

2015

Growing up black in the Jordan Park District: The St. Petersburg African-American experience during the civil rights era of the 1950s/1970s

Marvin L. Simner
Western University, msimner@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/psychologypub>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#), [Sociology Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Simner, Marvin L., "Growing up black in the Jordan Park District: The St. Petersburg African-American experience during the civil rights era of the 1950s/1970s" (2015). *Psychology Publications*. 100.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/psychologypub/100>

Growing Up Black in the Jordan Park District
The St. Petersburg African-American Experience During
the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s/1970s

Marvin L. Simner

Marvin L. Simner © 2015

This report was prepared for the St. Petersburg Museum of History to mark the 60th anniversary of the 1954/1955 Supreme Court rulings that outlawed segregation in the American public schools. Correspondence concerning this report should be sent to Marvin L. Simner, Ph.D, Professor Emeritus, Department of Psychology, Western University, Social Science Centre, Rm 7334, London, Ontario, Canada N6A 5C2 (email: msimner@uwo.ca).

Growing Up Black in the Jordan Park District
The St. Petersburg African-American Experience During
the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s/1970s

Marvin L. Simner

Section	Page
Overview.....	4
The Black Neighborhoods.....	5
Growing up Black in the Jordan Park District	7
The 1954/1955 Civil Rights Rulings.....	12
The Bradley Case.....	17
The 1971 Supreme Court Decision.....	22
Busing.....	24
Postscript.....	28
End Notes.....	32

Growing Up Black in the Jordan Park District

The St. Petersburg African-American Experience During the Civil Rights Era of the 1950s/1970s

Overview

To rectify the many injustices endured by African-Americans as the result of slavery, three Civil Rights amendments were inserted in the US Constitution around the end of the Civil War. Known as Reconstruction Amendments, the 13th Amendment, adopted by Congress on December 18, 1865, abolished slavery and involuntary servitude. The 14th Amendment, adopted two years later, gave African-Americans the right to receive equal treatment under the law, and the 15th Amendment, ratified on February 3, 1870, prohibited “federal and state governments from depriving any citizen of the (right to) vote on racial grounds.”¹ Although these three amendments were well intentioned, it soon became evident that many states found ways to avoid compliance in order to maintain the second-class status of African-American citizens who resided in their midst. While further civil rights rulings were approved over the years,² the most important rulings that affected schooling took place starting in the 1950s and extended through the early 1970s. The purpose of this report is to discuss the impact of these rulings on the black children who resided in the Jordan Park District of St. Petersburg, Florida.

The first part of the report will focus on the 1931 city zoning regulations that restricted, for over a quarter of a century, the neighborhoods where black families were permitted to reside. The second part will deal with the nature of the Jordan Park District and, through a series of interviews that I was given permission to conduct in 2013, what it was like growing up and attending school there immediately prior to the civil rights era. Next, starting with the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, I will discuss the evolution of this as well as other rulings that eventually led to cross-busing, and how cross-busing affected the schooling of the black children from this area. I will also consider the impact that these rulings had on the Pinellas County School Board since I also received permission to review the Board’s minutes as it attempted to comply with the need to desegregate the St. Petersburg school system. The final part of the report (the Postscript) will examine in some detail the nature of the 1954 ruling and whether cross-busing was necessary, or if the racial unrest and harm that it caused could have been avoided through the operation of several other Civil Rights rulings that were approved by Congress in 1964 and 1965, had these other rulings been given sufficient time to run their course.

The Black Neighborhoods

Although segregated housing was common throughout the South during the early years of the 20th century, whether this needed to occur through legally enforced zoning regulations was always an open question. Around the turn of the century, nearly 27% of the slightly more than 4,000 people who populated St. Petersburg were African-American. By choice, most lived just south of the railroad tracks around Ninth Street.³ In the early 1920s, however, the St. Petersburg planning board received directions from the city commission to place zoning restrictions on the location of the city's black neighborhoods. In response to this directive, William Straub, editor and part owner of the *St. Petersburg Times*, wrote a letter to David Nolan, city planner, in which he commented on this matter in the following way: "We do not want to zone the colored people by law, we are hoping by persuasion and suitable arrangement for them to bring about such corrections in their locations as may be found possible." A relieved Nolan replied: "I am quite in agreement with your statement about racial zoning."⁴ Nevertheless, in 1931 the city approved, as part of the City Charter, the following provision, which remained in the Charter through the early 1960s.

Segregation of Races

To establish and set apart in said City separate residential limits or districts for white and negro residents; to designate, establish and set apart the territorial limits or districts of said City within which white persons may reside, and separate territorial limits or districts of said City within which negroes may reside; to prohibit any white person from taking up or establishing a place of residence or business within the territorial limits of said City so set apart and established for the residence of negroes, and to prohibit any negro from taking up or establishing a place of residence or business within the territorial limits of said City so set apart and established for the residence of white persons.

In 1935 there were two segregated black zones on either side of Central Avenue.⁵ One zone, located north of Central, started half a block west of 9th Street and extended to 12th Street. This area became known as Methodist Town. The other zone, immediately south of Central and known as the Gas Plant District, started one block west of 9th Street and extended somewhat beyond 22nd Street. Because of numerous complaints concerning the housing in both areas the city eventually appointed a housing advisory committee to inspect these areas. The committee's findings were devastating.

Besides being below any imaginable level of comfort, many of these negro dwellings are entirely lacking in provisions for sanitary, healthful living...The committee inspected several large blocks of negro dwellings... finding as many as 14 houses in one group without running water, all 14 being served by a single pump. In 65 Negro houses in one section the committee members said that they did not find a bathtub.

Branding the city's south side Negro district slums as "even worse than we anticipated," members of the five-man housing advisory committee said...they will recommend to the city council that steps be taken immediately to remedy housing conditions.

In essence, according to the *St. Petersburg Times*,⁶ the housing in both areas consisted largely of “slum tenements” managed by white owners and were a disgrace to the city. The *Times* was equally critical of the city for not acting appropriately to obtain a Federal government grant of \$400,000 to construct “modern low cost Negro quarters on vacant land within the south side slum area...”

To address the public’s concern over the loss of this grant, the city council tentatively proposed a new area in which to segregate the black population. A map reported in the *Times*⁷ on December 19, 1937, showed an area allocated for black occupancy “approximately one mile wide and two miles long” that started at 7th Avenue and 16th Street and proceeded west. It is worth noting that this area, though not previously zoned, already contained a sizable black population. In fact, here the black community was large enough to warrant, as early as 1920, the construction of Jordan Academy, an all-black school at the corner of 9th Avenue and 24th Street in what came to be called the Jordan Park District on land donated by Elder Jordan, a black resident who was a major property owner.⁸ The Academy had 12 classrooms with long halls and benches that also served as classrooms for an estimated enrolment of 1100 black students. The faculty consisted of 12 teachers who offered instruction from 1st through 9th grade. The school was enlarged around 1925 and the name changed to Jordan Elementary.⁹

When additional funds were finally allocated by both the Federal government and the city to address the needs of the black community, the plan was to clear Methodist Town of all housing, make that area into park land, and erect 500 new dwellings for the black population in the area that was part of the tentative proposal mentioned above, once the city acquired the proposed land which also contained many substandard houses.¹⁰ It was this plan that finally gave rise to the subsidised housing project in Jordan Park. Construction of the first phase of the housing project began in 1939 and was completed the following year. Owing to its success, a second phase, referred to as the Jordan Park Extension, was completed in 1941.¹¹ In total, the project contained 446 units.

When Jordan Park was opened in 1940, a small family living in substandard housing could move into a modern 3-room apartment at a rental of \$12 a month if the family income was \$595 per year or less. A 4-room apartment rented for \$13 a month; and a 5-room apartment, for larger families, rented at \$14 a month if the family income was \$740 per year or less.¹²

By the mid-1940s, the Jordan Park District, which now consisted of the housing project, nearby neighborhoods, and the commercial area along 22nd Street had become a vibrant and totally self-contained community.

Its ten-block-core (along 22nd Street) of black operated businesses, professional services, entertainment hotspots and churches offered most everything a person required in a segregated society. You could be born in Mercy Hospital, buy groceries, clothing and furniture in any number of small stores, go on an after school date to Henderson’s soda fountain, choose a favourite beer garden, see a movie at the Royal Theater, consult physicians, dentists and lawyers, and, when life was over, be served by one of two funeral homes.¹³

Growing Up Black in the Jordan Park District

Not only was the Jordan Park District totally self-contained, it was also an extremely close knit community with adults helping one another cope with the demands imposed by the segregation laws of the times. As a child, however, what was it like, growing up in this community during the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s? To gather information on this matter interviews were held with five African-Americans who spent all or part of their formative years in or near Jordan Park. The first four grew up in the 1940s/1950s, attended segregated schools, and experienced the neighborhood prior to as well as during the very early days of the civil rights movement. The last person (Henry Allen) was born in the mid-1950s and was among the first to attend the fully integrated schools established during the 1960s. Although this sample is small, collectively the memories of these five individuals offer an important glimpse into the lifestyle of the times.

