

Deconstructing the Deeply Rooted: Educational Segregation, Desegregation, and Opportunity in  
St. Louis

Honors Thesis for Peace and Justice Studies  
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## **Introduction**

By 2019 St. Louis's Voluntary Transfer Program, the largest race-based transfer program of its kind will begin a phase-out. So that this upcoming closure will not signal an abandonment of the hopes and goals of educational desegregation in St. Louis, which have been dreamed and shaped by so many, I intend to present my research and findings about the complex history and implementation of the St. Louis desegregation plan, and the present state of diversity and inclusion in a particular district, in order to inspire and inform a continued commitment to educational integration and inclusivity. After Trump's election and the appointment of Betsy Devos as Secretary of Education, a significant part of me feels like it is hopelessly naive to write about racial integration in education, and promote it as an admittedly imperfect but important method to combat racial segregation and racism. When Trump's blatantly racist appointments and policies leave children living constantly in fear even while at school, when Devos calls HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), schools born out of the reality of racial segregation, "pioneers of school choice," and when a cartoonist feels that it's appropriate to compare Devos, a woman who has never attended, sent her children to, nor worked in public schools, to Ruby Bridges, the 6-year-old who entered an all-white school in New Orleans in the 60s amid racist taunts, abuse, and barricades (footnote w/cartoon), can we afford a focus on school desegregation and inclusion? Trump's victory revealed (at least to me--not to people of color and other marginalized people who haven't had the privilege of being unaware) that the powerful intersecting forces of racism, hate, and white supremacy remain in our society. When many people of color are be fighting for their survival, is it not violent to suggest they enter and occupy a white space where there is no guarantee of safety for them? Indeed, mirroring the trend of hate crimes that Trump's candidacy and election have legitimized and promoted, Ladue High

School, the St. Louis county high school that I attended has witnessed a stomach-turning “racial incident.”

The revelation of this incident, as well as other concerns and a developing understanding of the specific challenges that black students experience has shaken up the Ladue community. Students, parents, teachers, faculty, alumnus and residents of St. Louis have all become involved. Emotions poured out during a community meeting, 150 students staged a walk-out in support of the targeted students, and everyone on Facebook has opinions. It almost seems unnecessary to search through old newspapers for examples of the racial tension that came with the Voluntary Transfer Program, as the papers are reporting on that tension and hate right now. These violent incidents ask the question that the Voluntary Transfer Program and school desegregation in St. Louis has been asking for years: who belongs in our schools? That this question still exists means that a commitment to integration is more crucial than ever. We need to confront and think critically about St. Louis’s segregated history, and history of racialized violence in all our schools. Through this process and through an examination of the promise of desegregation in our city we can identify the models and inspiration that will allow us to keep fighting for education that is integrated, equitable, and safe for all.

Before I begin to examine the complexities of desegregation in St. Louis I want to make the case for why a focus on educational integration is vital in 2017. At a time when school desegregation is often regarded and taught in schools as a completed objective, and the upcoming termination of the Voluntary Transfer Program could signal an abandonment of the promise of desegregation in St. Louis, it is critical to understand the positive and meaningful impact of racial integration in schools. One of the consistent findings in desegregation research is that desegregation has significant educational achievement advances in terms of test scores

and graduation rates for nonwhite and poor children, and does not create any achievement losses for white and affluent children. Aside from these considerations research has found that racial integration reduces racial stereotypes through increasing cross-racial understanding, increases feelings of safety and reduces feelings of alienation from peers, and that students who attend racially diverse schools are more likely to work and live in diverse communities. Given these outcomes integration is an important aspect in promoting and protecting children's social-emotional health, knowledge, and well-being. Moreover, these achievements promote one of the ideal goals of public education--the maintenance of a diverse and understanding democracy.

## ***-Chapter 1 Constructing the Context-***

### **Section 1: Brown v. Board**

The context for the case that brought desegregation to St. Louis--Liddell v. Board of Education of the city of St. Louis *et al.*--and the subsequent legal decisions regarding the desegregation of public schools in St. Louis rests in Brown v. Board of Education. One of the best known landmark Supreme Court cases, Brown v. Board declared the segregation of public education based on race unconstitutional, and mandated the integration of U.S. public schools in 1954. Although most people are aware of the remarkable impact of this case it is important to review the case to understand the basis and legal necessity of Minnie Liddell's suit. Brown *et al.* v. Board of Education of Topeka *et al.* was first argued in the Supreme Court on appeal from the United States District Court for the District of Kansas on December 9, 1952 and was decided May 17, 1954. The case was the consolidation of four cases filed on behalf of African-American students denied admittance to public schools on the basis of their race. In the Court's conclusion Chief Justice Earl Warren overturned the doctrine of 'Separate but Equal' established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and affirmed that the segregation of white and black children in public schools solely on the basis of race violates the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment, as the plaintiffs argued. The Warren court rejected the claim that equivalent facilities and "tangible factors" within segregated schools did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment, and rather affirmed that race-based segregation itself deprives children of equal educational opportunities. Famously the court stated that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (495). The Court ordered states to end school segregation "with all deliberate speed." While this language was extremely vague and the court didn't issue any

concrete directions, one can presume that ‘deliberate speed’ would indicate sometime before well 1983 when the desegregation plan mandated by the Liddell case was finally implemented, twenty-nine years after the *Brown v. Board* decision. Despite the lack of impact *Brown v. Board* initially had on St. Louis, its very existence allowed Minnie Liddell to file a complaint against the city’s school board and the state of Missouri for practicing segregation. *Brown v. Board* informed the case throughout the process.

## **Section 2: Municipal Set-Up and Demographics**

Before delving into the complex history and journey that led to St. Louis’s comprehensive and groundbreaking desegregation program it is necessary for me to quickly sketch a picture of education in the city before the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board*. I believe it will also be useful to offer an explanation here of the municipal set-up of the city and county, and an outline of the public school districts in both places. I will be exploring in more depth the state of segregated schooling after *Brown v. Board*, as well as the relationships between certain city and county schools in St. Louis later. The governmental structure of St. Louis is quite unique in the U.S., because since 1876 St. Louis city and St. Louis County have been separate entities that operate independently. Greater St. Louis generally refers to the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County, which is comprised of individual cities. The United States Census Bureau estimated the population of St. Louis city as 315, 685 and the population of St. Louis County as 998, 868. Below is a table that breaks down the racial and ethnic make-up of the region.

2010 census ("Population Estimates")	St Louis City	St. Louis County	USA
White	43.9%	70.3%	62.6%
African- American	49.2%	23.3%	13.2%
Asian	2.9%	3.5%	6%
Hispanic	3.5%	2.5%	17%

**Table 1: St. Louis and U.S. Racial Demographics**

In terms of school district divisions in the City of St. Louis, the St. Louis Public School district operates 68 schools: forty-one are public conventional schools where attendance is determined based on residence; twenty-seven are public magnet schools where attendance requires advanced application and is determined by lottery. Meanwhile there are twenty-two distinct public school districts within St. Louis County and attendance is based on residence ("St. Louis County"). Figures 1 and 2 offer a visualization of the layout of city and county school districts, while figures 3 and 4 provide snapshots of racial segregation in public elementary schools in the St. Louis region.





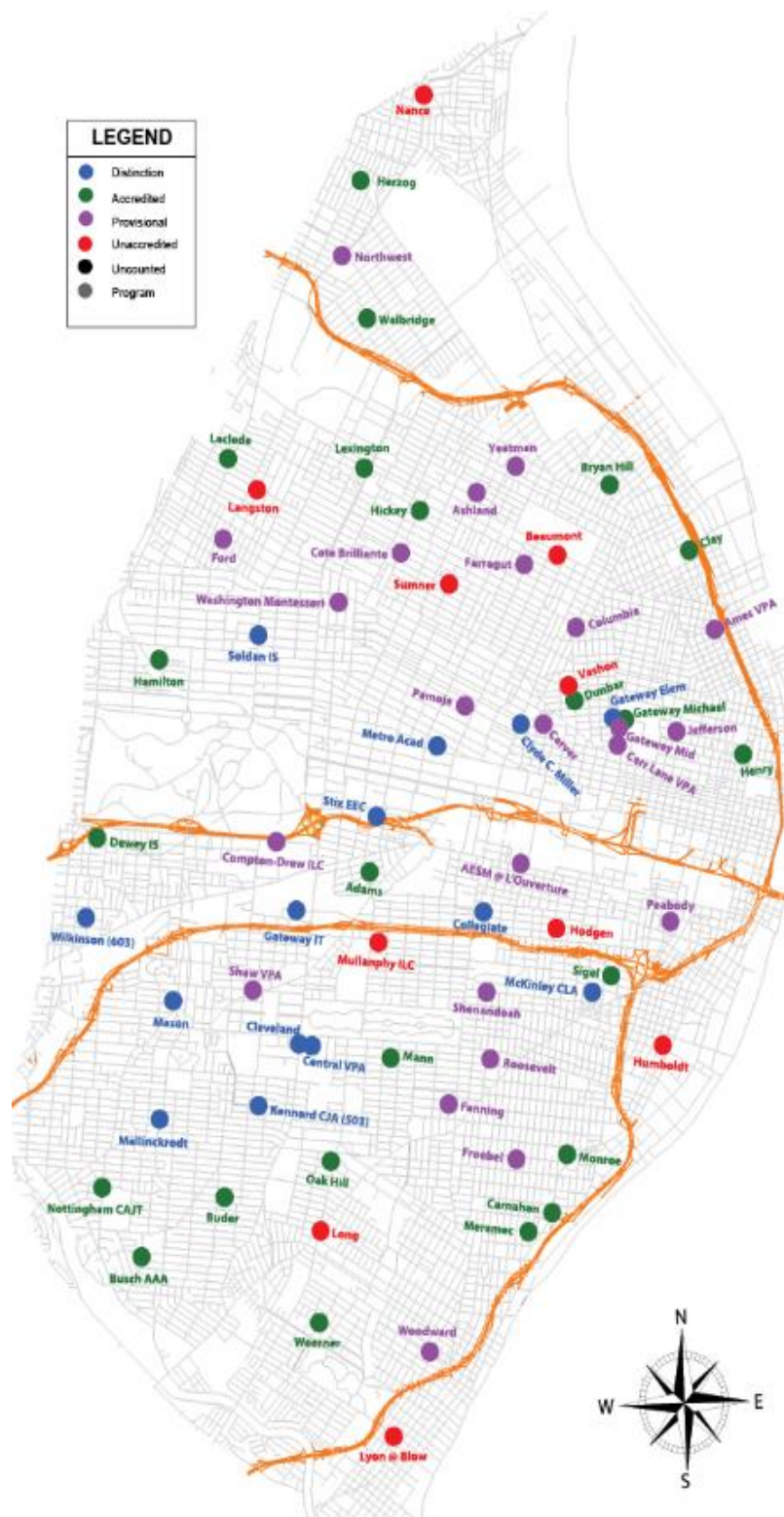


Figure 2: St. Louis City Public Schools (<http://www.slps.org/>)

School Segregation (Dissimilarity Index): Public Primary School Students Dissimilarity with White (Non-Hispanic) Students by Race/Ethnicity		Percent
Race / Ethnicity		2010-2011
Hispanic		42.3%
Black (Non-Hispanic)		74.1%
Asian or Pacific Islander (Non-Hispanic)		47.3%
American Indian or Alaska Native (Non-Hispanic)		S

**Definition:** The Dissimilarity Index is a measure of segregation that describes the evenness with which students of one racial/ethnic group are spread across schools in a geographic area (e.g. a metropolitan area), with respect to another racial/ethnic group. The index values displayed in this table show how students of the specified racial/ethnic group are spread across area schools relative to Non-Hispanic white students. The value can be interpreted as the percent of students of the specified racial/ethnic group that would have to relocate to another school in order for the racial composition of each school to mirror the racial composition of all students in the specified larger area (e.g. the metropolitan area). The Index ranges with 0% to 100% with higher values reflecting higher levels of segregation.

**Source:** National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey. | [Show Notes](#)

**Figure 3: St. Louis School Segregation Dissimilarity Index (Diversity Data Kids)**

Public Primary School Students' Exposure to School Poverty by Race/Ethnicity		Percent
Race / Ethnicity		2010-2011
White (Non-Hispanic)		34.5%
Hispanic		49.2%
Black (Non-Hispanic)		70.7%
Asian or Pacific Islander (Non-Hispanic)		27.6%
American Indian or Alaska Native (Non-Hispanic)		42.6%

**Definition:** Exposure to school poverty is measured as the poverty rate in the primary school attended by the average student of the specified race/ethnicity.

**Source:** National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey. | [Show Notes](#)

**Figure 4: Public School Students' Exposure to School Poverty by Race/Ethnicity in St. Louis (Diversity Data Kids)**

### **Section 3: Creating and Maintaining Residential Segregation in St. Louis**

It is impossible to ignore the role of residential segregation in maintaining racially isolated schools, and research confirms the reciprocal relationship that exists between housing and schooling segregation patterns.<sup>1</sup> This relationship is undeniable in St. Louis where the delineation of racial segregation is shockingly drastic. To get a sense of the segregation that divides the city in two, just drive toward downtown along Delmar Boulevard—a major east-to-west four-lane road. Soon enough you will reach an Aldi food market at a fork in the road and a choice of which reality you would like to enter. Go south and the blocks are lined with Tudor homes, wine bars and upscale furniture stores; this neighborhood, according to the most recent U.S. census, is 70 percent white. Turn north and the streets soon become dilapidated and treeless; this neighborhood is 99 percent African American. This stark boundary between majority white and majority black residential areas is known as the “Delmar Divide.”

