An Examination of Disingenuous Deeds by St. Louis Public Schools 1945-1983

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An Examination of Disingenuous Deeds by St. Louis Public Schools 1945-1983

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Abstract

The Saint Louis Public Schools (SLPS) St. Louis, Missouri, operated a *de facto* segregated school system for three decades after the United States Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*. National and local media outlets celebrated St. Louis Public Schools for their desegregation plan in response to the 1954 United States Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. However, the counter narrative to media celebration is that the St. Louis Public Schools system practiced *de facto* segregation. In reality the St. Louis school district officials protected school segregation for half a century. In this research, I will expose duplicitous deeds implemented by the St. Louis Public Schools to protect a segregated school system prior to 1954 United States Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* and sustained a segregated school system several decades after the decision. In 1980, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit in Missouri ruled through the *Liddell v. Board of Education for the City of St. Louis* that the St. Louis school district established and maintained a racially segregated school system in violation of students’ constitutional rights. This ruling mandated a metropolitan desegregation plan by the St. Louis Public Schools and surrounding districts twenty-six years after the United States Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.
Key Words and Definitions

Comprehensive Schools: Schools with open enrollment by geographical location. Comprehensive schools cannot choose which students enroll or select students based on a criterion.

Desegregation: The process of ending the separation of races in society. School desegregation meant White and Black children would attend schools together without any stipulations.

Disingenuous: lack of frankness, candor, sincerity; giving a false appearance of simple frankness; not truly honest or sincere; deceptive or misleading.

Historical Revisionism: The re-interpreting of history records while challenging the accepted views.

K-12: The K-12 represents school grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. The St. Louis Public Schools was the first school district in the United States to implement the grade of kindergarten and enroll students through the twelfth grade.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

St. Louis Public Schools received praised by national media for their desegregation plan in response to *Brown v. Board of Education*. St. Louis touted their proactive desegregation plan as a model for cities to follow. In 1966, a study by the University of Chicago supported by the United States Office of Education paid homage to St. Louis Public Schools. The study identified St. Louis as having the most ambitious desegregation program out of eight cities studied including Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Newark, Buffalo, Boston and Baltimore with an increase of 6% of black children attending schools with whites.¹

However, Missouri District Courts established that St. Louis Public Schools violated the United States Supreme Court decision two decades after the national media praised SLPS and *Brown v. Board of Education* for their desegregation plan. In 1980, Missouri District Courts demanded the St. Louis city and county districts construct a desegregation plan. What events led to the court decision? How did St. Louis Public Schools mask a segregated system for two decades? What dishonest deeds took place over a span of 20 years following the United States Supreme Court *Brown v. Board* decision?

Disingenuous deeds generally mean giving a false appearance to situations. Generally, it is associated with deceitful and dishonesty in terms of one’s intention. The intention of the user is to fabricate one into viewing an overall picture with underlies that may not match the overall picture. It is very popular in the political world where many

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deeds considered being a cloud of smoke with hidden agendas or laws piggybacked on the end of big ideas. In this study, I will examine insidious practices by the St. Louis Public Schools to safeguard a segregated school system.

First, we have to start with the history of segregated education in the state of Missouri. Missouri school segregation began in the 1800s and continued until 1983, despite the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. In 1980, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit in Missouri reversed and remanded, holding that the St. Louis Public Schools district had not adequately desegregated following *Brown v. Board of Education* and that the district policies had preserved segregation.2 The defendants, the Board of Education of the City of St. Louis and the State of Missouri, were found guilty of violating plaintiff class members’ constitutional rights and liable for the establishment and maintenance of a racially segregated public school system within the City of St. Louis. The United States court ruling emerged twenty-six years after the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

In this dissertation, I will provide evidence to support the statement that the St. Louis Public Schools deliberately operated a segregated school system between 1945 and 1983. In 1955, the United States Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education II* ordered public school districts to desegregate with all deliberate speed. The St. Louis Public Schools’ “deliberate speed” included ignoring protests, court decisions,

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and lawsuits for more than two decades; in fact, the St. Louis Public Schools were determined to continue a segregated school system.

I will begin this dissertation by exposing deceitful plans implemented by the St. Louis Public Schools to continue a segregated school system prior to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The St. Louis Public Schools maintained a segregated system prior to the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* by not deviating from the 1875 Missouri State Constitution, which established segregated schools. The St. Louis Public Schools’ Board of Education encountered multiple opportunities to desegregate the school system prior to the 1954 *Brown* decision. Second, I will reveal the St. Louis Public Schools’ misleading deeds after the implementation of St. Louis Public Schools’ 1954 Three Step Desegregation Plan. St. Louis Public Schools’ officials released the Three Step Plan to desegregate St. Louis Public Schools only in response to the United States Supreme Court’s decision. The school district’s Three Step Plan timeline forecast designed to implement within three years. However, the school system remained segregated through protests and court proceedings for decades.

In addition, Whites and realtors in St. Louis used housing covenants to ensure Blacks did not purchase homes in specific city locations. The practice of pursuing and enforcing these race-restrictive deed covenants began in the World War I era. Realtors’ licenses were threatened and in many cases revoked for selling homes to Blacks outside of designated areas. School district officials permitted the segregated housing patterns to dictate school attendance boundaries as well. The housing patterns were used to

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4 Ibid.
enclave Blacks and were parallel to the St. Louis Public Schools’ enrollment configurations, which contained Blacks within specific schools. Therefore, the school district’s racial enrollment mirrored the pattern of racial containment in the City of St. Louis. Consequently, a large number of schools remained predominately one race for more than a decade after school officials introduced the SLPS Three Step Plan. Ironically, today schools of predominantly one race still exist in the St. Louis Public Schools district, such as Vashon, Sumner and Northwest High Schools. Devious deeds plagued the school district before Brown v. Board of Education as well as twenty years after the 1954 Brown decision.

**Missouri Education History and Laws**

Segregation was a fixture in the state of Missouri and steered the school segregation in St. Louis. St. Louis Public Schools relied on state statues to remain segregated. However, throughout the beginning of education in the state there were those who attempted to educate Blacks. According to R. I. Brigham, “Missouri passed an act in 1817 regulating the traveling and assembly of slaves, which certainly could have been used to put a stop to any attempts at educating slaves.” Nevertheless, not all citizens wanted to withhold education from Blacks. Missouri laws and acts presented challenges for individuals who desired to educate Blacks. However, religious organizations, through their beliefs and traditions, were unwavering in their commitment to provide education to Blacks in St. Louis, Missouri. Baptist and Catholic churches were steadfast in their pursuit to teach Blacks to read and write through their religious beliefs and traditions.

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Reverend John Mason Peck, a pioneer of Black education in St. Louis, began by opening the first Sunday school in St. Louis in April 1818. As a result of the work of the Reverends John Mason Peck and James E. Welch, the Sunday School for Blacks began with 14 people, but the enrollment rapidly increased to about 100, and the school proved to be the nucleus of the colored Baptist church in St. Louis, organized about 1827.

Likewise, an African Baptist Church Minister and local activist, John Berry Meachum, founded the “Floating Freedom School” on the Mississippi River. The Freedom School was not a traditional schoolhouse with classrooms, student desks and chalkboards. The schoolhouse was a steamboat built by John Meachum, which anchored in the middle of the Mississippi River. Although the location was unusual, the setting was essential to avoid violating Missouri state education laws. Students traveled from the bank of the Mississippi River to the boat in skiffs, and no one interfered with them since the river was not within state jurisdiction. Meachum's "School for Freedom," as it came to be known, became famous, and teachers from the East came to St. Louis to assist with its work.

In spite of these efforts however, the state of Missouri and the City of St. Louis continued to deny Blacks an education during this time.

In 1820, the Missouri Compromise recognized Missouri as a slave state, and in 1847, the Missouri General Assembly passed a law prohibiting the education of Blacks. According to Donnie D. Bellamy, “in February (1847) the law stated: No person shall

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
keep any school for the instruction of Negroes or mulattoes, reading or writing.”

Churches and individuals faced death threats for their efforts to educate Missouri Blacks. White citizens believed an educated Black was a threat to society. Therefore, the legislature amended the Missouri Constitution as an avenue to deny Blacks an education. The Laws enacted to prevent Blacks from receiving an education stood firm. Persons indicted and convicted under the law were required to pay a fine or maximum jail time of six months, or both, for educating Blacks. The laws denied Blacks an education and unquestionably reprimanded any citizen who attempted to educate Blacks, enslaved or free. Missouri politicians were adamant that Blacks were not to receive any type of education. Laws and mendacious ideologies became permanent fixtures in public education in St. Louis, Missouri.

