College Students' Attitudes on Neighborhood Integration: From the Classroom to the Community and Back Again.

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It is one thing to agree that the goal of integration is morally and legally right; it is another thing to commit oneself positively and actively to the ideal of integration--the former is intellectual assent, the latter is actual belief.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.*

I grew up in an all white suburb, well, almost all white. There were two black families that literally lived on the wrong side of the tracks. Two large run-down old houses sat within five feet of the rumbling trains. Sometimes my family drove past those houses in our old station wagon. On days that our drive was interrupted by a crossing train, I would watch the barefoot black children playing by the street. I never thought of our suburb as being segregated, at least not until I was in high school.

As a teenager, I remember my parents teaching us that all people are created equal, that God loves us all, and that we should love each other. During the late 1960s, a black family moved into our suburb, only they didn't move to the poor side of the tracks. Instead, they moved right into the center of an all-white middle class neighborhood.

My parents' ideology was put to the practical test. They passed the first test by openly defending the rights of the Washington family to live in the suburb, while others were throwing rocks through their windows. But the second test of their beliefs was more difficult and they failed miserably when my sister started dating Mr. Washington's son.

I was young and relatively naive about racial matters, but I tried to carry the American creed and my parents' values, not their failures, into my adult life. In college, I intellectually supported the civil rights movement, but it wasn't until I was married and in the situation of

buying a house that I came to see the realities of neighborhood integration. My spouse came from a similar background, from a similar suburb on the opposite side of the large industrial city that was the hub of our metropolis. East siders and West siders were almost as segregated as blacks and whites. Choosing a side on which to live after we were married was resolved by our moving into the city.

Now we find ourselves rearing three children in a racially precarious urban area. The street was once all white, yet in one year's time three black families have moved onto the street. I waited nervously for the rocks to be thrown; there were none. Instead words were thrown in every direction. Some neighbors said they didn't care if one or two black families moved into the neighborhood, but more than that would bring down the value of the houses. Other whites said they weren't really prejudiced, but they didn't want to see the neighborhood "go black." Older neighbors found it difficult to say the word "black" aloud; rather they spoke in a normal tone until reaching the word "colored" or "black" and then they superstitiously whispered the word as if it were an ominous profanity.

Community leaders came into the neighborhood as more sale signs began to sprout in front yards. Meetings were held at the local bingo hall and both blacks and whites attended. The mayor and councilman spoke on the issue of commitment to a neighborhood, without ever mentioning terms like "white flight" or "block busting"; they managed to instill a sense of security and pride in the neighborhood. That night one of our neighbors, who had previously been concerned that he wouldn't be able to afford to move his family to the suburbs when the "blacks" started moving in, was so inspired he shook hands with one of his new black neighbors.

I was naive and idealistic as a college student and I am still idealistic today. I believe that our neighborhood can be peacefully and successfully integrated, but I realize that neighborhood integration is just one step in the process of achieving racial equity. As Martin Luther King, Jr., rhetorically asked, "What will he gain by being permitted to move to an integrated neighborhood if he can not afford to do so because he is unemployed or has a low-paying job with no future?"

Students attending an urban university where forced busing is still the norm and racial barriers still exist throughout the city may evidence higher levels of sophistication than I did during my college days. The purpose of this investigation is to address the attitudes of today's college students on the topic of neighborhood integration.

> *In a multiracial society no group can make it alone.*
> —*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*All King quotes are taken from *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Newmarket Press, 1983).

The struggle for integration began with the passage of the 14th and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution, ratified in 1865 and 1868, respectively. The Reconstruction era, that followed the Civil War, brought about significant changes for Southern blacks who exercised their right to vote and held political offices. However, in 1877, the reconstruction era came to an abrupt end and with it the civil rights progress of Southern blacks.

Discrimination increased and segregation became the rule with the Supreme Court ruling that upheld "separate, but equal" practices. The formation of the integration-oriented National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 supported integration, as did the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) which was formed in the early 1940s and supported the first Freedom Ride through Southern states.[1] However, not until Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) did legislation support integration. In 1957, blacks' rights were further protected with the establishment of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

The most dramatic gains toward integration were achieved during the 1960s. Following demonstrations led by black community leaders and supported by college students on campuses across America, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. After the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., Congress supported the concept of neighborhood integration by enacting legislation that disallowed discriminatory practices with respect to federally financed housing.

