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Faubus's first political race was in 1936 when he contested a seat in the [Arkansas House of Representatives](#), which he lost. He was urged to challenge the result but declined, which earned him the gratitude of the Democratic Party. As a result, he was elected circuit clerk and recorder of Madison County, a post he held for two terms

During the runoff, Cherry and his surrogates accused Faubus of having attended a "communist" school and implied that his sympathies remained leftist. Faubus at first denied attending, and then admitted enrolling "for only a few weeks". Later, it was shown that he had remained at the school for more than a year, earned good grades, and was elected student body president.

Faubus led a group of students who testified on behalf of the college's accreditation before the state legislature. Nevertheless, efforts to paint the candidate as a communist sympathizer backfired in a climate of growing resentment against such allegations.

Faubus narrowly defeated Cherry to win the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Relations were cool between the two men for years, but when Cherry died in 1965, Faubus put politics aside and was magnanimous in praising his predecessor

When the United States entered World War II, Faubus joined the United States Army and served as an intelligence officer with the Third Army of General George Patton.

He rose to the rank of major and was in combat on several occasions. His book, *In This Faraway Land*, documents the military period of his life. He was active in veterans' causes for the remainder of his life.

When Faubus returned from the war, he cultivated ties with leaders of Arkansas' Democratic Party, particularly with progressive reform Governor Sid McMath, leader of the post-war "GI Revolt" against corruption, under whom he served as director of the state's highway commission.

Meanwhile, conservative Francis Cherry defeated McMath's bid for a third term in the 1952 Democratic primary. Cherry became unpopular with voters, and Faubus challenged him in the 1954 primary.

Gubernatorial election of 1954

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in the 1954 [general election](#) campaign against Little Rock [Mayor](#) Pratt C. Rummel, Faubus secured the endorsement of the previous 1950 and 1952 [Republican](#) gubernatorial nominee, [Jefferson W. Speck](#), a planter from [Mississippi County](#) in eastern Arkansas.

Faubus defeated Rummel by a 63% to 37% percent margin. Rummel, a businessman and scion of a prominent Republican family, polled the strongest vote at the time for a GOP candidate since [Reconstruction](#). Faubus rejected his father's radicalism for the more mainline [New Deal](#), a pragmatic move.

He was elected governor as a liberal Democrat. A moderate on racial issues, he adopted racial policies that were palatable to influential white voters in the [Delta](#) region as part of a strategy to affect key social reforms and economic growth in Arkansas

Faubus' decision led to a showdown with President Dwight D. Eisenhower and former Governor Sid McMath.

On September 5, 1957, Eisenhower sent a telegram to Governor Orval E. Faubus in which he wrote "The only assurance I can give you is that the Federal Constitution will be upheld by me by every legal means at my command." This was a response to Faubus' concerns about being taken into custody and his telephones being wired.

Eisenhower did say in his telegram that the Department of Justice was collecting facts as to why there was a failure to comply with the courts.

This led to the September 14, 1957 conference where Faubus and Eisenhower discussed the Court order in Newport, Rhode Island. The quoted "friendly and constructive discussion" led to the Governor claiming his desire to comply with his duty to the Constitution, personal opinions aside.

The Governor did express his hope that the Department of Justice would be patient. The Arkansas Governor did stay true to his word and on September 21, 1957 President Eisenhower released a statement which announced that the Governor withdrew his troops, the Little Rock School Board was carrying out desegregation plans, and local law was ready to keep order.

On September 23, 1957, however, Mayor Woodrow Wilson Mann sent a telegram to Dwight Eisenhower stating a mob had formed at Central High School in Little Rock. State Police made efforts to control the mob, but for the safety of the newly enrolled children, they were sent home.

The Mayor stressed how this was a planned act and that the principal agitator, Jimmy Karam, was an associate of Governor Faubus. The Mayor further explained how there was no way the Governor could not have been aware of this planned attack. In October 1957, Eisenhower federalized the Arkansas National Guard and ordered them to return to their armories which effectively removed them from Faubus' control.

Eisenhower then sent elements of the 101st Airborne Division to Arkansas to protect the black students and enforce the Federal court order.

The Arkansas National Guard later took over protection duties from the 101st Airborne Division. In retaliation, Faubus shut down Little Rock high schools for the 1958–1959 school

year.

This is often referred to as "The Lost Year" in Little Rock.

In a 1985 interview with a Huntsville Arkansas student, Faubus stated that the Crisis was due to an "Usurpation of power" by the Federal Government. The State knew forced integration by the Federal Government was going to meet with unfavorable results from the Little Rock public. In his opinion, he was acting in his State's best interest at the time.

