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Milwaukee Voucher Ads Flunk Black History
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With schools fresh off the heels of honoring deceased civil–rights activist Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King's birthday and preparing for February "Black History Month," Milwaukee voucher racial ads on radio crashed their party.

Blindfolded by their manic protests of Democratic Governor Jim Doyle's proposed veto of expanding seats in the private and religious Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), pro–voucher radio ads compared the governor's action to those of infamous segregationist governors Orval Faubus of Arkansas and George Wallace of Alabama. Demanding increased voucher school "accountability" measures be included in any agreement, Doyle got the Faubus & Wallace hatchet treatment instead. Distorting history is fashionable in today's hip–hop marketplace – advertising to sell anything, even if it's fraudulent. The pro–voucher, racial radio ads proved likewise.

On September 2, 1957, the day before 9 black students were planning to enter "white only" Central high school in Little Rock, Arkansas, the National Guard, on orders from Faubus, had already surrounded the school. He had declared Central high school "off–limits" to black students, including those from the all–black Horace Mann high school. In reports, the governor claimed he ordered the National Guard because he heard rumors that white supremacists were gathering throughout the state to come to Little Rock. Faubus said that if black students attempted to enter Central, "blood would run in the streets." Daisy White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had helped organize the desegregation action, but not on the first day of school. She had called them the night before, planning to meet a few blocks away and walk in together on the second day instead. Elizabeth Eckford, one of the 9 students, didn't have a phone and didn't get the message. The following morning the courageous student attempted to enter through the hate–mongering mob alone. With threats of lynching ringing throughout the mob, the National Guard stood

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by and watched. Two daring, spirited white people came to her rescue instead, and she escaped unharmed. Following orders from Faubus, the National Guard refused to allow the other 8 students admittance to Central high school.

The dazzling darling of segregationists, Alabama Governor George Wallace, is infamous for his inaugural speech proclaiming "segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever." In the sweltering heat on June 11, 1963, Governor Wallace kept his pledge, standing at the schoolhouse door of Foster Auditorium at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. It was a symbolic attempt to block two black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood, from enrolling at the school, wrote National Public Radio (NPR) reporter Debbie Elliot, noting its 40th anniversary. "During his campaign, Wallace talked of physically putting himself between the schoolhouse door and any attempt to integrate Alabama's all-white public schools," she stated. But that never happened. After a federal judge ordered Malone and Hood be admitted to the university, state troopers and the National Guard ordered by President John F. Kennedy surrounded the entrance. Wallace refused to move, citing constitutional rights of states to operate their schools. After coaxing from Dep. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach to abide the court order, eventually Wallace stepped aside, allowing the 2 students to register for classes.

No doubt Wallace was trying to resurrect Alabama's image to uphold segregation. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and its new young leader Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. had succeeded in their historic lengthy boycott of Montgomery's segregated bus system. After the contentious efforts, on November 13, 1956 the U.S. Supreme Court had declared Alabama's "state and local laws requiring segregation on buses unconstitutional." Thereafter, both NAACP member Rosa Parks who had refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white person and Rev. King Jr. were catapulted into national and international prominence. Little did anyone know then it would be the significant spark that flamed the ensuing decades of civil-rights struggles – including Central high school in Little Rock.

"Ads take up cause to lift voucher cap," read the headline in the January 24, 2006 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "Spot likens Doyle to segregationist governors," read its sub-header. "Three separate advertising campaigns by supporters of Milwaukee's private voucher program are filling the radio airwaves, raising some eyebrows and affecting the pacing and dynamics of dealing with the hot issue of what lies ahead for the controversial program," reporter Alan J. Borsuk noted. "...It remains unclear whether an agreement will be reached between key players – Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle and Republican legislative leaders – and if so, what an agreement might contain." It has been reported the 60-second ad was created by arch-conservative talk show host Charlie Sykes and Mikel Holt, conservative editor of the black Milwaukee Community Journal weekly newspaper. Sykes is white, and Holt is African-American. The conservative Coalition for America's Families, based in rural Middleton, WI, said it would pay for using the radio ad. Its political campaign issues fit many rural Republican voters; supporting school choice, right to life, lower taxes, and supporting the right to keep and bear arms. One of Wisconsin's leading conservatives, Steve King of Janesville, chairs the Coalition.

African American Milwaukee Journal Sentinel columnist Eugene Kane had misgivings with the controversial voucher radio ads. In his column the same day, he said, "The furor over (school) choice has sparked a patently unfair radio commercial equating Doyle's stance on school choice with Southern governors such as Orval Faubus and George Wallace, who stood in the schoolhouse door to prevent black children from receiving an education." Kane continued, "I asked one of the ad's co-creators, Mikel Holt, associate publisher of the Milwaukee Community Journal, why the language in the ad was so racially inflammatory, particularly in the way it linked Doyle – the adoptive parent of two African American adult sons – with two racist Southern governors." Holt, he said, denied the ad was meant to be racist. "It simply represented a new civil rights struggle for black choice students." The ad, said Kane, "also wrongly suggests that school choice is the paramount issue for most blacks in the 2006 gubernatorial election. It's not." After a Milwaukee NAACP press conference was called objecting to the racially charged ads, the reference to Faubus and Wallace was

soon edited out.

In his same article, Borsuk said the second radio campaign, "paid for by the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC), has run since last week, and included nine 60-second ads." In each one, "a prominent community business leader or other figure gives his argument for why the limit on voucher enrollment should be lifted." One of the nine was Ken Johnson, an elected Milwaukee public school board member, and currently President of the board. He proclaimed the controversy to be "one of the greatest social justice issues we have in the country, going on right now, right here, in Milwaukee." Johnson, who is African American, added, "Not lifting the caps will destroy a major part of the infrastructure of the education system in the city... We should have more people, especially minority people, screaming from the rooftops, saying 'Gov. Doyle, you need to lift this cap.'" Johnson didn't see anything "inappropriate" about taking part in the pro-voucher ads, that he did it as an "individual" and not in the official capacity representing Milwaukee public schools.

Burning his political candle on both ends proved to be tricky. Because Johnson, the "individual," is one of the nine members of the MMAC pro-voucher advertising campaign team, he assumes Milwaukeeans can't see the inherent conflict with his school district duties. MPS is now part of the "education marketplace" his accomplices helped to create. Meanwhile, he votes consistently with his 4 pro-voucher board allies in 5-4 decisions to close MPS schools. Nor is it Johnson the "individual" who is invited to be the "luncheon speaker" by the Illinois School Choice Initiative on February 16, 2006. A project of the Heartland Institute, its monthly luncheon series "features national school choice experts." The Heartland Institute mission is to build "social movements" that include "parental choice in education, market-based approaches to environmental protection, privatization of public services," and other privatizing ideas of conservative libertarians. Obviously, his political candle is burning thin at the "public education" end.

Money needed to finance the MPCP voucher program is funded 55% from the state general purpose revenue and 45% from a "reduction in state general aid to MPS." With an increase to \$6,351 per full time student in the 2005-06 school year, the voucher program is estimated to cost \$93,683,601 for approximately 14,751 full time students in the 124 private MPCP schools. Of that amount – \$42,157,620 (45%) is taken from MPS coffers to help fund Milwaukee's voucher program, while it's closing public schools to "save" money. Johnson has no quibble about this controversy either.

Meanwhile, two voucher schools had to be closed by the state's education department for financial malfeasance during the "lift the voucher cap" radio ad campaign. More "accountability" woes, just like their racial Faubus and Wallace gaff.

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