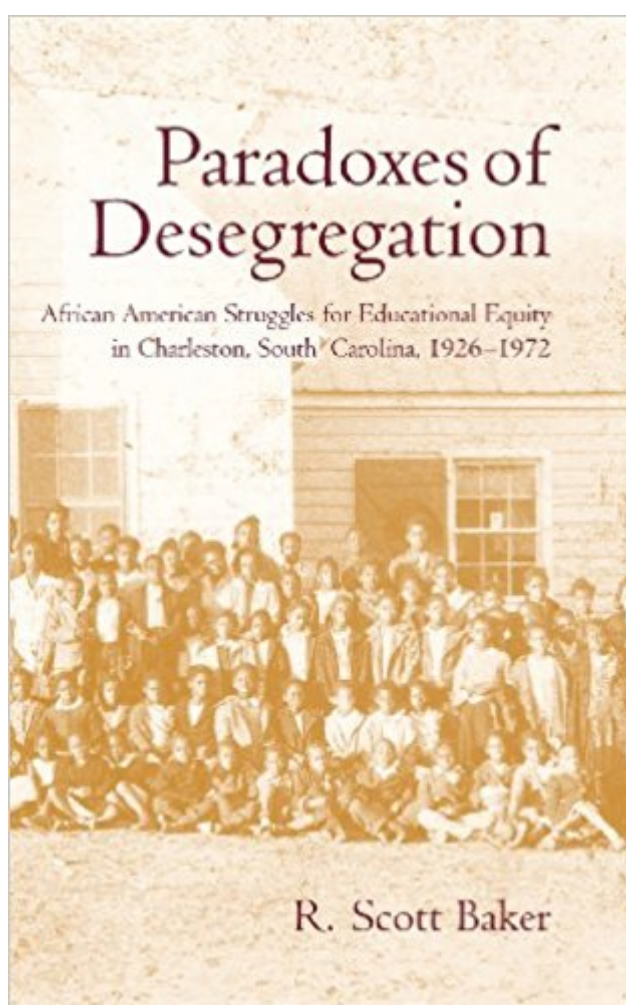


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# Paradoxes Of Desegregation: African American Struggles For Educational Equity In Charleston, South Carolina, 1926-1972



## Synopsis

In this provocative appraisal of desegregation in South Carolina, R. Scott Baker contends that half a century after the Brown decision we still know surprisingly little about the new system of public education that replaced segregated caste arrangements in the South. Much has been written about the most dramatic battles for black access to southern schools, but Baker examines the rational and durable evasions that authorities institutionalized in response to African American demands for educational opportunity. A case study of southern evasions, *Paradoxes of Desegregation* documents the new educational order that grew out of decades of conflict between African American civil rights activists and South Carolina's political leadership. During the 1940s, Baker shows, a combination of black activism on a local level and NAACP litigation forced state officials to increase funding for black education. This early phase of the struggle in turn accelerated the development of institutions that cultivated a new generation of grass roots leaders. Baker demonstrates that white resistance to integration did not commence or crystallize after Brown. Instead, beginning in the 1940s, authorities in South Carolina institutionalized an exclusionary system of standardized testing that, according to Baker, exploited African Americans' educational disadvantages, limited access to white schools, and confined black South Carolinians to separate institutions. As massive resistance to desegregation collapsed in the late 1950s, officials in other southern states followed South Carolina's lead, adopting testing policies that continue to govern the region's educational system. *Paradoxes of Desegregation* brings much needed historical perspective to contemporary debates about the landmark federal education law, *No Child Left Behind*. Baker analyzes decades of historical evidence related to high-stakes testing and concludes that desegregation, while a triumph for advantaged blacks, has paradoxically been a tragedy for most African Americans.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Paradoxes of Desegregation brings fresh insight to the struggle that unfolded around education in South Carolina, demonstrating its formative role in shaping the possibilities and limitations of the civil rights movement in the Palmetto State. Scott Baker offers a textured analyses of the African American challenge to unequal schools and the parallel efforts of white policymakers to resist and contain black access to public education. At the heart of the book is a compelling account of a movement that grew from the aspirations of black communities against the backdrop of major shifts in the social, economic, and political landscape of South Carolina and the nation from the Depression to the mid-1970s. This is a history that explains much about what changed, what failed to change, and why. It is a stunning achievement." —Patricia Sullivan, author of *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* and editor of *Freedom Writer: Virginia Foster Durr, Letters from the Civil Rights Years* "R. Scott Baker's case study of desegregation of public education in Charleston gives much needed support to the reality of white supremacy as institutional, long-lived and not always masked in hoods. This is especially important in the twenty-first century as attempts are made to minimize discussion of the extent to which power holders will and did go to resist change." —Millicent Ellison Brown, associate professor of history, North Carolina A&T State University

R. Scott Baker is an associate professor of education at Wake Forest University. A former high school teacher and literacy coordinator, he lives in Lewisville, North Carolina.

The title and seemingly narrow focus (and, indeed, the introduction) of this book might make it seem like a study suited only for academics. However, it most clearly is not. What is most remarkable about this book is how Baker paints portraits of the many, many ordinary (yet extraordinary) African-American individuals who were truly the prime movers in the struggle for educational opportunity in Charleston. The stories of these individuals and the durable obstacles they faced in gaining access to the most basic educational rights are both inspirational and deeply troubling. In the course of the book, Baker also lays bare the way in which the white establishment of Charleston

fought in every manner possible to insure that blacks would not be educated with whites and then, when it lost that battle, did everything in its power to insure that few blacks would "enjoy" that right. Baker rightly raises, but does not answer, the question of whether a strategy of dispensing with the hope for integration and instead creating well-funded black institutions might have, in the long run, better served the African-American community of Charleston. Equally interesting and equally disturbing is the book's argument that the genesis and use of standardized testing--so much a part of the educational landscape today--was rooted in an a conscious attempt on the part of the white establishment to deny access to equal pay for black teachers and equal educational opportunity for African American students. Anyone interested in issues related to the history of African-American education, equity in education, or testing--be it of teachers or students--would be wise to read this book.

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