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Program Participants: Avi Nelson, Jerry Williams, Robert Baram

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Recording Overview:

The Boston Busing Debate was an episode of the television show “A Left and a Right” which originally aired on Boston’s Channel 5 and was co-hosted two broadcast personalities, the conservative Avi Nelson and the outspoken “Dean of Talk Radio” Jerry Williams. The debate, moderated by Robert Baram, focused on the issue of forced busing in Boston during the 1970s.

Transcript Begins:

[Recording begins when program is already underway]

AVI NELSON: --Something we should be doing. Once again our decision talks about is headcounts. They count black heads. They count white heads. If it matches up to the proposed quotas, it’s okay. And if not we have to go back and do it again. This is not what we should be doing in America. We ought to be concerned about education. And there are certain things we can do. And I will be talking about it. In fact, some people in Boston are already doing them, mainly because of what has happened here in Boston.



We have the genesis of private academies that are developing all around the city because people want to get out from under the bureaucratic thumb, out from under the political appointments, out from under the government telling us what to do. And there is a voucher plan, which would help everybody in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and improve education across the entire state. These are the kinds of things we can do, practical alternatives. Not the kind of stuff which forces us to judge people on the basis of skin color instead of ability.

We’ve suffered for too long under this kind of quota system. It is high time that we the people of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the forefront of this anti-busing movement get together—first to pass a constitutional amendment and second of all to change education for the better everywhere, for everybody, in Massachusetts.

[Applause]

BOB BARAM: And now we will hear from Jerry Williams.

JERRY WILLIAMS: Thank you. Since Bob Baram said initially the topic is highly controversial and emotional, I have carefully prepared the opening statement. I don’t usually prepare opening statements. I talk off the cuff but I think it is necessary that I prepare this one. I want to emphasize, too, that I am not representing any groups or do any groups speak for me. I’m not a politician. I’m not looking for any votes. What I say tonight may be unpopular and I’m going to say them because they express my views alone.

Let me begin with the basics. In 1954, by a unanimous vote the United States Supreme Court found that schools for white and black kids could not be separate

and equal¹. They found segregation violated the 14th Amendment, even when blacks were provided with identical schools, which they rarely were. In 1965 in Massachusetts, the Kiernan report² showed that some Boston schools were imbalanced and suggested some remedies.

The report mentioned busing only as a dim possibility because it was easily possible to remedy the situation at that time. Instead, the Boston School Committee set out to do just the opposite. They refused to build schools in places where they would become balanced. They redistricted the schools to perpetuate imbalance. They established a feeder system which guaranteed that some schools would become black and others white using an open enrollment and control transfer system to close the doors on black students while opening them for whites.

The system of faculty assignments insured that the experienced teachers would go to white schools, leaving the fill-ins and provisional teachers to the blacks. The result -- a dual-school system, one for whites and another, inferior system for blacks. The State Supreme Court, US Court of Appeals, the First Circuit Court and the US Supreme Court all agreed that segregation was both allowed to grow and increase by the Boston School Committee.

¹ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* refers to the May 17, 1954 decision by the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.* (347 U.S. 483), which overturned earlier rulings going back to *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 by declaring state laws which established separate public schools for black and white students denied black students equal educational opportunities. The unanimous decision (9-0) stated the inherently unequal nature of separate educational facilities and, in so doing, paved the way for integration and the Civil Rights movement.

² The Kiernan report refers to a study of racial segregation in urban Massachusetts Public Schools done by Massachusetts State Commissioner Dr. Owen B. Kiernan and published in 1965. The report concluded that Boston’s public schools were racially imbalanced.



Now we have busing. The redistribution of students within the system to undo what the School Committee spent years doing. It was really a cruel joke because if the committee had acted responsibly back in '65, everybody today could probably walk to a racially balanced school today. I'm not trying to say that the current plan is perfect. As a matter of fact there are some disappointments.

What is important is this. There is a legacy of suspicion and hate and misunderstanding, which has been allowed to grow in carefully separated places. The same politicians that sold out their people in the last ten years is selling them out again, leading them down the same old blind alley, pandering to their hatred as a means of political power. Busing, chiefly suffering from the opposition of people who do everything in their power to sandbag the operation—and then turn around happily to proclaim it doesn't work.

Busing has become the symbol for people who simply just don't want black and white kids to go to school together. You have to look at the things written on walls, black or white men beaten on the streets to understand what it is about. We will talk about white flight tonight, I'm sure. The demagogues may find a thousand ways to cloud the basic fact of race that's empty words we are hearing.

The current plan offers some exciting possibilities for school children, white and black, with university and business participation in the classroom that could bring excellence to a system that is embarrassingly flawed with a terrible record. We could actually become, once again, the model of a system throughout the country. And it would be a shame if a handful of people were allowed to throw that away for everyone. Thank you very much

[Applause]



BARAM: Thank you, gentlemen. And we will be back with you in just a few minutes.

