

BUSING

THE END OF THE LINE?



Photo by Julia Malakie

Two decades after court-ordered busing divided many cities, two-thirds of black children still attend predominately minority schools.

Desegregation: An ideal in decline

By JONATHAN TILOVE
c.1992 Newhouse News Service

BOSTON — In 1974, school busing transformed Hyde Park High School into a racially balanced battlefield.

For years, a student body half black and half white waged war on one other, a bitter microcosm of a nation's noblest ambitions run amok.

At times, 50 or more cops patrolled the halls. Mounted police stood guard outside. A good day was one that lasted until the final bell.

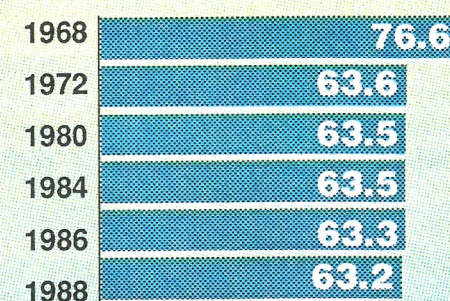
Today, Hyde Park High is quiet. Too quiet. It has a deserted, depleted air. Kids wear their coats in class, as if they're not staying long. Their test scores are dwarfed by the national average. The Hyde Park neighborhood remains mostly white, but Hyde Park High is 86 percent minority. Most whites and high-achieving blacks have fled to more selective public and private schools.

In the 18 years since busing began in a hail of rocks and bottles, Curtis D. Wells, a black man who is now Hyde Park's headmaster, has reached his verdict.

"To go through such a traumatic process, to lose 40,000 students in the school system, to lose teaching staff, to lose the reputation of an education system that Boston has never regained, was it worth it?" asks Wells, a lifelong veteran of the city's public schools. "My judgment is no."

Segregation persists

Percentage of blacks in predominately minority schools



Source: National School Boards Association '88, last year figures available.

Percentage of black students in predominately minority schools by region



EDITOR'S NOTE

It has been four decades since the Supreme Court ordered an end to separate but equal schools, and two decades since busing was ordered to integrate them.

Last fall, Newhouse News Service set out to learn just what this great social experiment actually accomplished. We found that across much of urban America, schools are more segregated now than ever. Nearly two-thirds of black children still go to predominately minority schools, and

many of the nation's largest cities never desegregated at all. Increasingly, blacks are insulted by the idea that their children must go to school with whites in order to get a good education. The new battle cry is to balance school funding, to make separate equal.

In this three-part series, we look at busing's long journey and its direction for the future.

Deborah Howell
Editor and Washington bureau chief

BUSING

THE END OF THE LINE?

Throughout much of urban America, white flight and growing minority populations have made a mockery of integration.

Over the past 25 years, many big city public schools have lost most of their white students. In Atlanta, white enrollment fell from 41 percent to 7. In Detroit, it fell from 41 percent to 9. In New Orleans, 34 to 8. In Los Angeles, 55 to 16.

Nationally, nearly two-thirds of black children still go to predominantly minority schools, according to data from the National School Boards Association.

That's an improvement of only 13 percent since 1968. Almost all of that improvement came by 1972. Since then, the number of blacks attending predominantly minority schools has decreased only 0.4 percent.

With more and more courts freeing schools from desegregation orders, experts predict the future will bring increasing segregation of the nation's growing minority population.

Almost four decades since the Supreme Court declared that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," America's enthusiasm for school desegregation is spent.

"As a movement, it's over," says Gordon Foster, who was an expert witness for the NAACP and the Justice Department in many desegregation cases.

TURNING POINTS

On the day *Brown vs. Board of Education* was decided in 1954, Thurgood Marshall, who had argued the case for the NAACP, predicted that within five years the nation's schools — and in nine years American society generally — would be integrated. Last fall, Marshall retired after a quarter-century on the Supreme Court, having witnessed nothing of the sort.

Long gone are the days when Linda Brown, the Kansas schoolgirl who gave her name to history, had to walk across a railroad yard to catch a bus because the nearest school wasn't open to blacks. But today Brown, a Head Start teacher in Topeka, laments that the schools in her hometown still too accurately mirror its segregated neighborhoods.

"There is a lot that remains to be done as far as desegregation is concerned and it has been put on the back burner," she says. "I am afraid as a nation we are turning backward."

In fact, the whole history of school desegregation in America has been one of two steps forward and one step back, of one step forward and two steps back, leaving a legacy that is anything but black and white.

Brown vs. Board of Education broke the back of American apartheid. With the advent of massive busing, there was significant desegregation in short order. Especially in the South, which went from being entirely segregated to the most integrated region of the country.

The Northeast has become the most segregated region, with nearly half of all blacks in "intensely segregated" schools, those with at least 90 percent minority

enrollment. The South, by contrast, has less than a fourth of blacks in such schools.

Increasingly, school systems are replacing mandatory busing with voluntary plans that combine neighborhood and magnet schools, or leave some schools mostly minority in exchange for providing those schools with extra resources.

Indeed, all signs point toward growing resegregation in the years to come.

"We'll see the period from the early '70s to the mid '80s as the peak of integration in our lives," predicts Harvard University political scientist Gary Orfield, one of the nation's leading experts on desegregation.

MOVING BACKWARD

The most notable failures were the many big cities that never had to attempt meaningful desegregation at all.

New York City, the largest school system of them all, escaped any desegregation plan. No civil rights group had the resources to mount a challenge against a school district so huge.

In 1974, the Supreme Court scuttled the prospects for meaningful desegregation in most of the big cities of the North by rejecting a lower court's plan for busing between the mostly black schools of Detroit and the mostly white schools of its suburbs.

In many of the nation's largest school systems, black schoolchildren are exposed to fewer whites than they were 20 years ago.

That's the case in Atlanta; Detroit; El Paso, Texas; Flint, Mich.; Gary, Ind.; Jersey City, N.J.; Milwaukee; Minneapolis; New Orleans; New York City; Newark, N.J.; Oakland, Calif.; Philadelphia; Portland, Ore.; Rochester, N.Y.; Sacramento, Calif.; San Antonio; San Francisco; Seattle and Washington, D.C.

And of course Boston.

WHITE FLIGHT

Boston was school desegregation's worst-case scenario. The Athens of America unmasked as some bloody Selma of the North was busing's most searing and damaging defeat.

Today, its public school enrollment is only 22 percent white even though the city is 62 percent white.

Most whites that can afford it move to the suburbs when their children come of school age, or put them in private school. The public schools are now primarily places for the poor. Eighty percent of Boston's grade school students get a free or reduced-price lunch, a rough measure of poverty.