The conclusion of the civil war produced educational changes through revisions to the state constitution, beginning with the Missouri Constitution of 1865. The 1865 Missouri State Constitution abolished slavery in Missouri. In addition, it revised the ban on education for Blacks, stating, “Missouri shall establish and maintain free schools for the gratuitous instructions of all persons in this State, between ages of five and twenty-one years” This revision of the constitution established education for Blacks, but less inferior to White counterparts. For instance, in 1869, teaching in Colored School No. 3 became impossible due to dampness and generally unhealthy conditions, and the school was forced to move to scattered, ill-equipped, unused rooms in another building.

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
13 Gerald W. Heaney and Susan Uchitelle, Unending Struggle: The Long Road to an Equal Education in St. Louis (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2004).
The Missouri State Constitution experienced several modifications during the course of the next century. Missouri State Constitution of 1865 was the second revision, and the third revision was a fundamental change inscribed in 1875 that established separate schools for children in Missouri: “The 1875 Missouri State Constitution required separate free public schools shall be established for the education of children of African descent.” The revision established separate schools for White and Black students. This government action compelled the St. Louis Public Schools district to open several schools for Blacks and additional schools within the next decade. The St. Louis Public Schools district included the first Black high school west of the Mississippi River, Sumner High School. In 1875, twelve schools were established for Black children, who were housed in dilapidated quarters and a long distance from their homes. Missouri State Constitutional laws and amendments changed constantly; nevertheless, the 1875 Missouri State Constitution’s law regarding separate schooling for Black and White children remained in effect until 1976.

Homer Plessy United States Supreme Court decision was a key factor which dictated inferior life Blacks for the next fifty years. Homer Plessy, a mixed race man, challenged the Louisiana state courts to uphold his constitutional right to sit in the White train cars. In 1896, the United States Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld the separate but equal doctrine. “The United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Louisiana statute (1890) that required railroads to provide ‘equal

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14 Missouri, *Constitution of the State of Missouri: Adopted by Vote of the People, October 30, 1875. Went into Operation November 30, 1875. Includes All Amendments Adopted by Vote of the People up to 1944* (Dwight H. Brown, Secretary of State), Jefferson City, MO: Midland Printing Company, 1944.

but separate accommodations for whites and colored races.”  

The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* United States Supreme Court decision protected the St. Louis Public Schools’ separate schooling for Blacks and Whites. However, Blacks, both individually and especially through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), used legal action to complicate and make more costly the enforcement of separation by demanding the standard of real equality in facilities; similarly, *Plessy v. Ferguson* proved serviceable in the NACCP’s fight against segregated schooling. 

In the early 1900’s, the city of St. Louis was a major contributor to school racial segregation. Housing segregation by race was a common practice throughout the United States and not much different in early twentieth-century St. Louis, Missouri. Instead of enforcing racial integration in schools by law, the new school plan continued racial segregation by exploiting residential segregation developed over decades. The city leaders continued to express their racial beliefs by enacting an ordinance. In the city of St. Louis voters decided to pass a segregation ordinance to maintain peace: “An ordinance to prevent ill feeling, conflict and collisions between the white and colored races in the City of St. Louis in city blocks occupied by both races and to preserve the public peace.”. In February 1916, St. Louis City became the first in the United States to legislate mandatory residential segregation, by a 3-1 vote. The 1916 St. Louis, Missouri, Segregation Ordinance prevented members of one race from occupying a home

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20 Wells and Crain, *Stepping over the Color Line*. 
on a city block that was 75% composed of residents of another race. The segregation ordinance was a precursor to preserve segregated neighborhoods and a segregated school system in St. Louis, Missouri. This legislation was a foundation for the school district to segregate schools. The ordinance did not last long but prepared the way for the damage of school segregation. In 1917, the United States Supreme Court upended the ordinance of racial zoning laws in Louisville, Kentucky, with the *Buchanan v. Warley* case. The law, which stated Blacks could not occupy buildings in White majority neighborhoods, was overturned, which reversed the 1916 St. Louis segregation agreement. However, the seed of segregation had planted itself both through housing and neighborhood schools.

In 1945, the Missouri Constitution provided a provision to include all races within the public school system: “The general assembly shall establish and maintain free public schools for the gratuitous instruction of all persons in this state within ages not to be in excess of twenty-one years as prescribed by law.” The 1945 Missouri Constitution amendment provided clarity for education to include all persons but stated that separate schooling for Negro and white children was an important element in the St. Louis Board of Education decisions.

There were efforts to terminate segregation within the St. Louis Public Schools: “The St. Louis Race Relations Commission recommended that a mandatory requirement of segregation of White and Negro pupils in the public schools be eliminated from the Missouri State Constitution, [which] was presented in February 1944 to the Constitutional Convention.” In addition, the St. Louis Race Relations Commission

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21 Ibid.
23 “Group Opposes Segregation in Missouri Schools,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 16, 1944.
desired equal pay for White and Black teachers along with eliminating segregated schools. “Edwin B. Meissner, chairman of the commission, stated the recommendation was in the interest of better race relations, [would] assist in opening the door of equal opportunity in education regardless of color, [and would] lead to a better understanding between groups of citizens.” 24 The recommendation did not flourish as segregation continued in the St. Louis Public Schools.

The NAACP initiated a proposal to overturn the 1945 Missouri State Constitution ruling of separate schools for Negro and White children: “The St. Louis NAACP branch launched a campaign in January 1951 to collect funds to end segregated schools in St. Louis.” 25 The funds assisted with the legislation of House Bill 135, a ban on racial segregation in Missouri schools. “The chief sponsor of House Bill 135, Representative Walter Lay of St. Louis, was key in the House Committee on Education vote in favor of the bill by a 15 to 5 vote.” 26 House Bill 135 moved forward with attention-grabbing quotes to support the bill. “Representative Jennie Walsh of St. Louis asked, ‘How long in America will we preach freedom, dignity for all men to other countries, while failing to practice [it] at home?’” 27 However, Missouri lawmakers did not have the same sentiments. “The House Bill 135 was killed by the Missouri House in April 1951 by a 62 to 54 margin.” 28 Ironically, across the Mississippi River, less than 60 miles from St. Louis City, the Edwardsville School District voted against segregated schools in the same month. “September (1951) ended racial segregation in the public schools of

24 Ibid.
26 Frances Watson, ”State Delegation Descends on House,” St. Louis Argus, January 23, 1951.
27 Ibid.
Edwardsville, Illinois, by the Edwardsville Community Unit Board of Education.” 29 The St. Louis Public Schools District remained segregated.

The city’s decisions about housing coincided with the school segregation. The housing market and covenants closely mirrored the segregated school districts. The St. Louis Public Schools used housing or neighborhood schooling to prevent desegregated schools and create a de facto segregated school system. In fact, residential segregation in the neighborhoods was set in stone in the mid-century. Realtors selling to African Americans buyers not within restricted zones could lose their realtors license. 30 St. Louis City misdeeds were parallel with the St. Louis Public Schools’ misdeeds. For example, in 1945 the Shelly family, a Black family, purchased a home in north St. Louis. However, the family were unaware they had purchased a home that was a part of the restrictive covenants. White property owners sought protection of race restrictive deed covenants to assure that Blacks could not purchase property in specific areas. 31 The city of St. Louis enclaved Blacks in the city’s central corridor to preserve these restrictive covenants. The Shelley family presented a case in court to preserve their home. *Shelley v. Kraemer* stated that private agreements to exclude persons of designated race or color from the use or occupancy of real estate for residential purposes did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment, but to enforce such an agreement through a court order (an action of the state) would violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. 32 This ruling was strategic to the St. Louis Public Schools’ misdeeds concerning neighborhood schooling.

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31 Ibid.
The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision restructured the education landscape in the United States and made segregation in public education unconstitutional. Thirteen plaintiffs filed a momentous lawsuit to desegregate public schools in Topeka, Kansas. The Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was arguably the most influential decision in the history of the United States. The United States Supreme Court stated, “We conclude that in the field of private education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate education facilities are inherently unequal.” 33 The Supreme Court indicated school segregation violated the Fourteen Amendment. “Judge Warren declared that to segregate Black children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.” 34 The *Brown* decision unlocked the doors to equal education for all American children.