[Pause]

BARAM: That is our debate topic for this evening. But that topic took a lot more than one evening to grow into the most challenging and complex problem in this nation’s history. You will recall that the implementation of the Massachusetts Racial Balance Law³ was fashioned by the legislative acts of 1965. One year later, on April 12, 1966 the Boston battle began. That is when the State Board of Education voted to withhold funds normally due to that city, to withhold such funds until an acceptable racial-balance plan for the city’s public schools was submitted.

Years earlier as Jerry Williams noted, the legal beginnings of the school desegregation issue were born when the US Supreme Court made its historic decision in the Brown v. Board of Education Case, 1954. That is when the court said and I quote, “Separate education facilities are inherently unequal.” And that was almost one full century after the Civil War and the alleged Reconstruction Era. That nation and its states, in effect, were ordered to insure equal and not separate educational opportunity for all its citizens, more especially for the millions who clearly had been denied such equality for decades and even centuries. That it must be done, but few disagree, the key question, of course, is how.

³ Passed in 1965, the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Law prohibited “racial imbalance” in public schools and discouraged schools from having more than 50 percent minority students.



Avi, I would like to throw a question to you to get the debate going. And that is, can we expect, really, that a problem so immersed in pain and suffering, terrible pain and suffering over decades and centuries for so many human beings—will not, in effect, call for special sacrifices of present generations in order to solve such a problem?

NELSON: You focused on one of the problems, Bob, I cannot justify in terms of moral argument that we should call upon an individual to be sacrificed for the evils perpetrated by somebody else a century ago. It simply is not justified that because somebody is white and somebody who also was white 100 years ago owned slaves—but because of this, the new individual, that is the individual living today, has to be sacrificed. His rights have to be advocated.

Beyond this, I have to advance a couple of outrageous points that Jerry made in his opening statement. He said, first of all, that there are a handful of people trying to overturn this. Jerry, you either are unable or unwilling to confront the situation as it is. The fact of the matter is that any survey that has been taken inside Boston or outside indicates that upwards of eighty percent of the community is against forced busing.

Beyond that, there was referendum on forced busing in the city of Boston, fourteen to one against it. If you will go along with a referendum of the people on this issue, I will be happy to side with you on that.

WILLIAMS: When you say there was a referendum, what the referendum was?

NELSON: The referendum was on forced busing, Jerry. You know, even the black community [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: What does the referendum say?

NELSON: We just took a survey in the City of Boston in April 1975 and we asked in the black community, “Do you think forced busing will improve the education for your children?” Forty-four percent said yes. Forty-two percent said no.

WILLIAMS: People are going to get the impression--

NELSON: Jerry---

WILLIAMS: The question on the Boston City ballot saying, “Are you in favor of busing or are you not?”

NELSON: That is in effect exactly what—

WILLIAMS: What did it say?

NELSON: Exactly that, Jerry. The people were voting on busing.

WILLIAMS: What did it say?

NELSON: Jerry, you are going to make a big thing about it, fourteen to one on [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: You said it. I didn’t say it.

NELSON: Jerry—

WILLIAMS: [simultaneous conversation] find out what it says so everybody will know.

NELSON: It was a referendum on busing

BARAM: Jerry, do you disagree that the referendum did say that, Jerry?

WILLIAMS: I disagree.

BARAM: What did it say, Jerry?

NELSON: That is my question. You posed the topic that I’m trying to get to.

WILLIAMS: —What you have to say, with reference to that referendum--

NELSON: And I’m trying to explain to you, Jerry, that without quoting chapter and verse, everybody who went to the polls that day understood the question was on forced busing.

WILLIAMS: Then let’s leave it, and say [simultaneous conversation] the question. I contend the question was not a direct question on forced busing at all.

NELSON: And do you want to argue with my statistics, also, that eighty percent of the people are against it.

WILLIAMS: Those statistics probably are accurate.

NELSON: Thank you very much...I'm glad you--

[Unintelligible comments]

WILLIAMS: People are generally against busing.

NELSON: Please recognize that your statement that a handful of people against it is therefore wrong. [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: Okay. And then I'm going to ask you a similar question. If you will respond as honestly as my response to you, All right? Do you believe in the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision that separate but equal education is unequal?

NELSON: Well, of course, that is a contradiction in terms. What they said was that separate was inherently unequal. And the term separate and equal--

WILLIAMS: I thought it was my question--

NELSON: But you phrase it in a contraction in terms, separate and equal [simultaneous conversation] separate and equal is unconstitutional. And I would go along with that. I would agree. They were, of course, referring to a very different situation and, you know, the crux of that argument, the thing that turned the Supreme Court that way was that black students in the south were being bused by the nearest school to a school of their own, that is, a separate school.

Now we have just the reverse [simultaneous conversation] students being bused--

[Unintelligible comments]

NELSON: It certainly did.

WILLIAMS: It did not have anything to do with busing. It had to do with separate but equal facilities.

NELSON: And how did they prove that.

WILLIAMS: __: [simultaneous conversation] And for you to twist it like that is really a contradiction.[simultaneous conversation]

NELSON: Jerry. Jerry.

NELSON: Jerry, they proved it by saying that, “See here, the black students are being bused by their nearest school.”

