

# THE STRUGGLE TO DESEGREGATE LOS ANGELES SCHOOLS, 1940-1970

## Lesson Plan



**CSUN**

CALIFORNIA  
STATE UNIVERSITY  
NORTHBRIDGE

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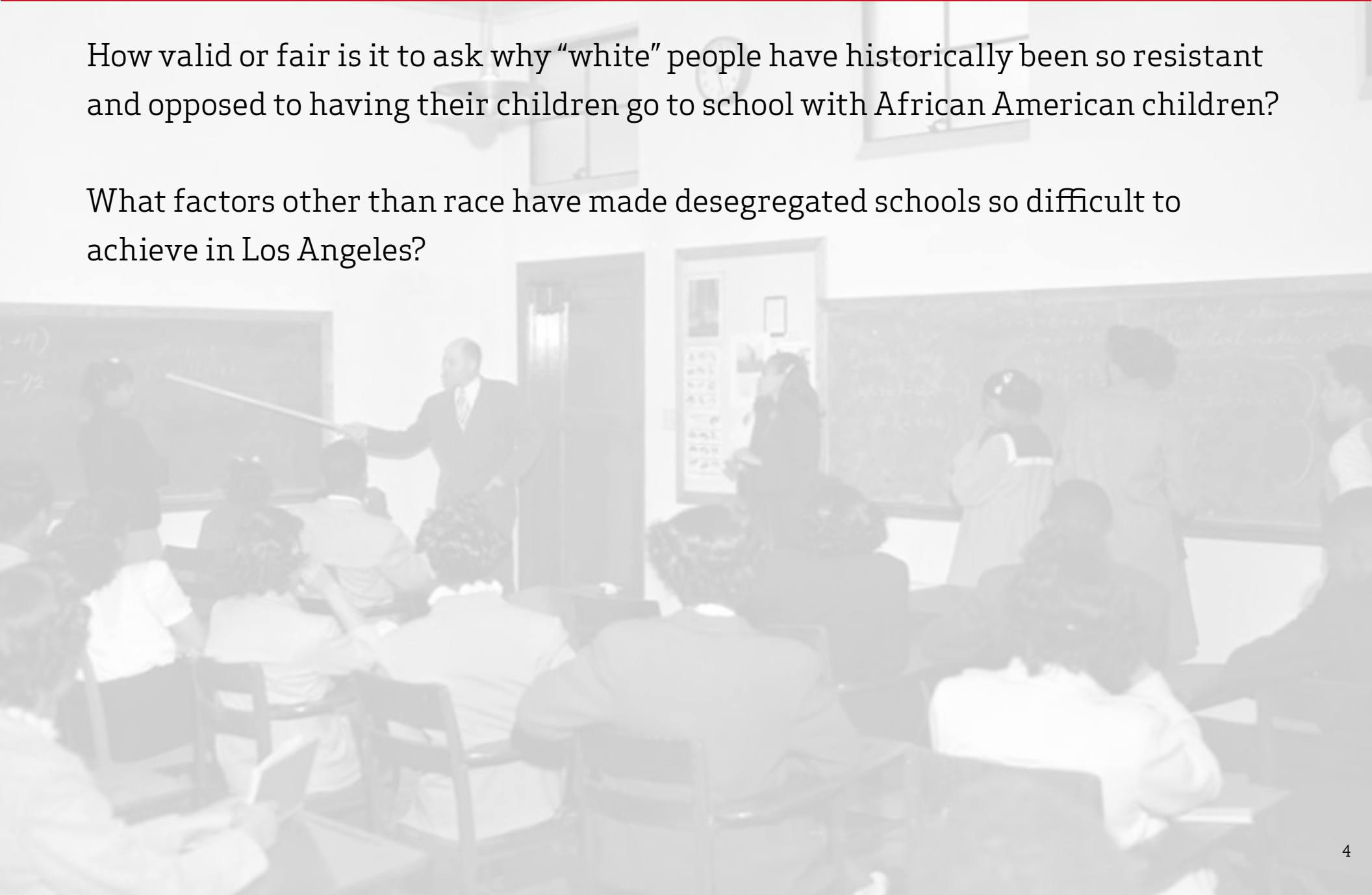
## 1. California Curriculum Content Standard, History/Social Science, 11th Grade:

- 11.10.2 – *Examine and analyze the key events, policies, and court cases in the evolution of civil rights, including Dred Scott v. Sandford, Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. Board of Education, Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, and California Proposition 209.*
- 11.10.5 – *Discuss the diffusion of the civil rights movement of African Americans from the churches of the rural South and the urban North, including the resistance to racial desegregation in Little Rock and Birmingham, and how the advances influenced the agendas, strategies, and effectiveness of the quests of American Indians, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans for civil rights and equal opportunities.*
- 11.10.6 – *Analyze the passage and effects of civil rights and voting rights legislation (e.g., 1964 Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act of 1965) and the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, with an emphasis on equality of access to education and to the political process.*

## 2. CENTRAL HISTORICAL QUESTIONS:

How valid or fair is it to ask why “white” people have historically been so resistant and opposed to having their children go to school with African American children?

What factors other than race have made desegregated schools so difficult to achieve in Los Angeles?



### 3. EXTENDED WARM-UP:

#### *The Moral Authority of American Literature*

Have you and your family ever experienced discrimination or racism in terms of finding a neighborhood and a place to live and getting along with neighbors?

As far as you know, have you and your family ever experienced discrimination or racism in terms of choosing and being admitted to a school?

Activities:

- Students write preliminary answers to the above questions.
- Students are given a homework assignment in which they interview their parents using the questions above.
- Students read, discuss, and write about the following excerpt from John Steinbeck's book "Travels With Charley" on the way to answering the questions above.

### 3. EXTENDED WARM-UP (CONT.):

Steinbeck, John (1962). *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*. The Viking Press Inc., Part Four, pp. 245-247, 263

*When he was sixty years old, Steinbeck, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962, took a trip across the country in a camper named for Don Quixote's horse Rocinante, and accompanied by Charley, a French poodle.*

"In Salinas in California, where I was born and grew and went to school gathering the impressions that formed me, there was only one Negro family.. Because they were not hurt or insulted, they were not defensive or combative. Because their dignity was intact, they had no need to be overbearing, and because the Cooper boys had never heard that they were inferior, their minds could grow to their true limits."



## 4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

### *African Americans in Los Angeles public schools before WWII*

Multiracial neighborhoods in the 1920s and 1930s should have led to integrated Los Angeles public schools. But neighborhood groups and parents pressured the Los Angeles Board of Education for a very flexible policy that allowed de facto (real or actual, as opposed to “de jure,” or official or by law) racial segregation in schools. That is, mostly white parents and students could petition to attend other schools and thus create virtually white-only schools.

