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The Different Shades of the Yellow Bus

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by Sean Means

Demographics

Pittsburgh Westinghouse is a 6-12 secondary school in Pittsburgh Public School District located in the East End of Pittsburgh. A place I call home, it currently draws from the Lincoln, Larimer, Wilksburg, East Hills and Homewood communities. The school is currently in School Improvement, a determination made by the state of Pennsylvania because of ranking in the bottom five percent of schools in the state in academic proficiency as measured by the state assessments. According to the 2017 A+ Schools Annual Report, the school serves 721 students. 97 percent of the student body is African American. (1) 90 percent of the students are from economically disadvantaged homes while the district's average is 60 percent.

In the 2017-2018 school year at Westinghouse, the middle school PSSA scores showed 15 percent of African American students were proficient in English and two percent in mathematics. This is compared to African American students scoring across the district with 30 percent proficiency in ELA and 10 percent proficiency in mathematics. (2) In terms of the high school Keystone exams, 27 percent were proficient in English, 8 percent in math and 12 percent in science. (3) In terms of readiness, 44 percent of graduates were attending a college and 8 percent graduated from college in 4-6 years. (4) Five percent of students hold a GPA of 3.0 or higher, according to the 2017 A Plus Schools Report. (5) For SAT scores, three percent of students met the average standard for math and 14 percent met it for reading. (6) The school boasts a number of Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes such as Carpentry, Culinary, Health Careers, Cosmetology, Emergency Response Technology, and Business Administration. The school has had a College in High School program in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh for three years. The school has been a pillar in the community for over one hundred years.

Rationale

My reason for writing this unit revolves around options: the options that some young people have and others don't, through no fault of their own. Real estate prices are often an indicator of greater societal trends. When you look at the current housing market, you can often point to which areas are thriving or failing. Areas where

there are more homeowners than renters often have residents with incomes above the national average, the schools have higher achievement rates and more resources, and communities are nearly free of violence. In neighborhoods with less single-family homeownership and more Section 8 housing, communities often experience higher crime and poverty rates, household incomes are significantly lower than the national average, and schools are often struggling.

This shouldn't be a surprise to anyone; what should be alarming is sadly not. It is a common reality that we all see in passing everyday. Most of these schools that are performing far below the state proficiency standards in math, reading and science are minority majority schools. In districts with urban student populations, with most students qualifying for free or reduced lunch, this is a reality that is all too often the case. With that said, I'd like to provide you with a bit of background on this unit, a follow-up to last year's unit, "The American Dream for Members Only." (7)

This past year, Westinghouse and University Prep at Milliones (U-Prep) have been two of the lowest performing schools in the district. In a sudden, poorly planned but well-intentioned move to correct the problem, central office officials came up with a possible solution at the end of the school year. The Deputy Superintendent of the district headed a team that proposed transferring U-Prep's approximately 100 middle school students to Arsenal Middle School.

In the 2017-2018 school year, U-Prep had zero percent of their students pass the math PSSA and only 17 percent of their students pass the English portion of the test. Arsenal, however, was ranked in the top 15 percent of the state in terms of academic growth. (8) It had made tremendous progress over the last five years with 38 percent of its African American population being proficient or advanced in ELA compared to the district average of 30 percent. Arsenal also outpaced the district average for African American students in math with 30 percent when the district average hovered around 10 percent. While this would be a major step forward for U-Prep students, I continued to ask myself, "Is this enough?" Even if this proposal were accepted, those students would still be sent back to U-Prep for high school, a school that only had 30 percent of its students who passed the literature Keystone, 23 percent of its students who passed the Algebra Keystone and 4 percent who passed the Biology exam. (9)

Although I am not a parent, community member or teacher at U-Prep, their primarily African American student population looked like mine and came from similar backgrounds. I felt the need to attend as many meetings as I could regarding this possible transition. At a meeting with the U-Prep families, the former Deputy Superintendent pitched the idea to the community. Although the meeting didn't go as smoothly as I had hoped, I felt it was the best move for the students; there simply wasn't a plan-B if they chose to stay at U-Prep for middle school. I was hopeful when I left and yet I came to find out sometime later that the idea was not approved and the students would remain at the failing school for the coming school year. What seemed to be an aggressive yet logical move for student growth was shot down without an alternative plan or action steps. I found myself asking, "So now what?"

