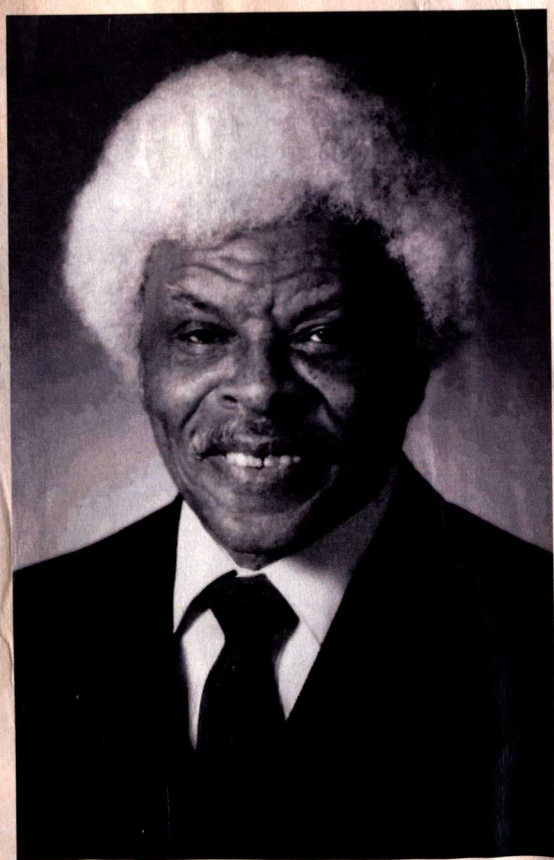


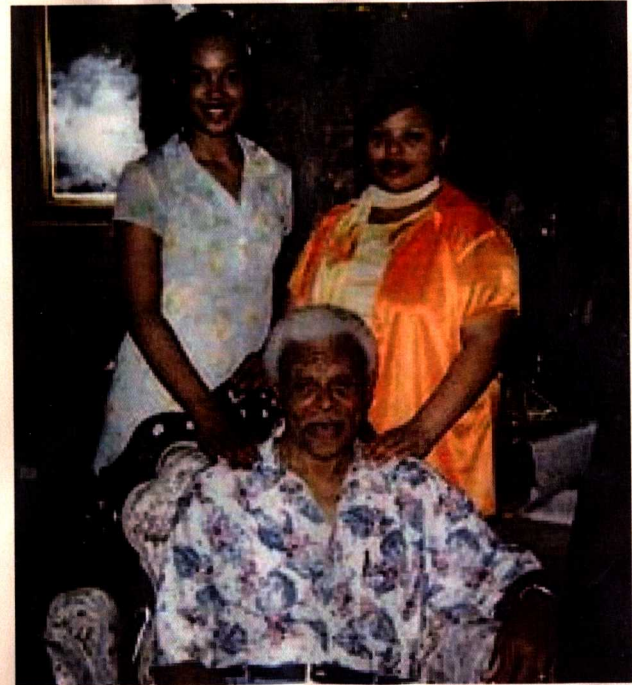
# Dr. Douglas L Conner, M.D.



Starkville's  
Martin  
Luther  
King Jr.

Photo courtesy of Mississippi State Special Collections, Douglas Conner  
Papers





In remembrance of Dr. Douglas L. Conner

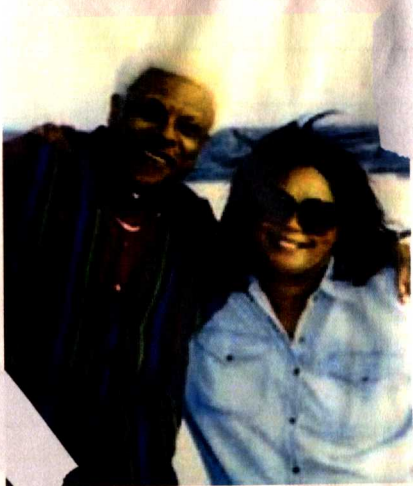
Pictured: Dr. Conner with his two daughters. Photo  
courtesy of Mississippi Writers Project



# Table of Contents

- Biography..... 1-2
- Background On NAACP and the Oktibbeha County Branch..... 3-5
- Timeline on Public School Desegregation in Starkville..... 6-7
- Primary Document Analysis..... 8-13
- Significance ..... 14-15
- Further Reading..... 16





# Biography

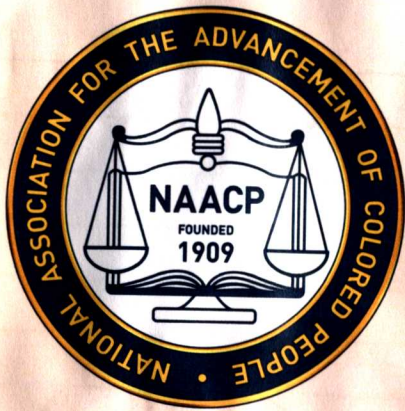
Dr. Douglas Lavoisier Conner was born to Jerry and Mary Elnora Conner in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on October 25, 1920. He attended Alcorn A&M university for four years with the dream of becoming a doctor. Following graduation, Conner was drafted into the segregated military of World War II and married Juanita Macon before assignment in 1945.