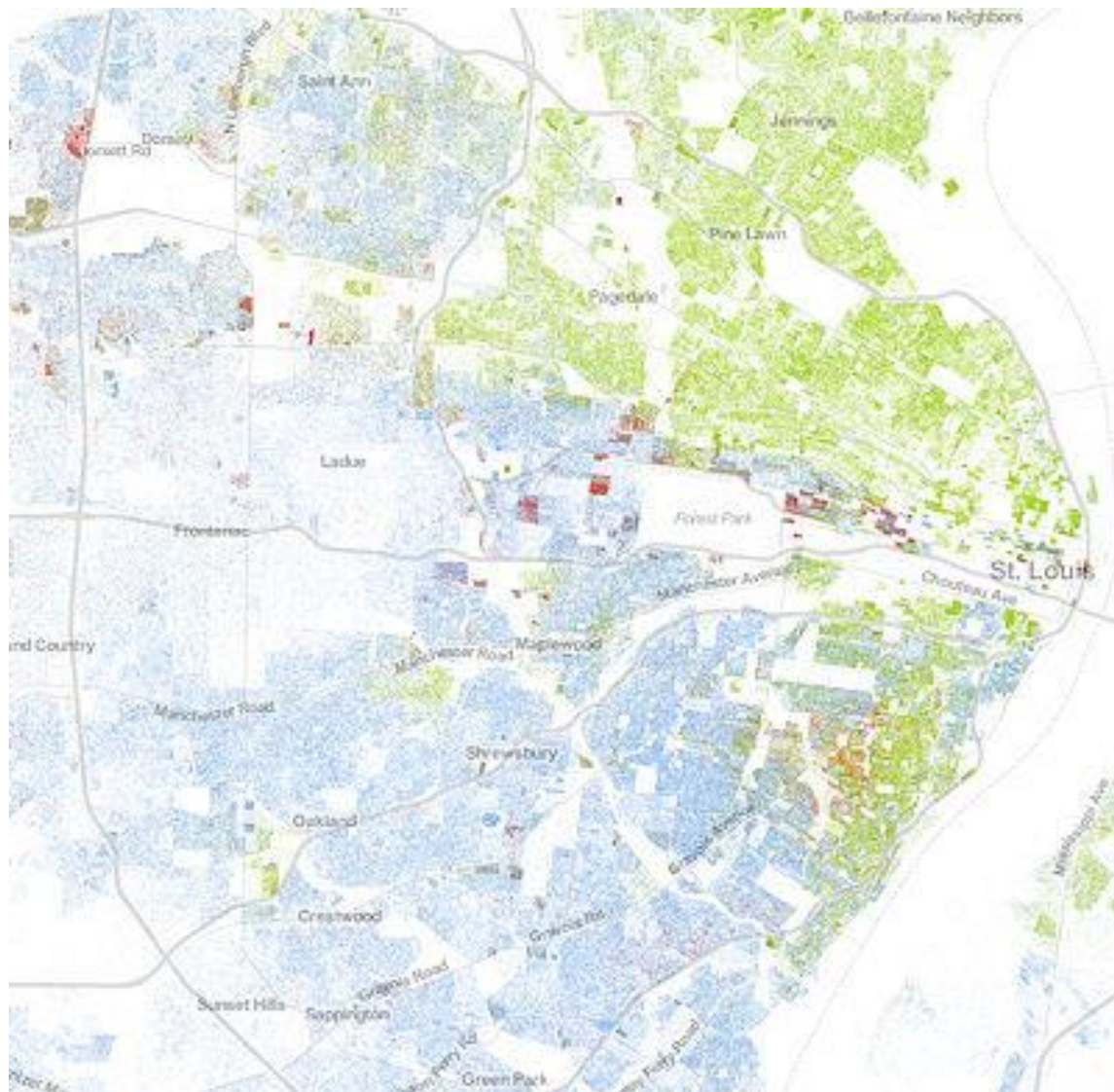
Growing up in an affluent suburb just south of the divide, I was not especially aware of the racial segregation of the city, although looking back, my experience only serves to confirm that segregation. The only times I really went north of Delmar was when I was volunteering or lost. To understand why, in 2017, this segregation is still very much the status quo in St. Louis and in most urban metropolises, it is necessary to look at the historically racist intentions of zoning and at the federal, state, and local policies that were explicitly intended to create racially segregated cities. When addressing contemporary urban segregation, we often place the blame solely on individuals’ personal prejudice and white flight (a term that describes the large scale

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<sup>1</sup> Erica Frankenberg explores and expands upon this relationship in “The Role of Residential Segregation in Contemporary School Segregation.”

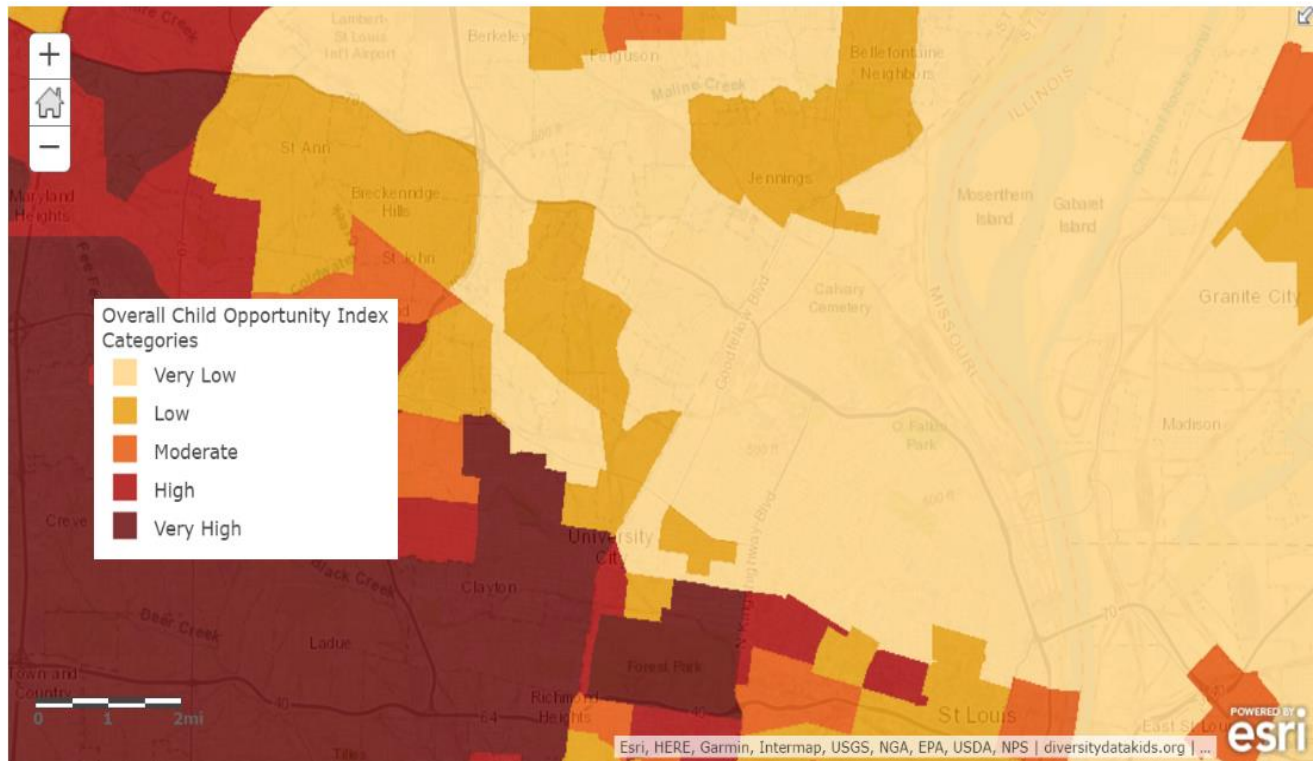


migration of white people from racially mixed regions to racially homogenous areas), and while this certainly plays a part, it overlooks the fact that governmental action was intended to, and did, segregate urban areas, including greater St. Louis. It is these explicitly racist actions that continue to determine patterns of racial segregation today. This residential apartheid in turn helps explain the ineffectiveness of the school integration process in the decades after *Brown v. Board*, as well as the educational segregation that exists today. Before delving into an exploration of these factors it is helpful to look at figure five and figure six, both maps of greater St. Louis, to clearly visualize racial segregation in St. Louis.



**Figure 5: Racial Dot Map of St. Louis**

([http://www.occasionalplanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/racialdotmap\\_03.jpg](http://www.occasionalplanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/racialdotmap_03.jpg). Each dot on the map is colored coded by race and ethnicity. Blue dots represent whites, African-Americans are coded as green, Asian Americans as red, and Hispanic Americans as orange. All other racial categories are color coded as brown.)



**Figure 6: Child Opportunity Map of St. Louis** (Diversity Data Kids. The Child Opportunity Index is calculated based on Education, Health & Built Environment and Neighborhood Social & Economic Opportunity indicators.)

To begin, tracing the underpinnings of residential segregation all the way back to The Missouri Compromise, when Missouri entered the youthful Union as a slave state, makes sense, but is not practical in the context of this thesis. Instead, I'll begin by looking at the initial implementation of racist zoning policies in STL. St. Louis's first City Plan Commission was appointed in 1911, and Harland Bartholomew was chosen as the full time planning engineer in 1916 (Rothstein 8). He made no secret of the racial intentions of St. Louis's zoning, stating one goal was to "preserv[e] the more desirable residential neighborhoods," and to "[prevent movement into] finer residential districts ... by colored people" (Rothstein 8). To this end, the

Planning Commission developed zoning rules that defined boundaries of industrial, commercial, multi-family residential, and single-family residential property with overt racial purpose. In “The Making of Ferguson: Public Policies at the Root of its Troubles,” Richard Rothstein asserts that “a neighborhood filled with single-family homes whose deeds prohibited black residence or prohibited resale to blacks was almost certain to receive a ‘first residential’ zoning designation that prohibited future construction of multifamily, commercial, or industrial buildings” (8). In contrast, the Commission adopted an ordinance in 1919 that designated zones for future industrial development if they were in or adjacent to neighborhoods with substantial black populations (Rothstein 10). These neighborhoods were zoned not only to permit industry (including environmentally harmful industry), but also taverns, liquor stores, nightclubs, and ‘houses of prostitution’ in African American neighborhoods. Such establishments prohibited as violations of the zoning ordinance in residential districts elsewhere. After this first ordinance, the Commission continued to issue classifications and variances based on the racial makeup of different areas. Rothstein cites multiple occasions on which the commission changed an area’s zoning from residential to industrial if African American families began to move in.

In “The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities,” John Silver asserts that the racial zoning movement had basically run its course by the beginning of the 1940s. This is certainly not to say that the racial imperative of zoning disappeared, however. Federal and local policies were still very much concerned with erecting racial barriers, and as Silver writes, “the substitute for racial zoning was a race based planning process that marshalled a wide array of planning interventions in the service of creating separate communities” (11).

St. Louis’s de-facto zoning ordinances mirrored the guidelines set forth by the Federal Housing Administration. Created in 1934 as a part of Roosevelt’s New Deal, the FHA promised

a loan program that guaranteed the mortgages of qualified borrowers, and repaid lenders if borrowers defaulted. The FHA rated metropolitan areas on a scale from A to D, based in large part on racial composition. The agency's manual stated, "If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes" (Bell 24). Therefore, racially integrated neighborhoods (which were classified as such by virtue of having just a few black residents) were given a D rating, and those seeking to purchase a home in those neighborhoods were not awarded loans. This served to further solidify racial segregation patterns, as those who were able to purchase homes in white neighborhoods were granted loans, while those who wished to live in racially mixed neighborhoods were denied any government assistance. Even when the FHA guidelines did not explicitly create or enforce segregation it was implicated in segregationist practices. Indeed, regarding the FHAs deference to private sector attitudes Christopher Bonastia asserts that "the close links forged between employees of FHA and private-sector actors (builders, realtors, bankers and so on) had two important consequences for public policy. The first is that the coziness between FHA and the private sector made corruption within the agency more likely. These close ties also led the federal government to accept without objection the segregationist practices of the private sector; in turn, the federal acceptance of, and even preference for, segregation legitimated private-sector practices with respect to race"(57). This deference reinforced the FHA's racist actions, and further set the stage for segregation as a governmental policy.

While outright governmental action certainly created and enforced racial segregation in urban regions, lack of governmental action against private-sector practices that increased segregation also played a significant role. This was undoubtedly the case with racially restrictive covenants that began as private agreements that were either ignored or condoned by the federal



and local governments, and were later adopted as public policy. A restrictive covenant is a clause in a property deed or lease that limits what the owner of that land or lease can do with it. Restrictive covenants further allow surrounding property owners, with the same or similar covenants in their deeds, to enforce the terms of those covenants in court. While the Commission in St. Louis and planning commissions across the country were developing racially restrictive zoning rules to control the movement of black populations, private real estate agents and white citizens were attaching these covenants to property deeds. The first such covenant was recorded in St. Louis in 1910 (Rothstein 13). Rothstein goes on to explain that “in St. Louis, the Real Estate Exchange provided a ‘Uniform Restriction Agreement’ for neighborhood associations to use. By 1945, about 300 neighborhood covenants were in force” (14).

The covenants were either clauses attached by homebuilders to property deeds that prohibited all buyers from ever selling to an African-American or allowing the house to be occupied by one, or they took the form of mutual agreements signed by a neighborhood association of homebuilders stipulating the same practices. In both cases however, exceptions were usually made for live-in domestic servants. The Real Estate Exchange in St. Louis and elsewhere was very often a signatory in these agreements, and Missouri courts supported these covenants by invalidating sales that violated them (Rothstein 14). In regards to further government involvement in these covenants the 1959 United States Commission on Civil Rights’ annual report explained how “for the first 16 years of its life, FHA itself actually encouraged the use of racially restrictive covenants. It not only acquiesced in their use but in fact contributed to perfecting them... The [1938 FHA *Underwriting Manual*] contained a model restrictive covenant which FHA strongly recommended for inclusion in all sales contracts.” When a sale to

an African American person did slip through segregationists' vigilance, neighborhoods quickly flipped from white to black as white flight ensued.

From their inception activists and regular homebuyers fought the legality of such covenants nation-wide. One of the most significant developments in the battle against restrictive covenants came in 1948 with the St. Louis case of *Shelley v. Kraemer*. In 1945 the Shelleys, a black couple, purchased a home on Labadie Avenue from a white woman, unaware that the home was covered by a restrictive covenant. Owners of surrounding property covered by the covenant filed suit requesting that the Shelleys be denied possession of the home and divested of the title. The trial court found in favor of the Shelleys, determining that they didn't know the property contained a restrictive covenant denying occupancy to anyone who wasn't white (*Shelley v. Kraemer*, 1948). This initial decision was reversed by the Supreme Court of Missouri, and was then appealed to the US Supreme Court, where the court agreed to hear it with *Sipes v. McGhee*, a similar case from Detroit. In the case, the court evaluated whether the Fourteenth Amendment could prevent racially restrictive covenants. Past cases had already established that the Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of equal protection did not apply to property or to discriminatory private behavior. As the court said, "That Amendment erects no shield against merely private conduct, however discriminatory or wrongful" (*Shelley v. Kraemer* 1948). The court held therefore, that restrictive covenants themselves did not violate anyone's rights. However, in an inventive interpretation, the court found for the petitioners, claiming that court enforcement of racially restrictive covenants constitutes state action implicating the Fourteenth Amendment. In analyzing whether judicial action constitutes state action, and therefore state enforcement of discrimination, the court states:

These are not cases, as has been suggested, in which the States have merely abstained from action, leaving private individuals free to impose such discriminations as they see

fit. Rather, these are cases in which the States have made available to such individuals the full coercive power of government to deny to petitioners, on the grounds of race or color, the enjoyment of property rights in premises which petitioners are willing and financially able to acquire and which the grantors are willing to sell. The difference between judicial enforcement and non-enforcement of the restrictive covenants is the difference to petitioners between being denied rights of property available to other members of the community and being accorded full enjoyment of those rights on an equal footing” (19).

In other words, white homeowners could attach as many restrictive covenants as they desired to their property; but if a homeowner sued to implement a covenant, the Court’s enforcement of it would be state action in violation of the constitution. Although this case was definitely a victory for anti-segregationists, it sadly did not bring an end to restrictive covenants. Many neighborhood organizations still advocated their use, often changing the language so that it was not racially restrictive in order to comply with the law following *Shelley v. Kraemer*. The decision did however, allow the NAACP to convince the FHA to no longer underwrite loans to racially restrictive properties—although it took the FHA two years to announce this change in policy (20).

While zoning rules and restrictive covenants created segregation and affected future segregation, they did not work alone, and public housing developments were employed by city officials to increase and solidify segregation especially in previously integrated neighborhoods. At the beginning of the New Deal the Public Works Administration (PWA) put a public housing program into effect that stipulated a “neighborhood composition rule.” Rothstein summarizes the effect of this rule, writing that

public housing projects could not alter the racial composition of neighborhoods in which they were located. Projects located in white areas could house only white tenants, those in black areas could house only black tenants, and projects in integrated neighborhoods could be integrated. Going further, the PWA segregated projects even in neighborhoods where there was no such previous pattern (12).

After the construction of seven federally-subsidized but privately-owned housing units across the country (one of which, the all-white Neighborhood Gardens, was placed in St. Louis, the PWA changed its focus to publicly-financed and publicly-owned housing). The Desoto-Carr project in St. Louis exemplifies the evolution of these units during the thirties and forties. In 1934 the city of St. Louis suggested razing the racially integrated, low-income DeSoto-Carr neighborhood to construct a whites-only housing project for two-parent families. After objections were raised St. Louis planned a blacks-only project as well in order to meet the government's standards for non-discriminatory funding. Eventually the city designated the DeSoto-Carr project (renamed Carr Square) for African Americans and moved the project designated for whites (named Clinton-Peabody) to the south. Of the projects' construction Jason Heathcott, a St. Louis urban scholar, claims, "the City Plan Commission, the St. Louis Housing Authority, the mayor's office, and the Board of Aldermen conspired to transform two multiethnic mixed-race neighborhoods – one on the north side and one on the south side – into racially homogenous projects" (Rothstein 14).