WILLIAMS: One other question. Do you feel that all these court decisions, having to do with what the Boston School Committee has, in fact, done over the last nine years is right? That they, in fact, set up a dual system of education in this city purposely.

NELSON: No, I would take issue with that. I would take issue with that. In fact, I think the Garrity decision⁴, the long, rambling decision that I have here does not

⁴ In 1974, a federal judge, W. Arthur Garrity, Jr. ordered the Boston school district to remedy its racial imbalance by sending students, usually by bus, to schools outside their racially homogeneous neighborhoods. The plan went into effect in September of 1974 and sparked fierce debate and violence throughout the City of Boston.



really spell out anything more than de facto segregation, which the school committee conceded. Incidentally, though, even if you accept the Garrity decision, they found that there was segregation in 26 of 177 schools. I do not think that that justifies a citywide situation. [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: [simultaneous conversation] Wait a minute, it was back in 1965 when the Kiernan report came down indicating that the public schools were imbalanced. The State Supreme Judicial Court is the court that ruled that the Boston School Committee had better comply and it went to the Federal District Court. The judge’s decision, by the way, was not rambling at all. People would have to read the decision to see how clear the decision was.

That is one of the big problems is that most people have not read the decision. They can probably by writing to the paperback book list distributing company, getting a copy of the decision, reading it for themselves.

NELSON: I’ve read it.

WILLIAMS: I know that you’ve read it. I’m saying the public, possibly has not read it. And if they can’t, if the most arrogant, Ku Klux Klan’er can’t see after reading this decision—that the Boston School Committee did, in fact, set up a dual system of education, purposely--

NELSON: Jerry, the decision itself only finds it in 26 of 177 schools. Why does that mean that it should be citywide? But beyond that, Jerry, you’ve made a second allusion now and that brings me back to a point you made earlier. And that is, the typical liberal line here that anybody who is opposed to this program is obviously a racist, that is a lot of nonsense.



WILLIAMS: Not at all.

NELSON: You certainly did.

WILLIAMS: Not at all.

NELSON: You said it in your opening statement and you implied it here when using the Ku Klux Klan.

WILLIAMS: I said down at the bottom, a great deal of this problem is race.

NELSON: And I contend that the real reason people do not want to have their kids put on a bus is because they, like you, want to be able to send their children to a school of their choice. In fact, if you ask them the question, would you allow your kids to be forced bused, if the buses were going out to Wellesley where Garrity lives or Newton or Brookline where there is no race involvement at all, they will still in overwhelming majority say no—because they don’t want to be told where their kids have to go to school.

[Applause]

And for you to make it sound that that legitimate aspiration of parents is based on nothing but race is a racism all its own. Because you are, in effect, casting aspersion against a large group of individuals and trying to give this general description of them in a pejorative tone simply because it is difficult for you to handle [simultaneous conversation]



WILLIAMS: You never use that tactic at all about putting [simultaneous conversation]

NELSON: That’s right. I don’t.

WILLIAMS: Like you said, some liberals or all liberals.

BARAM: Let me ask Avi a question.

WILLIAMS: Can we just quote from--

BARAM: Jerry, let me ask Avi a question. Do you feel that the Boston School Committee was in some way, that is, did drag its feet—

NELSON: Yes, I do. I think there was much the Boston School Committee could do and that is why I’m not a big fan of having the centralization of education in terms of controlled by the government. But I would say this, Bob, that even if we were to fault the school committee, there is no justification for taking some innocent house dweller who lives in Charlestown or South Boston or Dorchester and saying that he’s got to pay the penalty.

You know, there is an ethic here that is being perpetrated that somehow when you’ve seen one white person you have seen them all; when you have seen one black person you have seen them all—that if there was something done incorrectly by a white person that another white person has to suffer. That is morally bankrupt. And I can’t go along with it.

BARAM: What do you say to that Jerry?



WILLIAMS: I’m saying that the Boston School desegregation must, by law, take place. It should have taken place in 1965, ’66 and ’67. There was plenty of room for plans other than busing. In fact, there were no plans for busing at the time. But the Boston School Committee even gave up state aid for building because they didn’t want to build in certain places where there would be a mix or a balance.

In fact, they used to bus black kids past white schools to get them so the system was out of balance. As a matter of fact in the decision, Judge Garrity said, “Teachers are also segregated.” Seventy-five percent of Boston’s black teachers are in schools more than fifty percent black. Eighty-one schools have never had a black teacher.

NELSON: Interesting that you point that out because there were members of the black community who were very much in favor of having black teachers for black children. But that aside, Jerry—

WILLIAMS: --That has nothing to do with the desegregation.

NELSON: I know it doesn’t. That’s right and that is precisely the point I’m bringing up.

WILLIAMS: [simultaneous conversation] I would like to talk about [simultaneous conversation] blacks for blacks and whites for whites and the dual system.



NELSON: All I’m saying is, no, not at all—I’m simply saying that there are some people who see some benefit in maintaining the subculture. But beyond that I would like to hear the answer... [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: What subculture is that?

NELSON: The black subculture. Didn’t you know about that?

WILLIAMS: Oh, is there a black subculture?

