ST. LOUIS

RALPH REISNER

Associate Professor of Law, University of Illinois

ST. LOUIS IS THE ONLY community among the eight cities here being considered which until 1954 operated a segregated system of public education. Substantial compliance with the desegregation mandated by the fourteenth amendment was effected rapidly and with a minimum of dislocation. The initial stages of desegregation took place against a background of rapid population shifts. Like many metropolitan central cities, St. Louis has suffered an absolute decline in population since World War II, a decline which was sharpest in the 1950–60 decade when a net loss of over 100,000 residents occurred. During the same period the suburban area around St. Louis experienced an increase in population in excess of 50%.

This loss to the suburbs has been accompanied by significant changes in the composition of the population within the city. In 1930 nonwhites represented 11.6% of the total city population; by 1960 the percentage had risen to 28.8% of the city total.

Perhaps equally relevant to the problem of desegregation caused by overall migration is the internal mobility pattern and subsequent "segregation" of the Negro population. As is true in most cities, the Negro population is concentrated in several well defined areas. There are two

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EDITORS' NOTE: *Condensed by the staff of the* Law & Society Review *from a report to the United States Commissioner of Education ("Equality of Educational Opportunity in St. Louis," 58 pp.), written while Professor Reisner was working on a project surveying equal educational opportunities for the United States Office of Education.*

focal points of high Negro concentration in the city, one in the west end section, the other in the central-northwest portion of the city. The boundaries of the area of high Negro concentration have expanded progressively in a northern direction over the past decade. Expansion to the south within the city and north beyond the city limits has been inhibited by a combination of economic factors and discriminatory practices in the sale and rental of real estate. More recently, however, the suburban communities lying immediately to the north of the city have experienced a sharp gain in Negro population.

THE SCHOOLS

Approximately 155,000 children attend primary and secondary schools in St. Louis, 25% of whom are enrolled in the city's parochial schools. Approximately 5,000 attend a miscellany of private schools. The percentage of Negro children in both the public and parochial schools is strikingly disproportionate to the overall racial proportions of the community. Whereas in 1963 Negroes comprised 32% of the St. Louis population, only 8% of the parochial school enrollment was Negro. The disproportion is reversed in the public schools where 62% of the students at the elementary level and 45% of the students at the secondary level were Negro.

Despite the technical demise of segregation in the St. Louis public schools by fall 1955, the overwhelming number of whites and Negroes continue because of racially delineated residential patterns, to attend schools which are de facto segregated or only minimally integrated. As of 1964, 84% of the Negro pupils at the elementary level attended schools which had at least 95% Negro enrollment. Seventy-four per cent of the Caucasian pupils attended schools which had at least a 95% white enrollment. One hundred thirteen out of a total of 139 elementary schools had either a 95% white or Negro enrollment. In six of the system's eleven high schools, 95% or more of the enrollment was either white or Negro. One high school had an 86% Negro enrollment and the remaining four were more highly integrated.

In 1964 approximately 50% of the city's 3,611 teachers were Negro. The racial distribution of the elementary and high school faculties coincided, in general, with that of student enrollment. Ninety-one per cent of all Negro elementary school teachers were employed in schools with a 95–100% Negro enrollment, while less than 1% (12 people) teach in schools where the Negro or white minority is not less than 25%.

The high school faculties were only somewhat better integrated than those of the elementary schools. Seven high schools had staffs which were between 90 and 100% Negro or white. Of the remaining four schools, two had moderately integrated staffs (11 and 19% Negro) and two schools had well-integrated staffs (65% and 43% Negro).

Controversy

In the fall of 1962, 4,800 students were being bused daily from the predominantly Negro west end to 27 receiving schools in other parts of the city. Students were transported in classroom groups which were retained intact at the receiving schools. As a consequence, Negro transportees remained segregated in their classrooms.

While this practice was the subject of early criticism, it was not until the spring of 1963 that the policy came under focused and determined attack by both national and local civil rights groups. In a series of communications to the Board of Education, these organizations urged modification of the prevailing policy to allow full integration of transported pupils with students of the receiving schools. In response to these demands, the Board issued a statement affirming adherence to the existing policy, on the ground that transported pupils tended to show significantly lower achievement levels and higher chronological ages. It argued that classroom integration of students with such marked differences would impede legitimate educational objectives.

