

## **National Implications: Historical View of Black School Board Members of the State of Texas Until 1985**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**This study is an examination of the historical, social, economic, and political profile of the state of Texas and their opinions concerning the educational issues of school integration, segregation or desegregation, staff assignment and the overall participation of Black School Board members on their perspective school boards. It indicates an enhanced growth of board members and their concerns of all students comprising the school district.**

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### **Introduction**

**B**lacks experienced the horrors of slavery, the war between the states of the United States to preserve the Union and the abolishment of slavery, the Reconstruction Era, the dismantling of Reconstruction and the introduction of “Jim Crowism”, the dismantling of the “Separate but Equal” doctrine, and the emergence of Blacks into she political arena. The Black electorate, however, experienced appreciable political activity prior to the Reconstruction Era.<sup>1</sup> The advent of the Reconstruction Era facilitated the awareness of the Black freedmen and provided a support system which ensured the inclusion of Blacks in the political process of Texas and other southern states.<sup>2,3</sup> During this period, many Blacks were elected to numerous political positions and held significant positions in the Republican Party.<sup>4</sup> Democrats, on the other hand, made numerous

attempts to destroy the Republican Party and the accompanying political influence of Black Texans during Reconstruction and the subsequent years.<sup>5,6</sup> These efforts are documented in the literature and were fruitful throughout the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

Efforts to disenfranchise Blacks from the suffrage in Texas range from the use of lawful to unlawful means. Examples of lawful means utilized were literacy testing, gerrymandering, and the use of poll tax.<sup>7,8</sup> Unlawful means employed the formation of secret societies such as Ku Klux Klan, The Knights of the White Camellia, The Constitutional Union Guards, The Council of Safety and the White Brotherhood. These groups intimidated, terrorized and even lynched Black citizens.<sup>9</sup> These acts were instrumental in reducing the suffrage of Blacks to an ineffectual level and resulted in a corresponding reduction in the number of Black office holders.<sup>10</sup>

Blacks fought back to combat disenfranchisement and hostilities. Blacks formed coalitions with individuals and progressive-minded organizations. The development of organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League were vanguard organizations formulated to resist the prevailing wholesale disenfranchisement of Blacks. These organizations were followed by the formation of numerous other socioeconomic and political organizations to fight for and protect the freedmen rights.<sup>11</sup>

Blacks also utilized the judicial system to combat disenfranchisement from suffrage in primary and general elections. In Texas, several court cases had significant influence upon Black political participation. Some were Nixon v. Herndon, Nixon v. Condon, Smith v. Allwright and the Terry v. Adams.

The Nixon v. Herndon Case of 1927 held that a Texas state law, which prohibited Black participation in the Democratic Primary election, was unconstitutional. This case did not prevent the disenfranchisement of Blacks from the suffrage. Texas Democrats simply changed the vehicle of disenfranchisement. The state legislature adopted a law authorizing party leaders to determine who could vote in political primaries.<sup>12</sup> The Nixon v. Condon Case of 1934 held that it is unconstitutional for a state to pass a law authorizing party leaders to adopt provisions or policies which prohibited Black participation in the Democratic Primary.<sup>13</sup>

The Democrats utilized the local primaries held prior to the Democratic Primary to disenfranchise Blacks from the suffrage. The Terry v. Adams Case of 1943 held racial segregation unconstitutional in local primaries.<sup>14</sup> The Smith v. Allwright Case of 1944 held that the practice of racial discrimination in the Democratic Primary elections on any basis was unconstitutional. This included state, county or local levels of government.<sup>15</sup>

These four cases coupled with the adjudication of the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Case of 1954 led to increased opportunities for Black voter participation in Texas and were accompanied by an increase in the number of Black elected officials.<sup>16</sup> The passage of the Voter Rights Act of 1965 and subsequent extensions have also provided Texas Blacks and other minorities with unprecedented opportunities to achieve full participation in the political processes of the state and nation.<sup>17</sup> Since its passage, Blacks have been elected to various positions of importance in local, state and national governments, most prominently and significantly to public school boards of education.<sup>18</sup>

The increased number of Blacks holding elected school board positions has not facilitated a corresponding increase in research efforts to study Black school board members.<sup>19</sup> Umberger completed a national study of public school board members in 1982. He summarized thirty-five national demographic profile studies and noted that Black school board members have not been frequently studied in national studies.<sup>20</sup> In view of the void of earlier research of profile studies of Texas Black school board members, there is a need to focus attention in this study on the social, economic and political profiles of Black school board members of Texas public schools districts.