However, segregated schooling for Black children did not end after 1954. In fact, a group of parents collectively filed a lawsuit against the St. Louis Public Schools in 1972. These parents felt their students’ school transfers were unjust and violated their constitutional rights. Black students had to endure long bus rides to schools that because of overcrowding were less adequate than schools located in their respective neighborhoods. These parents from Yeatman School wanted a quality education for their students and, led by Minnie Liddell, filed a lawsuit against the school district. Their students participated in the intact busing program whereby the school district bused

students to an all-white school across town where they did not interact with White students. I will explore the deceptive practice of intact busing. Consequently, in 1972, Mrs. Liddell along with a group of African-American parents and their minor children filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri and took the case to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth circuit. The case involved more than twenty-five years of litigation, culminating in 1983 with an inter-district settlement agreement.

**Statement of the Problem**

The writer believes the St. Louis Public Schools exhibited dishonest practices to sustain a segregated school system from 1945 to 1983. The St. Louis Public Schools did not voluntarily establish a desegregated school system prior to 1954 nor after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Instead, the courts forced the district to do so. Black students experienced separate but inadequate school facilities and academic materials. Historically, the Board of Education and central school administrators routinely reacted to overcrowding of Black students in direct response to the Black community’s outcry for improved services to their children. However, the 1954 decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* added complexity to the current institutional concerns. In the same year, the St. Louis Public Schools received a legal push to provide additional resources for students who are marginalized and treated unfairly. For more than twenty years after *Brown v. Board of Education* until the resolution of the *Liddell v. Board of Education for the City of St. Louis* court case, the district stumbled to respond to demographic changes and increasing legal concerns. Analysis of these institutional

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35 Heaney and Uchitelle, *Unending Struggle*. 
responses is moderately understood to date. This study will offer a new understanding of the St. Louis Public Schools’ responses to the *Brown v. Board Education* decision and the school district’s deceitful actions.

This study is a counter narrative to the familiar story of desegregation in the St. Louis Public Schools. The counter narrative will challenge the St. Louis Public Schools’ national acclaim as a model for desegregating schools in the middle of the century. Research will expose St. Louis Public Schools’ efforts to combat full public school desegregation.

**Conceptual Framework**

Samples of different theoretical frames will lay the foundation of the St. Louis Public Schools’ activities. Race omissions and blind spots suggest the need for theoretical perspectives that move beyond the traditional paradigmatic boundaries of educational research to provide a more cogent analysis of "raced" people and move discussions of race and racism from the margins of scholarly activity to the fore of educational discourse. 36 Scholarly race activity was born through the channels of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical race theory has moved beyond legal scholarship to analyze the ways in which “colorblind” laws and policies perpetuate existing racial inequalities in education policy. 37 Critical Race Theory provides analysis of historical education events through a Black or different perspective. As a form of oppositional scholarship, CRT challenges the experience of Whites as the normative standard and

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grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of Black people. Critical Race Theory will provide the theoretical framework for this research. CRT in education emphasizes the role of education in helping racial minorities to articulate new counter narratives affirming community-appropriate pedagogies and school reforms, including increased funding and equal access to quality education. CRT will challenge deeds of the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) to enhance the future of urban education.

Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform, in this case in education. This research will counter the narrative of desegregation in written records of the SLPS. My experiences with the St. Louis Public Schools will shape the framework of this research and my inquiries as the researcher. Delgado Bernal’s (1998) notion of “cultural intuition” differs from theoretical sensitivity in that it “extends one’s personal experience to include collective experience and community memory, and points to the importance of participants’ analysis of the data.” My personal school experience is vital to the counter narrative of this research. The accolades for the St. Louis Public Schools desegregation was merely a facade due to subtle and misleading deeds. These misleading deeds and underlying truths are uncovered in this research. According to Straubs, Corbin and Delgado we create counter-stories from “(a) the data gathered from the research process itself, (b) the existing literature on the topic(s), (c) our own professional

39 Su, "Cracking Silent Codes."
41 Ibid.
experiences, and (d) our own personal experiences.” Journalists with little inner-city experience who have conducted research reports their findings to the public via print avenues. Nevertheless, their perspectives do not provide a complete picture. Do the reporters become theorists or practitioners? We must ask how selective was the information the public was privy to via the researcher? The reporter or newspaper’s editor offers the public a limited perception or reality. My own professional and personal experiences will add an additional layer to this counter narrative.

In addition, ethnography is the study of human cultures. Auto ethnography is a methodology that is qualitative whereby the author injects himself into the research. The author uses my personal experience to connect with culture experiences and analyze personal experiences. This research is not grounded in auto ethnography but my personal story joins to the research as an active participant. My person experiences are clearly associated with the research.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to dissect the St. Louis Public Schools’ deceptive actions with respect to school desegregation. There is a documented history of different strategies and decisions on the part of school officials to maintain a segregated school system. This study will expose the misdeeds surrounding segregation and the failed attempts by Blacks to desegregate the St. Louis Public Schools. The St. Louis Public Schools were resilient in their quest to remain segregated as evident by the inaction after the Board of Education’s decisions rendered half a century ago. Blacks challenged the St. Louis Pubic Schools’ board with institutional racism and requests to desegregate the

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42 Ibid.
school system beginning in the 1940s and continuing through the 1980s. As early as 1949, the Urban League advocated the elimination of racial segregation in the St. Louis schools. A major focus of this research will center on the district’s refusal to desegregate their school system regardless of protests, opportunities provided by courts, and a legal decision handed down by the United States Supreme Court.

In addition, the purpose of this study is to examine the misdeeds of the St. Louis Public Schools in response to the rapid expansion of African American enrollment in the public schools from 1954 until 1980. This was a critical time, beginning with the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and continuing throughout the district’s legal battles. The rapid enrollment of African American students initiated by the *Brown* decision placed the St. Louis Public School’s Board of Education in conflict with their previous philosophies and decisions to provide separate schools for Blacks and Whites. The 1954 Supreme Court decision immediately placed thousands of African American students at the doorsteps of public schools.

**Significance of Study**

This counter narrative is restricted to the St. Louis Public Schools’ mendacious endeavors prior to 1954 and in response to the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The St. Louis Public Schools’ misdeeds and the 1980 ruling of constitutional violation by the United States Court of Appeals may stagger the average St. Louis citizens and SLPS alumni.

The research will provide a scholarly consciousness of the misdeeds by the St. Louis Public Schools to circumvent desegregation. The slow pace and deferred process

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of desegregation by the St. Louis Public Schools’ officials may challenge readers’ previous opinions regarding the history of the St. Louis Public Schools. Today education trends nationwide have reverted to a pattern similar to that of pre-

*Brown v. Board of Education*—a pattern of maintaining segregated schools across the country. When asked about New York school segregation in May 2017, Mayor Bill De Blasio dodged the answer by saying that schools are a reflection of historical housing patterns and remarked: “We cannot change the basic reality of housing in New York City.” 44 Present-day politicians and school boards across the country are employing the same excuses for the current school segregation. Magnet schools and comprehensive public schools mirror segregation due to housing patterns or duplications of past practices. The question is as follows: how can we provide equal access to quality education, facilities, and materials in segregated schools? This research will expose the misdeeds to assist educators in avoiding the repetition of history and in beginning to answer the question of how to provide equal access to a quality education for students in the nation’s public schools.

**Limitations/Delimitations**

This research is limited to the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) district, located in the metropolitan area of St. Louis, Missouri. The population sample is St. Louis Public Schools which is a separate entity from St. Louis Public Schools. The study is restricted to St. Louis, Missouri public school system. In addition, the time period is delimited to 1945-1983. The major concentration is on the insincere actions implemented by the St. Louis Public Schools from 1945 to 1983. I will utilize records and deeds of the St. Louis

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Public Schools, court documents, print media and publications. St. Louis Public Schools’ archive division was located in a location that is now spread throughout different locations. Archive files are located in the St. Louis Public Schools’ central office and the Missouri History Museum. This research will coincide with Dr. Weathersby’s research surrounding St. Louis Public Schools’ building location. His research focused on building locations within the St. Louis Public Schools.

