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Why Busing Plans Work

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Why Busing Plans Work

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The year 1975 has seen a rising opposition to busing for school integration. Advocates of busing are placed in the position of defending the initiation and continuation of busing. Those opposed to busing can have their opposition widely accepted despite the complete lack of analysis of the consequences. Historical injustices against Blacks and minorities are widely known, but much of the public seems unaware of or unconcerned about present injustices and the official acts of discrimination which are still perpetuated.

I have come to the conclusion that there is a categorical truth in the United States: Black children attending predominantly Black schools are attending schools which are inferior in every dimension. If the injustices of racial isolation, segregation, and unequal opportunity are not to be perpetuated, desegregation is a necessity. The issue is not whether or not to bus, but whether or not to integrate, for there is no way to achieve integration except by busing. Busing need not be a calamitous event which tears cities apart and drives those who can leave to the suburbs, but to avoid calamity requires procedures which deal with the issues and problems involved.

In this paper I want to examine some of these problems and to look at the procedures used in carrying out desegregation and suggest why some desegregation plans have been successful and some have not.

Perspective on Advocacy

Many people who seem willing to accept integration as a goal are unwilling to accept busing as a means of achieving it. If busing is to be an acceptable procedure, the desirability of integrated schools must be made strong enough so that the hardship of busing will seem worthwhile. Many laws and regulations impinge on individual freedom or beliefs. Taxation, compulsory school attendance, conscription, and 55-mile per hour speed limits have varying degrees of opposition, but citizens speak to the need for taxes, military service, and

such, and the purpose becomes widely accepted. People seem willing to undergo hardships and adversities when the purpose is accepted. Some causes, such as abortion, have ardent opposition and support, but integration by busing does not seem to be a cause with much support.

In today's climate, advocacy for integration by busing is difficult to obtain from the political leadership. Much of Congress apparently sees that terminating busing will lead toward separatism, or consignment of children in blighted neighborhoods to stunted development, for antibusing legislation has encountered considerable opposition in Congress. Nonetheless, speaking openly in favor of integration by busing is not expedient, and thus the most advocacy that can be obtained is silence or lack of opposition.

There is probably a balance between how strongly people believe in the desirability of a particular outcome and the adversity which will be tolerated in order to achieve it. Increasing the commitment to integration is very much needed, but the balance could be partially rectified by attending to some of the hardships that accompany busing and desegregation. It is not trivial to begin by noting that there are both short-term and long-term hardships in desegregation. Some cities have suffered because attention was paid to the short-term effects rather than the long-term ones. It is the long-term effects for which there must be a balancing of goals and purposes with adverse effects.

Short-term effects include such items as reassignment to a different school; apprehensions of what the new school assignment will be like; moving graduating seniors to a different school; breaking up an athletic team. With effective planning and management the short-term adversities may have almost no residual effects after a few months.

Long-term effects are different. Long bus rides or long walks to school don't go away, but continue year after year. Even if a student believes in the desirability of integration, that goal may not be sufficiently strong to provide justification for a long bus ride. On the other hand, riding a bus to a better school provides its own

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justification. Attention needs to be directed toward assuring that for every student on a school bus the inconvenience is justified by the result. Some of the adverse events which occur in busing for desegregation can be controlled. The transportation system can be well managed with on-time buses and fast, efficient routes; sufficient, but not excessive discipline on buses, comfortable seats, and a relaxed mood. Included should be efficient systems for busing for after-school activities and emergencies. To reduce adverse effects, students should not be required to walk excessive distances, especially if there is a school nearer to their residence than the one to which they are assigned. If reassigned students do not view the new school assignment favorably in comparison with the previous assignment, or if students are bused to an integrated school which has segregated classrooms, ineffective teachers and programs, which lacks discipline, or has excessive racial hostility, then the adverse effects are increased. Students in integrated schools continually evaluate as part of their daily experiences the outcomes being achieved with the inconveniences of achieving them.

Desegregation Plans That Work

Perhaps some of the difficulties in developing desegregation plans result because Charlotte, North Carolina, has been used as a model. The Charlotte plan is fine for Charlotte, but other cities need plans which will meet their particular situations. North Carolina has a county organization of schools, thus the desegregation plan involved the entire county. Since Mecklenberg County is approximately 40 miles long and 20 miles wide and Charlotte is centrally located within the county, one could not easily work in Charlotte and live outside the school district. Integration in Charlotte has been successful not only because white flight was difficult, but because of teacher and citizen effort, because the court took immediate corrective action when one area changed in its population, and because there were built-in safeguards in the desegregation plan to assure residential stability.

The Charlotte plan was buttressed by walk-in schools in integrated neighborhoods, an important feature in any desegregation plan for it makes an integrated neighborhood the place to live to avoid busing.

