

Los Angeles Times | LOCAL

LOCAL U.S. WORLD BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT HEALTH LIVING TRAVEL OPINION DEALS

L.A. NOW POLITICS CRIME EDUCATION O.C. WESTSIDE NEIGHBORHOODS ENVIRONMENT OBITUARIES FINDLOCAL

IN THE NEWS: CONRAD MURRAY | ANDY ROONEY | LISTERIA | ROSH HASHANAH RECIPES | CHRIS CHRISTIE

Search

A bus ride to enlightenment

Students who were part of the integration of Pasadena's schools decades ago look back fondly on the lessons they learned.



The third-grade class at Noyes Elementary in Altadena, circa 1971, after a federal judge ordered the Pasadena schools to desegregate.



Share 992 Comments 56

By Hector Tobar
September 23, 2011

With metal lunch pails in hand, they climbed on school buses for a short but historic journey across the foothills of Pasadena and Altadena.

It was the fall of 1970 and a federal judge had just ordered Pasadena's public schools to mix up the races.

HECTOR TOBAR



For Karen Iwamiya, then in the second grade, this meant a trip eastward across Lake Avenue in Altadena, an invisible dividing line separating races and social classes. She traveled from her less-affluent neighborhood to a nicer one, with a nicer school — Noyes Elementary, where black, white, Latino and Asian American kids like her were now all thrown together.

L.A. Times on Facebook

advertisement



Hefner honored for

Bio | E-mail | Recent columns

ALSO



Demand nearly doubles at senior citizens food bank in Pasadena



Caps and gowns behind locked gates



Psychiatrists prescribe remedies for school bullying



Effort launched to raise \$200 million for L.A. public schools

"To me, they were all just my friends," said Iwamiya, who was 7 years old then and blissfully unaware of any controversy surrounding her presence at this new school. "That was the beauty of it. We didn't know."

Iwamiya, now a real estate appraiser, ended up staying in those integrated Pasadena public school classrooms until she graduated from Muir High School in 1981. Last month she attended her 30-year high school reunion at an Altadena park, alongside her old Latino, white and black classmates.

"We were lucky," said Cameron Turner, who is African American was a student leader in his high school days. "Whenever someone asks me, 'Can integration work,' I say: 'It already has.'"

When those first, court-integrated classes graduated from Muir High circa 1981, Muir's student body was closely balanced between blacks (about 50%) and whites (34%), with sizable minorities of Latinos (12%) and Asians (4%).

It was a fleeting moment of egalitarianism. For two decades or so, black and white, well-off and struggling, attended the Pasadena public schools together in large numbers. It really didn't matter what you looked like or where you came from — everyone more or less got the same education.

Muir isn't fully integrated anymore. Its demographics look like those of a lot of other urban public schools in California: 66% Latino, 29% black and just 2% white. To the great shame of all Californians, public education has become re-segregated.

Talk to the members of the Muir class of '81, all now in their late 40s, and they'll tell you they owe a lot to their integrated schools. It gave them a deeper understanding of the way the world works. They see that prejudice is born of shallow thinking.

"From that day forward, in classrooms and on sports teams, in student government and singing in the choir, you were with kids who looked like you and who didn't look like you," Turner told me, referring to his own busing experience.

"It's hard to walk out of that experience with stereotypes still in your head," he said.

We Americans are rightly proud of our traditions of equality. We are a country of "equal daughters, equal sons ... all alike endear'd," as Walt Whitman once wrote.

But look at American history and you'll see that equality never comes without a fight.

That's how that first court-ordered school integration came about. In the late '60s, inspired by the civil rights movement and the great victory of Brown vs. Board of Education, a group of parents filed suit against a school system that largely separated blacks from whites.

When those parents, most of whom were black, won the case, a lot of white parents decided to stick around.

Mike Hedblom's mom and dad told him that by getting on that bus to go to school with black kids, he was doing a good, necessary thing. Being 7, his only response was: "I get to ride a bus to school! Cool!"

