

An Imperfect Revolution

Transcript: September 16, 2007

Part 1

Stephen Smith: From American Public Media, this is an *American RadioWorks* documentary.

Ann Crehore: We were part of something bigger than just riding a bus.

In the 1970s and '80s, a generation of Americans took part in a vast social experiment. They got on buses, and rode across racial lines.

Gwen Jackson: I could see the fear on the white students.

Sonya Lee: We all learned. We were all students. We were all kids. We could be friends.

Now the era of desegregation is ending.

Larry Gauvreau: How dare any school system say because you happen to be white you can or cannot do this.

In the next hour, from *American RadioWorks*, *An Imperfect Revolution: Voices from the Desegregation Era*. First this news.

[piano]

Kathleen Brose teaches piano lessons in her house on Seattle's Magnolia Hill. It's a neighborhood of expensive houses and yards full of flowers. Brose says most of the kids here go to private schools but she's always sent her two girls to public schools. Brose was mostly a stay-at-home mom, never an activist. Until the year 2000, when her older daughter was about to start high school.

Kathleen Brose: Not only she didn't get to go to Ballard, her first choice, she didn't get her second choice of Roosevelt, she did not receive her third choice of Nathan Hale and all these schools are progressively farther away from our home.

In Seattle, you could pick any high school, unless it was full. If too many people applied, the district would choose students based on how far the school was from home, or whether a sibling already went there, or the student's race. The district was trying to keep a racial balance in schools.

Brose's daughter plays cello, and Brose says the only available school with an orchestra program was far from her home, and it had a poor reputation. But the popular schools didn't have room for a white girl.

Brose: I just thought it was terribly unfair. It was a violation of our children's Constitutional rights. I just felt that the school district needed to quit focusing on placing kids in schools based on their skin color.

Brose took her case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, and in June of 2007, she won.

In the next hour, an *American RadioWorks* documentary, *An Imperfect Revolution: Voices from the Desegregation Era*. I'm Stephen Smith.

The Seattle case is perhaps the most important school desegregation ruling since *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The *Brown* case outlawed segregated schools. In many cities, it led to busing of black children to white schools and white children to black schools. The 2007 ruling largely prohibits race-based busing. It's the capstone in a series of recent court decisions rolling back *Brown*. Around the country, even before the Seattle case, judges were throwing out busing plans, and schools were falling back into segregation.

[lockers slamming, school sounds]

Like in Louisville, Kentucky.

Central High School, in Louisville, has a long tradition of serving a mostly black neighborhood near downtown. But the Louisville school system was turning some African-American students away from Central so the school wouldn't be more than 50 percent black.

Deborah Stallworth: What is this student assignment that says you know only so many colored children can be in a school? Didn't we get rid of that back in the '50s or something like that?

Deborah Stallworth and some other African American parents sued the school district when their kids couldn't get into Central. In 2000, they won. Now, the school is mostly black. Deborah Stallworth says that's fine with her. Her son doesn't need to sit next to a white child to learn.

Stallworth: That's one of the things that people say all the time, well the NAACP fought to have integration, and I don't think that's what we fought for. I think we fought for better schools; the actual buildings, books, materials, that type of thing. I don't think we ever fought to be mixed with white children. I don't think that was ever the issue.

School district surveys showed most parents liked Louisville's school assignment plan. But a few years after the black parents' lawsuit, a white mom took the district to court when her child

couldn't get into the school she wanted. The Supreme Court heard her case along with the Seattle case. And it struck down Louisville's desegregation plan, too.

The Supreme Court decision says schools around the country may still try to promote diversity, but it doesn't say how they can do that if they're not allowed to consider a student's race.

[music]

A generation of Americans rode buses out of their neighborhoods and across racial lines. Now, busing is vanishing around the country; and in some places, the change is dramatic, like in Charlotte, North Carolina. Once, Charlotte had a reputation as the city that made busing work. Now, Charlotte offers a picture of what may be coming in other American cities.

Valda Jones: I'm looking at the entire country's school system being segregated again. I mean that's really what it's going to boil down to.

Valda Jones lives in Charlotte. She was in middle school when busing started, and she was sent to a white school. Valda Jones says the people who oppose busing ignore the sacrifice her generation made.

Jones: It's like it was all for nothing. We're going to end up where we started. Why did we have to go through that? We were called some names and had some things thrown at us. And we did some things too that shouldn't have been done. But we all learned that the bottom line was we were all students, we were all kids, we could be friends.

Many people who lived through school desegregation say it changed them forever.

Producers Kate Ellis and Catherine Winter went to Charlotte. They talked with people who were on the buses when two races that had been kept apart by law were forced together by law.

Catherine Winter narrates our story.

Catherine Winter: When you ask people in Charlotte, North Carolina about school desegregation, they're likely to tell you about the Boston visit.

[yearbook page turning]

Haywood: This is from the 1975 West Charlotte yearbook, and it's about the Boston visit.

Mitchell: We decided that we would invite the student council from South Boston High School to come to West Charlotte for a week and see what we were doing. Boston was having some struggles but West Charlotte, it seemed like West Charlotte the integration was going fine and could this be the model.