In the early 1930s, African American students were concentrated in Jefferson High School, close to Central Avenue, and Jordan High School, in Watts, about 7 miles south of downtown L.A., and attended school with whites, Jews, Greeks, Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants, and Asians.



## 4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

While there were cross-cultural and interracial tensions and misunderstanding, African Americans found the conditions more comfortable in L.A. than the very rigidly segregated communities of the Deep South and the north and eastern United States. (Sides, Chapter 1, pp. 19-20)

Interestingly, that many Mexicans and Japanese were dark-skinned people diffused the animosity of the mainstream population toward blacks. During World War II, Japanese-Americans and Mexican-Americans also absorbed much prejudice and discrimination.

## 4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

### *Post - WWII*

In the two decades after the war, Jefferson and Jordan were joined by Fremont in becoming predominantly African American high schools. South Central L.A.'s elementary and middle schools also became predominantly black, including "Carver, Adams, Mount Vernon, Edison, Foshay, Markham, and Gompers" (Sides, p.114)

For those students who completed high school, higher education opportunities were limited. In central Los Angeles, at N. Vermont Avenue between Melrose Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles City College was the junior college available to African Americans, but that was about 12 miles north of South Central L.A., while Compton Community College was about 10 miles south. Most of Los Angeles' freeways were constructed starting in the 1950s, into the 1960s and 1970s. Before the freeways, families with little or no resources could only rely on

## 4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

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limited and time-consuming public transportation, and thus had no good way to get their students to these educational opportunities.

Farther south, Compton was a city of predominantly blue-collar residents living in affordable suburban homes in the middle of an industrial area. A strong tax base had helped produce a superior public school system. But at Enterprise Middle School, there was physical conflict between white and black students in January of 1953 as white families violently reacted to the in-migration of African Americans attracted by affordable housing and land. Over time many white residents stopped resisting the migration, and unwilling to live with African Americans, simply left the area rather than see their properties values go down because they and others were unwilling to live close to African Americans.

The result was that in 1960, African Americans made up 40 percent of the population of Compton. The still integrated schools offered blacks an excellent education, enabling many families to send their students to good state college and universities.



## 5. MAP ACTIVITY:

### *Resources:*

- GoogleMaps, Mapquest, or other on-line resources. On-line, using “Satellite” and “Street View” features, find the structures that exist there now.
- Thomas Guide or any other paper maps.

### *Landmarks:*

- Jefferson, Jordan and Fremont High Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).
- Carver, Adams, Mount Vernon, Edison, Foshay, Markham, and Gompers middle schools, LAUSD.
- Los Angeles City College and Compton Community College

## 5. MAP ACTIVITY (CONT.):

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What is the current demographic make-up of the selected schools?

What other schools, public and charter, can be found in South Central L.A. now?

How can a student from a family in South Central L.A. get to those and other area community colleges, and CSU Dominguez Hills and CSU Long Beach now?

For a historical perspective, using the following resources, how has the area changed in terms of residential and industrial uses, as well as demographics?

- Aerial maps from the 1950s
- Photographs from the 1940s – 1990s
- Census tract maps from the 1940s to the present



## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

### *School Segregation and Integration in the Los Angeles area*

The late 1960s were one of the most turbulent eras in the nation's history. The growing political demands of African Americans nationwide were a powerful stimulus for civil rights.

- The 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, making voter registration requirements nationwide more uniform and fair, and officially ending racial segregation in schools, at the workplace and by facilities that served the general public.
- The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was designed to enforce the voting rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, and secured voting rights for racial minorities throughout the country, especially in the South.



## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

- The Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, 1964, outlawed poll taxes that prevented African Americans and poor whites from voting.

Passing the laws was important. Enforcing them, or making citizens obey them, was another matter.

When it came to trying to integrate the public schools of Los Angeles, many white parents saw the schools as the last bastion or defense of white privilege.

## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

### *How did Brown v. Board of Education Fare in Los Angeles?*

In the American South, the landmark Supreme Court decision of 1954 had led to a tremendous white backlash. In Little Rock, Arkansas, the governor had ordered the National Guard to block the entry of black students into a white high school in 1957, against the federal government's orders.

On the one hand, the official policy of the Los Angeles Board of Education was to assign students to schools based on residence, without considering race. And because the city was geographically segregated, the result was a district in which some schools were clearly predominantly white, and others predominantly black or Mexican-American. It was relatively easy for the Board of Education to argue that racial and ethnic disparities were the result of residential segregation, not Board and administrative decisions.

## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

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But in reality, the official policies were set aside in racially mixed areas. That is, white students were allowed transfers to attend white schools even if they lived far away, while other students were refused transfers and had to attend their school of residence.

In 1962, Black and Japanese parents trying to send their children to Baldwin Hills Elementary School, an all-white school at the time, were refused admission. Black students were refused admission at Huntington Park HS, also an all-white school at the time.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) tried to work with the Los Angeles Board of Education in the case of Jordan and South Gate high schools. By the 1950s Jordan was 98 percent black, and South Gate had only 5 black students out of a population of 1800s. This segregation existed even though the schools were less than two miles apart, and many students of each school lived closer to the other school.

## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

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A plan was proposed to determine based solely on commuting distance, but South Gate residents, backed by their city council, refused.

In 1963 the California Supreme Court ruled in Jackson v. Pasadena City School District that school boards had to take steps to eliminate racial segregation in schools no matter what its causes. But the Los Angeles Board of Education virtually ignored both the Jackson and the Brown decisions. The Board's intransigence, the court decisions, the civil rights movement in the Deep South, and a visit to Los Angeles by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired African Americans in Los Angeles to increase their efforts to desegregate schools.

Leaders, including NAACP activist Marnesba Tackett, NAACP president Christopher Taylor, Tom Bradley, Loren Miller, Gilbert Lindsay, and representatives of organizations such as the ACLU, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and labor unions, organized into the United Civil Rights Committee.

## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

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Many white and black supporters of the civil rights movement, including Kenneth Hahn, member of the county Board of Supervisors, saw a Freedom March on Monday, June 24, 1963, as too militant. There was also a hunger strike by CORE at the offices of the Los Angeles Board of Education and many other protests, but no change in the racial segregation of the schools.

One month later, in August 1963, the ACLU began what turned out to be a more than 15-year legal struggle to desegregate Los Angeles schools.

## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

### *School Desegregation and Busing in Los Angeles, 1963 - 1979*

In 1961, Mary Ellen Crawford, an African American teen, attempted to enroll at South Gate High School, the closest high school to her home. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) refused her request, and directed her to enroll at the more-distant Jordan High School. Jordan's student body was 99% African American, while South Gate High's was 98% Caucasian. Crawford's parents filed suit in Los Angeles Superior Court, alleging that LAUSD exercised discriminatory attendance boundary practices

In August 1963, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), acting on behalf of Crawford and a group of other minority students, brought a class action suit against the Los Angeles City Board of Education seeking to desegregate the two high schools. After five years of unsuccessful negotiations, the ACLU, with the NAACP, expanded their goals for desegregation to include all schools within LAUSD. In 1970, Judge Alfred Gitelson ruled that the Los Angeles City Board

## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

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of Education and LAUSD had engaged in de jure segregation in violation of the state and federal Constitutions, and ordered the board to prepare a desegregation plan for the district.

When the Los Angeles School Board submitted its voluntary plan for desegregating schools, a trial court declared the plan ineffective, and ordered the board to submit a new plan within 90 days. The revised plan calling for mandatory student reassignment and busing to be implemented in the fall of 1978 was never carried out, because it was challenged in court by Bustop, Inc., a grassroots organization opposed to mandatory busing.

## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

In 1979, the California the state legislature placed a constitutional amendment, Proposition 1, on the ballot. Proposition 1, also known as “Robbin’s Amendment,” declared that school boards had no obligation or responsibility to exceed the guarantees of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment with regard to student school assignment or pupil transportation. The amendment passed by more than two-thirds, ending all mandatory student reassignment and busing, though all students were (and are still) able to attend the school closest to their homes.



## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

### *Segregation and Desegregation School Nationwide*

In the late 1990s, at around the time the last photographs in this collection were taken, all across the country, economically and racially segregated neighborhoods had created segregated schools, albeit with great regional and state differences. (Orfield, Sara Schley & Sean Reardon, *The Growth of Segregation in American Schools*, Alexandria: National School Boards Association, 1993).

- More than half of all blacks in the U.S. lived in the South, where black students were more likely to be attending school with white students than in any other region of the country.
- African Americans were much more segregated in states in the Northeast and Midwest, especially in large, old industrial metropolises where the central city school districts are hemmed in by suburbs with their own independent districts.

## 6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.):

Los Angeles mirrored nationwide trends. The isolation of blacks in the city rose dramatically from the turn of the century to the 1970s. In 1890, the isolation index was 3.3, which meant an average black person lived in a neighborhood that was 3.3 percent black. By 1970, the index was 70.3. (Douglas S. Massey & Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, Cambridge, MA: The Harvard University Press, 1993.

But in recent years, the isolation index has seen a significant downward trend.

- For African Americans in the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale metropolitan area, the index fell to 60.2 in 1980, 42.1 in 1990, 34.3 in 2000, and 29.1 in 2010.



## 7. MAP ACTIVITY:

### *Resources:*

- Following the link to the website below, locate the two major indices: Index of Dissimilarity, and Exposure Index.
- Under Exposure Index, locate the Isolation Index description and graph.

<https://s4.ad.brown.edu/Projects/Diversity/segregation2010/msa.aspx?metroid=31084>



## 8. DOCUMENT ACTIVITY:

### *Central Historical Questions:*

- How valid or fair is it to ask why “white” people have historically been so resistant and opposed to having their children go to school with African American children?
- What factors other than race have made desegregated schools so difficult to achieve in Los Angeles?

## 8. DOCUMENT ACTIVITY (CONT.):

### *School Segregation and Integration in the Los Angeles area*

In each of the retrospective accounts contained in Documents A and B, and for each of the statements in the quotes on School Desegregation document:

- What are the most compelling or convincing points the author makes?
- What are some less convincing or weak points the author makes?
- What issues regarding the integration and desegregation of schools does the author fail to confront or address? What issues might the author be purposely avoiding or forgetting?
- If you had the opportunity, what questions would you want to ask the author?
- What more information would you like to know or have in order to answer the central historical questions of this lesson?

## DOCUMENT A: Congresswoman Fiedler on Busing

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW of Bobbi Fiedler (BF), parent, activist and leader of the effort to end forced busing in Los Angeles, and later a U.S. Congresswoman.

RM: The] whole situation with integration started pretty much in the early '50s; '54, I think, with the Brown versus Topeka Kansas School Board. Do you recall when that happened and if so, do you... [what were] your views at that time?

BF: Oh, frankly, I was a teenager at that time. I always had pretty strong feelings about segregation in the South. I am also Jewish, so I was strongly opposed to segregation and felt that it would, you know... deliberate segregation did have to be eliminated and that decision was one that was appropriate in terms of its primary focus of trying to eliminate separate but equal.

RM: Okay, so you don't feel separate could be equal then?

BF: Not in the sense of where it is deliberately the act of a school district to deliberately segregate students on the basis of their race. I was strongly opposed to segregation in every form, whether it be the Japanese in internment camps or the Jews, of course, during World War II...

RM: Los Angeles got involved in the integration process when...Mary Ellen Crawford was represented by the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] and in '63, I think it was. And they said



## DOCUMENT A (CONT.): Congresswoman Fiedler on Busing

that Los Angeles...didn't have de jure, by law, segregation. It was in fact segregation... Do you feel that that was true?

BF: They never proved that in court. Uh, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and the ACLU were vigorously, [for] over a period of more than twenty years, trying to prove that there has been some deliberate segregation in the City of Los Angeles. But to the best of my recollection, they never proved that there was any deliberate act on the part of the school district that created a segregated environment; that in fact, that the community simply had changed over the years and as a result of those demographic changes, they had resulted in more racially isolated schools, schools that had a predominance of one minority over another, but that there had been no deliberate act on the part of the School Board to create that effort...or to create that established effect.

RM: You originally got involved to... in an effort to curtail the integration of teachers?

BF: To give you an exact description, I had been a parent of two children who had attended one ... Lanai Road Elementary School, which is here in Encino in [the] San Fernando Valley...I was invited to attend a meeting which was called on an emergency basis by the parents in the area; and when I attended that meeting, I was told that there had been a number of teacher changes due to teacher

## DOCUMENT A (CONT.): Congresswoman Fiedler on Busing

integration that had been placed in that school.

One sixth grade class had had three changes in less than a matter of several months. Parents were up in arms about it. Some of them went to talk to the area superintendent who was the head of that region at that time, and was told that they better get used to changes because not only would there be teacher changes due to staff integration, but that we could expect student changes as well. Parents came back... were alarmed. They made a presentation to their community and everybody began to get very upset and I said, "Well, you know, don't get upset. We have to find out what [the] background is on this and then we can determine whether or not we need to take action and if so, what that action ought to be."

