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CURE

CITIZENS UNITED FOR RACIAL EQUALITY

3944 ½ Third Avenue, San Diego, California 92103

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INTEGRATED NEIGHBORHOOD AND INTEGRATED EDUCATION

by Jean Gregg Milgram

FOREWORD

The following article by Jean Milgram appeared in Integrated-ucation, Vol. XII, No. 3, May-June, 1974. Some have felt, I for one, that if we could integrate the schools, integrated neighborhoods would follow. This article gives contrary evidence. It tells of integrated neighborhoods in which parents send their children to segregated schools. It is disturbing and discouraging. But if we are to be successful in reducing racial inequities, we need to be aware of the complexities and contradictions involved.

--Shuf Swift

Federal Judge Jack Weinstein's recent desegregation order appointing a special master to develop a plan to desegregate not only Mark Twain Junior High School in Coney Island, but its neighborhood as well, gives welcome recognition to the intertwined relationship of the racial composition of schools and neighborhoods. Judge Weinstein has perceived that something must be done about segregation in the neighborhood if anything lasting is to be done about the school. The challenge he has given the special master is to determine what can be done.

As executive director of National Neighbors, a nationwide federation of interracial neighborhoods working to strengthen and encourage successful integrated communities, I do not envy the special master his job. A great deal can and is being done in our member communities to eliminate the housing practices that work to produce housing segregation . . . discrimination against minorities, steering of whites and non-whites away from integrated housing, panic-peddling in transitional areas, etc. All these practices are against the law, and active community organizations and government enforcement agencies are making considerable progress in eliminating them.

Unfortunately for the projected outcome of Judge Weinstein's order the really intransigent problem, even in established and successful interracial neighborhoods, is white flight from integrated schools. In large-city neighborhoods which have a stabilized racial mixture in housing, the schools tend to move steadily toward all-minority status. This is true of public schools at all levels. The elementary schools can sometimes retain a respectable minority of white children but the secondary schools almost inevitably become segregated black schools.

Obviously, this means that white families living in and moving into the area find that the advantages of living there outweigh the disadvantages of not using the local public schools. Sometimes they transfer their children to public schools in other areas; sometimes they send them to church-supported schools; sometimes they make use of expensive private schools. And often whites in an interracial neighborhood do not have school age children.

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LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear CURE Members:

After several years of membership in CURE, I now find myself President of the Board. I feel honored to have been chosen to lead CURE's efforts in 1974-75. This is particularly true because I subscribe fully to the concept that it is not only appropriate but vitally important for those of us who are both members of the majority community and concerned about racial equality to work within the majority community to promote racial equality.

Although the basic philosophy and goals of CURE remain unchanged, we of the Board are beginning to recognize the need for an evaluation of the effectiveness of our methods to attain these goals. We are all aware that violence and mass demonstrations have diminished greatly as we move through the mid-70's. I think it is fair to say that many

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It is equally obvious that this situation sharply limits the number of neighborhoods that can achieve and maintain a stable racial balance—even assuming that practices in the housing market change and promote residential integration.

Neighborhoods like Hyde Park in Chicago or West Mt. Airy in Philadelphia, both of which have survived as interracial for more than a decade, are attractive communities which appeal to many whites who respond to the quality of the housing and the desirability of the location, as well as to the ambience of the neighborhood as a liberal stronghold. The accessibility of good private schools and, in Philadelphia, a limited number of good public "alternative" high schools make it possible for white families to flee the local public schools without fleeing the neighborhood. This means, however, that many white families cannot afford the area. In Hyde Park, with its proximity to the University of Chicago, and in West Mt. Airy, with its high quality large homes, white families who can are in plentiful supply. Not all neighborhoods offer such potent attractions.

Many proponents of interracial neighborhoods find that the number of whites who want to live in a liberal community with a cosmopolitan racial mix is encouragingly large, but the racial composition of the public schools seems to deter a great many from moving in. The inevitable question from a potential white resident is, "What are the schools like?" And no matter how enthusiastically the educational program is described, it is usually quite plain that, for the buyer, it is the racial composition that presents the problem.