Betty Harden

Betty lived in Jordan Park among other places during her early years. She attended kindergarten at Jordan Elementary School in 1944. After kindergarten Betty moved to New Jersey to be with her mother's family and, for several years, attended school there. Around 1948 she return to St. Petersburg and once again attended Jordan Elementary in 4th and 5th grade. Betty graduated from Gibbs High School in 1957, which was all black at the time, attended an historical black college in Talladeqa, Alabama, and subsequently obtained a master's degree in social work from Indiana University.

Paul Stewart

Born in 1948, Paul lived on 5th Avenue South during most of his elementary school years then moved to 18th Street South and lived in a home owned by his grandfather. He attended 1st grade at the 16th Street elementary school, where his mother was a teacher, then attended Jordan Elementary in 4th, 5th, and 6th grade. He graduated from Gibbs High School in 1965 and went to Florida A & M University in Tallahassee.

Minson Rubin

Minson was born in 1944. He initially lived in a house rented by his grandmother in Jordan Park but later grew up in several larger units also in Jordan Park. He started school and remained in Jordan Elementary through 6th grade. After graduating from Gibbs High School he attended Tuskegee Institute on a basketball scholarship, left following the first semester, and then attended Florida A & M where he graduated with a major in education.

Mary Johnson

Mary was born in 1945 and grew up in Jordan Park. She attended Davis Elementary from 1st through 2nd or 3rd grade, transferred to Jordan Elementary, which she attended from 4th

through the 6th grade, then transferred again in the 7th grade, this time to the 16th Street School. Mary also graduated from Gibbs High School and then received a degree in nursing from Howard University.

Henry C. Allen

Henry, a middle child among six siblings, was born in Mercy Hospital in Jordan Park in 1956. His family at first lived in a two bedroom apartment in Jordan Park and the children slept on bunk beds. Eventually his parents moved to a three bedroom house also in Jordan Park. Henry started kindergarten in 1960 in Perkins Elementary; transferred to Glenoak Elementary and then attended Campbell Park Elementary School. Following graduation from Campbell he attended South Side Junior High School and graduated from Northeast High School in 1974.

Question: Since you spent your early years in and around the Jordan Park District, what was the neighborhood like in those days?

B.H. "I shopped downtown on many occasions and travelled there by bus. All of the buses from Jordan Park were filled mostly with black residents. I was not told to sit in certain seats because there were so few white people on these buses. Most of the residents, however, confined their shopping to 22nd Street with the exception of Wednesdays when they had sales at Webb City. I remember drinking from a white water fountain when I was around ten years old. My grandmother, however, pulled me away. I don't recall any reaction from the white shoppers."

Betty remembered the shoe store and the grocery stores on 22nd Street, though she didn't remember going to any restaurants. She said there were a number of white store owners on 22nd Street in the 1950s. When asked about crime in the area during the 1950s, she said that she was not aware that 22nd street was a dangerous place to walk even at night; for example, she attended the Royal Theater on 22nd Street and would walk home after dark without any fear.

During her teenage years Betty worked in Harden's Grocery located at the corner of 9th Ave. and 22nd Street. The store was owned by her grandfather, Sidney Harden, Sr. According to Betty, "Harden's Grocery sold what people in the community wanted: Georgia sausage, hog heads, possums, raccoons, land turtles, Dixie Lily Grits, Dixie Lily Meal, raw peanuts, snuff, Prince Albert tobacco in the can, kerosene, etc., products which many people laugh about now."

In 1958 Betty was with the group of college students who integrated Spa Pool and Beach, a white swimming area in St. Petersburg. Betty said she had no idea when asked if she wanted to go swimming, that she would become involved in integrating the white only swimming area, and she did not realize at the time the historical significance of this event. The city closed the beach after integration took place while city council decided what action

to take.¹⁴ Although a number of reporters were there, she did not recall any protesters but the next day her neighbors in Jordan Park were very upset since she had given her name and address to the press. The neighbours were concerned that their neighborhood might suffer repercussions.

P.S. Since black baseball players who came to St. Petersburg in the 1940s were not allowed to eat in white restaurants, when Paul was little his grandmother housed and fed the players in her home along with the rest of the family. This was her way of earning an income. Paul said that many of the baseball players, such as Roberto Clemente, often played ball with the neighborhood children and that he (Paul) earned money by washing their cars. He remembered that the adults bought the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* which had a page edited by Norman Jones devoted to news about the black community. In 9th grade Paul worked at Eckard Drug Store. He washed dishes, bussed tables and was well treated while there.

M.R. When Minson was in 6th or 7th grade he worked as an errand boy for his neighbors. His job was to collect their money and pay their bills to a finance company that loaned money to blacks. His neighbors could not borrow from banks because banks would not loan to black people. Although his parents warned him about how to behave to avoid trouble, as a child he often challenged the system by visiting white establishments through their back doors. Along with his friends, he also challenged the system of white establishments such as McDonald's when he was an adolescent by ordering food from the drive up window and driving away before the food arrived. Though never arrested, he was involved in a number of boycott protests at movies and cafeterias among other places. "You knew how far you could go to make a statement and you would go no further to stay out of trouble."

He recalled that beauty shops and barber shops were very important within the community since certain hair styles were considered critical if one wished to succeed in life. He also remembered that many blacks would try to become entertainers in order to leave the South to escape the "Jim Crow orientation" that was wide spread at the time.

M.J. When Mary was growing up, her views on life, which were promoted in the outside community, was that "colored people were dumb and poor." Because of this belief when integration started to take place, "we felt there was a need to spend what little money we had on clothes to overcome the idea that we were poor and to get knowledge so we wouldn't appear dumb. Many colored people went into debt in an effort to elevate their status."

Mary said that she did not feel uncomfortable walking downtown because "I knew the rules." When she was downtown, though, she largely window shopped because she could only try on clothes in Webb City.

When growing up Mary had no experiences with white people and had no white playmates with the exception of the white children whose father was Mr. Haslam, owner of Haslam's book store in St. Petersburg. She said that on occasion she remembered "staring at them since they were so different."

Because her parents couldn't afford to buy her dolls, the dolls she played with were cut out of magazines: "they were white, had pig tails, and were unlike the dolls the white children played with." Although she never played with black dolls she didn't recall paying very much attention to the skin color of her dolls. She also made dolls out of coke bottles with paper dresses, etc.

- H.A. Henry had very few memories of Jordan Park, though he did recall that during the 1950s and 1960s, "it was a nice neighborhood in which to grow up." The atmosphere in Jordan Park changed, however, in the 1970s when crack cocaine started to appear. He also recalled that when he shopped downtown he could buy shoes and clothes but could not try them on. (Note: Many of those who were interviewed for this report also commented that clothes were purchased by size and often had to be altered later. To buy a pair of shoes, for example, a black customer would bring along a cardboard sketch that showed the size of their foot. A shoemaker in the black neighborhood would later alter the shoes to fit, if needed.) Because Henry's parents separated when he was in junior high school, to help support the family Henry took a job washing dishes.

Question: *How would you describe the education you received?*

- B.H. When Betty attended Jordan Park Elementary and Gibbs High School, both were all black. In fact she was a member of the last class to graduate from Gibbs before it became integrated. The class size in both schools was about 30, and the size of the high school graduating class was around 130. She recalled receiving "very good help" from a black math teacher as well as a sociology teacher while at Gibbs. She was also mentored by members of Delta Sigma Theta, a black adult sorority, and met some white women through the sorority who in turn acted as tutors. While attending college Betty became a member of the sorority.
- P.S. "There were between 20-30 students in all of my classes. All of my teachers were black throughout my elementary grades as well as throughout high school. While most of the textbooks were well used and some were actually defaced, my mother, who taught business courses and English said (contrary to a widespread belief) that it was not because it was known they were coming to black schools. White schools often received similar books."

Paul did not feel he suffered as a result of being in all black schools; in fact, he was inducted into the honor society while in junior high school. Paul also said that there was a sense of community and pride in the schools he attended. When he was in 7th grade, the school raised its own money to buy a copy machine, however, "the machine was later taken from our school and placed in a white high school (St. Petersburg High School). We were never told why this happened."

- M.R. Minson remembered having spelling bees along with many opportunities for recitation. He also said that he appreciated the level of instruction he received in all the black schools he attended but that "the supplies were always limited and the text books were not new since

they all had names of the other children who used them before.” He did emphasize that he really appreciated the level of personal interest that his teachers took in him while he was in elementary school and in high school. In fact, “it was largely because of my high school teachers that I decided to go to college and then to university. I always felt that the level of preparation I received in school throughout the early years made me quite competitive when I went on to further education.”

When asked about the content of some his courses, he said that “in elementary school I never learned about the civil war though I was exposed to the war to a limited extent in high school. The true meaning of the war, however, was never taught. I did learn about the song Dixie, though I don’t recall having any strong feelings about it.”

- M.J. “Even though my shoes often contained cardboard soles, I always walked to school regardless of the weather because I wanted to achieve perfect attendance which was rewarded with a certificate.” Mary’s school year lasted 9 months starting in September. She remembered that there were never enough books for all of the students, so the teachers would summarize the material on the black board. The curriculum covered a wide range of subjects (math, geography, history, etc.) and all of the students were frequently tested: “Promotion depended on our test scores.”