He was bused westward, a short trip to the once largely black Audubon Elementary. "I later learned that it was a very poor, run-down campus, but I didn't see that as a kid," he said. His mom joined the

protecting sign



Showtime to produce Suge Knight doc



Fox sues Dodgers



L.A. River runs through Hollywood history

L.A. DEALS



\$99 for bowling party package from the LA Times (reg. \$200)

Most Viewed | Most Emailed | Latest News

Durable goods orders fell 0.1% in August
09/28/2011, 6:35 a.m.

Caltech professor awarded National Medal of Science
09/28/2011, 12:00 a.m.

L.A. County rejects bid for second Latino-majority district
09/28/2011, 12:00 a.m.

Robbers target distressed motorists on Inland Empire freeways
09/28/2011, 12:00 a.m.

Jerry Brown signs bill that limits delays to L.A. stadium project
09/28/2011, 12:00 a.m.

PTA there and helped organize a project to paint the walls.

For years, he didn't think much was different at his integrated schools. Then, as a teenager, a relative used one of the ugliest racial epithets in the English language to ask him what it was like to go to school with black kids.

"I was floored," Hedblom remembered. "That was the first time it hit me that it wasn't normal."

But for Hedblom, as for others, going to Muir redefined what normal was. All classes and most school activities were integrated, including the theater's stage crew, of which Hedblom was a member.

"I knew kids whose parents taught at Caltech and kids whose parents swept the floors at JPL," said Hedblom. "We'd go to the poor part of Pasadena to hang out, and then drive up into the hills and all do something together."

In the years that followed, a lot of the graduates went on to successful careers, finding themselves especially well prepared to navigate the new California.

"The more opportunities you have to live around different kinds of people, the better prepared you are to live in this world," Turner said.

Muir High in 1981 wasn't a racial utopia, by any means. But for the most part, it was a school that worked.

Another Muir graduate, Pablo Miralles, argues that what killed integrated schools wasn't racial intolerance but the budget wars that slowly consumed public education after Proposition 13 passed in 1978.

"Once school funding became a bigger issue than race, the middle class families left," said Miralles. The son of Argentine immigrants, he's making a documentary about the class of 1981, a clip of which can be seen online.

"I lived on a street that was all middle-class African Americans," Miralles told me. "Now they're not sending their kids to public school either."

Hedblom remembers going back to Muir in the 1990s and meeting up with one of his old stage teachers.

"This is a dumping ground," the teacher told him. "These kids can't learn anything."

Hedblom was stunned. "The whole school felt, for lack of a better word, tired. Beat up," he told me.

Those graduates who return to Muir agree that there are still many excellent teachers there, and an eager student body. But the teachers of today are clearly working with fewer resources, and the students of today have less opportunity than their parents' generation.

It's up to us today to fight for them — again — and to fight for the equality that makes us a stronger California.

hector.tobar@latimes.com

Copyright © 2011, Los Angeles Times



Share

Comments 56

[« Previous Story](#)

[More Local - news, Los Angeles, California, Southern California - latimes.com](#)

[Next Story »](#)



Hunting for good bugs to fight bad bugs



Conrad Murray trial off to an emotional start

MORE FROM THE TIMES

35 bodies dumped on street in Mexico

FROM AROUND THE WEB

9 Things You Must Know to Get Out of Debt

California Public Records »



Help keep government open and honest — share your documents.

Today in Events »

Knott's Scary Farm Halloween Haunt *Knott's Berry Farm*

L.A. County Fair *Pomona Fairplex*

Yoshua Okón *Hammer Museum*

What

Where



Reader Travel Photos »



Share your shots with us. We'll feature the best in print and online. Above, Ale's Stones in Sweden.

Sign In

Subscribe/Manage Account Place Ad LAT Store Jobs Cars Real Estate Rentals Classifieds Custom Publishing



Los Angeles Times

LOCAL U.S. WORLD BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT HEALTH LIVING TRAVEL OPINION

Search

BREAKING HOY CRIME APPS WEATHER TRAFFIC OBITS COMMUNITY CROSSWORDS COMICS

EACH NEW STANDARD LEADS TO ANOTHER. SEE HOW IT ALL CONNECTS.