Debates have been waged over the topic of neighborhood integration, both before and since the enactment of the 1968 law on fair housing practices. Some black and white leaders of the early 1900s concluded that integration was not "a viable strategy for the resolution of racial conflict."[2] Recent reports suggest that fair housing has resulted in suburban pockets of poverty. Speaking of the 9.5 millon individuals living in poverty in the suburbs, McCormick and McKillop reported that the poor residents "are too dispersed among their better-heeled neighbors to influence suburban congressmen and too disorganized to attract attention as effectivly as advocates for the nation's 13.9 million urban poor."[3]

Proponents of integration, such as abolitionist Frederick Douglass, precede the Civil War. Integrationists argue that integration must take place at a variety of levels in society including education and housing in order for integration to be meaningful. Housing discrimination results in inequity of services and creates social isolation and further economic deprivation.[4] Neighborhood integration creates more opportunity for black citizens through interaction and networking.

Racial integration, especially neighborhood integration, is not a issue. Rather it is laced with intricate complexities which have not yet been satisfied through simple solutions. Prejudice still remains and researchers still attempt to explain its origins and obstinate existence in a free society.

Being a Negro in America means listening to suburban politicians talk eloquently against open housing while arguing in the same breath that they are not racist.
                                                    —*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

In order to understand racial prejudice, the terms "race" and "prejudice" must be clearly defined. The biological definition of a race is "a subdivision of a species which inherits physical characteristics distinguishing it from other populations of the species."[5] This conceptualization has resulted in the scientific labeling of four main races: Australoid, Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid. The biological definition of "race" is not the same as the average lay person's definition of "race" which "represents a unity of physical, mental, personality and cultural traits which determines the behavior of the individuals inheriting this alleged unity."[6] "The fact is that all human beings are so much mixed with regard to origin that between different groups of individuals intergradation and *overlapping* of physical characters is the rule."[7]

In its simplist form the term "prejudice" refers to judgments made prior to obtaining facts or knowledge. A more complicated conception of prejudice has been offered by Myrdal. The author suggested that it is not preconceptions or generalizations made without prior knowledge that results in racial beliefs about inferiority of the black race; rather, it is the collecting of incomplete knowledge and "twisting logic" that results in an "incorrect deduction" about racial inferiority. For example, "He [the black man] is, on the average, poorer; his body is more often deformed; his health is more precarious and his mortality rate higher; his intelligence performance, manners, and morals are lower"; consequently, the unsophisticated individual draws the faulty conclusion that blacks are biologically inferior.[8] Goodman succinctly defined racial prejudice as "a projection onto others of one's own unacceptable traits."[9]

According to Montagu, "Today, more than at any previous time in the history of man, it is urgently necessary to be clear as to what this term [race] is and what it really means." Furthermore, "the fact is that the modern concept of *race* is a product of irrational emotional reasoning, and, as we have seen, from their inception "racial" questions have always been discussed in an emotional atmosphere."[10]

Through education we seek to break down the spiritual barriers to integration.
                                                    —*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Discussing racial issues, especially integration, became the focus of college classroom discussion in the 1960s. Gorden encouraged college professors to use a method of taped exchanges to help students learn more about social issues, including neighborhood integration, and to exchange their tapes with experts in the field.

The college students expressed low levels of emotion and expressed

what they considered to be liberal and well developed plans to encourage neighborhood integration. A critical and emotional review of the students' conclusions was returned by the experts, who were members of Citizens for Equal Rights of Austin, Texas. Students, first and foremost, always took the perspective that integrating neighborhoods meant moving blacks into white neighborhoods. They never conceived of whites moving into black neighborhoods. Furthermore, the college students' notion that neighborhood integration should be done gradually so as not to upset the white residents "precipitated caustic reaction" on the part of the experts who answered with the following remarks:

> Some of the questions you pose, such as, "Do you want to live next door to a Negro?" frankly border on the ridiculous.

> It is the attitude that you seem to have that it is you, the white citizen, who are in a position to grant something to the other areas of the populace, which just causes my spine to bristle.

> Our Negro citizens are not asking to be accepted, they are not asking for friends, they're not asking to be understood. They're insisting on their rights as citizens of this country--and they'll get them.[11]

In general the reviewers found the college students to be unsophisticated and naive at best, and racially prejudiced at worst.