It's a downward spiral, says Michael Fung, Boston's high school superintendent. More children in parochial school. Less support for public education. Fewer dollars to improve failing schools. Massive budget cuts and teacher layoffs.

"What good is it to have desegregated schools if all the schools are bad?" asks Fung.

School systems that extend countywide, like many in the South, suffered less white flight. But that is no guarantee of thorough integration.

Despite an outcropping of



Photo by Boston Globe

Boston police arrest demonstrator during protests that followed the imposition of forced busing in 1974.

white academies in the 1970s, Mobile, Ala., has maintained almost the same white enrollment as it had in the late 1960s. However, there remains considerable segregation within the district, with blacks concentrated in the inner city.

"People are going to associate with those they want to associate with," says U.S. Judge W. Brevard Hand. He presides over Mobile's desegregation from an office decorated with pictures of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, one of his wife's forebears. "They are going to move to where they want to live, unless you want to place them under a compulsory order until the millennium."

School desegregation fared much better in communities that, despite misgivings, really tried to make it work.

In Springfield, Mass., the plaintiffs who pressed for desegregation included Barbara Resnick, a white woman and the president of the League of Women Voters, who wanted an integrated education for her children.

Mayor William Sullivan, who had opposed busing, appealed for calm and obedience to the law when the city began busing in 1974. He rode some buses the first day.

Clergy turned out to encourage students on their way to school. Parents at many of the schools had coffee and doughnuts waiting for wary mothers or fathers who rode the buses with their children that first morning. The day went off without incident. News crews from Boston went home without the story they came for.

In Minneapolis, former Superintendent John B. Davis Jr. says that instead of trying to avoid desegregation, the school system developed a plan that the court accepted with only slight modifications.

"I think we did a reasonably good job, possibly because the minority proportion was a little bit

less. It was not tough like Boston, Kansas City or St. Louis," says Earl Larson, the federal judge in the Minneapolis case. "It worked out pretty darn well."

The school system is now about half minority, but public support has remained strong. While most whites in national polls oppose busing, in Minneapolis a narrow majority of whites support it. There is also evidence there that minority students are gaining on whites academically.

In the South, North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg County school district has long been considered the model of successful integration. After a shaky start, white business and civic leaders rallied behind the public schools at a crucial juncture. Because it's a county-wide district, white flight was minimized. The school system remains majority white and only 3 percent of blacks are in intensely segregated schools.

But Charlotte's experience has a significance beyond its borders.

THE POLITICS OF BUSING

Charlotte began busing in 1970, not by choice but under order of the district court. A year later, the Supreme Court rejected Charlotte's claim that the order went too far. Busing, the court said for the first time, was an appropriate remedy for segregation.

With that decision, the moral purity of desegregation was dragged into the political morass of busing.

It was the bitter backlash against busing that powered the presidential campaigns of Alabama Gov. George Wallace, who had made his name trying to block the integration of the University of Alabama by standing in the schoolhouse door.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the enormous reaction to busing, though, were Republicans. From Nixon to Bush, Republican candidates have opposed forced busing while most Democrats were left to

dutifully defend it as unfortunate but necessary.

Thomas Edsall, the author of "Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics," says it marked the Democrats indelibly as liberal elitists, only too happy to impose busing on working-class whites from the safe distance of their protected upper-middle-class enclaves.

Passions have cooled considerably since then. Busing has not been an important national issue for years. Most Americans still oppose busing, but not as overwhelmingly as before. In the 1970s and early '80s, three quarters of those polled opposed busing. A 1989 Harris survey put the opposition at 54 percent — 57 percent of whites and 28 percent of blacks.

The Harris poll also found that familiarity with busing breeds contentment. More than 90 percent of black and white parents whose children had been bused were satisfied with the experience. And, the percentage of college freshmen who agree that "busing is OK if it helps to achieve racial balance in the schools," has risen steadily from 37 percent in 1976 to 57 percent in 1990.

It is busing's final irony that even as it quietly fades into history, largely unchampioned and unmourned, it has never been more accepted.

BUSING'S DEFENDERS

Joe Parsons spends an hour each way on the bus traveling from his home on Cleveland's white west side to John Adams High School, which is nearly two-thirds black, on the east side.

"My parents hate it," says Parsons, a senior. "My stepfather, he's totally prejudiced and he's trying to bring me up prejudiced. But I refuse to be that way. I have a lot of black friends. Some of them I like a lot better than a lot of my white friends. I'd say, keep the busing."

A circle of friends, white and black, crowd around Parsons in the high school's auditorium. They agree. One after another they cast their votes: "Keep the busing." "Keep it." "Keep the busing."

"Normally you wouldn't know these people," says Jason Coles, a black senior. "I think the generation coming up is less prejudiced. Regardless of what Joe's stepfather says, he's not going to be prejudiced. I think you're going to see more of that."

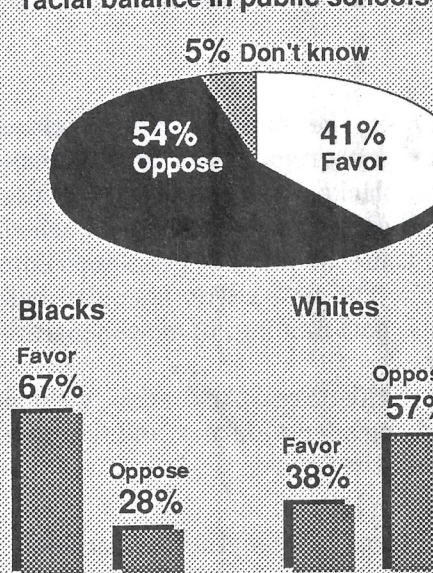
Even amid the dispiritment at Hyde Park High in Boston, school integration still has its believers.

"I think it's better to be integrated," says Ronel Justinvil, a black senior. "You learn from each other."

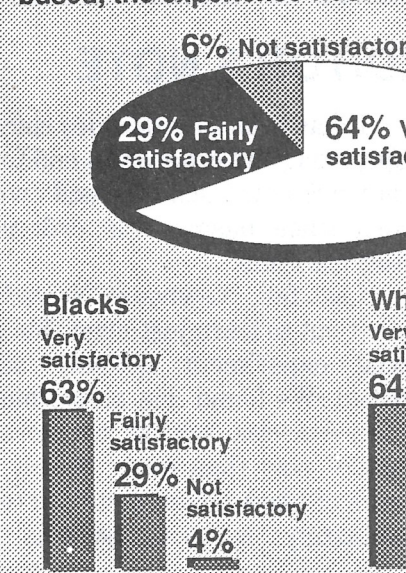
Opposition to busing softens

Most Americans oppose busing. But the level of opposition dropped sharply in the 1980s, from three-quarters of all adults to just over half, where it remains. However, the overwhelming majority of parents whose children have been bused say they were satisfied with the experience.