CADILLAC RACING
CADILLAC CTS-V COUPE

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

la-me-0923-tobar-20110923 10429847
3.00 from 13 ratings

A bus ride to enlightenment



With metal lunch pails in hand, they climbed on school buses for a short but historic journey across the foothills of Pasadena and Altadena.

SHARE

Facebook (17)

Retweet (0)

Digg (0)

ShareThis

Add your voice to the mix!

[Sign In](#) | [Register](#)

1400

sort: newest first | oldest first



Ingrid3 at 1:39 PM September 25, 2011

My older sisters and I grew up going to an integrated public elementary school in Altadena before any bussing, and our memories from then are all color-blind in terms of race. Our father worked at Caltech, and my parents bought their first home in an integrated part of western Altadena in 1954. They thought that the mixture of whites, blacks, and Asians (maybe Latinos included, I don't know) in our middle-class neighborhood was a plus. I only know that my best friend in Kindergarten was black because my mother later told me so. She led a Girl Scout troop in our back yard that included black families who even named 3 baby girls during that time with our unusual Scandinavian and northern European first names. When we moved out of state (to multi-racial Hawaii) in 1962, a biracial couple bought our house. However, the white wife didn't bring her black husband to see the house until the papers were signed. She was afraid my parents might not be willing to sell. She didn't know them! They met at International House at UC Berkeley, and my mother, an immigrant herself, always said, "I'm a citizen of the world and a member of the human race."

I know bussing for integration is a more difficult issue, but I'm grateful that my parents valued and taught, at home and in their classrooms, equality, tolerance and understanding between all peoples.

Thank you for this article!

Reply



Report Abuse

0

0

**oc_moderate** at 12:45 PM September 24, 2011

Let's just put it this way Mr. Tobar. When the hoards of illegals started coming in the late 70's and early 80's, that's when SoCal forever became what it is today, crap.

Reply

Report Abuse

2

0

**avo2diff** at 9:33 AM September 24, 2011

Hector, judging from these comments, you hit a hot button. Here is my experience with PUSD and integration. The first year (8th grade) I was bussed from the cozy enclave of Sierra Madre to Altadena's Elliot Jr. High. The bus ride took 40 minutes. In the 9th grade, I attended my "home school" Pasadena High. Oh, but wait. I started the day at PHS; at lunch I was bussed over to Marshall to finish out the day. God forbid if I got on a bus as the only white student. What suffered during "the road to understanding" was education. How can students learn when they are afraid to walk down the hallway alone? I was accosted in the hallway at Elliot. My arm was burned with a cigarette at Marshall. I was in a car that was jumped after a basketball game at Muir (we were in the pep squad). And yes, there were White, Black and Hispanic kids in the car with me. Not a pretty memory.

Who should be held accountable? The "decision makers." Are you listening, Mr. Cortines? It was a failed experiment. Schools (and students) cannot be used to create social change. Many on the board of education had children in private schools at the time. That speaks volumes.

When I think of my middle and high school years in the PUSD, one word comes to mind: pathetic. It had nothing to do with being friends with Black and Hispanic kids. It had everything to do with the quality of education.

Reply

Report Abuse

5

0

**wehnely111** at 8:52 AM September 24, 2011

I find it interesting that no one mentions that Pasadena has more private schools per square mile than most other American cities...this of course was due to the forced integration.

Reply

Report Abuse

4

0

**jagexxx** at 8:49 AM September 24, 2011

Perhaps Mr. Tobar hasn't realized Southern California has changed quite a bit since the early '70's.

See Sandy Banks' column in this very paper!

I was a teen and high school student in the early '70's.

SoCal was still a paradise then.

Reply

Report Abuse

3

0

**paulg999** at 7:13 AM September 24, 2011

Wow, this article sure is a magnet for non-white hating, racist pigs.

