect that it had not seemed best for all concerned that Negro schools be included in the Southern Association Study," the ACSSN Commission resolved to develop plans for a separate study.³⁷ At this meeting, after Robinson's report on the Commission on Secondary Schools' work, Tyler presented an overview of the Eight-Year Study's activities, and Jenkins described the Southern Study's work to date. After a discussion of these two presentations led by Robinson, Eight-Year Study staff member Hilda

³⁴ Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes, *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes*, New Orleans, Dec. 1937, 35.

³⁵ Interview: Principal W. A. Robinson (Negro)," July 14, 1938, Favrot Diaries, 1937–39, series 12, GEB Records.

³⁶ Leo Favrot to Frank C. Jenkins, Oct. 21, 1938, folder 4087, box 390, series 1.3, GEB Records.

³⁷ William A. Robinson, "Report of the Commission on Secondary Schools," *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes*, Tallahassee, FL, Dec. 1938 (np: The Association, 1939), 81.

Taba described major areas of emphasis in the work of the schools participating in the Eight-Year Study.³⁸

On June 3, 1939, the ACSSN submitted a request to the GEB for preliminary funding for a one-year exploratory period. Apparently responding to concerns that SACS had laid the groundwork and that the ACSSN study would involve fewer schools, the ACSSN revised its proposal for an exploratory period from one year to six months. By this time, Jenkins was identified as a member of the Control Committee of the Secondary School Study.³⁹ In December 1939, the GEB appropriated \$5,240 to the ACSSN for a six-month exploratory period.⁴⁰ Minutes record that the Executive Committee of the SACS Commission “expressed its desire to cooperate fully with the Negro Secondary School Study now underway in the South.”⁴¹ Robinson served as the director of the Secondary School Study from 1940 to 1945, with his associate director, William H. Brown, assuming the directorship for the study’s final year of 1945–1946. The six-month exploratory period was devoted to selecting participating schools and to organizing a planning conference. The State Agents for Negro Schools in the region nominated candidate schools for consideration; ultimately, the study staff selected sixteen participating schools (see Appendix B).

During the 1938–1939 school year, teachers and administrators in the Southern Study returned to their schools to enact the improvement plans they had devised at the Vanderbilt conference. Common “departures” from conventional practice involved “enriching subjects already being taught,” better efforts “to meet the needs of particular pupils,” and steps to correlate subject content.⁴² The following summer, the University of North Carolina hosted 205 participants from the thirty-three schools, who were assisted by twenty-one staff members from white schools and colleges in the South. Problem areas

³⁸Ralph W. Tyler, “Studies in Progressive Education and the Direction They Are Taking,” *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes*, 83–86; Frank C. Jenkins, “The Southern Association Study of Secondary Schools and Colleges,” *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes*, 93–99; and Hilda Taba, “The Philosophy of the Eight Year Study,” *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes*, 87–92.

³⁹Rufus Clement to Fred McCuistion, Oct. 18, 1939, folder 4087, box 390, series 1.3, GEB Records.

⁴⁰“Grant In Aid—Southern Program—Negro,” Dec. 18, 1939, folder 4087, box 390, series 1.3, GEB Records.

⁴¹Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Commission on Curricular Problems and Research of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, Feb. 2, 3, 1940, 4, SACS Records.

⁴²Jenkins, *Southern Association Study*, 18.

examined included developing new teaching techniques, revising existing courses and developing new courses, improving guidance and assessment practices, organizing the whole curriculum, and establishing constructive relations with the local community. Participants worked in their school group on the specific problems their school faced.⁴³

During the 1939–1940 school year, educators in the Southern Study continued work on “developing programs which are becoming an integral part of community life,” placing “emphasis upon content directly related to the experiences and concerns of pupils,” and attending to students’ individual differences. New areas of work included increased attention to developing “critical thinking, group cooperation, independence in study, and mastery of essentials.” Staffers continued to work with teachers and administrators in the schools on developing curriculum and instruction and on “the improvement of records and reports” and “the use of evaluation instruments.”⁴⁴ In short, participating schools sought to implement a range of improvements designed to address their local needs.

Meanwhile, April 24–27, 1940, the Secondary School Study held a planning conference at Fisk University to organize the overall study. Representatives from participating schools collaboratively generated six goals for the study and identified twenty-two tentative problems to guide their local improvement work. These included ways to relate academic subject matter to the needs of students and the community, relate the school to the local community, establish democratic processes in the classroom and the schools, obtain effective teaching materials, evaluate learning, and select and develop teachers.⁴⁵

Over a six-week period ending in mid-July 1940 at Atlanta University, working with a staff of five, the principal and two teachers from each of the sixteen schools developed plans for improving their local school during the 1940–41 school year,⁴⁶ including procedures to implement recently created statewide curriculum guidelines, establish “school-wide programs,” and reorganize subject matter.⁴⁷ During the 1940–41 school year, member schools implemented plans to improve reading instruction by acquiring new audiovisual equipment, to revise

⁴³Jenkins, *Southern Association Study*, 22–29.

⁴⁴Jenkins, *Southern Association Study*, 31, 30, 31, 32.

⁴⁵William A. Robinson, “A Co-operative Effort Among Southern Negro High Schools,” *School Review* 52, no. 2 (Nov. 1944), 534–35.