Haywood: And so they came. And with them came the largest media group you've ever seen in your life.

NBC Boston affiliate: When the Boston students arrived at the Charlotte airport last night, they were given a festive greeting but the purpose of their visit is quite serious.

Busing was causing riots in Boston, and the Boston students wanted to find out how Charlotte had managed to get past the turmoil so quickly. People who grew up in Charlotte love to tell how Southerners taught Northerners about race relations.

Arthur Griffin: I think people were proud of the fact that we didn't have the same level of violence.

Arthur Griffin's a lawyer in Charlotte. He spent 20 years on the school board. Griffin says Charlotte residents shouldn't congratulate themselves too much for being the city that made busing work; he says that's too simple.

Griffin: Because we fought busing. This wonderful community fought school desegregation tooth and nail.

Schools in Charlotte were separate by law when Arthur Griffin was growing up in the 1950s. Schools were part of the system of Jim Crow laws meant to keep the races separate: separate drinking fountains, separate waiting rooms, laws against mixed marriage. Arthur Griffin was born in a colored hospital and went to colored schools. He says the separate school systems were not equal.

Griffin: We just knew we were getting hand-me-down books, we knew we were getting hand me down band uniforms. Meyers Park had the original IBM stuff, the word processing, the electronic typewriters, card-punch stuff in their business courses. At our high schools, they had manual typewriters.

Around the country, black schools were poor cousins to white schools. Some had no indoor toilets, no gym, no cafeteria, not enough books to go around. Arthur Griffin remembers when people started talking about integration.

Griffin: It wasn't a sense of white kids having to sit beside black kids and black kids having to sit beside white kids. It was a simple notion of "give me the same stuff that these kids over here are receiving."

That was one of the arguments that persuaded the Supreme Court to outlaw segregated schools. In 1954, in the landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, the court said separate schools were inherently unequal. But three years later schools across the south were still segregated.

News report: Do you think the Negro students ever will get in here?

I think they'll get in here but I don't know how long they'll live after they do get in here.

When a few black children were allowed to enroll in white schools, violence erupted. In Little Rock, Ark., federal troops with bayonets guarded black students as they entered Central High School. Police held protestors back on the sidewalks.

Arkansas newscast from 1957: I just don't feel they have a right to go to school here.

Well why do you feel they don't have a right?

Because in the first place I'm a Southerner I was born a Southerner and I'm gonna die a Southerner. Amen. They got no business out here. This is our school; they've got theirs, they have their own.

That same year, 1957, the first black students were allowed into white schools in Charlotte. It had been three years since the Brown decision, but the school district only let in four African-American students. Dorothy Counts was the only black student entering Harding High School. She was 15 years old. There's a famous photo of her walking up to the school in a plaid dress with a long white bow down the front. She's surrounded by a mob of white people. Some are yelling and some are laughing. Her mouth is set as she walks forward.

[outside Harding High School]

The school is still there, 50 years later, and Dorothy Counts Scoggins lives nearby. She's in her 60s now.

Dorothy Counts Scoggins: When I came here this was the auditorium, and now this is the entranceway. That's where the street was barricaded.

It's a windy afternoon with a thunderstorm brewing. Dorothy Counts Scoggins stands in front of the school and tells the story she's told hundreds of times over the years.

Scoggins: Well, the people were lined up on both sides of the street and a lot of kids were in the yards and on the porches. And then of course there was a group called "the white citizens group" which was led by a Ms. Warlick and she was yelling to the kids, "Don't let her in she doesn't need to be there," and that's when the kids were yelling at me. You know, they spat on me, and they were throwing rocks and they were throwing ice and they were throwing all kinds of debris at me as I was walking down the street.

Dorothy Counts didn't have a police escort or National Guard troops. She walked into the building alone. That was a short day at school. She got her schedule and went home. The next

day, a Friday, she was sick, and every one thought she had given up and wasn't coming back. So on Monday, there weren't any protesters outside the school. But inside, the students pushed her and shoved her in the hallways. The teachers wouldn't call on her.

Scoggins: So when I went home that day, you know, my dad asked me how did it go and I just said to him I said, "things will get better. Once they get to know who I am then things will get better."

The next day, Tuesday, some boys spat in her lunch. So on Wednesday, Dorothy planned to avoid the cafeteria by going home for lunch.

Scoggins: My brother came to pick me up. And so, when I came outside and I stood and my brother's car was parked right there, and this window, right here, was shattered in a million pieces, and he was sitting in the car. And that scared me, and that was the first time I ever really felt fear because now, it's not just me. It's my family.

Dorothy Counts Scoggins says she still wanted to stick it out at Harding High, she wanted to pave the way for other black children. But her parents feared for her safety, and they pulled her out of the school. She'd been at Harding for four days.

For years afterward, only a few black children were allowed into white schools. Across the South, school boards responded to the Brown decision by enacting so-called "freedom of choice" plans. Under freedom of choice, black families could apply to have their children go to white schools.