Reply

Report Abuse

1

2



nonotever at 7:53 AM September 24, 2011
OINK OINK
Report Abuse

2

0



RafaelChavez at 6:14 AM September 24, 2011

Forced integration, which is what this is, doesn't last and is therefore ineffective in the long run. Schools that run a good program and are supported by interested educators and parents will always attract families that want the best for their children, no matter what the color. Well intentions don't always bring the best results. Today's problems in the schools area result of failed policies brought on by well intentioned administrators. A simple act like flunking a grade, which was common in my grade school days here in Los Angeles, is no longer practiced. The possibility of flunking out was an incentive for all of us to work hard on our assignments in school, and at home. Just like it is in real life. Isn't that right?
Segregated schools will continue to exist as long as mediocrity prevails.
Reply
Report Abuse

4

0



Prince albert at 3:52 AM September 24, 2011

When you begin running the white middle class out of California with blatantly racist policies of course the schools which remain will become segregated . The only middle class left are those who CANNOT leave, so these people will move to neighborhoods which are predominantly white and middle class and send their kids to these schools. Moves by integrationest to hijack their schools for more racist policies will be vigorously opposed and only serve to drive the last of the White middle class from the State.
Reply
Report Abuse

3

0



Olden Atwoody at 3:02 AM September 24, 2011

Hector's (Brown) History Lessons (again...)
This would have been a great story... FOURTY YEARS AGO. Bor-ring...
Gee, Hector - write something about White people once in a while (if you know any...).
Reply
Report Abuse

5

1



P McKann at 2:52 AM September 24, 2011

What a BS story. Back in the '70s, my elementary school had kids from an urban school bussed in, and within the first day I was assaulted twice and heard profanity for the first time in my life. White kids were terrorized every day. That's my experience. Any parent with a child in a good school that would even consider reintroducing a failed social experiment like "bussing" should have their children taken away from them.
Reply
Report Abuse

7

0



iLuv4U2 at 9:14 PM September 23, 2011

I went to school in LAUSD in the mid 70's to 80's and I remember my classmates being, white, black, Latino, Filipino, Chinese and Vietnamese, It didn't matter how much money one's family did or didn't have, we all learned and played together and the color of one's skin didn't matter. However, once the first wave of illegals from Mexico started pouring in around 1979, I was put in a class with Spanish-speaking kids and had to sacrifice my learning to get them caught up on what was going on. Needless to say, my parents were livid and demanded I get put into an English ONLY class at the school, to which I excelled.
THAT was the beginning of the end for LAUSD and ANY credibility they had as a good district, by coddling illegals who came to their schools without knowing one lick of English, yet because there is a kid in class with a Spanish surname, the assumption is they speak the language and can help them.

Years later this happened to my oldest child, in Hacienda-La Puente USD, when he was placed in an ELL (English language Learner) kindergarten class based on the family last name. Same assumption- Spanish surname, you speak Spanish.

Uh no, Spanish surname, does NOT mean Spanish speaking. In fact, nothing but ENGLISH gets spoken in my home, because we're AMERICANS and we will NOT be forced to speak someone else's drivel.

Reply

Report Abuse

6

1



maandrews213 at 10:14 AM September 24, 2011

Great post.

Report Abuse

0

0



TO Perspective at 11:54 AM September 23, 2011

yep, let's begin bussing again. Let's take the kids whose parents care about education and bus them to areas where the parents don't care and the kids don't speak english. Let Tobar's kids spend an hour on a bus, not mine.

Reply

Report Abuse

11

0



krvoni at 11:21 AM September 23, 2011

Times were different back then. There was a much broader middle-class base because there were a lot more manufacturing and engineering jobs in Southern California. When you have that much wealth, you can afford to experiment, and low-performing kids might actually get pulled UP because their peers are mostly high-performing.

Today, it's completely different. The middle class has shrunk significantly. Most of the kids in those schools are predominantly low-performing, so kids don't get pulled up anymore. They come from families that don't value education as much as the most of the current batch of white and Asian families.

Solutions from the past will not necessarily address the problems of today.

Reply

Report Abuse

11

0



Olden Atwoody at 3:04 AM September 24, 2011

"low-performing" Excellent choice of words.

Notice how many of the "low-performing" students now have anti-Middle Class, anti-White columns at the Times.