"Racial beliefs of the unsophisticated" have been described by Myrdal as lacking in an awareness of "such subtle influences as the denial of certain outlets for ambitions, social disparagement, cultural isolation, and the early conditioning of the Negro child's mind by the caste situation as factors molding the Negro's personality."[12] Twenty years later, Labov supported the views of Myrdal and suggested that "cultural, social, and economic factors" must be considered in order to understand the differences between blacks and whites.[13] The college students, who had considered themselves relatively liberal and free of prejudice, admitted to having learned a great deal from the classroom project.

The strong emotional response from black leaders may have been due to the content of the tape being racial in nature as implied by Montagu. On the other hand, Kochman has suggested that the black mode of debate "is high keyed: animated, interpersonal, and confrontational" even when the discussion is not racially oriented. Obversely, whites attempt to display a "low keyed: dispassionate, impersonal, and nonchallenging" mode. Blacks see no disparity between emotional argument and reason, while whites feel logic is lost in emotional intensity.[14]

The 1960s and 1970s were intense and emotional times, both for community leaders and college students. Today's campuses seem a quieter place to live and learn. However, at Cleveland State University, like many other universities across America, the racial questions have

not been put to rest. In a city which still enforces busing, students tend to come from either well-integrated city schools or completely segregated suburbs. They enter the college classroom with distinctly varied backgrounds in racial understanding.

The purpose of this investigation is to compare the college students' views today on neighborhood integration to those reported by Gorden in 1965. According to Brigham and Weissback, "with regard to the feelings of white Americans, there seems to be a continuing trend toward acceptance of equalitiarian racial policies."[15] Student tapes will be reviewed by experts in the field to determine if college students have reached a greater degree of acceptance and sophistication in understanding racial integration of neighborhoods. Furthermore, the response of the community experts will be reviewed to see if any changes have taken place in their response styles.

Thirty-two college students enrolled in a group communication course at Cleveland State University were asked to form six small groups and discuss the topic of neighborhood integration. Students formed groups based on proximity of classroom seating; only one integrated group emerged from the arrangement.

Specifically, students were asked if neighborhood integration is a good idea. If they responded with a negative answer, they were asked to supply a superior plan for achieving a more racially harmonious society. If they agreed that neighborhood integration is a good idea, they were asked to supply a plan to achieve neighborhood integration. Students were given the option to do library research on the topic of integration before meeting with their group.

In addition, students were asked to audio-tape record their half hour discussions, type a final version of their plan and a rationale for the choices they made. Finally, students chose a community expert in the field of neighborhood integration to review their tape and assess the students on an effectiveness form.

The effectiveness form was designed by Hirokawa and Pace to judge the effectiveness of university student groups' decision-making on ethical issues.[16] The original scale included the following items:

Inappropriate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Appropriate
Warranted	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Unwarranted
Unreasonable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Reasonable
Fair	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Unfair

The moral issues previously presented to students were hypothetical in nature. They did not receive the responses from the expert judges. We chose to add two more items to the scale:

Unrealistic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Realistic
Useful	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	Unuseful

so the students could see how realistic and how useful their plans might be to community leaders.

Education must enable one to sift and weigh the evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction.
—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Among the various group discussions several common or general attitudes prevailed. First, students often addressed the notion of "forced neighborhood integration" early in their discussions. Group #4 suggested, "It's not a healthy environment unless they really want to be there," and a member of Group #1 stated, "They're going to have to want to live in this neighborhood." A student from Group #3 remarked that we would "lose a slice of America" by disrupting tightly knit, very ethnic Irish, Polish, German or Italian neighborhoods through forced integration. In other groups as well, the idea that for integration to be successful it should occur naturally and voluntarily was a commonly held opinion.

A second issue that surfaced regularly in the groups' discussions was education and its relationship to neighborhood integration. Four of the six groups included recommendations concerning education in their proposals for enhancing racial integration and improving relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds. Members of Group #6 expressed their views on education and integration in the following ways:

> Integration isn't going to happen overnight, but if we start teaching our kids....

> The people who are hopelessly prejudiced now... they're lost. We have to worry about the younger people, and the people that are more liberal, and more educated.

Overall, the importance of education as a tool to eradicate fears, racial barriers, and stereotypes was a popular view among the discussants.