After his discharge from the army, Conner attended Howard University Medical School in Washington, D.C. and worked an internship for a black health facility. He began practicing medicine in Starkville in 1951, and soon became the hero of the black community.

Not only did he tend to thousands of patients, he also founded the Oktibbeha County branch of the NAACP and worked for the county and state Democratic Party. Dr. Douglas Conner became a prominent voice for the Starkville Black community and fought for equal rights by organizing marches, conducting lawsuits, and more. According to Mississippi Encyclopedia he "served as the driving force behind the integration of the Starkville schools, the initiation of voting rights for black people, and the hiring of black clerks in the city's downtown stores and banks."

Dr. Douglas Conner has two daughters with Juanita, Sadye Yvonne and Eileen Yvette, and they also cared for Richard Holmes, who was the first African American to attend Mississippi State University. Dr. Conner and Juanita divorced in 1987 and he remarried Rhonda Taylor. He passed away in Starkville on November 13, 1998, and has since had a Starkville street renamed in his honor.





## The NAACP

"The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is a civil rights organization in the United States, formed in 1909 as an interracial endeavor to advance justice for African Americans," states NAACP.org.

## The Oktibbeha County NAACP

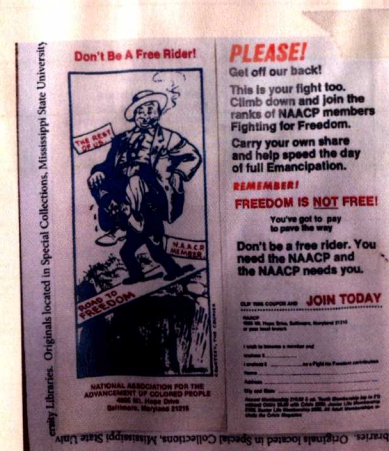
1965

The federal Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts have been passed nationally. However, life was still segregated between Whites and Blacks in Starkville.

After the Black community decided that action needed to be taken in Starkville immediately, the Oktibbeha County branch of the NAACP was formed on April 1, 1969. NAACP state field secretary, Medgar Evers, was confident that Douglas L. Conner would be the perfect leader for this branch.



- Throughout the 1970s-1980s Douglas Conner remained a dedicated leader and activist for the Oktibbeha County NAACP
- According to Starkville Civil Rights, "the Oktibbeha County NAACP served as linchpin in the local struggle for social justice. The chapter played a pivotal role in pushing for school desegregation, equal treatment of African American school teachers and administrators, and equal employment and shopping opportunities downtown."
- However, the first and major issue that the branch tackled was the segregated public school system in Oktibbeha County.





# Timeline on Public School Segregation in Starkville

Information collected from Dr. Douglas Conner's *A Black Physician's Story*

## 1954

- Brown v. Board of Education, Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools are unconstitutional

## 1965

- First Black student attends Mississippi State University, public schools still remain separated
- The United States Office of Education forces the Starkville school district to submit a desegregation plan. The federal government deems the plan as inadequate
- Federal government attempts to get the city integrate, but the city does little to comply
- Starkville board of education devises a freedom of choice plan for the next five years, which allowed students to choose which schools they attended

## 1967

- Schools are still segregated due to White students not wanting to attend Black schools, and Black students being too frightened and intimidated to attend all White schools.
- Equal Opportunities Section of the United States Office of Education came to Starkville and threatened to cut off public school funds if integration did not take place

## 1968

- After many rejected integration plans and excuses, the federal government cut off funds to Starkville public schools. At this time only 80 Black students attended White schools, and no White children attended Black schools.
- The Starkville schools still operated under the freedom of choice plan, and the Black community was exasperated

## July 2, 1968

- Douglas Conner helped organize a group to deliver a court-ordered end to the dual school system to the United States District Court in Aberdeen Mississippi

## August 5, 1969

- Judge Orma Smith held a hearing
- An issue was ordered the next day giving Starkville until December 1, 1969 to carry out a two-year plan ending the dual school system.
- Starkville wished to continue the freedom of choice plan for two years until the switch to integrated schools, the Black community was not happy.

## February 5, 1970

- Judge Smith issued an order stating that the dual system was to be abolished in the 70-71 school year, effective immediately. All existing school buildings, those originally for Blacks and those for Whites, were to be used.
- Teacher desegregation was also issued immediately by Judge Smith. He made it clear that no aspect of public schools, such as buses and activities, were to be segregated.