The schools Mary attended followed a two-track system. “We were tested and placed either in an upper track for the top scoring students or in a lower track for the others.” (According to Mary, this division apparently started around 3rd or 4th grade.) “I was always in the upper track.” Mary sometimes felt that the black teachers awarded grades based on the student’s’ skin color - lighter colored students received higher grades than darker colored students independent of the actual quality of their work.

“When I graduated from high school the graduation pictures showed all of the students in nicely dressed clothes. We were told to put on our best outfits for the picture. My outfit was the single nice dress that I owned at the time, the dress was only used for church attendance on Sundays.” After graduation Mary went to Howard University which was all black. When she arrived at Howard “I felt paralyzed because I realized how ill prepared I was in relation to many of the other students. I’m not sure why this was the case because, along with my parents, I was quite aware I was performing very well in school and I had no reason to question the quality of the education that I had received. As I think about it now, though, it could be that many of the other students came from wealthy families and might have gone to private schools where they would have received a better education.”

- H.A. As stated above, Henry started kindergarten in Perkins Elementary 1961, which was all black, and then attended 1st and 2nd grade in Campbell Park, which was also all black. He recalled that the teachers in both of these schools were very firm. “If you got out of line they would call your mother.” In fact, he remembered a “Mrs. Boden who insisted that when I print my letters they had to be just so.” In 1964 he transferred to Glenoak which was one of

the first white elementary schools to become integrated in St. Petersburg. Henry then completed his education in other integrated schools. When he went to Northeast High School, "I was bused and often had to get up as early as 4:00 a.m. to catch the bus, though I never minded it. Throughout the years I never experienced any difficulty. In fact, many of my friends, while growing up, were white and I still maintain contact with several today." (Note: During the years that Henry attended Northeast it was said to be "the richest endowed public high school in Pinellas" and one of the most innovative [*St. Petersburg Times*, January 9 and 11, 1972, p. 1B]. It was also one of the few that encountered no racial disturbances, which could help explain Henry's experiences and why they differ from the experiences expressed below.)

The 1954/1955 Supreme Court Rulings

After months of cajoling his feuding colleagues, (on May 17th, 1954, Chief Justice) Warren calmly read the court's ruling against segregated public schools. The unanimous opinion was short, unemotional, and non-accusatory. Drawing upon the 14th Amendment and studies showing segregation's damaging effects, Warren declared that legally enforced 'separate education facilities are inherently unequal.'¹⁵

In reaching this decision, however, the court realized that implementation at the local level would require considerable thought. To provide ample opportunity for local jurisdictions to develop appropriate procedures, the Court allowed a one year grace period before the decision would become binding. Thus, on May 31, 1955, the court issued its second decision, "commanding communities to desegregate with all deliberate speed."¹⁶ Because of the monumental changes that these rulings would subsequently entail, I asked if the interviewees, as children, were aware of the rulings and their potential consequences. Their answers were surprising.

Question: Were you made aware of the 1954/1955 civil rights rulings while you were in school?

B.H. "Throughout my years in school I cannot recall any conversations or concerns among my parents, teachers or family about the pending movement toward integration."

P.S. "There was very little discussion in my family about the Supreme Court decision to integrate the schools. The reason is they didn't believe it would happen...it was simply felt that it had no bearing on them."

M.R. "Although in church they talked about the Supreme Court Civil Rights decision, this was never a topic of conversation at home or in school. In fact I never really learned about the decision until around 1958 when I reached 9th grade and attended a civics class."

M.J. "There was little if any discussion about integration in my home and I had no thoughts about integration when it was mentioned in school. The ministers in the churches my family

attended dealt largely with religious matters and not political concerns, so they too rarely addressed matters such as integration. In fact, there was so little thought given to the possibility of attending an integrated school that if I did attend one and encountered any difficulty, my mother felt that God would look after me. Her belief in God's help was always the answer to all kinds of difficulties."

H.A.C. "We never talked about integration in our house. When my father left he dated a white woman and my mother dated a white man. As a result, no thought was given to integration while I was growing up."

What impact did the rulings have on the school system itself? The day after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, the full text appeared in the *St. Petersburg Times*.¹⁷ On page 1 the *Times* reported the following comment by Floyd Christian, Pinellas County School Board Superintendent, and Marion R. Price, an elected trustee.

I don't think there will be any radical changes in the Pinellas system. Most of our schools are so located that they serve areas of Negro population and there won't be any major changes unless they move out of that area....Mrs. Price said "I don't think it will affect us very much because of city zoning and school districting. Students living in certain areas must go to schools in that zone. Most Negroes are living in zones where there are no white students.

To fully understand the nature of these comments it is helpful to understand two points. First, St. Petersburg, like most other communities in North America, adhered to a neighborhood school attendance system which meant that children were only permitted to attend schools in their neighborhoods. Second, the legal meaning of the term "desegregation" did not imply the need to achieve racial balance within a given school or school district. This point was clearly stated in the undated memo received by the Board and which was subsequently approved by the United States Congress on July 2, 1964 under Title 42, Subchapter IV.

Desegregation means the assignment of students to public schools and within such schools without regard to their race, color, religion, or national origin, but "desegregation" shall not mean the assignment of students to public schools in order to overcome racial imbalance...

Thus, it is not surprising that the Pinellas County School Board did not feel the need to alter its procedures in order to comply with the Court mandate. In other words, since the black children were already attending their neighborhood schools, and since their neighborhoods were zoned for black residents, white children would not be able to attend these schools nor could black children attend white schools, which for the most part, were only located in white neighborhoods. Therefore it was argued that segregation could remain in effect without violating the Court's ruling.

The first meeting of the Board, following the Supreme Court decision, was held on May 26, 1954. Given the logic associated with determining school zones, coupled with the fact that the Court decision did not require the board to produce a racial balance within its system, it is not surprising that neither the minutes of that meeting, nor the minutes of the 15 meetings held between May 26

and October 27 of that year contained any references to this decision. Instead, the only topics under consideration focused largely on budgetary matters and administrative appointments.

There is reason to believe, however, that neighborhood zoning factors were not the only factors that the Board considered when deciding whether or not to desegregate. Take the case of a petition signed in September of that year by the parents of 25 black children who lived in Tarpon Springs.¹⁹ The petition called for their 7th and 8th grade children to be transferred from Union Academy (an all-black school in Tarpon Springs) to Tarpon Springs High School (an all-white school also in the same Tarpon Springs school zone as Union Academy). The children's parents argued in their petition that there were too few teachers and courses at Union Academy to meet their children's educational needs. While the Board agreed with the parents on this point, nevertheless, the Board decided against the petition and instead recommended that the children should be transferred to Pinellas High School in Clearwater, which was an all-black school, but well outside of the children's neighborhood zone.

Why did the Board elect to follow a procedure that was clearly at odds with their long established neighborhood zoning policy, to say nothing of the Supreme Court's decision? Was their ruling a reflection of a staunch segregationist stand, or was it due to some other factor? A possible answer to this question appeared in a Memorandum issued nine years later by Floyd Christian, who was still superintendent, under the heading "Problems we will probably face in desegregation in the opening of school in September, 1963."²⁰ The memorandum listed a number of potential trouble spots among the schools in the St. Petersburg area.

Mirror Lake Junior High School: There is a possibility that there will be a number of (black) junior high school students (who will apply for admission to Mirror Lake, which has traditionally been an all-white school) as a result of one student being successfully admitted last year. (These black students) are only two blocks from (Mirror Lake) and from what we hear now, there may be a number of Negro children requesting admittance here...I would suggest that the Board wait to see how many we have before any commitment is made. The number applying would determine what action the Board should take.

South Side Junior High School: There is a possibility that a few (black) students will apply at South Side (which has also traditionally been an all-white school). There are approximately 20 or 25 of them in this zone. There have been no rumors or reports, but I suggest that we wait and see, and if there are only a few, I would recommend we admit them.

Glenoak Elementary School: There are very few (black) children that have moved into this Glenoak zone. There have been no rumours or reports, and I would not make any statements regarding this and wait to see if any apply. There could only be a few (black) students who would be eligible, and if only a few applied, I would recommend we admit them.

Child's Park Elementary School: I understand that two Negro families have moved into the Child's Park zone, and the reports from parents and the principal are that they will have

children applying at Child's Park. It is my understanding that there will be four applying next year. If this is true, I would recommend that they be admitted.

St. Petersburg High School: We have no information on this, but one (black) boy was successfully admitted last year. I think there would be very few who would request it because most of them would want to go to Gibbs High School. I would wait to see how many apply before any decision is reached.

St Petersburg Junior College: We have already had applications from 10 or 12 (black) students...Dr. Bennett thinks all but one or two are not academically prepared to pass the junior college program...(the rest) can be successfully admitted. I would feel that we should follow his recommendation.

Dixie Hollins High School: There are already six (black) students that have been carefully screened, and Mr Lawson feels they are eligible and could be admitted without any trouble. I have asked him to make no announcement on this until later on since an announcement now would probably cause others to want to enrol in August, and I believe it would be better to keep this to the present limit.