On the other side of town, a similar situation came to the steps of my own school in Homewood. Scheduling has been an issue for years in my building and often becomes a point of division between certain factions, and this year wasn't much different. At the end of the year, a new schedule with more targeted academic intervention periods for students was presented to the staff. In theory, these strategic changes would help to increase scores and academic achievement in ELA and Math. To be fair, the new schedule wasn't completely discernable and there were questions as to how it would be implemented. The proposed schedule changes quickly ran into conflict with the union contract and was voted down and rejected. At a meeting a week after

the vote, the former Assistant Superintendent for School Transformation, who had gotten wind of the vote and made it clear that she believed it was an active move to derail forward progress, asked “Can we meet next week to come up with another plan?” The response she received was “no” because members of the union were on break for summer. Soon after this, the meeting turned into finger pointing from both sides, each claiming the other was at fault. In the end, not much changed, and the conclusion didn’t feel like a resolution at all. Making matters worse, the Assistant Superintendent who spoke so boldly at that meeting took a job in Kansas without addressing the staff of her plans. She had climbed out of the trench, just when we needed her the most.

I feel it necessary to highlight this squabble because it’s been the reality of a place I love and call home. While I was disappointed in the resistance to change in order to improve the school, I have often felt that all parties have been put into precarious situations. Let me say it plainly: I don’t think anyone knows what to do with the current bureaucratic constraints. It is clear that we are behind. We cannot expect to catch up if we intend to run at the same pace as everyone else. I’ve asked for examples of “Blue Ribbon” schools that have achieved exemplary status with similar student demographics and challenges. I’m still waiting for an answer. There are too many schools like mine throughout this nation who have a multitude of challenges and disparities without the necessary resources, support and political backing to meet every child’s needs. And too many of these schools have populations of over 95 percent poor minority students. If *Brown v. Board* had truly worked, this wouldn’t be the case. But because these children are black and brown, it’s deemed “unfortunate” at best. In the following pages, I will explain why people felt it necessary to integrate schools, how they went about the process, what disenfranchised children stood to gain from that legislation, and how we find ourselves back in a similar dilemma today.

It Was Never Meant to Be Equal

The first forms of slavery came to the shores of North America in 1501. Since that time, African Americans have had to close an economic gap that took hundreds of years to create. (10) Generation after generation of enslaved African Americans were split from one another and forced to live in unspeakable conditions, while white American families, those owning slaves and those who didn’t, were able to get an early start to obtaining wealth for themselves and future generations. Finally, in 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was ratified by the United States Congress, outlawing slavery in the United States. (11) With that, people of color were finally registered to compete in a race for prosperity. Almost four hundred years behind, they had to make every effort to catch up while still having to navigate unjust roadblocks along the way.

Yet nice words and some legislation were not enough by themselves to create meaningful change. There were several more steps before the nation was able to stomach the idea of black boys sitting next to white girls in classrooms. The court system, along with many of the people it served, made every effort to make sure that classrooms were not integrated. Following the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the Supreme Court struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875 on the basis that discrimination by individuals or private businesses was constitutional. Moreover, in 1890, Louisiana passed the first Jim Crow law requiring separate accommodations for Whites and Blacks. In 1896, the Supreme Court authorized the legal use of segregation tactics in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In this case, the court found that Louisiana's "separate but equal" law was in fact constitutional. In a 7-1 ruling, built on notions of white supremacy and black inferiority, it provided legal justification for Jim Crow laws in southern states. Hence the idea of separate but equal not only supported the idea of white superiority,

but it would also lead to some African Americans questioning their own worth as well.

Although many people would make the argument that “separate but equal” was in fact equal, the facts of the matter tell a very different story, beginning in 1900-1901 when \$1.48 was spent for each white child but \$1.38 was spent on each negro child. (12) Although this was a gap, it was an extremely small one at the beginning. In the 1917-1918 school year, that number had reached \$3.08 for white students but only one dollar for African American students. By 1932, the gap had widened even further to \$19.40 for whites but \$9.24 for every black child. These trends in spending have impacts on student resources such as books, teachers and the maintenance of the school buildings. (13)

While Plessy v. Ferguson made the assertion that they planned to keep public facilities equal for all Americans, the data shows that there was never any intention to do so by the states. Without federal intervention, they didn’t have to take any real action to see things through. In 1940, 45 percent of the black K-5 schools only had one teacher teaching the entire school. Moreover, in that same year, black schools only received 43 percent of what whites had in terms of salary, resources and overall budget. For teacher training, the average years of college education for African Americans in 1940 was 2.7 and the average training for whites was 3.8. While these trends don’t seem like much, one must remember that African American educators were charged with the task of catching up to the non-dominant class and doing so with fewer resources, educators, finances and political capital. (14)

Brown was not an isolated case. Paul Green explains that while Brown was the major case brought to the Supreme Court, the argument was multi-tiered as it had connections to several other lower court cases, each of which challenged the practices of legal segregation of public schools. (15) Among these cases was South Carolina (Briggs v. Elliott, 1952), Virginia (Davis v. County School Board, Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1952), Delaware (Gebhardt v. Belton, 1952), Washington D.C., (Boiling v. Sharp, 1954) and Kansas (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954).

