

STATE OF MICHIGAN LAW DAY 2004 ESSAY CONTEST

“To Win Equality by Law”

6th Grade – 3RD Place - By Marlin Koetje

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Should a school child be allowed to attend a neighborhood school instead of being bussed across town to achieve racial diversity at a school in a different neighborhood?

Should we bus children across towns to achieve racial integration? Still writing about how to achieve racial diversity in our schools in the year 2004 feels strange. Fifty years have passed since Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483(1954) and this issue still provokes controversy. The United States Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was discriminating to African-Americans who were being denied equal protection of the law guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. All persons born in the United States were included in the Amendment, therefore giving African-Americans citizenship, rights and privileges.

My father is eleven years older than my mother. He was raised in a predominately Caucasian neighborhood and attended his local school with very few African-Americans. My mother was raised in a small community with no African-American neighbors and was bussed across town to achieve racial diversity within the schools. Although my parents agree on most topics, they do not agree on the issue of bussing.

Growing up, my dad did not have many interactions with African-Americans. He now tends to be more fearful of being in a diverse situation. On the other hand, my mom attended school with a very large group of diverse children and was exposed to many different cultures. She was unaware at the time that she was being bussed across town for that reason and she resented having to ride the bus for almost an hour both ways. This took time away from after school activities and getting homework done early. At the age of four, she was not aware of segregation or the fact that Greene v. County School Board (1968) would have an impact on her life. The Court ordered that students would be bussed to different areas in order to obtain more diversity among Caucasians and African-Americans. She now appreciates the fact that she was just a little naive girl. She learned to accept people for who they are and not by the color of their skin. She benefited from the inconvenient bussing.

As for myself, I attend a private school that is small and does not have buses. My parents drive me to and from school everyday. Although our school is predominately Caucasian, we do have some diversity. My school also does a great job in educating us about other cultures.

It is my opinion that students should be bussed to different school districts to obtain racial diversity. With the years that have passed since Brown v. Board of Education, we now have many more options available to us than my parents did. We have many private, charter, and public schools that offer great opportunities. Therefore, parents do not need to necessarily accept the public school system. They have so many other options that may fit their child's needs and education.