For civil rights activists the struggle for desegregation involved more costly trade-offs when it came to housing than in other policy areas. Especially on the local level, it was difficult for black leaders to fight against low-income housing that was so necessary, even though its creation would typically increase segregation. In the late 1950s one black newspaper editor was quoted as saying, "We think public housing is wrong in the way it's being handled, but on the other hand we can't oppose it too much because we don't want to penalize people who need housing somewhere of some kind...so what do we do? We just mumble about it" (Bonastia 67). The dilemma between desegregation and the need for housing definitely held true in St. Louis. Not only was there a tradeoff between the provision of needed housing and an increase in segregation, but the all black housing was often very poor quality, and lacked essential services.

In the 1950s the city constructed the Pruitt-Igoe towers specifically to house low-income African Americans. In 1972 the federal government evicted all residents and dynamited the towers, as the Housing Authorities' neglect of services and facilities had led to such deteriorated conditions that the towers had become a national symbol of dysfunctional public housing (Rothstein 14).

Public Housing was often financed by funds designated for urban renewal, which, like public housing, urban renewal plans often led to further residential segregation. The National Housing Act of 1949 "authorized loans of up to \$1 billion and grants up to \$500 million to localities undertaking urban redevelopment and slum clearance" (Bonastia 68). (It is important to note that most of the allotment and redevelopment was overseen by the FHA). Silver describes the difficulty in recognizing the difference between planning initiatives designed for overall community enhancement and initiatives designed solely to enhance and reinforce racial segregation as trends moved from "racial zoning to 'racially informed planning'" (12). Indeed, many urban renewal plans that were touted as the former undoubtedly had the effect of the latter.

As evidenced by the Carr Square and Clinton-Peabody developments in St. Louis urban renewal often broke up previously integrated housing. It also displaced African-Americans from good neighborhoods, reduced the available supply of living space for them, and constructed housing beyond the financial means of many African-Americans in formerly affordable areas. By 1956, 60 percent of the people displaced by urban renewal plans were nonwhite, and of the dislocated families moving into public housing nine out of ten were black (Bonastia 70). Of the urban renewal efforts implemented by the National Housing Act, Bonastia points out that "it is during these times of federal investment in housing that the government is particularly poised to fight discrimination" (69). Yet, the government chose to do nothing with this opportunity.

The annexation of the unincorporated community of Elmwood Park, in 1950, by the adjacent town of Olivette in St. Louis County exemplifies the inherent racism and racist intentions of many urban renewal schemes. Elmwood was bisected by railroad tracks and Olivette annexed the portion north of the city and south of the railroad tracks in what it claimed was simply a move to “straighten” the city’s boundaries (Rothstein 23). This claim proved dubious, for after the annexation Olivette provided no services to its new Elmwood Park neighborhood, erected a barbed-wire fence between the neighborhood and the nearest white subdivision, and did not inform the newly annexed residents of the change until it started evicting them and auctioning off their homes for nonpayment of taxes and other fees. The true aim of the annexation appeared to be to force Elmwood residents from their homes so the area could be developed industrially and thus increase tax revenues to Olivette, as well as to solidify the barrier between Olivette and the remaining African-American community in Elmwood. A decade later, in 1960, Olivette’s annexation plan had not succeeded, as most of the residents of Elmwood still remained and had succeeded in paying their outstanding taxes. To rectify this, Olivette obtained federal urban renewal funds that allowed it to condemn the land of Elmwood, and attract industrial development, as well as to demolish homes in Elmwood by claiming they were too dilapidated for rehabilitation. After rezoning the annexed area as industrial the city began charging residents rent to live in houses they previously owned free of mortgages. After initially declining to enforce the requirement that the City of Olivette relocate the displaced residents as specified by federal urban renewal policy, the government finally required Olivette to address the displacement after protests. Olivette solved this by building 10 housing units within the industrial section of the industrial zone, which it then separated from the middle class section with a park. These new units were all black and regardless, many former Elmwood

residents moved to the all-black suburb of Wellston or to the more integrated suburb of University City.

While urban renewal actions by suburbs like Olivette forced African-Americans to seek housing back in the city, St. Louis and other cities pursued renewal and redevelopment plans designed to attract white suburbanites back into the city and force African Americans to relocate to the suburbs. In the 1950s St. Louis urban renewal projects demolished mostly African-American housing and erected monuments, interstate highways, hotels, and middle class housing in its place. Sometimes, both nationally and in St. Louis, when an African American neighborhood was razed, the anticipated redevelopment project was never implemented. This was the case in the Kosciuski Urban renewal project in St. Louis, which, in the early 1960s, required the demolition of an African American neighborhood of 70 blocks that remains vacant over 50 years later (Allen, "A Brief History of the Kosciuski Urban Renewal Area"). In the 50s and 60s by design, and in later decades as well, urban renewal served to create or accentuate clear-cut racial boundaries.

Another public policy that is important to explore in examining the development and continuation of public housing is the denial of municipal services to "ghetto" areas in St. Louis and elsewhere. As highly concentrated black populations formed in the north side of the city due to racial zoning, restrictive covenants, and other public practices, they became increasingly run down as services like trash collection, street lighting, and emergency response were not as adequate as services in white neighborhoods. (This consistently held true for public housing as well, as evidenced by the Pruitt-Igoe Towers). The lack of these services allowed whites to equate poor conditions with black families and further entrench resistance to residential segregation. The stereotypes created by these conditions likely contributed to

patterns of white flight, or white residents moving out of residential areas when African Americans moved in. In this way, governmental policies can be held responsible for fueling this flight.

At the same time, even when analyzing the governmental policies that created and perpetuated residential segregation, it is important to note the role white hostility played in restricting housing choices for African Americans. Scholars refer to acts of intimidation and violence directed at racial minorities that have moved into an all-white neighborhood as “move-in violence.” Unfortunately it is possible to find multiple examples of such harassment both in the past and today. Regarding this vicious response to attempted neighborhood integration Bell writes that “by attacking the homes of minorities who move into white neighborhoods, perpetrators violate entrenched cultural and legal understandings about the home. For targets of anti-integrationist violence, home is not a place of security” (5). The perpetrators of move-in violence make an explicit statement about who belongs in a community and who does not. And while this violence served to reinforce governmental segregation policies in the past, today it is primarily an extralegal way to continue the entrenched segregation of the past by subverting statutory protections. Move-in violence sends the message to minorities that they are not welcome in a particular neighborhood, and greatly raises the stakes of someone seeking to move into a majority white neighborhood. Understanding the powerful effects of racial zoning policies, racially restrictive covenants, segregationist urban renewal, and other mutually reinforcing public policies as well as the effects of personal racism and racist action is essential to understanding the historic and current state of residential segregation. This understanding also begins to explain why, after the St. Louis Board of Education indicated its intention to comply with the mandate of Brown



v. Board shortly after it was handed down in 1954, by 1972 almost no progress had been made towards integration of St. Louis Public Schools. Instead, segregation that relegated black students to underfunded, resource-poor schools remained the status quo until one mother stepped up to demand change.

***-Chapter 2 People Power Meets the Courts: Minnie Liddell and Judge William Hungate-***

**Section 1: Minnie Liddell**

One figure that emerges as a vital pioneer in the history of school desegregation in St. Louis is an African-American mother named Minnie Liddell. In the 1940s and 50s, St. Louis city and county operated under a constitutional mandate of a segregated educational system. This kept African American students at a disadvantage and was needlessly expensive, as St. Louis county school districts paid tuition and transportation to send black students to segregated schools in the city (Heaney and Uchitelle 64). At the time of *Brown v. Board* in 1954, the city of St. Louis had the second-largest segregated public school district in the United States. When the case outlawed this explicit legal segregation, however, thanks to the division of the city and the county and fierce residential segregation, the stage was still set for *de facto* segregation to prosper in St. Louis. Though many activists groups expressed excitement and urged the Board of Education to move with haste and “put St. Louis in front with leaders in desegregation,” and the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* also declared that the sooner integration be achieved the better, the Board moved brutally slowly. Thus in 1956 the suburban district Clayton (Ladue’s rival!) reported: “Integration complete at all levels, Negro enrollment 2 percent” (Bouma and Hoffman, 73). In fact, in 1962 *The St. Louis American* reported that, largely thanks to housing discrimination, segregation had only gotten worse in the previous seven years (Heaney and Uchitelle, 75).

By the time Minnie Liddell’s children were attending St. Louis public schools in the 1970s very little had changed. As part of the St. Louis Board of Education’s post-*Brown v.*

Board “desegregation plan” school zones were redrawn to be almost identical to boundaries of racially identifiable neighborhoods and black children were continuously being reassigned to schools by the board. Liddell’s oldest child, Craton, attended one school for kindergarten, another one for first, second, and third grade, and yet a different one for fourth and fifth grade. Many of these schools were in dilapidated buildings with insufficient resources and overcrowding (Norwood, 8-9). Due to overcrowding in the neighborhood schools Craton was assigned to a predominantly white school in South St. Louis as part of a policy known as ‘intact busing.’ His whole class, including his teacher, were bused to the school where a room was set aside for them separate from the white students. Everything was scheduled so that black and white students would not even cross paths. They arrived, departed, ate lunch, and had recess on a different schedule than the rest of the school, and some parents alleged that black and white students even had to drink from the water fountains at designated times, and enter the school through different doors (Norwood, 10). After a year at this school, Craton was reassigned to the newly opened Yeatman, a nearby school whose location allowed Liddell to get involved in her son’s class. However, after a year there, she was notified that because of overcrowding at Yeatman her children were all being reassigned to Bates, a nineteenth-century school that had been closed because of poor conditions. Worse yet, Bates was much farther away from the Liddell’s home and it would have been Craton’s fourth school in five years (Rias). Craton’s experience was representative of the experience of black students attending public schools at the time. Even though school boundary lines were almost constantly shifting, the shifts seemed to always keep black children in black schools, or segregated within a white school in the case of intact busing. But now Minnie Liddell had had enough. She began to reach out to other parents who she believed would share her concerns. Minnie’s campaign, which would end up creating

an entirely new system of desegregation, started out through her completely grassroots organizing. She described channeling her frustration with her son's educational experience, saying "I simply started ringing doorbells and talking...because all of us up in that area were being put out of that school. And I began to walk and ring doorbells and see if other parents were as upset by this as I was" (Norwood 5). Through her outreach Minnie galvanized other parents who were concerned and outraged by the unstable and unpredictable education their children were receiving. Together, with Minnie Liddell as the leader, they formed the group Concerned Parents of North St. Louis (aka Concerned Parents).

Minnie Liddell and Concerned Parents demanded to be heard, but the school board refused to meet with them. In response, the parents began picketing outside Bates, and called for a boycott of the school. The boycott lasted for six weeks, and half of the student body participated (Norwood 11). In response, the Board eventually agreed to allow parents to send their children to the school of their choice, but would not provide transportation to anywhere other than Bates. Minnie Liddell chose to send her children to Simmons elementary, where she and her husband had attended school, and her husband, Charles, drove them to and from school every day (Heaney and Uchitelle 19). This was not a satisfactory solution, and Concerned Parents was indignant when the School Board immediately halted the intended transfer of a small group of white students from one school in South St. Louis to another one nearby when white parents expressed concern. The group doubled down on their demands for better schools and opportunities for their children, although they continued to face resistance. Liddell described her response to the impassivity of the School Board, saying "I kind of changed the structure of their meetings, though. They couldn't make me sit down. I talked as long as I wanted to, and I said what I wanted to say. I think [the president of the Board] thought I was crazy for a long time.

The more we were rebuffed, the more angry I became. I saw these people with total control of my children's lives and futures in their hands, and none of them really gave a damn" (Norwood 12). The group continued to grow, but they faced resistance outside of the School Board as well. Minnie Liddell recalled that they were turned away the first time they approached the NAACP, because according to the president of the local chapter "schools in St. Louis [were] not segregated. The NAACP took care of that in the 60s" (Norwood 4). Despite the lack of official response and the rejections the group faced, they had an opportunity when the Acting School Superintendent Ernest Jones agreed to meet privately with just Minnie and Charles Liddell. It was during this meeting that Minnie resolved to truly create change. In an interview for the book *Unending Struggle: The Long Road to an Equal Education in St. Louis* Minnie recalled that Superintendent Jones finally told her that he'd been working in the system for twenty-seven years and that "you can't change a thing" (Heaney and Uchitelle 19). Looking back on this meeting Liddell claimed: "That's the day we set about to change things in the St. Louis schools" (19).

The parent group contacted two lawyers who had been recommended by a local pastor, William Russell and Joseph Duffy, who agreed to take on the case even though Concerned Parents couldn't offer any payment. The lawyers told the group they would need to take on the necessary research and the parents began collecting data on the physical conditions of schools, the distribution of resources, student achievement, and student assignments. They discovered patterns of the Board repeatedly redrawing attendance lines and constantly opening and closing black schools. Liddell and the Concerned Parents raised money and on February 18, 1972 they filed a class-action suit against the St. Louis Board of Education on behalf of children in St. Louis who were being forced to attend segregated schools.

The lawsuit waited in the justice system for five years before it came to court, but during that time the case drew all kinds of attention and Minnie received both encouragement and threats. When the trial finally came before the court Minnie made a powerful impression on the witness stand. A former anti-segregationist white parent, Dorothy Springer, who later became friends with Minnie described her stately bearing at the trial saying “She filled the doors. It almost looked like the doors weren’t big enough for her presence. Her voice was firm. It had conviction. It had compassion,” (Norwood 16).

In 1979 the District Court Judge, James Meredith, found that the Board of Education was not responsible for creating segregated schools as it did not create housing segregation, but that it was responsible for remedying the situation (Rias). Both sides immediately appealed and in 1980 the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Meredith’s decision, and said that both the Board and the State were responsible for maintaining a segregated school system. The case was remanded back to Meredith who went even further and found that the state defendants were the primary constitutional violators and must take responsibility for desegregation. The court’s order also approved a comprehensive desegregation plan to take effect at the start of the 1980-1981 school year. The seven essential elements of the voluntary desegregation plan included “reassigning students to achieve the greatest possible number of desegregated schools (defined as 30-50 percent black); establishing magnet and alternative schools designed to attract students of all races from throughout the St. Louis area (this part of the plan was created by Minnie Liddell, based on research she had done); organizing a middle school system for grades 6, 7, and 8, to facilitate clustering, pairing, and other integrative efforts; instituting and expanding specialty and part-time integrated programs; facilitating the student transfers that were allowable under the plan; initiating cooperative interdistrict desegregation programs; providing for integration of and

special training for personnel; and developing a comprehensive community relations program” (Heaney and Uchitelle 95).

Craton Liddell, the man who had been the child at the heart of the case that led the largest inter-district school desegregation program, and one of the largest school choice programs in the country passed away January 3rd, 2013 when he was 43 (“Craton Liddell’s Legacy”). Craton had mixed emotions about his name and legacy being forever attached to historic case. As a child, Craton, along with his siblings, overwhelmed with the pressure and racist hate the family received from opponents to integration and the toll it took on their lives, would beg his mother to abandon the case, but Minnie Liddell held firm in her conviction to see the long struggle through to its end. She claimed however, that as Craton got older he began to appreciate the historic significance of his involvement and the outcome of the case. At a March 2012 conference at Washington University School of Law in Minnie Liddell’s honor he said that his mother’s unwavering determination to desegregation and access to quality public education wasn’t “just about [our] family. It was about kids who hadn’t even been born yet” (Norwood 26).