Busing children to achieve racial balance in public schools



Of those whose children were bused, the experience was:



Source: Harris Poll

Newhouse News Service

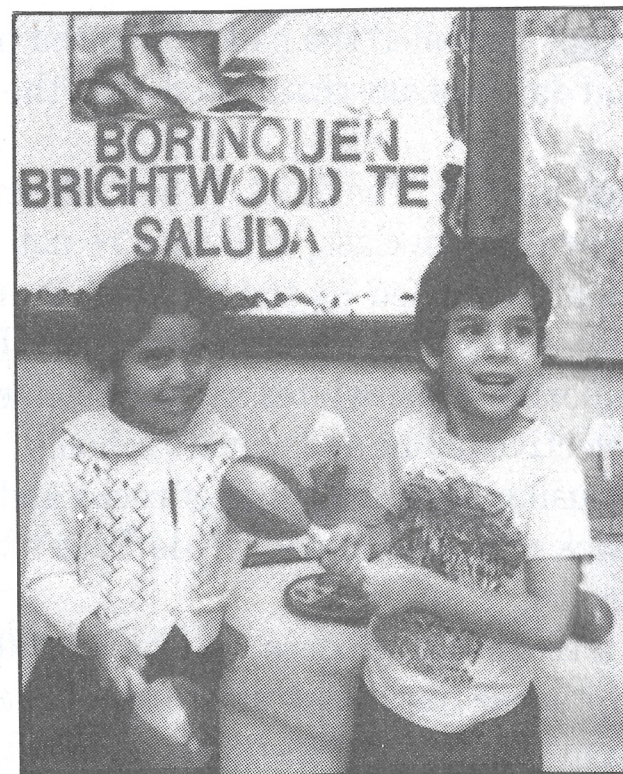


Photo by Mark Gordon

Students in Springfield, Mass., benefited from community support for busing. Natalie Pizaro and Javier Cintron attend Brightwood School.

True integration remains elusive



Three decades after federal troops helped desegregate Central High School, whites and blacks keep largely to themselves.

Photo by David Gottschalk

By JONATHAN TILOVE
c.1992 Newhouse News Service

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Central High School is right out of central casting, the movie version of some grand and noble citadel of learning. On a bright and balmy afternoon, the grounds are a picnic area for students enjoying lunch and conversation.

But there is something wrong with the picture. All the students are white.

In the mind's eye of history, there are some indelible images of Central High: Of Gov. Orval Faubus dispatching the National Guard in 1957 to keep nine black students from desegregating the all-white school. Of President Eisenhower dispatching federal troops to assure those students safe entry.

Today, 60 percent of Central's students are black. So where are they? Inside, downstairs, in the cafeteria. That's where the blacks eat lunch.

"Everybody seems to get along fine, but all the black people eat together and all the white people eat together," explains Brooke Fitton, a white junior.

"It's sort of a self-segregated thing," agrees Wendy Walter, a black senior. "It's not like the black kids don't like the white kids. It's just majorly who you hang around with every day."

The fact is, at Central and most other American schools, true integration remains elusive.

Blacks and whites can go to school together without becoming close with one another. And while the gap between white and black achievement has narrowed, it has not closed.

The number of blacks going on to college has dropped steadily over the past 15 years, blamed in part on declining financial assistance.

According to Harvard University political scientist Gary Orfield, the average black family still has only one-eleventh the wealth of the average white family.

"Society in general expected

school desegregation to solve too many things," says Ernest Green, the first black to graduate from Central High.

"You can't look at desegregation without looking at the problems of housing patterns and employment discrimination," says Green, a former undersecretary of labor in the Carter administration and now an investment banker in Washington. "Those issues are much harder to resolve."

"Society in general expected school desegregation to solve too many things." Ernest Green, the first black to graduate from Little Rock's Central High.

Former Gov. Faubus, now retired and living outside Little Rock, agrees that desegregation placed the burden of social change too heavily on the schools.

While he now acknowledges the moral legitimacy of desegregation, he believes forced busing is akin to the Roman general who marched his prisoners into the water so that they might be baptized. "I don't think he made too many Christians."

"I always said that association by compulsion will not achieve what they would like," says Faubus.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Research in a number of school districts across the country indicates that integration contributed to black academic achievement, without compromising white success.

In 1950, less than 14 percent of black Americans had a high school education. Today, 66 percent have met that mark.

The gap between white and black schooling has shrunk from nearly three years to less than three months.

In the last 15 years, average combined SAT scores for blacks

have climbed 50 points to 736, but lag far behind the white average of 930.

Desegregation was especially beneficial to middle-class blacks, who would have done well in all-black schools but were now in settings that raised their sights higher.

Yet the common wisdom in many cities that underwent desegregation is that schools are bad and busing is to blame for driving out the white middle class.

Busing's friends and enemies alike say it was foolish to expect that the integration of poor blacks with poor whites in poorly funded schools was going to improve anyone's education.

"You're putting the poor and the minorities together and saying, 'Let's have a good school system, let's be on a par with those affluent communities that do all they can to keep the minorities and poor out,'" says John Kerrigan, who was an

anti-busing leader on Boston's school board in the late '60s and '70s.

"I never thought that desegregating by itself was going to make everybody read better or close the achievement gap," says Thomas Atkins, former president of the NAACP in Boston. "Families that don't have jobs, mothers that don't have spouses, kids that don't have other positive things in their lives — it's not going to overcome all of that."

But desegregation did discourage the common practice of simply giving less money and resources to schools where blacks were concentrated.

Elizabeth Coles, a parent activist in Cleveland, recalls going to meetings at white schools on the west side before desegregation. "We would visit these schools like they were a foreign land. We would go in the doorway and go 'Ahh,' because the walls were

painted, the lockers were neat, there was carpeting on the floor and we'd say "Wow," because where we just came from on the other side of town there was chipped paint coming off the walls, old desks that still had the inkwells plugged up, and we'd say, "How come?"

Desegregation hasn't spared the Cleveland schools from the city's hard times, says Coles, but it has been a powerful force for fairness.

"Now you may go east and west and find nobody with a book, but they are equally without a book," she says.

THE BLACK CHILD'S BURDEN

But that greater equality has come at a cost.

In Las Vegas, black children are bused 11 years and white children one. The imbalance is not that stark everywhere, but blacks al-



Black students congregate together at Central High School.

Photo by David Gottschalk



Photo by Associated Press

Under orders from Gov. Orval Faubus, Arkansas National Guardsmen turn away black students trying to enter Central High in 1957.

most always bear the burden of busing.