⁴⁶William A. Robinson, “A New Era for Negro Schools,” *Progressive Education* 17, no. 8 (Dec. 1940), 565.

⁴⁷William H. Brown and William A. Robinson, *Serving Negro Schools* (Atlanta: Association of Schools and Colleges for Negroes, 1946), 33–34; and Robinson, “A Co-operative Effort,” 535.

testing procedures, to rearrange library space, and to improve communication skills across all subjects. They sought to improve curriculum and instruction in math, science, and social studies by working with study consultants and visiting other schools to examine their practices. One school conducted a “school-community survey” to identify ways in which the school curriculum could address community needs, such as improving health conditions as well as math skills for local businesses. Supplementing insufficient library resources was a common upgrade member schools made. The study’s central staff also created a library of professional books that circulated among the member schools based upon faculty needs.⁴⁸

Following a preliminary planning meeting in spring 1940, the summer conference for the Southern Study took place between July 17 and August 20 at Eastern Kentucky State Teachers College in Richmond, Kentucky. Problems addressed at the Richmond conference included evaluating revisions enacted thus far and identifying appropriate next steps; improving school schedules, school records, and parent reports; generating usable scope and sequence charts; developing core programs; designing experiences for targeted groups of students; and reorganizing subject-specific programs. The Southern Study staff consultants not only provided technical assistance but also facilitated relationships between participants.⁴⁹

Improvements pursued in schools in the Southern Study during the 1940–41 school year entailed continuing projects previously initiated as well as new lines of work. These included collaborative development between teachers and students of a “city-wide recreation program”; collaborative development between teachers and parents of cooperative plans “for correcting specific weaknesses in pupils”; and revising the schedule in one participating school “around interest groupings of pupils rather than in terms of grade levels or subject groupings.” Although teachers became increasingly involved in planning such work, staff also found that some teachers did not seem to appreciate the nature of the whole study and identified administrators as a significant barrier to teachers’ improvement efforts.⁵⁰ As local work intensified, in 1941 about half of the participating schools sent representatives to a summertime “central conference” at Georgia State College for Women in Milledgeville, Georgia; the other half attended workshops or studied at universities, held their own joint conference, or held “preschool” conferences locally.⁵¹

⁴⁸Brown and Robinson, *Serving Negro Schools*, 36–37, 38, 39–40, 36.

⁴⁹Jenkins, *Southern Association Study*, 33, 36–38.

⁵⁰Jenkins, *Southern Association Study*, 40, 43, 44.

⁵¹Jenkins et al., *Cooperative Study for the Improvement of Education*, 54–55, 57–58.

As for supporting the Secondary School Study, at its September 1940 meeting, the SACS Executive Committee reaffirmed its position that it was “heartily in favor of giving all support to this study among Negro schools” and prepared to dedicate \$5,500 to support such assistance.⁵² By the time the Executive Committee met in November 1940, a staff member from the Southern Study had contacted Robinson to initiate such assistance.⁵³ In December 1940, the GEB appropriated \$70,000 to SACS for a four-year period beginning June 1, 1941, for work on the Southern Study, including \$2,500 to support the Secondary School Study.⁵⁴ By January 1941, staff from the Southern Study were working with some of the schools in the Secondary School Study.⁵⁵ So although SACS refused to include black high schools in its study, it did direct funding to the black Secondary Study as the GEB required; the white study also provided some support to the black study through the service of its director and some consultants. In effect, the Southern Study appeased the GEB while maintaining segregated schooling.

The GEB used funding to facilitate cooperation between the two southern studies and the Eight-Year Study, as well as with other school reform initiatives at northern universities. Cooperation between the studies included Jenkins and Robinson conferring about how the Southern Study experience could inform the Secondary School Study, dedicating part of the Southern Study budget to its black counterpart, consultants from the Southern Study working with educators in the Secondary School Study schools, interactions between black and white participating schools in Moultrie, Georgia, and teachers from both studies participating in a Stanford civics workshop. Materials of some kind were shared as well. Unpublished archival documents reveal some of this collaboration, as when Robinson wrote to Fred McCuiston of the GEB, “Dr. Jenkins has given the Secondary School Study very effective cooperation” despite the “loss of personnel to the armed forces,”⁵⁶ and when the GEB minutes recorded “the

⁵²Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Commission on Curricular Problems and Research of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, Sept. 2, 3, 1940, 8, SACS Records.

⁵³Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Commission on Curricular Problems and Research of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, Nov. 6, 7, 1940, 3, SACS Records.

⁵⁴Resolution P-40060, Minutes of General Education Board, vol. 1940, 40235—0237, box 26, series 3, GEB Records.

⁵⁵Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Commission on Curricular Problems and Research of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, Jan. 17, 1941, 4, SACS Records.

⁵⁶William A. Robinson to Fred McCuiston, Dec. 28, 1942, folder 4090, box 391, series 1.3, GEB Records.

regular interchange of materials and experiences between the two groups.”⁵⁷ Moreover, staff from the Eight-Year Study worked with both southern studies, and teachers from both southern studies attended several professional development workshops at northern universities.