Both Craton and Minnie Liddell lived to see the final 1999 settlement of the case (Minnie Liddell passed away in 2004 at age 64), which would terminate the state’s financial obligation to the Transfer Program as well as exempt county districts from participation. The 1999 settlement made county district participation truly voluntary, allowed the state to begin phasing out their funding obligations, and transformed the group that oversees inter-district transfers from the Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Committee to the Voluntary Interdistrict Choice Corporation. During the hearing that led up to the settlement Minnie Liddell, who was recovering from a stroke at the time, made an appearance in order to speak her mind again. Words slurred from the stroke she told the court, “I got out of my sickbed hoping I would hear

something new and different, but I didn't. . . . I hear the state still trying to deny their guilt in perpetuating segregation in 100-and-some years in the state of Missouri, mandated by law. . . . We are asking for the same thing today, 25 years later, as we were asking in 1972: that is a quality, integrated education. Everyone wants to know whether integration works. Well, I can tell you what don't work—segregated education didn't work. It didn't work for me and it didn't work for a lot of black people. You owe it to the children of St. Louis to provide them some choices and a quality education. And if you don't see that happens, all of us are going to pay for it. Each and every one of us is going to pay for it" (Norwood 25). Although the state, through every successive attorney general after John Ashcroft, had fought the desegregation process, during the settlement hearing the state officially apologized for supporting segregated education. Ultimately, Liddell gave the settlement her blessing as it provided some closure to decades long litigation. Given that the 1999 settlement did not totally end the program, but rather scheduled program termination for the end of the 2008 school year, and that the VICC and voluntary participating districts voted for an extension of the program in 2007 Minnie Liddell did not live to see the implementation of her struggle and hard work dismantled. Now that the program must legally come to an end it may seem like Liddell's powerful dream for equitable opportunity in education may also be reaching its expiration date (especially since this opportunity has already been downsized). However, from the beginning Liddell's vision was almost constantly on trial, and she and her allies in the battle for desegregation had to fight every step of the way, and yet they had previously unimaginable success. The timeline for the phase-out of the VICC and the VTP mean that the last transfer students will be admitted to the program in 2023. This means that the VICC, educators, and activists have seven years to continue to observe the program and study the ways in which it evolves. And many are already thinking about options for the



continuation of the Transfer Program. Furthermore, with the St. Louis community, encouraged by organizations like the Ferguson Report and by national news coverage, beginning to respond to the need to think critically and engage in thoughtful conversations about race and segregation in the region, now is the time to draw inspiration from Minnie Liddell's powerful grassroots activism and unwavering conviction.

## **Section 2: Judge William Hungate**

Judge Meredith should be recognized as a judicial architect in the building of a sweeping plan to desegregate St. Louis schools. However, he resigned from the case for health reasons on December 22, 1980, almost nine years after it had first entered the court (Heaney, Uchitelle, 102). When Judge Meredith left the case was at an impasse, largely due to the reluctance of the suburban school districts to participate at all. It was at this moment of deadlock, when the case could have conceivably extended for many more years, that Judge William L. Hungate was appointed to preside over the Liddell litigation. Judge Hungate had been on the federal bench of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri for just a year when he was assigned to the case the same day Judge Meredith resigned (Heaney and Uchitelle 107). Despite this newness, by 1983 Judge Hungate had put in place the largest attempt to desegregate a major metropolis. He was firm and steadfast in negotiating and cementing a plan that was as true as possible to the committee and Liddell's original vision, and bold and visionary in its scope. Given his official role, he received much of the backlash and anger that was directed at the controversial plan, but he defended the plan throughout political attacks and posturing, continuing litigation, and state and county district efforts to minimize their involvement and responsibility. Over winter break I had the opportunity to dig into The Hungate Collection at The State Historical Society of Missouri, a collection of documents relating to the case that the judge

and his staff collected and saved, and which has only very recently become available. From his notes, to relevant studies and books, to letters (both positive and hateful), to newspaper editorials and letters-to-the-editor, the documents reveal the Judge's thinking, the progression of the case, as well as the public's response to the Voluntary Transfer Program. In the first footnote of section VIII of Judge Hungate's memorandum of the case, he deflects the credit for the implementation of the Voluntary Transfer Program and the other measures of desegregation, writing that "While the media and some public officials incessantly refer to this as the 'Hungate Plan,' and although the compliment implied inflates me with legitimate pride, it is nevertheless to be denied! This plan is the result of the efforts of learned counsel and leading educators throughout the St. Louis community." (Hungate Box 12-119, 57224). That the plan was the result of collaboration between, and contributions from, a multitude of community activists, specialists, and educators is undeniably true, but Judge Hungate's role and actions deserve to be highlighted as well and the fact is that the volume of documents saved because of his official position allows me to do so.

When the deadline for the response to the Voluntary Transfer plan passed, only five districts (Clayton, Kirkwood, Pattonville, Ritenour, and University City) had approved it. Judge Hungate immediately added the remaining 18 county school districts (Affton, Bayless, Brentwood, Ferguson, Florissant, Hancock Place, Hazelwood, Jennings, Ladue, Lindbergh, Maplewood-Richmond Heights, Mehlville, Normandy, Parkway-Riverview Gardens, Rockwood, Valley Park, Webster Groves, and Wellston) as defendants in the case. He then intensely raised the stakes for the county districts and announced that not only would he make a desegregation plan mandatory if the districts could not agree to the voluntary plan, he would order the consolidation of the St. Louis city and county public school districts, creating one unified

district. This would of course mean that schools in the city and county would be drawing funding from the same tax base, and that county schools would have likely have no choice in terms of integration. It essentially gave the noncompliant school districts two options; they could participate willingly in the courts city-county desegregation plan or be forced to take part in a larger mandatory plan after fighting a court battle they would almost certainly lose. This threat spurred the recalcitrant districts into motion, and they immediately began sending in their approval of the Voluntary Transfer Plan. Finally, in February of 1983, the districts all agreed to the plan, and in September it was underway, with 2,500 city transfer students enrolled. The Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council (VICC) was created to oversee student transfers and voluntary teacher exchanges, and the State of Missouri was ordered to pay the costs of the voluntary interdistrict plan and also pay one-half of the cost of improvements in the city schools

footnote: in his decision Judge Hungate wondered: “If the state of Missouri had the power, through its constitution and laws, to enforce educational segregation, why does it not have the power to eradicate it?”) One year later more than 5,500 St. Louis area students were participating in the voluntary St. Louis Student Transfer program, crossing school boundaries in order to attend the school of their choice and Minnie Liddell’s vision to change St. Louis schools had come to pass. (“Desegregation Timeline”). Judge Hungate’s files, through his compilation of resources, notes, letters, studies, and newspaper and magazine articles reveal his thinking towards the settlement and the varying reactions from the public to the plan’s initial implementation and its operation over the next sixteen years.

Judge Hungate’s files revealed that he was dismayed to learn of the high degree of educational segregation that existed twenty-five years after *Brown v. Board*. To understand this enduring segregation he believed it was necessary to put the questions this case raised in the

relevant historical context. To achieve this Judge Hungate referred to the book *Inside U.S.A.* by John Gunther in his opinions, and a much-highlighted copy of this book is saved in his archives (Box No. 72-100c(4)). Published in 1947, the book chronicles Gunther's travels through 48 states and his observations during that time. Hungate referred to and quoted Gunther's impressions of Missouri who claimed that "Negroes call Missouri a 'southern state with northern exposure.'" He goes on to say that "the most interesting over-all aspect of the negro issue in Missouri is in education." While Gunther focuses on the state of segregation in higher education, it is interesting that he is already identifying educational segregation in Missouri as a focal issue, seven years before *Brown v. Board* made it a national issue. Judge Hungate used *Inside U.S.A.* to offer a comprehensive background of segregation in St. Louis, beginning with the Missouri Compromise and covering the state's division in the Civil War. The archives also contain copies of the research and reports he commissioned about the feasibility and impacts of school desegregation in St. Louis.<sup>2</sup> Other reports and texts that Judge Hungate was reading over the course of the case for context and guidance--some of which he received from educators, desegregation experts, and even concerned citizens, along with notes urging him to read and consider the content--included a pamphlet from the Citizens Commission on Civil Rights, "There Is No Liberty...A Report on Congressional Efforts to Curb the Federal Courts and Undermine the Brown Decision: October 1982"; a report from the American Bar Foundation, "Special Masters in the Pretrial development of Big Cases: Potential and Problems, 1982"; The State Historical Society's "Missouri Historical Review"; three research papers delivered in 1982 at the meeting

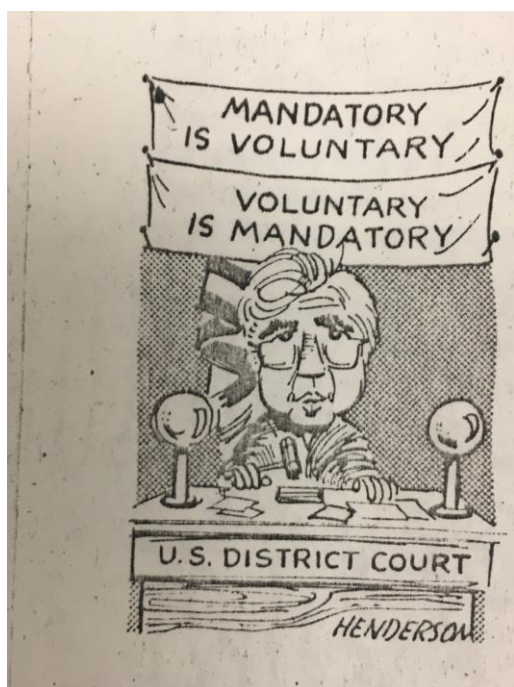
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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly a focus on the possibility of city-county district unification and examples of unified school metropolitan school districts in these reports (particularly in a large report titled "Final Report on the Feasibility of School Desegregation in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area: February 1, 1982") reveal that Judge Hungate did not consider this desegregation option merely a threat, but perhaps a possibility

of the the American Political Science Association entitled “Incrementalism, Pluralism, and Failure of School Desegregation”; another report for the same meeting, “Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of School Desegregation Plans”; a study on “Presidential Policy Making in Civil Rights” and “School Desegregation, White Flight, and Housing Values”; two contributions from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, “Executive Summary of The Final Report: An Examination of Desegregation Court Orders and School District Plans with Regard to Educational Components,” and “A Handbook for Inservice Education: Guidelines for Training, Multicultural Education, and Desegregation”; as well as journalistic reports on desegregation efforts in other cities, and law journals regarding jurisprudence and legal ethics. These research materials demonstrate the breadth of Judge Hungate’s attempt to develop a scope of understanding for the case.

Perhaps more compelling than the materials Judge Hungate was drawing information and inspiration from, are the articles and texts saved in the archives that create a picture of the range of responses to “his” desegregation plan. Many of the letters Judge Hungate received were anonymous and many were filled purely with racist hate, and I do not feel like reproducing them here would be productive. Some of the letters however, as well as the Letters to the Editor preserved in his files, are illustrative of overarching fears and concerns regarding the desegregation plan. A passage from the letter of an education major who planned to work in special education in St. Charles summed up the lack of connection that racial segregation imparts as he wrote “Why should St. Charles suffer for the problems that are going on in St. Louis?” (Hungate Collection). This idea--not our children, not our problem--can be heard in debates about education today. Another letter that captured a common thread in desegregation debates, Educational NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard), came from a white mother from Jefferson

County who wrote “I can honestly say my opposition has nothing to do with racial bias. I am not opposed to my children going to an integrated school, but I am violently opposed to my child going to a school anywhere that requires a 15-40 mile trip one way from our home.” Not only would the writer’s children not be called upon to travel anywhere--it was African-American children who would be bearing the burden of integration--Jefferson County was not a district that would participate in the VTP. This mother’s letter reveals the often irrational fear that exists around changes in education and integration.



(A cartoon from The St. Louis Globe-Democrat, a now defunct newspaper that was unfailing opposed to the desegregation plan, depicting Judge Hungate from July 15, 1981 saved in the Hungate Collection)

In an initial draft of his legal opinion Judge Hungate wrote, “The Court wishes to commend the educational and religious leaders of this community, together with the school officials and the attorneys in this cause, who must receive full credit for this historic settlement like none other achieved in this country, and far beyond the wildest dreams of the participants: a settlement agreement that would set the standards by which all other desegregation plans would

be measured; a settlement agreement which would bring to an end on an amicable voluntary basis, 11 years of emotional, complicated, and sometimes divisive litigation” (Tr. May 13, 1983, at 6). This is a lengthy quotation, but it truly captures the multitudes of communities and voices that came together to create a plan for school desegregation in St. Louis. It is these voices and perspectives, from Minnie Liddell to Judge Hungate that we must consider now in order to continue the legacy of integration and educational equity in St. Louis.

### ***-Chapter 3 St. Louis Responds to Desegregation-***

#### **Section 1: Public Reactions to the “Hungate Plan” and the Voluntary Transfer Program**

The Historical Society’s Hungate collection was a treasure trove of responses to the implementation and operation of the Voluntary Transfer Program. Judge Hungate and his staff collected and archived articles exploring, evaluating, and editorializing about the plan from mainstream sources like the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* newspaper, to more alternative sources like the *Riverfront Times*, as well as an array of Letters-to-the-Editor, and direct Letters-to-Judge-Hungate. In general the newspaper and magazine articles seem well-disposed to the VTP, or at least willing to evaluate outcomes of the plan before passing judgement. The *Post-Dispatch* in particular published several articles focusing on the successes of transfer students in the program, and on their experiences as well as the experiences and reactions of students and educators native to the district. The articles that helped Judge Hungate monitor the reception of what many called ‘his’ plan, also chronicled the political challenges to the desegregation plan, most notably from an anti-desegregation ticket that ran for the School Board in 1999 as well as the continuation of legal challenges to the VTP primarily from Missouri’s Attorneys General.

To provide some context around the VTP’s many legal challenges and extensions, since the final desegregation plan was implemented in St. Louis all of Missouri’s Attorneys General except Chris Koster (2009-17) and current AG Josh Hawley (who has been in office since January 7) have waged a legal battle against the plan. The gist of John Ashcroft’s, William Webster’s, and Jay Nixon’s argument was that St. Louis had had enough desegregation; it was



time to stop (even as soon as it had begun). A *St. Louis Post Dispatch* article from December 6, 1993 entitled “Desegregation Appeal Has None” details Jay Nixon’s motion to dismantle court-mandated desegregation. He claims that his appeal is a “break from the past” as he does acknowledge the state’s history of race-based segregation. However, his motion offers no future support for school desegregation. Nixon sought an outright end to the program. The article’s author makes clear that this motion was one in the long line of attempts to end the program and save the state money, and that the Attorneys Generals courted public opinion in this effort. He writes “During the 1980s, hardly a Supreme Court term passed without Attorney General John Ashcroft or William Webster filing an appeal in either the St. Louis or Kansas City case. They always lost but talked a lot about their fight on the campaign stump.”

