

Busing? "The Real Issue Is Racial Integration..."

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BUSING is an educational strategy that has become emotionally laden and highly politicized. The President of the United States, from whom we might have expected leadership on what has become a crucial issue in desegregating the schools of America, in the North as well as the South, in an election year has fanned the flames of fear. Thereby he has created enmity between the people, on the one hand, and boards of education, their superintendents, and chief state school officers, on the other. These are the very ones who have direct educational and moral responsibility for reducing the glaring gap between our ideals and observable human behavior and for creating an integrated harmonious open society where equal educational opportunity has real meaning for those who have been deprived of it.

The issue is not busing, it is not desegregation—the real issue is racial integration. Yet it is necessary to address oneself to the facts of busing before putting the topic into its proper context.

There are some who believe that transportation of children to school by motor vehicle is something new. There were school buses as early as the 1860's which were used for transporting children to school. By 1919,

all of the states in the United States had passed pupil transportation laws. In every recent decade there has been an accelerated proportional rise in the numbers of children being transported to schools. Today almost 20 million children in the United States get to school by riding one of those yellow buses. This is about 40 percent of the school population in the United States.

In the State of New York, at a cost of more than \$250 million per year, we transport some two million of our 3½ million children to school. This is approximately 58 percent of the total. The best estimate is that children transported for reasons of desegregation approximate some 3 percent. It is only recently that some of our children were no longer transported by horse and buggy to school, and we still have some children who get to school by boat because of the physical location of their homes on islands separated from schools by bodies of water. Being transported to school is really not the issue.

In the frequent rich rhetoric on the subject, there are always references to "long dis-

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tances" and to "massive numbers of children being bused all the way across town." In New York, the average ride, one way, for all children transported, is seven miles, taking 30-35 minutes. A normal "long" distance is 20 miles, taking one hour. A handful of handicapped children are bused 55 miles, taking an hour and 45 minutes.

Nobody complains about these times and distances or the costs involved. After all, parents know their children are getting a better education as a result, and that school facilities are being utilized more efficiently and economically since transportation makes possible better use of existing school facilities and serves to reduce capital outlays for new ones.

Yet when it comes to busing for racial integration purposes, the relatively small cost involved is pointed to as money which had better be spent for improving the education of minority children where they now are (thus reviving the "separate but equal" dogma which was supposed to have been laid to rest in the famous Brown case of 1954).

And we hear, when racial integration is involved, that riding on a school bus is bad for children. The literature on the subject points out the pleasantness of the bus ride. Moreover, at one time, busing was reserved as an exclusive privilege for white children in the South. Had it not been for busing, dual school systems and segregation could never have occurred. As to safety, the record of school transportation vehicles is 300 percent safer than that of all other means of transportation. The occupant death rate per 100 million miles in school buses is one-fourth of the fatality rate of commercial buses and one-fortieth of that of automobiles.

Many educators have seen a report of a study which describes how schools can be desegregated with a minimum amount of busing. The report points out that maximum desegregation of public schools even in many large cities can be achieved by busing and within practical limits of time and cost. So, all talk of limited busing is rhetoric, as was so ably pointed out in testimony before the House Education and Labor Committee by a member of the New York State Board

of Regents and a professor of psychology, Kenneth B. Clark. An able and competent researcher who is familiar with the entire field from both an academic and a practical point of view, he pointed out that "there is no evidence that the usual amount of busing has unfavorable effects on children."

Even with these understandings, there would still not be an overwhelming outpouring of support. The opponents of busing are more vocal, more organized, and more willing to write letters expressing their opposition than are their counterparts who support desegregation. In my view, the massive opposition to busing should not be the determining factor in whether or not equality of educational opportunity is to be provided to all of the children of our land. Democracy is not solely a determination of the will of the majority; the Constitution reminds us that the rights of minorities must be protected. What should be an educational issue has become highly politicized and grossly misinterpreted and misunderstood.

So much for busing—now for some more comments on the provision of equality of educational opportunity. Recently I testified before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives in connection with hearings on the proposed amendment to the Constitution. I said then:

1. Results of current research clearly indicate that schools isolated on the basis of race may be decidedly harmful to the academic achievement of their students. It must be said, too, that racial isolation is a part of the broader problem of social class isolation.
2. The studies of more than 50 school integration programs generally substantiate the positive effects of integration reported in the more representative national or regional studies of the issue.
3. When lower-status students are transferred to schools with predominantly upper-status students, the evidence suggests that continued residence in a lower-status neighborhood will not interfere with the achievement gain that is to be expected as a result of attendance in the school with predominantly upper-status students.

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4. In integrated schools the aspirations and the self-esteem of black students are positively affected.

5. The findings of national and local studies generally indicate that the integrated school setting improves interracial understanding among Negro and white students.

6. Transfer of the minority child to schools with predominantly majority children is more likely to help his education if certain specific conditions are met.

I must add that while compensatory education and enrichment programs designed to raise the academic achievement of black students in predominantly black schools have had some positive effects, compensatory education is no substitute for quality integrated education. Studies of the scholastic achievement sought since 1965 by the expenditure of \$644 million of Title I ESEA money have not achieved the desired improvement. The commission studying the Quality, Cost, and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education in New York State found that reading scores in predominantly nonwhite schools were $2\frac{1}{2}$ grade levels below the national norm, while predominantly white schools were above the norm by an equivalent amount. The Public Affairs Committee of the First National City Bank found no relation between achievement in predominantly minority schools and the amount of monies expended. Finally, the American Institute for Research found that only 3 percent of compensatory education programs could be called successful.

None of this is to suggest that compensatory education programs should be abolished. They should be conducted in addition to, not as a substitute for, quality integrated education. In this regard, it is questionable that where inadequate segregated

facilities and educational services already exist and serve minority students, the majority will be willing to sustain additional increases on already strained taxbills for the upgrading of those facilities and the education they offer, rhetoric to the contrary, when busing is opposed.

To bolster their arguments for neighborhood schools and against busing, white people report that blacks do not want desegregation or integration. A recent Harris poll indicates that most black Americans do not support the anti-busing position of the Administration. Further than this, in my own experience, no substantial body of minority group individuals or groups has rejected real opportunities for quality integrated education.

Education must prepare students for living a sensitive, creative, and humane life. I advocate extending to more and more school districts a style of education that brings a double benefit: improved academic achievement to minority group students without any loss to majority group students; and the opportunity for increased mutual knowledge and understanding of different racial and social groups that is possible in an integrated setting.

Let me share with you my own definition of quality integrated education.

Integrated education is one in which the child learns that he lives in a multiracial society, in a multiracial world, a world which is largely nonwhite, nondemocratic, and non-Christian, a world in which no race can choose to live apart. It is one that teaches him to judge individuals for what they are rather than for what group they belong to. From this viewpoint, he learns that differences among people are not as great as similarities, and that difference is a source of richness and value rather than a thing to be feared and denied.

A black author has remarked that, while integration is not a guarantee of quality education, at least an integrated education makes possible "a legal and political climate in which the potential for quality education for black children can exist and grow." And he adds: "This potential is not lessened and may increase in the face of white opposition and hostility." □

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