Yet, despite the laudatory remarks Robinson and Jenkins each made about the other’s commitment to collaboration, the amount of assistance that the Southern Study provided the Secondary School Study appears to have been limited. The final report of the Secondary School Study noted:

In spite of their willingness to share their services with the Negro schools, members of this [the Southern Study’s] staff could give only very occasional service and make only brief visits in the member schools of the Secondary School Study. Thus, the most experienced resource people available were those who had worked on the staff of the Eight Year Study or as teachers in the group of thirty schools in that Study.⁵⁸

Although most of the support the Secondary School Study received came from the northern staff of the Eight-Year Study, in the brutally oppressive context of Jim Crow, the cooperation between the segregated Southern Study and the Secondary School Study can be considered relatively remarkable.

Outcomes of the Southern Studies

Employing the approach to school improvement implemented in the PEA’s Eight-Year Study, both southern studies followed procedures Tyler developed that utilized evaluation principally as a component of a school improvement process. Schools used extant standardized tests diagnostically, with the aim of identifying instructional needs, and there is some indication for the use of instruments that assessed skills such as “application of principles,” like those developed by the Eight-Year Study’s evaluation staff.⁵⁹ Evaluation features in both southern studies included (1) emphasizing that assessment was customized for local needs and programs, (2) evaluating practices and

⁵⁷Resolution I-43028, July 21, 1943, Minutes of the General Education Board, box 26, vol. “1943,” 43095, series 3, GEB Records.

⁵⁸Brown and Robinson, *Serving Negro Schools*, 50; and Robinson, “A Co-operative Effort,” 535.

⁵⁹“Some Evidences of Student Achievement in the Participating Secondary Schools of the Southern Association Study,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (May 1943), 253–303; and W. A. Robinson and Beulah L. Boley, “Teaching the Beginning of New Life,” *High School Journal* 24, no. 2, part 1 (Feb. 1941), 72.

outcomes against school aims and objectives, (3) assessing a range of student learning that extended beyond academic achievement, (4) deriving information on student growth and program effectiveness from a variety of sources (such as teacher observations, student products, and student self-assessments), and (5) improving progress-reporting processes, which included input from students and parents.⁶⁰ Thus both southern studies determined their impact and outcomes not through follow-up studies but in terms of changes made to the educational experiences students had in the participating schools.

By its final active year, the animating purpose of the school improvement efforts in the Southern Study's member schools was to relate the school experience to the life of the student—using student interests as a springboard for study—and to the life of society.⁶¹ Schools identified purposes beyond the conventional academic curriculum. As a principal in Waynesboro, Virginia, put it, “There has been a shift

⁶⁰Verner M. Sims, “Evaluation in the Southern Association Study,” *School and Society* 57, no. 1464 (Jan. 16, 1943), 77, 78; Robinson, Boley, and Bigelow, “Teaching the Beginning of New Life,” 72–73; Lila M. Blich, “Achieving Certain Educational Objectives Through Work with Eighth-Grade Pupils,” *High School Journal* 26, no. 4 (May 1943), 134; Waynesboro High School Faculty, *An Account of the Work of the Waynesboro High School in the Southern Association Study* (Waynesboro, VA: Waynesboro High School, 1943), 20–29; M. L. Orr, “How Do the Graduates of the Montevallo High School Experimental Program Fare in Their Academic Work at Alabama College,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Feb. 1945), 118; William H. Dennis, *Miss Parker The New Teacher: An Account of How a School Took Its First Cooperative Steps in Establishing and Maintaining Working Relationships* (Albany, GA: Albany State College, 1946), 67–69; Lincoln High School, *The Evolution of Susan Prim: A Story Developed by the Lincoln High and Elementary School Faculties* (Tallahassee, FL: Lincoln High School, 1944), 41, 57; and W. H. Brown, “Partial Directory of Development Programs in Schools Cooperating with the Secondary School Study,” n.d., folder 4095, box 391, series 1.3, 8–11, GEB Records.

⁶¹On relating the school to the community, see for example, O. E. McKnight, “Holtville School Is Different,” *Journal of Arkansas Education* 15 (March 1942), 4; Sarah Rogers, “Utilization of Community Resources in Learning in Secondary Schools,” *Kentucky School Journal* 18 (Feb. 1940), 21; Samuel Everett, “A Rural High School Strives to Meet Community Needs,” in *General Education in the American High School* ed. Paul B. Jacobson et al. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1942), 220–28; and Stuart Chase, “Bring Our Youngsters into the Community,” *Readers Digest* 40, no. 237 (Jan. 1942), 5–8. On student interests, see, for example, Janey Haneline, “Pupils and Teacher, Inc.,” *Practical Home Economics* 20, no. 4 (April 1942), 136; Gladys Espy, “A Description of an Attempt to Meet the Mathematical Needs of High School Pupils,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (Aug. 1943), 318–31; Sarah Rogers, “A Description of a Teacher's Work with Tenth Grade Pupils in English-Social Science,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (Aug. 1943), 349; Leon Hicks, “A Program for Individualizing High-School Science,” *High School Journal* 24, no. 2 (Feb. 1941), 64; James Chreitzberg, “A Rural School and Its Community,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Aug. 1939), 469–70; and Maxine Davis, “Lots Goes On Here,” *Country Gentleman* 111, no. 3 (March 1941), 12–13, 67–68.

from the concept that the major function of education is to give pupils academic training and prepare them for college to the belief that the school is an agency of society to work with children in improving their lives and their community.”⁶² The principal of the high school in Greenville, North Carolina, asserted, “Factual knowledge, as valuable as it is, in itself is almost worthless unless the possessor has achieved the ability to interpret and use it.”⁶³ Teachers in these schools worked to provide students with experiences that offered them opportunities to apply subject matter to some aspect of their personal life or the community, which by the 1930s had become definitive features of progressive education.

