

INTEGRATION AND QUALITY EDUCATION: THE MORAL CASE

The vast majority of Americans believes in integration. The vast majority believes in quality education for all. There is no disagreement on the goals.

On the pragmatic level -- on the means and methods -- there is, as there should be, serious disagreement.

Unfortunately, for some citizens, ideology in these matters has replaced practical reason. They are for busing. Period. Or they are against busing. Period.

We believe that court-ordered busing is workable only under very special circumstances. In many circumstances, court-ordered busing has not achieved the purposes its partisans intend. In many circumstances, it has had exactly opposite effects. We have come to believe that the premises on which the case for court-ordered busing have been built are faulty. These premises are especially blind to the way in which creative forces in many cities and districts actually work to achieve economic progress and class mobility. Attempting laudably to win liberty for some, they choose a remedy that deprives others of liberty. A policy based on faulty premises is doomed to failure.

The goals of integration and quality education are too important to be left to questionable methods.

We recognize that localities differ, and that different methods -- or a different mix of methods -- work better in some regions, and others in others.

We urge public officials, social scientists, educators, and concerned citizens to join in developing ever more adequate methods to achieve the high goals we all cherish.

In particular, we believe that all aspiring students, of all races and cultural backgrounds, should have as many open and real choices within an entire school system -- or even between neighboring school systems -- as possible.

We deplore the assumption that neighborhood schools cannot, if they are black, attain high levels of excellence. But we believe strongly that opportunity to choose freely to send one's children to schools outside the neighborhood should be open to every family, of whatever race or culture, in this nation.

We believe strongly that the principle of individual choice, supported both by public encouragement and the proper award of the economic means to make such choice effective is far more in keeping with sound American traditions than coercive measures, that it will show greater practical fruit in shorter time, that it is less costly financially and socially, and that it will win the wholehearted acceptance of the vast majority of the American people, of all races and cultures.

For ours is, in Whitman's words, "a Nation of nations, " and also " one nation indivisible." As Americans, we cannot be satisfied until all of our citizens have equal opportunity, learn from each other, and build up one unified nation, fair and equal to all. We believe that to concentrate all hope on court-ordered busing alone will delay or even doom the fulfillment of such a dream.

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