Boston and Busing

A prominent battleground for aggressive desegregation was in one of America’s most historical cities, Boston. On June 2, 1974, Federal District Court Judge Argur Garrity ordered a two-phase desegregation plan for the Boston Public Schools. (16) In Ronald P. Formisano’s book “Boston Against Busing,” the writer gives a graphic detail of the opposition that stood between African American students and their new schools.

When they stepped out of the schools in Boston, they were met with a number of people who opposed their presence because it represented something far greater than just another student in a desk. It could be stated that fear ruled the day in Boston, fear of the unknown and a sense of deterioration of the level of privilege the dominant class once knew. For example, Joseph Piccolo, a welfare investigator for the state, had enrolled his daughter in private school rather than have her bused. Even though many of the protesters did not work with African Americans on a daily basis and had no real understanding of their culture, they didn’t take kindly to the idea of having their kids sitting next to “those” children. Irish Catholics often had the feeling that African Americans came from a “unrestrained sexuality of ghetto culture intensified [their] fears of blacks. Many whites associated ghetto blacks with promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, single-parent families and prostitution.” (17) On the opening day in 1974, Piccolo watched the buses come in and said bitterly, “I worked three jobs

just to be near this school and this church and now it's all being taken away from me." (18)

Anti-busing organizations were popular; in August of 1974, some 800 parents voted for a two-week boycott of the school. (19) One father of the Boston community wrote to Judge Garrity, who was presiding over much of what was happening in Boston at the time, "If you are so concerned about the so-called minority, as a beginner you might consider building low income housing in Wellesley and the rest of suburbia." (20) Many Bostonians, proud of their history with the revolution, felt that they were fighting a similar battle today, a fight for their independence and their rights. One man put it, "How come when negroes have a civil rights march people pay attention... but when we do, nobody stirs? Don't we have civil rights?" (21). It would have been ugly enough if these were only just words, yet these words would soon be followed by more aggressive protests and actions unbecoming of the American spirit.

Women played a large role in the anti-busing protests. Louis Day Hixie was one of the main leaders of the group R.O.A.R, which stands for Restore Our Alienated Rights. This group, comprised of all women, led the charge for much of the anti-busing movement. (22) Hixie's protesters often led rallies at schools, in the streets, and at city hall, demanding an end to the effort to delay schools. Ironically, many of these same women would later demand equal rights for women yet would deny those same rights to children.

In April of 1976, Boston experienced one of the most violent months in the city's history. A black lawyer, Theodor Landmark, was on his way to work when he crossed 15 anti-busing youth from South Boston and Charlestown who were protesting. They attacked Landmark, striking him across his head and face. Another young man attacked Landmark with the American flag, using it as a spear. Throughout this ordeal, the city's elected officials watched from their offices, angered and upset by what their city had become. Throughout the ordeal a photographer took pictures as Theodor was being beaten, one photo that later became a Pulitzer Prize winning photo.

A Haitian immigrant driving through south Boston narrowly escaped after being dragged from his car by a mob. (23) Things soon turned from bad to worse and the Governor had to call out 450 National Guardsmen to calm the unrest that was spiraling throughout the city. (24) Boston had turned into a war zone.



(NPR. Org)

Creating Roadblocks To Opportunity

There are other de jure forms of segregation that have been and continue to be upheld by the United States government and its courts. Although the United States Supreme Court can be given credit for striking down *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the Federal and State governments have often been less than aggressive with integrating schools. Often the three branches have been supportive of creating obstacles, specifically with lack of busing, to keep children of color away from white children.

