



History of Education Society, Annual Meeting, Part IV. History of Education Society (HES).

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PART IV: "Local Lessons" Roundtable

ROUNDTABLE: Local Lessons: A Roundtable on the History of Desegregated Public Schools in Evanston, Illinois, 1960 to the Present—A Public Discussion <p> Jack Dougherty (Trinity College) Davison Douglas (William and Mary School of Law) Dolores Holmes (Evanston, IL; former Director of Family Focus) Bennett Johnson (Evanston, IL; former President Evanston/North Shore NAACP) Dan A. Lewis (Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University) Thomas J. Mertz (University of Wisconsin-Madison; former Evanston public school student) William Sampson (Public Policy Studies, DePaul University; former member Evanston Board of Education) <p> This session was a new breakthrough for HES. Organized by a doctoral candidate who participated in the desegregation of the Evanston schools as an elementary school student, it involved scholars and community activists in challenging and illuminating discussions. Members of the Evanston community were invited to join HES conference participants. This open admission policy led to the sharing of personal and educational oral histories by a number of participants in addition to the panelists. The timeliness and intensity of the interactions were verified by the fact that the roundtable continued long past its two hour time slot, and would have continued into the night if a physical facility had been available. Personal connections made at the roundtable have led to continuing communication between and among participants and attendees. <p> Mertz began with an overview of the history of race and schools in Evanston. The presentation drew upon an extensive "Evanston Chronology" and map packet he designed as source material, along with a chronological selection of quotes, some attributable to panel members. Mertz pointed out ways

in which geography and housing had led to segregated schools in District 65 up to 1960. He highlighted key developments that led to the present state of affairs. Douglas provided a history of the struggles to desegregate schools in Illinois up to 1950. This included pre-Civil War limitations on admission to public schools, litigation, the great migration of Southern Blacks to the North, and a prohibition against Black teachers teaching integrated classes. Pressure by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) led to the passage of the Jenkins amendment by the state legislature. School districts that did not desegregate ran the risk of losing funding. However, indirect types of segregation still existed, and the 1963 Armstrong Law took this into consideration in drawing school boundaries. <p> In his presentation, Sampson drew upon the <cite>Journal of Social Science Research</cite> and his recent book, <cite>Black Student Achievement: How Much Do Family and School Really Matter? </cite> as well as the work of Ogbu and Clark.[1] Sampson said that children who are sent to school prepared to learn do well. He stated his belief that "desegregation has helped White kids learn about Black kids, but did not really help the Black kids." He found that neighborhood, income and race do not explain differences, but the amount of help given in the home does affect outcomes. He asked whether we would be able to change families. He also stated that measuring success by the performance of Black kids is a waste of time and money. Intelligence does not explain the differences. (This would seem to indicate that he disagreed with the premise of the October 2003 study, <cite>What Works with African American Students: Learning from Successful District 65 Teachers</cite>. The study is

based on observations of matched pairs of teachers and analysis of differences in pedagogy, practice, and behavior.[2]) Sampson believes that integration has not improved education anywhere in America. <p> Johnson, who attended Foster School as a child, described the struggle over the retention of Superintendent Gregory C. Coffin in 1969. Firmly committed to integration and civil rights, Coffin proposed a magnet plan for Foster School that included an accelerated academic program and special instruction in music, drama and industrial arts. He aggressively implemented a district-wide program that included extensive teacher training, faculty integration, the elevation of African-Americans to administrative positions, and integrated after school activities. Citing the Board of Education's published rationales for non-renewal, lack of communication and personality, Johnson stated that this led to a school boycott by parents. They supported not only the plan for quality education, but Coffin's involvement in political activities, particularly those in favor of open housing. Coffin supporters narrowly lost the School Board election, which led to boycotts of White businesses, mass meetings and a "Freedom School." Mertz comments in the chronology that although news reports referred only to Black boycotters, Freedom School students and protesters, he knows there were some White protesters, because he was one of them.[3] Johnson stated that we must teach *every* child, not just "gifted" children. <p> Lewis, co-author of <cite>Race and Educational Reform in the American Metropolis: A Study of School Decentralization</cite>, stated that the segregated school of the sixties is the basis of the No Child Left Behind law [4]. He believes the authors want quality education with few new resources. He feels that they want to break up or destroy democratic schools (by the use of charter schools). According to Lewis, the policies of today are often built on the problems we defined yesterday. There is a deconcentration of poverty due to population shifts. There is resistance to new poor coming into the community, because today they have "Section Eight" vouchers, but no TANFA money to help them live. Evanston has over eight hundred "Section Eight" vouchers, the highest on the North Shore. <p> Holmes said that there are a lot of young nuclear families in the community now. The lack of a "core person," such as a grandfather in the home, to see that homework was the first thing done after school (even if he did not read), is problematic. This has made a difference in what the families expect from the schools.. She said one gets tired, because today the Evanston community is speaking about the same things it was speaking of twenty, thirty and forty years ago. <p> Dougherty,

the final panelist, referred to the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of <cite>Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education</cite>. He cited newspaper reports from the 1950s in which many African Americans were calling for a return to neighborhood schools. Integration was a "Black Power" movement. According to Dougherty, this leads to historical confusion. He said, who does or does not get power is the "bottom line." <p> The floor was then opened to the audience. This is a summary of the comments. Audience members discussed the transformative power of civil rights stories, and modified vs. regular history courses. In describing the Ether Project at Northeastern University, an HES member stated that, "It is up to Black leaders to look to themselves and find solutions to our own problems. School can be a foundation for a kid from a home where there is no support." An Evanston Councilman said that "everyone who remains silent is contributing to what is happening." A parent made remarks about the rationale for her decision to send her child to Foster Magnet School in the 1960s. In a discussion of "how to parent." one audience member said that children "are being sold easy sex, so how can these kids be helped? Can we do something about uneducated parents?" An HES member said that the history of early childhood education can offer some things that have worked. This is an example of history impacting education to help find solutions. One contributor said that there is a need for Blacks to mobilize because Whites don't have the necessary motivation to meet the Black problems. Treadway (see endnotes) cited the Hess report mentioned above. She stated that teacher expectation impact whether the child learns and succeeds. She asked about cultural sensitivity, and then stated that if a teacher expected a child to succeed, they succeeded. She provided a historical overview of the "sixty percent" guidelines, stating that a lot of the data came from the community. <p> This session more than achieved its purpose. It raised as many questions as it answered, gave everyone present much food for thought, and reminded those in attendance to challenge our own assumptions on a regular basis in order to see what lens we are using. <p> Notes <p> [1]. Sampson, W. A. (2002). <cite>Black Student Achievement</cite>. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press. <p> [2]. Hess, G. A. (2003, October 7). <cite>What Works with African American Students: Learning from Successful District 65 Teachers</cite>. Evanston, IL: The Lighthouse Partnership. (Courtesy of Judith Treadway, chair of the NAACP education committee in Evanston, 2003). <p> [3]. Mertz, T.J. (2003). <cite>Evanston Chronology</cite>. Madison, WI: Author. <p> [4]. Lewis, D. A. & Nakagawa,

K. (1995). <cite>Race and Educational Reform in the tion</cite>. Albany, NY: SUNY Press. <p> American Metropolis: A Study of School Decentraliza-

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