Though the busing controversy remained the focal point of attack, in the spring of 1963 pressures mounted in other areas. A planned relocation of an integrated teachers college from a Negro area to an underused "white" high school, to free the building for a new middle school, was opposed. Public debate on this issue, as well as on the busing, and assignment of teachers by race, was raised by the NAACP and the Urban League at an April 1963 meeting of the Board of Education. These three specific issues and a general program to reduce school segregation became the wide ranging front of attack in spring 1963.

The Board of Education responded to the protest by establishing a citizens committee headed by Reverend T. P. Maher, S.J. (referred to as the Maher Committee) to investigate the entire segregation problem. The first report of the Maher Committee endorsed the teachers college transfer. However, the group also suggested the elimination of a much criticized Negro technical high school and its combination with a second integrated high school. The Board approved both plans but four mem-

bers (including the three Negro members) dissented on the teachers college transfer.

To keep the issue of school segregation alive over the summer, civil rights groups concentrated on the busing question. During the last week of school, 30 demonstrators blocked the departure of 12 buses carrying 500 Negro pupils from one of the schools. This was followed by hymn-singing, picketing, and heated debate at the next Board of Education meeting. The Board voted unanimously to seek a declaratory judgment in federal court on the constitutional requirement in the busing question. The Board's attorney, three days later, gave an opinion holding that the busing program was consistent with both federal and state constitutional requirements. The attorney also addressed himself to the wider question of school boundaries and teacher assignment and concluded there was no affirmative duty to integrate. The Superintendent followed this opinion with a policy statement holding that there would be no mandatory re-assignment of teachers in order to effect greater integration of school faculties.

During the late spring, while the controversies were continuing, the Maher Committee was preparing its report. While clearing the school administration of the charge of purposeful "resegregation" of the schools, it nevertheless proposed a number of policy changes including the following:

1. Bused students should be fully integrated into the classrooms and extra-classroom activities of the receiving schools.

2. Teacher assignment patterns should be changed to achieve greater integration.

3. School attendance boundaries should be redrawn and new school sites should be selected with the goal of promoting integration.

4. An "open enrollment" policy should be adopted, under which a student could request assignment to another school if space permitted.

The report engendered immediate public reaction. Civil rights organizations were unanimous in their endorsement and called for its prompt implementation. The principal organized opposition came from the Public Schools Patrons' Alliance, a parents' organization with affiliates at approximately sixty-five elementary schools in north and south St. Louis. In a series of public statements, the Alliance staunchly opposed full integration of transportees at the receiving schools and mandatory teacher

reassignment. Similarly, it condemned the proposals for an "open enrollment policy" and a revision of attendance boundaries as undesirable departures from the "neighborhood school" concept. This concept became the focal point for opposition to the Maher Report. Of the city's two major newspapers, one voiced qualified approval, noting that while the Report had defined a number of worthwhile goals, it might not be "administratively feasible or educationally sound to carry out all the reforms on a short run basis." The other, in a series of editorials, condemned virtually all aspects of the report and charged the Committee with having been "insensitive or unaware of administrative problems" connected with the implementation of the proposals.

Confronted by strongly divergent pressures, the Board voted to hold public hearings on the Report and also referred it to the Superintendent of Instruction for evaluation. At the July 9 meeting, the Board did not take any action on the Maher Report, but did adopt a general policy statement disavowing the maintenance of "barriers in policy or practice that [would] prevent the achievement of maximum integration, consistent with sound educational principle and responsibilities." The NAACP immediately charged that the declaration was "too ambiguous and [failed to] commit the Board to any definite action of implementation."

On July 24, the Board received the Superintendent's evaluation of the Report. The Superintendent opposed the Report's proposal to integrate the bulk of bused pupils into receiving school classrooms. Furthermore, he favored the utilization of voluntary transfers to achieve greater faculty integration rather than a mandatory reassignment policy. Regarding school boundaries, the Report concluded that elementary school boundaries, unlike those of some high schools, could not be altered to achieve greater integration "without destroying the [accepted] principle of a neighborhood school."

The Patrons' Alliance criticized some aspects of the Superintendent's recommendation as a compromise of "high educational standards for the sake of appeasing integrationists." Negro and civil rights groups were unanimous in their opposition to the Superintendent's report. They warned of demonstrations and litigation to achieve what they considered to be full implementation of the 1954 Supreme Court decision. Criticism notwithstanding, the Board approved the Superintendent's recommendation by 8 to 3, over the dissent of all three Negro members.

The next step in the controversy was application by both parties to the courts with the focus of attention once again on the busing issues.