Nixon, who just before had watched the Florida Democratic Presidential Primary that was taken by George Wallace, an unapologetic segregationist and racist, in a landslide victory, gave a moratorium on busing and explained why in front of the entire nation. Nixon said he wanted the nation “to establish a reasonable national standard” and that he felt busing brought about “unequal treatment among regions, states and local school districts.” (25) Although Nixon had never believed in busing, the timing of this was nothing short of

tactical. With an upcoming election, he had just been given word of a Straw Poll where 74 percent of voters said they were against busing, and now having seen George Wallace, an open racist, gaining ground throughout the South, Nixon knew he needed to speak openly in regard to his position on the matter.

Moreover, Nixon put these words into action. He delayed desegregation plans in Mississippi, drawing complaints from over 60 civil rights lawyers. Nixon lost this battle, overturned in *Alexander v. Holmes County* and ordered by the Supreme Court to terminate dual school systems at once and operate unitary schools. (26) Even with this, the public pushed Nixon to do more. Nixon was constantly provoked toward more action, receiving over 5,000 letters and telegrams from the anti-busing establishment. "One father implored the White House to come to the rescue of the silent majority who may not be silent much longer." (27) Throughout his tenure as president, Nixon felt pressure from this faction, a group that he often sided with and supported before he left office.

Sadly, the pressure to end busing did not end with the executive branch. Probably the most powerful decision that supported white flight and continued the trend of school segregation was *Milliken v. Bradley*, a case that was elevated from a lower court case in Detroit to the Supreme Court that resulted in one of the greater injustices of the 20th century. The case rejected busing to desegregate schools and provided a mortal wound to the efforts to purposefully create policies that ensured schools would not have an overwhelming level of integration. The 5-4 decision by the Supreme Court made the claim that "with no showing of significant violation by the 53 outlying school districts and no evidence of any interdistrict violation or effect," the district court's remedy was "wholly impermissible" and not justified by *Brown v. Board of Education*. (28) Furthermore, the Court noted that desegregation, "in the sense of dismantling a dual school system," did not require "any particular racial balance in each 'school, grade or classroom.'" (29) The Court also emphasized the importance of local control over the operation of schools. (30) By doing so, it stopped city schools from sending students out into the suburbs. It also paved the way for a mass exodus of both white and blue-collar workers into the suburbs who freed themselves of forced integration. This eventually led to many schools with African American students becoming 75 to 90 percent of the entire student body, most of whom were economically disadvantaged. (31) While busing wasn't easy and was never supposed to be, it was intended to give equitable and just opportunities to people who didn't have them. However, the Court's ruling seemed to realign with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* verdict, reaffirming that blacks were never meant to be "peers" to whites.

Yet there were more strikes against desegregation to come in *Board of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* (1991). In an aggressive strategy to move the demographic composition of schools in Oklahoma, the school system organized a massive busing program. The program was called "The Finger Plan." In 1977, the support for the plan was lost at the district court level. Shortly after, the board created the Student Reassignment Plan (SRP) which decreased the amount of busing in hopes of reducing the amount of time black students were on buses, thus significantly reducing the amount of students who had previously been bused and returning them to their original schools. In Kansas City, Missouri, the school district wanted to increase taxes to increase revenue to support continued desegregation, with much of the funding going to transportation. Although the lower court ruled in favor of the tax, the Supreme Court said that it was unconstitutional.

Busing is Just Another Word for Desegregation

In one of the earlier Presidential debates of the 2020 primary presidential election, senator Kamala Harris asked Joe Biden his position on busing. Joe responded with “I did not oppose busing in America. What I opposed is busing ordered by the Department of Education. That’s what I opposed.” (32) At this moment, the seasoned politician and possible presidential candidate appeared completely out of touch with the realities and racial maneuverings of public education and the boards that govern its legislation. While he may not believe in the de jure, or enforced, segregation, he has turned a blind eye to the de facto segregation techniques that have been carefully coordinated by school boards, city planners, and legislative and judicial systems.

After this debate, Joe Biden attested that he grew up in a middle class background and aside from his summer job at the community pool, his exposure to African American culture was limited, to say the least. This is an honest self reflection as none of us can control the lives we are born into, however it’s important for all political leaders such as Biden to understand their platform and ability to use executive powers to change the course of American action. You cannot be a moral leader if you bury your head in the sand when confronted with controversial issues.

Two Worlds Apart

Just outside of Pittsburgh sits a metropolitan area littered with high functioning schools that not only have substantial scores but have exposed children to a number of electives commonly found in areas with ample resources.