David Goldfield: You went through a lengthy application process. It was much worse than applying for a bank loan. I mean it was really intrusive.

Civil rights historian David Goldfield.

Goldfield: And then you went for an interview to see if you were the right family for the freedom of choice, and, as you might imagine under this system, not too many black kids got into white schools. And that of course was the origin of the suit of Darius Swann and his family.

Darius Swann was a black Presbyterian minister. He wanted his 6-year old son James to go to the nearby white school. But the district said no: James would have to go to a black school. So Darius Swann sued.

It was 1965. The civil rights movement was at its peak. It was two years since the march on Washington and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Congress had passed the Civil Rights Act, but many schools were still segregated around the country. In Charlotte, North Carolina, the great majority of black children still attended all-black schools. The few who went to white high schools had some hard and lonely years.

Like Gwen Jackson. She's a counselor at North Mecklenburg High School. The school's out on the north end of the county, in a suburb of Charlotte that's growing fast. Years ago, she went to North Mecklenburg High herself.

Gwen Jackson: And when I went to North Meck we were called the country hick school. It was all farmland, all of this area, all these new houses were all farmland, so we were the country hick school.

Gwen Jackson's family lived in a small black community a few minutes drive from here. She grew up going to black schools, but when she was in the 7th grade, her dad applied for her and her brother to go to white schools. Gwen Jackson was one of seven African-American students in a junior high with about 700 white kids.

Jackson: Seven blacks in the entire school, and it was so difficult. Oh gosh, it was so hard. The kids didn't want us there, they didn't understand. I didn't understand what was going on truly but they didn't want us there. They picked at us, they teased us, they called us names when we walked down the hall. It's hot in here.

It's not really very hot, but Gwen Jackson starts to fan herself, and then she starts to cry.

[crying]

She says she's surprised by her own tears. She thought she was over this.

Jackson: Okay let me see if I can finish this, okay. The only whites, I was not raised around whites, so the only time I would see them would be in the store in the marketplace or things of that nature, so it was totally new. And to go from a situation where you were somewhat popular into a situation where you were like the scum of the earth, it was tough. Okay, I'm going to talk about something else first. Let me talk about my brother. Because he was such a good athlete that it was just so totally different watching him play and how they respected him. I remember at a basketball game, he was really good in basketball, back then they would have like a cooler and they would have like a dipper, and everybody would drink out of the same dipper, and he would drink, they would drink, and it was just amazing to see that they just accepted him because he played ball so well. I mean they would literally drink out of the same dipper! I was proud because that was one shining spot that I had to go on that he was accepted.

The next year, black schools were closed in Gwen Jackson's neighborhood, so more African-American children came to her middle school. That year, a federal judge issued a ruling in the Swann case. He said Charlotte had to do more than just let some students switch schools. It must actively break down the system of segregation. Since the city's neighborhoods were segregated, children must be bused from one neighborhood to another. The school board appealed, but while it waited for the Supreme Court decision, the buses began to roll. And people got angry.

WBTV: Carmel Road and Quail Hollow Junior Highs were hit by vandalism causing an estimated \$40,000 in damages. At Carmel Road, "no forced busing" signs were smeared over the walls in purple paint and glue.

Some parents refused to send their children to school. People called in bomb threats to school officials' homes. It must have been hard not to take them seriously. The lawyer who represented the Swann family had the windows of his house blown out by a bomb, and his office was set on fire.

WBTV News in Charlotte did a retrospective a year after busing began:

WBTV: Fighting erupted in some schools. There were hair-pulling incidents on buses, rock throwing incidents were reported. But it was the students themselves who found a peaceful solution to many of the disputes. Thus began a new wave of events in the schools: the love-ins. The first happened at Meyers Park High School, where scores of black and white students joined hands forming a huge circle of friendship.

"Both races can get along. We can do things, and this is nothing but true love we have over here at Meyers Park Senior High School this year."

The video shows kids in afros and bell bottoms holding hands in a field and grinning.

Gwen Jackson says things got better at her school with the infusion of black students, but kids weren't sitting around singing Kumbaya.

Jackson: It was like boom, it was, all the halls were mixed all the classes were mixed. It was good for me to have them there but I could see the fear on the white students to have so many black kids there.

Gwen Jackson says even after widespread integration, many of the white teachers still treated the black kids badly. After she graduated, she went to a black college. She says she loved it there, away from white people. But then she married a man in the military, and she was thrown in with white people again.

Jackson: One day I woke up and I had a best friend that was a white girl. I was in Germany. Her husband and my husband were stationed over there together. And we were friends, and then one day I realized she was my best friend and that was an awakening for me to know that I could trust her. And that was because of segregation and forced integration. Not to trust white people. But now I'm better.

In 1970, that first year of "forced integration," many people in Charlotte hoped that busing would end once the Supreme Court had weighed in. Around the country, there was opposition to

busing. President Nixon opposed it. His administration filed a friend of the court brief in the Swann case from Charlotte, urging the court to move slowly on integration.

But the court had lost patience with waiting for schools to integrate on their own.