Report Abuse

4

0



rocamadour at 11:04 AM September 23, 2011

In 1970, I volunteered on the Caltech campus to ride a Pasadena school bus on the first day of integration. I was a frosh and had been on campus just a few weeks. This was the first year of undergraduate women. I said yes. The next morning I was dropped off at a quiet corner in north Pasadena. I wore a leather headband with dangling red beads over long dark hair, and a new ankle-length red shift. No one, no cars were on the street that bright morning. Only, silent scrutiny behind a few curtains. Finally, a couple of kids were escorted out to the sidewalk by their parents when the bus arrived. No one spoke. I smiled. The crowd quietly expanded. We all stood there wordlessly: a crowd of young black children, their anxious parents and one white teenager. As the big yellow bus stopped, with squealing brakes and clouds of fumes, the kids and I got on. I sat in the front seat. I sensed that I should say something. I stood up and faced the sea of wide-eyed angels with their first-day-of-school freshness. "Boys on the left," I said, pointing to one side, "and girls on the right." They immediately dove across the aisles to line up perfectly, relief breaking out all over. I could hear us all breathing again. There were even a few timid smiles. I sat down and started carefully watching the front and side windows of the bus, and we roared off to the other side of the world. L. Anderson, Paris

Reply

Report Abuse

2

3



Olden Atwoody at 3:33 AM September 24, 2011
Mighty White of you.
Report Abuse

2

0



bigbill60 at 8:41 AM September 24, 2011

So the Evil White Beasts didn't mob the bus, take the little angels out and suck their blood? What a fluke! Surely you stayed on the bus for at least a week or two to make sure the Savage White Beasts didn't attack, right?
Tell me, when DID you have to fight them off? Did they throw rocks, all those Evil Hating Monster White People? Or did they bring knives and try to cut bits of flesh off the poor innocent babes you were protecting? Did they at least give you two-way radios to call in tactical air support against the marauding white bands?
My goodness! You are lucky you lived to tell the tale. If you weren't there, Dat ol' debbil white man probably would have stopped the bus and lynched some of those grade schoolers. White people are like that, you know.
Report Abuse

1

0



kmaudw at 9:34 AM September 23, 2011

"To the great shame of all Californians, public education has become re-segregated."
Lo and behold I agree with you on this comment. But I doubt seriously if we agree as to why because I feel it is liberals like you who have destroyed California cities for caucasians filling it with so many Mexicans, particularly the illegal ones. In the 70s you better believe all those kids spoke English!
Reply
Report Abuse

8

0



MTKayak at 8:43 AM September 23, 2011

It also destroyed the following cities:
Detroit
Baltimore
Indianapolis
Cleveland
Philadelphia
Reply
Report Abuse

8

1



jennfurr at 8:18 AM September 23, 2011

I was part of the LAUSD desegregation (integration) program. They called it Tri-Ed, and they combined students from Westport Heights Elementary School, Cowan Avenue Elementary School, and Windsor Hills Elementary School.
All the sixth graders went to Cowan Ave, fifth grade went to Windsor Hills, and fourth grade to Westport Heights.
I remember being one of about 250 6th graders at Cowan Avenue, about 75% of whom were black.
It wasn't a big deal for us kids.
As far as I recall, it only lasted a couple years.
Reply
Report Abuse

0

0



bwasson at 7:52 AM September 23, 2011

Hector, my Caucasian son attended our neighborhood Noyes Elementary until just before PUSD shut it down. We still live in the neighborhood. It's a rare adult who cares enough about keeping all the children together to stand for the few things that reliably create that outcome. Will you be one of those people?

<http://www.altadenaschools.net/altadenadeclaration.htm>

Reply

Report Abuse

4

0



BlazinBob at 7:38 AM September 23, 2011

We had at least 8 bus loads of kids brought into the junior high school I was attending in the San Fernando Valley during the late 70's. The class sizes were larger and many of the "imported" students were disruptive. I wasn't forced to attend a school outside of my neighborhood, but my younger sister was and my parents immediately put her in private school. It was a huge disruption to her life and cost my parents a bundle of money to accomplish, but they did not want her bused to the ghetto as part of a social experiment. Thanks LAUSD for that.