What do the schools outside the city have to offer? Mount Lebanon High School sits roughly nine miles from University Prep. According to the U.S. World Report, Mount Lebanon scores for students in math were as follows: 43 percent advanced, 50 percent proficient, and 7 percent basic or below. In reading, 20 percent were advanced, 76 percent were proficient, and 4 percent basic or below. (33) Their underserved population, subgroups that usually underperform in state assessment including African American, Hispanic and anyone considered economically disadvantaged, performed at a combined 84.5 percent proficiency rating, higher than the natural average. (34) Compared to their overall proficiency rating for the majority at 96 percent, the two groups are not that far apart.

Moreover, the school’s 12th grade class has a robust Advanced Placement program. 52 percent of its senior class took the AP exams and 87 percent of test takers scoring 3+ or more (meaning they’d most likely receive college credit for that course), a pass rate that is that the national average. SAT scores were an average of 1250. (35) The school also ranked 18th in Pennsylvania high schools, #5 out of Metro Area high schools and 15th out of 10,758 districts. (36)

However, the school’s population breaks down as having an 11 percent minority enrollment. Yet of that 11 percent, only 2 percent are African American, with Hispanic Americans making up another 2 percent. How could these schools stay so segregated, when there is such a large number of African American students right

down the road?

While there are many reasons for this, one obvious reason is that the school has designated itself as a “walking district.” On the district’s website, it states “Mt. Lebanon School District is a walking school district. In addition to reinforcing safe walking rules with students at the beginning of the school year, the MLPD has established Safe Walking Routes for each elementary school.” (37) Why is this important? This is another impediment to prevent other places from busing in students. By making it solely a “walking district,” they assure that no student is bussed into the area that isn’t zoned for that school. Mount Lebanon’s “walking school” policy is one simple form of de facto segregation.

This is not an isolated single school district situation. Fox Chapel sits 7.6 miles from the Pittsburgh Westinghouse and the experiences are extremely different. Fox Chapel boasts a proficiency rating in mathematics of 40 percent advanced and 51 percent proficient with only 9 percent of the student body basic or below basic. (38) The reading proficiency distribution is at 26 percent advanced, 71 percent proficient and 4 percent basic or below basic. Regarding how the school aims to prepare students for college, 44 percent of its students take AP classes and 40 percent of them score 3 or higher, with 91 percent of 12th grade students having at least one passing score on an AP exam. (39) Their underserved student populations scored 84.2 percent proficient on the Keystone exam, which was not a wide gap with the privileged population who scored 94.3 percent. 17 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged, qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Of the 1,380 students, only 4 percent of students identify as being African American, 3 percent as Hispanic, and 8 percent as Asian. (40)

Similar to the Mount Lebanon, Fox Chapel has a very small African American population but is geographically extremely close to Pittsburgh Westinghouse. Of Westinghouse’s 721 students in the 6-12 school, 97 percent are African American. According to the 2018 A+ School’s Annual report, 27 percent of students are on grade level in ELA, 8 percent in math and 12 percent in science. (41) The school’s enrollment increased 3 years ago when it was combined with Wilkinsburg’s middle and high school, another predominantly African American school. Today our school is in School Improvement, meaning the school is in the bottom five percent of schools in the state. While the scores aren’t great, there is learning happening in the school, it just has to pick up momentum and it needs to happen quickly. I am of the opinion that a reintegration of schools via a two-way busing system with metropolitan schools will achieve this goal.

We Know Better but Will We Do Better?

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, an assessment was taken from the 1970s that showed there was a 53 point gap in reading scores between black and white students 17 years of age. That gap was narrowed significantly in the following years and by 1988 was merely 20 points. At this time, almost every school district around the nation had implemented and were continuing to practice enforced integration to varying degrees. Although the Northeast continued to fight to remain in its previously segregated state within the classroom, the south was making gains once thought impossible. In the south in 1968, 78 percent of black children attended schools that were almost exclusively minority schools. By 1988, that number decreased to 24 percent. (42) These trends continued on the West Coast of America as 51 percent of black children attended schools that were almost exclusively black; the number dropped to 29 percent within a twenty-year window. (43) Yet as city populations have dwindled and school boards have seen integration as

less of a priority, schools have become more segregated and those students unable to maneuver attending magnet schools or schools in the suburbs have suffered academically, according to test results.