On August 7, the Board of Education filed suit in the U. S. District Court seeking a declaratory judgment to uphold the legality of its busing program. It requested an injunction to restrain Negro and civil rights groups from interfering with the transportation of pupils. On September 20, the NAACP responded by filing a suit on behalf of thirty-one Negro pupils, claiming that the Board had "adopted a policy of racial containment" and had failed to take "affirmative action as would alleviate and eliminate racially imbalanced schools." It requested an injunction requiring the Board of Education to secure total integration of bused pupils in the receiving schools, redraw attendance boundaries, and assign a "reasonable number of qualified teachers to such faculties which are racially integrated." There were no court hearings before school opened.

PROTEST 1963–64

The 1963 fall term opened without incident. The Board's voluntary transfer policy was put into effect but only 77 pupils applied for the 1,195 vacancies despite the NAACP's offer to help parents pay the transportation costs. As in the previous year, 4,600 pupils were bused, with full integration effected in five of the thirty-three receiving schools.

By the beginning of 1964 it became apparent that even after the completion of six new elementary schools in the fall, 2,800 west end elementary pupils could not be accommodated in existing facilities. In response to this projection, the administration recommended immediate installation of thirty-four transportable classrooms either on playgrounds or on tracts adjoining a number of west end schools. In rejecting busing as a feasible alternative, the administration relied primarily on the virtues of the "neighborhood school." The proposal soon became the subject of contention. The planned additions were denounced by the NAACP, the West End Community Conference, and the newly established Parents for Integrated Education, as a Board attempt to extend "its program of [Negro] containment." They also criticized it on the ground that it would involve installation of inferior structures which would take up needed playground space. More important, some viewed the proposal as an undesirable alternative to the busing of west end pupils to underutilized schools in other parts of the city.

In spite of this opposition the Board adopted the Administration's proposal at its January 14 meeting, and unlike the related issues which had confronted the Board the preceding year, the proposal won the support of two of the Negro members. Though the building program

was subject to sporadic attack even after its adoption, it never engendered widespread Negro opposition.

In the fall of 1964, the availability of new elementary schools and transportable classrooms reduced the number of pupils bused to underutilized schools to 772. Significant changes in procedure accompanied this reduction. Unlike the former plan, the new program provided for the transportation of pupils of all elementary grades. More important, transportees were completely integrated into receiving school classrooms.

On October 22, 1964, the Board of Education and the NAACP petitioned the U. S. District Court for dismissal of the action, alleging that grounds for the pending suit had disappeared. With the granting of the motion, the last vestiges of the busing controversy disappeared.

Conclusion

The events described herein are illustrative of the disposition of a specific issue which confronted the system over a period of two years. Ultimate resolution was in the nature of a compromise: the construction of additional schools in several of the Negro areas permitted a significant reduction of the number of Negro pupils who had to be accommodated elsewhere; for the small number that continued to be bused after the fall of 1964 a change of administrative policy resulted in their full integration at the receiving school. Issues of a different and broader dimension continue to confront the St. Louis system. The substantially segregated character of the schools poses the main one. As to this issue, the administration is virtually powerless to effect any meaningful change. The adoption of a vigorous integration policy by the Board, including redistricting and a greatly expanded busing program could, if confined to the city system, make only limited inroads on present patterns of school segregation. Given the present racial composition of the city schools even a determined effort in this direction would permit less than 25% of the Negro pupils to attend well integrated schools. Clearly, any comprehensive solution of this problem lies at the state or federal level.

As to other issues, more amenable to solution by the system, school authorities have been reluctant to formulate modifications which may be unacceptable to the white community. The policy of teacher assignment is symptomatic of this caution. The present racial distribution of the faculty, particularly at the elementary level (over 90% of the Negro elementary teachers are assigned to schools which have a predominantly Negro enrollment) can be traced to both pre-1954 and present assign-

ment policies. While a token number of Negro teachers has been shifted from Negro schools to predominantly white ones, no comprehensive faculty desegregation program involving mandatory reassignment has been implemented. It is interesting to note in this connection that while teacher desegregation constituted a legal obligation that might have been judicially vindicated, civil rights elements in the community never made this issue the subject of determined and focused attack. Quite possibly the failure to press in this direction was, at least in part, an accommodation of interests in both the Negro and white communities.

In conclusion, the picture in St. Louis is a mixed one. From the standpoint of an area that operated a segregated system until 1954, the achievement has been remarkable. Assessed in terms of the social needs of the 1960s, however, the achievement is not so impressive. Implicit in this conclusion, however, is the recognition, that the principal deficiencies of the system bearing on equality of educational opportunity could not be eliminated by the system itself without state or federal intervention.