

Exodus to the Suburbs!

An Interpretative Essay
of Busing and Racial Integration

Name
Date
Class subject
Class meeting time
Prof.

Although the legality of desegregation is nearly set in stone, the method of how to go about it continues to be debated. The failure of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court decision to establish a timetable for school integration resulted in the perpetuation of segregation in America's schools. The *Green v. County Board of New Kent County* decision of 1968 added to the *Brown* by ruling that school systems must take positive action to promote integration. Another ruling, the *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education* of 1971, superseded this decision by prohibiting the limitation of desegregation plans to only walk-in-schools. If necessary, it required schools to use bus transportation as a tool for integration. Response to the *Swann* ruling, by American cities, was less than enthusiastic. As each city reluctantly moved toward integration, white parents organized, often violently, to block their efforts. Like earlier segregation battles, the white parents lost, leaving them to move their children to the suburbs or private schools. Meanwhile, black children were faced with the burden of busing as racial tensions climbed.

In their book *The Burden of Busing: The Politics of Desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee*, Richard Pride and David Woodward examine the effect of twenty-five years of school desegregation and busing on the people of the Nashville. He begins by stating that the Second Reconstruction of the South began with the *Brown* Supreme Court decision and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s. The movement's short-term goals were to guarantee black people freedom from discrimination and access to America's societal institutions. Its long-term goal, however, was to establish equality between blacks and whites in both class and civil status.¹ Establishing equality in education was seen as a means of attaining higher status for blacks, and it was hoped that in the long-term, equal access would make such an achievement possible.²

¹ Richard A. Pride, and J. David Woodward. *The Burden of Busing: The Politics of Desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 278.

² Pride and Woodward, 281-282.

In Nashville, the city's dual school system reflected and reinforced black inequality. Even with the announcement of the *Brown* decision, the school system continued to maintain segregated facilities for three years. Finally, it took the first steps towards desegregation by integrating at the grade and neighborhood level. This grade-a-year plan, however, failed to integrate fully in part due to the city's segregated housing. The authors claim that black children continued to be stigmatized because of the city's failure to integrate.³

Pride and Woodward claim that the initial goal of busing was to assimilate black people into the white, Anglo-Saxon culture. This was based on the assumption that blacks had been unfairly excluded from American culture and needed to be assimilated into white society, via school busing. From this ethnocentric view, blacks had little to lose and everything to gain from busing. "Since they had little heritage and brought little of value with them, it remained only for black children to be made into white children with dark skin."⁴

Following the *Swann* decision, Federal Judge L. Clure Morton ordered the integrated busing of children in Nashville's primary grade schools. Seeking to match the required integration ratios, the school worked to achieve the seventy-five percent white and twenty-five percent black levels in each of its schools.⁵ Seeking to avoid integration, many white parents placed their children in private schools or moved beyond the busing zones. The removal of twenty percent of the white student population threatened to reestablish the city's old segregated school system.⁶

While affluent whites fled to the suburbs or attended private schools, poor urban whites decried that integration compromised the quality of Nashville's public education. However, academic surveys in the late 1970s proved that integration had not been

³ Pride and Woodward, 281-282.

⁴ Pride and Woodward, 279-280.

⁵ Pride and Woodward, 78.

⁶ Pride and Woodward, 94.

harmful to white's as feared. The performance level of white students remained steady and the scores of black students improved. However, a sizable the achievement gap between white and black students continued to remain. Integrated and performing lower than whites, black children continued to be stigmatized.⁷

In the late 1970s, both whites and a growing number of blacks began questioning the utility of busing. The school administration, seeking solutions, decided to implement a busing plan on a county-wide basis. The new plan, however, placed a greater burden on the black children, forcing them to travel further to school. Because of this travel burden, a federal judge temporarily blocked this program. Eventually it was reinstated by an appellate court.

Pride and Woodward state that busing is a redistributive policy that uses institutions that weld society and community together to reallocate educational services and social respect between the races.⁸ Although intended to create situations in which blacks and whites shared equal status, busing also placed additional burdens on the black community and its children. While suffering a minority status at white schools, black children were more often bused out of their neighborhoods than white children. Busing for racial balance, the authors claim, denied black children the right of subculture equality and deprived them of the emotional security needed to ultimately succeed. Restrictive and paternalistic, busing continued to reinforce the idea of white control over blacks. These effects continued to undermine the self-esteem of black children. Because of racial balance, busing, and the persistent gap in black achievement, blacks began to push for the creation of homogeneous schools. As a result, many blacks leaders began developing separatist feelings concluding that, only in majority black schools, with black teachers, located in black neighborhoods, would black Americans succeed.⁹

⁷ Pride and Woodward, 282.