NELSON: There is a black subculture. There is an Italian subculture, a Jewish subculture. And I happen to be one of those who think that homogeneity is not the be-all and end-all of America. I think that the orchestra plays more beautifully when there is more than one instrument playing. We can play in harmony but we ought to be able maintain the sub-cultural balance.

[Applause]

WILLIAMS: And now I suppose I’m going to hear about the black keys and the white keys playing the “Star Spangled Banner.”

NELSON: Not from me you won’t hear it.

WILLIAMS: Well, somebody will say that as well. You want to come up with some of those old clichés. I’m merely trying to tell you that this school system must be desegregated by law. That’s what it says.

BARAM: Gentlemen, on that note we will have to take a break and we will be back very shortly and let the audience ask some questions.



[Pause]

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1: The parents and the children did not create this problem. The problem is that that United States Supreme Court has ruled that the public schools of Boston are segregated and segregated schools are against the law of the land. But the School Committee has failed to bring about compliance with the law of the land. The court has ordered busing simply as a means to bring about an end to segregated schools and bring the system into compliance with the law. I know that you support law and order. How do you propose to end segregation in the Boston schools and bring about compliance with the law of the land?

NELSON: Fine. Ok. That is a good question. That is about the law. It is the same kind of question the Martin Luther King had to ask himself a couple of decades ago about the law that existed in the south, the law that required black people to ride in the back of the school bus. And he protested that law. He challenged it because it thought it was a bad law. I'm suggesting the same thing.

I have never advocated violence in terms of civil disobedience. I have suggested and would defend those people who take it upon themselves to disobey the law in order to challenge it. I don't think it's a good law. I think desegregation in terms of what it is supposed to do does not accomplish its objectives. It does not provide for better education for black students or white students. Therefore I suggest we try to change the law.

I don't think blind adherence to the law is at issue. I would say that peaceful civil disobedience is what we are after in the same spirit that Martin Luther King did so much for black people and white people a couple of decades ago.

WILLIAMS: The problem is, what are you talking about in terms of change of the law. The gentleman said “desegregation” is the end in mind. How would you change the law?

NELSON: I would change the law, first of all to have a constitutional amendment to eliminate forced busing as a means.

WILLIAMS: How would you desegregate the schools?

NELSON: Fine. Now the question is whether we should have mandatory desegregation. I would much prefer to have quality education as the objective. Therefore, if you are going to ask me would I go along with a law that requires desegregation my answer is no. Having investigated the basis of the law, which is [simultaneous conversation] Professor Colman—I know what the Supreme Court has said, Jerry. That doesn't mean that I, as a free American, have to agree with the Supreme Court [simultaneous conversation]

BARAM: [simultaneous conversation] Jerry and Avi, we will be moving into specific solutions that you gentleman have for this problem in our next segment. Could we have another question? Do you have a question, sir?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2: Yes. My name is Andy Downy. I’m from South Boston, the organization ROAR⁵. Mr. Williams, don’t you think the Massachusetts State Board of Education and **Commissioner Anray(?) has** become an instrument of federal policy—that the State Board of Education has become a kind of a sociological police force determined to change all American education whatever the cost in money and suffering is to bring about changes the social engineers are pushing in Washington?

WILLIAMS: Well, it’s quite clear. Once again, I have to agree with the United States Supreme Court decision of 1954, that dual school systems, one white and one black are unequal. That is the kind of system we have in Boston. This School Committee got a chance to comply with the law for nine years. Let me re-emphasize that again. It quite clearly states in Judge Garrity’s decision. Judge Garrity merely implemented this decision of the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision, the Supreme Judicial Court’s decision.

And the Board of Education’s plan, which was the one that was implemented in 1954—Judge Garrity had nothing to do with that plan except to say, “Do it.” Implement the State Board of Education plan, not Judge Garrity’s plan.

NELSON: Jerry—

WILLIAMS: I’m not here to defend the judge. I’m saying that integrated education is a goal, whether you want to call it devised by the federalists or the social engineers, is a goal that in America we should achieve.

⁵ Restore Our Alienated Rights, or ROAR, was an anti-busing organization that was founded in 1970s in response to the Garrity decision.

NELSON: Jerry, first of all, the main thrust of Garrity’s decision is the 14th Amendment, where he invokes the clause that says that there must be equal protection under the law. And the reference there is to state law. Do you think that it is equal protection when some people are forced to give up sovereignty over their children and are forced to send those children on a school bus, to a school which is not of their choice and others are not forced to do that?

WILLIAMS: The Boston School Committee--

NELSON: I’m talking to you, Jerry.

WILLIAMS: --The opportunity to do it.

NELSON: But do you think it is fair? Do you think it is right?

WILLIAMS: I think that the Boston School situation in terms of the law, must be desegregated with the least amount of busing possible to alienate people with the least amount of busing—

BARAM: Gentlemen.

NELSON: ...(inaudible) amount of busing is not--

WILLIAMS: Well, that is not true, either.

BARAM: Gentlemen.



WILLIAMS: That’s not true, either. Forty percent of the people in the United States are bused to school.

BARAM: Jerry, another question from your group.

