

South leads North in school integration

By PETER ARNETT

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The South has moved ahead of the North in school integration.

In the wake of this reversal of the historic pattern, Northern and Western communities are becoming the targets of a growing pattern of court actions and enforcement proceedings that were formerly directed almost solely at the 16 Southern and border states.

This has brought strife and tension to some cities outside the South, much of it focused on the one activity that most alarms parents: busing.

Anxiety over busing is behind a major effort by its foes to win congressional approval for a Constitutional amendment that would ban busing to achieve integration—an issue many believe will be a major one in the coming national election campaign.

What is the school integration picture right now? Figures from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare show unmistakable patterns.

There are now far more blacks sharing elementary and high school classrooms with whites in the South than in the North. At the end of the last school year, 39 percent of the South's three million blacks students were in schools where there was a majority of whites, one standard measurement of integration used by HEW.

HEW officials expect the percentage in the South to increase somewhat when all figures for this year are in. But in the North only 28 percent of the blacks were in classrooms with a majority of whites last year, and the officials say this figure will not rise this year.

Under another HEW measurement, the South advanced while the North fell back. This was in the nation's 50 largest school districts in 1970. In no Southern district did the number of blacks attending all-black schools increase.

Yet, according to HEW figures, blacks in all-black schools increased in districts in New York City, Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Boston, Newark, Kansas City and Buffalo, N.Y.

BUSING HAS gone quietly in some Northern communities this year, such as South Holland, Ill., and Oxnard and Riverside in California, to name just a few. But elsewhere there has been uproar.

Scenes reminiscent of the South of a decade ago have been replayed this year in the North. Pontiac, Mich., was a battleground between parents and police the week that school busing began. Ten school buses were fire bombed on the eve of school's opening, and five members of the Michigan Ku Klux Klan later were charged with the crime.

Parents kept their children out of school in San Francisco to protest a court-ordered plan for elementary schools.

Parents from Detroit, Boston and Wichita, Kans., have demonstrated outside the Supreme Court in Washington.

However, white parents opposed to busing are discovering that the 17 years since the high court ordered an end to separate schools for whites and blacks have seen the development of all but invincible legal barriers, and these weapons are now being turned on segregation in the North.

So the parents are turning their efforts in another direction—to Congress—and are pressuring their congressmen to approve a Constitutional amendment to ban busing.

"There is no doubt that the idea of school integration has exploded like a bomb in the North this year," said J. Stanley Pottinger who heads an enforcement agency of HEW, the Office of Civil Rights. "The pity is that the North had 10 years of opportunity for gradual change. That change did not come gradually; now comes the reality."

"And the whole syndrome—panic, resistance, anger, delay—is moving North," Pottinger said.

Black leaders who see the path to better black education running squarely through the courts, express concern over the rising antagonism to busing in the North.

"The whole thing is getting out of hand now," said Dr. Jesse Goodman, a Detroit black leader. "The will of the militant whites is prevailing. If this gathers momentum, and the work of the courts is killed, then what happens to 17 years

of black efforts to achieve educational equality?"

An ironic counterpoint to the furor is that widespread busing to bring about desegregation has come during a national administration that is on record as opposing it. "I have consistently opposed the busing of our nation's children to achieve racial balance, and I am opposed to the busing of children simply for the sake of busing," President Nixon declared in a statement Aug. 3.

The President said he had instructed officials to hold busing to the minimum required by law. This school year has seen the biggest increase ever in busing for desegregation purposes, said HEW officials, but final statistics are not yet in. Last year 40 percent of the nation's 43 million students were bused to school for all reasons.

So how is it that there is more busing now than ever?

Educators and Justice Department and HEW officials in Washington say the answer is that the legal momentum built up during nearly two decades of struggle is pushing it forward.

While the President can insist that government officials do no more than required by the letter of the law, the officials point out, he cannot change the law.

Still, some charge that the government has put the brakes on.

A Southern educator, Cyril Busby, state superintendent of education for South Carolina, told this reporter, "the federal attitude is being adjusted to deal more liberally with states outside the South. This year HEW let us keep seven black schools in our plan. They would not have allowed this a year ago, and it means to me that the North will have it easier than we had down here."

THE OLD educational system in the South did not truly go under until 1968 when the South finally had exhausted all legal and political avenues of resistance.

The neighborhood school still exists in the big metropolitan areas of the South, in Atlanta, New Orleans, Memphis and Nashville. Each of these cities still has all-black schools.

But all the medium-sized cities and the heavily black-populated countryside of the Deep South are expected, by next school year, to reach maximum possible integration.

"The South has gone about as far as it can go," commented a field worker for the Office of Civil Rights. She said many small rural South school districts have all-black systems because white students were pulled out by their parents when segregation was enforced.

While the South was painstakingly dismantling its system, the North was unchanged, even though racial isolation caused by housing patterns in major cities had in fact created dual educational systems.