⁸ Pride and Woodward, 286.

⁹ Pride and Woodward, 282-284.

Author 1

Pride and Woodward claim that the problem with busing and other forms of affirmative action is that it reinforces racial thinking. Because people became caught up in racial concerns, important common interests were often pushed aside. Busing also had the problem of reinforcing racial consciousness and stimulating racial conflict between adults. The black community hoped that the multi-racial environment of integrated schools would immunize the children against racial hostility. However, the authors claim that if black and white children believed that their life chances would be adversely affected by busing, the policy would have been a failure. Both races, untrusting of one another, sought to undermine this multi-racial environment by passing onto their children the basic belief that integrated busing was unfair. This attitude undermined the people that it sought to help the most -- blacks.¹⁰

In conclusion, Pride and Woodward state that the answer to better education and race status for blacks does not necessarily lie in school busing. A better distribution of educational services such as, modern facilities, textbooks, programs, and money, would greatly advance black education.¹¹ This statement by the authors reflects the necessity of finding other solutions in improving black education.

Author 2

In seeking an answer to the question of school busing, Dennis Cuddy offers an idea that provides first-rate education to blacks and whites alike. In his article "The Problem of Forced Busing and a Possible Solution," Cuddy states that the issue over busing developed from the original 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*. He argues that the court based its ruling on the belief that school desegregation would help improve minority academic achievement.¹² Reasoning that if schools within a system had an approximately equal number of black children as they do white, white racists would be kept from shifting funds away from black education.

¹⁰ Pride and Woodward, 283-284.

¹¹ Pride and Woodward, 281.

¹² Dennis L. Cuddy. "The Problem of Forced Busing and a Possible Solution." *History of Education Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1987), 55.

The courts therefore instituted a system of busing to achieve a "racial balance" in the schools. This tactic, Cuddy argues, simply replaced one form of discrimination with another. Because systemwide "racial balance" required that the minority population be bused in inverse proportion to the majority population, this tended to place a disproportionate burden on blacks to travel to white schools. The author also claims that those students who were required to remain at inferior city schools to achieve racial balance were also being discriminated against because of the lack of opportunity to attend superior suburban schools.¹³

Cuddy explains that the goal of improving black academic performance has not been met with school busing. A study conducted by the National Institute of Education discovered that schools that used forced busing did not experience an increase in academic performance. Higher academic achievement resulted more from improved instruction and curricula and parental involvement than other factors. He also quotes nationally syndicated commentator Tony Brown where he states "busing is not a Civil Rights issue. Quality education is the issue."¹⁴ In quoting Raymond Wolters in *Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation*, Cuddy reiterates that "instead of improved academic performance, there has been 'white flight' and a general deterioration in standards of behavior and school work."¹⁵ Cuddy supports Pride and Woodward's findings by claiming that the action by the courts to establish racial balance has actually led to a resegregation of society through "white flight" and "white non-entry."¹⁶

The most important feature of Cuddy's article is what he views to be a solution to the problem of busing and segregation. Because of the discriminatory nature of racially balanced busing, he recommends that it be prohibited. To prevent resegregation,

¹³ Cuddy, 56.

¹⁴ Cuddy, 56.

¹⁵ Cuddy, 55.

¹⁶ Cuddy, 56.

students will then be granted free transportation to attend any school within their district that predominantly enrolls members of another race. This places the control of equal educational opportunities in the hands of the minorities themselves, and allows all students to transfer out of inferior neighborhood schools. "The right to transfer with free transportation should solve the national problem of forced busing because it would desegregate dual school systems thus making them unitary."¹⁷

Cuddy claims that this plan will not result in forced resegregation. "First, because busing for racial balance is ended, already integrated neighborhoods will not become resegregated."¹⁸ The solution also allows for the creation of magnet schools and other voluntary means of achieving racial balance. Third, "open enrollment" plans improve racial balance when they provide free transportation and allow majority to minority transfers. Finally, the solution does not prohibit other means of integrating society, such as federal housing projects in the outlying areas of the cities or the rezoning of school attendance boundaries. The author argues that because recent Supreme Court decisions regarding school desegregation have been mostly concerned with eliminating "dual school systems" and "segregative intent," his free-travel open enrollment plan stands a good chance of succeeding.¹⁹

