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BLACK GROUNDSWELL AGAINST BUSING

In past nationwide polls, small majorities or pluralities of blacks expressed an opposition to forced busing (busing for racial balance) and this rather silent opinion occasionally found its way into the rhetoric of black political leaders at the local level prior to the implementation of a busing order.

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Once a busing order is under way, however, vocal opposition to busing is muted by institutionalized pressures built around a "Let's Make It Work" strategy and the politically defusing gambit by the media and establishment "community leaders" that busing is "inevitable" and is "the law of the land." The effect of this strategy is compounded as concerns blacks, who, understandably, are more amenable to the proffered benefits of busing.

George Armstrong,
Louisville, Ky.
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Warren, Mich.
Joyce DeHaven,
Dallas, Texas

In the past, then, there has been little in the way of organized black opposition to busing. Blacks were not only loath to take an opposing view on an issue where white opposition is perceived as racist, but were also hesitant to question the wisdom of the likes of the NAACP, white liberals and courts purportedly acting on their behalf.

Mary Eisel,
Omaha, Nebraska
Marlene Ferrell,
Nashville, Tenn.
Ruth Glascott,
Rayonne, N.J.

But times do change, or, as Clarence Darrow said, "Time makes more converts than reason." Reason, however, eloquently put by a handful of black opinion leaders opposing busing, has been an integral part of this change.

Baron Goodburn,
Columbus, Ohio

Black opinion leaders against busing

Goldstein,
Valley, Cal.
Kaye Haws,
Cleveland, Ohio

In March, 1977, television producer and commentator Tony Brown, on his nationally-televised "Journal", began a series of programs questioning, from a black perspective, the results of forced busing. Blunt and to the point, Brown exposed the racist premise of busing - that black children cannot learn unless they are sitting in a majority white environment. And Brown, whose concern for the commonweal of blacks is absolute, was willing to take on the NAACP in his arguments and is impervious to any criticism from white liberals.

Jim Kelly,
Boston, Mass.

Bettie Margeson,
Columbus, Ohio

Barbara Mueller,
St. Louis, Mo.

Roby Ruiz,
Phoenix, Arizona

John Seale,
Houston, Texas

Shallow,
Chester, Mass.

Studley,
Boston, Mass.

Kaye Wm. Taylor,
Charles, Mo.

James Venema,
New Castle, De.

Kancy Yoits,
Boston, Mass.

At the same time, William Raspberry, a moderate syndicated columnist out of the Washington Post, subtly questioned the premises and results of busing and chided the NAACP. Said Raspberry in one column, referring to the issue itself, "The NAACP is going to lose one this time."

REGISTERED AGENT

Frank Southworth,
Denver, Colorado

By the end of the decade, Thomas Sowell, an intellectual and conservative economist, began gaining more and more coverage of his strident and incisive dissertations and research exploding the myths and premises not only of forced busing but of the whole affirmative action ball of wax. Joining Sowell with his own biting commentary was Walter Williams, staunchly conservative both as an economist and politically.

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Not gaining as much national coverage were a few other courageous blacks. For example, Bill Moss, of Columbus, Ohio, actually won a school board position on an anti-busing platform in a black constituency, joined with the NANS president on a Tony Brown segment and and with NANS leaders in meeting with Carter Administration officials and spoke before NANS rallies in Wilmington, De., Pittsburgh and St. Louis. Tom Curtis, a lawyer, writer and former college professor from Newark, De. and then Baltimore, testified alongside NANS officers before the Republican Platform Committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The seed of organized black opposition to forced busing, strengthened by the fertilizing realization among black parents that the policy was not achieving its purported goals, began to bloom. While social planners were concerned with coerced integration and breaking up black residential pockets, responsible black parents remained concerned with the education of their children and realized that busing was depriving them, as parents, with the crucial input and control inherent in the neighborhood school.

Examples of the groundswell against forced busing

In Prince Georges County, Maryland, the local head of the NAACP demanded an alleviation of the busing order there. The NAACP hierarchy moved in quickly to strip him of his position. But the NAACP cannot control grass roots black opposition to busing finding other methods of expression. The following are some examples.

Dallas, Texas

Kathlyn Gilliam, a one-time supporter of court-ordered busing, once worked for Dallas Legal Services, which filed the "desegregation" lawsuit there in 1970 and saw it implemented in 1976.

In May, 1981, Mrs. Gilliam, a black, startled pro-busing forces when, as president of the Dallas school board testifying in the ongoing litigation, she presented a position paper demanding the end of forced busing.

In her testimony, Mrs. Gilliam said that busing has been a "negative experience" for the Dallas black community, which no longer believes it is an "effective desegregation tool." She said, "We thought that was the way we needed to go, but it didn't turn out the way we thought it would...If that's what we're trying to hang our hat on, you can forget it...The issue is whether we're going to educate our children ...A bus won't teach you anything."

Answering a questioning NAACP attorney, she said, "I don't buy the premise that a black child can't be educated where he lives." When a Legal Services attorney asked her if she was aware that adoption of her position paper's neighborhood school recommendation would lead to "resegregation" in Dallas schools, she answered, "I didn't consider any of that. I only considered the desire of parents in this district."