NELSON: There is a big difference, Jerry, they are not forced to go on buses.
[Simultaneous conversation]

NELSON: --Means of vehicular transportation. [Simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: They mostly go by bus or they can walk or go by private transportation or other—

BARAM: Jerry, another question from your guests.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3: Yes. My name is Ed (inaudible). I’m a concerned parent. And, first of all, I would like to clear up some of the obvious misinformation that Mr. Nelson is giving out. Forty-three percent of the children in this country are bused to school and only two or three percent have to deal with busing. Secondly--

NELSON: I never once said the statistic that you gave is incorrect. Also, why do you call it mis-information on my part?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3: Eighty percent, 80 schools in Boston were found imbalance. Secondly, forced busing is working, particularly in the South. Boston



is different than Detroit. It is not seventy percent black. And white flight⁶ has never been an impediment to enforcing the Constitution. And that is not the case in Boston. So, obviously, if forty-three percent of the children in the United States are bused and only two or three percent have to do with desegregation and over 30,000 kids are bused in Boston last year, obviously, force is not the issue. What is it, Mr. Nelson?

[Applause]

NELSON: For somebody who is concerned about mis-information you certainly gave a fair amount of it. In the first place, force is precisely the problem. The argument is not a school bus. I rode on buses when I went to school. The question is, where the bus is going. If you get on a bus and you want to go from here to Worcester that is all well and good if it goes to Worcester. If you want to go to Worcester and it takes you to Hartford that is not so good. That is why the issue is one of forced busing, not just busing.

Beyond that, in terms of your claim of success in the South, nowhere in the country has it been successful. The only places where there has been a claim of success, it is interesting to note, that concurrent with that, there has been a proliferation of private schools developing along the same way—because people were concerned and did not want to participate in the program.

Beyond that, if you want to talk about the situation in Detroit, originally it was seventy percent white and thirty percent black. Now it is reversed. It is seventy percent black and thirty percent white because of white flight. And the reason I bring up white flight is not to argue that the constitution ought not to be applied

⁶ the movement of whites from neighborhoods undergoing racial integration.



when there is white flight but to indicate what happened to the cities. When the cities undergo white flight, it means the cities end up poorer. The black community ends up more isolated. The tax base is undercut.

And this is why the mayor of Newark, who is black, the mayor of Atlanta who is black, William Raspberry Black columnist for *The Washington Post* are all against forced busing because they see what it does for the black community.

WILLIAMS: It seems to me that in the last ten years when black kids were being bused beyond white schools, when feeder systems were set up purposely to send black kids to black schools, purposely to avoid the order of the court that nobody was speaking up in the so-called anti-busing community. Nobody spoke up. The schools became segregated only in the last ten years.

BARAM: Except ...(inaudible) the question, obviously made your group If you want to just quickly respond.

NELSON: Yeah. I was just going to say that the argument of wrongdoing in the past means that we ought to do the same things wrong in the future seems to me a very uncomfortable [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: [simultaneous conversation] Why do the wrong things at all?

[Applause]

BARAM: Do you have a question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #4: Mr. Williams, you are saying that busing is a means of integration. And a lot of blacks are saying integrate and quality education, etcetera. Okay. Fine. So we take our quota of blacks and we ship them into schools like South Boston. And we take our quota of whites and ship them into school systems like Roxbury. Great! We’ve got an integrated classroom. Fine! What happens to the quality of education?

Everybody knows that schools like South Boston and schools like those in Roxbury, they have the most inferior educational system in New England.

WILLIAMS: Why is that?

NELSON: Answer her question, Jerry. Answer her question. She said what about segregation versus quality education?

WILLIAMS: What I’m saying is that segregation is illegal in the Boston public schools. You are saying that you want segregation but quality schools.

NELSON: She didn’t say that. She said what if you accomplish segregation and you end up with a desegregated school community with no quality in the education.

WILLIAMS: Who said there would be no quality?

NELSON: Are you contending that there will be?

WILLIAMS: There will be quality. I call it quality in the charter school. Is there quality in the Latin Academy School? Is there quality in the Boston Tech School?



Those are schools in the ghetto, by the way. And there are many white people waiting to get into those particular schools. Waiting. They are not afraid of high crime in the ghetto when there are good schools at the end of that bus line.

BARAM: Jerry, I see you have one more question.

[Applause]

NELSON: In terms of analysis of this problem, Professor David Armor did a study of the METCO⁷ program right here in Boston and he showed that after you desegregation you end up with a lessening of the quality of education

[simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: You're telling me that you want separate but equal education--

NELSON: On the contrary, Jerry [simultaneous conversation]

BARAM: Jerry and Avi, let us give our audience [simultaneous conversation] half a minute, a quickie question and a fast answer from Avi. Sir?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #5: I just wanted to say, preface my question with a very brief statement. I believe that busing is a relatively minor issue. And even integration versus segregation, that issue ought to be placed in some kind of

⁷ The Metco program is a grant program funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and administered by METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity), Inc. It is a voluntary program intended to expand educational opportunities and reduce racial imbalance, by permitting students in certain cities to attend public schools in other communities that have agreed to participate. (Taken from the Massachusetts Department of Education website.)



context. My question is, why can't we spend more time discussing the merit or the liabilities of a single rather than a dual school system?