Such experiences were developed largely through cooperative planning between teachers and pupils, sometimes including parents and other interested community members.⁶⁴ As experiences extended beyond the traditional subject matter curriculum, a variety of materials—books, magazines, newspapers, 78 rpm and LP sound recordings, state agency brochures, information from other subject classes, community excursions that included interviews, and modeling clay (in a geometry class)—supplemented and often supplanted conventional textbooks.⁶⁵ Several schools offered English and Social Studies as a

⁶²R. C. Jennings, “Curriculum Development in Waynesboro,” *Virginia Journal of Education* 34, no. 8 (May 1941), 322.

⁶³V. M. Mulholland, “Greenville Improves Pupil-Progress Reports,” *High School Journal* 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1940), 17. On the application of subject matter, see, for example, V. M. Mulholland, “Growth and Progress in Greenville High School, North Carolina,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (Nov. 1939), 540; Elizabeth Rose, “A High-School Unit on Tenant Farming,” *High School Journal* 24, no. 4 (April 1941), 149; Velmer E. Crout, “Mathematics in General Education,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Aug. 1939), 475–81; Eugene A. Waters, “Science Instruction in Schools of the Southern Association Study in Secondary Schools and Colleges,” *Science Education* 27, no. 1 (Feb. 1943), 6–11; and L. N. Connor, “Notes from Lee H. Edwards High School, Asheville, North Carolina, 1943,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (Aug. 1943), 365–70.

⁶⁴Blitch, “Achieving Certain Educational Objectives,” 125–26, 132; Mulholland, “Growth and Progress in Greenville High School,” 542; Rogers, “Utilization of Community Resources,” 22; and Jennings, “Curriculum Development in Waynesboro,” 322.

⁶⁵Helen Shular, “Procedures Employed in Developing Certain Concepts Through the Use of High School English Materials,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (Nov. 1943), 478–85; Elizabeth Utterback, “A Senior High School English Program,” *English Journal* 30, no. 10 (Dec. 1941), 816; Rose, “A High School Unit on Tenant Farming,” 152–53; Vincent Raines, “Educational Recordings,” *Wilson Library Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (Dec. 1941), 291–97, 314; Ruth Persons, *A Written Account of a Teaching Unit in Conservation*, Florida Forest and Park Service Circular No. 4 (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Forest Service, 1941); Harriet B. Herbert, “Have You Tried Clay?,” *School Science and Mathematics* 42, no. 3 (March 1942), 218–20; and

block-time course.⁶⁶ As schools made these changes, they did not neglect college preparatory work.⁶⁷ Yet unlike the reports from individual schools in the Secondary School Study, many of the schools in the Southern Study reported changes to vocational education courses. These included involving students in generating solutions to farm problems, creating a three-year homemaking program for girls, using home economics classes as a laboratory for identifying and solving household problems, and surveying graduates to identify occupational skills that the school could address.⁶⁸

The Southern Study also extended its work beyond its member schools to organize small conferences with county education officials, state departments of education, and regional colleges and universities. At thirty such conferences held with universities, participants explored ways to study local community problems, planned in-service programs for teachers, and developed instructional materials to support local curricula. Additionally, leadership training provided leaders for the cooperating agencies who were familiar with the problem-solving approach of cooperative experimentation.⁶⁹

Improvements implemented during the last two years of the Secondary School Study included developing individual student appraisal forms and cumulative record forms, establishing techniques of pupil-teacher planning in social studies and science, expanding library holdings, enhancing guidance as a form of student study that contributed to developing local curricula based upon student needs, and establishing a school student council. Nine of the schools

Eugenia Whitehead, "An Approach to Sex Education," *Journal of Home Economics* 32, no. 6 (June 1940), 374.

⁶⁶Rogers, "A Description of a Teacher's Work," 349; Shular, "Procedures Employed in Developing Certain Concepts,"; Elizabeth Rose, "Changes in My Teaching of English Since 1935," *High School Journal* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1941), 8; and Mary Greene, "Attempts to Meet the English Needs of College Preparatory Seniors in Waynesboro High School," *Southern Association Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (Nov. 1943), 453.

⁶⁷Greene, "Attempts to Meet the English Needs," 453, 456; Espy, "A Description of an Attempt," 328; and Waters, "Science Instruction in Schools," 9.

⁶⁸J. Gordon Canterbury Jr. "Cooperative Activity for Young Farmers in Part-Time Classes," *Louisiana Schools* 19 (Feb. 1942), 22, 33; Jessie Schnopp, "Shall We Have a Third Year for Vocational Homemaking?," *Practical Home Economics* 17, no. 5 (May 1939), 138–39; Martha Templeton, "Home Economics: Parker Girls Serve the Community," *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* 16, no. 1 (Sept. 1941), 22–23; Helen Hawkins, "Making Use of the School Laundry," *Practical Home Economics* 17, no. 5 (May 1939), 140, 153; and Robert Barker, "Occupational Survey of Graduates of Cumberland and Benham High Schools," *Kentucky School Journal* 19 (Sept. 1941), 29–32.

