

DESEGREGATION'S RESULTS:

BERKELEY NO LONGER HAS A SIBERIA

By Richard Coleman

(Oakland Post, Apr. 21, 1976, p. 1)

Editor's note: This is the third article of a series that discusses the issue of desegregation in Berkeley schools. In this final article, the POST asks the question. What is the future for desegregation in the city?

In September, the city of Berkeley will celebrate its eighth birthday of total school desegregation. Will there be cause for a celebration of the "historic" program of desegregation; that is based on two way busing? How has the system fared?

Frank Brown, president of the Berkeley branch of the NAACP, the branch that made the initial movement for desegregation in Berkeley, said that desegregation is a physical thing. "Placing kids all over the city into schools together is desegregation not integration, but this was a first step."

Concerning the integration of kids in all, the NAACP leader said that some inroads have been made. He added, "But we are certainly a long way from accomplishing the goals we would like to see reached."

"I think the board of education has done some things it should do but there are other things the board should be dealing with."

Brown cited dealing with the problem of under-achieving youngsters. He said, "we still haven't bridged the gap. There is still too much diversity."

This concept of diversity has come under much criticism lately. This was one of the goals of desegregation — to lower the gap between Black and White students in achievement, according to Carol Sibley, former member of the Board of Education for 10 years, and an initial supporter of desegregation.

The board hoped and expected, in Sibley's words, "to give a finer quality of education to all the children. We didn't think that because Black children sat next to white children in the classroom, that they would rub off on them. But we did feel they would be exposed to exactly the same kind of circumstances of education."

Integration is important. Sibley said, "as a board we unanimously supported it and worked very hard for it."

One of the reasons she gave as the board's insistence on integration, "so there would be parents of all races on PTA boards, working in the schools to try to bring the whole thing up to better education."

Desegregation has helped Blacks, as well as other students, Mary Jane Johnson said, because Berkeley no longer has a "Siberia." Johnson is the only Black member on the board of education.

Desegregation, Johnson asserts, "has brought a different caliber of teachers into the south-west part of the city from what we had prior to desegregation."

Explaining her comment further, Johnson said that south-west Berkeley was a dumping ground for teachers who couldn't "hack it" in the hill area and "that was Siberia for them."

"Now with desegregation in the schools, and white students in all of the schools in comparable numbers, no one goes to Siberia anymore. Prior to that southwest Berkeley was a dumping ground for teachers who were incompetent." Not to be misunderstood, Johnson stressed, "there were some good teachers there. Now there is no place to dump incompetent teachers."

Beatrice Ferreira, a principal at Martin Luther King Jr. High school, in her testimony to the California Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, talked of her involvement with desegregation as a principal.

She told commission members that to facilitate a process of desegregation into an integrational process, the individual school needs "a strong well organized plant manager. Without that, people are confused and are unable to do the job."

Among other things, Ferreira told the commission of the "positive interaction" among kids at her school. Asked if there was racial tension, she replied, "I don't think so."

Ferreira said, the kids "push and shove" and talk about the other, "but that is bound to be." She said that there were over 1,100 kids in one small building.

"But if they weren't together they would never have the opportunity to interact at all," she said.

At Berkeley High School (BHS), the student consensus was positive.

Jimmie Harold Jr., a BHS senior, said people are "getting caught up on this thing of color instead of on the fact that everyone is human. The student body president said that if desegregation is the force that brings people together. "I would like to see desegregation continued."

Asked whether she felt integrated, Kaien Meyer . . . and replied, "not . . . physically." Why, Meyer asked. She attributed it to . . . income groups . . . what separates people.

The BHS junior said she had been in Berkeley schools for only three years prior to that . . . attended private schools but said she was in favor of desegregation, continuing, "if it could be fully, where you live, your income and jobs . . . school is not the solution. The young ady said of . . . High. "I don't like it I . . . school enjoyable at all.

. . . around the campus you could see a distinct pattern of segregation. Black students were grouped in one area. [At] the steps of the theater [were] seated a group of white students.

A group of Asian students, standing out on the steps to one of the main buildings talked at length on their feelings about desegregation.

The Asian fellows when questioned about the sectionalized social grouping, agreed that it was just people with their friends. "It's a natural thing . . ." Willie Szeto said.

. . . said that . . . was good at the . . . level. Kamada . . . Malcolm X school. The first year they were ill at ease [with] "mostly white students from the hill," he explained. "Then things started getter better." Looking around at the different groups, Kamada added, "but really everyone respects the other."

The board of education will be taking their own sample polling of the results of integration. The superintendent's ESAA proposal states that for 1976-77, the evaluation [of] the activities of the ESAA project will be conducted internally by the BUSD personnel. Five schools will be involved in the evaluation three public and two parochial.

Students in grades K-8 will be tested in reading and math achievement this spring and again in the spring of 1977. Testing will also examine multicultural . . .

The proposal, which is well over 200 pages, goes on to add that all teachers involved in the project will be surveyed in the winter [of] 1977 along with a random sample of parents. The collected data will be used to assess the effectiveness of the ESAA project.