NELSON: Well I would agree with you that desegregation ought not to be our focus in education. I think you are quite right. I don't think that forced busing ought to be the issue. I think we ought to concentrate on, in so far as a single system, we talk about quality of education in that system. The problem is, of course, that we have forced busing. My argument here is to get rid of that and let's concentrate on the issue of education.

We are going to spend between forty and sixty million dollars in two years on forced busing according to Mayor Kevin White. I think that's outrageous.

BARAM: Thank you, Avi. Thank you, Jerry. Thank you very much, audience.

[Applause]

[Recording Resumes]

BARAM: We have been discussing court ordered busing and desegregation. Very briefly, if I may, Avi Nelson has in effect told us that this is an indefensible concept. It is not a moral nor practical. And he feels it has not worked and that it will not work and that individuals of this generation are paying for the sins, in effect, of other generations. And that this is not right.

Jerry Williams believes that this is the law of the land and stated as such and that we must put this into practice both for legal and for moral reasons. And that we would have had the system in effect some time ago in this area, at least, if the

Boston School Committee had done what the court had asked and the law had expected of them.

And now we will move to some of the discussion of some of the specific ways of solving this very, very complex problem. How do the suburbs fit in to this particular issue and when do they fit in to the solution?

WILLIAMS: Well, in the Detroit case the courts obviously ruled that the suburban areas do not fit in. And the city lines are the end of the so-called school boundary.

BARAM: Do you feel that the Boston suburbs must be involved in order for this to be a real solution?

WILLIAMS: I would go along with the metropolitanization. My personal view would be, of metropolitanization would be satisfactory to me. I do feel that one of the large problems in the City of Boston is the Boston School Committee, the elected Boston School Committee and that the elected Boston School Committee ought to be abolished. We should not have anybody running for public office in their School Committee positions.

NELSON: Why not?

WILLIAMS: [Simultaneous conversation] I’ll get it out and I’ll let you answer. The fact of the matter is I don’t think those positions—they are certainly positions where people use them as jumping off spots for other, higher political office when they run for city council or they run for congress or when the run for something else.

I think there should be an appointment, a system, much like the City of Chicago where they appoint twelve people over a six-year period, each appointed by, run by the Board of Education, run by the mayor. They would be staggered six different years so that no mayor or board of education or governor would have any control in the staggered situation. They would only be allowed to appoint two every year over a six year period or over a ten-year period [simultaneous conversation] It would take it out of political control. These people would be--

NELSON: Taken out of the hands of the people completely, right? None of the judges are appointed.

WILLIAMS: I didn't say the judges ...(inaudible) Avi.

NELSON: I'm saying, like the judges are appointed. Like we got Garrity because he was a political hack of Kennedy's?

WILLIAMS: What did Garrity do to you?

[Applause]

[Unintelligible comments]

WILLIAMS: [simultaneous conversation] the law must be enforced.

NELSON: I said that Garrity was appointed by Kennedy because of political favors that were owed. Garrity ran[simultaneous conversation]



WILLIAMS: He was not appointed by Kennedy.

NELSON: He was appointed--

WILLIAMS: We went through this once before. [simultaneous conversation]

NELSON: I think you ought to check on it. [simultaneous conversation] because he was nominated by Kennedy and rubber stamped by Johnson because he had run the Wisconsin campaign for Jack Kennedy in 1960.

BARAM: Avi and Jerry, I think moving into Judge Garrity’s qualifications [simultaneous conversation] Jerry, Avi, we are moving into the qualifications of Judge Garrity rather than the solutions to this particular problem.

WILLIAMS: Judge Garrity has been a target [simultaneous conversation] on that side of the issue? Why?

NELSON: Because I think he is an outrageous job of implementing his own decisions, his own [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: What has he done? That is not his decision. That’s the state courts decision in 1974.

[Unintelligible comments]

NELSON: I’m going to go on with some remedies that I think would be a great improvement here in the City of Boston. In the first place, I think congratulations

are in order for the people of Boston for the way they have resisted this authoritarian strategy [simultaneous conversation]

[Applause]

NELSON: And they have done this by and large without violence, the way they have done this by and large in spirit of civil disobedience and non-violent context—I think it is rather remarkable that they were able to keep as much self control. More than that, they have moved to the position of forming academies so they will be out forever, once and for all from under Judge Garrity and federal government [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: [simultaneous conversation] Garrity.

NELSON: I certainly would because I don't think—and this is not a matter just of the quota system that we are working under but also in terms of curriculum, in terms of handling of discipline problems in the schools. I think we would be far better off without the government in it. So the academies I think are one solution.

Second of all, I would propose that this state move to a voucher plan. And a voucher plan, briefly outlined, allows the public schools to become more attuned to the needs of the parents. And it also allows parents to decide whether they want to send their kids to public or private schools. It allows for people who are not of financial means to be able to send their kids to good schools. It allows for diversity in education.