As we gathered the information...we found that we had a very liberal School Board that was strongly in support of forced busing...and that they were ready to go along with the concept of desegregating schools even though no court had ever ordered it....

And when we formed the organization Bustop, it was for the purpose of supporting [a] voluntary integration program, but strongly opposing mandatory integration.

What I did is, I put together a large number of individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds; some of who had been adoptive parents, some who happen to be multi-racial parents,

## DOCUMENT A (CONT.): Congresswoman Fiedler on Busing

[and] all sorts of kids from a variety of backgrounds who became our clients; and we focus[ed] heavily on minority children, because we knew that the charge of racism would be made the minute that we started trying to go to court. We felt that it was important that the minority community, who also strongly opposed forced busing, was well represented in this case. In fact, they made up the majority of plaintiffs. And we went to court and proceeded in stopping it. And that was our first major effort; and we did that with about \$40,000 worth of free legal services, and nothing but volunteers, and a handful of attorneys who had volunteered their time to the effort. And we managed to succeed, and then it just went from there.

RM: What were some of the arguments against the busing for integration?

BF: Well, I think the biggest argument were that we lived in a community, a city, a large city where people made decisions regarding where they, you know, rented residences and purchased homes, and that whatever level of integration or lack of it took place, which was a result of free choice of the people who lived there. There was no effort on the part of the School District to deliberately segregate students to say, because a child is black he had to go to a school across the city or if a child is white, that they could go to their neighborhood school. Whoever lived in the neighborhood went to their school there and so we felt that there was, you know, a local school district available to a

## DOCUMENT A (CONT.): Congresswoman Fiedler on Busing

child regardless of race or ethnicity meant there was no deliberate discrimination or segregation taking place.

The other arguments were that there was a historic period of time in which desegregation had taken place and regrettably there was very little to show for it from an academic standpoint and the cost of desegregating a school system, especially one the size of Los Angeles which meant an average bus ride of an hour and fifteen minutes each way, was that that cost should better be invested in the classroom....At that time, it was running a thousand dollars per child to bus the children, and we were spending only about fifteen hundred dollars a child in the classroom. So when you take a thousand dollars and waste it on transportation instead of education there is a big cost factor, and the cost of the desegregation effort that were made, even the voluntary one which I personally supported, the cost is just tremendous proportional to the overall cost of the educational program.

Unfortunately, in most of the programs, there has been no direct showing that simply because children sit beside children of other racial or ethnic backgrounds that it improves the quality of their performance or their education. In fact, as I was saying earlier, it depletes resources for the basic classroom education.

## DOCUMENT A (CONT.): Congresswoman Fiedler on Busing

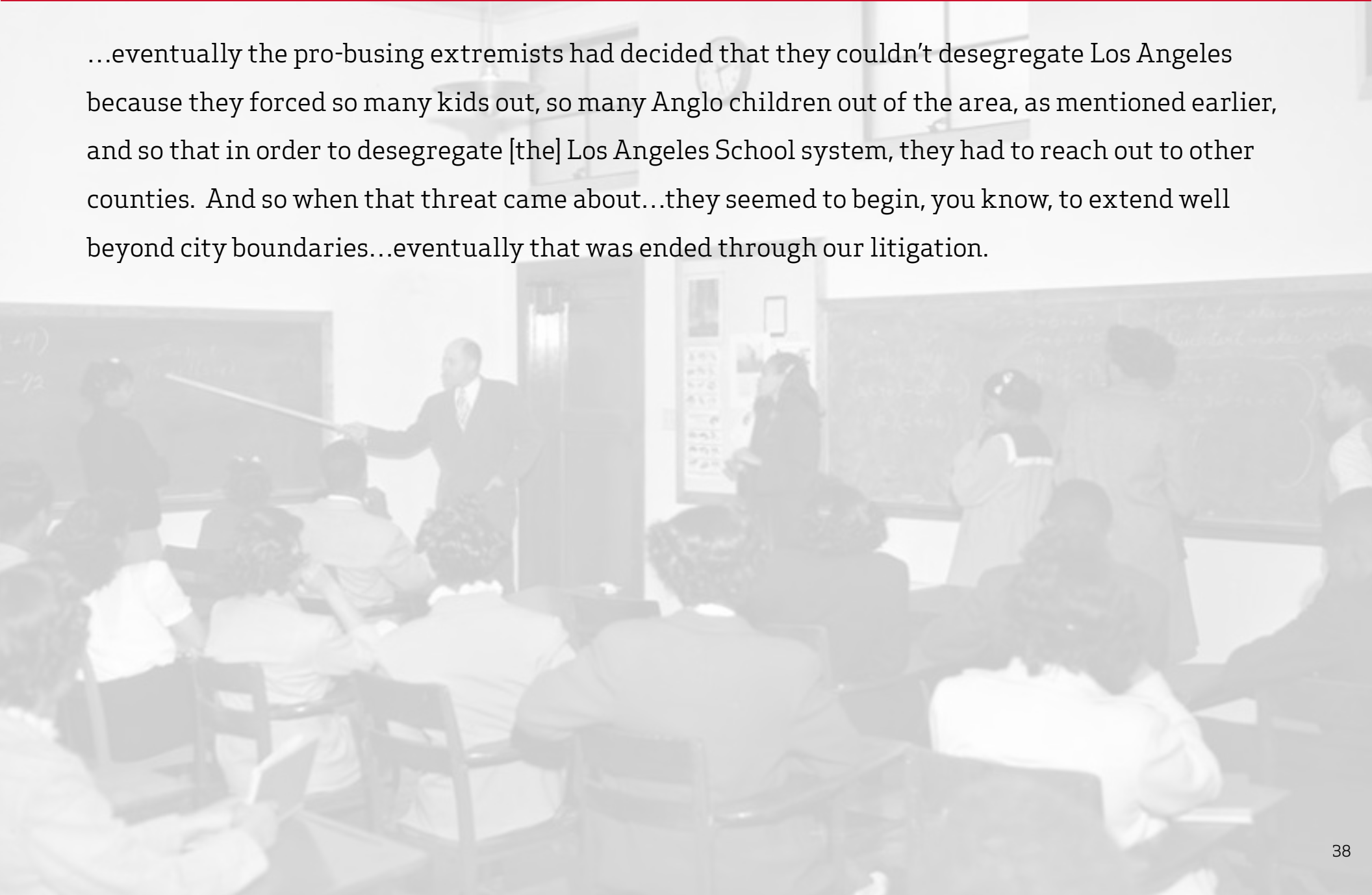
RM: Okay, besides from the financial costs, do you think that there was any emotional costs paid by the parents and the children involved?