As the foregoing examples show, Christian was not necessarily opposed to desegregation as long as it could be accomplished with small numbers of children. If only a few black children had applied to enter a white school, permission would be granted. When the numbers exceeded "a few" permission would be denied. If the same reasoning held sway in 1954 perhaps this is why the Board refused to grant the petition submitted by the parents of the 25 students in Tarpon Springs, i.e., there were far too many black children involved.

But why was the Board concerned over the issue of numbers? Although we were unable to find any reasons for this concern in the minutes, it is likely that the Superintendent as well as the Board members were very aware at the time of the Klan's widespread influence in Florida and therefore were troubled by the possible harm that the Klan might inflict on the community if desegregation was allowed to proceed at too rapid a pace. (See end note 21 for a brief history of the Klan's operation in Florida.) As long as the numbers remained small, it was anticipated that desegregation could proceed without difficulty. In line with this belief, Christian described the outcome of his recommendations in a letter to the Board dated September 6, 1963.

I want to bring you up to date with a final report on the action taken by this office in admitting Negro students to white schools...I have talked with each of the principals, and we have visited the schools to which Negro students were admitted for the first time, and in each case there has not been a single incident within the school by the students, teachers, etc. We have had some fairly nasty telephone calls, which is to be expected. The final tabulation runs as follows:

White Schools	Negro students successfully admitted to the white schools
Mirror Lake Junior High	4
South Side Junior High	18
Glenoak Elementary	9
St. Petersburg Junior College	6 in the day program 10 in the night program
Dixie Hollins High School	8

In addition to the numbers of black children who applied to transfer, it is quite possible that Christian was also very sensitive to the demeanor of the person or persons who initiated the transfer request. In this same letter Christian drew attention to an issue in an agenda that the board would be asked to address during a forthcoming meeting. The issue concerned a request to transfer three children from Melrose Elementary, an all Negro school built in 1962, to Glenoak Elementary, a predominately white school built in 1914. Although the names in the following copy of the letter have been deleted to protect the identities of the people involved, as the letter shows, the request was initiated by a person who was very outspoken and, according to Christian, clearly very troublesome.

Under item #9 of the agenda you will see that there is an appeal by two parents on behalf of their three children. The first parent lives in a house with Mrs. XXX, and the second parent rents an apartment immediately behind Mrs. XXX's home. Both residences are right across the street from the Melrose School. Mrs. XXX claims she has adopted the first parent's two children, and that she has been the leader in taking these children over to Glenoak every day and leaving them, making the statement that if they are left there, sooner or later they will be admitted.

Both parents have been informed in writing by me that their application for transfer was denied. Mrs. XXX then came into the office, and acting as spokesman for the two, demanded that they be allowed to attend Glenoak. She was not only insulting to Dr. Craig and my secretary but to me when I indicated to her that she had no grievance or appeal to this office since none of the children were hers and she did not have legal adoption papers for any of the children. Several years ago you will remember Mrs. XXX was the one who sent a letter requesting that a white principal and white faculty be appointed at Melrose. She has also been a very troublesome soul in the past with everything we have tried to do with the Negro schools in our community, and a most insulting person to try to work with at all...If the appeal is denied and she continues to take them to Glenoak, I have talked with the Juvenile authorities, and the parents can be arrested for abandoning (their) children.

This may seem like a very small matter, but unless you know Mrs. XXX and her determination to get her name in the paper and be a crusader for any cause, you cannot

appreciate the amount of time that has been involved in trying to handle these three children. Our principal has had to take the children back to Melrose each day since the opening of school. A copy of Mrs. XXX's letter of September 4 to me is attached.

On September 11 the Board heard the request, denied the appeal, and assigned all three children to the Melrose Elementary school. In short, it would seem that the board's refusal in this instance may have been prompted by the Superintendent's letter which contained a very clear message that if the petition had been granted and the children allowed to transfer to Glenoak, the outspoken nature displayed by Mrs. XXX might have promoted considerable unrest among the white parents whose children were already attending Glenoak.

It is perhaps worth noting that shortly after this decision was reached, the first parent, joined a class action suit launched by five other families, each of whom had resided elsewhere in Pinellas County and had attempted to have their son or daughter transferred from an all-black school to a white school but were rejected by the school board. The suit, formally known as "Bradley v. Board of Public Instruction of Pinellas Co. Florida," was heard by the United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit. The suit, which is still ongoing and is discussed below, led to substantial changes in the way desegregation was subsequently handled in St. Petersburg.

The Bradley Case

The *St. Petersburg Times*, with reference to the Bradley case, reported in 1964 that "the desegregation progression (in St. Petersburg) falls short of an all-encompassing school integration suit now pending in the Federal Court. The suit seeks complete desegregation of teachers and students."²² In keeping with the court's subsequent ruling, the following proposals were approved by the Pinellas Country Board in 1965.

Zoning: that dual zoning be eliminated beginning with the 1965-66 school year, and that by the 1967-68 school year, all attendance lines be based on unitary zoning without regard to race. A few temporary exemptions were permitted pending the construction of several new schools.

Special Education: the Nina Harris building be used as a school for all special education children, regardless of race...that all special education children in the central area, regardless of race, be served by the new special education school to be built in Pinellas Park.

Employment: We accept the plan for hiring instructional and administrative personnel on the basis of merit without regard to race. We recommend that this policy be extended to include all employees of the school system including clerical and maintenance staffs...We would like all segregated lists abolished and all applications and records be placed in a single file in each hiring level. The board is asked to encourage the principals to conform to the spirit of this recommendation in choosing personnel.

Despite the success that had been achieved in preventing community disruption between 1954 and 1964, through what is often referred to as “token integration,” it was in the mid-1960s following the Bradley ruling that certain difficulties began to emerge. The first of these was documented in a series of articles that appeared in the *St. Petersburg Times*. The articles focused on the Glenoak School, which, as shown above, in 1964 only had 9 black students and therefore was a predominantly white school. By 1966, however, it had experienced a sizable shift in its black population such that now there were 419 black students and only 8 white students in attendance.²³ In an interview with the principal in 1965, the *Times* reported the following.

A valiant little St. Petersburg elementary school, facing heavy odds, is trying to lick the problems Congress foresaw school systems would have as soon as school desegregation was seriously undertaken...What are the problems that confront a desegregated elementary school? They're the same ones that confront any other elementary school except that the gap between the high and the low in achievement is greater so the troubles can't be “lived with” - they demand to be faced...Here's a profile of the job they have before them....Says Principal Gerald Caffrey: “I just felt we were facing an impossible task. The 108 incoming (Negro) first graders tested in September ranged from rankings at the 1st to the 99th percentile. Scores at the 1st percentile are practically unheard of in a predominantly white school - and we have 20 children at this scoring level ...Fourteen percent was the median percentile of the first graders. In an average school the median score would be in about the 70th percentile. Almost any of those below 50 are considered poor risks....Only 20 (of these children) are above the 50th percentile...”²⁴

In commenting on this problem Caffrey, said “We have a tendency to blame the Negro schools... But we have pupils (who never attended school because of their young age and are already) behind in first grade.” In essence, according to the principal, the problem the black children were experiencing did not originate within the school system but instead was due to the lack of appropriate preschool experiences needed for successful transition from the home into first grade. To emphasize this point, it is interesting and perhaps ironic, that in a follow-up article on the Glenoak experience published one year later, the *Times* congratulated the civil rights movement for alerting the community to the need for better preschool preparation in dealing with the needs of disadvantaged children.

The American public... should express its deepest gratitude to the American Negro and the civil rights movement for initiating the greatest breakthrough in educational philosophy and principles in the history of education...for in recognizing the needs of the disadvantaged has come a greater awareness of the needs of all children...The teachers and principal, Gerald Caffrey, have learned a lot about the effects deprivation can have on children when they come to school. Schools have seen the effects of deprivation before, when their enrolment was of white children. Because the victims were not in such great numbers what they needed may have gone unnoticed until later on when they simply dropped out of school.²⁵

In an article published later that year, the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* attributed the lack of appropriate preschool facilities to the “state legislature, which in 1965 agreed in principle to (offer)

state aid for kindergartens under the Minimum Foundation Program, but made money available for only a small fraction of the state-wide need.”²⁶ The article went on to claim that:

The next Legislature should, and we believe will, bring the kindergartens fully into the Minimum Foundation Program system... “Head Start” programs around the country financed with anti-poverty school training, particularly for children in low-income, culturally deprived families, can make the difference between success and failure in later school years. The experience fully justifies inclusion of kindergartens as a universal and integral part of the state-aided public school system.

A second difficulty resulted from an appeal launched by the plaintiffs in the Bradley case.²⁷ In 1970 the United States Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit, ruled that the desegregation process in Pinellas County, which, like the rest of the country needed to ensure proportional racial representation and therefore integration, was proceeding far too slowly. In short, by allowing parents the freedom to choose where their children would attend school this prevented schools from becoming proportionally integrated. In Pinellas County the black population at the time represented about 19% of the population. Therefore, the student body in each school in the county needed to contain roughly this proportion of blacks. To achieve this goal, the court recommended a system that would produce the desired racial mix more rapidly than freedom of choice would allow. Specifically, the court proposed the “pairing of some schools in close proximity to each other” thereby forcing children to attend certain schools solely to achieve the desired racial mix.