## Taking a Look at a Primary Document

### SCHOOL DESEGREGATION POSITION OF THE OKTIBBEHA COUNTY BRANCH - N A A C P

Separate schools for the races in our city and county have resulted in inadequate preparation of our young people - black and white - to meet the needs and challenges of life in America and the world today. They have resulted in mass undereducation, duplication and unnecessary expenses which have helped to keep Mississippi's illiteracy rate among the highest in the nation. As citizens of Oktibbeha County we urge the unbiased consideration of the following one-year desegregation plans by the entire community. We, the people of this city and county, can no longer afford the staggering burden of a dual educational system from all viewpoints - morally, legally nor economically.

Mississippi State Special Collections, Douglas Conner Papers

## Background

- Published in 1969, this primary document is an excerpt from the formal position statement of the Oktibbeha County Branch NAACP on terminating the dual school system.
- It is specifically written by the Special School Segregation Committee of the NAACP, which Douglas Conner was an important member of.
- Although this is the typed official document, the handwritten draft is signed by the signatures of Douglas Conner, Benny Butter, and an illegible name starting with J.J.
- The Letter is addressed to the Superintendents and School Boards of the Starkville Municipal Separate School District and the Oktibbeha County School District, and pertains to the court order requiring the desegregation of the Starkville public schools.

Douglas Conner  
Benny Butter  
J. J. McFar

Signatures from handwritten draft  
Mississippi State Special Collections, Douglas Conner Papers



## What is a Position Statement?

- A clear and simple letter the plaintiff writes to give the court and defendant an outline/summary of their position before the hearing.
- It ensures there is a written record of your position at the time and can help bring a case to an early conclusion if the other party accepts it.
- Usually a judge states when the position statement should be filed and served, meaning brought to the court or brought to the opposing party.
- In this case the plaintiff is the NAACP and black families, and the defendant is the Superintendents and School Boards of the Starkville Municipal Separate School District and the Oktibbeha County School District.
- This particular statement includes a reasonable three page introduction followed by two different plan options, plan A and plan B, on how to integrate the separate schools of Oktibbeha County.

## Analysis

This excerpt is pulled from the end of the introduction of the letter. Therefore, it is the final words the Superintendent and School boards will read before they view the integration plans. It is crucial that the plaintiff provides a clear explanation, facts, and persuasive elements in attempts to convince the defendant, the audience.

### Sentence 1

---

The paragraph starts with a clear statement declaring that separate school systems do not equip the children of Oktibbeha county for the real world. After the word "children," there are dashes with "black and white" between them. These dashes add a dramatic effect and interruption to the sentence. Additionally, addressing that white children are also affected will catch the attention of the white readers. The sentence also features the phrase "America and the world." This phrase turns this problem from a county issue to a country/worldwide issue, which heightens the severity of school desegregation.



## Sentence 2

Touching on education, financials, and illiteracy rate, the second sentence provides examples that justify the claim that separate schooling has negative impacts. The inclusion of a financial example highlights the clear inefficiency of having a dual school system, which builds the logos of the argument and catches the attention of structure minded individuals. Additionally, mentioning Mississippi's illiteracy rate as one of the highest in the nation further emphasizes that this issue's effects stem farther than Oktibbeha county.

## Sentences 3 & 4

The next sentence has a firm and earnest tone, the plaintiffs are begging for the defendants to carefully consider their plan. Word choices such as "urge" and "unbiased" contribute to the desperate asking of the defendants to abandon all predisposed thoughts and biases when reading, which the plaintiff should not have to ask. The plaintiffs also assert their credibility as Oktibbeha citizens, which builds their ethos and shows they deserve to be heard. In the following sentence they repeat their credibility a second time to establish that they are not Northern outsiders that want change, they are a part of the community just like the reader.

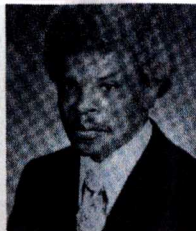
"WE, THE PEOPLE OF THIS CITY AND COUNTY,  
CAN NO LONGER AFFORD THE STAGGERING  
BURDEN OF A DUAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM  
FROM ALL VIEWPOINTS- MORALLY, LEGALLY,  
NOR ECONOMICALLY."

## Closing Sentence

The closing sentence wraps up the thoughts of the introduction and adds even more graveness to the issue. The phrase "staggering burden" emphasizes the overwhelmingness, stress, and mental toll the dual school system brings to the black community. The last collection of words in the sentence includes a dash before it, which creates another dramatized pause and amplifies the language. These words, "morally, legally, nor economically" further emphasize the broadness of the issue and how it affects a variety of different areas, not just education. The word morally speaks to the reader's pathos because it directs the reader to reflect on their moral character and the moral code of society. The words "legally" and "economically" are examples of logos because it appeals to the readers' reasoning and builds the logical argument of school desegregation. The language choices throughout this legal document contribute to the possible convincement of the defendants to read the integration plan with an open mind and to agree to the plan.