While their separate schools may not have been equal, blacks still gave up a lot in desegregation.

Formerly black schools, rallying points for their communities, were the ones most often closed; their principals and their coaches made underlings at integrated schools.

"We submerged a culture, a people and a tradition," says Hazel Fournier, a black member of the school board and former assistant superintendent in Mobile, Ala.

"I always said that association by compulsion will not achieve what they would like," former Arkansas Gov. Orval Faubus.

It has been estimated that by 1970 as many as 6,000 black teachers had lost their jobs and more than 1,000 black principals had been fired or demoted.

With desegregation, black children who had been taught by black teachers were now frequently in the classrooms of white teachers who sometimes expected or demanded little of them.

Milton Ford, who grew up outside Little Rock, went to segregated black schools until his last two years of high school, when desegregation placed him in a school that was 90 percent white.

"We lost some and we gained some," says Ford. The facilities were better at the integrated school, but at the black school all his teachers "were very firm and saw to it you were walking in a straight line." At the integrated school, he said such concern was rare.

Arthur A. Fletcher, chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, recalls being hugged by his teacher his first day in a black school in Oklahoma City. But going

to an integrated school in California, "I don't recall a white teacher every hugging me or hugging a black child." These days, Fletcher says, a well-meaning white teacher may shrink from disciplining a black student for fear of being called racist.

In the Brown decision, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote that segregating black children into separate schools "generates a feeling of inferiority ... that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

One of the sad ironies of desegregation is how often it only confirmed those feelings.

In schools all across the country, special education classes are mostly black and advanced courses are overwhelmingly white.

Likewise, blacks are more commonly subject to disciplinary action, suspended and expelled.

Even the pecking order of schools in most desegregated districts delivers clear images of white superiority. Districts pump money into magnet schools to lure white students into inner-city neighborhoods. As the schools improve, they become whiter and blacks who went there before it got "good" are squeezed out.

In St. Louis, half of the seats in magnet schools are reserved for whites even though they are only a quarter of the district's enrollment.

DESEG'S CHILD

Kenneth Smith embodies and appreciates this mixed legacy of desegregation. Smith grew up in an all-black neighborhood in West Charlotte, N.C. He started school in 1971, the year the Supreme Court first approved busing as a way of integrating the Charlotte school system.

"It was the first contact I had with whites," recalls Smith, and he is glad for it. He says he is more comfortable, less deferential and more competitive with whites than his parents' generation. He made and kept white friends.

Yet he deeply resents the desegregation mentality of many whites. "I don't think being next to

whites is going to improve my lot one bit."

That said, Smith acknowl-

"We submerged a culture, a people and a tradition." Hazel Fournier, a black member of the school board in Mobile, Ala.

edges the advantages of being bused to South Mecklenburg High School, a historically white school

out in the county. The school had a stellar academic reputation, as well as a generous parents' booster club.

But, he recalls, other blacks didn't fare as well. Some "didn't know they were poor, didn't feel inferior until they were integrated."

When reunion time came, they wouldn't go back to South Mecklenburg because they never considered that "white school" their own.

Smith went on to Harvard Law School and recently returned to Charlotte to practice law. He doesn't like to think that in order to

guarantee his children a good education he would have to put them on a bus so they could sit next to white children. But he expects that is probably what he will have to do.

He cannot forget those textbooks his grandfather saved from his segregated schooldays in Charlotte, hand-me-downs the black schools got when the white schools were through with them. Scrawled on their pages are racial epithets and crude drawings of blacks.

"Integration," Smith says, "acts as a check to stop that sort of thing." Despite his misgivings, "I think busing may be the way to go."

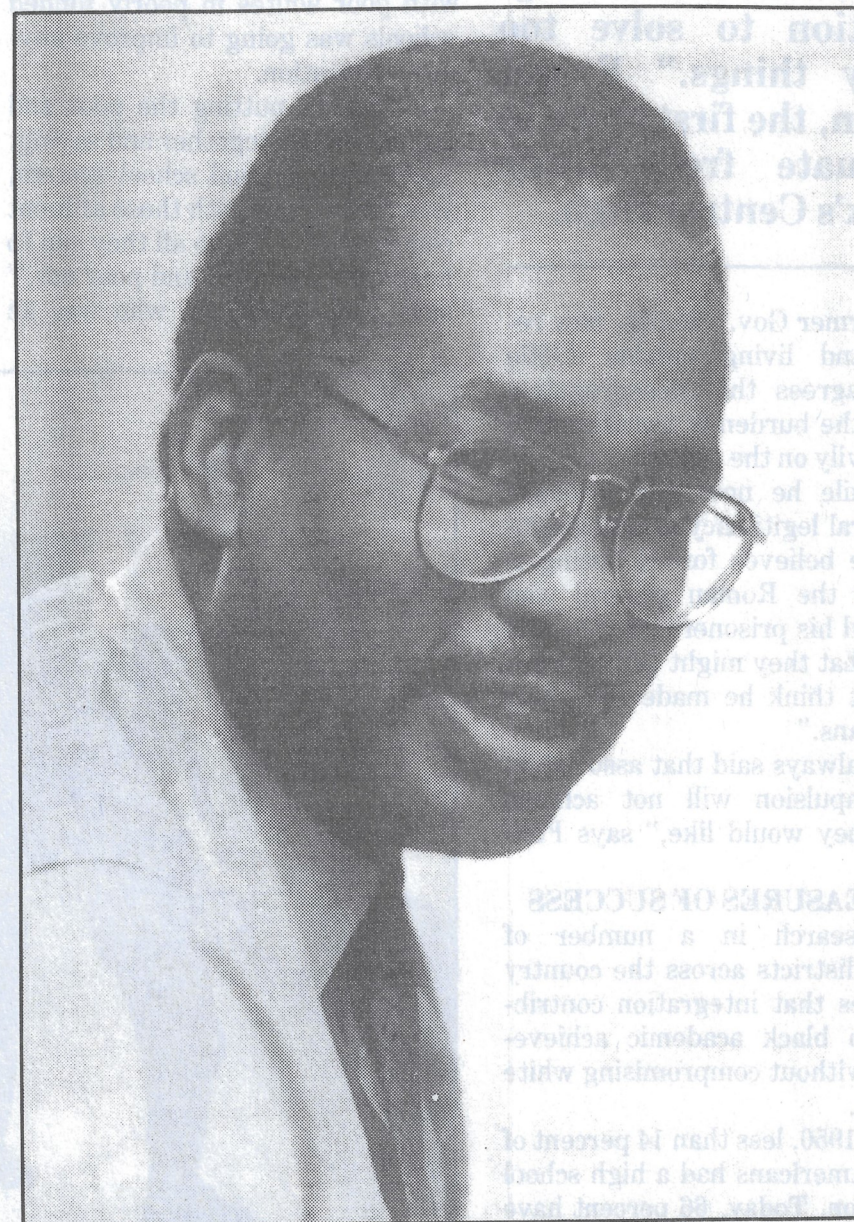


Photo by Rob Crandall

Ernest Green, the first black to graduate from Central High, says America expected too much of school desegregation.