By way of illustration, consider once again the Glenoak Elementary School. As mentioned above, in 1965 Glenoak was a predominately white school. By 1970, however, and through parental freedom of choice, it had become a predominately black school (490 Negroes and 7 whites). This change, which had taken place over a five year period, was brought about largely because the parents of the white children who had attended Glenoak, had exercised their freedom of choice and transferred their children either to private or public schools that were still all white. To correct this problem of “white flight,” the court’s reasoning with respect to schools like Glenoak was as follows: on the south Glenoak was bounded by two predominantly white schools - Lakewood, with 77 black students and 431 whites; and further south by Bay Vista with 7 black students and 482 whites. Since Lakewood was 1 ½ miles from Glenoak while Bay Vista was 2 ½ miles from Glenoak, it was “ordered that Glenoak be desegregated by implementing either of the following alternative plans:

- 1) By paring Glenoak and Lakewood, resulting in a racial composition in the new school zone of 567 blacks and 438 whites, or
- 2) By grouping Glenoak, Lakewood and Bay Vista, resulting in a racial composition in the one zone in which these three schools are placed of 574 blacks and 920 whites.”

Although permitting a departure from strict adherence to the 19% goal, nevertheless, under either condition the only way to accomplish anything near this goal was to implement a large scale cross busing program. How did the community react to this program? By adopting the following resolution on August 14th, 1970, the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce endorsed the program.

Be it resolved that the Board of Governors...accepts school desegregation as the law of the land and favors its lawful implementation by organizing (the) black population so that the percentage of black students in each school will equal the percentage of the student black population to the total student population.

On the other hand, the public's reaction, though mixed, was often quite negative. In an article dealing with the first day of school, the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, noted the following: "While school officials were reporting only normal, opening day problems, the United Residents of Pinellas (an organization opposed to busing) was recording the first day of cross-busing on film. William Courtney, president of URP... said the film will be spliced together for a one-hour presentation, possibly for legal use."²⁸ In addition, this organization was planning to circulate petitions "calling for the removal of six of the seven School Board members from office," who voted in favor of the cross-busing proposal. The only member left off the list was Dr. Charles Crist who voted against the busing plan. The reasoning behind Crist's negative vote appeared in the *Times* the year before.

...the cross-busing plan (is) "not good educationally, un-American and artificial." He complained that public school systems "are being used" nationally to achieve desegregation and said it is a "perversion" of their function.²⁹

Of particular interest was a 55 page document issued by a Board appointed committee.³⁰ The committee summarized its views on cross-busing by quoting comments that had recently appeared in the press by a number of black as well as white leaders throughout the country who were strongly opposed to the desegregation/integration plan approved by the court. The following examples illustrate both the nature and tone of the comments.

Black Leaders

James Farmer, former head of the Congress of Racial Equality, currently Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

Our objective should be to provide a high-quality education. The real problem is not integration or segregation. It is the quality of education. Busing is not relevant to high-quality education. It works severe hardships on the people it affects.

Mrs. Thelma Miller, head of the New York City district of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers.

Let's stop kidding ourselves about integration. Let's make all schools equally good for all children. Then nobody will mind what school his child attends. People who advocate busing for integration are still living in a dream world.

Roy Innis, Head of the Congress of Racial Equality

Integration is dead. Its epitaph has been coming for a hell of a long time. Integration came to be viewed by the civil rights aristocracy not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself.

Dan Watts, editor of the black militant publication, *The Liberator*.

It's a traumatic experience for a black kid to be bused clear across town...we've got to move away from integration and toward co-existence.

White Leaders

John Mitchell, Attorney General

(All citizens have) the right to reject unreasonable requirement of busing and to send their children to neighborhood schools. (This right) is just as important as the right of all our citizens to be assigned (to schools) without regard to their race.

George Romney, Secretary of housing and Urban Development

Busing is not the basis for overcoming the vital problems resulting from separation of our people in most communities. It is a superficial compromise...I believe that every American school child is entitled to the opportunity to attend a quality school within a reasonable distance from his home.

President Richard M. Nixon

One of the mistakes of past policy has been to demand too much of our schools. They have been expected not only to educate, but also to accomplish a social transformation. Children in many instances have not been served, but used in what all too often have proved a tragically futile effort to achieve in the schools the kind of multi-racial society which the adult community has failed to achieve for itself.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning a summary statement in the Superintendent's Report directed to members of the Pinellas County School Board.³¹

While there was considerable apprehension among certain parent groups that there might be greater disturbances in our public school system, primarily arising from increased integration, there has not yet been a radical increase in securing problems, considering the school system as a whole.

There has, however, been a significant increase in incidents at one facility, Sixteenth Street Junior High School. It appears that this has arisen from a number of factors, including some resistance to sending their children to this school by certain parents, reflected in the attitudes

of their children, disturbances by male black elements who have intruded on the school grounds, and the understandable problems of adjustments for white children and teachers in this previously all black school.

We have temporarily stationed one unarmed, non-uniformed, off-duty Saint Petersburg police officer and one of our own security officers at this school, largely to prevent intrusions on the campus by undesirable outside elements. The fencing of this entire campus, now nearing completion, including gates that can be closed during the school day, should do much to inhibit undesirable intruders from entering the school grounds.

From the foregoing accounts, although there were many who disagreed with cross-busing as a solution to the issue of desegregation, it would seem that only limited disruption occurred within the school system itself. This situation was to change, however, with the 1971 Supreme Court ruling.

The 1971 Supreme Court Decision

Spurred on by many lower court rulings similar to the one issued in the Bradley case, in 1970 the Supreme Court elected to hear an appeal to a ruling by U.S. District Court Judge James B. McMillan in Charlotte, North Carolina.³² The McMillan ruling stated that the public schools in Charlotte and the surrounding Mecklenburg County needed to desegregate, not piecemeal through token integration, but in a more deliberate manner. To achieve this goal he also imposed a racial balance requirement on the schools. Because of the proportional distribution of the black vs. white populations in the Charlotte area (29% black, 72% white), to the extent that it was possible, each school needed to achieve this level of proportional representation. The judge further ordered that busing was to be implemented to attain this balance. Because the McMillan ruling had been the subject of considerable debate in Charlotte, and because a segment of his ruling had been overturned, the appeal was initiated by parents who wanted a verdict from the Supreme Court that favored the entire McMillan ruling.

The controversy over how best to address this matter raged within the Supreme Court judges' chambers for some time. The final decision was rendered in April, 1971. The Court's verdict, which upheld the original decision by McMillan, stated that busing to achieve racial balance through desegregation was justified and that black students from the inner city could be bused to suburban all-white schools if needed to achieve such a balance.³³

How was this news received in St. Petersburg? The Pinellas County School Board held a lengthy and often acrimonious debate during an open meeting on May 12 to address the matter. The opening remarks by Dr. Charles Crist, as recorded in the school board minutes, set the tone for the remainder of the meeting.

Dr. Crist stated that he strongly and firmly supported the neighborhood school system and that this was his position when this item went to the Supreme Court to see if there could be a neighborhood school system anymore. He was hoping that this was what they would rule, but they did not and ruled (instead) just the opposite...that federal, district and circuit judges

can use pairing, clustering, mass busing, and racial balances to desegregate a school system. Therefore, there was no question in his mind that these methods would have to be used in our county. In fact, just yesterday Judge Krenzman ordered Hillsborough to go ahead and do this or he would do it for them. It now comes down to picking the best plan to be instituted for our county with the least disruption and the least expense.³⁴

The school board was given four plans to consider prior to the meeting. All four plans, as reported in the *Times*,³⁵ involved the following seven mostly black elementary schools: Glenoak, Roser Park, Jordan, Melrose, Perkins, Wildwood, and Campbell Park.

Plan I requires busing of students up to 10 miles from home to give each school a similar percentage of black students. This plan allowed three of the all-black schools and two of the white elementary schools to remain intact.

Plan II was the same as Plan I but involved five of the all-black schools.

Plan III required the closing of up to seven of the black schools and the remaining elementary schools would be clustered or grouped with some grades within each cluster attending one elementary school and other elementary grades attending another school.

Plan IV would close three to seven of the black schools and distribute the students among other white schools by zone.

All of the plans called for busing of the black students to the white schools. Needless to say, given these options, while some members of the community were sympathetic, many others were outraged. The outrage centered largely on the fact that the neighborhood system was being outlawed and that, independent of which plan was selected, certain schools would be closed and busing, mostly confined to the black students, was to be implemented in order to comply with the court's ruling. Typical among the letters and petitions received by the Board in response to the options were the following.³⁶

We, the undersigned Black Ministers, Citizens, and Taxpayers of the St. Petersburg Community, vigorously oppose any action by the Pinellas County School Board to close badly needed school facilities located in the Southside of St. Petersburg. We also protest any attempt on the School Board's part to initiate the proposed Plan IV as this plan would only result in the destruction of an established community as well as convey unwise and arbitrary use of tax-payers funds.