Definitions

**Blacks:** I use the term Black to represent African-American people. The term will represent adults and students. The capitalization is out of respect.

**Board of Education:** The board of education is the governing body of a school district. The board of education enforces the school district’s policies.

**Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka:** The 1954 United States Supreme Court decision that eliminated racial segregation in public schools. The case stated that “separate but equal” was not constitutional. 45

**Comprehensive Schools:** Schools with open enrollment by geographical location. Comprehensive schools cannot choose which students enroll or select students based on a criterion.

**Desegregation:** The process of ending the separation of races in society. School desegregation meant White and Black children would attend schools together without any stipulations.

**Disingenuous:** lack of frankness, candor, sincerity; giving a false appearance of simple frankness; not truly honest or sincere; deceptive or misleading.

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**Historical Revisionism:** The re-interpreting of history records while challenging the accepted views.

**Intact Busing:** An act by the St. Louis Public Schools to bus entire classes of Black students and their teachers to White schools without any contact between the races. I recall conversations with individuals who experienced separate starting times, entrances, lunches, recess, etc. to ensure the two races would not have any contact during the school day.

**K-12:** The K-12 represents school grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. The St. Louis Public Schools was the first school district in the United States to implement the grade of kindergarten and enroll students through the twelfth grade.

**Liddell v. Board of Education of the City of St. Louis:** Minnie Liddell filed a lawsuit against the St. Louis Public Schools in the state of Missouri. The lawsuit led to district court ruling in the future of school desegregation in the St. Louis metropolitan areas.

**Misdeeds:** an immoral or wicked deed; illegal act

**Role of the Researcher**

Phenomenology is a study of people’s conscious experience of their life-world.\(^{46}\)

The inspiration for this study is my personal connection and affection for the St. Louis Public Schools. I am proud K-12 St. Louis Public Schools alum. During my time as a student, the St. Louis Public Schools system included caring nurturing teachers and administrators who went above the call of duty to educate all students. Staff members placed value in students as illustrated by their compassion toward student learning and social health. The St. Louis Public School staff members resided in the neighborhood,

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
which created a special relationship with students and families. In addition, staff members were SLPS graduates with a strong passion for students and the district. Today a majority of the staff of the St. Louis Public Schools live outside the school district community and did not attend SLPS.

I entered the SLPS as a four-year-old at Marquette Elementary School (Pre K-8), located on McPherson Avenue, and remained there from Pre-K through third grade. Marquette was an all-Black school where my mom and additional relatives attended during their adolescence. Later in 1977, students from Bryan Hill Elementary merged with Marquette. The merger included all Black students which did nothing to desegregate schools. During the summer before my third grade year, my mother relocated my sister and me to Laclede Town apartments in the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood. The following school year I attended Banneker Elementary School. The school population consisted of neighborhood Black students and teachers who created a pleasant academic and social atmosphere. Upon the completion of my fifth grade semester I experienced busing for the first time in my education career. St. Louis Public Schools officials transported Laclede Town students from the Mill Creek neighborhood to a predominately Black middle school in the Peabody housing projects located five miles from our residence. We were met with violence and melee during our tenure at Clinton Middle School due to the different neighborhood views. Coincidentally, Waring School, which enrolled middle school students, was located within of our neighborhood. It was depressing to watch White students enter a school within our neighborhood while we traveled miles to another neighborhood only to be met with violence. High school replicated our middle school experience by St. Louis Public Schools. The ensuing four
years were met with more violence at Roosevelt High School in south St. Louis miles from our community. My first year of high school was my first predominately-integrated school experience with a diverse population of Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Bosnians and others. As a substitute for school buses we traveled to school by public transportation. The violence reached its pinnacle my senior year with a fight between south side students and myself. It was one of countless fights involving my neighborhood. The principal decided to expel me from the school after the fight. Later after school, I witnessed what looked as if the entire south side teenage generation appeared with bats and weapons from Tower Grove Park to Grand Avenue bus stop. We were greatly outnumbered but stood strong as usual being the dominant force in the school for years. However, within minutes police officers came from different directions with the administrative staff to intervene. A week later the principal summoned all Laclede Town residents to the auditorium for new transportation guidelines. In an unprecedented resolution, a single bus was instructed to travel Compton Avenue, a non-public transportation route, to our neighborhood after school every day. The public transportation and the school district agreed to special arrangements to maintain peace. Needless to say, the stress of transportation and violence took a toll on my peers academically and socially.

After graduation, I wandered into a more stressful situation at Mineral Area College in Flat River, Missouri. Flat River was located 60 miles south of St. Louis in an alleged racist town. The college enrolled five Black students, who were athletes. I truly obtained an education on racism while attending Mineral Area College. My first encounter was with a White young lady who never encountered a Black person. Her request to feel my skin was peculiar. However, I learned she was under the impression
Blacks were monkeys with tails because of her dad. This eye-opening experience nearly caused me to lose self-control. The experience led to long conversations with my mom and coach, who guided me through racial situations. Thoughts of my friends and I lying face down by police on the hot St. Louis summer heat while searching us for spurious reasons. Often qualitative studies are of intense human experiences such as love, anger, betrayal, and so on. My lived experiences molded my views and my Critical Race Theory research.

As an employee of the St. Louis Public Schools, I have the opportunity to witness decisions that affect student segregation decades later. For example, the SLPS spends funds to advertise their magnet and choice schools. However, there are no funds to advertise the comprehensive schools, which reflect the demographics of neighborhoods. The direct conflict between magnet and choice schools v. the comprehensive schools extends the topic of segregation. The comprehensive schools remain predominantly one race located in the same neighborhoods as the pre-Brown v. Board of Education era. There are single race schools in the same neighborhoods more than a half a century later.

**Summary**

Missouri’s long history of denying Blacks equal education has been deeply rooted. Blacks customarily experienced segregation in education dating back to the 1800s and continuing to the 1980s court decisions and beyond. The Minnie Liddell case raised awareness within the courts of the injustice caused by segregated schools and set a precedent for decisions rendered to assist school desegregation. However, many Whites still were not accepting of Blacks. By the end of July 1981, only five school districts in 47 Ibid.
the St. Louis area had conditionally agreed to participate in the voluntary desegregation plan. Therefore, the struggle continued.

Chapter Two will speak to the literature regarding school segregation around the country within specific school districts. I will explore Critical Race Theory and its application to this particular research.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Education research is a unique field of research using diverse perspectives presented through historical lenses. I believe education history widely presented from a safe perspective and presented with the same narrative. There are a few topics of study presented in Chapter Two including desegregation, Critical Race Theory and historical revisionism.

**Desegregation**

*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines “desegregation” as “the action of ending a policy that keeps people of different races apart.” Desegregation involves bringing together in the same school or social setting Blacks and Whites. Harris explained that desegregation might not be the same as integration, which implies a change in attitude and association beyond the physical space between the races. A school desegregation success should hinge on and be evaluated by the following, according to Harris (1983):

1. Racial balancing, which concerns the ethnic distribution of children in a school — i.e., are the ratios of white to black students providing desegregated school facilities?

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48 Heaney and Uchitelle, *Undending Struggle*.
in school desegregation -- whether or not children of different races are receiving equal treatment under desegregation; (3) Educational improvements, which implies that black and other minority children should have access to quality educational programs that will increase their achievement levels in school; and (4) Citizen participation, i.e., allowing parents and citizens directly affected by desegregation policies to have an input in shaping policies in ways that will build support for desegregation. The St. Louis Public Schools operated a de facto segregation system.  

(2) De facto school segregation is a term used to describe all Black or all White schools that reflect the surrounding housing patterns. The St. Louis Public Schools and districts across the country used housing patterns to continue a de facto segregated school system.  

*Brown v. Board of Education* prohibited school segregation based solely on race, but it indicated that there is no constitutional prohibition against racial separation resulting from district boundaries based on nonracial criteria.  

Ironically, districts continued the use of housing patterns decades after *Brown v. Board of Education* until threatened by the federal government. However, many smaller school districts, particularly in the South, desegregated in the 1960s after the federal government threatened to withhold Title I financial assistance to districts that continued to discriminate by race.  