Gary Orfield in *Must We Bus?* seeks to explain the necessity of busing programs in achieving integration. He begins by stating that the busing problem has become an explosive issue for three reasons. First, schools are the largest and most visible of public institutions and their activities directly affect millions of families. Second, school district patterns, unlike housing or job patterns, are completely determined by public officials and are subject to rapid change. Third, school desegregation is occurring at a

¹⁷ Cuddy, 56.

¹⁸ Cuddy, 56.

¹⁹ Cuddy, 56.

time when prosecution against other forms of discrimination have been hampered by weak government enforcement and controversial court decisions.²⁰

Orfield bases his examination of school desegregation on two assumptions: first, that the courts will continue to require urban desegregation; and second, that successful and stable integration is an important goal in American society.²¹ The choice for America, he claims, is not between integration and nonintegration but between violent integration or peaceful integration. Inaction, the author claims, perpetuates segregation and continues hatred and violence. The constant debate and resulting violence over school busing only undermines the making of improvements in education.²²

In his discussion of educational performance, Orfield refutes claims that busing is harmful to either black or white children. He bases his claim on a federally sponsored study in 1973 which found no evidence that busing per se had any negative consequences on academic achievement. A 1975 review of studies by Weinberg concludes that "there seems to be little or no reason to believe that busing children to a newly-desegregated school would have a different impact on students' academic performance."²³

Orfield claims that the biggest problem the busing has to overcome is its dominant public image resulting in hatred and violence outside some Boston schools. He states that this image does not portray normal patterns of school busing but rather the worst failure of local leadership. This is an important problem for busing to overcome because this image not only energizes the anti-busing movement but also leads many people to conclude that "busing has failed."²⁴ He also states that, divisiveness within

²⁰ Gary Orfield. *Must We Bus? Segregated School and National Policy* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1978), 2.

²¹ Orfield, 3.

²² Orfield, 455.

²³ Orfield, 119-120.

²⁴ Orfield, 4.

the black community, images of blacks rioting, receding Congressional support, and the ambiguous role of the federal government, have undermined public support for busing.²⁵

Orfield explains that government support for integration has been limited by the ability of its courts to impose changes that go against the public consensus. He explains that courts accomplish very little without the support of law enforcing agencies. He also describes the misconception people have regarding the role of judges in school integration. He explains that the judge's task is not to design the optimal structure for American education and society but to rule on possible evidence of segregationist practices and devise plans to correct their effects. Because of the vastness of urban segregation, the only options the court can take are busing or continued segregation and once the constitutional violation is proved, there is no choice.²⁶

Orfield in describing America's choice regarding school integration states that the solution is not an easy one. Even though busing is not an ideal or natural solution, it is simply the only solution currently available. The real choice for America is not between busing and doing nothing, but between busing in an intelligent way that will begin to consolidate integration and busing in an ill-planned way that will reinforce the existing separation and deepen racial polarization.²⁷ Deepening racial polarization leads inevitably to violent racial clashes. This was especially evident during Boston's anti-busing movement.

Formisano, in *Boston Against Busing*, examines the long historic conflict of Boston's opposition to forced integration. Focusing on the white perspective of the conflict, he states that the Boston anti-busing movement was a combination of political culture, race, ethnicity, class, time, and place factors.²⁸ The author compares the city of Boston to that of New Orleans, claiming that, in certain respects, they are similar. Both

²⁵ Orfield, 235-236.

²⁶ Orfield, 2.

²⁷ Ronald P. Formisano. *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 7.

²⁸ Formisano, 4.

are graceful tourist cities with high cultures and an aristocratic lifestyles. They also possessed busy shipping ports, a polyglot underclass, and were home to liberal French Catholicism and segregationism.²⁹ Formisano states that what set Boston's anti-busing conflict aside from other cities was its high level of violence and the way various character elements of the city came together to form in opposition.

