Why Hoxie?

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On May 17, 1954 The Supreme Court ruled segregation in public schools unconstitutional but it wasn't for many years that every school in the United States desegregated. However, in Lawrence County, Arkansas, the Hoxie public school system was moving forward with a speedy desegregation of their student body. The motivations of the Hoxie school board were not simply because The Supreme Court ruled segregation unconstitutional, but the combination of the schools provided a plethora of benefits for the economics of the town itself.

The population of the town Hoxie was reportedly 1,855 with around 30 of those residents being African American students (Encyclopedia of Arkansas, 2026). Both schools would release the students in the fall to help with the harvest, as Hoxie was also located on railroad tracks, and an integral part of Arkansas' agricultural system. Arkansas as a whole was a poor state at the time, but Hoxie also reported a financially burdened population. The superintendent of the school, K. E. Vance wanted to help reduce financial burden on the city by combining both schools. Vance said the integration was, "right in the sight of God,", and pushed to have the integrations by the morning of July 11, 1955 (Encyclopedia of Arkansas, 2026).

Vance reported it was taking $5,000 of the schools budget to transport the African American students to Jonesboro, and by eliminating the need to segregate the schools would be saving (Harris, 2013). When the vote was passed the students successfully integrated together into one school system much to the dismay of other Arkansas school boards and residents. The school even received recognition in *Life* magazine leading to more irate segregationists to target the Hoxie school board. Soon enough there were 350 segregationists gathered in Hoxie City Hall to protest the desegregation of the schools (Encyclopedia of Arkansas, 2026).

As the Hoxie school board braced themselves against the forces, Arkansas governor Orval Fabus informed the board the state would not help. Thankfully, all harassment remained

vocal and nothing escalated. The Hoxie school board did not back down, either, filing suit against the segregationist leaders. The courts ruled in the favor of the Hoxie school district, giving them a temporary order of protection against the segregationists.

The rest of Arkansas was not ready to accept desegregation as fast as the town of Hoxie. Even individuals in the town of Hoxie reported familial disputes, and in August 7, 1955, the Arkansas Democrat headline posted, “Hoxie, A City Divided” (Harris, 2013). This did not sway the board of Hoxie either, the financial benefits outweighed the opinions of the time. It simply made more sense to integrate the African American students considering the school was in debt (Harris, 2013). Under Arkansas laws at the time no school could operate in the red, so they faced closure unless expenses were cut, and the expense of $5,000 bussing a few African American students to another town was not sensible for the school board. No amount of familial disputes or segregationist leaders could change the circumstances of the Hoxie school system in that time period.

Not only did it make financial sense for the Hoxie school system, but the students integrated successfully. There were no violent incidents from the desegregation of the Hoxie school systems, and the schools continued to function after a couple of closures fighting the segregation laws. Ultimately, most of the segregationists moved along to the Arkansas government for their complaints and left Hoxie. Especially in 1957, when governor Faubus and the segregationists attempted to prevent the Little Rock Nine from attending school.

In conclusion, Hoxie was one of the first towns in Arkansas to desegregate their schools. The Hoxie school board had to cut expenses to keep the schools functional, and they were following the law as well as their morals. Although they faced backlash from their community

and eventually the entire state they persevered and the schools were able to successfully be integrated.

References

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