We, the membership of the 74th Street Elementary School Parents' Club of St. Petersburg...do hereby declare that we are opposed to any form of cross-busing of school children. Cross-busing will result in the elimination of the neighborhood school concept, which we support, thus usurping the right of parents, by means of choosing the location in which they desire to reside, to select the school they wish to have their children attend. In our opinion, cross-busing will cause an unnecessary hardship on both the children and

parents involved, will cause concern for the safety of the children involved, will not provide any known benefit...and will cause an expenditure of tax funds which could better be used to benefit public school education in this county. (The accompanying petition contained 964 signatures.)

Rev. B.P. Stanton, Pastor of the Meadowlawn Baptist Church and representative of the Citizens' Councils of America...opposed all cross-busing to achieve a racial balance in Pinellas County schools...and called for a boycott of all schools for white parents who oppose cross-busing to let their general country-wide protest be felt.

The Community Alliance strongly urges the completion of desegregation of Pinellas County Schools by September, 1971. We have examined the various plans to be suggested to the Pinellas County School Board and, of these plans, endorse the principles basic to Plan II. The Community Alliance has considered the possibility of closing certain schools. It is our conclusion that only those schools should be phased out or closed as recommended by the State Survey on the grounds of being unsafe for future use.

It is worth noting that although the Board was forced to decide among the four alternatives, the Board's commitment to the neighborhood school system, rather than to busing, was clearly expressed during a special meeting held on May 19th, 1971.³⁷ Specifically, the Board unanimously moved to approve the following amendment to the Florida Constitution proposed by Congressman Bill Young on April 29.

The right of students to attend the public school nearest their place of residency shall not be denied or abridged for reasons of race, color, national origin, religion or sex and the Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

The motion also stipulated that this action on the part of the Board be sent to "all the School Boards in the State of Florida and the Pinellas County Legislative Delegation."

After reviewing the many comments received from the public, on June 2 the Board revisited all of the options and reached a final decision to adopt Plan II.

Under the plan, approved yesterday 4-0 by School Board members, about 11,000 additional Pinellas students, both black and white, will be bused to other districts in order to distribute black students more equally. No black student schools will be closed under the new plan... (and) no student will be bused more than 10 miles.³⁸

Busing

Local reaction to the busing decision was swift and far reaching. An anti-busing rally was held on August 28, 1971 in Al Lang Field by a state-wide organization called "Parents Against Forced Busing." The organization claimed to have as many as 50,000 Pinellas County supporters and was

headed by former governor Claude R. Kirk Jr. Then on September 15 the *Times* reported on a proposed increase in the mill rate designed to cover the additional buses needed to comply with the court's ruling. The proposed increase was defeated. In the same issue the *Times* also reported that about 80,000 signatures had been gathered on a petition to have all five members of the school board resign, that "150 parents picketed the 74th Street Elementary School Monday morning," and that around 700 people met to discuss organizing sympathy strikes in protest to the busing decision.

Of greatest importance, however, was the impact of busing on the children. Because of the need for proportional racial distribution, coupled with the large number of schools in the Pinellas County School Board District, the overall geographic size of the district, and the requirement to limit the amount of time the children needed to spend on a bus, an acceptable plan required considerable thought which, in turn, led to an extremely complicated process. The first step was to divide the district roughly in half at Ulmerton Road. The second step was to decide how to distribute the children in order to comply with the Court's ruling (e.g. at the elementary level, the all-white schools south of Ulmerton must now have at least 13% black students and north of Ulmerton, the white schools need at least 6% black students.⁴⁰)

Focusing on the area south of Ulmerton Road, in 1981 the *St. Petersburg Times* summarized the outcome of the process in the following way.

Because most blacks and whites still live in segregated neighborhoods, the Pinellas School Board has to bus black students to schools in white areas and white students to neighborhoods with a high percentage of blacks. But the black community is hit far harder than the white. Fifty-seven percent of the black students in the county are bused each year compared to 4 percent of the white students. Most blacks in southern Pinellas live in a 30-by-40 block area (around Jordan Park), which means every (white) school in the lower half of the county (south of Ulmerton Road) must get... its black students from there.⁴⁰

To achieve this goal at the elementary school level this 30-by-40 block area was divided into 53 zones. Each zone was dedicated to a specific school. For instance, three of the zones were dedicated to Starkey Elementary School, three others were dedicated to Walsingham, while two others were dedicated to Azalea. Hence all of the black elementary children who lived in the neighborhoods defined by these zones were bused either to Starkey, Walsingham, or Azalea. Since it was also decided that three of the elementary schools in this area were to remain predominately, but not totally black (Campbell Park, Glenoak, and Perkins), some of the white children who lived below Ulmerton were to be bused to these schools. Adding to this complicated procedure, parents of the white elementary children who were bused were told that their children would not be bused out of their neighborhoods for more than two years, yet the black children, on the other hand, "are generally bused for the entire time they are in school."⁴⁰ The following story, which appeared in the same issue of the *Times*, reveals the nature of the social disruptions that many of the black elementary children suffered as the result of this procedure.

Like most little boys, Ron Hill, 10 and Davaelyn Hayes, 9 enjoy doing things together. One thing they don't do together is go to school, despite the fact that both live within walking distance of Lakeview Elementary. Under the Pinellas County School Board's desegregation

plan, black youngsters who live within easy walking distance of Lakeview are assigned to 13 different elementary schools. So Davaelyn, who is in the third grade, walks to Lakeview, while Ron, a fifth grader who lives one street away, has a 30-minute bus ride to Starkey Elementary near Seminole. Both boys say they wish they were going to Lakeview together. "If he (Ron) were going to Lakeview with me we could walk to school together," says Davaelyn. "And we could both play together in p.e. (Physical Education)" says Ron. "I can't see why he has to go way out to Starkey when there's a school almost in his backyard. I just don't understand it. It doesn't make sense."

In addition to this issue caused by cross-busing, there was the equally troublesome matter of racial disturbances within many of the schools where busing took place. Since most of the disturbances occurred at the junior and senior high school levels, given the stereotypical images of the times, the following comment written by a black *Times* columnist in 1981 who reflected on her junior high school days is also revealing. It suggests what at least some black students might have worried about when white students were assigned to their previously all black schools. Although the focus was probably different, it is not unlikely that many of the white students had similar erroneous stereotypical images of the black students who would be assigned to their schools.

When the first busload of white students rolled into the gravel driveway of Sixteenth Street Junior High School in 1971, the first thing that went through our minds was, "Uh, oh - there goes the band!" Everybody knew that white folks don't have the necessary rhythm to blast those sassy, soulful tunes that made the all-black band a favorite in Central Avenue parades. "And Lord help our championship basketball team." Everybody knew that white boys just don't have those silky smooth moves needed to weave that round ball down to midcourt and send it sailing into the hoop without touching the rim. But while "everybody" had heard those popular stereotypical rumours, the fact was that nobody really knew what to expect. The arrival of that first busload of whites was, for most of us black students, the first time we ever had any close interaction with white people our own age.⁴⁰

In 1971 racial disturbances were indeed reported at four junior high schools (Meadowlawn, South Side, Tyron, and Sixteenth Street). While the situation described below took place at Sixteenth Street, the disturbances were very similar at the other three schools.

A number of black students picketed 16th Street Junior High School before classes started Monday and as many as 25 white students may have left afterwards...a 14-year-old white student received a minor bruise before school when about 25 black students ran by and hit him and two friends "at random"...The School Board formally recognized Wednesday during a conference session that academic as well as discipline problems exist at 16th Street...The discussion of the 16th Street situation began because of parental complaints of fights, extortion, non-students coming on campus to bully students after school...⁴¹

In addition to these reports, four of the seven senior high schools (Boca Ciega, Dixie Hollins, Lakewood, and St. Petersburg) that drew their black student populations from the 30-by-40 block area mentioned above also experienced racial difficulties. The situations that emerged here were similar to the ones that unfolded at the junior high school level with the exception that at the senior

high school level the racial confrontations were often more pronounced, involved more students, and often made use of deadly weapons.

Lakewood High School

The St. Petersburg Police Tactical Squad was called to St. Petersburg's Lakewood High School Monday morning for what became the most serious racial incident to trouble the city's schools so far this year. The trouble began when a group of black students refused to go to class and refused to leave the school halls. Fistfights and scuffling then broke out between black and white students, and the police were called to clear the halls. Police also had to clear a large group of white youths – several of them not students at the school – from a position across the street. One officer was swung at with a car jack handle and arrests were made. Through the morning, police stopped and searched roaming bands of white youths, and confiscated an array of knives, clubs, chains and tire irons.⁴²

St. Petersburg High School

One youth was stabbed in the back with a knife, kicked and beaten by about 12 youthful assailants in one of several fights that broke out near St. Petersburg after a basketball game with Gibbs High Friday night...Windows in at least two stores to the east of the school were broken by roaming gangs of youths.⁴³

Boca Ciega High School

According to school officials, when the black students arrived by bus early this morning, they grouped together...Then a large group of white students entered the school and began running down the corridors toward the black students...The blacks ran back to the bus area...the white students were told to attend class or leave the school grounds...for about an hour they milled up and down the street surrounding the Gulfport school. It was during this milling that a white boy was arrested by the Pinellas county sheriff's deputies when he was found to have a blackjack wrapped around one wrist and a thick towel around the other.⁴⁴

Dixie Hollins High School

Pinellas County law enforcement officials arrested four persons yesterday at Dixie Hollins during a two-hour melee between black students and white students and adults...Six persons were injured, none seriously, as fist fights and rock-throwing skirmishes broke out after a Confederate flag-waving motorcade appeared in front of the school...⁴⁵

Unfortunately these disturbances did not end in 1971. The following report on the difficulties encountered at Boca Ciega in 1973 illustrates the magnitude the racial strife that continued to exist in many places in Pinellas County. It is important to note that in Boca Ciega at the time the disturbances occurred, the black student population comprised only 12-13 percent of the total student body.

