

As Segregation Ends

This article reports the progress various states are making in eliminating segregation in public schools. It also points to the promise and the principles of American democracy which must guide, inspire and sustain school people in this critical transitional period.

AS SEGREGATION ENDS in the public schools, America is fulfilling a great promise. It is the promise of liberty and justice for all. America is not only advancing our basic moral, human and democratic values, but is translating noble principles into tangible democratic achievements.

The momentous decision of the Supreme Court outlawing segregation in our schools, was a crushing blow to many undesirable customs, traditions, and mores in our country and the beginning of the full implementation of the fundamental things which go to make up our great American creed. This decision is the recognition of such ideals as the essential dignity of the individual, the basic equality of all men, and the inalienable rights of freedom, justice and fair opportunity guaranteed to all American citizens. Some people in our country, however, regard this decision as "unconstitutional" and as a "foul blow" to all the customs, traditions and mores which many people in our country have revered for over 200 years.

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But what has happened since this decision was announced on May 17, 1954?

What progress is being made toward implementing the decision?

In America, education is a state function. The problem of implementing the Court's decision, therefore, becomes primarily the responsibility of the several states. Local school officials, for the most part, depend upon the state officials for direction and guidance in dealing with such a decision. However, in this particular case, there are a few exceptions. Some local communities are going forward with the integration of schools without delay and without much guidance from state officials.

Before this decision, seventeen states and the District of Columbia required segregation in the public schools. In four states it was permissive. Eleven states had no laws on the subject; and sixteen states prohibited the practice.

There are several positions a state may take now that the decision has been rendered. A state may take the position that:

1. The Supreme Court has rendered the decision; let it enforce it.
2. It is better to abandon the public

school system than to comply with the decision.

3. It is better to accept the law without question and to proceed without delay to abide by the decision.

4. It is better to implement the decision gradually.

5. It is better to wait for the final decree before acting.

While there are many people in each state who are willing to comply with the decision, there are some who vow that they will never comply; and the voices of those who vow not to comply are loud enough to cause some of those who would to hesitate.

On Thursday, June 10, 1954, officials from fifteen southern states met in Richmond, Virginia to discuss the Supreme Court decision. This group included nine governors. The meeting was held behind closed doors. According to the press, it was decided that each state would deal with the problem of integration in its own way. It appears that Georgia, South Carolina and Mississippi stood firmly on their vowed intentions of not mixing white and Negro pupils. West Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky and, to some extent, Oklahoma, indicated that they would accept the verdict as a directive to end segregation and would begin steps to integrate their separate schools. Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, Texas, Louisiana and Florida, seemed to take positions somewhere in between these extremes.

What States Are Doing

Since that time, the following things have occurred with regard to the implementation of the Supreme Court's ruling:

The *District of Columbia* Board of Education adopted 6 to 2 a five point plan for ending segregation in the public schools of Washington. The plan calls for ending segregation in these schools beginning with the fall term 1954 and completing the process of desegregation by the fall of 1955. The five points included in this plan are as follows:

1. All assignments and ratings in the school system shall be based upon merit, not race or color.

2. No pupil shall be favored or discriminated against because of race or color.

3. Children in no event shall be permitted to attend schools outside the boundaries in which they live for reasons of race or color.

4. No records of pupils or personnel shall make any reference to race or color.

5. All schools shall be used to maximum efficiency without regard to race or color.

South Carolina has threatened, through its governor, to abandon the public school system if no legal method of circumventing the Court's decision can be found.

Virginia has announced officially that schools in this state will continue to be operated during the 1954-1955 session on a segregated basis. In the meantime, a commission consisting of members of the legislature only has been appointed by the governor to study the problem posed by the Court's decision and to make recommendations for next steps.

North Carolina at the present time has a commission appointed by the governor to study the problem. The

public schools in the meantime are being operated on a segregated basis.

The state officials in *Tennessee* have recently announced a "Tennessee Plan." This plan calls for a gradual integration of Negro and white pupils in the public schools of the state. According to this plan, integration will begin with the first grade, the other classes continuing on a segregated basis, but each year the new first graders would be mixed and the integrated classes would move up gradually through elementary and high schools. According to this plan, it will take from ten to twelve years to complete integration of the public schools of Tennessee.

West Virginia is attempting to integrate the public schools in line with the Court's decision. Desegregated classes began in Barbour County, West Virginia with the opening of schools this year. It is stated officially that no incidents occurred against the policy. According to the press, the president of the school board described the opening day as routine and without incident.

In Baltimore, *Maryland*, a small Negro girl walked into Oliver Cromwell Elementary School, August 31, 1954, and requested to be registered as a first grade pupil, according to an Associated Press dispatch of that date. She was accepted. It was the first time in the history of public schools in Baltimore that white and Negro children were registered in the same public school. Previously Oliver Cromwell School had been open to white children only. It is said that the same thing was taking place throughout the city. The City Board of Education

announced the end of segregation last June in compliance with the Court's decision. The Maryland State Board of Education, however, decided to delay integration elsewhere on the ground that the Supreme Court had not ruled on an effective date or method of bringing about the change.

Mississippi has attempted to get Negro and white citizens to agree to maintain segregated schools on a voluntary basis.