Walter Cronkite, CBS News: A unanimous supreme court today affirmed the principle of busing school children to desegregate schools. The decision came in four cases, the main one involving Charlotte, in Mecklenberg County North Carolina.

In April of 1971, the Supreme Court upheld Charlotte's busing order.

Daniel Schorr, CBS News: The effects of this decision are almost incalculable. Hundreds of desegregation plans north and south will have to be revised and because of the millions of dollars and the tide of emotion involved, some fear a serious blow to support for public education. Daniel Schorr CBS News at the Supreme Court.

Stephen Smith: You're listening to *An Imperfect Revolution*, from *American RadioWorks*. I'm Stephen Smith.

In the wake of the Swann decision from Charlotte, judges around the country began ordering school districts to bus students across racial lines. From San Francisco to Richmond, Virginia, children climbed onto buses and rode across town. Parents of both races were frightened and angry. In some cities, white protestors lined the streets. They threw rocks and bricks at busloads of black children. There were riots in Boston and Atlanta and Louisville, Kentucky.

[rioting sounds]

Louisville news archive: The street violence that accompanied the start of court-ordered busing in Louisville was quick to subside. But this method of school desegregation appears to have produced more negative than positive results. And some officials are admitting that they did not anticipate the depth of the reaction that has set in since schools opened nearly two months ago.

Thousands of white parents pulled their children out of the public schools, or moved out of cities where busing had been ordered. But in Charlotte, North Carolina, moving to the suburbs didn't help. The suburbs and the city were all part of one large school district. White parents had to put their kids in private school, or put them on the bus.

Coming up after a short break, white students enter a historically black high school.

To learn more about school desegregation, and to share your own story, visit our Web site, AmericanRadioWorks.org.

Our program continues in just a moment, from American Public Media.

Part 2

Stephen Smith: From American Public Media, you're listening to an *American RadioWorks* documentary, *An Imperfect Revolution: Voices from the Desegregation Era*. I'm Stephen Smith.

A new ruling from the United States Supreme Court means the end of many school desegregation plans around the country. But even before the ruling, judges in many cities were ordering an end to busing, and schools were becoming racially segregated again.

One striking example of resegregation is Charlotte, North Carolina. It's a painful change for some Charlotte residents; they were proud of being the city that made busing work.

Back in the 1970s after the Supreme Court upheld Charlotte's busing order, many residents decided to stop fighting integration. CD Spangler was a wealthy businessman who sat on the school board. He grew up in Charlotte, but he says he didn't realize until he was an adult that the schools black children went to weren't as good as the white schools.

CD Spangler: And so it became time that that be rectified in a city like Charlotte. Not only was it morally wrong to have these discrepancies but also it was unwise for future business activities.

Spangler worried racial turmoil would discourage businesses from investing in Charlotte. He put his own daughters on the bus to what had been a black high school. Today, he insists that wasn't a sacrifice. But a lot of people in Charlotte say CD Spangler's example persuaded other white families to keep their kids in the public schools, and to try to make desegregation work.

Catherine Winter continues our story.

Catherine Winter: When busing started in Charlotte, it was the first time many children had ever spent time with someone of another race. But racial mixing had always happened in certain circles. Well-off white families had intimate relationships with the black people who worked for them. Ann Davant Crehore grew up in Charlotte in the '60s and '70s.

Ann Davant Crehore: We had couple of black women that worked for us when we I was little, they took care of us, fed us, gave us [*the*] best bath you ever had in your life. My grandparents had a cook named Annie and so I grew up just loving these people. They were just like a part of our family.

Still, Ann Crehore says going to a mixed-race school made her discover that she had ideas about race she didn't like to see in herself. She remembers a bad day in middle school

Davant Crehore: I really have sort of debated about whether to tell this story or not, but when I was at Piedmont I had braces and got elbowed in the mouth by a boy in shop class. My lip started to bleed so I went to the bathroom to wash out my mouth, and there were couple of girls

in there who had no business being in there, they were sort of the "bad girls" you know, one was white, one black, they asked me what was wrong. And I just casually said, "Oh, some black guy hit me in the mouth."

The two girls were so offended by her choice of words that they started to beat her up. Ann Crehore escaped from the bathroom. Today, she's not bitter at those girls. She still feels bad about what she said.

Davant Crehore: Why didn't I say, "Jim hit me in the mouth"? Why didn't I use his name? He had a name. If it'd been some white guy, would I have said, "Some white guy hit me in the mouth"? Probably not. So it just taught me valuable lesson about choosing words. So when my kids would come home from school and start telling me a story, if they said, "This black girl," or "This black boy," or whatever, I'd say, "What does the color of his skin have to do with this story?" And they'd say, "Well nothing." And I'd say, "Well, then I don't need to know what color his skin is."

When Ann Crehore reached high school in 1976, she was bused to West Charlotte High. West Charlotte had been a black high school before desegregation, and a lot of white parents refused to send their kids there. They put their kids in private schools. But Ann Crehore gets tears in her eyes when she remembers how much she loved West Charlotte. She calls it "almost a utopia," a mix of black and white kids who were in the same clubs and on the same teams.