BF: There was an immense cost. We found an enormous level of white flight. Yes, part of the cost was the fact that families felt so strongly about keeping their children in schools in their own community that many of them weren't willing to take the chance that they'd be forced to leave and go to another area outside their local community, and so they simply picked up and left. And we went from, in 1976, an Anglo population of 40% and strictly balancing the minority, to an Anglo population of say less than 17%.

We quickly [simply] saw a massive flight of the school system and the result has been, and this is not unusual with these but rather usual, that resulted in that there has been less opportunity for natural integration which has been taking place within Greater Los Angeles, to take place and consequently, those minority students, who otherwise might be involved in integrated experience aren't because many of the students that they would have participated within their own community in their local school just aren't there any longer. They now are in Ventura County, in San Bernardino and Riverside County and areas outside of Los Angeles that don't have busing programs.

## DOCUMENT A (CONT.): Congresswoman Fiedler on Busing

...eventually the pro-busing extremists had decided that they couldn't desegregate Los Angeles because they forced so many kids out, so many Anglo children out of the area, as mentioned earlier, and so that in order to desegregate [the] Los Angeles School system, they had to reach out to other counties. And so when that threat came about...they seemed to begin, you know, to extend well beyond city boundaries...eventually that was ended through our litigation.



## DOCUMENT B: One Student's Busing Experience

Author: David L. Moguel is a professor of secondary education and social studies at the Michael D. Eisner College of Education, California State University Northridge. He was born in South Central Los Angeles to Mexican immigrant parents, attended elementary school in East Los Angeles and middle and high school in L.A.'s San Fernando Valley.

I participated in a voluntary busing program from my home in East L.A. to middle and high schools in the San Fernando Valley from 1977 to 1983, 45 minutes away from home. It was my family's choice to avoid the neighborhood schools in search of a better education at a predominantly white school. My parents wanted to shield me from the influence of gangs and drugs. Our teachers had encouraged the move, urging us to get an education so we could someday get out of our barrio in East L.A.

At my junior high, some of the students were part of the short-lived mandatory busing plan that brought African American students from South Central L.A. to the school, and took white Valley students to inner-city schools. Others, including myself, were part of voluntary busing programs. When it was time for high school, we were given only one choice: Reseda High School. Birmingham and Taft high schools were close by, and the word was that they were stronger academically, but no bus was offered to either school.

We were told that before students from other parts of the city arrived, our junior high school was one of the highest-ranking schools in the state. We were told celebrities had attended Portola Junior High School, including the actress who played Cyndi from The Brady Bunch television show. For about two weeks in 8th grade Janet Jackson attended Portola. The Jackson family lived in Encino, and Janet had become famous after appearing in

## DOCUMENT B (CONT.): One Student's Busing Experience

a shocking series of episodes about child abuse on the Good Times television sitcom. Years later, in 1984, when businessman Peter Ueberroth chaired the Los Angeles Olympics, I realized I had sat behind his daughter Heidi in math class.<sup>i</sup>

Academic success was responsible for much of my sense of identity and self-esteem during those years. I remember a special pride at being one of the very few Latino students in the college prep track, along with Asian-American students from Monterey Park.

With a wonderful relationship with my parents at home and academic success in school, I was able to have good relationships with teachers and other students that did not seem to hinge on issues of race or ethnicity.

A Jewish friend invited me to his bar mitzvah. My parents drove me all the way out to the temple and came back for me hours later. I wore a yarmulke for the first time in my life, heard my friend read from the Torah, drank a toast with his family, then partied with clowns and magicians and other guests in the tennis court of the biggest backyard of the biggest house I had ever seen in my life. I was honored to have been one of a few friends my friend had invited to such an important occasion.

With a combination of bused and neighborhood students, the cliques of college-bound students to which I belonged were integrated. I had acquaintances and friends who were African American, Asian-American, and white, something which would not have been possible had I attended my neighborhood schools.



## DOCUMENT B (CONT.): One Student's Busing Experience

As a Latino, there were a number of occasions on which my race, ethnicity and culture were an advantage. In French class, my native Spanish made my pronunciation better than that of other students. In high school I needed only one semester of Spanish to prepare for and pass the Advanced Placement examination.

The long bus ride contributed to my sense of identity. The bus radio introduced me to music that strengthened my evolving sense of being an American – Stevie Wonder, Earth, Wind & Fire, The Beach Boys, The Doobie Brothers, and others. There was an unfortunate division between “disco” and “rock” in the late 70s and early 80s, one which had most white students identified with “rock” and most African Americans identified with “disco.” Often the Latino students were identified with “disco,” but we were open to new horizons, and I came to appreciate the music of Foreigner, Styx, Aerosmith, Led Zeppelin, and other bands.

Being part of a desegregation plan was a good experience for my family. We chose to travel far to “white” schools for the same reason I never played in the streets of the neighborhood: to avoid the influence of gangs, drugs and violence. I did well in school, and was enriched by relationships in a culturally diverse community of peers and teachers. I graduated with honors and went on to a good college.

But in the years since, I have wondered what was lost by making this choice.

I was deprived of sleep and put on the Los Angeles freeways for an hour-and-a-half each day. That was an extra 7.5 hours every week that could have been spent sleeping or doing homework. I must have recovered some lost sleep on the bus, but it was often a bumpy ride. Written homework was not possible and I do not remember reading anything.

## DOCUMENT B (CONT.): One Student's Busing Experience

Perhaps one could make the case that being on a freeway for two hours is better than hanging out in a ghetto or a barrio for two hours. It is possible, but for me it was a waste of time. I grew up in the schools, libraries and parks of East L.A., not on its streets. Had I attended the neighborhood school, I would have been able to continue playing baseball and the clarinet.

But because of the long commute time, I stopped playing ball and practicing music. The district offered a "late bus" for those who played sports or engaged in other afterschool activities, but this was not an option for me. It was either homework or the extracurriculars, so I had to give up sports and music. I would have never reached the professional ranks in either field, but sports and music were an important part of my childhood that were sacrificed.

We can also take the additional hours every week to calculate more than 40 extra days of school per year, the sort of additional instructional time that would yield increased academic achievement and learning in any school. I wonder how much better my neighborhood school would do academically if it had an additional 40 days in which to educate children.