Louisiana is seeking to evade the decision by invoking state police powers to maintain the "good health and morals" of its citizenry. In Baton Rouge, September 3, 1954, thirty-nine Negro children accompanied by their parents, attempted to enroll in a white elementary school. They were turned away by the principal who said she was not authorized to admit Negroes.

Georgia, like South Carolina, has threatened to abandon its system of public schools if no other way is found to avoid the implementation of the Court's decision.

In Hobbs, *New Mexico*, white and Negro children quietly began attending desegregated schools August 30, 1954, according to an Associated Press dispatch on that date. "Fears of violence proved groundless," said the dispatch. The children went to classes without incident after a week of tension among adults and predictions that the end of segregated schools would lead to bloodshed. The Hobbs School Board has ordered an end to segregated schools on the basis of the Supreme Court's ruling outlawing the practice.

Alabama is continuing segregation in the schools of that state until the Court hands down the final decree. In

Montgomery, September 2, 1954, a group of twenty-three Negro children tried to enroll in an all-white elementary school. They were denied admission. Since then, no other attempt has been made by Negroes in Alabama.

Missouri's policy permits any school district in the state to desegregate this year if it so desires. In the city of St. Louis, three Negro and two white high schools will be integrated February 1, 1955, according to present plans, and in September 1955 it is planned to complete the integration of all public schools in that city. Other local communities in Missouri are working out similar plans.

Delaware's State Board of Education is approving plans of individual school districts to integrate their white and Negro schools but has not completed the formulation of a state policy. Up to now, integration has taken place slowly. In Wilmington, the local board has approved a system of integrating elementary grades, but only in exceptional cases has it approved integration on the secondary school level. About a half-dozen school districts have approved integration of the public schools in Delaware, but all of these seem to be in the most northern of the three counties which make up Delaware.

In Arkansas, it is reported that at least six Negroes will go to the Fayetteville, Arkansas high school opening September 13, 1954. There seems to be no apparent opposition. These students formerly attended a high school sixty miles away.

Some states are altogether sincere in trying to carry out the mandate of the Supreme Court without delay and

with the least friction, while others are violently opposed to the decision and are determined to maintain segregation at almost any cost. In the latter case, these states are trying to find ways of evading the ruling of the highest court in our land in spite of the fact that the rest of the world is looking to America for leadership in the implementation of democracy. Those who would circumvent this decision have lost sight of the fact that it is difficult to get people to respect our ideal of freedom unless we make free all who live in our land. Those who are seeking ways of getting around this decision would have a whole ethnic group continue to accept the prevailing customs, mores and established social patterns of a large section of our country, without protest, even though these customs and mores are anti-democratic, antisocial and un-American in their manifestations.

A Rich Cultural Heritage

As segregation ends, there are some very important things to be remembered. One thing to remember is that there is a rich cultural heritage residing in the American people. We in the United States are composed of many national, social and religious groups. America has within it the sons and daughters of every fragment of civilization. This makes our country great in human resources. Not separately, but together as a people we can create a better kind of human relationship. We can create a democracy of cultures and a society of free individuals. At our disposal are the values and ideals, the arts and knowledges, the laws and techniques, the human and natural resources.

We have in America both brain and brawn. What we need most of all is the will to do that which we profess to believe and which we proudly express in our great American creed.

This creed is not new. It has grown out of man's experiences through the ages. Its tenets pervaded the life and works of free Athens. Its tenets were found in the life and works of the world's great prophets. They were found in the liberalizing and humanizing movements of the modern age, in the Renaissance, in the Reformation, in both the French and the American Revolutions, in the breakdown of feudal institutions, in the rise of the middle classes, in the overthrow of slavery and now we find them at work in this great determined struggle to break down segregation and to establish complete integration in all phases of American life.

For generations, the principles of this great creed have been taught in our schools, ministers have preached them from the pulpit, and courts have pronounced great decisions in their terms. It is because of this heritage that millions of Negroes in America, who in the past have been forced by law to build their whole economic and social existence on the basis of segregation, appealed to the highest tribunal in our land to end this undemocratic and un-American practice. This group realizes that minorities exist in America and that these minorities must abide by the decision of the majority when the decision is the law of the land. But these minorities realize also that they are guaranteed the right to fight, through peaceful and legal means such as are provided by our courts, to change

the decisions of the majority especially when these decisions violate the principles of democracy.

As segregation ends, a very undesirable process involving the Negro child will end. In mathematics the process is called "infinite progression." It may be illustrated as follows:

You start a man toward a particular destination, let us say toward Chicago. At the same time, you manipulate his travel conditions in a way that it will take so long for him to get there that he will never arrive. No intelligent person would argue that the man is not traveling toward Chicago, but the rate at which he is going and the conditions under which he is traveling are so slow and so bad that they are having the very physical, emotional and psychological effects on him that are necessary to prevent him from ever fully arriving. This kind of thing has been happening to Negro children for generations as the "separate but equal" doctrine has applied in our public schools. Under this doctrine thousands of Negro children have been lost as potential contributors to society. Because of poor and limited educational facilities, they could never arrive at their educational destination.

As segregation in the public schools ends, the policy of "infinite progression" will be abandoned and, instead, the policy of finite progression will be adopted. Thus all citizens in America will be guaranteed arrival at their educational destinations not only in a reasonable and defensible time, but they will be guaranteed arrival without the warped and wounded personalities caused by the rate and the conditions under which they have to travel.

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