Narrowing the gap

Number of school years completed

	White	Black
1950	9.7	6.9
1989	12.7	12.5

Average SAT scores

	White	Black
1976	944	686
1991	930	736

Sources: The College Board, U.S. Department of Education

Newhouse News Service

The return to separate but equal

By JONATHAN TILOVE
c.1992 Newhouse News Service

DETROIT — In Detroit, school desegregation is dead in practice, dead in theory and dead as an ideal.

Which is fine with Kwame Kenyatta, who has enrolled his 6-year-old son in Malcolm X Academy, a new addition to the Detroit public schools.

"I think he can get a better start in an African-centered environment," says Kenyatta, who works the night shift as an attendant at a juvenile detention center.

In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court killed a plan for massive busing between mostly black Detroit and its mostly white suburbs. The decision doomed school integration in Detroit, where the student enrollment is now 90 percent black, and in many other big cities.

But like Kenyatta, school officials in Detroit are insulted by the whole idea that blacks need to go to school with whites in order to get a good education.

"Allow me to have the same resources other school districts have and I'll educate the children," says Frank Hayden, vice president of Detroit's Board of Education. "Whether or not they're sitting next to someone of a different color should not be the focal point."

It is all a long, long way from Brown vs. Board of Education and its ringing declaration that separate schools are inherently unequal. But all across America desegregation is in decline and the new battle cry for racial equity is to equalize school funding — to make separate equal.

The latest wave of desegregation settlements give up on integrating the blackest inner-city schools, instead earmarking extra money to make up for past discrimination.

But skeptics abound. Experts warn that more money alone can't make segregated schools successful.

"Nobody has figured out how to make separate but equal school systems," says Harvard University political scientist Gary Orfield.

Atlanta tried, foregoing busing in 1973 in exchange for black control of a school system now 92 percent black. Today, Orfield says, Atlanta spends more on its students than surrounding communities, with poorer results.

And even some of the fiercest advocates of funding equity doubt they will win many meaningful victories.

"The prospects are grim," says Jonathan Kozol, whose recent book "Savage Inequalities" details the dramatic differences in school funding between black cities and white suburbs. "I am certain we are going to see a continuation of gross inequalities for at least another generation and partly as a result, a



Lunch at Grosse Pointe South, which spends about \$7,000 per pupil.

Photo by Richard Lee



Lunch at Pershing High, which spends about \$4,200 per student.

Photo by Richard Lee

widening and deepening of segregation."

What makes the stakes even higher is America's growing minority population, which by 1995 is expected to represent one-third of all public school students. "The demographics of this country will not allow the issue of race in the schools to go away. You can't make a third of the kids invisible," says Leonard Stevens, who was the court-appointed monitor of Cleveland's school desegregation effort for 10 years.

Stevens worries about a society in which a black student in

Detroit attends Malcolm X Academy while white students in the suburbs don't even know who Malcolm X is. "If that's not a formula for social dynamite, I don't know of one."

ROLLING TO A STOP

Desegregation, and busing, will not disappear overnight. Hundreds of districts remain under court order and many school officials are just as happy to leave it that way and not reopen old wounds.

But the broader trend is unmistakable. More and more districts will be emerging from court

orders and moving away from busing.

Last January, in its first desegregation case in years, the Supreme Court ruled that Oklahoma City was within its rights to end busing if it had done everything "practicable" to remove the "vestiges" of discrimination.

The Supreme Court stopped short of defining when desegregation has been achieved. It could address that question later this year in a case involving DeKalb County, Ga. The Atlanta suburb contends it has done enough, even though its voluntary busing plan has left most

blacks in schools that are at least 90 percent black.

In Denver, the city's first black mayor, Wellington Webb, also wants an end to busing.

"To a majority of people in this town — without regard to race, creed or color — it does not make sense to bus their kids across town just for racial balance," says Daniel Muse, Webb's city attorney. Muse, who is black, put his own children in private school rather than see them bused.

Seattle, the only major city to implement massive compulsory

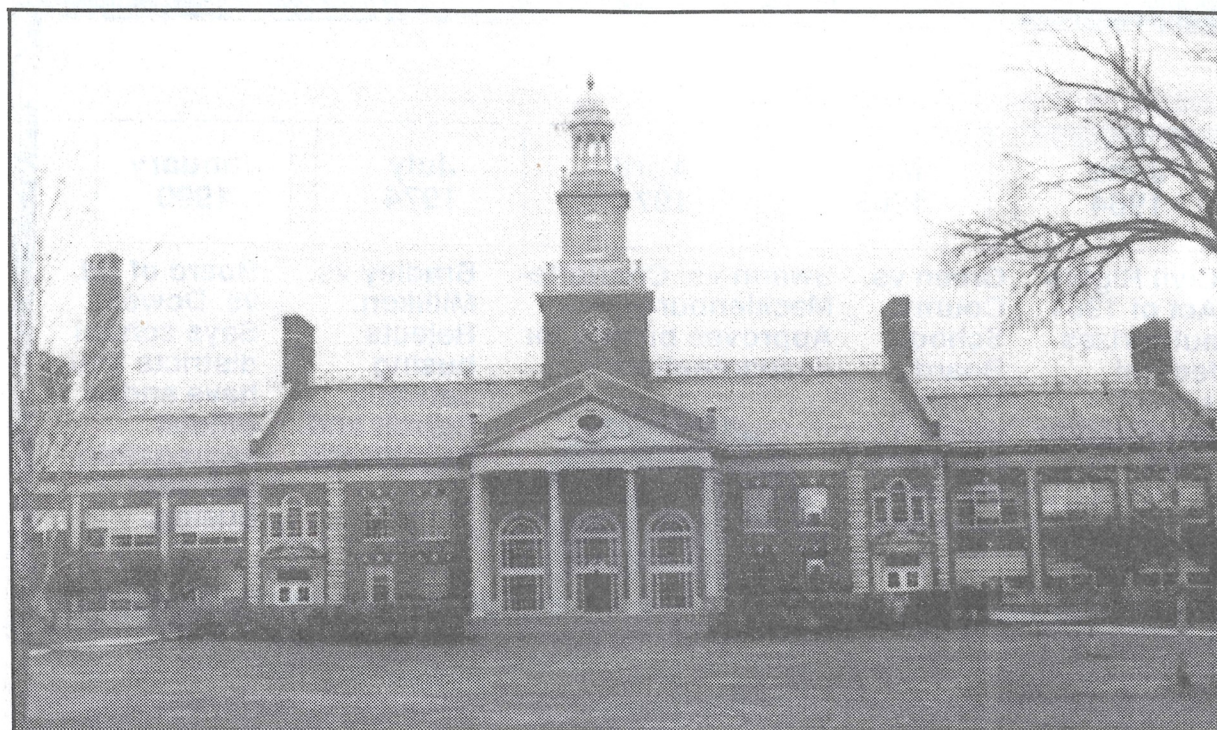


Photo by Richard Lee

At South High School in Grosse Pointe the dropout rate is only about 2 percent.