⁶⁹Jenkins et al., *Cooperative Study for the Improvement of Education*, 127, 170, 141.

participating in the Secondary School Study focused their problem-solving efforts on improving their students' reading competencies.⁷⁰ Schools also developed long-term plans to continue their work beyond the study's funded years.⁷¹

Schools participating in the Secondary School Study focused efforts on relating the school experience to students' lives and to local community life. Through cooperative pupil-teacher planning, studying the needs of the local community, and improving the school environment, schools devised experiences through which students applied subject matter to daily life. At Moultrie High School in Georgia, for example, community study included interactions with the local white high school, which participated in the Southern Study, that involved school projects relating to housing and health and included "the sharing of certain facilities."⁷² Another instance applied elements of algebraic problem-solving to foster thinking skills applicable to everyday experience. Another attempted to identify the principle of light most useful to daily life by surveying 182 people in science-related fields, offering dozens of applications that would relate to students' experience. Another involved moving away from curriculum organized around a traditional biology text toward curriculum organized around student interests and that drew from a variety of materials in a unit on human reproduction. And another involved ways to achieve continuity in chemistry instruction by using group and individual learning in classrooms and by rejecting mental discipline in favor of applying chemistry principles so that "subject matter serves as a means to some ends rather than an end in itself."⁷³ This emphasis on academic curriculum in participating schools in the Secondary School Study is consistent with historical findings that document an emphasis on promoting academic excellence in African American schools in the South, rather than vocational education.⁷⁴

⁷⁰Brown, "Partial Directory of Development Programs," 2–4.

⁷¹Brown and Robinson, *Serving Negro Schools*, 37, 39, 40, 41.

⁷²Lincoln High School, *Evolution of Susan Prim*, 22–23, 24–25, 48, 32–36, 57; and Dennis, *Miss Parker*, 12, 19, 30–31, 36–37, 67–69.

⁷³William N. Jackson, "What Can Be Done in Algebra? A Study of the Relation Between Table, Verbal Statement, Formula and Equation, and the Graph," *School Science and Mathematics* 42, no. 364 (Feb. 1942), 144–56; E. C. Fonsworth, "Principles in the Field of Light Needed to Interpret General Life Situations," *Science Education* 25, no. 1 (Jan. 1941), 16–20; Robinson and Boley, "Teaching the Beginning of New Life," 66–73; and W. H. Brown, "Continuity for What in Chemistry Teaching?" *Science Education* 29, no. 1 (Feb. 1945), 29.

⁷⁴Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 204, 210–11; Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 181; Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, 35–36; Adam

In some discussions of work in the Secondary School Study schools, the commitment to deploying progressive education practices to democratize life in black schools was pronounced. In an article nominally about teaching science, Brown, staff associate in the black study, presented a rationale for a curriculum change that involved students in the planning process and that would foster democratic habits of conduct among both students and teachers. Brown not only advocated applying science subject matter to practical matters but also to examining controversial social issues specifically. In this vein of racial uplift, Atlanta University faculty member S. M. Nabrit discussed human ecology as a means of “crossing rigid departmental barriers” that moved beyond curriculum design to document the impact of socio-environmental conditions on the degradation of African Americans in Georgia. Nabrit offered a compelling empirical argument against the “inferiority myth” that whites perpetuated to rationalize their own racial supremacy.⁷⁵ And Robert E. Cureton identified curriculum organizations and educational purposes appropriate for such a social studies curriculum. These kinds of classroom activities were not unlike African American educators’ efforts to instill civic mindedness through studying African American culture that Patrice Preston-Grimes found.⁷⁶

GEB funding enabled the Secondary School Study to help about 130 black teachers from both high schools and colleges to participate in workshops on improving social studies, science, reading, evaluation, English, mathematics, and guidance. These workshops, conducted by noted progressive educators, were held mostly at northern universities, including Stanford University, Teachers College, Columbia University, the University of Chicago, Fisk University, Ohio State University, and New York University.⁷⁷ The Secondary School Study staff also sought to provide services to nonmember schools in an effort to disseminate school improvements in black high schools widely. Reportedly, four to five hundred nonmember schools “shared

Faircloth, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); and R. Scott Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926–1972* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006).

⁷⁵W. H. Brown, “A Task for Negro Science Teachers,” *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 20, no. 8 (Aug. 1942), 239–41; and S. M. Nabrit, “Human Ecology of Georgia,” *Science Education* 28, no. 4 (Oct. 1944), 208, 211–12.

⁷⁶Robert E. Cureton, “Citizenship and the Social Studies,” *The Herald: Official Journal of Georgia Teachers and Educational Association* 10, no. 1 (Oct. 1943), 7–9; Preston-Grimes, “Teaching Democracy Before Brown,” 10, 22, 23; and Preston-Grimes, “Fulfilling the Promise,” 41.