Davan Crehore: Not all of the teams, obviously, the football team was probably predominately black, and the soccer team was predominately white, but you know we all showed up to football games, we all stood next to each other. We all cheered. We had great school pride. I just remember, very fondly, not saying us versus them, it was just us. It was we.

[West Charlotte's school cheer]

Three old friends from West Charlotte High.

Tim Gibbs.

Tim Gibbs: West Charlotte High School class of 1978.

He's a city planner now.

Eric Montgomery.

Eric Montgomery: Class of 1983.

Voted most likely to succeed. He's a lawyer for Bank of America now.

And Sonya Lee.

Sonya Lee: Class of 1980 Lions, very proud.

Sonya Lee was Miss West Charlotte, and queen of Charlotte's Carousel Parade. She beat girls from all the other high schools.

Montgomery: She was the prettiest girl in the school.

West Charlotte was the only historically African-American high school in Charlotte that stayed open through integration. This is a sore point with many black people. When integration came, black schools were closed throughout the South. Black teachers and administrators were sent to white schools and often demoted, but West Charlotte stayed open. People in the African American community were proud of that school. Eric Montgomery played football for West Charlotte.

Montgomery: When we played there, we'd look up in the stands, people there from '30s and '40s, still coming to football games, and still prideful for West Charlotte, making sure West Charlotte was successful.

People who went to West Charlotte after it integrated say it was the best high school in town. School officials wanted to make sure white students would be willing to attend, so the school offered a wealth of advanced classes and activities. West Charlotte won sports tournaments. It had the coolest band. West Charlotte cheerleaders could stack themselves in the highest pyramid.

Sonya Lee.

Lee: It felt like a level playing field. In other words, it doesn't matter what your race was or what community you grew up in. You always felt like you had a fair chance whether you were trying out for cheerleader, student government, the drama club, whatever it was. The best people got the job.

People who went to West Charlotte say it wasn't perfect: There were still black tables and white tables in the lunchroom. But you could switch tables if you wanted to.

Some West Charlotte grads say they got so used to easy relations between the races that they were surprised when they went out into the community and found it wasn't like that. Several people told the story of the skating party. It was a party at the end of the season for the boys and girls' basketball teams, black kids and white kids. Some of the black kids arrived at the roller rink together, and they weren't allowed in. They were told it was full. Sonya Lee was there.

Lee: And we're out in the parking lot, oh, man it's full, and then some of the white kids came on the basketball team and they're like, "What do you mean it's full? Surely it's not full." Well they

went down, and they let them in. They came right back out and they told us, it is not even full, there's hardly anybody in there. They were more upset than we were. When we got to school the next week, the FBI came and interviewed all of us.

Sonya Lee says shortly after that, the skating rink was shut down.

Lee: But it's because the white kids were brave enough to go and see what was going on and they told. Because they didn't appreciate the fact that we couldn't go in the skating rink, and that was 1980.

Again and again people say this: The kids in the schools had an easier time with integration than the adults that surrounded them. Eric Montgomery says in his years of being bused, the only time he can recall racial tension is when the miniseries *Roots* was on TV in 1977.

Montgomery: It was the first time on TV you really got an inside look into slavery and it had a huge impact on everybody's lives both black and white.

[clip from Roots]

James Mitchell: I did not watch *Roots*. I was scared it was going to hurt my relationships with my white friends.

James Mitchell is a Charlotte city councilor. He graduated from West Charlotte High in 1980.

Mitchell: I'm probably one of the only black folks you know didn't watch *Roots* because I was scared that I would get angry. "Why you look at me, you think I'm Kunta? You know!" And you know.. I didn't watch *Roots*. Because I think what I had was great and it's almost like, I didn't want to deny my past but I'm like, okay that's history, let me keep it. I got to build on what's now.

James Mitchell remembers getting on well with white and black classmates. He says at West Charlotte, over the lunch hour, black and white students would get together and dance in a room they called The Dungeon.

Mitchell: There was a jukebox. It was just a place, and they would say, "Wait a minute, what are you doing, what you call that?" Say, "That's the bump." "Show me the bump!" We would have a Soul Train line, you saw black kids white kids, everybody bumping. You know then we would laugh and say "No, no, no, no, more rhythm. Hit the hips! No! You being too gentle." And they would, some of them would turn red like, "What you mean, move more hip? I can't move more hip." But, you know. It isn't a place like black only sign, white only sign, like, hey Dungeon! All right! You all ready to party? Let's go party.

Inside the school, black and white kids danced together. Outside, it was a different story. Mitchell remembers feeling sort of under siege at West Charlotte, as though some people in the city were hoping the experiment of mixing the races would fail. He says people from other schools, even parents from other schools, called it West Chocolate High.

Mitchell: It didn't make us mad. That was the interesting thing. It did not make us mad. It's almost like it made us raise our bar and say, "OK we're going to show you, you call us West Chocolate High? OK. We going to show you what West Chocolate High is about." Carousel, band competition, we'd always win.

