

## A CHRONOLOGY:



# INTEGRATING ST. LOUIS SCHOOLS

.....1954.....

In one of its most significant rulings in history, the U.S. Supreme Court decides, in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, that it is unconstitutional to require black and white students to attend separate schools. Seventeen states, including Missouri, had such a law on their books.

.....1972.....

A group of five black North St. Louis parents, led by Minnie Liddell, files a complaint in the U.S. District Court, claiming that certain practices by the city's school board and the state of Missouri are responsible for segregation in the St. Louis school system.

Their suit, *Liddell v. Board of Education*, filed on February 18—a Friday—



*Minnie Liddell: She filed the suit.*

alleges that both the previous and the current school boards had carried out practices that "(had) the actual effect of discriminating on the basis of race against

black children attending the public schools." They contend that the boundaries of the five school sub-districts in the city had been drawn in such a way as to promote segregation, and ask for the boundaries to be redrawn so that they are not racially identifiable. The plaintiffs suggest that, to reach a true solution to the problem of segregation in the city schools, perhaps county school districts may have to become part of any plan developed. Chief Judge James Meredith will preside.

.....1973.....

Responding formally to the suit, the school board, not denying that segregation exists in its schools, says the cause and responsibility for the segregation lie outside of the schools. The problem, they say, is in the demographic structure of the city: Certain neighborhoods and areas are predominantly black, others white. Another obstacle to achieving racial balance in the city schools is that more than 70 percent of the students in the city are black. In December, the school board asks that the County and County school districts be added as codefendants in the case, but the motion is denied.

.....1975.....

On Christmas Eve, nearly four years after the suit is filed, Meredith approves a consent decree drawn up by attorneys for both sides. Through the decree (developed to avoid the lengthy and often angry litigation experienced in other urban desegregation suits), the school board

agrees to increase its number of minority teachers and promises to attempt to "relieve the residence-based racial imbalance in the city schools." They also agree to report on their progress in setting up magnet schools.

.....1976.....

The NAACP objects to the settlement, saying that it cannot provide effective desegregation of the school system. Meredith does not allow them to enter the case, however, since, he says, they had more than three years—between the day the suit was filed and the day the consent decree was approved—to enter it but had not done so. Meredith also says the interest of blacks had been adequately represented on the original case.

The NAACP appeals Meredith's refusal of their request to intervene and the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals grants them permission to intervene.

.....1977-1978.....

Several groups are added to the case. As defendants with the school board: The State Board of Education and the State Commissioner of Education. As plaintiffs: The City of St. Louis and two groups of white parents. Because of the increased complexity of the case with the addition of these groups, Meredith opens hearings to determine if, indeed, the city schools are guilty of a constitutional violation because of segregation. The hearings last five sessions and thirteen weeks—from October 17, 1977 until May 26, 1978—and generate more than 7,000

BY JOE SCHUSTER

pages of transcripts.

.....1979.....

On April 12, Meredith rules that the city school board has not intentionally segregated black students from white students. He says the principal cause of the segregated conditions is the city's housing balance and that, following the 1954 *Brown* decision, the school board had assigned students to neighborhood schools without regard to race and that the board, in drawing the school boundary lines, could not have foreseen the population shift in the subsequent years. Meredith instructs the board to provide an updated report according to the settlement reached in 1975.

.....1980.....

The Court of Appeals reverses Meredith's decision, saying the city board and the state were responsible for maintaining a segregated school system. The appeals court cites that the Missouri Constitution contained an article calling for separate schools until 1976. The Court also says the state had not taken proper steps to insure desegregated city schools and that actions by the city's school board following the *Brown* decision had, indeed, contributed to segregation. The Court suggests the development of an exchange program between the city and the county, and returns the case to Meredith.

In April, school officials submit a draft of a desegregation plan to Meredith. After hearings during May, Meredith approves the plan, calling for desegregating city schools in September with a transfer of 7,500 students. He also orders the preparation of a voluntary, interdistrict plan among others.