The learning process gave way to mob violence at Boca Ciega High School here this morning. At least a half dozen white students reportedly were injured as 400 to 500 whites and blacks met head-on in the hallways with fists, chains, rocks and clubs. Only a handful of school security officers were on hand when the violence erupted around 7:30 a.m., but within the hour a dozen police units from St. Petersburg, at least three Pinellas county Sheriff's Department cruisers and Gulfport police were at the scene.

As the whites neared the school entrance, a red Chevrolet driven by a young black man, a non-student reportedly on his way to work, was attacked by the white students. The whites swarmed over the car, beating it with the sticks, shattering the car windows. Every window in the car was either smashed or partially shattered. For a while the car could not be seen because of the surging crowd of white students.⁴⁶

There were even reports of racial unrest as late as 1976 in schools such as Dixie Hollins.

Simmering racial tensions at Dixie Hollins High School exploded Wednesday morning into widespread fighting between black and white students, prompting officials to close the school until Monday. Isolated fistfights erupted at about 6:50 a.m. and quickly swelled to involve hundreds of students in what officials called the worst outbreak of racial violence at the Pinellas County school in three years.⁴⁷

Postscript

It is quite clear from the foregoing review that the most difficult aspect of the 1954 ruling resulted from the subsequent ruling by the Supreme Court in 1971 that mandated some form of proportional racial representation in all schools through cross-busing. Aside from the disturbances caused by cross-busing, this difficulty was further emphasized in Pinellas County as late as 1991 when the School Board was asked to consider a proposal to establish a task force to study this "controversial method of bringing black and white children together."⁴⁸ Although the majority of the board spoke in favor of cross-busing, the very fact that it was still considered a problem 20 years after it was initiated, clearly illustrates the community's continuing concern over the harm that cross-busing was causing.

Could cross-busing have been avoided? To answer this question it is necessary to consider the major aim of the 1954 ruling. Contrary to popular belief, that aim was not to equalize schools in areas such as transportation, buildings, curriculum and supplies since that aim had already been accomplished as shown in the decisions reached by a number of the lower courts.⁴⁹ It is also important to keep in mind that many of the differences that had existed at one time between the black and white schools, were no longer apparent as illustrated in a survey conducted in the mid-1960s. The survey involved 4,000 public schools from across the United States, all of their teachers, principals, and district superintendents, as well as all of their students in third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth grades along with all of the first grade students in half of the schools. In total, more than 645,000 students were involved in this undertaken. The results were compiled and published in 1966 in a report entitled Equality of Educational Opportunity under the supervision of James S. Coleman and issued by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

In commenting on the outcome of the Coleman Report, Graglia⁵⁰ concluded that the “general assumption that predominately black schools were inferior (to predominately white schools) was largely incorrect” (p. 274). The reasoning behind his conclusion stemmed primarily from data in the report which showed that although there was room for improvement on some of the measures, on a large number of others many of the differences between the schools were either marginal or inconsequential. By way of example, the following data from Tables 1 through 6 in the summary of the Coleman Report, illustrate the most important findings gathered from the metropolitan schools in the southern states including Florida. In view of these findings, it is perhaps not surprising that those who were interviewed for the present report and who attended all black schools in St. Petersburg in the early-to-mid 1960s (P.S., M.R., M.J., H.A.) were quite satisfied with the education they received.

	Elementary		Secondary	
	Black	White	Black	White
School building under 20 years old	77%	75%	74%	84%
Principals' salary \$9,000 and above	30%	26%	61%	46%
Principals with at least an MA degree	83%	74%	97%	93%
Average teacher degree	3.2	3.0	3.2	3.3
(Note: the number 3 represents a BA)				
Average teacher years of experience	14	10	12	8
Free textbooks	84%	82%	58%	34%
Free textbooks under 4 years old	71%	91%	56%	65%
Sufficient number of free textbooks for an entire class	74%	98%	69%	97%
Accelerated curriculum	19%	41%	72%	81%
Biology Laboratory			95%	100%
Chemistry Laboratory			94%	100%
Physics Laboratory			83%	100%
3 ½ or more years of English			67%	89%
2 ½ or more years of Math			46%	55%

If the aim of the 1954 decision was not to equalize schools in terms of curriculum, etc. what was the aim of this decision? As expressed in the following words of Chief Justice Warren in 1954, the true aim, was to eliminate feelings of inferiority caused by the belief that through segregation blacks were being treated as second class citizens.

Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other tangible factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal education opportunities? We believe that it does....Segregation of white and colored children in public schools have a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law; for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. A sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn. Segregation with the sanction

of law, therefore, has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system.⁵¹

How did Earl Warren reach this conclusion? In her introduction to the process that led to this conclusion Turner (2008) stated that:

The NAACP's top lawyers and affiliates spent long months crafting their briefs arguing that segregated schools violated black children's Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection under the law. Important to their case was an appendix prepared by Kenneth Clark outlining the ways segregation produced in black children "feelings of inferiority" and "a lowering of personal ambitions."⁵²

According to Turner, along with many others,⁵³ the bulk of the evidence presented to the Court that fostered the notion of "feelings of inferiority" came from testimony by Kenneth Clark, a psychologist, who reported findings on a number of young black children using what is often referred to as the "Doll Test." Because the 1971 Supreme Court decision to eliminate segregation through busing ultimately stemmed from the need to satisfy the rationale underlying the 1954 ruling, did the evidence provided to the Court by Clark truly justify the use of busing?

The material given by Clark appeared in a study published by Clark and Clark in 1947.⁵⁴ That study, conducted in the early 1940s, which of course, was long before busing started, involved four dolls, two brown with black hair and two white with yellow hair. Other than skin and hair color all of the dolls were the same. Two hundred and fifty-three black children who ranged in age from three to seven years were asked to respond to eight items. The following five items were considered most important because it was felt that they had a direct bearing on how the children viewed themselves in relation to their own color.

- Item 1. Give me the doll that you would like to play with.
- Item 2. Give me the doll that is a nice doll.
- Item 3. Give me the doll that looks bad.
- Item 4. Give me the doll that is a nice color.
- Item 8. Give me the doll the looks like you.

The major findings in relation to the Supreme Court's decision were summarized in the Clark and Clark article in the following way.

Approximately two thirds of the children indicated by their responses to items 1 and 2 that they liked the white doll "best," or that they would like to play with the white doll in preference to the colored doll, and that the white doll is a "nice doll."...Fifty nine percent of these children indicated that the colored doll "looks bad," while only 17 percent stated that the while doll "looks bad." ...Only 38 percent of the children thought that the brown doll was a "nice color" while 60 percent of them thought that the white doll was a nice color." The importance of these results for an understanding of the origin and development of racial concepts and attitudes in Negro children cannot be minimized. (p. 175)

In view of these findings it is not surprising that Warren would reach the conclusion cited above. When I reviewed the same article, however, I discovered some additional findings that I believe lead to a somewhat different conclusion at least with respect to issue of busing. Recall that the children ranged in age from three to seven years. On page 172 Clark and Clark reported that, "In response to item 8, there is a general and marked increase in the percent of subjects who identify with the colored doll with an increase in age..." Whereas among the three year old children, only 36% selected the colored doll as looking more like themselves, by age five this percentage had grown to 48%, by age six it had increased to 68% and by age seven it had reached 87%. Thus, by age seven the children no longer "misidentified." On page 175 the authors also reported the following.

Analysing the results of items 1 and 2 together, it is seen that there is a marked increase in preference for the white doll from three- to the four-year level; a gradual decrease in this preference from the four- to the five-year level; a further decrease from the five- to the six year level; and a continued decrease from the six- to the seven-year level. These results suggest that although the majority of Negro children at each age prefer the white doll to the brown doll, this preference decreases gradually from four through seven years...

In essence, although Kenneth Clark as well as the Warren Court interpreted the findings from the Doll Study as indicating that black children suffered from a strong sense of inferiority due to segregation, it would appear from these additional findings that this sense of inferiority was evident largely among the youngest children and that it gradually diminished as the children grew older independent of busing. Therefore, it would seem that the 1971 ruling in favour of busing might not have been necessary since it was designed to help children overcome a problem which, according to the age differences in the Clark and Clark findings, might not have existed among the older elementary, middle school, and high school students that the ruling was largely intended to help.