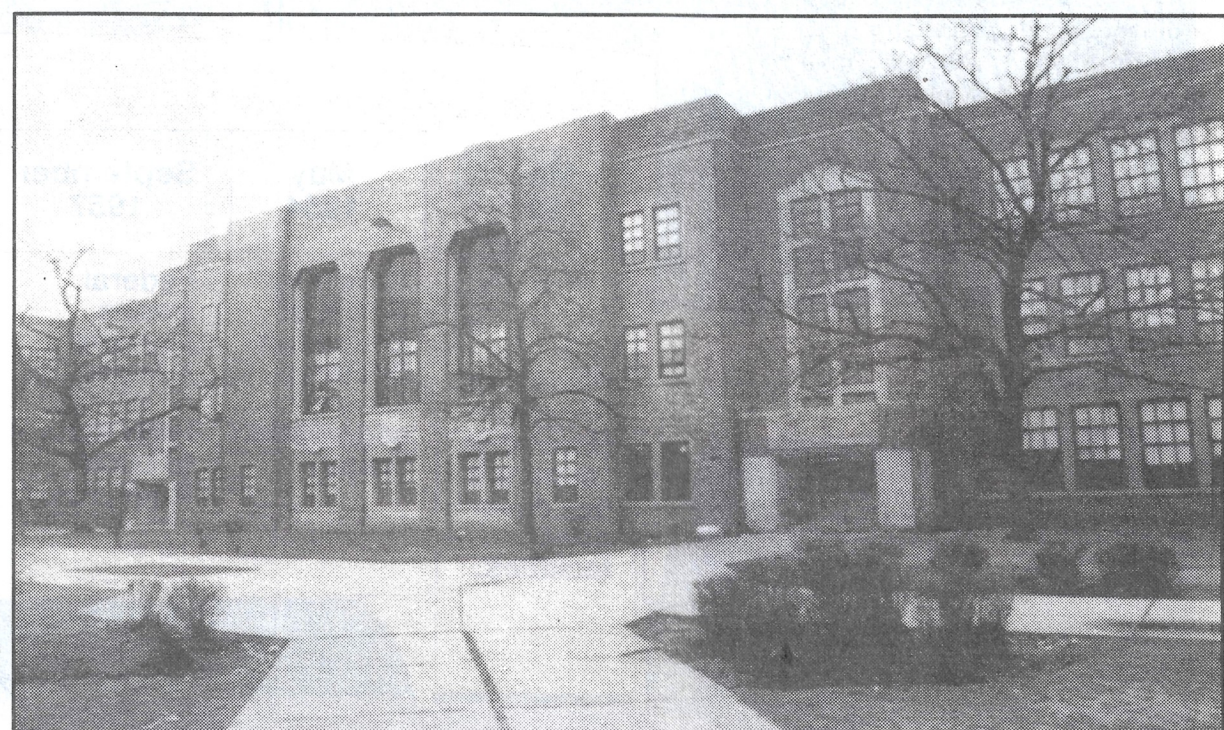


Photo by Richard Lee

Nearly 40 percent of the students at predominately black Pershing High School drop out.

busing without a court order, is also edging back.

"I don't think there's much opposition to getting rid of busing," says Reese Lindquist, president of the Seattle Education Association. "It disrupted community identification with their neighborhood schools, it's been more difficult for parents to be involved in their school and a lot of money and time was wasted."

SHARING THE WEALTH

Cities in several states are trading desegregation for extra money to black schools.

In Little Rock, Ark., seven inner-city elementary schools get double funding under a recent court settlement.

"It sounds good," says Superintendent Ruth Steele. But she worries it does nothing for most black children, because less than half the system's black elementary students attend those seven schools. And she is troubled by an approach that says to the people of Little Rock, "If you have the privilege of going to a white school, you'll get half the money. It's an equity question."

It's also a powerful political question. How long will taxpayers, most of them white, support a system that provides twice as much money for a handful of black schools?

In Mobile, Dr. Robert W. Giliard, the president of the NAACP and former president of the school board, has his fingers crossed that the school system will live up to its promise to improve the black schools in the inner city. But he remains very skeptical. "All-black schools never get the curriculum, the best-trained and most talented teachers, the physical improvements and maintenance that will take place if the schools are desegregated. It just doesn't happen."

Already there are calls from out in the county, where the schools are predominately white, to create their own school district separate from Mobile and its concentration of black schools.

In Missouri, there has also been a backlash against a court-ordered desegregation plan for Kansas City that does not require busing but does require massive spending to improve the schools, most of it at state expense.