Other former students have said the same thing, that making West Charlotte succeed was their act of adolescent rebellion. Mitchell says black and white kids studied at each other's houses, they skipped class together. He remembers the first time he saw a mixed race couple at West Charlotte.

Mitchell: And to me that could have been a good example of, saying "No no, now you done cross over the line. We don't mind, you know, studying with you, playing ball, but now you talking about dating. You crossed the line." I'll never forget, Dare Morgan, class of '80, she was dating a guy Dana Berry, class of '79. We called him Gooberry. Gooberry say I'm bringing a date and it was a dance, we was supposed to have a dance after the basketball game. And he walked in holding Dare's hand. Now the true test, it was the stares, whoa. And then it was like, "All right. Let's start dancing."

That was more than 20 years ago. The kids who went through West Charlotte High in the '70s and '80s are grown up and have kids of their own. Many of them say going to an integrated high school changed who they grew up to be.

[baseball game]

Lou Trosch: That's a hit.. Way to hit Louie!!

Lou Trosch cheers for his son, Lou Jr. The baseball field is outside his son's junior high, Randolph Junior High. Lou Trosch went to this school himself, in the late '70s. He lived in the neighborhood. At the time, other white kids were bused in from a suburb called Matthews, and black kids were bused in from a community called Griertown. They didn't get along.

Trosch: So there was some racial tension at this school when I was here. If my attitudes had just been shaped by what I witnessed here, well, it wouldn't be good.

Lou Trosch says what did shape his attitudes was going on to West Charlotte High. His white friends who were assigned to West Charlotte fled to private schools. But Lou Trosch's parents insisted that he go. They said it was the right thing to do.

Trosch: West Charlotte was probably the first time I saw people actually mixing together and hanging out with each other and doing things together.

I think my senior year there were two white guys on the basketball team and our coach, who was African American, would mix us up a lot. The other guy was Lex and I'm Lou. He'd go "Lex, get in the game." Then he'd look, "No, not you, Lou. Or, Lou get in the game, no, Lex." So it was good. When I first started again, it's not utopia, my name was white boy. That was when I first started. It started out probably there was an edge to it, but well, by the time I was on the team they didn't call me white. I mean, the other teams that we would play against would say guard that white boy or whatever but, my teammates called me Lou.

Lou Trosch says going to West Charlotte changed who he became when he grew up.

[courtroom]

Trosch: You want to go back to detention? Then what do you need to do?

Today Lou Trosch is a judge in juvenile court. On a recent afternoon, he had a courtroom full of teenagers and parents, probation officers and social workers.

Trosch: Can you hold yourself together? You think you can. So you're not going to act a fool next week.

Judge Trosch says the time he spent at West Charlotte influences how he is a judge, how he listens to other points of view. He feels so strongly about it that he has trouble explaining it. His eyes fill with tears. He says he didn't expect talking about West Charlotte to make him cry.

Trosch: I'm thinking how to say it. I'm struggling to get this into words. What I keep trying to tell y'all is, it's, the reason West Charlotte is so different, or affected people, affected me profoundly, I can't speak for other people, was that it was a place that everywhere else is not.

Lou Trosch says West Charlotte taught him two seemingly contradictory things. The first was that race was a big deal, and the second was that even though race was a big deal, people of different races could get along. He'd like his own kids to go to a high school with a racial mix like the one he went to, but that's much harder to do in Charlotte today. It isn't the same town.

[outside Trosch's chambers]

There's a balcony near Judge Trosch's chambers. You can see across downtown Charlotte. Everywhere are shiny new office towers and upscale condos.

Trosch: The growth is unbelievable. If you look on this side, there was one big building. You see the building straight in front of us, with the blue crane? That was the only big building in town. All of the rest of that is new.

Charlotte's a boom town. It's got new banks and businesses. It's got professional sports teams and sprawling suburbs that it never had when Lou Trosch was in school. The population has more than doubled since he was a kid. A lot of Charlotte's longtime residents say that's changed everything. They say the new people don't appreciate Charlotte's history. The newcomers moved here from places where their kids could go to neighborhood schools. They didn't understand about busing. And today, in the city that made busing work, busing is gone.

Larry Gauvreau: How dare any school system say because you happen to be white you can or cannot do this.

Larry Gauvreau publishes The Rhinoceros Times in Charlotte. It's a conservative weekly that covers local politics.

Gauvreau: We're kind of the Fox News if you will for weekly print publications.

Larry Gauvreau has a reputation as a loose cannon. But he got elected to the school board, and a lawsuit he filed helped end busing in Charlotte.

Gauvreau and his family moved to the Charlotte area in 1994. He says he knew Charlotte bused kids, and he didn't approve.

Gauvreau: And we were offended that The Charlotte Observer would print a full page supplement, and show the racial balance of all the schools. Moving down from Washington D.C., Northern Virginia we'd open that up, and we were disgusted. I mean, we thought we were in South Africa, I mean this is apartheid going on or something.

But Gauvreau wasn't moved to do anything about it until the year the oldest of his three children was ready to start school.