Though Faubus later lost general popularity as a result of his stand against desegregation, at the time he was included among the "Ten Men in the World Most Admired by Americans", according to Gallup's most admired man and woman poll for 1958.

This dichotomy was later summed up as follows: Faubus was both the "best loved" and "most hated" of Arkansas politicians of the second half of the twentieth century

The McFerrin Amendment in 1906 allowed voters to raise the millage rate, but opposition to taxes limited its effectiveness. The passage of the first compulsory school attendance law in 1909 meant little since it was optional for the counties; naturally, most rural counties (especially in the Delta) opted out of the law. In 1917, only 446,525 of the state's 649,083 school-aged children were enrolled, and only 292,413 attended regularly. Nevertheless, high schools received state aid in 1911, vocational education funding from the federal government arrived in 1917, and membership in the Arkansas Teachers' Association (the former STA) had risen from 150 in 1900 to 1,500 in 1915. Amendment 11 (the Eighteen-Mill District School Tax), adopted in 1926, allowed districts to tax up to the new limit. "Better Roads to Better Schools," the political slogan of Governor [John E. Martineau](#) in 1926, reflected the ethos of the 1920s. [Road](#) construction came first, though, and by 1932, the state's per capita debt was the highest in the nation.

In rural areas, the split term, whereby students attended only during the winter and in July and early August, remained the norm; seventeen counties had no high schools at all, and in no county were high schools available for all children. Advanced educational opportunities for black students were virtually nonexistent, and the entire educational system was infected with racism. In [Mississippi County](#), a hardly mysterious fire claimed the new school that planter [Robert E. Lee Wilson](#) had built for his black tenants. Statewide, only 1.8 percent of school-aged black students attended high school. State money earmarked for black schools was regularly diverted to white schools, a practice that, by 1948, cost black schools more than one million dollars annually. Indeed, central to the creation and survival of black schools was outside money. The John L. Slater fund, the oldest, began distributing money in 1882; the General Education Fund, with Rockefeller support, started in 1902 and assisted with libraries and teacher training; the [Anna T. Jeanes Fund](#) supported industrial education after 1907; and

the [Julius Rosenwald Fund](#), from 1912 to 1932, aided in the construction of more than 320 black schools. The age of segregation led to the formation of the [Arkansas Teachers Association](#), the segregated counterpart to the white body. [James Carter Corbin](#), the principal at Branch Normal, was the first president.

One of the few positive features of the 1920s was funding for “Opportunity Schools” sponsored by the Arkansas Illiteracy Commission. Although Arkansas ranked thirty-seventh in literacy, the state was tenth in decreasing illiteracy. Anti-intellectualism, a persistent feature in Arkansas life, surfaced when Arkansas voters used the initiative process to ban any mention of Darwin or evolution from the state’s schools in 1928. [Hendrix College](#) fired evolutionist professor Edwin L. Shaver, and [Baptist](#) colleges required loyalty oaths. Even the state schools had mandatory chapel and required Sunday School attendance. What did flourish in the twentieth century was [sports](#), first football and then [basketball](#). For town schools, team success was used to define community prowess. While some critics insisted that academic values were being compromised, [Mountain Home](#) editor Tom Shiras argued that sports taught students how to get ahead in life.

The Great Depression paralyzed the [agricultural](#) economy and hence the property-tax base. Schools often closed, or they demanded tuition (in violation of the state constitution). [Junius Marion Futrell](#), elected governor in 1932 on a platform of cutting government expenses, believed high schools were a waste of money. Fortunately, federal officials disagreed, and [New Deal](#) assistance stabilized the situation. In addition, the [Works Progress Administration \(WPA\)](#) and other programs such as the [Civilian Conservation Corps \(CCC\)](#) supported both building schools and paying for teachers. Many rural schools got a WPA gymnasium/auditorium/cafeteria courtesy of the federal government, with the result that basketball games no longer had to be played on dirt floors, and gym shoes became an additional expense for parents. The expansion of the road system led to more school buses, and slowly the number of one-room school districts declined. However, no governor and few legislators would risk making education reform an issue.

World War II through the Faubus Era

[World War II](#) created a crisis and an opportunity. Male teachers often left for the army, and many teachers took advantage of a national teacher shortage to find better-paying jobs elsewhere. Probably the best education in the state was at the relocation camps at [Jerome](#) (Drew County) and [Rohwer](#) (Chicot County), where those of Japanese ancestry had been interned during the war. Quality teachers were recruited and paid nationally competitive salaries. Not lost on the students was the irony of being taught American values of freedom and democracy while being confined behind barbed wire.