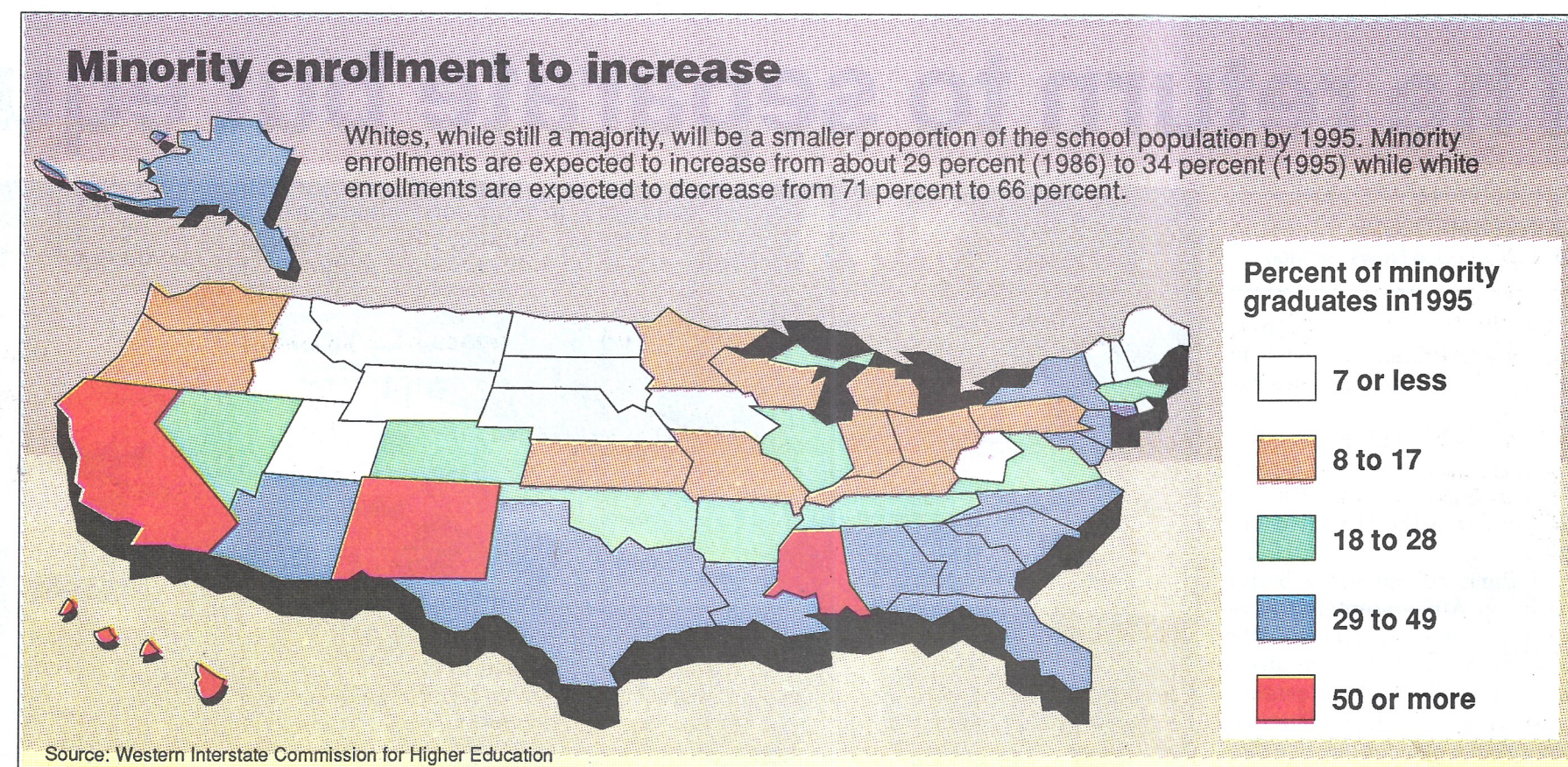
In New Jersey, Gov. James Florio incurred the wrath of taxpayers after enacting an ambitious "Robin Hood" plan to equalize school funding by taking money from richer communities and giving it to the poorer ones.

Orfield's bleak prognosis: "There's no educational solution for the large cities."

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

A few weeks before his assassination in 1968, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at South High School in Grosse Pointe, the elegant old-money suburb hard by the decay of Detroit.

"There is no more dangerous development in our nation than the constant building up of predominately Negro central cities ringed by



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white suburbs," King told his audience that night. "This will do nothing but invite social disaster."

In the years since, that buildup has continued unabated. The one hope for significant integration in the Detroit schools, and much of the urban North, died in 1974 when the Supreme Court rejected a plan for massive busing between the city and its mostly white suburbs.

Today the very idea seems long ago and far away.

"That was never going to happen," says Thomas Woodhouse, the assistant principal at Pershing High School in Detroit.

Grosse Pointe busing its children to Detroit? "Absurd," says Woodhouse.

Nor would he want his children bused out to the suburbs. Poor black kids can learn right where they are, he says. "If you expect them to excel, they will."

Yet, by almost any standard, the odds are far longer. In every way, Pershing and Grosse Pointe South are separate and unequal schools.

Pershing spends about \$4,200 per pupil. Grosse Pointe spends \$7,000.

At Pershing the average class size is 33. At Grosse Pointe, 23.

At Pershing the mean combined SAT scores is about 600. At Grosse Pointe, 979.

At Pershing, the dropout rate is close to 40 percent. At Grosse Pointe, it is about 2 percent.

On a recent morning at Pershing, Woodhouse is expelling a young woman, one of 23 students caught in a surprise weapons sweep, many of them girls who said they carried blades for protection.

Meanwhile, over at Grosse Pointe, where the walls are made of marble and the cafeteria is adorned with a fireplace, assistant principal Bernard Le Mieux must attend to the misdeeds of a shy young woman with a clarinet. "So," Le Mieux asks, "what are we going to do about your tardies?"

To travel the short distance from the gray urban nowhere

around Pershing to the plush verdant comfort of Grosse Pointe is to ride the range of American life.

"It's kind of a strange thing to go from falling apart to manicured lawns," says Blair Hess, a senior at Grosse Pointe, of the abrupt dividing line between city and town, from "Checks Cashed" and "We Accept Food Stamps," to weeping willows and a drug store quaintly called the Apothecary.

Hess visited Pershing as part

of a one-day exchange program last spring. "I think our teachers are a lot better here," he says. "Their teachers didn't seem like they wanted to be there."

But Rashieda Addison, a Pershing senior who visited Grosse Pointe in the exchange, is unjealous and undaunted.

"I think there's education here just as good as in the suburban schools," she says. And, she adds, the triumphs are greater. "There is

so much trying to bring you down, to overcome it is such a big reward."

Back at Malcolm X Academy, Beverly Hunter has registered her young grandson, Djuan, whose parents were murdered. She wants the best for Djuan, but can't imagine sending him to school in a wealthy white suburb. "He's already black, he's already poor. Now you want to put him out there with those rich white kids? Why?"