Mrs. Gilliam, as an alternative to forced busing, recommended more resources for schools with mostly minority children, hiring more minority personnel and building new schools in minority neighborhoods to relieve overcrowding.

Boston, Mass.

The infamous busing order in Boston began in 1974. In late 1982, the

black parent plaintiffs instructed their attorney, also black, to file with the court a freedom of choice plan as a replacement for the busing order. The plan would reserve seats in each school for students based on city-wide racial percentages, with unfilled seats then available on a first-come, first-served basis without regard to race. Under such a plan, black parents could not only send their children to a school of their choice away from their neighborhoods, but could opt to have them attend neighborhood schools.

Said attorney Larry Johnson, "Segregation is an act by the school department in prohibiting black students from attending the school of their choice. There is no segregation if it is just distance, or even if it is fear of going into another community."

Stubborn in opposition, purporting to represent the very black plaintiff "class" attorney Johnson speaks for, is Thomas Atkins, the chief counsel of the NAACP.

Norfolk, Va.

The school board in Norfolk, after 11 years of forced busing, is seeking court approval to end that policy in the city's elementary schools. The board's plan would establish a system of 35 neighborhood schools, 10 of them with more than 95 percent black enrollment.

Rising up to support the school board is a group called the Parental Involvement Network (PIN), headed by Earlean and Nelson White, a black couple and parents of five school age children, who believe that their chief opposition is an insensitive black middle class using the busing issue for political gain at the expense of the poor.

Mrs. Brown went door-to-door in the lower-income housing projects in Norfolk to collect 1,200 signatures on a petition in support of the busing-ending position and says, "Our children are the victims of racial politics...We feel like we have sacrificed 11 years of children, because black children have regressed badly. We're not willing to sacrifice any more black children..."

In mid-July, 1983, Tony Brown went to Norfolk to support PIN (516 W. 36th St., Norfolk, Va. 23508, telephone 804-627-1875). Then, in late October, he gave national coverage to the group and its position on his "Tony Brown's Journal" (Suite 2014, 1501 Broadway, New York NY 10036).

St. Louis, Mo.

Forced busing was implemented in the City of St. Louis several years ago. Then, in a "class action" suit, the NAACP and other pro-busing forces moved for a city-suburbs school racial balancing scheme envisioned to involve the city and four surrounding counties. The federal district court judge, perhaps sensing the explosive political realities (there are six NANS affiliates in the four suburban counties), has, threatening mandatory assignments otherwise, allowed five years for a quota-laden "voluntary" plan to "work."

Formed in opposition to all this, either "voluntary" or mandatory, is a black group, Concerned Citizens & Parents for Quality Education (P.O. Box 5340, St. Louis MO 63115), whose attorneys will use a just-completed survey (August, 1983) in an attempt to halt the litigation.

The survey, conducted by Washington University (St. Louis) Professor of Black Studies Robert C. Johnson, involved interviews with 700 black residents, 69 percent from the city and 78 percent female.

Answering one question, "Do you think black children have to be bused to mostly white schools to receive a good education?", 82 percent said no and 15.3 percent yes.

To another question, "If you had a choice, would you spend money to bus students out of neighborhood schools or to improve neighborhood schools?", 94.2 percent favored improving neighborhood schools and only 2.6 percent favored busing.

Still another question gave three choices for "the best way to achieve quality education for black children." "Improve neighborhood schools" was the choice of 71.5 percent. "Give parents the right to choose any school they like in the metropolitan St. Louis area" was favored by only 20.3 percent (bear in mind here that the court hopes to transfer 15,000 black students from the city to the suburbs in five years). 3.7 percent favored "Bus students."

Philadelphia, Pa.

In Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania State Human Relations Commission, endowed with power by the state legislature to force racial balance in schools, is seeking mandatory school assignments based on race.

On September 26, 1983, Dr. Constance Clayton, the city's first black school superintendent, told the school board she "will not propose and will not seek board approval for a mandatory pupil assignment plan."

Said Dr. Clayton, "There is absolutely no constituency among parents - black, Hispanic or white - for a mandatory plan", adding, while pointing out that mandatory busing "would only increase the flight of students of all races from the school system", "It cannot work and need not be tried."

Dr. Clayton and the school board favor a voluntary plan and the enhancing of educational programs in the schools.

However, the Human Relations Commission disagreed, turning down the school board's proposal by a 5-0 vote and placing the matter before a state court.

William D. D'Onofrio, President
National Association for
Neighborhood Schools, Inc. (NANS)
October 22, 1983

Sources:

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Norfolk: "Anti-busing black leader in Norfolk", The Virginian-Pilot and The Ledger-Star, July 17, 1983

St. Louis: Poll data from an editorial, "Busing Lacks Black Support", St. Louis Globe-Democrat, September 24-25, 1983

Philadelphia: "Phila. school chief nixes forced busing", Wilmington, De. Evening Journal, Sept. 27, 1983 and subsequent articles in the Philadelphia Inquirer.