In 1992 the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* ran a retrospective on the desegregation plan in St. Louis, a copy of which was included in Judge Hungate’s files. The paper included a short interview with Minnie Liddell who said that she was “glad” she began the whole process. While she believed she saw the school system’s failures still in dropouts and underprepared high school graduates in her work at the St. Louis Job Corps, she nevertheless claimed she didn’t see the blatant discrimination she remembered from her children’s school days. Her focus in that interview resonates with the work schools need to do today, as she spoke about the need to make schools welcoming environments and stated “educators have got to realize kids must have schools they want to go to. It must be enjoyable” (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2/16/92). The retrospective then offered two divergent opinions about the school desegregation case: “It’s Been Worth It” and “It Hasn’t Worked.” The former view is expressed by lawyer Kenneth Brostron, who was the St. Louis School Board’s lead advocate for the desegregation case since 1981, and although he is representing the optimistic view of the plan, and he does believe that the parties

involved in the case have managed to improve educational opportunities for children in St. Louis, he still expresses some major reservations about the success of the plan. He focuses on the continual cuts to funding that have “eviscerated” the comprehensive program, and states that the court reductions of financial costs over the years have reduced and limited the program's scope.<sup>3</sup> Representing the latter “It Hasn’t Worked” view is School Board member (since 1987) Thomas Bugel who, according to the *Post-Dispatch*, had become a leader of the mostly white opposition to the school desegregation program. In the article he calls desegregation a social engineering scheme that hasn’t worked. According to Bugel the fatal flaw of the desegregation plan from the beginning was “thinking you can improve the academic performance of black students simply by putting them in a class with white students,” and that it has only contributed to the decline of the city school system and caused white parents to move out of the city, and has not improved integration. This divide in opinion was represented by the Board of Education elections in 1991, coverage of which was well represented in the Hungate collection.

Like so many pieces of the story of desegregation in St. Louis this election is deserving of at least its own thesis as the two opposing slates, one anti-busing and the other less extreme but still supportive of an end to the Voluntary Transfer Program, offer a pertinent example of the rhetoric that existed and continues to exist around race-based desegregation. The anti-busing slate, organized by Thomas Bugel (the Board member who offered his opinion to the *Post-Dispatch*), consisted of five white board members all of whom resided in South St. Louis and called themselves Friends and Advocates of Neighborhood Schools of St. Louis (*St. Louis Post-*

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<sup>3</sup> In an undated letter to the *Post-Dispatch* that seems to be from around the same time the then president of the Riverview Gardens Board of Education makes a similar point, writing that he is in favor of the court mandated programs to provide equal education and integration, but wants to expose the difficulties his district encounter because of the method of financing and the unwillingness of the state administration to provide the necessary funding.

*Dispatch*, 3/24/91, Hungate Collection). The group's motto, "States Rights-Racial Integrity," revealed their racist agenda and calls to mind the rise of the white-supremacist, neo-nazi rhetoric of the "alt-right" today, and in fact the *Riverfront Times* reported that the group and their agenda was supported by a former Klu Klux Klan leader (*Riverfront Times*, 4/10-16/91, Hungate Collection). The *Riverfront Times* also produced an interview with Ruth Stone, a candidate on what the paper termed the "Bugel Brigade," who displayed an understanding of racial segregation completely divorced from a perspective of historical institutional racial discrimination and white supremacy, that excused her from any responsibility. She claimed that St. Louis is "not segregated" but at the same time asked, "Is it my fault that North St. Louis is black? There is a law that people can buy a home in any neighborhood they want. It is not the fault of the anti-busing slate that people live where they live. People live where they want to live. If you go back in history, when the Irish came to us, they lived together...and the children seemed to learn. They choose to live with their own people" (*Riverfront Times*, 4/10-16/91, Hungate Collection). In opposition to the Bugel Brigade was the slate 4 Candidates 4 Kids (also a Republican slate), with two white and two African-American candidates. In contrast to the previous group, one candidate had children who attended county schools through the Voluntary Transfer Program, and one had been an educator in the St. Louis Public Schools for over 20 years (*The Riverfront Times*, 1991, Hungate Collection). However, the group also wanted to end busing but believed the best way to do so was to comply with orders from the U.S. District Court concerning capital improvements and expansion of the magnet school program. They wanted to offer students a choice between attending a neighborhood school or a magnet school once court supervision ended (*The Riverfront Times*, 1991, Hungate Collection). Of course, neither faction nor any politician who sought an end to the Voluntary Transfer Program truly got their way for

many more years. Other articles saved in Judge Hungate's archives were wholly positive regarding the desegregation program from a *Post-Dispatch* article that highlighted the accomplishments of transfer students in county schools, to one that explored what county and city students had learned about diversity and multiculturalism, to one that celebrated what was going right in city schools.

One *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article from 1993 reveals the wide range of impacts on the students and school districts involved in the Voluntary Transfer Program, as well as the perception of that impact. The article was written in response to St. Louis Mayor Freeman Bosley Jr. calling for an end to court-ordered segregation. In the article, titled "Transferring Hope?; End of Desegregation Plan Could Save City Football," reporter Mike Eisenbath describes the differences between the world of city athletics ("aging athletic facilities. Saturday afternoon games that conflict with college fair. A few hundred fans - at the most - sitting on well-worn bleachers") and county athletics ("thick green grass on a field surrounded by a new all-weather track. Bright lights on a Friday night. Uniforms with players' names on the back. A raucous pep band blaring, dozens of cheerleaders and pompom girls dancing") and makes the case that ending the voluntary desegregation system and thus returning student athletes to the city schools would lead to improved sports seasons for those districts. He points to the fact that four city school systems that had football programs in 1981, the last season before court-ordered desegregation, no longer have those programs. He blames this on depleted rosters resulting from students transferring to county districts. However, only 150 out of about 14,500 of the students participating in the Transfer Program at that time were varsity athletes (Bosley) and the article makes clear that these student athletes feel they have benefitted from the program, and would be unhappy to see it end. Eisenbath quotes one mother whose sons were bused from the South Side

of the city to the county district of Lindbergh and were recruited from there to Purdue: "‘My sons have not only excelled in sports, but they have the motivation to get the most out of themselves academically,’ Ruby Connors said. ‘When I went to conferences with their teachers in the city, they told me they were doing below potential. But there was no one teaching them who was motivating them. In the county, they found an environment where teachers enjoy teaching.’” Ruby Connors’ perception of the difference between school districts, as well as Eisenbath’s description of the two athletic environments, points to the need to continue investing in city schools and to create an equal system of education in which there is not such a feeling of disparity and all teachers enjoy teaching, but it also shows the way in which the Transfer Program can benefit students. Connor went on to say that "my children haven't been spoiled by the system...But they are reaping the benefits. They loved going to school and playing football at Lindbergh" (Eisenbath, in Hungate Collection).

Eisenbath also quotes several football coaches from both the city and the county and they are mainly supportive of the Transfer Program citing its positive effect on individual students. However, two coaches, one from Sumner, a city school, and one from Parkway South, a county school, are critical of the program. Larry Walls, the Sumner coach, does indeed believe that student transfers have depleted his roster and says that "except for the county schools, I don't think deseg has done anything for our kids." Walls does bring up an important point that, with the Voluntary Transfer Program, it is the county schools that are being integrated, not the city schools that remain majority black. With the plan, money was allocated to improve the city school system, and white students were bussed to certain magnet schools in the city, but the city schools themselves remained segregated, something that must be addressed in order to truly practice integration in St. Louis. The Parkway South coach Eisenbath interviews, David

Yarborough, is critical of the program for a different and likely more racist reason. He claims that "one of the most serious negative effects of deseg is on school spirit...Regardless of how friendly we are, the city students don't feel they truly belong and that it really is their school. And when the county kids see the city kids there, they can't feel it's their neighborhood school, either. There's no ownership of it." Blaming the black students transferring into a majority white school for undermining school spirit and disrupting the atmosphere simply by their existence is clearly a racist viewpoint. He puts the blame entirely on the black students, stating that it doesn't matter how 'friendly' the white county community is, yet at the same time believes that the mere fact that there are 'others' at their school makes it hard for county students to feel a connection to it. The coach's use of 'city kids' is clearly a racialized stand-in for 'black kids' but still effectively otherizes them. If Coach Yarborough truly believes that there is no way for black students from the city to fit in at his majority white county school it is no wonder that those students feel that 'they don't truly belong' and it makes one wonder how he can possibly create a feeling of unity among his team. The Coach's skepticism about the program and Eisenbath's article reveal that ten years after the Voluntary Transfer Program was implemented it was still unsettled and faced criticism, but was making a difference in students' lives. These articles, largely preserved in the Hungate files, are significant for the chance they give us to analyze the rhetoric that has existed and continues to exist around school desegregation. This opportunity is important now as the VTP comes to an end, and stakeholders consider what comes next so that we can anticipate and familiarize ourselves with the often cyclical rhetoric that may arise.

The newspaper articles I've highlighted cover the period of time during which, despite funding changes and cuts, all the original school districts that served as defendants in the original desegregation case participated fully in the program. For thirteen years, courtesy of the VTP

state-funded transportation that was provided for all Transfer students, the receiving districts were paid the full cost of educating students they received, and almost 13,000 students enrolled every year. Thus, for thirteen years in theory students' race and economic status did not affect their exercise of choice (if there was room for them to participate in the VTP that is).

Unfortunately, the state fought the transfer plan as long as it existed. It was required to pay the cost of every student, and the goal of educational integration was not shared by all Missouri voters and office-holders. Therefore a settlement agreement in 1999 mandated an enrollment decline of 25 percent in the transfer program, turned the VICC into a non-profit, and established that students would be allowed to enroll only through the 2008-2009 school year. Since then the VICC has twice voted to extend the deadline for accepting students into the program at least until the 2018/19 school year, and participating districts have indicated they will continue to accept students, but without state support and funding for transportation, the program is severely weakened.

## **Section 2: Turner v. Clayton and Accreditation Based Transfers**

Switching my focus slightly, it is important to address recent student transfer cases due to de-accreditation in relation to the Voluntary Transfer Program order to distinguish the former from the deliberate desegregation policy of the VTP. In order to do so it is necessary to examine a St. Louis student transfer case--Turner v. School District of Clayton (Breitenfeld v. Clayton when remanded)--and its implications for inter-district transfers. The process of accrediting school districts in Missouri is mandated by state law and by State Board of Education regulation and is undertaken by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Accreditation certifies that a district is competent and has the authority to provide a K-12 education. Unaccredited school districts do not have state authorization to provide a K-12

education. In 2007 SLPS (St. Louis public school system, known at this time as the City of St. Louis Transitional School District) lost accreditation, prompting four parents to file suit against the Clayton School District, the Board of Education of the City of St. Louis, and the City of St. Louis transitional district. Prior to the district's loss of accreditation the parents, residents of the City of St. Louis, had a private arrangement in which they paid tuition directly to Clayton, a public school in the County, which allowed their children to attend the high-performing district. When SLPS lost accreditation the parents requested that Clayton charge the transitional district directly for their students' tuition, which Clayton refused to do. It was under these circumstances that the parents filed suit, claiming that Missouri statute 167.131 required unaccredited school districts to provide the tuition costs of students who choose to attend accredited schools in an adjoining district. The case made it to Missouri's Supreme Court which found that section 167.131 was indeed written to apply to the scenario in the case and that children in Missouri are constitutionally guaranteed the right to attend accredited schools. The court declared that unaccredited school districts are required to provide tuition and transportation costs in order for their students to attend an accredited school in the same or adjoining district and in this case SLPS must pay Clayton. The defending school districts SLPS and Clayton claimed that interpreting the section as requiring the unaccredited district to pay tuition and transportation costs to an accredited district was in conflict with the court statute that created the Voluntary School Transfer Program. They identified what they believed to be one tension between the two orders pointing out that "the funding mechanisms are different in that 167.131 requires the unaccredited school district to pay the child's costs of attending another school, while transfers under 162.1060 (the statute implementing the Voluntary Transfer Program) are funded by the corporation that oversees the urban voluntary school transfer program"



(Breitenfield v. Clayton) and that applying 167.131 to the city of St. Louis would siphon funds from the city schools. They also argued that “applying 167.131 to the city of St. Louis will destabilize the urban voluntary school transfer program...because participating St. Louis County school districts would be likely to discontinue participation in the program to accommodate the increasing number of city students choosing to transfer to county schools...the remedial purpose of 162.1060--to desegregate the city’s schools--would be undermined” (667). The defendants’ final quarrel with the application of the court order was that it would cause an exodus of students to county schools and that the decreased enrollment would cause a large reduction in the city district’s state funding making it even harder to regain accreditation.<sup>4</sup> The court did not find these claims offered compelling reason to exclude the city district from order 167.131. Further, the court rejected Clayton’s claim that under the statute the accredited district has the discretion whether to admit a student transferring from an unaccredited district or not. The court affirmed that the chosen school, so long as it is in a district in the same or an adjoining county, is required to accept the pupil.

It is important to distinguish between the legal precedent this case established and the intentional focus on desegregation of the Voluntary Transfer Program. The former is a last-ditch measure, not an intentional step towards integration. Under 167.131 transfers only occur in response to a dire situation---the descent of a school district into unaccreditation--and it is only viable as long as a school system remains unaccredited and thus not a tenable situation for any student. While the Voluntary Transfer Program is a (albeit decreasing) piece of a larger plan that includes methods of strengthening the public city school district, the transfers that result from the understandable desertion of an unaccredited school are not a part of any program that strengthens

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<sup>4</sup> This feared exodus contradicted their worry that the county schools would discontinue their involvement with the Voluntary Transfer Program.

that school. Finally, examining how the application of statute 167.131 has played out across St. Louis school districts makes it clear how different these transfers are from those that occur because of the Voluntary Transfer Program. I want to offer a quick overview of the implementation and impact of transfers that stem from school de-accreditation in Missouri in order to differentiate that process from the implementation and impact of the Voluntary Transfer Program.

To begin, In 2012 St. Louis Public Schools gained provisional accreditation (Bock), and in 2015 the district qualified for full accreditation for the first time since 2000 (“SLPS Qualifies”). As a result of these changes SLPS students were no longer eligible to transfer out of the district, meaning that, once again, the Voluntary Transfer Program offered students the only transfer option. In the meantime however, the Normandy School District (a public school district serving 24 municipalities in northern St. Louis County) became unaccredited in 2013 (“Accreditation Status”), and the Riverview Gardens school district, another district located on the North Side of St. Louis soon followed. While these districts are not located in downtown St. Louis, the area they are located in, North St. Louis, is also predominantly black and both schools serve over 97% black students, over 75% of whom are part of the free or reduced lunch program (Tate *et al.*, 1). Under the decision of the *Turner (Breitenfield)* case students at these schools are eligible for transfer to an adjoining district. As a part of the provisions of the cases the two unaccredited districts do not have to provide transportation to any district of the students’ choosing, but are required to provide transportation to one other accredited district of their choosing (Tate *et al.*, 9). Both Normandy and Riverview Gardens selected geographically distant districts due to financial considerations. Normandy chose Francis Howell School District in St.

Charles County, and Riverview Gardens chose the Kirkwood School District after their first choice, Mehlville was determined to have insufficient capacity (Tate *et al.*, 8)<sup>5</sup>.

Both of these districts are majority white and located even farther south than St. Louis County. Significantly, unlike the school districts in St. Louis County that have had over 33 years of experience with race-based transfers, neither of the chosen districts in St. Charles County, Francis Howell or Mehlville, had experience with transfers or much experience educating black students. In *The Journal of Negro Education* the authors report that “The populations of the Normandy and Riverview Gardens school districts were both 98% black in 2012, while those of Francis Howell and Mehlville were 7 and 8% respectively” (Tate *et al.*, 2). The community and specifically the parental response that emerged to these transfer plans from the accredited schools’ community was and continues to be shockingly racist, and severely reminiscent of the racist fear and outrage that school integration resulting from *Brown v. Board* sparked in the 50s and 60s. This response, that was documented in national as well as St. Louis news sources, is a reminder that racist ideas about and conceptions of black children, particularly black children from the inner-city, have never really gone away. Parents used racially coded language expressing concern that city students would just have trouble fitting in at the school, and that they wouldn’t be academically ready to keep up with the community’s children--allowing them to transfer in wouldn’t be fair to them. They also employed outright racist stereotypes worrying about the “danger” that city students would bring with them: violence, gangs, and drugs. A *This American Life* broadcast, “The Problem We All Live With,” explored this anger and resentment in detail and made a case for the need for school desegregation today. Education reporter Nikole

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<sup>5</sup> The transfer decision cases had indicated that districts had to accept students who wanted to transfer, but the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education directed districts to create guidelines to establish how many students they can accept at each school and at each grade level.