Desegregation policies can present different facts to integrate school districts. The implementation of desegregation plans is at times a discriminatory process. According to

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50 Ibid.  
52 Ibid.  
Daniel J. Monti, if this is true there is a need to analyze how a district’s typical defenses counter the threats posed by desegregation. School districts were able to control the power of how and where desegregation occurred within a district. Districts publicly appeared to change policy concerning segregated schools. Monti argued existing and new policies are a device for recasting reforms in a way to minimize disruption of the establishment while creating a façade that change is occurring.

**Critical Race Theory**

Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman founded Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the early 1970s. Critical Race Theory challenged previous scholars through research. CRT emerged from law as a response to critical legal studies and civil rights scholarship. Critical Race Theory challenges the exclusion of voices "from the bottom" in mainstream legal scholarship. Derrick Bell led a group of professors to reshape racial thoughts and challenged the thinking about race relations within America. His methods of writing about race and law were at the forefront of a new school of thought in law: Critical Race Theory. CRT challenges the traditional beliefs of White Americans and their perceptions of Blacks. This scholarly tradition argues against the slow pace of racial reform in the United States. Research that integrated CRT paid greater attention than in previous decades to the roles of racialized systems (e.g., institutional promotion of

55 Ibid.
58 Tate, “Critical Race Theory.”
inequality via racial discrimination) in shaping family structures, processes and life chances.  

History was usually written from White perspectives with little input from Blacks as to how life shaped their views and direction. CRT is as an effort to build upon and extend the legal scholarship and activism that led to the civil rights movement rather than an attack on the thinking and efforts associated with the legal scholarship and strategies of that era. CRT gives new weight to the voices of those who forced to play by the rules, but who had thus far not received the opportunity to help make the rules. It affords scholars an opportunity to articulate their stories and provide the personal perspective of people of color to research. CRT provides the public with a different written historical perspective to expose history, question the rules, and provide opportunities to right the wrongs of the past. According to Delgado and Stefancic, some aspects of CRT include the following:

1. Racism is commonplace, and colorblind conceptions of equality will only address the most egregious forms of individual-based racism, rather than structural inequalities between social groups.

2. “White-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes” via the notion of interest convergence. Most anti-racist reforms expect to only happen incrementally, and only when they also serve the interests of white elites.

3. Race is socially constructed and historically embedded.

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62 Su, “Cracking Silent Codes.”
4. In contemporary American society, the unique voice of color serves important purposes. This is a controversial point. Alongside its firm stance against notions of racial essentialism, CRT contends that the social realities of people of color nevertheless give them experiences, voices, and viewpoints that are likely to be different from mainstream, dominant narratives. It, therefore, becomes imperative that people of color advance their own counter-narratives, often via storytelling modes that fall outside the usual confines of academic discourse. 63

This research will expose a racialized White privileged school system. Board members’ decisions designed barriers that prohibited a fully desegregated public school system.

Critical Race Theory challenges the popular narrative and can provide a counter narrative to the St. Louis Public Schools’ history. After all, research on CRT emphasizes the role of education in helping racial minorities to articulate new counter narratives and affirms community appropriate pedagogies and school reforms, including increased funding and equal access to quality education. 64 Decision makers who were revered and praised for their influence on school desegregation exposed by this research. Black children now attend schools with the namesakes of board members who opposed desegregation. This research will not demean or diminish any of the contributions by board members but will offer a different perspective on their decisions. I respect the contributions of all individuals who made decisions for a school district that I hold dear to my heart. However, the decisions rendered by the St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education require a deeper insight. The counter narrative of CRT will challenge the

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64 Su, “Cracking Silent Codes.”
decisions of individuals as well as the St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education to deny Blacks facilities and learning experiences equal to those of their White counterparts.

I chose the method of Critical Race Theory to counter the traditional story and tell the history of the Saint Louis Public Schools regarding segregated schools and constitutional violations. Delgado posited four reasons as justification for legal analysis and scholarship that incorporate stories or voices chronicling the experiences of people of color: “(a) reality is socially constructed, (b) stories are powerful means for destroying and changing mind-sets, (c) stories have a community-building function, and (d) stories provide members of out-groups mental self-preservation.” 65

Perspectives that run opposite or counter to the presumed order and control are counter narratives and do not agree with and are critical of the master narrative. 66 This research is a counter narrative to St. Louis Public Schools’ history of desegregation. The traditional narrative suggests that after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, St. Louis applauded for its response to the task of desegregation: “In 1957 St. Louis was awarded ‘All-America City’ status by the National Municipal League and Look magazine for its progress during the first two years of desegregation”. 67 “In 1966 the city was cited as having the most ambitious program in eight northern cities due to the busing program.” 68 The counter narrative of research based on Critical Race Theory will uncover decisions rendered by the board of education. There are self-accolades and published accolades as previously mentioned, but contradictory research counters the

claim of justice to Blacks by Whites within the constitutional period. Counter narratives act to deconstruct the master narratives, and they offer alternatives to the dominant discourse in educational research and multiple and conflicting models of understanding social and cultural identities.  

There is little dialogue regarding the dishonest acts by the St. Louis Public Schools between 1945 and 1983, which triggered the Missouri District Court decision. St. Louis Public Schools acknowledged across the country for their desegregation plan yet still faced legal battles and lawsuits through Missouri District courts for two decades after the 1954 Supreme Court decision.

The state of Missouri provided the St. Louis Public Schools several opportunities to desegregate the school district during the decade preceding the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Missouri District Courts rendered decisions that provided avenues to desegregate schools prior to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The St. Louis Public Schools decided not to use the opportunities to desegregate and rested on the 1875 Missouri Constitution to perpetuate a segregated school system. The district made believe there was an appropriate educational system in place before the *Brown* decision, but the counter narrative research will expose an opposite reality. For example, Daniel Schlafly, elected to the St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education in 1953 contradicted popular tales regarding school desegregation. Schlafly stated, “I don’t remember any talk about integration when I ran for the school board that spring of 1953—despite the fact local and national media praised St. Louis for their proactive plan.”

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69 Stanley, “When Counter Narratives Meet.”  
Historical Revisionism

Society promotes education as the key to a person’s future. As with many educational journals and research, education has been the tool to propel a person’s life ambitions. I read many well-written articles regarding the positive impact of education. A rhetorical question always riddles my mind is from whose perspective is the research written? What political bias or prejudice used to tell the story? A “revisionist” approach has risen among educational historians, which is calling into question the so-called democratic structure of education and challenging the idea of the “American” dream. Since the 1970’s, educational historians have generated a new body of scholarship, asking new questions about the past in light of present day concerns. The publishing of a book by Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society*, in the 1960’s was the beginning of the “revisionism.”

I agree with author Colin Greer’s statement that we need to examine what really happens in American education rather than trust the intentions found in education history. I will use St. Louis Board of Education decisions, enrollment figures and maps to examine what actually transpired. Research delivers to an editor’s audience a point of view to appease the audience. However, those points of view may not be, as Greer states, “what really happens.” Additionally, Bailyn spoke about moving beyond present research and looking to study the informal process. The revisionist deconstruction of the

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73 Ibid.
74 Franklin, “Historical Revisionism.”
“darkness to light framework” challenged historians of higher education to write a clean slate.\textsuperscript{75} I will focus on those informal processes that led to misdeeds by St. Louis Public Schools. The revisionist perspective I write from examines the informal process and challenges the intentions of researchers. Adapting theories from author Michael Katz, \textit{The Irony of Early School Reform}, I argue that the influence of society on the schools and elites’ formation of education reinforced class inequalities and social injustice.\textsuperscript{76} As with the St. Louis Public Schools, the SLPS elites designed board policies that influenced different deeds.