I also wonder if I lost important ties to my neighborhood and community. I spent intellectually and socially formative years away from my home community, and am missing a set of neighborhood friends and old teachers and good memories. Memories and friends from six years of schooling in the San Fernando Valley can make up for some of that, but not entirely since I was never really became a part of that community. We were integrated into a school for part of the day, but not into the community as a whole. I would have even fewer ties to my neighborhood

## DOCUMENT B (CONT.): One Student's Busing Experience

if I had not gone to elementary school in East L.A. and played Little League baseball at a local park. Had I been bused from kindergarten on there would be very little tying me to the community.

I understand that was the trade-off for a better academic experience. But here is an irony, or an unintended consequence: we were supposed to be leaving behind bad influences, namely gang members who might do drugs. So we were put on a bus to go to a school ostensibly free of such evils. Instead, we got on a bus with some gang members, arrived at a school that now had gang members and other undesirables from other parts of the city, and then had to deal with resident deplorables. What is the difference between being exposed to foreign or domestic enemies?

I have mentioned our junior high enjoyed a very high academic reputation; one of the highest-ranking schools in the state, we were told. I do not know whether this was true, but I benefited from being placed in the college preparatory track; in the best classes along with the white students that were left after the white flight from forced busing and desegregation.

A few of us benefited, but I am afraid the rest of us found out the non-college bound tracks were the same everywhere. The college prep track had very few black and Latino students in it; when we got off the bus I lost sight of many of my bus mates. The non-English-speaking students were segregated from the rest of us. I wonder if attending schools in their own neighborhood would have allowed such students to build and maintain the kinds of informal networks needed for employment after high school.<sup>ii</sup> Another indicator of academic underachievement was the dropout rate. Its most visible sign was that the huge bus that picked us up in 7th grade

## DOCUMENT B (CONT.): One Student's Busing Experience

had turned into a small van by our senior year. I assume some students returned to the neighborhood schools or moved, while others dropped out of school completely.

I am not sure how much better the opportunities were for the college-bound students. There may never be a complete and accurate answer to this question. Historical records on graduation or college enrollment rates are largely unavailable at many schools. The only point I can make is purely anecdotal, from memory. During my four years at Stanford University, and later, two years of graduate school at Harvard University, I met only one person who had attended my junior high or high school. On the other hand, during that same period I met several Latino students at each of those universities who had attended my neighborhood or home school, and several more who had attended other racially segregated schools in East L.A.

It seems plausible, then, to say that by being bused we received an education of no significantly better quality than the one available back home. We received an average, adequate public school education, something we could have obtained without being bused an hour and a half each day. I think I would have succeeded anywhere, and judging from my college friends who attended segregated neighborhood schools, we would have been college classmates just the same.

It seemed clear to those of us on the bus that we were being transported to a better school than the one available in our neighborhoods. But it was crystal clear that white parents were not interested in having their students be our classmates. We were very aware of the resistance to forced busing on the part of white families. Through a voluntary busing program, we arrived at our junior high in the fall of 1977. The district implemented forced

## DOCUMENT B (CONT.): One Student's Busing Experience

busing in the fall of 1978, and untold numbers of our classmates were pulled out of school by their parents. We had made friends in 7th grade we never saw again. The message was obvious. We were inferior beings, socially and academically, and we did not belong in the same schools and classrooms with their children.

My contributions to diversity were not always positive. I am particularly ashamed that I contributed to an atmosphere of interracial misunderstanding and insensitivity. Thinking about other students as deplorables because they were not in the gifted or college prep track is deplorable. I took books of ethnic jokes to school and read them to my classmates. I know I made fun of Asians and blacks and whites when they were not around, and learned the derogatory labels applied to them. Out of my mouth came words like nigger and honkey and chink. I grew to mistrust and stereotype others, made fun of the music they listened to and the clothes they wore, and criticized their values and beliefs and religions. I cannot excuse my behavior.

But I would not want anyone excusing the behavior of the white kids that laughed at what my mother made for a food fair. I remember one white kid wondering why I wore undershirts, and her friend helpfully volunteering that Mexicans seemed to practice this peculiar custom, possibly because we were sweaty and greasy. I remember people pointing out my accent or making fun of a slight trip up in my English. I remember a teacher who put a few of us in certain seats and called us his "minority row." I remember a couple of black kids slugged me fourteen times each in P.E. class, in full view of everyone, in honor of my birthday. I remember that a few black and white thugs made my life miserable in the locker room and on the P.E. field.

## DOCUMENT B (CONT.): One Student's Busing Experience

At the dances, sets of music for the black and Latino kids alternated with sets for the white kids. And sometime there were tense and ugly moments when the music changed. While there was some integration during lunch and break times, there was also clear segregation by race. In retrospect, I don't see how much of the desegregation experience contributed to greater understanding among students from diverse backgrounds.

The problem I am identifying is that we were placed together in one school but we rarely confronted issues of racial, ethnic or cultural difference and misunderstanding in a structured, academic environment. At best, I think we learned some things about each other but much less than was possible. At worst, we allowed ignorance, stereotypes and generalizations to dominate our thoughts, feeling and actions. It would have been best if having been bused to integrate a school we had actually talked about segregation and desegregation in schools and communities



## 9. QUOTES ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION:

*"To separate [children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone...[Therefore] separate educational facilities are inherently unequal...[and deny] the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment."*

*--Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)*

New York University professor David Dent explained the movement of middle-class African Americans into suburban enclaves in a 1995 Los Angeles Times article:

*"Rather than feel alone in largely white communities, "they want to find a comfortable space for their family, themselves and their children...They're saying to themselves: "I'm not going to set myself up in a hostile world for the sake of integration." Black people are aggressively looking for comfortable spaces to breathe and be themselves."*

*-- Sam Fulwood III, "Black Attitudes Shift Away From Goal of Inclusion," Los Angeles Times  
October 30, 1995*



## 9. QUOTES ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION (CONT.):

*"It's not the distance, it's the niggers."*

-- A white mother in Virginia at the height of the integration struggle in 1972, quoted in Theodore M. Shaw, "Brown Was Bigger Than Test Scores," *Education Week*, February 7, 1996, p. 42.

*"Integration as a reality was as great a hoax on black people as the melting pot myth. And most important, it gave further credence to the stigma of racial inferiority because the burden of implementation was placed on the black American...Black children who did attempt to attend integrated schools, outside their neighborhoods experienced physical, social and emotional retribution--overt hostility, segregated ability grouping within an integrated school, apartheid in extracurricular activities, and a curriculum designed to meet the needs of the disadvantaged migrant."*

-- Ermon Hogan, "Racism in Educators: A Barrier to Quality Education." *Racial Crisis in American Education* (Chicago: Follet Educational Corp., 1969) p. 153.