⁷⁷Brown and Robinson, *Serving Negro Schools*, 82–88.

to varying extents the resources” of the study. The directors noted that “non-member schools, after cooperatively developing long-term plans, sought and secured consultative services, study opportunities through colleges, universities, and other agencies independently.”⁷⁸

Educational Improvement as Resistance

As noted earlier, historians have found that from the early 1900s into the 1920s, northern philanthropists seeking to educate African Americans in the South imposed industrial education on them that would not disrupt the economic and racial order of southern society.⁷⁹ Yet records reveal that the GEB did not impose any educational scheme on either the white or black southern studies. On the contrary, not only were schools in the Secondary School Study free to choose their improvements, but these involved applying contemporary progressive education practices across the school curriculum and only occasionally emphasized vocational education. Director Robinson, with some incredulity, acknowledged the independence of the Secondary Study schools from the GEB in a 1946 note to the GEB’s McCuiston:

I must say that the Board has not indoctrinated, a phenomenon I shall never understand knowing the source of its funds. I know I would have been sensitive to any such effort and would have repelled strongly against it personally. If any influence indoctrinated in the Study, it was my own influence and that, I am pleased to say, was not to my own ideas but the best I could find and use the nation over.⁸⁰

Given the general historical finding that northern philanthropies often sought to impose industrial education on southern black schools and students, how can this independence be explained?

Eric Anderson and Alfred Moss established that GEB officers sought to appease white southerners and preempt criticism of support for black education by supporting the development of education systems for whites. They also noted that, beginning in the 1920s, the original donors in northern philanthropic foundations were largely removed from daily operations when it came to funding education programs in the South.⁸¹ In the case of the two southern studies,

⁷⁸W. A. Robinson and W. H. Brown, “Report of Progress in the Secondary School Study,” *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes*, South Carolina State A & M College, Orangeburg, South Carolina, December 7-8, 1944 (np: The Association, 1945), 78-9.

⁷⁹Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 147.

⁸⁰As cited in Kridel, *Progressive Education in Black High Schools*, 121.

⁸¹Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 10.

such appeasement tactics were evident—most obviously in the GEB’s simultaneous support of the white and the black study. Additionally, GEB officers were also more forward with SACS and southern white educators than foundations had previously been, particularly in suggesting, though not insisting, that black high schools participate in the white study and then facilitating cooperation between the two, though still within the limits of what was tolerable to white educators.

The finding that the Secondary School Study focused on improving academic education at least as much as vocational education, and proportionally more than the Southern Study, confirms the findings of historians such as James Anderson, Vincent Franklin, Vanessa Walker, and James Leloudis, who documented that in the midst of Jim Crow, African American educators pursued academic excellence in black secondary schools.⁸² Findings like these have led historians such as Adam Faircloth and R. Scott Baker to argue that improving black education within the confines of white supremacy constituted a latent form of resistance. Faircloth suggested, “By insisting upon the sanctity of knowledge and the innate humanity of black children, they performed political work of the most far-reaching kind.”⁸³ Baker suggested that such historical findings indicate “how significant schools were as sites of black resistance, where African Americans created an evasive and oppositional culture that propelled growing numbers of black students forward in spite of white opposition.”⁸⁴ The work of the schools in the Secondary School Study amounted to a similar form of resistance; however, an additional form of resistance was manifest in the Secondary School Study’s commitment to promoting democratic living for African American teachers and students through education reform. This points to an important difference between the two southern studies.

The Southern Study’s final report presented a largely technical description of the problem-solving method employed in participating schools, which it depicted as the synthesis of “two trends, use of the scientific method and local self-study.” It featured an entire chapter on the scientific method in general and its application in the participating schools. Generous reference was made to “systematic problem solving” and the “scientific method,” and it was noted that “in the Southern Study there was encouragement of the use of the scientific method in ‘clinical practice.’” Notably, unlike the final reports of the Eight-Year Study, discussion of any connection between education

⁸² Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 204, 210–11; Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 181; Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, 35–36; and Leloudis, *Schooling the New South*, 200.

⁸³ Faircloth, *Teaching Equality*, 67.

⁸⁴ Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation*, 39.

and democracy is conspicuous in the Southern Study's final report by its almost sheer absence. Only two places in the report's closing chapter mentioned democracy, almost literally as an afterthought. In its final paragraph, the report proclaimed, "Democracy works to the extent that we are successful in marshalling the total intelligence for the common good."⁸⁵ Yet because the Southern Study excluded black schools and would have effectively improved white schools at the neglect of black schools, even this meager democratic rhetoric amounted to mere lip service. In the Southern Study, progressive education practice was a professional technique that served dominant interests.

For the leaders of the Secondary School Study, however, implementing progressive education practices in black high schools not only promoted educational progress but also engaged teachers and students in democratic forms of living. The Secondary School Study's final report highlighted the democratic aspect of collaboration and cooperation. For example, at the planning conference at Fisk University, participants saw in collaborative planning "opportunities for pupils to experience democracy."⁸⁶ In a description of the Secondary School Study, Brown noted, "All believed that better education meant broader opportunities for intelligent participation in and responsibility for democratic living." He elaborated:

Schools have attempted to provide more opportunities for participation in a democratic society, opportunities for learning intelligent self-direction, opportunities for learning to make wise decisions through participation in making these decisions, opportunities for pupils to learn more about themselves and other people, and opportunities for acquiring important factual information for use in thinking and in choosing wise courses of action.⁸⁷

Indeed, a GEB officer who observed six of the participating schools reported that in "almost all of the schools visited there was evidence of democratic procedures."⁸⁸

⁸⁵Jenkins et al., *Cooperative Study for the Improvement of Education*, 34–35, 37, 230, 231, 235; and Wilford M. Aikin, *The Story of the Eight-Year Study with Conclusions and Recommendations*, *Adventure in American Education*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper, 1942), 24–45.