This study is a partial replication of an empirically arrived social, economic and political profile study of the Black school board members of the state of Louisiana. As a partial replication, the research instrument, design, and overall ideal were employed. This study focused on the Black school board members in the state of Texas and in no way, shape, form or fashion intended to duplicate, fully replicate or validate the findings of Lockett.<sup>21</sup> Instead, this study attempted to identify or discover if a trend exist as to the social, economic, or political profile of Black school board members across the state. This study generated new knowledge as it relates to the existing body of knowledge on the school board members of Texas and filled the void of existing research information on the Black school board members of the state of Texas.<sup>22</sup>

### **Procedure of the Study**

The first step of this study was to contact Lockett at Southern University requesting approval to utilize his questionnaire and acquire approval to replicate his study of Louisiana's Black school board members in Texas. Next, modifications were made in the questionnaire to make it applicable to Texas black school board members. The next step was to determine that the mail questionnaire was appropriate for this study. Tyres Hillway and Nunnery and Kimbrough listed several advantages of the mail questionnaire.<sup>23,24</sup>

The survey instrument had been validated by Lockett<sup>25</sup> and Vincent<sup>26</sup> in earlier studies of Black school board members in Louisiana and Mississippi respectively.

This study was undertaken to answer the following questions: (1). What are the social, economic and political characteristics of those Black elected or appointed to the school boards of Texas public school districts? (2) What were the motivational factors leading to their candidacies for the school board positions? (3) What groups were of assistance to them in their candidacies? (4) What were their attitudes concerning social changes and strategies for implementing them?

An empirical investigation was used, augmented by an open-ended questionnaire and a descriptive survey analysis. An analytical scheme was designed to gather data regarding the demographic profiles of Texas Black School board members in Texas in 1984. The data collection technique involved the utilization of a specially designed and validated questionnaire developed by Raymond Lockett.<sup>27</sup> This questionnaire was chosen

because its structure and purpose were compatible with the structure and purpose of this study.

The survey method was employed in this empirical investigation to collect data from the population sample consisting of fifty-seven (57) Texas Black school board members. These school board members were listed among the seventy-nine (79) Texas Black school board members listed in the Black Elected Officials: A National Roster.<sup>28</sup> Questionnaires were mailed to the seventy-nine (79) elected school board members listed in the publication. This roster is the most authoritative, up-to-date list of Black elected officials.<sup>29</sup> However, an analysis of the roster revealed that 6 Black school board members listed on the roster were no longer on the school board and one questionnaire was returned incomplete. Thus, fifty seven (57) of the target population actually participated in the study. This represented seventy-six (76) percent of the actual participants of the study.

### **Results of the Study- Personal Characteristics**

The personal characteristics indicated that the typical Texas Black School board member was born in his father's state of birth, Texas. The data indicated that the typical Black board member is a protestant male between the ages of 28-78 years old with a mean age of 52.8 years. The educational level of the parent is very low compared to the educational level of the board member. The father is likely to have had some high school training as opposed to the school board member who is likely to be a college graduate with some graduate hours. A large percentage of the Texas Black school board members attended either Prairie View A& M University or Texas Southern University. The typical Black public school board member attended a public school. He is likely to be professional, white-collar worker or retiree. His occupational background ranges from labor to medical doctor. However, he is not likely to be a teacher or to have served in the military services. His father's occupation was likely to be found in agriculture or labor. His median income at the time of his first election is on the rise and ranged from \$23,000-\$26,000.

Politically, the typical Black school board member is likely to be a democrat and the child of a democrat. His parents possess a strong political philosophy and he is likely to possess liberal or moderate political views. He is likely to be married and has three (3) children. These data reveal that the age, place of birth, religious preference and sex of Black school board members compare favorably with white school board members.