## 9. QUOTES ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION (CONT.):

*"...the receiving communities do not want the black students there. Our children suffer all types of humiliation in those schools. They are treated as if they had leprosy. In what are supposed to be integrated schools, black children stick together. If churches at 9 on Sunday mornings are the most segregated places in adult America, surely playgrounds are the most segregated places for our children...black students in white schools have teachers who do not like them."*

*-- A. Polly Williams, former Wisconsin state senator, "Education is not just for the privileged few,"  
Education Week, February 7, 1996, p. 41*

*"One must expect that white teachers and administrators who themselves have been influenced by patterns of segregation will bring to their initial contacts with Negro students feelings, attitudes, and stereotypes reflecting their lack of previous contact with Negroes. It is not uncommon for such whites to believe that Negro children are intellectually and psychologically different from white children, and that these differences will result in inferior academic performance. As a result of these fundamental assumptions, they believe that when a significant number of Negro students are admitted to their school the educational standards will be lowered, and that they must provide*

## 9. QUOTES ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION (CONT.):

*specialized counseling to conform to their stereotyped notion of the Negro's inferior abilities and job opportunities...[alternatively] Some teachers in a non-segregated school may bend over backward in their desire to be fair to their Negro students. These teachers, probably motivated by over-solicitous feelings that reflect deep feelings of guilt, may react by not holding Negro students to the same standards of achievement and conduct as prevail for the white children."*

*-- Ermon Hogan, "Racism in Educators: A Barrier to Quality Education." Racial Crisis in American*

*"Many understandably, have learned to make a virtue of necessity and have found a way to draw pride out of scorn, pretending to choose what has in fact been chosen for them by America, and even claiming to find merit in an isolation that may nurture cultural autonomy. The nation, moreover, has facilitated this romanticized accommodation by providing a lexicon of innovative phrases to adorn apartheid with the trappings of an often inauthentic version of empowerment. Thus, we hear of "site-based" ghetto schools with "greater input" from parents, ghetto schools with curriculum more relevant to the "special needs" of those we have encaged. But the cage itself, the institution of the ghetto school as permanent disfigurement upon the body of American democracy, goes virtually unquestioned."*

*--Jonathan Kozol, 1995, in Noll, J. W. (ed.) (1995) Taking Sides: Clashing views on controversial educational issues. Dushkin Publishing Group, p. 104*

## 9. QUOTES ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION (CONT.):

*"...children can be given and absorb quality education despite living in poverty and residing in a drug-infested environment, or having parents who cannot read or who for whatever reasons are not involved in school affairs...some schools segregated by race and poverty do produce quality education."*

*-- Robert L. Carter, one of the original NAACP litigators for Brown and later a U.S. District Court judge, "The Unending Struggle for Equal Educational Opportunity," Teachers College Record, Summer 1995, Volume 96, Number 4, p. 623.*

*"Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity, any more than a man ceases to be socially influenced by being so many feet or miles removed from others... If however, they were all cognizant of the common end and all interested in it so that they regulated their specific activity in view of it, then they would form a community. But this would involve communication."*

*--John Dewey, Democracy and Education, 1916*

## 9. QUOTES ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION (CONT.):

*"Segregated schools are concretely and perceivably undemocratic...A segregated school gives children an indelible impression of the inferiority of a whole group of people--an impression that cannot be neutralized by any amount of classroom indoctrination in the ideals of democracy; nor by the most effective intergroup-relations programs and assemblies; nor by the best teacher-training methods in human relations; nor by the most sensitive and objective textbooks that present the contributions of different races to the growth of American civilization. Democratic ideals taught only through words are abstract; segregated schools are concrete. Children are less likely to learn from abstract teachings than from the concrete realities of their daily experience"*

*-- Kenneth Clark, Prejudice and Your Child (New York: Beacon Press, Inc., 1955) p. 86*

## 9. QUOTES ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION (CONT.):

*"...theoretically, the Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. What he needs is Education. What he must remember is that there is no magic, either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, with hostile public opinion, and no teaching of truth concerning black folk is bad. A segregated school with ignorant place holders, inadequate equipment, poor salaries, and wretched housing is equally as bad. Other things being equal, the mixed school is the broader, more natural basis for the education of all youth. It gives wider contacts; it inspires greater self-confidence; and suppresses the inferiority complex. But other things seldom are equal, and in that case, Sympathy, Knowledge and Truth outweigh all that the mixed school can offer."*

*-- W.E.B. Dubois, Journal of Negro Education, 1935, p. 335*



# 10. IMAGES:



A few white girls among a predominantly black band and drill team, 1963



Drill Team, 1963



Jefferson HS prom, mostly black teachers, 1949



Laura Slayton's Two Queens (Child's Festival), Jefferson HS, 1948



MayDay with Williams' daughter Yoshi, 1948



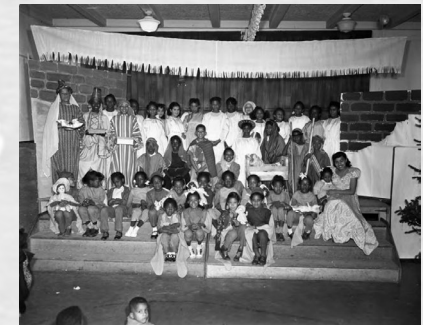
MayDay at School, 1948



Pictured with his daughter Yoshi, 1965



Children's choir, 1967



Children in a nativity play, 1949



# 10. IMAGES (CONT.):



MayDay with Williams' daughter Yoshi, 1948



Homecoming court Jefferson HS senior prom, 1949



Elementary school picture, kids dressed as clowns, 1949



A graduation of Los Angeles Academy, 1949



School girls playing softball, 1949



Well-dressed boys and girls in school cafeteria, 1949



Math class everyone well-dressed, 1949



Classrooms in rows, 1949



LA Academy faculty group, 1949



# 11. MAPS:



1952 LA; Slauson Ave. (BOTTOM)  
Alameda St. (RIGHT)



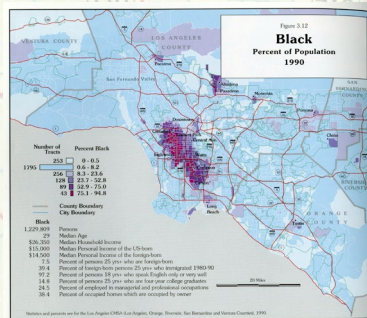
1952 LA; Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum  
(UPPER LEFT) Broadway (RIGHT)