It seemed for a while that school desegregation might solve this problem for interracial neighborhoods. The reasoning was that the issue of the racial composition of the schools need not be a consideration in selecting housing if all schools had the same racial percentages. And neighborhoods in Denver, Nashville, and Norfolk have reported that white move-ins did indeed increase when the schools were desegregated.

Elsewhere school desegregation has resulted not in an end to white flight from one neighborhood so much as an increase in white flight throughout the school district. When the opportunity for flight is limited, as in Nashville where a metropolitan plan incorporated the suburban areas, whites still flee, but to church-operated schools. But at least so far whites have not moved rapidly into rural areas—just out of the schools.

From National Neighbors' vantage point in promoting successful interracial neighborhoods, the problem appears from the reverse of Judge Weinstein's view. He wants the neighborhood integrated so that the school can be integrated. We want the schools to remain integrated so that integrated neighborhoods can stay that way. The clear need is to have both, since the segregation of either makes the other much more difficult to achieve.

Our experience is that it is easier to get whites to live in a neighborhood which has a substantial black population than it is to get them to send their children to a substantially integrated school. As one Evanston teacher succinctly informed the United States Commission on Civil Rights, "When a school becomes more than fifty percent black, white families leave."

Having watched this process in community after community across the United States, my conviction is that—no matter how compelling the reasons for integrating our schools—we will fail at it until we understand the reasons for white flight from black children and find some way to persuade whites to accept integrated schools voluntarily.

Too often I have seen even the most ardent integrationists among whites become anxious and disturbed when their children are a small minority in a school. Lois Stalvey's account in her latest book, Getting Ready, of her fears and deep misgivings in that situation illuminates the strength of these feelings. Mrs. Stalvey stuck it out and urges others to do the same. I doubt if the backbone required is in sufficient supply to make that a common course of action.

Tom Wicker of The New York Times in his April 1, 1974, column reports that while school integration itself does not result in much improvement in black children's achievement scores, innovative educational programs in integrated schools have in some scattered instances resulted in fantastic gains.

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CURE

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide a forum for the dissemination of information and the expression of opinions among those concerned with combating racism. CURE believes the opinions herein need to be expressed, although they may not represent official policy of CURE.

Board of Directors

Loudin Beam, Richard Berry, Joan Bigge, Bertha Crowell, Arthur Deutsch, Virginia Gilloon, William MacInnes, Joe McGuire, Viola McKern, David Quessenberry, Verna Quinn, Jane Senour, Shuf Swift, Martha Vickers.

LETTER

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important legal victories were recorded in our quest for racial equality during the 60's. I think it is also fair to say that many victories are yet to be won in the areas of social and personal acceptance of racial differences. Barriers which stand in the way of racial equality today have become less obvious and more subtle. Some of the agencies, legislative acts, and programs which came into being during the 60's to improve racial equality can lull us into inaction or unconcern with regard to racism as it exists today.

False Assumptions

There seems to be a growing, although erroneous, sentiment that all the legislative guarantees of equality that have been passed mean the battle for racial equality is all but won. There is a misguided sense that now that the laws are passed, everything will take care of itself. Another, equally incorrect, opinion I hear is that since there are no longer any large civil rights marches, nor are entire blocks of our major cities in flames, then everything must be all right. In fact, the legal victories were the easy victories. We are now faced with the greatest challenge of all, making the legislation work so that race will no longer be a factor in societal or individual relationships.

CURE played an important role in helping the white community of San Diego understand the racial unrest of the 60's and also played an important role in gaining the legislative victories I have mentioned. CURE must now direct its efforts to help the majority community understand how racial problems and relationships have changed in the 70's, and to promote the cause of racial equality accordingly. The Board is just beginning to struggle with the definition of its actions in the mid-70's. It is going to need ideas and assistance from you, the membership of CURE, if the changes which I have just described are going to be met, effectively, by CURE.

Changes in Board Personnel

I have spoken of change and the efforts of the CURE Board to deal with change. It saddens me to report that one of the most immediate changes we have had to adjust to has been a large turnover in Board Membership. Several persons have resigned for reasons of poor health, involvement in national efforts, and other equally valid reasons. We will miss Pat Backman, Jane Emerson, Helen Halyburton, Florence Jamieson, and Mary Eunice Oliver. Their efforts past and continuing, are much appreciated. We accepted their resignations with sincere regret. The Board has appointed four new members to fill unexpired terms. Martha Vickers, William MacInnes, Arthur Deutsch, and David Quessenberry, a student at Mission Bay High School, will all add much to the Board. One of Martha's first jobs as a Board member has been to help us redefine and fill the secretarial position which she resigned before appointment to the Board.