⁸⁶Brown and Robinson, *Serving Negro Schools*, 32, 21, 31, 58.

⁸⁷W. H. Brown, "Report of Two Years of Activity of the Secondary School Study," *Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools for Negroes*, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, Dec. 1942 (np: The Association, 1943), 49–50, 50, 52; and Brown, "Partial Directory of Development Programs," 1, 2, 4–8.

⁸⁸"Report on Negro Secondary School Study," March 15, 1943, folder 4091, box 391, series 1.3, GEB Records.

Brown noted that in the Secondary School Study democracy was taught through cooperative relations between the teacher and pupils, through “democratic leadership on the part of teachers,” which involved fostering “among pupils the acceptance of responsibilities which unquestionably belong to the pupils,” and by “exploring problem situations and areas of interest with pupils, rather than for pupils.”⁸⁹ As a result, teachers developed “materials in their classrooms which are definitely related to Negro life and Negro problems, both local and national in scope.” These materials included units on “Minority Groups in Mississippi,” “Family Relations as Revealed Through Literature,” “My Responsibility as an American Citizen,” and “The Negro and the Bill of Rights.”⁹⁰ The purpose of promoting democratic ways of living surfaced as well in the ongoing problem of the lack of classroom materials that pertained directly to African American life. As Brown put it:

Certain aspects of civic participation in government, vocational preparation, employment opportunities, the understanding of issues surrounding labor, taxation, wartime economics, social policies of government, civil rights, effective participation in the war effort, the meaning of patriotism, etc., have not been developed from the point of view of minority groups and there is danger of the development of racism as a result of this lack of instructional materials.⁹¹

A joint statement prepared by seven teachers from the Secondary School Study and three teachers from the Southern Study advocated education for democracy—an outcome of their participation in a workshop of the Stanford University Social Education Investigation during the summer of 1943. In an extraordinary instance of apparent interracial collaboration between the two studies, these teachers together emphasized learning democratic forms of living by directly experiencing them in school, which would include resolving regional social problems “through the cooperative efforts of all groups working together.” In a section titled “Inter-ethnic Relations” these teachers implored, “The situation toward which we must strive is widespread belief in the principle of inter-group cooperation as the only Christian and democratic means of bringing improved social conditions to all groups and to all classes within these groups.”⁹²

⁸⁹Brown, “Report of Two Years of Activity of the Secondary School Study,” 54.

⁹⁰Brown, “Report of Two Years of Activity of the Secondary School Study,” 55.

⁹¹Brown, “Report of Two Years of Activity of the Secondary School Study,” 61.

⁹²Mary L. Anderson, Robert E. Cureton, Newall D. Eason, Butler A. Jones, Evelyn Lawlah, Charity Mance, Albert E. Manley, James E. Pierce, Jennie B. Ramsey, and John T. Robinson, “Improving Education for Socio-Civic

Moreover, the Secondary School Study saw in the war effort a rationale for the realization of democracy at home. Brown, referring to denying black youth full membership in a democratic way of life and the resulting squandering of human potential, suggested that “those who persist in the practices that involve unnecessary loss and wastage of human resources are betraying the democratic aspiration; they constitute the internal enemies against which our national defense must be organized.”⁹³ Perhaps reflecting a commitment to what some civil rights leaders called a “Double V,” that is, “victory over fascism and imperialism abroad and over racism at home,”⁹⁴ Brown concluded, “We may need to win a war in order to give democracy a chance to survive, but victory will not in itself guarantee the survival of democracy.”⁹⁵ As educators working in the Secondary School Study leveraged progressive education methods to foster democratic educational experiences, accommodationist practices nevertheless persisted in participating schools, which would seem to make characterizing their work as social reconstructionist problematic.⁹⁶

References to democracy in reports of work in the Southern Study alluded to little beyond cooperative pupil-teacher planning, school goals, or the war effort, and certainly no argument was advanced to extend to African Americans the rights of citizenship whites enjoyed. Even the term “progressive education” was used rarely and cautiously in describing the Southern Study’s work. For example, after quoting the Greenville High School student newspaper’s slogan (“*Green Lights*, published tri-weekly by the students of Greenville High School in the interest of a progressive and democratic school life”), the school’s principal noted, “Some might object to the ‘blah-blah’ indefiniteness of ‘progressive’ and ‘democratic.’” He then observed that although students understood these terms with respect to school practice, “each of these terms is constantly being evaluated and redefined by thoughtful students.”⁹⁷ Similarly, an account from Port Arthur, Texas, of individualized social studies teaching influenced by the social reconstructionist American Historical Association’s *A Charter*

Competence in the Southern States,” *Southern Association Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Feb. 1945), 91, 95.

⁹³Brown, “A Task for Negro Science Teachers,” 239.

⁹⁴Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 20.

⁹⁵Brown, “A Task for Negro Science Teachers,” 239.

