



A Campaign of Quiet Persuasion: How the College Board Desegregated SAT® Test Centers in the Deep South, 1960-1965 (Making the Modern South)

Jan Bates Wheeler

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In 1960, the College Entrance Examination Board became an unexpected participant in the movement to desegregate education in the South. Working with its partner, Educational Testing Services, the College Board quietly integrated its Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) centers throughout the Deep South. Traveling from state to state, taking one school district and even one school at a time, two College Board staff members, both native southerners, waged "a campaign of quiet persuasion" and succeeded, establishing a roster of desegregated test centers within segregated school districts while the historic battle for civil rights raged around them. In the context of the larger struggle for equal opportunities for southern black students, their work addressed a small but critical barrier to higher education.

Shedding light on this remarkable story for the first time, Jan Bates Wheeler tells how the College Board staff members -- Ben Cameron and Ben Gibson -- succeeded. Their candid and thoughtfully written records of conversations and confrontations, untouched for nearly fifty years, reveal the persistence required to reach a goal many thought unachievable and even foolhardy. Indeed, their task placed them in the unusual position of advocating for school desegregation on a day-to-day basis as part of their jobs. This positioned Cameron and Gibson squarely in opposition to prevailing laws, customs, and attitudes -- an ill-advised stance for any nascent business venture, particularly one experiencing competition from a new, rival testing organization purported to accommodate openly those same laws, customs, and attitudes.

Cameron and Gibson also accepted the personal danger involved in confrontations with racist school officials. The officials who cooperated with the pair assumed even greater risk, and in order to minimize that threat, Cameron and Gibson pledged not to publicize their efforts. Even years after their work had ended, the two men refused to write about their campaign for fear of compromising the people who had helped them. Their concerns, according to Wheeler, kept this remarkable story largely untold until now.

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