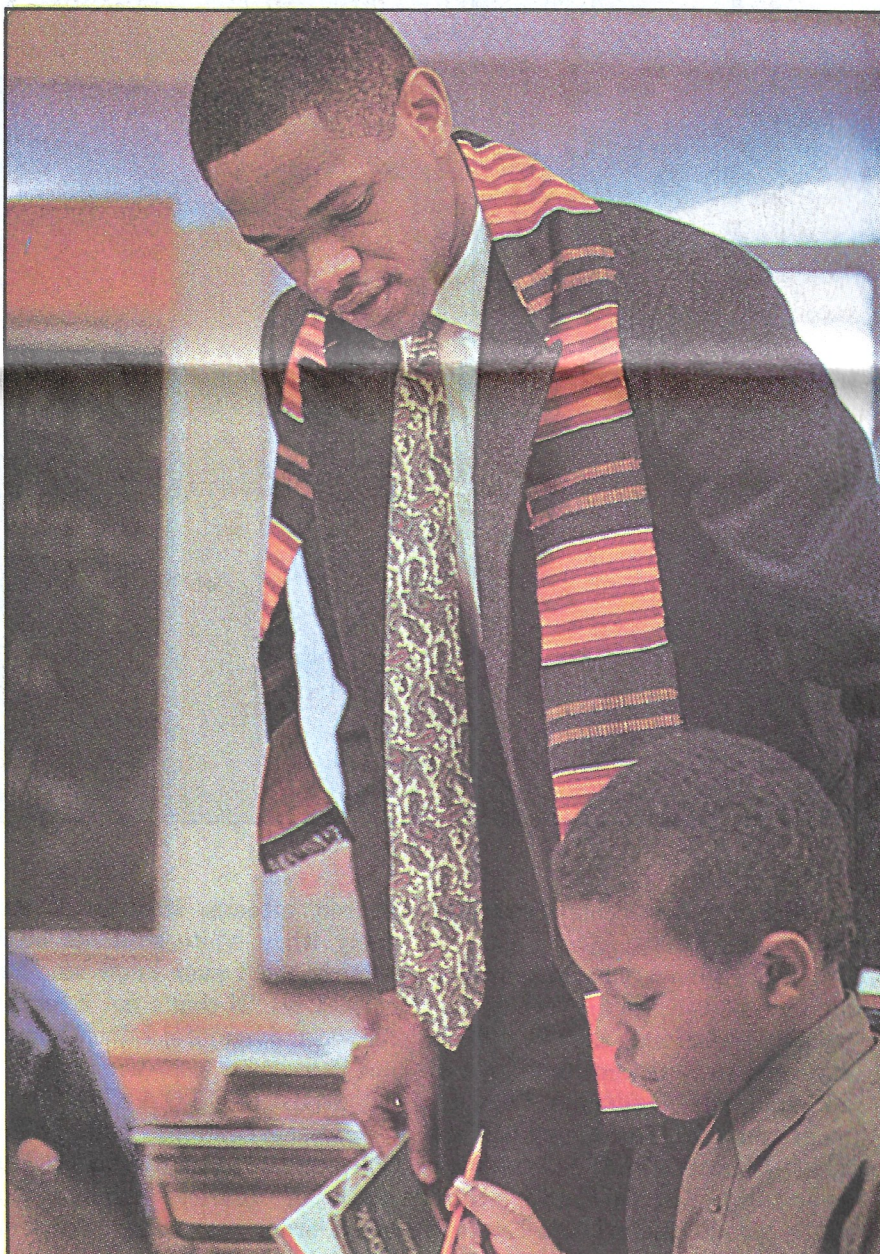
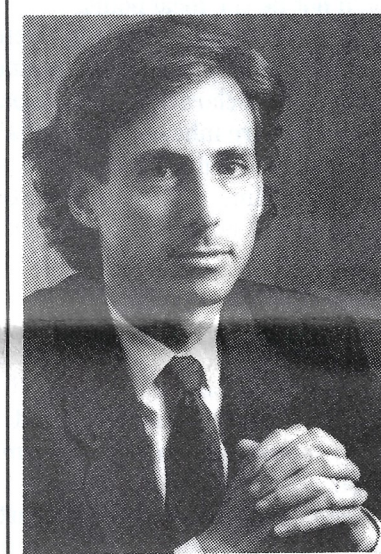


Photo by Richard Lee

Gregory Moore looks over the studies of Michael Hill, a third-grader at Malcolm X Academy. Many blacks are now endorsing the old notion of separate but equal schools.



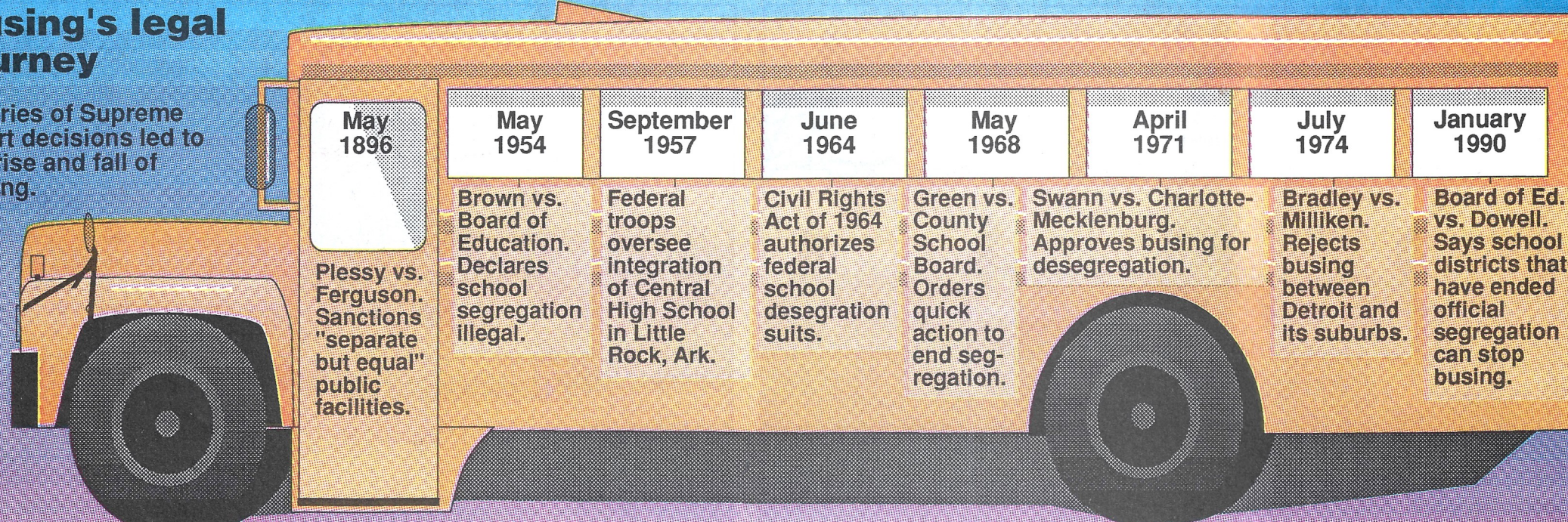
Jonathan Tilove

Jonathan Tilove, 37, has been a national correspondent with Newhouse News Service since 1988. He joined the Newhouse group after graduation from Tufts University, working for the Springfield, (Mass.) Union-News as a reporter, political writer and Washington correspondent. He was assigned in 1991 to cover race relations.

For this series, he traveled to Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Little Rock and Mobile, Ala., talking to students, parents, teachers, judges and school board officials about their experience with busing.

Busing's legal journey

A series of Supreme Court decisions led to the rise and fall of busing.



Monica Seaberry/ Newhouse News Service