Nikole Hannah-Jones, an investigative reporter with The New York Times, studied several schools systems throughout the United States. One system she focused on was Durham, North Carolina. In an interview on "This American Life," Ms. Jones stated that "in 1971, blacks 13 years old tested 39 points worse than white kids. That dropped to just 18 point by 1988 at the height of desegregation. The improvement in math was close to that, though not quite as good." (44) Ms. Jones explained that it was bigger than just putting white kids next to black kids. She states "what integration does is it gets black kids in the same facilities as white kids, therefore it gets them access to the same things those kids get." (45) She claims that if "you're surrounded by a bunch of kids who are all behind, you stay behind. But if you're in a classroom that has some kids behind and some kids advance, the kids who are behind tend to catch up." (46)

Jones explains that students who are in schools with concentrated poverty don't have that option. There might be a few students, but most students with parents who have means and other options leave. Ms. Jones doesn't hold back about her feelings toward the majority. "White people fled the school system, basically they resegregated school systems by fleeing." (47) Jones is a product of busing herself. She grew up in Waterloo, Iowa. She and her sister, two of five black students, rode a school bus for two hours each day to go to school. Jones explains that there were some social issues with her leaving the community she knew to study in a community she had little connection with, but she is glad her parents made the decision. Jones says, " I think I'm so obsessed with this because we have this thing that we know works, that the data shows works, that we know is best for kids. And we will not talk about it. And it's not even on the table." (48)

Two people I had the chance to interview for this piece were John and Jacquelyn Means, my parents. Jacquelyn, who grew up in Holt, Alabama, explained that she had integrated the Tuscaloosa Public Schools under The Freedom of Choice Program in 1968. The program allowed parents to integrate schools that were previously only for white students as long as they found their own way to school. The program was progressive as it came two years before the county integrated all of the schools in Tuscaloosa via federal mandate. Before this, Jacquelyn attended Botler High School. Her parents had served on the Civil Rights Council in the community and they saw this not only as an opportunity for their five children but all children of color. Jacquelyn explained, " I remember coming home one day and my mom said that we would be changing schools in the fall. It wasn't like we had a choice. I lived in an era when we did what we were told to do by our parents." (49)

That fall, Ms. Means and four other students entered Holt High School, a 7-12 grade school in Alabama. Jacquelyn entered as a 9th grade student, along with her sister Estoria, Gwen Martin, Sanja Lee and another student she couldn't recall. When asked about funding, she screamed, "Funding!! They had better equipment, libraries, books, everything!!" (50) She seemed giddy, reflecting on what she saw that fall much like a kid on Christmas morning. An active student Ms. Means explained, "they taught me golf, tennis and horseback riding," activities that would later be taken away during the forced integration because they were considered to be elite. (51)



(Jacquelyn Means and teammates, Holt High School)

Ms. Means continued: "I had a new book in every class I took." (52) She explained that they had to share books when she was at Bolter and many of those books were missing pages. She pondered for a moment and then spoke softly, "What's strange is that Bolter and Holt were just over a mile and a half from each other." She continued, "We went on field trips at Holt. I can never remember going on a field trip when I was at a black school." (53) Many of her friends still went to Bolter that first year. Although Jacquelyn didn't want to go Holt at first, she understood why her parents made the decision and she believed it has made her a better person today. "I had friends on both sides, Black and White. I think that is why I have been able to cross over the lines with my friendships today. The decision that my parents made put me in a better place to navigate the world." (54)

Unlike his wife, John Means Jr. had grown up to be a bit more rebellious. His neighborhood in Mobile, Alabama was harder and he didn't make great grades. "I saw my first serious stabbing when I was 10. One teen stabbed the other teen above the heart and blood was squirting for what seemed like three feet. This stuff happened all the time," Mr. Means said. (55) In order to get his son a better life, John Means Sr. had his son integrate schools at the first possible chance. John Means Jr. left his all black school called Leona B. Warren Elementary (1st-6th grade) and made his way to Azalea Middle School and Davidson High School. When he first started, the school had 3,800 students, 800 in the graduating class and only 14 African Americans, including himself. Like his wife, John was surprised by the amount of funding the school had, explaining "it was like night and day." In addition to having better facilities, he said, "they had fancy cars in the parking lot from country club kids, nice clothes for the students and teachers." (56) He continues, "I had way different classes: Advanced Physics, Chemistry and Latin. The school had a key club and beta club. They had everything to drive achievement. I thought I had gone to hang with the rich people," he said with a chuckle. (57)



(John Means, golf team, senior year)