⁹⁶Goodenow, “Separate and Unequal Progressive Education,” 207; Kridel, *Progressive Education in Black High Schools*, 99; and Pierson, *Laboratory of Learning*, 76–77.

⁹⁷Mulholland, “Growth and Progress in Greenville High School, North Carolina,” 540.

for the *Social Studies* concluded, “Is it ‘Progressive Education’? We are making no such claims.”⁹⁸

Conclusion

Although reflecting the segregation pervasive in the Jim Crow American South during the 1930s and 1940s, given their common means and ends and, though limited, their nevertheless notable interaction, the Secondary School Study and the Southern Study are best understood, as Robinson proposed, “as one story of the region.” Expressly implementing the Eight-Year Study’s approach to school improvement, both southern studies engaged local educators in identifying and resolving local school problems, conducted summer workshops to develop school programs and provide professional development opportunities for teachers, employed evaluation to test proposed solutions to local problems, advocated no single program, and implemented a variety of problem solutions. As extensions of the Eight-Year Study that benefited from its direct assistance, the two southern studies amounted to further chapters in the story of the Eight-Year Study. Not only should the Eight-Year Study be understood as more than its thirty participating schools, but also it is accurately represented not as manifesting, child-centeredness or social efficiency, but rather as engaging in activities that at the time were significantly progressive, both educationally and socially.

Although both southern studies embraced the wider approach to school improvement known as cooperative educational experimentation, the Southern Study emphasized participatory problem-solving as a clinical technique while the Secondary School Study emphasized participatory problem-solving as a vehicle for democratizing African American education, tacitly resisting hegemonic white supremacy. If an emphasis on academic excellence in African American secondary schools represented an emerging form of resistance to white oppression, as historians have argued, certainly another aspect of resistance is found in the Secondary School Study’s use of the cooperative study to provide experiences in democratic living to black teachers and students. By facilitating the Secondary School Study and by providing educators in the participating schools the latitude to pursue any improvements—an opportunity they probably would not otherwise have had—including both academic excellence and democratic

⁹⁸Texie Smyth, “Making the Social Studies an Adventure in Individualized Teaching,” *Social Studies* 32, no. 6 (Oct. 1941), 250. For the American Historical Association’s *Charter for the Social Studies* see Charles A. Beard, *A Charter for the Social Studies in the Schools* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932).

experiences, perhaps GEB officers were building a different kind of state than foundations had been building decades earlier. Reflected in their differing interpretations of the method of cooperative study was the Southern Study's conception of progressive education as technique and democracy as racially exclusionary, and the Secondary School Study's conception of progressive education as an emancipatory process for enacting a fuller measure of democracy in African American schools in the American South.

Appendix A

Participating Schools—Southern Study

Benham High School, Benham, Kentucky
Campti High School, Campti, Louisiana
Canton High School, Canton, Mississippi
Collierville High School, Collierville, Tennessee
Cradock High School, Portsmouth, Virginia
Dixie County High School, Cross City, Florida
Drener High School, Columbia, South Carolina
Edinburg High School, Edinburg, Texas
Lee H. Edwards High School, Asheville, North Carolina
Frankfort High School, Frankfort, Kentucky
Goldsboro High School, Goldsboro, North Carolina
Greenville High Schools, Greenville, North Carolina
Highland Park High School, Dallas, Texas
Holtville High School, Deatsville, Alabama
Lafayette High School, Lexington, Kentucky
E. E. Lyon High School, Covington, Louisiana
Meridian High School and Junior College, Meridian, Mississippi
Miami Beach High School, Miami Beach, Florida
Minden High School, Minden, Louisiana
Montevallo High School, Montevallo, Alabama
Moultrie High School, Moultrie, Georgia
Norris High School, Norris, Tennessee
Okolona High School, Okolona, Mississippi
Parker High School, Greenville, South Carolina
Peabody Demonstration School, Nashville, Tennessee
Peabody Training School, Milledgeville, Georgia
Radford High School, Radford, Virginia
St. Petersburg High School, St. Petersburg, Florida
Sumter High School, Sumter, South Carolina
Thomas Jefferson High School, Port Arthur, Texas
Tuscaloosa High School, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
University Demonstration School, Athens, Georgia
Waynesboro High School, Waynesboro, Virginia

Appendix B**Participating Schools—Secondary School Study**

- Drewry Practice High School, Talladega College, Talladega, Alabama
- State Teachers College Laboratory Schools, Montgomery, Alabama
- Lincoln High School, Tallahassee, Florida
- Atlanta University Laboratory School, Atlanta, Georgia, closed in 1942, replaced in study by Moultrie High School, Moultrie, Georgia
- Staley High School, Americus, Georgia
- William Grant School, Covington, Kentucky
- Natchitoches Parish Training School, Natchitoches, Louisiana
- Southern University Demonstration School, Scotlandville, Louisiana
- Magnolia Avenue High School, Vicksburg, Mississippi
- Dudley High School, Greensboro, North Carolina
- Booker T. Washington High School, Rocky Mount, North Carolina
- Booker T. Washington High School, Columbia, South Carolina
- Pearl High School, Nashville, Tennessee
- I. M. Terrell High School, Fort Worth, Texas
- Huntington High School, Newport News, Virginia
- D. Webster Davis Laboratory High School, Virginia State College, Ettrick, Virginia