Some had thought the North outside legal scrutiny because the segregation was not ordained in law. "De facto," they called it. Segregation in the South was "de jure," imposed by law, and could therefore be remedied by law.

But now the line between the two has been blurred. Boston has been charged by HEW with deliberately imposing segregation on the blacks. Less than 1 per cent of Boston students were in all-black schools in 1968; now that figure has jumped to 11 per cent. HEW warned Boston this month it could face court action and a loss of federal school funds unless it designs an acceptable plan for desegregating the 93,000-student system.

Federal judges have found that school board policies in some communities have abetted segregation, particularly by redrawing district boundaries whenever blacks moved into previously all-white neighborhoods.

Fred Cloff, northern coordinator of the Office of Civil Rights, said the assault on the Northern systems is being launched from four directions.

The first is through the Justice Department which under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has the authority to bring suits against school districts not complying with the law. Justice has been seeking voluntary compliance in Indianapolis, Pasadena and Chicago.

Chicago recently issued new guidelines in an attempt to stem the drift toward increasing numbers of all-black



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schools in the city—113 of 519 at last count.

A second approach is through private suits against cities, brought by the Legal Defense Fund and the Private Citizens Fund, two organizations staffed by black and white attorneys. They have sued in Pontiac, Denver, Detroit, San Francisco and Kalamazoo, Mich.

The third approach is by HEW which shares responsibility for enforcement of constitutional and statutory law with the Justice Department. HEW operates in smaller school systems, and has been seeking voluntary compliance in Dayton, Ohio; Wichita, Kan., and Ferndale, Mich.

The fourth approach is by state enforcement through state human rights commissions, an approach used in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and California.

AFTER a Federal judge found Detroit guilty this year of operating a dual school system detrimental to blacks, a lawyer for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People told reporters jubilantly: "With this ruling of proven segregation in Detroit, we can get a similar ruling against every city in the North." Black leaders had long regarded Detroit as one of the most interested of Northern cities in solving the school problem.

School busing as the remedy is the central, controversial issue around which Northern resistance is focused.

Many are alarmed by the busing of black inner-city children to outlying former all-white schools, as well as the busing of white children from outlying schools to the inner city. For parents who fled the inner city to take their children out of ghetto schools, busing is a threat to what they have been working for.

"Bus judges, not children" read a placard carried by demonstrators when school opened in Pontiac, but the buses ran anyway, carrying black and white children across town to sit together at desks in schools previously attended by only one race. The Pontiac plan provided for a racial mix in the schools equivalent to the proportion of students in the whole system. Other busing techniques have been used.

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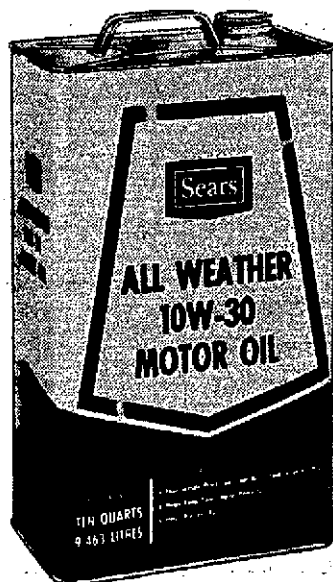
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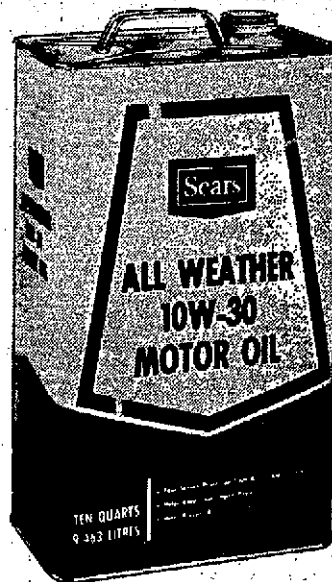
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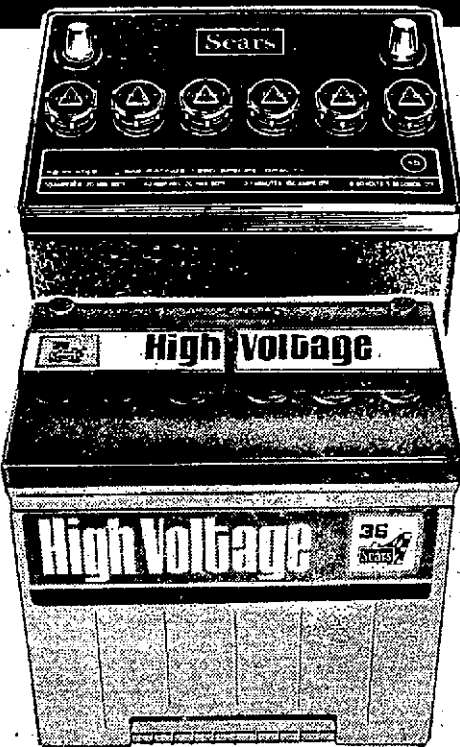


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