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### **Motivational Factors that led to Candidacy for the School Position.**

The data suggested the following reasons for seeking office: (1) to improve the school system, (2) to improve the condition for his race, (3) dissatisfaction with some aspect of school board procedures or policy and (4) influence of friends, relative and acquaintances.

Lockett's study of Black school board members in the state of Louisiana revealed that the majority of the respondents indicated that the three (3) factors that influenced Black school board members most were: (1) the prestige that come with the office, (2) improvement of the school system and (3) dissatisfaction with some decision made by the board.<sup>30</sup>

Vincent's study of Black school board members in the State of Mississippi indicated that the over-riding factor to improve the condition for his race was the most significant motivational factor that led to candidacy for the school board.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, these factors are somewhat different from Texas Black school board members who indicated that their number one priority was to improve the system and rated improvement of conditions of the race as their second motivational factor for candidacy for the school board.<sup>32</sup>

### **Assistance from Groups**

For many years, it was believed that the National Association provided a large percentage of the financial support for Black electorates for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The results of this study refute this claim. No school board member listed the NAACP as a financial contributor. School board members indicated that churches provided support for 35.9 percent of their support. Service organizations ranked third among contributors to Black school board members with 14 percent, and friends were close fourth with 12.5 percent. Frequently, the board members received support from teacher associations, businesses, labor unions, and social clubs. These findings should dispel the notion that the NAACP or any other single organization supports the black school board members financially.

### **Attitudes Concerning Social Change and Strategies for Implementation**

Eighty-five percent (85) of Texas Black school board members indicated that they favor busing to achieve a racial balance in the schools while a large percentage of the whites in their district favor segregated schools. In addition, ninety-five percent (95) of the Black board members support the contention that racially mixed schools promote positive effect upon the quality of education.

In implementing social changes, the majority of Texas Black school members (78) percent favored hiring both black and white principals with each having a member of the opposite race as his assistant. In a school where the majority of the pupils are black, Black board members indicated that the top priorities of hiring patters are: (1) 50/50 ratio of Black/White teachers (53.6%), (2) Majority Black teachers (25%) and (3) best competent teachers of all races (12.5%)

Regarding race relations in their communities and the quality of education Black children are receiving, Black school board members reported good racial relationship and satisfaction with the quality of education Blacks are receiving in public schools. Black school board members saw the following three (3) major obstacles to improvement of education in their districts. Major obstacles included the attitudes of teachers, attitudes of majority of board members, attitudes of Black community, attitudes of the state law and attitudes of the superintendents.

In reference to the question, “Are you satisfied with most of the decisions made by the school board?” the majority were satisfied and they saw a good future for education in Texas. These board members generally were satisfied with the decisions made by the school board.

Throughout this study, it is clear that Blacks are not proportionally represented on the school boards in the United States. This is evidenced in a study completed in 1927.<sup>33</sup> It is evidenced in numerous other studies such as the Hansen observation on the school districts in Washington D C in 1968.<sup>34</sup>

Doughty interviewed several Black school board members. His final question was what are the things that Black school board members should avoid: The results of this effort are ten directives to Black board members.<sup>35</sup>

1. You should not go into a school building to evaluate personnel and programs.
2. You should avoid the semblance of representing only Black people.
3. You should not use racially divertive hate tactics when running for board of education.
4. You should avoid such psychological weakening things as dwelling areas where you have been hurt, insulted, turned down or ignored.
5. You should not go along with things because someone else who you respect says it’s all right.
6. You should not aspire to hold other political offices.
7. You should not do things for militant or personal reasons.
8. You should not exhibit frustrations, be boisterous, or demanding.
9. You should not bring things up for a board vote unless they will pass.
10. You should not call your fellow board members racists: let their vote and statements speak for them.

Epps asserted that Blacks can only gain power and influence and promote their needed advantages by having sufficient representation in elected position. Since the local school boards frequently find themselves concerned with a variety of activities including maintaining the status quo, pleasing various factions or serving the interest

of local businesses and other political groups. It is highly significant that Blacks must acquire political power so that they can be a source of influence.<sup>36</sup>

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