Hannah-Jones focused on the Normandy School District and the reception and reaction from the Francis Howell community. She traces the experience of Normandy students getting to know their new school and presents audio of the PTA and community meetings in which parents voiced significant objections. Locally, some people felt it unfairly characterized Francis Howell and the St. Louis community more generally<sup>6</sup>, but the opportunity gap and ugly racism it exposed was not fake.

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<sup>6</sup> One article claimed that “The supposed demise of the program fit the overall narrative of the episode laid out in an introductory segment with Hannah-Jones and Ira Glass, host of *This American Life*. In that segment, Hannah-Jones said America had abandoned the one educational tool that had improved educational results — integration. State officials ‘killing’ St. Louis’ desegregation program in 1999 fit that narrative while the true story of state officials preserving St. Louis’ model school desegregation program in 1999 did not” (Freivogel).

### ***-Chapter 4 The Future of the Voluntary Transfer Program-***

As I've said, the Voluntary Transfer Program, a program that has allowed more than 60,000 African-American city residents to attend the predominantly white county district of their choice, will begin its last year of enrolment in 2019. Legally, the VTP was never meant to last in perpetuity, but the Voluntary Transfer Council (which became the Voluntary Inter-district Choice Corporation after the 1999 settlement) had, until just recently because of the legal requirement, always voted to prolong the program. Now, starting in 2019 county enrollment will only be open to the younger siblings of current participants. The intended plan will allow only 250 new city students to attend suburban schools in the 2019-2020 year, the first year of what's expected to be the final extension of the program. That number will eventually decrease to just 150 in 2023-2024, the final year of the planned extension. The plan will however continue to allow county students to attend city magnet schools, though no enrollment limits have been specified. Siblings will also have priority for transfers from the county to the city. I spoke to the current Director of the VICC David Glaser, who is interested in the ways in which transfers could continue to take place in St. Louis even after the current program ends. The VICC has commissioned Jerome E. Morris, the E. Desmond Lee Endowed Professor of Urban Education at the University of Missouri St. Louis and author of the book *Troubling the Water: Fulfilling the Promise of Quality Public Schooling for Black Children*, to study the VTP and how it could evolve. Glaser clarified that changing the program is a different option than extending the program as it exists now, and that the VICC now has seven years to discover how it could evolve. He mentioned the possibility of a program based on socio-economic status rather than race, for example. Of the upcoming change Glaser said, "Since it started in 1983 and students will be involved in it until 2036, it will have been running for almost 56 years. It's amazing for

any public program to last that long. Programs are meant to change and evolve. Now we're seeing, with the re-accreditation of the STL city schools, Dr. Adams' (the new SLPS superintendent) positive influence on City school. It's been a privilege to watch him. He will be a continuing good for City schools. I can't predict, but we will be seeing how this will affect the demand for the transfer program and what it will look like in the future given that there are more options within the STL public city schools. This past year there were 6-7 times the number of applicants for the available spaces. We will have to see if this re-accreditation will lead to a decline in the number of applicants. Ultimately, the quality of county schools is still perceived as better, which is why parents and students are willing to endure these long bus rides" (Glaser).

He went on to talk about the future of educational integration in St. Louis and said that "Amending the program really is about changing its nature. For example, do we include districts in North county, which are majority African-American but more socio-economically diverse? A lot depends on how much we are willing to think regionally. There's that slogan, 'Better Together,' about the importance of unifying the city and the county more broadly" (Glaser). Now, before the phase-out of the VTP, is the time to think about how we can honor the progress that has been made on integration in St. Louis and prevent a huge back-slide? What can sustain the positive components and outcomes of the VTP given the barriers that have existed and the ones we can't imagine now that it must change? How can we draw hope from this program and use that hope to work for a more progressive future; a future that is equitable, integrated, and safe for all?

## ***-Chapter 5 Ladue School District: A Case Study-***

### **Section 1: An Introduction to the District**

Answer the ubiquitous St. Louis question “where did you go to high school?” with “Ladue” and people immediately jump to several conclusions. If any city, in the mind of St. Louisans, epitomizes county privilege, wealth, and exclusivity, it is the City of Ladue. Answer the question on *The Riverfront Times*’ “Where You Should Have Gone to High School Flowchart” “Does your daddy own lawyers?” with “Yes, bitch” and you will wind up in Ladue. Ladue draws from a deep tax base; its 2015 per-pupil expenditure was \$15,147.21 (Levitt). Last year, the district passed Proposition R, an \$85.1 million bond referendum to renovate the high school and undertake smaller projects at other district campuses (“High School Renovation”). The district consistently places in the top three in Newsweek's yearly ranking of Districts in Missouri. In many ways Ladue can seem to represent the regional divide and educational NIMBYism that exists in St. Louis. Given its stereotype, most people would not suspect (and I was surprised when I first learned) that Ladue is the most naturally diverse district in St. Louis. Indeed, for a county school in one of the whitest, wealthiest counties in the region, Ladue is more diverse than most. While only about 12 percent of Ladue students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, one measure of poverty, about 17 percent of students are black, 14 percent are Asian, 4 percent are Hispanic, 6 percent are multiracial, and white students are in the majority at 59 percent according to state data (Taketa). Based on these numbers The Public School Review gives Ladue a diversity score .58, which is higher than the Missouri average of .22, and higher than the national average of .31 (“Ladue School District”). Ladue did not always have claim this natural diversity however. Like the other St. Louis County Districts it was a defendant in the expanded *Liddell v. Board* and began the Voluntary Transfer Program in 1983. By 1999 the

diversity within its boundaries allowed the district to opt out of the program, something it did as soon as it was possible. Ladue's history with school desegregation and, more recently, transfers from unaccredited schools, is increasingly relevant in light of the conversation about race the district is now having. The conversation involves students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, and is exposing biases, tensions, gaps of understanding, and the truth about the role of race within Ladue. I believe that it's important to examine Ladue's position in the context of segregation in St. Louis in order to appreciate the opportunity it has now to honestly and bravely confront race, racism, and prejudice and emerge as a model of school inclusivity. Ladue is a pertinent case study in terms of its history with desegregation. Like the other county districts it had to be coaxed into joining the Voluntary Transfer Program, participated in it at the required levels throughout the eighties and nineties, and withdrew from participation as soon as withdrawal became an option in 1999. Now, as a district with the most naturally diverse demographics in the region, demographics that are a microcosm of those of St. Louis, and one of the largest populations of transfer students from unaccredited schools, Ladue is being forced to confront what it means to have this diversity as a resource-wealthy district. Given its history and position within a segregated city, and the issues it is currently responding to, it is worthwhile to explore Ladue as a district on the precipice to becoming a model for what schools in St. Louis can and should be.

## **Section 2: The Beginning of Desegregation at Ladue**

As with the other suburban districts desegregation (courtesy of the Voluntary Transfer Program) came to Ladue in 1983. That year was the first that black students left city schools and transferred into the district. The recorded student reaction to this change was underwhelming. The only mention that year of this integration effort was an article in the "This Year at Ladue"



section of the high school's yearbook, *The Rambler*, entitled "Desegregation Comes to Ladue." The article, which takes up about a fourth of a page, offers a concise (though perhaps not grammatical) overview of the events, in and out of court, that led to the implementation of the VTP. The article concludes with the information that, as a result of the court case, each suburban district would "accept a ration of black students." The tone of the article, and the use of the word "ration" is highly impersonal and removed. Perhaps tellingly, the desegregation article is dwarfed by a celebratory article about the Cardinals' recent triumph at the World Series. In all the *Ramblers* and school newspapers I looked at between 1983 and 1999, this article was the only mention of desegregation and the Voluntary Transfer Program I found. It wasn't until 2016, when Trump's victory and the unprecedented legitimization of hate that accompanied it brought the racial tensions and historical hurt at Ladue to the surface that a school publication chose to explore desegregation again. This time, it was the school newspaper, *The Panorama*, that dedicated a front-page article, "Diversity: Desegregation in the 21st Century" to the issue.

### **Section 3: Ladue Faces the Legacy of Desegregation and its Present Racial Reality**

Racial tensions became an unavoidable topic On November 17th 2016, hundreds of students walked out of their classes at Ladue High School to protest outside the building. They held Black Lives Matter signs and signs proclaiming Racism Stops With Me. The week before, as the girls basketball team was boarding their bus after practice, a group of white students targeted the black players, chanting "Trump, Trump, Trump" towards them. One of the white male students then told the black the students that they should "sit in the back of the bus" according to witnesses. It was this sickening and horrifying racial bullying that the students were responding to. At a School Board meeting that night, members of the school community voiced their outrage over the incident, and told the board that this incident was not isolated. Tango

Walker-Jackson, the mother of sophomore Tajah Walker who was one of the targets of the racial abuse, said her daughter had already endured five incidents this school year. Tajah Walker, who emerged as an activist during this time spoke out as well and stated: “I will not be mistreated and I will not let my friends be mistreated; white, black, or anything ... I will not be ashamed of my race” (Madden). The next day, Ladue students protested to declare that they would not tolerate this racist hate, hate that they believed was indicative of a larger cultural problem in the district, that they would not be silent, and that they expected action and real change on behalf of the administration. In a ‘Statement On Discipline Issues Occurring November 10, 2016’ released by the district several days after the protest, the authors claimed that the two students who were identified as perpetrators of the incident had served their entire assigned discipline period. They further stressed that removal from class is only one aspect of discipline and claimed (rather vaguely) that there are other actions to be taken to make sure that students learn from an incident and do not repeat certain behavior (“Statement”). However, during the protest Tajah Walker, who led that day’s march, claimed that one of the students who allegedly faced discipline had bragged that day about his mother “getting him out of it” (Stewart). The protestors marched to the district’s administrative office where the students confronted district spokeswoman Susan Downing, and demanded to speak to the superintendent, Dr. Donna Jahnke. They accused the administration of downplaying the incident, and not taking seriously the racism they experience at school. The students formed a circle and shared emotional personal stories and fears with each other. One student who wished to remain anonymous shared the environment she experiences at Ladue revealing that she was only a sophomore and “yet I’ve had so many racial issues already. From the two years that I have been here, I’ve already had so many racial issues – and the only time you [the administration] have done something about it is when you get busted

for it” (Stewart). Superintendent Jahnke came out to speak with the students and told them she knew she didn’t understand their experience, but that students needed to work with her and the administration in order to fix things. Many of the students were not satisfied with the administration's response, especially because they feel it came after an attempt to downplay the incident, and a history of minimizing responses to reports of racist problems. Tajah Walker told the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* that, in her opinion, Dr. Jahnke “has the privilege to sit there and give us the fluff answer. ‘Sorry’ don’t fix everything.” She went on to say that the protestors will “come back to school when they treat us right. If they suspend me, they better suspend everybody” (Taketa).

#### **Section 4: Student Voices**

The fact that students are bravely speaking out about their experiences is raising the awareness of the larger student body. After getting in touch with Sarah Semmel, the current sponsor of *The Rambler* and *The Panorama*, Ladue High School’s yearbook and monthly newspaper respectively, I had the chance to read *The Panorama*’s December 2016 issue with the article entitled “Diversity: Desegregation in the 21st Century.” The article seeks to offer a brief overview of “the effects left by legal segregation” and discuss desegregation in light of the recent racist incidents in the district. The article was given a two page spread, with one half devoted to facts and figures. The high school reporter provides a brief timeline of integration nationwide, an ethnic breakdown of five St. Louis County school districts, as well as an ethnic breakdown of students enrolled in advanced and AP courses at the high school. The content of the article is focused on the recent incidents and response, as well as the experience of transfer students both past and present, and potential options for addressing racism within the district and promoting a culture of inclusion. The author quotes Social Studies teacher Shante Lyons, who encourages

thoughtful conversation about institutionalized racism and segregation in his African American Studies class. He echoed the sentiments of so many in the district (present and former students who have spoken out, administrators, and parents) who are interested and involved in promoting equity and integration at Ladue and stressed the importance of understanding the historical roots of the situation while working to create progress. He told the paper that “what we saw regarding the issues in Ladue hasn’t been a hot flash; they have been bubbling through generations. I think we need to be intentional about how we proactively deal with these situations--with what conversations are being held in class, what courses we have that are designed to help influence and inspire the thinking around social justice and with thinking about around a moral aptitude to embrace each other as human beings.” Through his history class Lyons is deliberately addressing race and creating space for students to have difficult discussions and confront privilege and prejudices. That Ladue offers African American history as a social studies elective is a positive indication of the district’s potential to expand opportunities for students to think about the impact of race and historical and current racism in their lives, and engage in culturally responsive teaching.

Lyons’s class is meaningful, but it cannot be incumbent solely on individual teachers to create these opportunities. The administration needs to commit to an all-encompassing culture of integration, sensitivity, and openness. Professional trainings regarding diversity, privilege, micro-aggressions, cultural sensitivity, etc that equip educators with the understanding and tools that are essential in establishing this culture will be essential. Lyons went on to outline the abiding stereotypes that illustrate the need for this training and further educational opportunities and spaces for students to understand and contend with their racial positions and the role of race in their schools and their city. Of the institutionalized segregation and racism of the region and

district Lyons said “It is pervasive in the way we value each other. We unintentionally label one kid as a city kid, and he or she is unjustly labeled with having a deficit in intelligence, limited educational experiences and they are poor and disadvantaged. Further, we assume that county kids do not lack anything. The interplay between these assumptions exists in schools today, and influences how we treat and see each other as people.” The article also offers Senior Shannon Harper’s impression of coming to Ladue as a transfer student from Normandy. She came to Ladue in 2013 when Normandy lost accreditation and did find Ladue significantly more diverse than she was used to. She said that “diversity is in the real world. You have to learn how to deal with other people who are different from you with different backgrounds, so coming here was good for me.” She noted the academic differences between the districts as well, and the weight of societal expectations that may contribute to these differences. She claimed that “In Ladue the classes are a bit more focused on what they are teaching. They didn’t really take school as seriously in Normandy. Maybe that is because here they instill a future. In Normandy they instill a future too, but we always felt like schools like Ladue were better than us, and I guess we let society’s thoughts about us get to us, so it made us not want to do better for ourselves” (Panorama).

I know that high schoolers don’t always read the school newspaper cover to cover. When my friends and I picked up a copy of *The Panorama* in high school we’d skim it quickly over lunch mainly to check the celebrity look-alike section and if there was anything good to gossip about--and I even wrote for the paper. However, this article is extremely timely, given the events at the district--the racial incidents, the walkouts, and community meetings--and the dialogue that is beginning to take shape, and I imagine many students are curious about the contents of the story, and do want to be informed. I think it’s an encouraging sign that the school

paper is addressing desegregation and its continuing impact on Ladue. It presents further evidence that students are ready to and want to talk about race. The conversation may have been forced upon the district and people of color may have had the burden of starting the conversation, but there are stakeholders within the district who are prepared for, and have been pushing for a dialogue about race in Ladue Schools, and students will necessarily be a part of that dialogue.