Gauvreau: And then when I got the little thing in the mail that says "By the way, your son cannot go to this school because of the racial balance numbers," I said, "That's it."

Gauvreau asked a judge to throw out the court order requiring Charlotte to bus its students. He joined another dad who was already suing; his daughter didn't get into a magnet school because she was white. That dad was a recent arrival in Charlotte too.

In court, the school district argued that busing was good for kids. Thirty years before, the district had fought against busing. Now it fought to keep busing. But the district lost.

ABC News: A federal judge in North Carolina has ruled that the Charlotte North Carolina school system may not use race as a factor in any decision it makes about operating the school system. Among other things, no more busing students to schools outside their neighborhood in order to integrate schools rather than allow segregation.

It was similar to rulings in other cities. The judge said Charlotte had successfully desegregated its schools, so it didn't have to bus anymore. In fact, it wasn't allowed to bus kids based on their race anymore. That would be discrimination.

The problem was, in places like Charlotte, neighborhoods had never desegregated. So when the city went back to a system of neighborhood schools, it meant many schools were nearly all black, or nearly all white.

Gauvreau: So what? And that sounds harsh, because this mindset in America is "Well, we can't be all black or we can't be all white because that reminds us of the past."

Larry Gauvreau says times have changed. The Jim Crow signs are gone and busing isn't needed. Besides, he says busing never achieved its goals.

Gauvreau: We've got a huge problem in public education. Minority achievement is still in the dumps, it just is, so that's what I'm saying. It hasn't worked.

Some African American people agree with Larry Gauvreau. Busing didn't work. And it cost too much, too much money and too much heartache.

[drumming]

That's the Greenville Combined Youth Orchestra, out practicing on a spring afternoon. African American kids thump on drums and march up and down the sidewalk in front of a community center. Pops Sadler is directing. He and his wife Marie opened this center to try to do something for the people in this neighborhood. Families can stop in for help, and sometimes for food

Marie Sadler: Y'all may have one cupcake. You have to ask your mother.

Marie and Pops Sadler managed to find computers and books for kids to use here. They want kids in the neighborhood to succeed in school, and Pops Sadler says busing didn't help.

Pops Sadler: Matter of fact, in some instances it hurt us, it hurt our children. All the problems that our children are having now, they didn't have 35 years ago when they were in the segregated schools.

In fact, Pops Sadler says segregated schools have advantages.

Sadler: We'd get a chance to preserve our history, teach our kids about our heritage. I guess I'd welcome academic segregation if it is going to enhance the quality of life for our kids.

Marie Sadler says busing wasn't worthless. Kids who were bused got opportunities for scholarships and jobs they wouldn't have had otherwise.

Marie Sadler: But had those things been in our schools it would have been I think a lot better.

Pops Sadler: When busing started here, we had a lot of African Americans that was for it they just believed that the resources are over there, let's send them over there to get it. We're going to put them where the resources. Bus the money. Don't bus our kids, bus the money to where our kids are.

It's an argument that comes up a lot when people talk about school desegregation. There's no question busing was hard, and that it was harder on black families than white families. Black children were much more likely to be bused out of their neighborhoods. Why not bus the money instead of the children?

Arthur Griffin: It doesn't work. Hasn't worked anywhere in America.

Former Charlotte school board member Arthur Griffin.

Griffin: Conceptually it sounds great. But think for a moment about the notion that education is about more than reading and writing. It's about citizenship. How do you get hope? How do you get inspiration and aspiration out of busing money?

Research bears out Arthur Griffin's opinion. When the Supreme Court heard the recent desegregation cases from Louisville and Seattle, more than 500 social scientists filed a friend of the court brief presenting research on the effects of school integration. The brief said kids who go to integrated schools tend to have less racial prejudice, and it said integration has improved school achievement for African American students.

Gary Orfield: There's nothing magic about sitting next to a white child, but there is a tremendous difference between being in a middle class school and high poverty school.

Desegregation expert Gary Orfield points out that integration doesn't just mix races, it also mixes social classes, and schools where there are a lot of middle class parents tend to be better schools. More affluent parents won't put up with poor teachers. More affluent kids encourage their classmates to do well and go on to college. Orfield says schools where most of the kids are black or Latino tend also to be schools where most kids are poor.

Orfield: If you look at these highly concentrated impoverished minority high schools, those are the country's drop-out factories: a few hundred schools where most of the kids never graduate

from high school and almost nobody is prepared for college. These are places that just destroy people's lives. And to think that we know how to equalize this with just putting some money into them is thinking something that simply is not true.

In other words, as the Supreme Court said 50 years ago, separate can never be equal.

[West Charlotte High hallway]

Here's West Charlotte High School today.

At lunchtime, kids pick up chicken sandwiches and pizza in the cafeteria. Nearly everyone is black. Most of these kids are so poor that they're getting this lunch for free, or at a discount. John Modest is principal of West Charlotte.

John Modest: I think that has been one of the side effects of resegregation. You end up with schools that are extremely high needs.