In December, citing health problems, Meredith steps down from the desegregation case. U.S. District Judge William L. Hungate, who had been sworn as a judge by Meredith fourteen months earlier, is assigned to the case.

.....1981.....

In January, the city school board and the NAACP file separate motions asking that school districts and other governmental parties in Jefferson, St. Charles, and St. Louis counties be added as defendants in the case.

In July, Hungate proposes a regional voluntary desegregation plan and calls for responses from 39 school districts. The plan, drawn from several proposed plans, would require the state of Missouri to pay for transportation costs and also supplemental aid to those districts that participate. On August 6, the deadline for

response to the plan, only four districts approve it, but ask for some changes. (The four are the Clayton, Kirkwood, Ritenour, and University City school districts.)

Two and a half weeks later, Hungate adds as defendants seventeen school districts in St. Louis County. He does not add as defendants the four districts that had approved of the voluntary plan as well as the Ferguson-Florissant district, which had been part of an earlier desegregation case. (The order in that case called for the Ferguson-Florissant district to merge with the predominantly black districts of Kinloch and Berkeley.) On the



U.S. District Judge William Hungate.

next day, the Pattonville district asks to join the voluntary plan. Others begin considering it.

.....1982.....

In August, Hungate announces that he will consider calling for mandatory desegregation of schools. The plan—a combination of several submitted by the city, the state, and three experts—calls for the merger of the city and county school districts into four sub-districts governed by a single board. The plan, he says, will only be implemented if a suitable voluntary plan, agreed to by city and county districts, cannot be developed and the county school districts are found liable for the segregation that exists in the city schools.

During the next half-year, the city and county school districts work to reach agreement on such a voluntary plan.

.....1983.....

In February, an agreement on a voluntary plan is announced. The plan is endorsed by officials in twenty of the 23 county districts. County school boards debate the plan.

Six weeks later, on March 30, a final settlement plan—now approved by all districts—is given to Hungate. After two

months of fairness hearings, Hungate announces on the day after Independence Day, 1983, that he approves the plan.

It calls for the interdistrict transfer of students; by the fifth year of the plan, an estimated 15,000 students will be attending schools outside of their home districts for the purpose of desegregation.

The state of Missouri is responsible for the costs of the voluntary interdistrict plan and must also pay one-half of the cost of improvements in the city schools as specified by Hungate's order.

Hungate also directs the city to submit a bond issue to its voters to pay for its share of the improvement costs. If the issue fails to pass, Hungate reserves the authority to consider making an appropriate order to pay for the improvements. He also orders that a property tax rollback, approved earlier by city residents, be canceled.

The state of Missouri appeals the settlement, saying they cannot bear the burden of paying for the plan—they estimate the cost will be in the hundreds of millions over five years; estimates of the cost by others are less. The Court of Appeals holds hearings on November 28.

.....1984.....

On February 8, the Court of Appeals announces it is upholding Hungate's decision in the school desegregation case. An exception is that the Court reinstates the property tax rollback for city residents during the 1984-85 school year. The Court says should sufficient evidence be found that all other avenues of securing funds necessary for the city to pay its share of costs under the plan be exhausted, Hungate will have the authority to order a solution, including ordering a tax increase and once again canceling the property tax rollback.

The state appeals the case to the U.S. Supreme Court. No decision, including whether or not the court will consider the case, is expected until the Court begins its fall sessions in October. (The Court refused to hear two earlier appeals by the state in the case.)

.....Today.....

During the 1983-84 school year, more than 3,000 students transferred to schools outside their home districts as part of the desegregation plan. According to Dr. Charles Willie, a Harvard University professor and an expert in desegregation cases, the St. Louis plan is a landmark in the history of desegregating schools. When the 1984-85 school year begins in the next few weeks, he says, the number of students participating here will make the St. Louis plan the largest voluntary interdistrict program in the nation. □