Another eye-catching and touching response to the racist incidents and resulting conversations was a display of art at Ladue High School titled “There is Room For You Here: A Display of Emotions.” The display fills up a large wall in the school’s lobby that is typically dedicated to student art, and the result is a cacophony of colors and words. A description of the project declares that “LHWHS Painting and Photography students reflected today on how they feel about the current situation affecting our school. They were given a poem, “There is a Place for You Here,” to illustrate anyway they saw fit. The reactions ranged from colors of sadness and despair to images of hope and eagerness to heal. This diversity is a sign of our strength as a community and as individuals.” The different ways the students chose to express their feelings through artwork is evident in the display, indicating the ways students have been differently impacted and affected by racism and racist incidents in the district. Many students chose to incorporate the poem into their art--one student placed the quote on a background of bright pastels and added the words “We Are Here For You” in large letters. Another student placed a ripped copy of the poem over roughly textured shades of black and copper, and one piece includes the poem in front of the St. Louis Arch and a blood red river. Some of the students’ messages are explicit: puzzle pieces with the message “Everyone Fits,” illustrations that read “Heal,” “Together,” “Love,” “Equality,” and “Everyone Deserves To Be Heard.” There are black

and white hands clasped together, one student wrote a list of “Hate Safety Rules,” and another drew a tank under the Arch with the word ‘Empathy’ above it. Some of the artwork is more abstract: there is an image of a figure sitting in a cave done in different shades of brown, black mountains over abstract red and orange shapes, and a bleeding red heart. There are definitely varying degrees of talent on display as well, but the efforts all seem to be sincere and genuine. I have included a selection of the images displayed in appendix A to illustrate the ways students expressed the emotions, responses, and thoughts racism, division, and traumatic experiences within the district provoked.

### **Section 5: Ladue Community Meeting**

The response to the highly publicized racial incident went beyond student and faculty engagement in the high school. The conversation necessarily grew to include all stakeholders, including parents and other community members. On December 5, 2016 the NAACP joined forces with the St. Louis Ethical Society to host a town hall meeting at the Ethical Society, located in Ladue, where community members could engage in conversation and confront issues of inclusion, diversity, equity, and racism that had become unavoidable. At the beginning of the meeting NAACP member and social justice facilitator Kenny Murdock addressed the gathered stakeholders, students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and Ladue residents, to ask: "Tonight is about how a community heals itself. How does a community work together to make itself a little bit better?" Investing the time, energy, and emotion necessary to answer the question is Ladue's challenge and opportunity. Through engaging in difficult conversations like these as a community, the district has the opportunity to become a leader in the region; in the future they can offer themselves as an example of a district that has been forced to confront the reality of being an integrated educational community in a segregated city and a racist nation and emerged

with a renewed dedication to inclusion and equity. The stories, comments, thoughts, and perspectives that were exchanged at this town hall reveal the struggle that it will be to get to this point, but I believe also reveal that many in the community are sincerely dedicated to walking that path. The conversation that took place makes evident that there is a gap in understanding between the actual lived experiences of African-American students and parents, and what some white parents and School Board members perceive those experiences to be, as well as an understanding of the difference between explicit racism and more subtle forms of racism like implicit bias and microaggressions, and the violence inherent in both forms. The meeting demonstrated the racism that does exist within the District and community, and obstructions to inclusion and equity that could and do exist, as well as the meaningful impact a sincere commitment to diversity training could have. Above all, it reinforced just how vital these conversations are. Indeed, among the speakers that night two repeated themes were the idea of turning a crisis point into opportunity, and the need for more training--leadership training, racial justice training, facilitation training, etc.--at every level. Dr. Jahnke began by reiterating that the administration was committed to listening to students deeply (a response to accusations from students and families of color that the administration has been slow to respond to concerns and complaint if they respond at all), and that they will take advantage of the window of opportunity that has opened right now to become a school district where every student feels welcomed and valued. The first parent who spoke during the meeting, an African-American mother with children in the high school, echoed this idea of opportunity. She said: "We have the chance now to be trailblazers for inclusion like we weren't able to be when we were coming up in high school ourselves. We are all better because we have each other." She stressed that she saw the need for racial leadership training for students because her experience showed her that "our



children are already making these relationships. They want to know how to be there for each other and show up for each other.” She believed leadership training could help students channel these impulses into productive conversations and empower them to step in and speak out when they encounter racism and inequality, as well as offer an alternative for students who “are not hearing the right messages at home.”

This theme of opportunity and change which dominated at the beginning was challenged as the meeting went on, and some of the obstacles that could stand in the way of this desired change became apparent. After a white middle school teacher emphasized the need for Ladue faculty and administration to reflect the student body, and made the case for expanding a faculty development program aimed at hiring teachers of color that African-American principal Tiffani Taylor-Johnson has implemented at the middle school, a white School Board member stood up to express his feelings of confusion. He acknowledged that he had heard fifty to sixty stories from students and families of color about racism that they had experienced at Ladue, and that he “totally believes them” and yet he knows the district’s teachers and knows that they are not racist. He went on to say that he couldn’t imagine any teacher who would put up with racism in their classroom, and concluded by admitting that he couldn’t “see what more these teachers could be doing. More training will not help.” To me, this School Board member’s articulation of the gap between what he was hearing and his understanding of how racism works is actually a perfect illustration of why diversity and social justice training is so necessary for all of Ladue as it moves forward. He seems to believe that either people are explicitly, outright racist or they are not. Training that addressed social justice theory, conscious and unconscious racial microaggressions and stereotypes, the ways in which white privilege and white supremacy operate in school settings, and allowed participants to unpack their own racial position should be

mandatory for everybody involved in education at Ladue, including the School Board members. The man's comments certainly drew a reaction from the crowd, which only grew when he shifted his focus from teachers to students. He claimed that most of "our kids" are good kids who are not trying to be racist, and went on to wonder if the community was too focused on questioning the level of leniency exercised in disciplining the student who told African-American women to go sit at the back of the bus. He said that he had doubts that the "young man-- only fifteen years old--really understood the history behind what he was communicating."

This absurd notion shaped the conversation going forward. A middle school teacher immediately stood up to confirm that his students know all about Rosa Parks, and that ascribing an innocence of history to the student's racist taunt would not explain it away. The next speaker, an African-American father there with his son, offered a moving testimony that revealed how harmful dismissals and minimizations of racism are. Speaking directly to the Board member he told him that of all the statements made that night, his made him the most doubtful that change could happen. He went on to address the gathered community and say "I just heard a Board member say I don't see the need for anymore help or guidance \*Applause\*. You feel you don't need to take another step. You don't need to defend our students any more. That bothers me-- I'm shaking." His son, a high school student, spoke out next and offered his personal testimony as someone who has experienced and is experiencing the issues that were being discussed, and, at least in one case, dismissed. He explained that racism, intentional and unintentional, existed in the district before the escalation of the bus incident, but that many teachers and students, his friends included, claimed that they were not aware of a problem. He further shared a shocking response he and other students received after they participated in the student protest: "We were told by teacher and other students that we disturbed their morning [and] we were being

disrespectful. We should go back to our classes and stop pretending like we have problems. That we should understand that we're not in Ferguson, that this is Ladue \*Gasp from audience\*. That we should be held to a higher standard in Ladue. It's past the point that you're unaware or you're a good teacher and you don't notice [what's happening]: you are now allowing it to happen." His personal statement drew applause, and again demonstrates the need for engaging every member of the faculty, staff, and student body in racial awareness training and holding space for students to continue to share their experiences and be heard. Again, the next several speakers reinforced these ideas. The facilitator stepped in to affirm that social justice training does work, but that the community needs to value that work and be willing to hire organizations that have already created and offer these training, such as the NAACP. Another African-American mother confirmed that she knew from experience working in HR that such training works, and that it should not be optional because her son shouldn't be afraid to go to school in the morning. More speakers, including a white mother, a white teacher, and an African-American mother, highlighted the fact that the district will not change until the white members of the Ladue community recognize their own white privilege and what it means to live in a nation predicated on white supremacy<sup>7</sup>.

One high school teacher really brought this point home when he admitted that, although he began teaching in University City in the 1970s at a time when public schools there were undergoing a transformation to majority-black populations thanks to massive white flight, and was at Ladue through the beginning and end of the Voluntary Desegregation Program as well as during the more recent deaccreditation based transfers, he feels he is just now starting to

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<sup>7</sup> To clarify, when I use the term white supremacy I am referring to an understanding of the concept based on critical race theory as a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of people of color that maintains a system of wealth and power that privileges white people.

understand the conversation around institutionalized racism in education. He said: “As a white man of privilege I never ‘got it’ until recently. Until Ferguson, until all that’s happened these last few weeks in the district and in this nation. What has helped me understand is conversations like these...All these years and I’m just now understanding.” A final thought that I believe could serve as a response to this teacher’s experience, and offers a powerful concluding note to the various emotional and heartfelt ideas, concerns, and experiences raised during the meeting, came from an African-American mother who again focused the conversation on conversation and training. She claimed that “without radical listening<sup>8</sup> we don’t have radical inclusivity and we don’t have healing and wellness. Let’s be very honest with each other now--This community has every resource and capacity to lead a path forward on this.”

#### **Section 6: LadueCares and Other Stakeholders**

I spoke to Ladue High School principal Brad Griffith about where he believes the district is now in terms of celebrating diversity and legitimizing all students’ cultural capital and experiences, and what he sees as the district’s challenges and opportunities going forward. (Dr. Griffith is relatively new to the position. He was appointed in 2013, and his tenure began with the 2013-2014 school year--the year that corresponded with Michael Brown’s death and the subsequent engagement with race and segregation in St. Louis. I believe that in his short time at Ladue, he is the first principal who has had to so publicly confront issues of racism and segregation within the school.) Dr. Griffith emphasized Ladue’s unique and often forgotten position as the most diverse district in the state, the stereotypes that erase that diversity, and the challenges he believes the district’s demographics present. He explained Ladue’s unique position from his perspective, saying “I think that we truly are a microcosm of the larger country.

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<sup>8</sup> The idea of very purposefully focusing on both the intent of the speaker and what’s being said--listening to truly understand rather than respond.

And when I say that I mean we have an economic divide, and (most people again don't understand this), we are the most diverse school district in the state. And if you're from Ladue or you're from St. Louis, when people think Ladue they don't think that. When most of our students do not reside in Ladue proper, (which also represents another challenge-we serve students from Creve Coeur, we serve students from Olivette, from Richmond Heights, from Ladue, from Huckley, from a number of different municipalities) there is not, from a governmental standpoint or a municipality standpoint, this overarching feeling of, 'we are one community' so that's another kind of bridge that we have to divide." Although Ladue no longer participates in the VTP Dr. Griffith spoke about the impact that the transfer program had on his life, as a student who attended a county district (Kirkwood) that participated in the program. He acknowledged that without the VTP he would not have had experience with racial diversity growing up where he did. He stressed that he is grateful for having been given that opportunity, and that his experience has made him recognize the importance of diversity in his students' education. Dr. Griffith explained that "I think is important too for our students as they go out into the world with the recognition that, what is the small community from which you came is a larger context to the world, and having exposure to that at an early age is critical, which was a beneficial component of the desegregation program." (Griffith)

In looking back at his own educational experience, and at the opportunity he believes Ladue's demographics represent, Dr. Griffith wondered "how often in life do students get an opportunity to really engage with people from other walks of life--politically, socially, economically, upbringing, all of those components? It's very rare." He recognized that student transfers that resulted from school deaccreditation were a part of Ladue's diversity and spoke highly of the student population that has transferred in, noting how well they have done with the

transition. He also spoke about the administration's focus on this transition (a process that might have been familiar for districts that have participated in the VTP in the past). He confirmed that "from the start there was a...big effort, and not just in our district, in a lot of the districts, to ensure that when these students came they felt welcome. And we've been pretty cognizant and aware of this. We've been making every effort, and we've made every effort to ensure that these are not transfer students. These are students. One thing that we did not want to do is set up any kind of dynamic in the building that says you're something else."<sup>9</sup>

If Ladue is going to seriously undertake the long, hard work of introspection and cultural change, it is vital that all the stakeholders in the district are engaged in the process. (It is also necessary for all community members to realize that they are indeed stakeholders). In the process of my research it was heartening to come across those in the district who were already engaged and leading in issues of inclusion. One of these leaders is a group that that I believe is vital to the current conversation: LadueCares. LadueCares is a community of district parents dedicated to exploring race, racism, and white privilege within the community and schools and working towards a vision of equality and understanding. The group recognizes that organizing for change is a difficult process and that pushing the district to progress has been and will be a struggle, but they are hopeful about the opportunity Ladue now has to be thoughtful and intentional about addressing race and diversity.

LadueCares was founded by two white mothers, Lynn Delearie and Megan Frank, in August 2015 after Mike Brown was shot and killed. Delearie and Frank, who both had children

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<sup>9</sup> He did admit that he doesn't know what will happen to the students from Normandy and Riverview Gardens when their home districts regain accreditation, an end goal that both districts will likely achieve in the near future. In fact, this appears to be a point of confusion for everyone involved, as there is no legal precedent for how to proceed when a previously unaccredited district receives reaccreditation.

at the middle school, came together and began reaching out to others who were disturbed by the rhetoric surrounding Brown's death and the subsequent protests. I met with Katie Ciorba, who quickly became involved in organizing the group, and she described how the conversation in Ladue seemed to be centered on people feeling unsafe and a sense of concern that people from Ferguson would come to the county to protest, especially since Mike Brown's mother, Lesley McSpadden, was a graduate of Ladue as a former participant in the Voluntary Transfer Program. This connection provides an illustration of the sometimes contradictory and conflicting impulses that seem to characterize Ladue when it comes to race, as students organized to send letters of sympathy and support to alumna Ms. McSpadden, at the same time that rumors spread about protestors from Ferguson planning to show up at the high school's homecoming. Katie says that there was a sentiment among many of the first members of LadueCares that this was not the right conversation to be having. DeLearie and Frank were aware that a (then) principal at Kirkwood had brought to that district the model of Courageous Conversations, a curriculum of race-based training facilitated by *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* by Glenn E. Singleton, and hoped they could adapt the model for the Ladue community. Katie describes the beginning of LadueCares as a very important period of realization and self-reflection for many of the white parents who joined. At their first meeting, the group gathered with food, watched a portion of the documentary *White Like Me* (an exploration of racism and white privilege), and shared an eye-opening discussion about race. Katie said that this first meeting got the momentum going and revealed misconceptions among the members. She said that "a lot of people in Ladue conflate race and class--If you're black and in Ladue and have money than you're immune to racism--and black parents were telling

their stories. [Saying] No I live here and I get stopped all the time and the teachers who were attending said the same thing.” (Ciorba)

Educator attendance is important to LadueCares as they provide essential perspective, and insights, and can use the discussions and information they learn to inform their teaching. The members of the group are aware that a connection with the district’s administration is necessary as well in order for them to have the impact that they seek, and this relationship has been trickier to navigate. Katie said that for the first five to six months of LadueCares meetings, the administration consistently sent representatives, but that their presence raised concerns among the teachers who wondered if the meetings really were a place they could speak openly and honestly. She claims the administration intimated that LadueCares could be a helpful model to implement in other St. Louis schools to address race, and that this implementation is perhaps where the group should focus their energy, rather than continue with their focus on the Ladue district. She says the group pushed back against this idea, pointing out that Ladue was not a perfect model, and that this pressure really inspired them to start asking for information regarding tough issues like the racial discipline gap. It was around this time that the district was campaigning for Proposition R,<sup>10</sup> and Katie had the impression that the administration was focused on presenting a cohesive, positive image of the schools. When a member of LadueCares’ leadership, Kisha Lee, decided to run for school board with the group’s support, it seems like the administration took the bait they might have been looking for and stated that they could no longer support the group as it was now a political organization. Some members of the administration however, including district Diversity Officer Dr. Derrick Wallace, high school associate principal Pablo Flinn, and middle-school associate principal Tiffani Taylor-Johnson (all

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<sup>10</sup> The \$85.1 million bond referendum to renovate the high school.



administrators of color), still regularly attend “unofficially.” In regards to this situation Katie explained that “on the one hand I feel like the administration really does want to be supportive of our efforts, on the other hand there is a feeling of fear regarding the large white wealthy majority [of parents].” It was soon after the administration officially stepped back that LadueCares really solidified their vision and mission statement. Katie spoke about Ladue’s unique position in St. Louis as a naturally diverse and very wealthy district, and the opportunity this allows to combat racial bias and inequity and foster a safe and inclusive environment. She explained that “the amazing thing about Ladue is that we have the capacity and ability to really figure this stuff out, and massive amounts of resources and energy and [those willing to put in the] effort to do this. Our vision was to become a national model of African American excellence and to work with African American parents and students, and partner with the Ladue school district to become this national model. We focused on the areas of academic achievement, opportunity gap, discipline disparities, white privilege, and the hiring and retention of staff of color.”