\textbf{Summary}

Critical Race Theory is very important to this particular research as we work to shape a different thought pattern surrounding actions of the St. Louis Public Schools. Included in the research are the counter narrative examples of race and theory, which demonstrate St. Louis Public Schools’ misdeeds. Historical Revisionism provides the opportunity to write the clean slate on previous research or history. Research will provide the avenue to present facts and data in a systemic way that will outline the decades of deeds to sustain a segregated system. Historical research will offer answers to the decades of misdeeds that produced court rulings against the St. Louis Public Schools. The historical research will include SLPS board decisions that contradict court decisions as well as maps and figures of containing minorities. Missouri courts presented St. Louis


\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
Public Schools an opportunity to desegregate a high school prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*. Building upon Dr. Claude Weathersby’s research provided examples of containment by St. Louis Public Schools.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Revisionism are synonymous in research scholarship. My research will place the two similar theories into practice. According to Reece and Rury, the “radical” revisionist argued that schools reinforced existing patterns of discrimination and inequality. (Reece and Rury) CRT argued against the popular acceptance of written history, which included patterns of inequalities. I will explore the radical side of research by examining patterns of inequalities of written history. CRT offers new voices to the unheard while revisionists ask new questions. This will afford an opportunity to revisit written history and bring darkness to light while exploring new questions. My new questions surrounding misdeeds will undoubtedly shed light on hidden inequalities within the St. Louis Public Schools. Furthermore, similarities continue as revisionist examines what really happen rather than trust intentions history while CRT exposes a different historical perspective. Subsequently the two overlay, it stretches what occurred versus written history. Both provide the editor to tell his side of view in an informal experience. It is important to understand CRT provided an avenue for the voices excluded for years while revisionist rely on the editor’s point of view. While revisionist focus on asking new questions Critical Race Theory build upon or extend previous search. My research will build upon Claude Weathersby’s research regarding buildings and locations. Buildings and location was a contributing factor to deceitful deeds executed by St. Louis Public Schools to sustain a segregated school system.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The focus of this dissertation is the insidious deeds regarding desegregation 1945-1983. The state of Missouri, the city of St. Louis and the St. Louis Public Schools stated their commitment to desegregating schools. This situation not only applied to the St. Louis Public Schools but also was applicable throughout the United States. However, the St. Louis Public Schools were not very forthcoming in their actions toward desegregating schools. These misdeeds remained intact regardless of court decision or protests.

I will attempt to expose the misdeeds to bring about awareness of present and future school segregation. The study will uncover past decisions of the board of the St. Louis Public Schools to deny desegregation. Viewing research through the CRT lens will assist with the exposure of racist attitudes.

This chapter is a detailed explanation of the research methodology I will utilize in this study. I will discuss the components of a qualitative research study based on the following definition by Sharan B. Merriam:

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting—and the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting…the analysis strives for depth of understanding.

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Qualitative researchers study subjects in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.\textsuperscript{78} Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as real world settings.\textsuperscript{79} This research will attempt to add clarity to the misdeeds of the St. Louis Public Schools.

**Research Design**

This research uses qualitative study design via Critical Race Theory lens. Central to this kind of research is the idea of political empowerment of people through their involvement in the design and implementation of the research project.\textsuperscript{80} My direct involvement (as a former student and present employee of the St. Louis Public Schools) “embedded in my attending and employment with the St. Louis Public Schools” provides me with the ability to witness and experience the district’s political powers. As a student, I experienced the decisions made by SLPS board officials. As an employee, I witness decisions made by SLPS board officials that directly affect school segregation. These experiences provide me with a better understanding of the oppressions committed by the board and the effects on students across the district.

My objective is to challenge the decisions throughout St. Louis Public Schools’ history and create a new thought pattern. In critical inquiry, the goal is to critique and challenge, to transform and empower according to Merriam.\textsuperscript{81} This study will challenge intellectuals’ school segregation morality. The end of this research is to renew

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Merriam, *Qualitative Research*.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
conversations regarding present school segregation. There is an urgent need for such a conversation, especially because the new United States Education Secretary is a strong proponent of charter and voucher type schools, which may further segregate students.

**Data Categories**

Print documents will be the primary sources of artifacts during the research. Primary and secondary resources used to analyze and document the St. Louis Public Schools’ history of misdeeds. The major focus is the decisions made by the St. Louis Public Schools to deter desegregation of schools between 1945-1983.

I will draw from different types of data in this study. Social media and television are more prominent today; however, during the research period newspaper articles were predominant document information on different subjects. In addition, the St. Louis Public Schools’ board documents, records, letters and communication will serve as the primary sources.

**Data Collection**

One of the greatest advantages in using printed documentary material is its stability such data is an objective source and does not alter what is being studied. 82 This documented material will lend itself to genuine experiences through school district data, maps, newspapers, deeds, and photos from neighborhood journals, court documents and school documents provided by the Missouri History Museum, St. Louis City Hall records and the City of St. Louis as well as the St. Louis Public Schools. Mass communication materials such as newspapers, photos from local journals, etc., as previously mentioned, are especially readily sources for dealing with questions about some aspects of society at

82 Ibid.
a given time, tracking cultural change and trends. 83 The study will provide insight into St. Louis Public School’s decisions in response to the Black citizens’ outcry for school desegregation. I spent the majority of research time in the Central Library in downtown St. Louis, which is the main branch of the St. Louis Public Library. I spent six to eight months reviewing a variety of artifacts for research purposes. The second floor microfilm room provided a plethora of historical facts from St. Louis’ newspapers. In addition, a room dedicated as the St. Louis Room was a great source of St. Louis history.

Data Sources

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the St. Louis Globe-Democrat delivered daily print information to the St. Louis metropolitan area. The two newspapers largely read by the White and Black communities in St. Louis featured White reporters with White perspectives. Their role in and documentation of the St. Louis Public Schools was valuable with timely interviews and reporting. The microfilm presented time stamped documentation daily.

The St. Louis American and the St. Louis Argus are the two oldest Black newspapers in the St. Louis metropolitan area. The American and Argus represented the Black community with Black reporters reporting from a Black point of view. These sources were able to provide a voice for the underrepresented Black community. The two Black newspapers offered the oppressed an outlet for their feelings about desegregating the schools.

Additional documents drawn from previous scholarship and dissertations by peers will drive my writing. Previous scholars have researched the St. Louis Public Schools in

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83 Ibid.
different areas. Scholars have explored desegregation of the school system, neighborhood schooling, Black containment and neighborhood schools. My research will address these topics in relation to hypocritical claims and awards for St. Louis Public Schools.

Personal interviews are not included in this research. It is my belief that personal interviews become subject to individual experiences and not presented objectively. Such research may taint the overall project. In addition, my research is subject to time constraints Therefore; I will focus on the print data to support the topic.

Data Analysis

This research will assist to gain a healthier understanding of human behavior through grounded theory. Concerning social phenomena, grounded theory’s purpose is to develop a higher level of understanding that derived from a systematic analysis of data. The design of this study is qualitative and contextual in nature. Its qualitative nature will provide the opportunity to analyze misdeeds directly through the previously mentioned research documents. The purpose of this exploration is to gain a richer understanding of the decisions African American leaders rendered in response to court orders, lawsuits and citizens’ protests. The central principle of data analysis in grounded theory research is constant comparison. Grounded theory is particularly useful for addressing questions about process, that is, how something changes over time. This research will expose the process of desegregation or lack thereof in the St. Louis Public Schools over half a century.

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85 Ibid.
86 Merriam, *Qualitative Research*. 
Validity and Reliability

Validity suggests that the research findings truly represent the phenomenon. Research validity is a sign of how solid the research is. Validity cannot be assumed, and presentation of research findings must invite the opportunity for critical reflection for consumers. Creswell and Miller (2000) define validity as how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and whether reality is credible. The qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion “makes sense.” Details generate through different findings about a specific subject. The use of a single site or a small sample size does not in itself threaten the validity or potential generalizability of a qualitative study. I will apply these statements to detail decisions by St. Louis Public Schools. The day-to-day documentation articles will help validate the time period and interworking of the district and the board of education.

Reliability refers to the research that stands the test of time. The research will yield the same results over a period or withstand the same test after a number of times. In some instances, the results may yield slightly different results depending on the point of view, but these instances do not negate reliability. Rather than demanding that the outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense and are consistent and dependable. Data collected for this research will produce a diverse outside perspective to re think the deeds by St. Louis

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88 Merriam, *Qualitative Research*.
90 Merriam, *Qualitative Research*. 
Public Schools. The desired research outcome is to generate new discussions regarding desegregation in education and the present state of desegregation. The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study refer to as reliability, and if the results of a study are reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered reliable. 91 The real question for qualitative researchers is not whether the results of one study are the same as the results of a second or third study, but whether the results of a study are consistent with the data collected. 92

**Research Questions**

This qualitative study examines decisions by the St. Louis Public Schools and the central administration’s response to the rapid expansion of African American enrollment from 1945 to 1983. My research questions are as follows:

1. What disingenuous deeds did St. Louis Public Schools used to preserve a segregated school system from 1945-1983?

2. How did the St. Louis Public Schools respond to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision?

**Limitations**

This research is not a comprehensive analysis of all the articles and research regarding the St. Louis Public Schools desegregation case. The research centers on St. Louis Public School administrators more than the desegregation case itself. In addition, I spent the majority of my time conducting research in the Central Library, the main

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92 Merriam, *Qualitative Research*. 
branch of the St. Louis Public Library, which does not have a comprehensive collection of materials related to the St. Louis Public Schools. The St. Louis Public Archives division was moved from the Hampton Avenue location two years ago which hinders the research. St. Louis Public Schools’ archives are located throughout different St. Louis City locations.