I can recall a planning session where someone suggested that people might buy trailers and locate their trailers after the school assignments were made. A quick solution to that problem was jokingly

offered. Make all the schools portable and have a rule: first put down the houses, then the schools. During the planning for Charlotte it became clear that the major problems in developing the desegregation plan, once the court gave its directive of what must be done, were how to prevent white flight and how to provide stability in housing. The grade assignment plan for elementary schools which located the fifth and sixth grades in Black neighborhoods and the first four grades in white neighborhoods provided residential stability, because, except for those residing in integrated neighborhoods, all white elementary level children were bused two years for the purposes of integration. There was no place to move, except to an integrated neighborhood or outside the county to avoid busing.

The Charlotte plan had some equity since equal numbers of Black and white elementary children were bused, although each Black child was bused four years while his white counterpart only two, and the primary school-age Black children were bused while the white children bused were older. The plan could not, however, easily evolve so that the artificiality of the schools serving grades 5 and 6 would disappear. Subsequently, in three cities, Waco and Austin, Texas, and Boston, Massachusetts, I proposed a plan in which the school organization would be 4-4-4 or 5-3-4. In these plans there would be middle schools, all of which would be located in the Black or minority neighborhoods. Although recognizing that such a plan would have inequities, perhaps even too much inequity to be tolerated because young Black children but not young white children would be bused, such a plan might make bus riding purposeful if Black children felt that riding to an integrated elementary school was worthwhile and if white children felt that the middle-school programs and facilities were good. Complete equity may be less important than feelings of satisfaction and acceptability by children and parents, improved educational experiences, and stabilized city populations. No city has adopted such a plan, probably because too much school plant alteration and construction is required, although high costs would seem a small price to pay for a successful school desegregation plan.

Cities are different, and a plan which is suitable for one city may be quite inappropriate for another. In Denver, for example, anyone who has the financial means can avoid busing by moving to Denver's outskirts. This is possible because Denver is bordered by other cities, and the Supreme Court in the Detroit case ruled that except under certain circumstances the suburbs could not be included in a desegregation plan. The Denver plan, however, has many features which provide residential stability within the city. Denver, like Charlotte, has walk-in

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schools in integrated neighborhoods and integrates as many schools as possible, when integration can be accomplished with a short bus ride. In the part of the city most distant from minority neighborhoods and possibly most prone to white flight, white students are bused either to junior or senior high school, but they are not bused at elementary level. Instead, they attend elementary schools which receive minority children who have long bus rides for six years. Those minority children are selected because they live within walking distance of both junior and senior high schools.

As originally designed, Denver had a unique pairing feature whereby some 10,000 of Denver's 40,000 elementary pupils attended schools which were part-time paired. A child went to his neighborhood school for half the day and thus was not in an integrated classroom. The child would spend the other half of the day in an integrated class, either in his own school or in one to which he was bused. Every child attended and was a member of two schools, had two teachers and two sets of classmates, one integrated, one not. Children in the paired schools were rotated so that for a semester a child would remain in the neighborhood school, and then for a semester would be bused. The part-time feature of the Denver plan was recently overturned by the higher courts. However, the plan was designed in anticipation of this possibility, so that, even though Denver intends to use a grade assignment plan for those schools for September 1976 no major realignment of paired schools will be required. The part-time feature probably lessened some of the apprehensions about desegregation, and this may well have been one of the features that resulted in Denver's success. Another major contributing factor was undoubtedly attributable to the diligent efforts of the school administration, principals, and teachers, and to the very effective work of the Community Education Council that the Court appointed to monitor the desegregation program.

The Denver plan has been at least somewhat successful in meeting a goal, which should be an important part of every desegregation plan. A prospective purchaser of a home or a prospective renter finds that the desegregation plan does not have much influence on the choice of home location within the city, except that the influence is to maintain integrated neighborhoods. Meeting this criterion does more than prevent within-city movement. It assures that the citizens will be aware that the procedure is as fair as it can be. Parents will not discover that some friend has been lucky and avoided busing, or that some political string has been pulled and a preferred assignment obtained.

Cities are different. What may be appropriate in Charlotte and

Denver may be completely inapplicable in Boston with its discrete ethnic groups, or in Detroit with its school population now 73 percent Black with a trend showing a very regular 2 percent yearly increase in Black population for the past 15 years.

Desegregation Plans That Don't Work

Some desegregation plans have followed practices that seem destined to fail. In Dade County, Florida (Miami), elementary children have been reassigned, and large groups of children residing only a short distance from one school are required to walk as much as two miles to a different school. Requiring walking, rather than providing a bus, not only creates initial resentment by parents and children, but the resentment continues because the long walk continues. In any desegregation plan, children should be provided with as much convenience as possible in all aspects of any new school assignments, not just as a matter of equity since the children are not guilty of any transgressions, but also because hardships such as long walks create resentment which is frequently directed at desegregation and the court, rather than at the school department which has failed to provide the transportation.