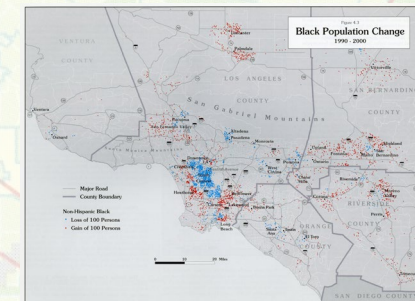
1954 LA; Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum  
(BOTTOM), Rosedale Cemetery (UPPER RIGHT)



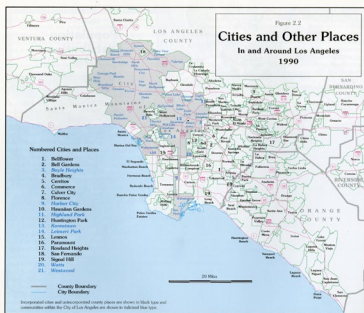
1954 LA; MLK Blvd. (RIGHT), Leimert Park (UPPER  
LEFT) Manual Senior Arts High School (SOUTH-WEST OF  
COLISEUM), Slauson Ave. (MIDDLE)



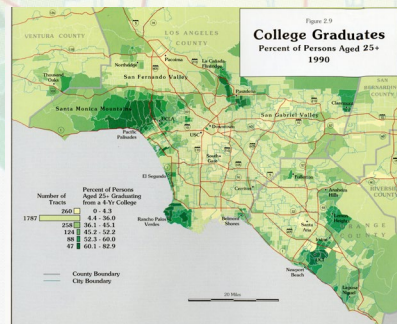
Black Percent of Population 1997



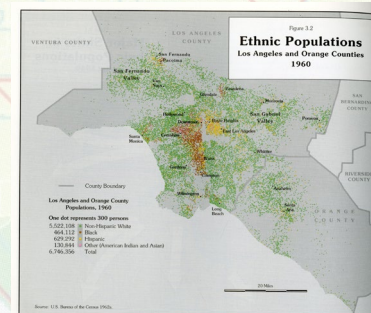
Black Population Change  
2002



Cities and Other Places In and Around  
Los Angeles 1997

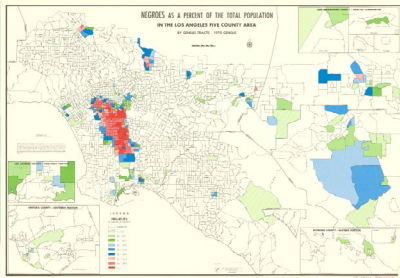


College Graduates Percent of Persons  
Age 25+ 1997

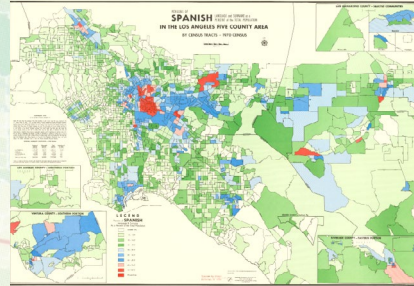


Ethnic Population Los Angeles and  
Orange Counties 1997

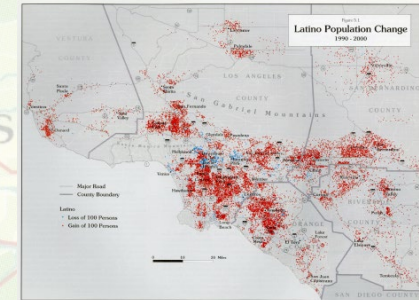
# 11. MAPS (CONT.):



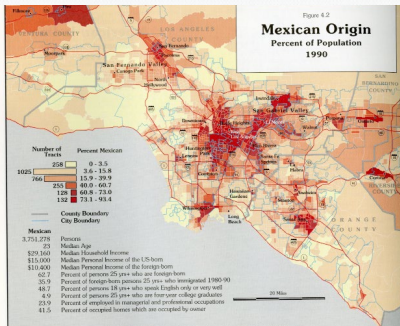
Negroes as a Percent of the Total Population 1970 Census



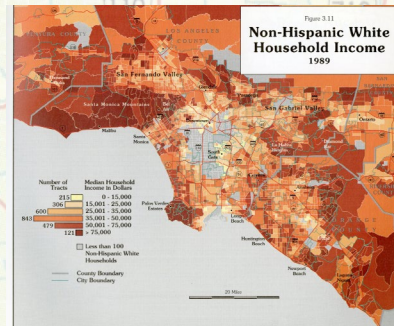
Persons of Spanish Descent in the Los Angeles Five-County Area 1970 Census



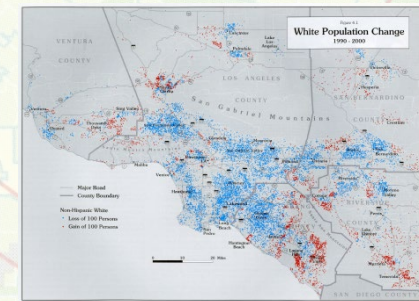
Latino Population Change 2002



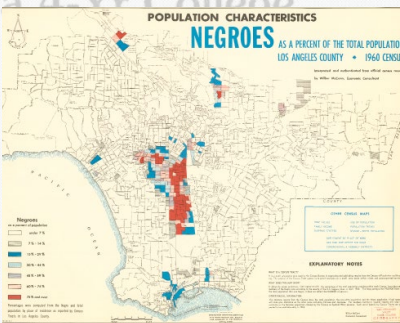
Mexican Origin Percent of Population 1997



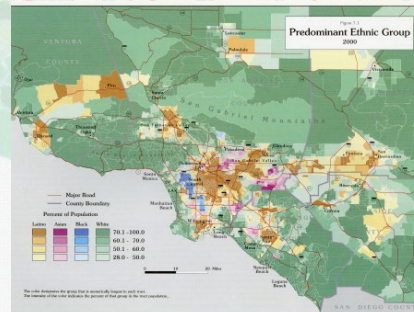
Non-Hispanic White Household Income 1997



White Population Change 2002



Population Characteristics Negroes as a Percent of the Total Population Los Angeles County 1960 Census



Predominant Ethnic Group 2002

## 12. CITATION:

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<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/fiedler-bobbi>, retrieved on March 5, 2017, article by Susan Khanweiler Pollock that appears in the Jewish Women's Archive, Encyclopedia

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Note: Special thanks to Genna Weisenberg, CSUN teacher credential candidate, for the Scott and Orfield references above.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW of Bobbi Fiedler

17 November 1988

Ace. #: 89-27

Interviewed by Richard McMillan (RM)

Transcribed by

Farah Ortega, Student Assistant

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Northridge, California 91330-8329 [Final transcription - December 1990]

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