As mentioned earlier, this research does not contain personal interviews. During the research period, racial tension in the United States was at a high level. It is my belief that personal interviews would have included racial tones and views. Racial experiences were different depending on what school a former student attended during the research. Interviews with former students who attended segregated schools might have produced a specific response relating to their experiences. In addition, previous students who lived in Black-contained neighborhoods would have different perspectives from Whites who lived throughout the city. Personal interviews may have included lack of memory or storytelling by the interviewees.

My research focused on print literature but could not include every piece of print literature due to the demands of the writing. Despite limitations, print documents are a good source of data on a particular subject, better than observations or interviews, because such documents would provide a timed stamp to correlate with various aspects of the research topic. 93

93 Ibid.
Chapter Four: Research

Pre-Brown v. Board of Education, 1945-1955

St. Louis Public Schools district (SLPS) relied heavily on the Missouri Constitution, which required separate public schools for Black and White students, so the district created a dual school system. The United States Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson required the SLPS to provide at minimum separate but equal facilities for the St. Louis city student population. However, the history of the St. Louis Public Schools did not always fall in line with the United States Supreme Court decision. Black schools encountered insufficiencies with regards to school structures and overcrowdings. The equality of the facilities was challenged by the community and civic leaders and community as being subpar to White school facilities. The result was court cases and lawsuits against the school district. Disingenuous deeds plagued the St. Louis Public Schools for nearly a half of a century. For example, high schools for Black students were limited to Sumner, Vashon and Washington High Schools, which were located in north St. Louis. The location led to Black containment and was crucial to the lasting segregation for future decades in the St. Louis Public Schools.

For decades the St. Louis Public Schools district was unwavering in their decision not to retire the segregated system despite local and federal court decisions. Black students attempted to integrate the St. Louis Public Schools’ dual school system but were constantly denied by the district. The St. Louis Public Schools continued to forestall Black students’ quests to desegregate St. Louis city schools, citing the Missouri State Constitution. The decade prior to the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision of Brown vs. Board of Education observed numerous attempts to terminate segregated
public schools in St. Louis city. However, individual attempts were met with resistance and opposition from school district officials. The school district employed various deliberate and surreptitious tactics to remain a segregated school system.

The efforts to tear down the segregated school walls were met head on by the St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education. Families tried to enroll their students in segregated schools and filed law suits but were rejected by the St. Louis Public Schools district. One of the earliest attempts to segregate St. Louis city schools emerged in 1944. According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “The St. Louis Race Relations Commission recommended that a mandatory requirement of segregation of White and Negro pupils in the public schools be eliminated from the Missouri State Constitution,” and this recommendation was presented in February 1944 to the Constitutional Convention. In addition, the St. Louis Race Relations Commission desired equal pay for White and Black teachers along with eliminating segregated schools. The Commission stated that the recommendation was in the best interest of race relations and the democratic process in St. Louis. “Edwin B. Meissner, chairman of the commission, stated the recommendation was in the interest of better race relations, [would] assist in opening the door of equal opportunity in education regardless of color, [and would] lead to a better understanding between groups of citizens.” However, the recommendation fell on deaf ears as the SLPS continued business as usual as a segregated school system.

The St. Louis Public Schools routinely faced legal actions for their duplicitous deeds concerning violations of the United States Supreme Court and the Missouri

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94 “Group Opposes Segregation in Missouri Schools,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 16, 1944.
95 Ibid.
Supreme Court decisions. For example, another attempt to question the legality of the school system was presented by Black parents. Parents challenged Black students’ class sizes comparable to White student’s class sizes. A 1945 Circuit Court suit was filed by Mrs. Bertle Davis stating her grandson’s school violated the 1896 United States Plessy v. Ferguson decision requiring separate but equal facilities. “The suit compels the St. Louis Board of Education ‘to furnish adequate public school accommodations for Negro children equal to those provided for White children.’”

St. Louis Public Schools assigned Black students at Marshall Elementary School to basement classrooms that were not conducive to learning with class sizes approximately fifty-two to fifty-four students. However, White students’ school classrooms were totally opposite with adequate learning space. According to St. Louis Public Schools board member Daniel Schlafly page 54, “I got some statistics from the Building Department about the ‘colored’ schools and prior to the 1954 decision where the black schools were marked on official records with a small c. The Building Department records showed that pupil/teacher ratios were much higher in the black schools than in the white schools.” However, again the actions fell on deaf ears and the SLPS challenged integration. The lawsuit continued to expose the disparities between White and Black schools in St. Louis city.

The St. Louis Public Schools were uncompromising with regards to educating White and Black students in the same school setting. The St. Louis Public Schools district was challenged again in 1949 regarding the 1896 United States Supreme Court Plessy v. Ferguson separate but equal doctrine. The district provided two technical high

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96 “Negro's Suit Asks Races Be Treated Alike in Schools," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, October 21, 1945.
schools at that time, one for White students and one for Black students. Hadley Technical High School enrolled White students, and Booker T. Washington High School enrolled Black students. A report by Edwin Meissner, chairman of the St. Louis Race Relations Commission, stated that the school district violated the *Plessy v. Ferguson* separate but equal doctrine decision due to facility inequalities. Hadley Technical High School’s contract cost was $1,665,919 compared to Washington Technical High School’s contract of $237,910. Hadley Technical High School had 71 classrooms with cost per room at $23,463 and Washington Technical High School had 27 classrooms with cost per room at $8,811. Washington Technical High School was originally built as a junior high school. At the time, St. Louis city Mayor Aloys P. Kaufman, recognized the disparities between the two schools. Mayor Kaufman stated that he supported the Meissner report 100% because he knew the need was there. Despite the outcry, the St. Louis Public Schools district did not render any changes within the two high schools. The decision not to render changes was evident by a law suit filed against the St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education regarding Hadley Technical High School and Washington Technical High School two years later. Meissner reported that school facilities presented glaring inequities and inadequacies that deprived Black students of future career opportunities. According to the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, “His work cited there was overcrowding at Booker T. Washington but not at Hadley Technical and there were subjects taught at Hadley that were not taught at Booker T. Washington.”

98 St. Louis, Missouri, *Annual Report of the Board of Education of the City of St. Louis, Mo.,* 1950-51
One subject that demonstrated this inequality for Black students was aeromechanics, which was taught at Hadley Technical High School. “In the fall of 1949 Wesley Brewton, 17, and Wilbert Brewton, 15, sought to enroll in Hadley Technical High School for Whites to take the aeromechanics class.” 101 Aeromechanics class was listed as a course selection for Whites at Hadley Technical High School but was not listed as a course selection for Blacks at Booker T. Washington High School. Therefore, Black students did not have access to the class or the career path as required by the United States Supreme Court. The White students were offered an extensive training in the aeromechanics field. Hadley Technical High School offered aeromechanics three hours a day for five semesters, which constituted more than half the four years of high school; nevertheless, the course was not offered for Booker T. Washington High School students.

A lawsuit was filed with the St. Louis Circuit Court on behalf of the Brewton family. The St. Louis Circuit Court provided the SLPS the opportunity to integrate schools, but the SLPS refused to integrate their dual school system. The SLPS district appealed the St. Louis Circuit Court decision to the Missouri Supreme court rather than allow Black students to enroll in the White Hadley Technical High School. The St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education challenged the Circuit Court based on the Missouri Constitution, which called for separate schools for White and Black students. The Missouri Supreme Court upheld the St. Louis Circuit Court decision. Therefore, the highest courts in the state presented the St. Louis Public Schools the opportunity to enroll Black students in Hadley Technical High School and integrate their dual school system, thus ending segregation. Missouri Supreme Court Judge Laurance M. Hyde stated that

the St. Louis Public Schools district had violated the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Federal Constitution. Judge Hyde stated that by second semester February 1950 the St. Louis Public Schools had to provide a course in aeromechanics at Booker T. Washington High School or admit students from Booker T. Washington High School to take said course at Hadley Technical High School. The Missouri Supreme Court essentially granted the St. Louis City school district permission to integrate the two technical high schools with White and Black students. In other words, the Missouri Supreme Court provided a clear path for the St. Louis Public Schools to desegregate before the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision, but instead the school district decided to eliminate the course.