Atlanta is one of the cities which has become resegregated. The procedures adopted there were such that resegregation was inevitable. Dallas in 1971 used similar procedures with similar results. In both cities the children in a neighborhood or area in which whites resided were assigned to a Black school simply because the area was the nearest area to the Black school, while other areas of the city remained untouched. The procedure avoided busing, or at least long busing, but the affected areas were quickly depopulated of school-age children. The procedure may not have produced much educational benefit anyway since areas close to Black neighborhoods frequently are of low socioeconomic status, but that is a moot issue because, by one means or another, the white population disappeared. People with children don't rent or buy in the area, and those who can do so, move elsewhere. Where movement out of the area does not occur, children are sometimes listed as living with relatives, or parents simply give false addresses.

Oklahoma City provides another example of a plan which may not work in the long run. Oklahoma City uses the Charlotte model, but, since the plan has been implemented, new housing tracts have been developed that are in areas annexed to Oklahoma City but incorpo-

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rated as separate school districts before annexation. Oklahoma City could lose much of its white population to these areas, and if they are not made part of the Oklahoma City school district the city schools will become increasingly Black.

One of the reasons that desegregation plans fail is because some children are bused but others are not, for this creates residential instability.

In Raleigh, North Carolina, the school board submitted a preliminary plan using grade assignments similar to the Charlotte plan but in which children from some areas of the city were not bused because the plan had some defects in its design. Before the plan was considered by the court, real estate advertisements appeared which indicated where houses could be purchased so as to avoid busing.

The Boston plan is also residentially unstable. Boston faces many problems which probably result from the tediously slow process by which that city has finally been required to fully desegregate, a process which allowed the opposition to busing to become fully and completely organized and the animosities and ill will to become intensified and hardened. If Boston should survive these problems, it is doubtful that it can surmount the consequences of its present pupil assignment procedures, which create preferential home locations and, as a consequence, residential instability.

Assigning students to desegregated schools by computer has been attempted, but all the computer programs that I know of create residential instability and for this reason will not work effectively. A preliminary plan was prepared but rejected for Denver. I attempted unsuccessfully to use a computer program for Stamford, Connecticut, developed by the Desegregation Center at the University of Miami.

A computer program which assigns students to schools and provides transportation routes would seem to be very desirable because it could simultaneously minimize number of students to be bused, travel time, and number of buses required. Unfortunately, minimizing these parameters results in some extremely undesirable outcomes. If students are selected on the basis of race and proximity to school, students residing in integrated neighborhoods would sometimes be assigned to Black schools if they are white and white schools if they are Black. Sending Black and white students in an integrated neighborhood to different schools is not a desirable outcome of a desegregation plan. This problem could be avoided by an alternative procedure which assigns all the students in a city block or some other geographic aggregate to a school. However, both procedures create residential instability for several reasons. Some children of the same

race will be bused all 12 years and others not bused at all. The residents of some areas of the city will be bused and other areas will not be bused. This in itself would result in residential instability, but could be exacerbated if influential people succeeded in having their residential area not selected for busing or if people believed that this occurred. The computer-program procedure results in a pattern throughout the city of bused and nonbused areas.

Concluding Comments

It is the courts that are carrying out desegregation procedures because the president of the United States and the Congress do not have the courage to rectify the constitutional offenses identified by the courts. Political leaders are perfectly aware of the problems of blighted cities, problems which include poverty, crime, and violence. It is deplorable that they often do not direct their support toward those remedies that would help to eradicate the sources of difficulty. The integration of schools is a primary example of such a remedy.

The courts may not be the most effective agency for carrying out such broad social remedies as desegregation, for courts do not have administrative capabilities in their structure. Lawyers are designated as officers of the court, because courts rely upon them through the advocacy system to bring the facts, the law, and the precedents before the court. A judge's task is to determine whether the facts in a case are of sufficient similarity to some previous cases to justify relying upon precedent. Characteristics of cities are so different that a judge providing remedial procedures consistent with what has been approved by higher courts may have difficulty selecting procedures that are both appropriate and equitable.

Judges are human too. Because of public sentiment against busing, a judge may adopt undesirable practices or fail to undertake steps he knows are needed, desirable, or just. For example, too few buses may be ordered or inadequate school facilities may be tolerated, or students may be reassigned from a school with excellent facilities to a substandard school lacking everything, or some students may be bused many years and others not at all. A court, even while enforcing the equal protection clause of the Constitution, may violate that very section by not assuring that students, innocent of any transgressions, are accorded every possible convenience to compensate for the inconvenience of reassignment or busing.

There is no way to achieve desegregation except by busing. Those

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who oppose busing but favor integrated schools are advocating an unattainable outcome. Their cozy platitudes of "Integration, yes! Busing, no!" could bring this nation to racial isolation and separatism.

Perhaps I am a dreamer. Perhaps racial prejudice and hostility are too deep-seated ever to be rectified. Perhaps I was naive in believing that integrated schools could bring effective education to all students. Perhaps, because desegregation has not proceeded smoothly, prejudices have been renewed and kindled, and the possibility of reconciliation and brotherhood is gone. I hope not! I hope there will soon come a day when political expediency will give way to leadership, and with it will come fulfillment of the American ideal of equality.