A better education becomes evident through achievement testing. School superintendent Laval Wilson states in ESSA that, although minority children are still not achieving as high as white students, nevertheless their individual achievement has risen.

The complaints have been . . . as has been the praise, but the small random sampling of students, educators and administrators suggest that Berkeley continue to implement its two-way busing for desegregation and iron out the bugs that are there.

IS TEN YEARS ENOUGH TIME?

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF DESEGREGATION IN BERKELEY

By Richard Coleman

(*Oakland Post*, April 14, 1976, p.1)

In an effort to assess the process of desegregation in Berkeley schools at this particular time, when the educational system in the city is again in the midst of change, it is important to take in a historical account of what went on to make a decision whether education in Berkeley has changed for the better or for the worse.

The *Post* has reported in earlier articles on the desegregation issue. One report concerned the national hearings on desegregation held last month and a later article told what two young high school students feel about desegregation in Berkeley.

One of the Students' main concerns was that the understanding of what desegregation was about, which was explained to them when it was first begun through retreats and seminars, had completely vanished and this, they felt, added to the negative attitude students had toward desegregation.

This is how desegregation was accomplished in Berkeley:

In the winter of 1957, the Berkeley chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) made a formal presentation to the school board. The NAACP asked the board what they planned to do about segregation, as a result of the 1954 Supreme Court decision on desegregation, and when they planned to act, according to Frank Brown, current president of the Berkeley branch of the NAACP.

Brown said that in 1957 Lincoln, Longfellow, Columbus and Franklin schools were predominately Black and other minorities. The schools are located in south and west Berkeley.

The NAACP continued to apply pressure to the board and in June, the following year, the board agreed to appoint a citizens' committee to look into the charges. Judge Redmond Staats headed that committee.

Nearly two years later, in the fall of 1959, the Staats committee reported back to the board. While it went around the basic problem of how to remedy segregation in the schools, it did not specifically recommend the hiring of more Black teachers and the establishment of a program for the teaching staff to discuss deeply problems associated with race and integration.

In following years, another civil rights organization spoke formally to the board about its segregation problem. That organization was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). CORE asked the school board to correct segregated schools especially at the junior high school level.

The board, now realizing that something had to be done in the schools, again set up a citizens' committee and a Superintendent's task force to recommend possible solutions. Proposals were submitted to the Superintendent as possible ways of achieving integration. Of the plans, the Ramsey plan was adopted. The plan is named after the Berkeley junior high school teacher who suggested it.

Under the Ramsey Plan, Martin Luther King Jr. (then Garfield) and Willard became two-year junior high schools serving all seventh and eighth-graders in the city, and Burbank (now West Campus) Junior High school, until that time was 76 per cent Black, became an all-ninth-grade school.

So in 1964 the first of two phases of desegregation took place at the junior high school level. The high school was already integrated because there was and remains only one serving the city of Berkeley.

The task force recommended total desegregation, "but politically we knew it was impossible because we knew that there was really a rising group against integration in schools," former school board member Carol Sibley said.

The next step was to desegregate the elementary schools, which came in 1968.

Now the coloring of the schools has changed. Where before everything was either all "chocolate" or all "vanilla," a physical mixture has been reached.

But it didn't all flow easily year after year. There were some very "ugly" confrontations, according to Sibley, a 10-year member on the board from 1961-71 and past president. In 1961, for instance, the Parents Association for Neighborhood Schools, one of several anti-integration groups, succeeded in placing a recall measure on the city ballot to recall those members who had voted in favor of integration. The recall attempt failed.

CRITICAL TEST:

DESEGREGATION IN BERKELEY PROBED

(*Oakland Post*, March 24, 1976, p. 1)

A two-day informal public hearing last week in Berkeley focused on the school desegregation process in that city. The hearing was conducted by the California Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

The purpose of the hearing, which was held in the Berkeley City Council chambers, was to examine the process of school desegregation in the Berkeley Unified School District during the past eight year and to explore the . . . and problems the Berkeley community, students, teachers, and administrators have faced during the process.

The Berkeley schools were first desegregated in 1964 at the secondary level, followed by complete desegregation of all grades in September, 1968.

In desegregating, Berkeley school officials have tried a variety of instructional models. The advisory committee is interested in the relative success of the various models school officials tried and in their relationship to effective desegregation.

To obtain this information, the Civil Rights Advisory Committee selected over 21 speakers who represent a cross section of the Berkeley school district including a school board member, school . . . , a Berkeley High school Black senior, a school custodian, Principals and the Superintendent of Berkeley Schools.

The Berkeley hearing is part of the Commission's national program on school desegregation which will include Commission hearings in Tampa, March 29-31, and in Louisville, April 26-28. The national program on school desegregation also includes a random sampling of 2,300 school districts, a series of case studies by advisory committees, and 3 other advisory committee open meetings similar to the Berkeley effort. The program will culminate in a report to the nation in August.

The Berkeley hearing is supposed to be critical to the commission's study because the district has been voluntarily desegregated since 1968, and it was the first urban area in California with a population over 100,000 and a Black student population of 40 per cent or more to completely desegregate. In-depth coverage of the Berkeley schools' desegregation process will appear in the *Post* in weeks to come.