If busing had not been implemented, however, would the overall pace of integration have been substantially slower? While it is impossible to provide a direct answer to this question, it is possible to offer an indirect answer by considering the impact of several other rulings that took place prior to 1971. On July 2, 1964, Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964. One of the most important provisions of this Act, as stated in the preamble, was "to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs..." This act was then closely followed by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the aim of which was to help eradicate poverty by providing federal funds to local educational agencies "serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their education programs..." Considered together, these two acts meant that any school district that wished to receive federal educational funds needed to demonstrate that they did not advocate segregation but instead sanctioned integration. As a result of this financial incentive, there is evidence to suggest that the pace of integration had indeed begun to increase several years before busing was fully implemented. For example, "the percentage of southern black children attending public school with whites rose to 6.1 percent in 1965-66 and 32.0 percent in 1968-69..."⁵⁵ Finally in 1968 Congress approved a further Civil Rights Act which "prohibited discrimination in the sale, financing, or rental of housing property..."⁵⁶ which meant that it would no longer be possible for municipalities to maintain

segregated neighborhoods. Therefore, the rationale that had long been given for ensuring the existence of two separate school systems based on race alone was now eliminated. Taking all three acts into account, it is quite possible that, without the need for busing, there would have been a gradual integration of the races within their own neighbourhood schools had these separate rulings been given sufficient time to achieve their objectives.

End Notes

¹Foner, E. (1988). Reconstruction. Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.: New York, p. 446.

²Williams, H.R. & Beard, B. (2009). This Day in Civil Rights History, New South Books: Montgomery, AL.

³Arsenault, R. (1996). St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream 1888-1950. University of Florida Press: Gainesville, FL.

⁴Stephenson, R.B. (1997). Visions of Eden. Ohio State University Press: Columbus, OH, p. 65

⁵*St. Petersburg Times*, December, 22, 1935.

⁶*St. Petersburg Times*, September 27, 1937.

⁷*St. Petersburg Times*, December 19, 1937

⁸Michaels, W. (2012). The Making of St. Petersburg. History Press: Charleston, SC.

⁹McCoy, L. (1965). Jordan Elementary School Faculty Handbook. St. Petersburg, FL.

¹⁰*St. Petersburg Times*, December 10, 1937

¹¹Arsenault, R. (1996). St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream 1888-1950. University of Florida Press: Gainesville, FL.

¹²*Housing Authority of the City of St. Petersburg, 32nd Annual Report, 199-1970*, p. 2. It is perhaps worth mentioning that by the mid-1950s the rent had increased, but only marginally and in keeping with increased wages. For example, according to a contract issued in 1954 to Columbus Yopp (see Dwelling Lease for Columbus Yopp in Box #2, urban Planning and Design Department , St. Petersburg), a 3-room apartment rented for \$33.00 per month with the stipulation that the “annual net income of the Tenant and his family” must not exceed \$1,924.

¹³Peck, R. & Wilson, J. (2006). St. Petersburg’s Historic 22nd Street South. History Press: Charleston, SC., p. 42

¹⁴Paulson, D. (1982). Stay out, the water’s fine: Desegregating municipal swimming facilities in St. Petersburg, Florida. *Tampa Bay History*, Vol. 4, 6-19.

¹⁵Dierenfield, B.J. (2008). The Civil Rights Movement. Pearson Education, Ltd.: Harlow, England, p. 24

¹⁶Williams, H.R. & Beard, B. (2009). *This Day in Civil Rights History*. NewSouth Books, Montgomery, AL., p. 169

¹⁷*St. Petersburg Times*, May 18, 1954, p. 6-7.

¹⁸*United States Code Enacted Through Congress*, 1964, p. 432.

¹⁹*Pinellas County Board of Education Minutes*, September 8, 1954, item 35.

²⁰*Pinellas County Board of Education Minutes*, July 2, 1963.

²¹ As early as the 1930s, the Klan had approximately 30,000 members in Florida. According to the Imperial Wizard, by the early 1940s Florida was the strongest Klan state in the union and in the 1950s there were three active Klan factions in the state: The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Florida, the Association of Florida Klans, and the Southern Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. There was even a local chapter in Tampa in the 1950s and Bill Griffin, a long-time resident, was once the Great Titan of this chapter. Moreover, Bill Hendrix, head of Knights of the Klan, ran for Governor of Florida in the early 1950s and received over 11,000 votes. From these few statistics it is quite easy to see that during these years there was considerable support for the Klan throughout much of the state.

Beyond these matters what is most important to realize is the extremely violent nature of this organization. In 1951, for example, the Klan was responsible for damaging black homes, Jewish synagogues and Catholic churches in Miami. A chronology of these events appeared on December 26, 1951, in the *St. Petersburg Times* accompanied by the following editorial comment: "...since such evil is contagious and self-spreading, there is no guarantee that the terrorism will continue to be confined to Dade County. Every one of us in Florida is affected, our safety is lessened, our government weakened, by each of these incidents in Miami." Then on Christmas Day that year a bomb set by the Klan killed Harry T. Moore, a superintendent of public instruction and head of the Florida NAACP. The bomb was detonated in Moore's home in Mims, Florida. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that in the early-to- mid 1960s mob violence was promoted by the Klan in St. Augustine. In view of this very brief history, it is difficult to imagine anyone in a decision making position living in St. Petersburg during these years, who would not be aware of the possible harm that might result within the community if they had approved measures antagonistic to the Klan's philosophy. (Cook, F.L. (1989), The Ku Klux Klan: America's Recurring Nightmare, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Simon & Schuster, Inc.; Kennedy, S. (1990), The Klan Unmasked, Boca Raton, FL: Florida Atlantic University Press.; Wade, C.W. (1987). The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.)

²² *St. Petersburg Times*, September 8, 1964, p. 3B

²³ *St. Petersburg Times*, September 21, 1966.

- ²⁴ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 14 and 17, 1965.
- ²⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 27, 1966, p. 4D.
- ²⁶ *St. Petersburg Times*, September 6, 1966, p. 6A.
- ²⁷ *Bradley v. Board of Public Instruction of Pinellas Co., Fla.*, 431 F.2d 1377 (1970)
- ²⁸ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, September 8, 1970, p. 3A.
- ²⁹ *St. Petersburg Times*, October 30, 1969, p. 13B.
- ³⁰ *Report on State Control of Pinellas County Schools*, September 23, 1970.
- ³¹ *Superintendent's Report on Opening of Schools*, September 1970
- ³² Woodward, B. & Armstrong, S. (1979). *The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court*. Simon and Schuster: New York.
- ³³ Dyckman, M.A. (2011). *Rubin O'D. Askew and the Golden Age of Florida Politics*. University of Florida Press, Gainesville, FL.
- ³⁴ *Pinellas County Board of Education Minutes*, May 12, 1971.
- ³⁵ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, May 23, 1971, p. 1B.
- ³⁶ *Pinellas County Board of Education Minutes*, May 12, 1971, plus material related to agenda items 6 and 9
- ³⁷ *Pinellas County Board of Education Minutes*, May 19, 1971.
- ³⁸ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, June 3, 1971.
- ³⁹ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, February 8, 1973.
- ⁴⁰ *St. Petersburg Times*, September 1, 1981, p. 1B
- ⁴¹ *St. Petersburg Times*, January 23, January 30, March 12, October 22, 1971
- ⁴² *St. Petersburg Times*, April 20, 1971, p. 1B
- ⁴³ *St. Petersburg Times*, January 31, 1971, p. 2B
- ⁴⁴ *St. Petersburg Times*, December 6, 1971, p. 3A

- ⁴⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, October 13, 1971, p. 1A
- ⁴⁶ *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, February 2, 1973.
- ⁴⁷ *St. Petersburg Times*, March 4, 1976, p. 1B
- ⁴⁸ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 28, 1991, p. 6B
- ⁴⁹ See Friedman, L. (1969). [Argument, New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers] for examples of the decisions reached in the lower court cases that preceded the 1954 Supreme Court case.
- ⁵⁰ Graglia, L. A. (1976). Disaster by Decree: Supreme Court Decisions on Race and the Schools. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- ⁵¹ *ST. Petersrsburg Times*, May 18, 1954, p. 6A
- ⁵² Turner, K.M. (2008). *Brown V. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). In Tanenhaus, D. S. (Ed). Encyclopedia of the Supreme Court of the United States. Vol. I. (pp. 208-212). New York, NY: MacMillan Reverence USA.
- ⁵³ Benjamin, L.T. & Crouse, E.M. (2002). The American Psychological Association's response to *Brown v. Board of Education: The case of Kenneth B. Clark*. American Psychologist, 57, 38-50.
- ⁵⁴ Clark, K.B. & Clark, M.P. (1947). Racial identification and preference in Negro children. In Newcomb, T.M. & Hartley, E.L. (Eds). Readings in Social Psychology. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company. Pp. 169-178.
- ⁵⁵ Klarman, M.J. (1994). How Brown changed race relations: The backlash thesis. The Journal of American History. Vol. 81, No. 1, P. 84.
- ⁵⁶ Williams, H.R. & Beard, B. (2009). This Day in Civil Rights History. Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, P. 117.