Reply

Report Abuse

10

0



nonotever at 7:32 AM September 23, 2011

Ratbone at his best "urban public schools in California, 66% Latino, 29% Black, and just 2% White. To the shame of all Californians public education has become re-segregated"

AH NO , Californians did not ask for , vote for, or invite millions of criminal illegal alien Latinos to overwhelm our school system. If the schools have been re-segregated it's the Latino's fault, just as it's their fault that our healthcare , prison and welfare systems have been swarmed and destroyed.

Reply

Report Abuse

11

0



emmaco at 7:07 AM September 23, 2011

Claiming that integration has worked at Muir High School is a farce. Maybe for a couple of years until the whites moved away, but seriously?

Muir is a disaster (murders, group sex, gang fights, failed API scores) and is officially classified as a failed school under state management.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Muir_High_School_\(Pasadena,_California\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Muir_High_School_(Pasadena,_California))

The basic question left unresolved in this story is that Asian and White parents don't want their children's education retarded by Black and Hispanic students, who aren't performing as well. None of our commentators will touch the issue with a ten foot pole without calling you a racist.

Yet it's not about skin color, it's about results and wanting your child to have the best opportunities possible. Muir as it exists today is a horrible school.

San Marino HS API: 938

La Canada HS API: 928

South Pasadena HS API: 887

Muir HS API: 650

Reply

Report Abuse

10

0



jabouja at 8:58 AM September 23, 2011

hard to argue it when you back it by facts, something this article lacks...

Report Abuse

7

0



waskoman at 6:42 AM September 23, 2011

I lived far enough away from the inner city to have kids bussed out to our school or vice versa. Thank god. I got my racial integration from hanging out down at the pier in Santa Monica on Sat. nights.

Reply

Report Abuse

3

0

**TommyBirchfield** at 6:33 AM September 23, 2011

"Hell Hector"

"Good job sir, yes intergration works, and should be continued throughout the country not just here. I don't like segration, it's wrong and If I'm not mistaken the United State Surpreme Court said it's wrong!

..."In conclusion, we are a nation of one, it's time we started acting like it! Sure kids will fight, times are different today then what they where 40 years ago, but that's not to stop U.S. from doing what it right!

We should be helping those who need help, we should educating our kids, with the best teachers/textbooks/money can buy, we are losing our kids, and if we lose them, we lose our future, for the future belongs to them!

..."Real differculties; "Can be overcome; "It is only the imaginary ones; "That are unconquerable."---Theodore N. Vail

...."Hell Hector..."

..."Good job!

Reply

Report Abuse

1

0

**enmaco** at 7:12 AM September 23, 2011

It's generally not about teachers, textbooks, or money.

Generally speaking, it's more about the PARENTS doing their job, like setting limits and enforcing them.

There is no excuse for a child not reading when they walk into Kindergarten. Yeah, it may take a couple of hours a night for three years, but DO IT.

Biggest gift you could ever give your child.

Report Abuse

7

0

**jhklat** at 6:27 AM September 23, 2011

We want our kids to go to schools close to where they live.

We want our schools to be ethnically diverse.

We want people to have the freedom to choose where they live.

Not all of these things are compatible with each other. Unless you're willing to force neighborhoods to include specific quotas of ethnicities, the only way to force a certain ethnic makeup of a school is to do disruptive things like busing.

Reply

Report Abuse

7

0

**mike_from_sgv** at 6:07 AM September 23, 2011

"Integration worked"... what a bald-faced lie. It brought together studious kids with rowdy, uninterested, rough kids. Guess who wins that confrontation?

Fast forward 40 years later and what does your integrated utopia look like? Any white or Asian Pasadena family who can afford it sends their kids to private school (like I do) or else has long since left for Arcadia or La Canada or even Orange County. The Pasadena school system is predictably 2nd-rate. Here is the fruit of liberal utopian thinking. Will there ever be any accountability for this vandalism of a once-fine school system?

Reply

Report Abuse

13

0

« Previous 1 2 Next »