In addition to the better classes and facilities, John was extremely happy to find out that his new school had a golf team. Although it took him three attempts to make the team, he finally did and that was “his ticket,” as he called it, to a scholarship to Tuskegee University and playing competitive golf. He said this would have never happened if he hadn’t integrated the school. It was at Davidson High School that he found his love for mathematics and engineering. Davidson offered higher level math courses than the schools he would have gone to just a few years before and the labs he had access too were far better than anything his previous school could have provided. However, he did believe that the teachers at his old school “were good teachers. They cared about us and our success, they just didn’t have the same resources as Davidson.” (58)

I appreciate that these two individuals took time out of their busy schedules to tell me about their time integrating the schools in Alabama. They both were living during George Wallace’s tenure as Governor and there were more than enough roadblocks to stop what they were trying to accomplish. Separate but Equal was never intended to be equal and that remains the case today. Today, schools that have been failing for years are a stone’s throw from other schools that have been a pillar of success within their communities. While there are many people who will act as if these differences happened as a matter of fact or dumb luck, we know better. So we must take steps to do better.

Standards

Standard- 5.1.12.A

Analyze the sources, purposes, functions of law, and how the rule of law protects individual rights and promotes the common good.

Standard - 5.2.12.B

Examine the causes of conflicts in society and evaluate techniques to address those conflicts.

Standard- 5.1.12.C

Evaluate the application of the principles and ideals in contemporary civic life: Liberty/ Freedom, Democracy, Justice and Equality.

Standard- 5.3.12.J

Evaluate critical issues in various contemporary governments.

CC.8.6.11-12.B.

Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

Standard- CC.1.2.9-10.B

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences and conclusions based on an author's explicit assumptions and beliefs about a subject.

Standard- CC.1.2.11-12.C

Analyze the interaction and development of a complex set of ideas, sequence of events, or specific individuals over the course of the text.

Standard- CC.1.2.11-12.G

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Standard- CC.1.2.11-12.A

Determine and analyze the relationship between two or more central ideas of a text, including the development and interaction of the central ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

Standard- CC.1.4.9-10.C

Develop and analyze the topic with relevant, well-chosen, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic;

include graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

Activities

Introduction to the Unit

Students will analyze various forms of content both from the unit and additional resources to construct their own conclusions regarding educational trends in America's History. My personal approach is to provide the facts through a number of vehicles including the unit, audio and visual media and focused readings that piece together a very complex puzzle. Students should not be forced in any one direction; however, they should be encouraged to look at these chronic problems from different perspectives. It's important that don't study the material for simple memorization but a level of appreciation for the content that motivates them to create change within their own community. By applying what they've taken from this study and using it in an active form, whether it be Town Hall meeting, letter to the governor or other action within their own educational confine, they will demonstrate that they have taken the main ideas from this course and will be able to discern between what is given to them and what they justly deserve.

Students will be introduced to Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown vs. Board and Milliken vs. Bradley. After watching quick video clips, they will close read an article selected by the instructor that summarizes both Supreme Court Cases. Students will then create a T-Chart for each case that is labeled on each side Cause-Effect. This will help them comprehend the impact both cases have on future policies. If the instructor would like, they can also have the students create their own posters and present them to the class which would allow for a public speaking opportunity. Students can also compare and contrast the different cases and the ramifications of the Supreme Court's decisions.

Resources

Plessy v. Ferguson:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sj54KP16llw>

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/plessy-v-ferguson>

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/politics/scotus/articles/court-plessy-decision.html>

Brown v. Board:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1siiQelPHbQ>

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/brown-v-board-of-education-of-topeka>

<https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/history-brown-v-board-education-re-enactment>

Milliken v. Bradley:

<https://www.npr.org/2019/07/24/744884767/milliken-v-bradley>

<https://vialogues.com/vialogues/play/39633>

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/433/267>

Busing

Students will watch a film on the history of busing in America. While the film touches on many topics, students will leave with an understanding of the who, what, when, where, why and how.

Resource

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sld722slarw&t=492s>

Presidential Candidate Debate on Busing (1-3 Days)

Students will watch the debate between Joe Biden and Kamala Harris that is centered around the issue of busing. They will analyze why Harris used the issue of busing to attack Biden's stance when it comes to busing and education. In order to better understand his past, the class will then listen to a podcast on Biden, busing, and the case that he made for it being a state issue and not a federal issue. Students will then make the case whether Biden was right in his initial assessment. Was Biden naïve in his approach to busing and did he really think that without federal intervention that the states would take the necessary steps towards creating an equitable school system?

