

## **Dissertation Abstract:**

“Not Separate But Not Equal: Fighting for Quality Public Education in South Carolina After Jim Crow” analyzes how African American public school students in South Carolina used direct action protest to demand the implementation of quality, desegregated public education in the 1970s. Students built off of the legacy of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which empowered the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to withhold federal funds from school districts that practiced overt segregation and became the mechanism by which the federal government could force states to desegregate. As a result, most South Carolina schools desegregated by 1970 and technically met federal civil rights standards, retaining federal school funding. In reality, many white school district officials and communities found ways to manipulate or circumvent new federal regulations while maintaining racially discriminatory policies, and federal and state authorities did not have the laws, policies, or political gumption to adequately deal with post-desegregation obstructions.

This dissertation examines the problems that the first generation of black students attending totally desegregated schools faced. School districts closed majority-black schools to achieve desegregation and enrolled black students into previously all-white institutions that disrespected the history and identity of former majority-black institutions. Districts compounded black student and community frustrations when they fired and demoted many black teachers, administrators, and coaches, frequently replacing them for less qualified white candidates. Southern school districts tracked black students into lower level academic classes, which promoted segregated classrooms and racial isolation within newly desegregated schools and subjected black students to harsher discipline policies. Many white residents in majority-black school districts abandoned South Carolina’s desegregated schools launching a prolific private school movement in the state, but simultaneously worked to control majority-black school districts, often funneling public resources into private, segregation academies. In the face of white resistance, black South Carolinians, civil rights activists, and a myriad of civil rights organizations once again inherited the burden of ensuring that their local and state governments implemented federally mandated desegregation regulations. From 1969-1979, black student protests emerged in communities across the state. Students boycotted classes, presented grievances, and petitioned state and federal authorities to demand that local school districts provide better education to black students.

This dissertation asserts that black activists took advantage of growing state and federal oversight, and contributed to new desegregation regulations by providing accounts of the post- problems and discrimination they faced in their communities. By the late 1970s, South Carolina legislation regulated almost every component of education previously left to the jurisdiction of local school boards and the federal government revised many of its

desegregation regulations. African American students, parents, and activists of the 1970s built on the legacy of black civil rights activism, established from the early twentieth century in South Carolina and across the South, and employed direct action protest to demand quality, integrated public education in South Carolina. Black South Carolinians achieved some successes and also witnessed many setbacks, but they continued to fight, placing quality education at the center of that struggle