The evident weaknesses of Arkansas’s public schools after 1946 did not influence the legislature. It was voters who forced consolidation in Initiated Act No. 1 in 1948. In 1948, 424 districts were made from the 1,589 of a year earlier. However, non-compliance was widespread. A 1966 report later indicated thirty-one districts still did not offer twelve years of

schooling, and in at least three cases, schools that had consolidated to meet the law de-consolidated shortly thereafter. Although the law set the number at 350 students as the standard per district, seventy-one districts had fewer than 100 students in grades seven to twelve, and none met North Central Association (NCA) standards.

Although Governor [Sidney McMath](#) acted to end the diversion of black school funds to white schools, readers of *Life* magazine read about and saw conditions in [West Memphis \(Crittenden County\)](#), where white residents had a new school but voters had rejected replacing the burned-out black school.

There was universal white opposition to the high court's *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruling in 1954, and in 1957, Governor [Orval Faubus](#) became a hero to voters for standing up to the federal government during the [desegregation of Little Rock Central High School](#). Thereafter, acting under one of the state's anti-integration laws and in accordance with Amendment 44, which claimed to nullify *Brown v. Board of Education*, Little Rock voters shut down their schools for one school term. Although the state lost its cases in federal courts, little real integration took place until the early 1970s.

Desegregation invariably meant that African-American students now had to attend the white schools. In [Jonesboro \(Craighead County\)](#), the newest school building had housed the black students, but it stood abandoned because white parents refused to allow their children to go to a former black school for fear the students would catch syphilis. Other victims of desegregation were black administrators and teachers, who were rarely taken into the unified systems. In Delta regions with high black student enrollment, white residents put their children in [private academies](#). Many had nominal Christian affiliations. At first, some of these schools would not accept black students, but faced with federal discrimination lawsuits, these restrictions were abandoned. White voters then often opposed any attempt to increase the public school millage rate, leaving the virtually all-black public schools starved. One of these poorly funded districts, [Lake View](#) in Phillips County, eventually filed an important lawsuit against the state's educational funding formula.

Modern Era

Modernization of public education in the last quarter of the twentieth century was controversial. Stories of incompetence were widespread, including one of a teacher who mistakenly taught students about World War Eleven (II). Every governor faced the issue, but one, [Bill Clinton](#), made it a dominating issue that served as a springboard to his presidency. Clinton began by making a thorough study of the problem—too many districts, too little pay. By the 1980s, some teachers were receiving food stamps, and their children were eligible for free lunches. A one-percent increase in the state's sales tax financed the plan, the most controversial part of which was testing the teachers for their competency. What Clinton began was soon matched by other states, but Clinton had the benefit of being known both as the education governor and as one who stood for accountability even at the cost of teacher support.

The next phase came in response to the last of the repeated rulings by the state Supreme Court that the existing system violated the state constitution. In [*Lake View District No. 25 v. Huckabee* \(2002\)](#), the court ruled unequivocally that inequality was unconstitutional and that the legislature must fix the problems in accordance with the decision under court supervision. The state was badly divided over implementing this decision as smaller districts fought back legislatively to prevent consolidation. Adding to the controversy was the federal “No Child Left Behind” law. In Arkansas, twenty-nine percent of the schools failed the federally mandated test and thus were threatened with takeovers or being shut down.

Some parents—in response to forced integration, a desire for better educational quality, a fear of secularism, and other reasons—now turned to private and church-sponsored schools and home-schooling. Many religious schools promised rigorous education often explicitly free from secularism and implicitly free from race mixing. Home-schooling by 2005 was virtually unregulated. There was much enthusiasm for charter schools that would be free from bureaucratic control. A reinterpretation of the teaching profession had also taken place. The [*Arkansas Education Association*](#), as the former STA was called after 1920, was by 2000 constantly referred to in the press as a “union,” a term intended to denigrate teachers both professionally and financially.

Conclusion

Arkansas had long possessed what by national standards consisted of a backward educational environment. One element was a lack of professionalism, a condition often apparent in high school social studies classes too often taught by uncaring and under-trained coaches. Science instruction, especially in biology, frequently yielded to community pressure, with the result that evolution information was often not taught. Ironically, it was Arkansas that provided in [*Epperson v. Arkansas*](#) (1968) the case in which the Supreme Court struck down anti-evolution statutes. A legislative attempt to mandate teaching “creation science” came to grief in district court with the case [*McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education*](#) (1982).

A review of the addresses made by Arkansas’s governors since 1836 reveals that educational issues ranked along with economic development as the most consistently discussed topics. However, discussion has not led to solutions.