Resources

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/30/politics/kfile-joe-biden-cnn-interview-busing-desegregate-schools/index.html>

<https://time.com/5616709/joe-biden-busing-democratic-debate/>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/07/01/why-joe-bidens-history-busing-matters/?utm_term=.28d0b8c5bef3

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/evangerstmann/2019/07/03/why-joe-biden-is-right-to-oppose-federally-mandated-busing/#c94ac3e2ea54>

<https://www.npr.org/2019/06/28/736995314/listen-biden-supported-a-constitutional-amendment-to-end-mandated-busing-in-1975>

New York's Integration Plan (1-3 Days)

Students survey New York's plan to integrate their school system. Before jumping to conclusions, it is important that students look at what is happening in the system from every angle and how the plan is actually constructed to integrate the schools.

Resources

New York's Plan to integrate it's schools: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G-YxChVUzg>

New York Middle School integration plan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ee63BNgrW0U>

Article on the plan to integrate New York Middle Schools:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/16/nyregion/new-york-city-school-segregation.html>

Boston and Busing (1-2 Days)

Students will read the following article, they will then close read the text and answer questions in regards to the overarching themes from the article.

Resource

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/the-boston-busing-crisis-was-never-intended-to-work/474264/>

School Segregation: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (2 Days)

How Humor Highlights Reality: Students will watch the following video twice. The first time they will watch the video for the comic relief. When they hear a joke, they will write the joke down as it is; they can paraphrase the joke to summarize. The second time they watch the video, they will write down what points the jokes were supposed to communicate. Once the film ends, the class should use the remainder of the time to see if John Oliver was accurate in his portrayal of the chronic problems facing public education, if his audience would leave with a greater understanding of those issues, and whether or not they'd feel inspired to do anything about it. The instructor should note the type of audience the show has and why it's important that this type of show speaks to that audience about issues that don't always impact them.

Homework: For homework, students should make a three-minute improv sketch that speaks to the overarching themes of the unit. They can use their personal experiences in addition to historical references to shed light on the overarching ideas of the unit.

Resource

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8yiYCHMAIM>

Your Town (1-2 Days)

Students will be given four days to examine the history of their town. They will find at least three historical references that explain how their school system has tried, succeeded or failed to desegregate their schools. Once they have completed their research, they will write a one-page reaction explaining their findings and how it made them feel about the school system they are currently studying under.

The Problem We All Live With: NPR Podcast (4 Days)

The instructor will have students listen to a podcast on school segregation. Students will answer focused questions as they listen. After each class the teacher will create a homework question(s) that push the students to show their understanding of the topic and how they can apply their understanding of previous lessons.

Resource

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/562/the-problem-we-all-live-with-part-one>

What do the Numbers Say?

Students will use the following resources plus any additional sources to research educational trends and create their own numeric narrative that explains why changes need to be made related to how schools look in terms of race, class and opportunity.

Resources

<https://www.vox.com/2019/7/3/20676991/school-segregation-busing-harris-biden-bernie-sanders>

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/05/31/433014/isolated-and-segregated/>

https://laist.com/2018/07/03/las_schools_are_segregated_laUSD_says_theres_only_so_much_they_can_do_about_it.php

<https://www.denverpost.com/2015/10/10/denver-district-focuses-on-quality-as-schools-resegregated/>

<https://www.vox.com/2018/3/5/17080218/school-segregation-getting-worse-data>

<https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/landscape-of-diversity-in-dc-public-schools/>

<https://dyske.com/paper/1252>

Cumulative Project, Student Exchange (1 Week)

Students and their teacher will work with a nearby suburban school (example Pittsburgh Westinghouse and Fox Chapel). Ten to twenty students from each school will meet beforehand. Students will be taught the history of Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown vs. Board and other related school integration topics. Once both groups feel that they have a strong foundation in terms of legalities and politics around education, they will then meet together to plan a three-day student exchange. Be sure that parents and administration are aware of what's going on because this should be an excused absence. Students visiting the school should travel alone or in a group of two so that they can take in the new culture as it is and not defer to their usual classmates. They will not only learn what is being taught by the visiting teacher but they will log forty notes a day that revolve around school culture, facilities, class sizes, resources, textbooks, diversity, behavior, lunches etc. Once their visit is over, they should write a five page paper that explains their why they chose to make the trip, how it aligned with Brown vs. Board and what they felt needed to change and what was going well in terms of creating an equitable educational experience for all students. If the students would like to take another step, they can communicate their concerns to their local school board and superintendent.

Footnotes

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18. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 130.
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