While most students agreed that neighborhood integration was a laudable goal which society should strive to achieve, it was also pointed out and emphasized by some students that racial integration must be done carefully and gradually. Group #3 collectively arrived at the conclusion that racial integration could not happen overnight, and that community involvement, not government intervention, would be a vital component in the process.

Two major restraints to neighborhood integration were expressed by the college students: 1) cultural and 2) economic. One group discussed cultural differences implying that a serious transition would have to be undertaken by inner-city blacks moving into all white suburbs. One student from Group #2 said that the integrating urbanites would have to "assimilate suburban norms," such as property upkeep and keeping an eye on their children.

Concerns about economic factors led Group #1 to suggest that different races could be mixed more easily than people of different incomes. Groups

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#2 and #3 expressed fear over low income minorities moving into white communities because they felt property values would go down and crime would go up.

Group #1 concluded that in order to achieve neighborhood integration several steps should be taken. First, residents of neighborhoods should be surveyed to gain a better understanding of their interests and willingness to integrate. Second, the students called for benign steering on the part of banks and the real estate industry. Finally, they encouraged further education of young people.

Group #2 called for the discontinuation of forced busing. Rather, they suggested that more money go toward improving neighborhood schools.

Group #3 called for education of young children through education and media and the natural evolvement of neighborhood integration.

Group #4 suggested that low interest rates be offered to integrating neighborhoods and that government intervention should be used, especially as a watchdog service to protect the rights of minorities. The students also suggested that community groups should be formed to help with the integration process. Furthermore, at the grass roots level, projects that would bring people together and improve the neighborhoods should be instituted (e.g., neighborhood clean up projects). Finally, Group #4 recommended continuing education to decrease racial stereotyping.

Group #5 called for more government intervention and regulation in the educational system, real estate industry, and mortgage lenders.

Group #6 concluded that better enforcement of existing laws like the Fair Housing Act of 1968 should be implemented. They also thought new legislation should be created to encourage neighborhood integration. Watchdog committees should be formed to protect minorities and ensure their rights are not being abused. Finally, education to reduce prejudice should be continued or strengthened.

In general the students' discussions were less prejudiced than the discussions of the 1960s supporting the trends toward liberalism as reported by Brigham and Weissback. For example, although Group #3 had a fairly weak plan, their discussion addressed integrating whites into black or Hispanic neighborhoods. However, most groups did evidence a rather naive understanding of the problem that could be summarized in the statement by one college student that we'd all be better off if "God had created us color-blind."

Students were asked to send their tapes and a written summary of their plan to a community leader who has some expertise in the area of neighborhood integration. Students were encouraged to choose black leaders in order to gain a different perspective (since the majority of students were white). The community experts included two councilmen, a representative of the Community Relations Board, a city prosecutor, a minister, and an administrator from the county extension agency.

Group #1 received a mean of 5.15 on the effectiveness scale from their expert judge. Their lowest scores were in the area of appropriateness,

usefulness, and realism. The reviewer remarked that their plan to audit or survey residents about their attitudes held great potential if it could be implemented. Another expert, commenting on another group, wrote:

> It is good to know that integration is acceptable to your group. Some type of statistical information may, perhaps, give us a better view of large ethnic and cultural groups.

Group #2 received the lowest ratings of all the groups (X = 3.66). The expert judge complimented the students on being "open and honest about their opinions on these controversial and debatable topics"; but the expert criticized the students for failing to discuss "other factors, such as the economy, unemployment, the national tone, challenging civil rights laws, to name a few." Furthermore, the expert felt the students focused too heavily on the subject of busing much to the neglect of neighborhood integration.

Group #3 averaged 4.66 on the effectiveness scale with their lowest ratings in fairness, usefulness, and realism. Although Group #3's plan was no more concrete than Group #2, they may have received a higher ranking based on some of the issues they discussed. For example, the group members agreed with one student who said, "As the black population increases and their economic strength becomes greater and their political involvement, I think there will be more change for them."

It should be noted that Group #3 evidenced more conflict than any other group. They spent more time debating issues and less time formulating a plan.

Group #4 received the highest ratings of all the groups (X = 6.50). The expert judge wrote:

> I was also impressed with the sensitivity to the topic, the sensitive listening, and the mutual respect that occurred. There was a notable absence of time consuming rhetoric, allowing time for the best ideas to surface.

It should be noted at this point that Group #4 was the one and only integrated group (50% black and 50% white). The expert judging Group #2 encouraged those students to work in integrated groups in the future as they might achieve better solutions by having different perspectives.