WILLIAMS: One question on that.

NELSON: And it gives the greatest leverage to the people in the poorest communities. [Simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: One question on that. Suppose 2,000 parents decided to send 2,000 students to Hyde Park High School.

NELSON: Fine.

WILLIAMS: There are only 1,000 seats. [Simultaneous conversation] What do they do?

NELSON: Fine. You see here, what happens here is what happens with any good commodity, like the university, for example. If there is a certain school, which by virtue of its curriculum, by virtue of its style of handling students and education is so attractive to the parents that quite clearly its mode of operation will be emulated by other schools. So, yes, there will be overcrowding for a brief period of time until other educational facilities recognize that whatever Hyde Park High School is doing is worth imitating. So [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: [simultaneous conversation] How would that make schools comply with the law?

NELSON: Well, you know something, Jerry? I have a deep seated faith in the people here. I contend that when black students and white students are looking for the same thing out of education—and black parents and white parents are looking for the same thing in education, I think they will be attracted to the same schools. I don't think that people are all racist.

If the school is good you will find blacks and whites wanting to go there. You could simply have the law enforce that a school is not allowed to discriminate on the basis of skin color and must accept a voucher--

WILLIAMS: How would you balance the schools, Avi, that is the question? The law says that these schools must be balanced.

NELSON: You see, Jerry, I’m talking now about my alternatives, my solutions. I contend that balance is not the be-all and end-all [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: You’re saying again that separate but equal..(inaudible) quality schools are fine? ...(inaudible)

NELSON: I just contended, Jerry, that we will have everybody on a voucher plan. [simultaneous conversation] And I’m contending that my argument is that balancing quotas, headcounts, walking into a classroom and counting black faces and white faces and totaling it up--

WILLIAMS: That is exactly what has to be done.

NELSON: And I contend that that is immoral and wrong.

WILLIAMS: That is what the court is saying. [Simultaneous conversation] Pardon me. That separate but equal facilities, which is what they did in the South until 1954, is unconstitutional. Let people understand that. It is against the law. If you want to have a voucher system that sets up a freedom of choice (inaudible) what that will do is destroy the public school system.

NELSON: On the contrary.

WILLIAMS: It will destroy the public school system.

NELSON: How?

WILLIAMS: Let me at least respond to your argument. It will destroy the public school system.

NELSON: How?

WILLIAMS: By the fact of the matter that people will go to private schools, parochial schools and the public school system, which nurtured people like Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, Americans that went to public school. I think public schools are the heart of this country.

NELSON: What a strange argument Jerry. On the one hand you say that--

WILLIAMS: What is strange about that?

NELSON: [simultaneous conversation] strange but yours are. [Laughter]

[Applause]

NELSON: On the one hand you say that people—

WILLIAMS: I usually argue with substance. I don't call people's arguments strange.



NELSON: On the one hand you've given voluntary choice will abandon public schools because they find the private schools better. And then on the second hand you turn around and tell me what a great job the public schools have done because they turned out Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower.

WILLIAMS: The public schools in Boston—all I'm saying is Boston has been destroyed by the Boston School Committee in the last ten years.

NELSON: And they will be changed [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: --You went to school. Three out of four kids go on from Brookline High Schools into higher education. Three out of four children in the Boston Public Schools do not.

NELSON: By the way, you might be interested to know that there is a higher percentage of people that go on to higher education from Roxbury High that from South Boston High. And that is what leads us to the question, why would people in Roxbury want to go to South Boston.

[Applause]

WILLIAMS: Once again I'm trying to get to this whole business of where you are at.

NELSON: I'm trying to persuade you—

BARAM: Jerry...Avi



[Unintelligible comments]

WILLIAMS: You’re going to set up another dual system.

NELSON: No! Not at all.

BARAM: What about the question of the suburbs that Jerry responded to?

NELSON: Should it be metropolitanization?

BARAM: Yes.

NELSON: Well, if I argue here that the plan here is immoral and impractical, metropolitanization we are generalizing it, merely becomes a matter of spreading the misery around. It’s not a matter of trying to bring more people into it. It’s a bad plan. It’s immoral. It’s not working. And it won’t work no matter how many people [simultaneous conversation]

WILLIAMS: What you are saying, again, is the 1954 Brown v Board of Education is the immoral decision.

NELSON: No. I’m saying that’s all right. Although, I will say this. That the basic sociology that was brought to bear on that decision, the so-called contact theory that the more blacks and whites are exposed together the better things will be—has been completely discredited by Professor David Armor. And he studied the Boston METCO situation.



He found out that the more contact there is between the two, it turns out that there is a counter production here. Black students’ self esteem went down. Their aspirations went down. The attitude toward integration of both black and white communities [simultaneous conversation]

[Unintelligible comments]

BARAM: Gentlemen, we will continue this discussion after a short break. Please stay with us.

[Pause]

BARAM: Ordinarily, this segment of our program, as you know is devoted to responding to questions and comments from last week’s mail relating to the program that preceded this. But because of the controversial nature and the importance of this subject, we are going to try to take some more questions from persons in our audience. Avi, we will start with someone from his audience for Jerry. Your question sir?