LadueCares is committed to what Katie called the “slow work” of this process of change and realize they need to involve themselves as stakeholders within the district. Two members, Lolita Flynn and Kisha Lee,<sup>11</sup> ran for the school board, someone attends the school board meeting each month, and and Katie sits on the District Diversity Committee (which she was invited to do by the school board). After what the community is referring to as the “school bus incident” LadueCares’ membership ballooned. Normally the meetings are attended by 15-25 participants, and about 70 people showed up at the meeting following the incident. Katie claims the incident revealed significant historical hurt surrounding issues of race in Ladue, especially relating to redistricting and is impressed at the “veracity and feeling” with which alumni are

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<sup>11</sup> The school board election took place on April 4 2017; Lee was one of three candidates selected.

joining the conversation. In addition to providing a channel for the arising conversations, LadueCares held a Unity Vigil at the high school football field following the bus incident. Additionally, the administration seems more responsive to the group now, and even grateful for their presence during this time. Principal Brad Griffith has praised the group for undertaking positive steps after the incident. At the same time the administration seems unsure about how to involve parents in change. The involvement of all parents in the community, and an acknowledgment of the importance of all parents' involvement (not just the wealthy, white parents), is such an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to creating a culture of racial equality, and LadueCares does have specific and actionable ideas for that process. The group has taken steps to ensure that their perspective and concerns are represented within the district's dialogue. The group also stays active and engaged on social media as well. The Facebook group has 338 members, and members post articles and thoughts and engage in conversation about de facto segregation and unconscious bias in schools, the role of money in education, raising anti-racist children, unpacking racial stereotypes, protecting transgender students and much more, as well as keep the page and each other updated about events and decisions at Ladue and other relevant community events, workshops and news.

One link that was shared on LadueCares Facebook page demonstrates that they are not alone in their campaign to promote and foster inclusivity and equity in St. Louis schools. In a letter that currently has 644 supporters on the website [DearSt.Louis.com](http://DearSt.Louis.com) addressed "Dear St. Louis Regional School Leaders," the authors call for the region's school leaders to demonstrate their commitment to equity and inclusion and make daily decisions that promote and model compassion, connection and understanding of historical contexts of oppression and privilege for their students. The authors identify themselves as community parents administrations may not

be used to hearing from, but assure them that they are “part of your community. We live near your schools and make memories on your playgrounds. We take part in your camps, activities, concerts and fundraisers. Many of us are your alumni. Some employ your graduates. Some work within your walls. We are among your supporters, donors, volunteers and community leaders” (“An Open Letter”). These community members acknowledge that many of them are white and that in the past they have allowed the burden of beginning and continuing necessary conversations to fall on parents of color, and that through their silence on these matters they may have allowed for the impression that integration and an inclusive and just environment are not their first concerns when choosing where to send their children to school. However, they make clear that this is not the case, and indeed a consideration of these factors is a family priority. These parents explain their fears about accepting the status quo in St. Louis and write that “we are concerned that, without your leadership and support, no matter where we live, our children will grow up seeing our stark segregation as “normal.” That they will lack opportunities to know and befriend people with different heritage, family structures, abilities, experiences, and worldviews.” They continue on to inform the school leaders that “your commitment to equity and inclusion, both in spirit and in practice, at the macro scale and the micro, matters to us. Your dedication to fostering supportive environments for thoughtful, open discourse matters to us. Your support for teachers to live as their full selves both inside and outside of the classroom matters to us. Your investment in the greater local and regional communities matters to us...Consider this an invitation to help us see your commitment to equity and inclusion. Show us your resilience in the face of resistance” (“An Open Letter”). This pointed message surely resonates within Ladue, and across the region.

LadueCares and the Ladue administration share certain goals, but they also have different focuses and opinions about race in the district. One thing LadueCares and the Ladue administration share is a concern about the achievement gap between black and white students in the district. Principle Griffith identified this achievement gap as one of the challenges Ladue faces, and specifically spoke about this as a consequence of students transferring in from less academically rigorous districts. He explained that the administration has “to figure out, when students come to our district, not in kindergarten, but transfer in, [how to] create systemic and ongoing programs of academic support that remediate skills in real time that ensure that by the time they come across the stage, they’re ready.” He explained that this remediation is a focus of the district when students transfer in from districts that are not as blessed with the resources of Ladue, and have not had the same academic preparations as students who have been enrolled in the district from a young age. He said that the older students are the harder it becomes to make sure they have the skills and information that will ensure their success at Ladue. He elaborated on this goal and went on to say that it is “one thing where, again, I wish there was an easy solution; but, we have got to focus our resources on those tier 2, tier 3 interventions to ensure that our students have the academic support – as well as the social, emotional support – to get to a place where they can be successful here in the building, because this place, as you know, is tough. And so if you have not come through your schooling experience in this type of academically rigorous environment, it’s going to be difficult... And it’s tough when you don’t feel that success, coming into a place like this” (Griffith).

Like the administration, LadueCares wants to address the achievement gap as well, a goal that Katie mentioned, but they are also concerned with academic tracking that falls along racial lines. As the *Panorama* article revealed, African-American students are underrepresented in AP

classes, and this is true for the gifted program in Ladue as well, a truth indicative of a national trend. Katie spoke about this gap and mentioned the work that one gifted teacher at Ladue's Old Bonhomme Elementary School and co-chair of the District Diversity Committee, has been doing to change qualifications to ensure that children of color are identified for the gifted program when they are qualified and are simply not being identified by the current system. (Whether I believe that identifying and labeling a certain subset of students as "gifted" is conducive to a healthy educational environment is a matter for a different thesis). Another issue that LadueCares has been focusing on, that is now (largely thanks to the recent community meetings and engagement) on the district's radar as well, is the discipline gap. The numbers certainly reveal the racial disparity that exists at Ladue in terms of who is getting punished another national trend that has been receiving more media attention lately. LadueCares members do feel like they had a significant win this fall when the district signed on to say that by next school year they will change discipline policies to stop out-of-school suspensions for K-3rd graders (following the recommendation of "Forward Through Ferguson: A Path Towards Racial Equity" a report produced by the Ferguson Commission, a group of regional leaders who continue to study racial inequities and conflict that Ferguson has come to symbolize). Although this pledge is important, Katie acknowledged that grade school suspensions have never been a huge issue at Ladue. Instead, they are more concerned about discipline disparities at the middle and high school level. Katie also expressed concern about discipline in another sense, wondering about whether the students who had taken part in the racist offense on the bus had been asked to truly understand the impact of their actions. She echoed issues raised at the community meeting and claimed that in terms of racism in the district, "There's an unwillingness to hold folks

accountable-and not shame them-but to say that they did know what they were saying and they can understand the historical connection of their actions” (Ciorba).

Further, LadueCares and Principle Griffith also both expressed their focus on hiring teachers of color and ensuring that students see themselves reflected in their education. My own experience at Ladue is reflective of the lack of diversity of Ladue’s teaching staff, and Katie confirmed that this has been her children’s experience as well. She talked about the way in which the hiring of white teachers is reinforced, stating that “at Reed [one of Ladue’s elementary schools--the best one!], for the last 7 years that I’ve been there, every hire has been a white woman between the ages of 22 and 30. People hire people who look like them--it seems like they think, ‘Oh, we’ll be great on the team together.’ And then you get the same person all over the school. And it’s, I think it’s a detriment to students, all students, not just students of color that don’t see people like them, but my kids, who don’t have teachers and role models who are people of color.” Principle Griffith acknowledged that hiring staff of color was important, and is a need that has been coming out through the ongoing dialogue. However, he stressed that this process, and the larger process of making sure the culture at Ladue is safe for and respectful of all students, will be ongoing. He claimed that “for pieces like the fact that we don’t have enough African-American teachers in the building, some of those things take time, and some real intentionality. You can’t just snap your fingers. And we have to be mindful of the fact that, yes, we had the issues that we did, and those received a lot of attention. But it takes time, and a meaningful, ongoing effort after all of that attention goes away to continue along that work.” Ultimately Principle Griffith identified relationships, communication, and modeling as the most important aspects of creating an inclusive environment and moving forward productively. He believes that through creating strong relationships with students, teachers are fostering an

environment that feels like home. He identified these healthy relationships as well as constant and ongoing communication and outreach with the home as vital for the whole community. In terms of what Principle Griffith feels his personal role is in engaging with diversity and questions of race and racism at Ladue, he explained that “I think overall it’s modelling, modelling for other administrators, modelling for teachers, modelling for students, about what we stand for overall as a community and as a school. And making sure that we’re always mindful and aware that we’re not all one thing. Our differences make us stronger, and recognizing different points of view and celebrating that I think is critical. I would say that there’s this belief that you have that I could implement this one program or do this one thing and then boom-this would happen. But the reality is that this work is ongoing and you have to be able to create an environment that’s inclusive, supportive, reflective of the core values for what we stand for.”

These aspects are clearly important in building a safe and inclusive school community, but if anything has come out of the protests and community conversation sparked by the racist sparkpoints in the district it is that the district must place diversity, cultural competency, and anti-bias education at the very center of its processes. These values must become the dominant culture at Ladue and be reflected in everyday decision making, long-range planning, personnel hiring and training, and curriculum planning and development. It cannot be the responsibility of individual teachers to tackle racism in the district on their own; they must be supported by the entire district and their work must be recognized and valued, and all teachers need to undergo the necessary and continuous training that will equip them with the tools to recognize and challenge unconscious bias, microaggressions, and stereotyping, and transform their classrooms into safe and inclusive spaces.

A final similarity between LadueCares' and Dr. Griffith's conception of what lies ahead for Ladue was their focus on opportunity--a focus that keeps coming up in the developing conversation. Dr. Griffith said that the administration has been looking at the recent events as "an opportunity for us to engage our community, to engage our teachers, to engage our kids, around these conversations and in a place like St. Louis that has this history, these are not places where people feel entirely comfortable in engaging in these conversations, and you do need a focal point or a why to start the work." He hopes that, by engaging in this conversation now Ladue can serve as an exemplar for other districts in the St. Louis area. Katie identified this moment as an opportunity as well, but was more cautious about the future. She explained that "We're hopeful and skeptical at the same time. Will this [incident] create change or will it be another moment of energy that then will go down?"

Ladue District spokesperson Susan Downing told the St Louis American that before the racist bus incident the district had tried "a lot of piecemeal things" in order to promote tolerance and equity (Stewart). Now is the time for Ladue to move beyond piecemeal and fully commit to dedicating itself to equity and inclusion. The relevant stakeholders have stepped up and are taking part in the necessary community conversation about how to move forward, and how to make sure that all voices, especially those that are too often silenced, are involved in that process. Ladue students are passionate and involved and bravely sharing their experiences, and they deserve to go to a school that makes them feel safe, valued, and important. The language surrounding this conversation and process, employed by administrators, educators, parents, and students has overwhelmingly been that of opportunity. I believe Ladue can seize this opportunity, and as so many in the community hope, become an example that inspires other districts to work for equity and inclusion.



### ***-Conclusion-***

When Judge Hungate proposed creating a unified city-county school district to ensure racial integration in St. Louis schools it was intended as a threat to jump-start county district compliance, and it functioned as such. However, I believe the time has come to move past viewing city-county district unification as an outcome to be avoided, and rather as the most reasonable and viable option for fulfilling the promise of educational integration in St. Louis that Minnie Liddell began forty-five years ago. City-county unification will ideally lead to a school system in which all schools/districts are similar to Ladue: racially integrated and resource-rich. Of course these schools will be starting at different points when it comes to academic achievement, etc, but Ladue could be in the position to serve as a model for creating an educational environment that prioritizes inclusivity and equity, and engaging the entire community with these values. I admit that city-county unification, of government, financial systems, and school districts is the ideal, utopian outcome, but I believe that we have to envision the utopian scenario in order to work to build the future that we want to see. And this outcome is not so far fetched. Both Principle Griffith and David Glaser spoke about the positive potential of a unified St. Louis city and county. Recently there has been renewed conversation in St. Louis about this possibility, in part because of the mayoral race.

City treasurer Tishaura Jones' bid for mayor of St. Louis was exciting, not only because she would have been the first African-American woman to lead in that position, but because of her campaign's emphasis on City-County unification. The campaign's slogan was "Better Together," and in her "Children, Youth and Families" platform she writes that as mayor she would "promote a consolidation or merger of the St. Louis Public Schools with surrounding school districts" ("Children, Youth and Families"). Jones also published an open letter to *The St.*

*Louis Post Dispatch* after editorial page editor Todd Robberson lamented the fact that he didn't feel safe walking his dog in the city because "neglect by city leaders have allowed a bombed-out graffiti-covered, war-zone image to prevail," and that this graffiti is "killing our city." Jones reminded Robberson that the issue that underlies his dog-walking fears is poverty, a poverty that directly results from the intentional and continuing segregation that divides St. Louis. She explained to him that "What is killing our region is a systemic racism that pervades almost every public and private institution, including your newspaper, and makes it nearly impossible for either North St. Louis or the parts of South St. Louis where African Americans live to get better or safer or healthier or better-educated." Jones goes on to describe the ways in which she would work to dismantle this systemic racism and offers Robberson (who is new to St. Louis) what I believe is a powerful reminder. She writes: "I think you were in Texas during Ferguson. If so, you may have missed what happened here: We woke up. Black people woke up. Allies stood up. Young people spoke up." Unfortunately, despite passionate support, Jones lost the Democratic primary. She did however, almost do the impossible and pull off a stunning upset as she came in only two percentage points behind the leading candidate. Although Jones did not win this time, her candidacy furthered the necessary conversation about the role of race and segregation in St. Louis, and introduced City-County unification as a viable policy option. As she said, St. Louis has woken up, and I believe that young people especially will continue to demand and support necessary change.

One of the demographics that I hope to engage with this thesis, and the demographic that I most believe I am capable of reaching, is those young people, my peers. I want to make other young people aware that we are stakeholders in this issue, and that this will only become more true as we start to make more choices that will shape the rest of our lives. I hope to inspire and

encourage my peers, particularly my St. Louis cohort, to think about what their position and impact has been when it comes to racial segregation and specifically school segregation in St. Louis, and what these can and will be. As we begin to make more permanent decisions about our lives--what we want to do, where we want to live, and eventually (for some of us) where we want to send our children to school--we must be aware that these decisions have very real consequences and that all of them start to contribute to shape the community and ultimately the city that we live in. We will not be making decisions regarding residence and the school district our children will attend in a void. They are inherently political choices made in a city whose racial present has been shaped by an often contradictory history and the inherently political decisions of those who have come before us. I can't predict which of my classmates are going to stay in St. Louis, or move back to the city, or what kinds of young people and young families will move to our city for the first time, but for those who do settle here, their individual choices--when it comes to renting or buying a home, to what and who they vote for, to the conversations they choose to engage in, and whom they choose to engage in them with-- will, together with the governmental actions toward city-county unification I believe are necessary, help determine the region's future.

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## Appendix A

Pieces from the Art Display “There is Room For You Here: A Display of Emotions” at Ladue High School