High needs means a lot of the kids at West Charlotte can't do the schoolwork.

Modest: We have students who are coming to West Charlotte who aren't prepared for high school. Sixty-seven percent of our students currently read below the 9th grade level.

Some people who graduated from West Charlotte are sad to see what's become of it. Some of them are trying to raise money for the school, or serve as mentors for the kids. Councilman James Mitchell comes to campus because he has meetings here, and he talks with the students.

Mitchell: Now a lot of them recognize me just cause of being elected official, say "Hey councilman! Hey councilman! Yeah!"

Mitchell says he asks the guys not to wear their pants so low.

Mitchell: Because I say if you wear your pants down, all of a sudden your academics going come down. Your academics come down your attitude going to come down. I say think about it everything's going down, I need you to pull them up, pull your attitude up, pull your grades up.

Today at West Charlotte, Principal John Modest is meeting with some business leaders to try to get them to help the school. He's bringing along a few top students, like Isaiah Scott. Isaiah is president of the student body. He says it's still possible to get a good education at West Charlotte. But he says the students are missing out on getting to know people of other races.

Isaiah Scott: One of my friends is Asian. He's actually Hmong. You know you don't meet too many Hmong. But you know he told me about his culture and his religion. If I ever meet another Hmong I can speak to them. I know how they kind of are, and it's going to be a huge

advantage if I go on an interview with someone of a different race, they're not going to intimidate me. If I had grown up around all African Americans my entire life, I might not have that same advantage.

Isaiah's friend Patrick Jones is meeting with the business people, too. Patrick takes Advanced Placement classes. He hopes he can help pull up West Charlotte's test scores.

Patrick Jones: And sort of right now with the position my school is in a lot of the administrative staff is depending on us to try to turn around the situation the school is in, so we try to do the best we can for the better good of our school.

Patrick wants a future in law or in music. He's in a saxophone band and he plays at his church.

[church music]

It's a big, beautiful church, packed on a Sunday morning with people all dressed up. Women in hats and girls in frilly ankle socks and little boy ushers in white gloves. Nearly everyone is black. After all these years of school desegregation, in some ways, Charlotte, North Carolina has remained stubbornly segregated. People of different races work together and have lunch together. But they still tend to live in neighborhoods with people of their own race, and go to church with people of their own race. Patrick's mother, Valda Jones, chooses to come to this black church. But she still thinks schools should be mixed.

Valda Jones: We're not going learn to be tolerant of one another. And to be patient and understanding of one another if we never see each other.

Valda Jones and her husband, Patrick Sr., were bused to a white school when they were in middle school. They resented it. But when they walked through the doors, they discovered the equipment the white kids had that they didn't.

Valda: We were amazed.

Patrick: Amazed. The books.

Valda: We were just in awe. Even in the cafeteria, there was a jukebox, and we were like *[slaps hand on table]* music? During lunch? A jukebox?

Patrick: Not to share a book with her, to have my own book. We didn't have to share these books, she didn't have to take it home one night, then I could get it the next night, then turn the work in the following day.

Valda Jones says being bused taught her she could compete with white kids. She found out she was just as good at school. Just as good at cheerleading. And eventually, she made friends with white people.

Valda: We would bring white friends home. I went over to the cheerleaders' houses for dinner when we didn't want to come home because we had a game, and you subsequently taught your parents to be tolerant. You know I, we walked, me and there was two other African American friends of mine, walked in the door with the head cheerleader who was white, and it was like, their parents say, "OK." And that's going to be lost if we go back to segregating the schools.

Schools around the country are already less integrated than they were during the 1980s. Segregation has been increasing for two decades, and the new Supreme Court ruling is likely to accelerate that trend. Under the ruling, school districts may still try to make their schools diverse. But they can't try to achieve diversity by assigning kids to schools based on their race. They can try building schools that straddle neighborhoods of different races, or using magnet schools to draw people across racial lines. But research shows those methods don't work as well as busing.

Some people who supported busing had hoped that by now that kind of deliberate mixing wouldn't be needed. We'd be an integrated society. But Lou Trosch says people don't seem to mix unless they're pushed into it. He's the West Charlotte grad who's a judge now.

Judge Trosch says when he was in high school, he thought it might be different. The world might change more than it has. Maybe that's what makes him tear up when he talks about West Charlotte High. A grief for the hope of what might have been. A grief for those high school years when it seemed like people could get beyond race and get along.

Trosch: I guess as good as we can get in this society, that's what it was. I don't want to quote Martin Luther King, but you know he says you can, the mountaintop? We weren't on the mountaintop. But you could kind of see it off in the distance.

Stephen Smith: An Imperfect Revolution was produced by Catherine Winter and Kate Ellis. The editor was Mary Beth Kirschner. Technical help from Craig Thorsen. The RadioWorks team includes: Sasha Aslanian, Ochen Kaylan, Ellen Guettler, Laurie Stern, Katherine Lewis, Courtney Stein, and Joel Grostephan. At American Public Media, Brad Robideau and Nick Kereakos.

I'm Stephen Smith.

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