AUDIENCE MEMBER #6: Do you think we need National Guardsmen, State Troopers and etcetera? And is it a waste of money?

WILLIAMS: Well, I would hope that we wouldn’t need National Guard, state troopers, police or anybody. I would hope that kids be able to go to school, there would be no bricks thrown at anybody. It would be peaceful and quiet. I think that is what most people want on both sides of the question. I think that is the tragedy of it all. We have to have in abeyance state troopers, the Boston police, TBF(?) and other so-called militaristic forces. I don’t we believe we need them, we



should have them. People on this side of the audience ought to be able to talk to this group of people and work out the problems in balancing Boston Public Schools with no police.

AVI NELSON: Second part of the question, Jerry, is the forty to sixty million dollars that we are going to spend according to Mayor White going to be a waste?

WILLIAMS: It is wasteful. Let me put it that way, clearly. If there were no problems, if there were no violence, if there were no threats of it or if there were no implied threats of it we wouldn't [simultaneous conversation] I think we agree on that.

BARAM: ...(inaudible) agreement because we have a question on Jerry's side. Sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #7: Sam Likey(?), Brooklyn, Connecticut. As I'm not directly affected by this emotional problem, I would like to ask a broader yet related question. The last few weeks, as tonight, you have been stating, or at least implying, if I can say so, that you don't seem to be an advocate of the public school education. I would like to know your reasons why this is and if you have any solutions as to changing it without damaging the quality of education?

NELSON: You're right. I'm not impressed with public education. In fact, that is what is going on in the City of Boston, is precisely what we are talking about is the failure of public education. I think it has not done a good job and I think the main reason for that is because the government has complete control over it.

The solutions that I advocate, having to do with the voucher system, we give control back to the parents. This would give benefit to the parents in so far as they would be able to choose the schools, not only on the basis of curriculum but also on the basis of locality, special interest. It would also give tremendous financial leverage to poorer people because they would then, for the first time, be able to make use of their tax dollar. After all, they paid for this education and they could supplement it, perhaps, if they wanted to go, send their kids to a special school. So I think all in all the quality of education would be greatly enhanced.

BARAM: Jerry, how about you?

WILLIAMS: Public school education is simply that. It is a public school education. People are always compelled to go to particular kinds of school. They have done that ever since public schools have been. And to change it into a voucher system would, in fact, destroy the public school system, which I don't want to do. I think that people have a right to a public school education.

NELSON: That's true. And the voucher plan does not change that at all. It simply gives a voucher to every child to go to school. It does not eliminate the public schools. It merely gives choice to—

WILLIAMS: Once again it brings back—if people want to do things by choice as you indicated—should we have choice, then, to not pay taxes. I don't want to pay taxes.

BARAM: We have a choice for questions right now, Avi a question from your group for Jerry, maybe the last one.



AUDIENCE MEMBER #8: The suburban communities are now becoming aware of and joining the ROAR organization because they are consistent in their stand against forced busing—in that they are supportive of the position against the metropolitanization of the school system. Don’t you think that forced busing or forced reassignment of students to schools other than their neighborhood schools is counter-productive to the American way of life and our guarantee of equal protection of the law under the constitution?

WILLIAMS: I hate to do this but I have to go back once again to where that could have been achieved in 1965. I was here in the city at that time, went through many discussions on the air with the relationship of how that could be achieved without busing, without annoying people from Dorchester and South Boston and people in Roxbury, cross integration of the bus lines.

But the Boston School Committee would not comply. And it took four orders of the court, the withholding the state and federal funds to have the Boston School Committee comply, finally in 1974. It should have been done in ’65. That is how I would have preferred it.

BARAM: We have time for a very quick response from Avi.

NELSON: Don’t you think though that even if everything that you said were granted in terms of argument, I don’t grant it, but even if it were, isn’t it now wrong to force some people to bear the brunt when others do not? Isn’t that a violation of the 14th amendment?

WILLIAMS: No, I don’t think it is a violation. No. No. Once again, the Boston School Committee has contended that on any number of occasions. And all the

courts have once again tossed it right back to them say, “Balance the schools. Desegregate the Boston public schools in any way that’s feasible.”

NELSON: Trample on some people’s rights.

WILLIAMS: Try not to. Try not to. They have implied that many times.

BARAM: Gentleman.

WILLIAMS: If you read the Garrity decision you will find that he indicates clearly—

BARAM: Jerry. Jerry.

WILLIAMS: --That busing should not be the complete and total instrument.

BARAM: We want to thank you men and women for your questions and your cooperation and patience. We want to thank you and Avi, of course, for responding to those questions. And this is a sensitive issue, as you know, and a rather heated issue. We hope discussions such as this, as brief as they may be, and yet quite long for television itself, will in some way help to make all of us understand these positions more clearly—and to do what we should be doing. Now, when we return, we will give a summary position of our two adversaries.

END OF PROGRAM

Sources used:

<http://jerrywilliams.org/files/burninguptheair/NotesAndSourcesIntro.pdf>

<http://www.workablepeace.org/pdfs/busing.pdf>