Group #5 received a 4.16 on the effectivenes scale with their highest ratings in realism and usefulness, which was contrary to most other groups. However, their highest scores did not exceed 5 out of 7. The expert judge considered the group to be unprepared and disorganized. While their ideas were perceived as good ones, they were unoriginal and probably difficult to implement.

Group #6 received a 4.83 on the effectiveness scale with their lowest scores in realism and usefulness. The expert praised the group for their effort but cautioned them with respect to reliance on education. "Education alone has not shown to be a useful tool for achieving integration," the expert explained. Their somewhat vague plan did not clearly address the economic problems of minorities.

In general, the experts praised the students for participating in a difficult and controversial topic. Although stereotypical comments sur-

faced, especially in Group #2 (e.g. property values would go down, crime would go up, blacks would have to learn to keep up the property and watch their children), reviewers offered criticism without caustic statements. Emotional arguments were more touching than stinging, as one expert reminded the students that Archie Bunker could never be persuaded from his prejudice against the Polish by his son-in-law, Mike. The reviewer wrote:

> Thus, one would ask the question - Why is it that Archie resisted Mike's attempt to educate him? Mike would say "Piece by piece you (Archie) eat my heart out."

The experts seemed to be educating the students who seemed generally unsophisticated with respect to operable (i.e., realistic and useful) plans for neighborhood integration. The expert who used the Archie Bunker metaphor continued:

> So what is the answer? Economic preservation. If Mike had been economically sufficient, Archie would have changed his mind about Mike but not about Polish people. This is why I conclude that it is important for education and economic independence to occur in the same time-space, otherwise integration cannot survive.

The street that I live on recently held a neighborhood clean up project. All residents were invited, and afterward neighbors met for hot dogs at the local church. Several neighbors have joined together to form a neighborhood association to encourage both blacks and whites to move to the neighborhood. The board for the association is comprised of both blacks and whites. Finally, most of the neighbors have been acting as watchdogs concerning realtors who have attempted to stir up negative feelings which may lead to white flight.

We do not intend to paint a Pollyanna picture of neighborhood integration, but as each generation grows more sophisticated with respect to racial prejudice, and neighbors begin to work with community leaders, rather than pay "lip-service" to integration, progress can be made. Integration is inextricably linked to political, economic, and educational factors; each must be addressed.

> *Anyone who starts out with the conviction that the road to racial justice is only one lane wide will inevitably create a traffic jam and make the journey infinitely longer.*
>
> —*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Notes

[1]R.L. Blumberg, *Civil Rights: The 1960s Freedom Struggle* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984); N. Wright, Jr., *Black Power and Urban Unrest: Creative Possibilities* (New York: Hawthorne, 1967).

[2]W.A. Edwards, "Racial Purity in Black and White: The Case of Marcus Garvey and Ernest Cox," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 15, 1 (Spring 1987): 119.

[3]J. McCormick and P. MicKillop, "The Other Suburbia," *Newsweek* 113 (June 26, 1989): 22.

[4]E. Higgenbotham, "Race and Class Barriers to Black Women's College Attendance," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 13, 1 (Spring 1985): 89-107.

[5]A. Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race,* 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974): 5.

[6]Montagu, 11.

[7]Montagu, 7.

[8]G. Mrydal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy,* 20th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962): 97.

[9]P. Goodman, "Reflections on Racism, Spite, Guilt, and Violence," in *Racial Attitudes in America: Analyses and Findings of Social Psychology,* J. Brigham and T. Wiessback, eds. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972): 17.

[10]Montagu, 51.

[11]W.I. Gorden, "Tape Exchange in the Discussion Methods Course," *Southern Speech Journal* 30 (1965): 235.

[12]Myrdal, 98

[13]W.Labov, "Objectivity and Commitment in Linguistic Science: The Case of the Black English Trial in Ann Arbor," *Language in Society* 11 (1982): 165-201.

[14]T. Kochman, *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981): 18.

[15]J.C. Brigham and T.A. Weissbach, "The Current Racial Climate in the United States," *Racial Attitudes in America: Analyses and Findings of Social Psychology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972): 5.

[16]R.Y. Hirokawa and R. Pace, "A Descriptive Investigation of the Possible Communication-based Reasons for Effective and Ineffective Group Decision Making," *Communication Monographs* 50 (1982): 363-378.