"Don't Wait to Be Asked"

I wish I could tell you now how the Board is going to respond to the changed needs and conditions of the mid-70's. I wish we knew, with certainty, which of the varied and complicated options are best for us to take. I am certain of the dedication, integrity, and human concern of the members of the Board and I am also certain that we will find our way to being a continued force for racial equality in San Diego. I am even more certain that we will need your ideas and help now, even more than in the past. When we ask for your help I hope you will be ready, but don't wait to be asked. If you have ideas or talents which you wish to volunteer, write to the CURE Board or come to a Board Meeting (first Thursday of each month) and make your ideas known.

Workshop

Or better yet come to the workshop at the First United Methodist Church, Mission Valley, at 9:00 a.m. to noon, on Saturday, April 26.

It is the hope and intention of the Board to see CURE increase its effectiveness in addressing the racial problems of the 70's. The means of accomplishing this are being studied and planned. Now is the time for you to get involved if you want to help shape the future of CURE.

Sincerely,

Dick Berry
President of the CURE Board

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES For Fiscal Year June 1, 1974 to May 31, 1975
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INTEGRATED NEIGHBORHOOD

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But while innovative programs and educational excellence should help any child to learn more, it is not immediately certain that white children will stick around long enough to benefit from them. Yet what white children can learn in an integrated school is probably even more important in solving our race problems than improving the test scores of the black children.

My skepticism on the success of educational excellence in attracting white children to an integrated school—the solution most National Neighbors communities are seeking—stems from my own experience.

My three children, who span twelve years in age, went to Windsor Hills School in Los Angeles. Over that period I saw the school go from all white to ninety percent black, and all of that time I watched white friends and acquaintances abandon a school that I was convinced was doing a fine educational job. In the end, after the school had become ninety percent black, I enjoyed some bitter satisfaction when the state ordered the test scores for each California school made public. Windsor Hills School had the highest median I.Q. and the third highest reading score in the Los Angeles school district of over four hundred elementary schools, the majority of which are all white. Even this outstanding achievement did not attract whites back.

The cause of white flight can be summed up, of course, in the phrase, "white racism." But white racism is a complex and far from simple phenomenon. Today even the worst of white bigots will tolerate some black proximity. And most Americans, when polled, express themselves in favor of an open housing market and integrated schools. The real question is what causes white parents to be so afraid of an integrated school and how can we reassure them—particularly, how can we reassure them.

My own belief is that parents tend to feel quite helpless in influencing what goes on in public schools, and that a feeling of helplessness is the best breeding ground for irrational fears. When this feeling of helplessness is combined with their deep concern and responsibility for their children, schools become a focus for a tremendous amount of suspicion and incipient panic. As long as the school seems to be going along in what a parent perceives as a normal and acceptable manner, he can control his suspiciousness and panic. But integration of the school, whether through integration of the neighborhood or through busing, profoundly disturbs this uneasy equilibrium. It introduces all sorts of new conditions which were not a part of his original decision to live in this neighborhood and to send his children to this school. The parent's feeling is that he has no control and there may be danger. Then panic erupts.

If I am right in this analysis, perhaps the need is to introduce more choice into the public school system, perhaps through a voucher system that mandates integration but allows educational options on curriculum, philosophy, etc., in the hope that this will restore parents' feelings of having control over their children's education.

Of course it may be that white flight from an integrated school system would persist no matter what educational choices were offered within it. Perhaps some other approach would better stem white flight. But we greatly need a solution to this problem, for unless we find one we are doomed either to return to segregated public schools or to having our public school system become, like the county hospital, an inadequately supported institution serving only the poor and minorities.

Perhaps this nation can survive without a public school system that serves all children. But I doubt that we can achieve stable interracial neighborhoods without good integrated public schools, except in a few affluent areas. And if interracial neighborhoods cannot multiply in this country, we may indeed survive for a time, but it will be as a nation seriously and perhaps mortally wounded.

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