## T'S TIME FOR A CHANGE



August 5, 1975

photos courtesy of Mississippi State Special Collections,  
Douglas Conner Papers

VOTE NOVEMBER 2



Mississippi needs leadership.  
Dr. Douglas Conner is a leader.

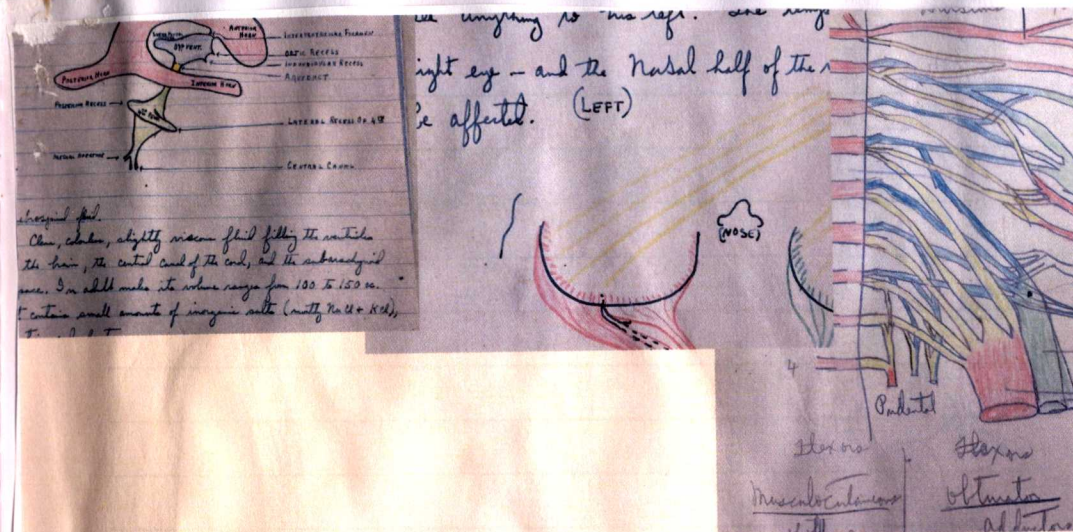
**Douglas Conner**  
**for State Senator**

**Elect Dr. Douglas Conner your Senator  
for Noxubee and Oktibbeha Counties**

# Significance

Dr. Douglas L. Conner is an inspiration to many. He played a critical role in Civil Rights activism where he fought for school desegregation, job equality, and more opportunities for the Black community. He was also involved in the Democratic party, where he campaigned for State Senator. Lastly, he was the first black male to practice medicine in the city of Starkville.

Dr. Douglas L. Conner is a prime example of fighting for what you believe is right and fighting to achieve your dreams, no matter the circumstances.



Photos of Dr. Douglas L. Conner's  
medical school notes. Courtesy of  
Mississippi State Special Collection  
Douglas Conner Papers

"to African American students, know that we have come a long way trying to beat the odds. One person can not change the world, but can change something. And if everyone changes something, it would eventually become a domino effect to climbing the 'ladder of success'."

- Dr. Douglas L. Conner



# Acknowledgements

Conner, Connie. "Douglas L. Conner, a Mississippi Writer, Civil Rights Leader, and Physician."

*W*[www.mswritersandmusicians.com](http://www.mswritersandmusicians.com),

[www.mswritersandmusicians.com/mississippi-writers/douglas-l-conner](http://www.mswritersandmusicians.com/mississippi-writers/douglas-l-conner). Accessed 26 Apr. 2023.

Conner, Douglas L., and John F Marszalek. *A Black Physician's Story*. 1985.

Douglas Conner Papers, Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University Libraries

Marszalek, John F. "Conner, Douglas L." *Mississippi Encyclopedia*, Center for Study of

Southern Culture, 13 Apr. 2018, [mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/douglas-l-conner/](http://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/douglas-l-conner/).

*NAACP: Oktibbeha County | a Shaky Truce : Starkville Civil Rights, 1960-1980*.

[starkvillecivilrights.msstate.edu/wordpress/naacp/](http://starkvillecivilrights.msstate.edu/wordpress/naacp/). Accessed 26 Apr. 2023.

Special thank you to Carrie P. Mastley, Assistant  
Professor/Curator of Material Culture at Mitchell Memorial  
Library Special Collections

## Further Reading

Douglas Conner Papers, Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University Libraries

At the Mississippi State Library Special collections  
you can find additional readings such as multiple  
interviews, medical school documents,  
information regarding boycotts, Democratic  
political papers, and more.