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It's the End of the Bus Ride That Matters

By THEODORE M. HESBURGH

NOTRE DAME, Ind.—After seventeen torturous years, the United States was about to desegregate many of its formerly segregated schools, North and mostly South. Following a decision of the Supreme Court, many of the school districts were using busing as a means—often the only possible means—of doing so. After more than a decade and a half of legal struggles, the law seemed clear and finally, through the heroic efforts of many school boards, mainly in the South, the law was about to be followed. The result would be that finally, more than a century after slavery was ended in America, the great-grandchildren of former slaves would finally have the opportunity to obtain a first-class education—the key to final liberation and upward social mobility.

At this strategic point, the President of the United States declared that he was opposed to busing. The case in point seemed to be Austin, Tex., which was following a plan devised by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and seemingly approved by the Department of Justice and the White House. Then came the intervention by a powerful Texas Senator that led to the repudiation of the Federal Government's plan by its leader. All who had worked for the implementation of the *Brown* decision during these seventeen dreary years were stunned, but little was said. It was the August doldrums. Then came the second blow with the White House press office reiterating the President's statement, and indicating that anyone in the Government opposing it might well find himself working elsewhere.

Who could respond? Most of those who might have responded were long since gone — from H.E.W., Justice, White House. The only maverick left was the U.S. Commission on Civil

We Must Transcend Our 'Dismal History' Of Racial Inequality

Rights — an independent, bipartisan agency created under President Eisenhower in 1957 to try to discover the facts on equal protection and discrimination and to advise the President and Congress regarding corrective action. The commission is a peanut. It has a budget that is one-fourth the cost of a single fighter plane, a staff of about 150, and six commissioners who are employed full time elsewhere.

Even so, they spoke out, indicating that the President's statement, at this particular time, could only give aid and comfort to those who opposed the desegregation of schools, and render the task of those trying to comply with the law immensely more difficult.

Moreover, the President's statement, while obviously popular with those who are unwilling to pay the price for a united America with freedom and justice and good education for all, especially blacks, really ignores the facts of busing. Forty per cent of all school children in America are bused to school—two billion miles a year—at a cost of 98 million dollars for 250,000 buses. To be opposed to busing is to not want 40 per cent of American youngsters to get to school.

If the commission had hired Governor Wallace, he could not have performed better. The day after the commission's statement, Wallace began to help the President. All across the South, and also in the North where school buses were fire-bombed in Pontiac, Mich., the forces of obstruction arose anew, buoyed by the President's stance, and the battle already won, had to be joined again. Numer-

ous Federal judges had to restate their cases and even the Chief Justice of the United States had to speak again—on the side of the angels, but with reservations.

Busing is really not the issue. What is important is the education that awaits the child, especially the minority child, for the first time good education, at the end of the bus ride. Busing never aroused emotions when it was done for all the wrong reasons—like the black youngsters in Wallace's Alabama who were bused 100 miles a day from Selma to Montgomery and back to attend a black vocational school when there was a lily-white vocational school where the buses left from in Selma. I remember Medgar Evers saying that his first recollection of busing was the new school buses passing him and other black children on the way to school—a very bad school—splashing them with mud as the white children on their way to a good school yelled out the window, "Nigger, nigger!" No objections to busing then.

One can argue about the costs of equality in America today. God knows we have known the costs of inequality—wasted talents, frustration, poverty piled on poverty, generation after generation. Laws have been grudgingly passed and more grudgingly obeyed, with every possible legal evasion tested. If we are ever to emerge from our present state of inequality, it will not be by insisting on minimum compliance with minimum laws. Generosity, magnanimity, and human understanding will alone allow us to transcend, in our day, our dismal history of racial inequality.

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