The author describes the anti-busing movement as being a reactionary, grassroots, populist creation.³⁰ In reviewing the background of Boston's racial history, he traces its segregationist roots back to the interaction between the democratically elected school committee and its constituents.³¹ The author states that the combination of democracy and segregation was only one of the many ironies in Boston. It was also ironic that the anti-busing movement was made up of people who avoided social activism and could be labeled as people who prefer the status quo. The perceived decline of society, economy, and respect for authority further added to their frustration over school busing. As events culminated, the people turned against the system. Having lived through the turbulent sixties, these people applied its methods of civil disobedience in an attempt to achieve their political goal.³²

Another part of the anti-busing movement was its racial, ethnic, and territorial consciousness which was shared by the people. There were few cities that were more ethnically conscious than Boston. The working Irish still harbored bitter memories of competing with blacks in the market place. The fact that they would now have to share their schools with them was unthinkable. This unfathomable idea encouraged the Irish and other groups to become extremely defensive and violent when their residential territory and way of life were threatened.³³

²⁹ Formisano, 20.

³⁰ Formisano, 172.

³¹ Formisano, 4.

³² Formisano, 138.

³³ Formisano, 225.

Boston's political climate also fueled the anti-busing movement. Most of the leaders that held positions on Boston's School Committee were only interested in using their office to attain higher political objectives. As a result, the incompetence and naiveté of its officials needlessly heightened racial tensions.³⁴ School officials carelessly selected schools that were in the poorest neighborhoods for desegregation. They ignored offers from affluent whites to have their schools integrated first and discounted schools in areas of the city where black children already lived.³⁵

Integration also challenged the hold on city politics by the Irish. Politicians within the bureaucracy believed that the busing problem could be "fixed" like a parking ticket and lost in the red tape. Boston's desegregation controversy was very much a contest over whose values would prevail. The hatred and violence of those trying to defend localism and ethnic values placed them at a disadvantage. Other factors such as the city's size, stagnant economy and high unemployment (during the 1970s), added to existing racial tensions.³⁶

Eventually Boston's day of reckoning arrived. On June 21, 1974, Judge Arthur Garrity, Jr. handed down his decision finding the Boston School Committee guilty of maintaining a dual, segregated school system. The days over stonewalling the busing question were over. The opening of schools in the fall was met with bloodshed and violence on both sides. School officials attempting to propose integration plans involving less busing were sent back to the drawing boards time and time again.³⁷ The violence displayed throughout the crises enshrined Boston as a negative symbol of what not to do in the area of integrated school busing.³⁸ As the seventies passed into the history books and era of limited government intervention commenced under the

³⁴ Formisano, 44-45.

³⁵ Formisano, 70.

³⁶ Formisano, 15.

³⁷ Formisano, 75.

³⁸ Formisano, 223.

Reagan Administration, opposition to busing increased. The magnitude of white flight soon made busing an impracticality.

The controversial use of busing as a tool against segregation has been scrutinized over time. Richard Pride and David Woodward found it to be an unjust burden on minorities because it more often required black children to leave their neighborhoods than white children. Busing also failed to drastically increase the academic performance of blacks. As a result, black children continued to be stigmatized. Pride and Woodward concluded that offering better educational services to black students would have a greater impact on improving academic performance than busing. Dennis Cuddy would agree with Pride and Woodward in that busing placed an undo burden on black students to integrate. Cuddy, however, differed on the means of offering better education to blacks. He argued against bringing superior education to the black student, like Pride and Woodward, but in favor of bringing the black student voluntarily to the superior education. In doing so schools would offer open enrollment to all students within a district and provide them with free transportation to the school of their choice.

Orfield's view of busing was somewhat reflective of Cuddy, and Pride and Woodward. Although Orfield admitted that busing was not the ideal form of integration, he believed it was the only option available. Without busing, segregation would continue to exist and with it racial hatred and violence. Racial hatred and violence was no where more evident in busing than in Boston. Ronald Formisano, in writing about opposition to busing in Boston, explains that integration is a sensitive issue and needs to be handled by competent public officials. The failure to institute integration measures with the concerns of all parties involved, runs the risk of inducing racial hatred and violence.

Which Author You Support and Why

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cuddy, Dennis L. "The Problem of Forced Busing and a Possible Solution." *History of Education Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1987) : 56-386.

Formisano, Ronald P. *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Orfield ,Gary. *Must We Bus? Segregated School and National Policy*. Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1978.

Pride, Richard A. and J. David Woodward. *The Burden of Busing: The Politics of Desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985.