Despite the Missouri Supreme Court ruling, the St. Louis Public Schools did not exercise the right to integrate the two high schools but insisted on protecting their segregated school system. The St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education was so steadfast about remaining a segregated school system that the district canceled the class at Hadley Technical High School rather than allow Black students to enter a White school. Superintendent Hickey exercised his discretionary power and had certain courses dropped from Hadley Technical because he suspected Black students would register at Hadley Technical since these courses were not offered at Washington Technical.

Superintendent Hickey’s decision preserved a segregated school district, ensuring Black students would not sit next to White students in class. Was that perfidious? Why did the SLPS not use the Missouri Supreme Court ruling to desegregate schools? In lieu of the

103 “Abandonment of Segregation,” St. Louis Argus, March 2, 1951.
Missouri Supreme Court decision, the St. Louis Public Schools district continued to use the Missouri State Constitution to perpetuate a segregated school system. Ironically, presently there is a St. Louis public school with an all-Black student population named Hickey Elementary School, after Superintendent Hickey, although under his leadership Blacks were not allowed to enter White schools.

In a similar incident, twelve Black students sought to enroll in two White south St. Louis schools but were denied by the St. Louis Board of Education, citing the Missouri State Constitution despite the decision rendered in the previous case. Black students attempted to enroll in Virginia School and Carondelet School, but their applications were not approved by the St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education (SLPSBOE). This action took place after the appeal of the *State v. Board of Education* case in which the Missouri Supreme Court and Circuit Judge Aronson ordered the SLPSBOE to admit two Black students to the all-White Hadley Technical High School, hence granting permission to educate White and Black students in the same setting.

According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* a spokesman for the SLPS Board said applications were rejected because of the board’s policy of segregation based on the state constitution. 104 St. Louis Circuit Judge Robert A. Aronson held that the United States Supreme Court had repeatedly allowed such segregated schools to be established as long as they afforded equal education opportunities. 105 This was another opportunity for SLPS to integrate their schools. However, again the St. Louis Public Schools refused to allow Whites and Blacks to learn in the same classrooms. The St. Louis Public Schools

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104 “12 Negro Pupils Barred Trying to Enter 2 Schools,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, December 21, 1940.
105 Ibid.
district was determined not to allow Black and White students in the same classrooms as demonstrated by their decisions during this time period. This pattern of behavior was evident throughout the decade preceding the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and displayed a strong disposition against school desegregation.

The NAACP initiated a proposal to overturn the 1945 Missouri State Constitution ruling of separate schools for Black and White children: “The St. Louis NAACP branch launched a campaign in January 1951 to collect funds to end segregated schools in St. Louis.” 106 The funds assisted with the legislature of House Bill 135, a ban on racial segregation in Missouri schools. According to Frances Watson of the *St. Louis Argus*, “The chief sponsor of House Bill 135, Representative Walter Lay of St. Louis, was key in the House Committee on Education vote in favor of the bill by a 15 to 5 vote.” 107 House Bill 135 moved forward with attention-grabbing language in support of the bill. “Representative Jennie Walsh of St. Louis asked, ‘How long in America will we preach freedom, dignity for all men to other countries, while failing to practice at home?’” 108 However, Missouri lawmakers did not have the same sentiments. “The House Bill 135 was killed by the Missouri House in April 1951 by a 62 to 54 margin.” 109 The Bill failed while St. Louis Public Schools made neither attempts nor conversations regarding segregating schools. Ironically, across the Mississippi River, less than 60 miles from the City of St. Louis, the Edwardsville School District voted against segregated schools in the same month. “September (1951) ended racial segregation in the public schools of

108 Ibid.
Edwardsville, Illinois by the Edwardsville Community Unit Board of Education.” The St. Louis Public Schools district remained segregated and St. Louis did not entertain the idea of desegregating their school system regardless of the fights from local citizens or the Missouri Courts’ rulings that allowed desegregation.

Could desegregation have saved the St. Louis Public Schools district money? The decision to ignore the report and move forward was another misdeed by the school district. In 1952, an Institute of Human Rights was held at Kiel Auditorium in downtown St. Louis. A report by Washington University professor Dr. Stuart A. Queen presented a financial savings for the St. Louis city school system. According to Dr. Queen, $10,000-750,000 was needed to raise Negro schools to the level of white schools. The findings centered on overcrowding in Negro schools while White schools experienced empty classroom space throughout the school district. The inequalities clearly violated the United States Supreme Court 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. But the St. Louis Public Schools district by no means intended to integrate the school district regardless of the amount of funds sacrificed. School district leaders chose to spend additional funds rather than to desegregate schools. The report indicated $14,500 annually was used to preserve a segregated school system. The conference presented the cost savings that the school district would experience by desegregating schools, but the St. Louis Public Schools held steadfast on remaining a segregated school system.

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110 "Education Board Votes End to Act of Racial Bias," *St. Louis Argus*, April 13, 1951.
112 Ibid.
Sumner High School
4248 Cottage
Vashon High School

3035 Bell

The St. Louis Public Schools district was persistent in their quest to remain a segregated school system for more than half a century, regardless of local and federal court decisions. Nevertheless, the ensuing United States Supreme Court decision dealt a serious blow to the philosophy of segregation subscribed to by the St. Louis Public Schools leaders. Prior to the United States Supreme Court Brown v. Board of Education decision, the writing was becoming clear regarding desegregation of schools. It was well documented that local and state courts had allowed for school desegregation for a decade in St. Louis. Nationally, segregated school systems were being challenged in the courts.

In Murray v. Maryland the Maryland Court of Appeals foreshadowed major court decisions involving Thurgood Marshall. The University of Maryland refused to admit Donald Murray into its law school program based on his race. Thurgood Marshall led attorneys’ arguments that the University of Maryland did not provide equal law school opportunities for Blacks, which violated the 1896 separate but equal doctrine. The Maryland Court of Appeals ruled in favor of Donald Murray, holding that the state did not provide equal access to law school. A few years later a similar case transpired in Missouri when Lloyd Gaines tried to gain entrance to the University of Missouri law school, Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada. The University of Missouri was the only higher education institution in the state that offered law school. The University of Missouri legally had to admit Mr. Gaines under the separate but equal doctrine. However, the University of Missouri decided to pay for Gaines to attend a law school out of state to avoid admitting a Black student to campus. The United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of Gaines. In another case in 1950, McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents,
the University of Oklahoma was forced to remove the separate but equal restrictions under which a Black student, George W. McLaurin, could attend its education doctorate program, restrictions that included sitting at a desk just outside the door of his classroom. This United States Supreme Court case found that a lower court decision that had allowed the university to require segregated facilities for graduate students because of their race was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. These previous landmark cases laid the foundation for the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which reshaped the world of education. However, despite all the previous cases, it would seem that the SLPS did not plan to desegregate their school system until mandated by *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision restructured the education landscape in the United States of America and overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* United States Supreme Court decision. Thirteen plaintiffs filed a momentous lawsuit to desegregate public schools in Topeka, Kansas. The United States Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* was arguably the most influential court decision in the history of the United States. The United States Supreme Court stated, “We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate education facilities are inherently unequal.” Furthermore, the United States Supreme Court indicated that school segregation violated the Fourteenth Amendment and therefore overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. The Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed equal protection under the laws of the United States of America. According to Melvin Urofsky, “Judge Warren declared that to segregate Black children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race

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generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.” 114 Judge Warren’s declaration removed the barriers that lined the front doors of White schools. The St. Louis Public Schools district could no longer hide behind the Missouri Constitution after this United States Supreme Court decision and deny Black students access to all schools. Brown v. Board of Education erased the misdeeds of the previous decades. The SLPS Board of Education faced the daunting task of desegregating schools in opposition to their past strategies to remain segregated.

However, it was interesting that within the same city limits the Archdiocese of St. Louis had desegregated their schools in 1947 and had no signs of problems. Their actions took place after the St. Louis Public Schools were previously presented opportunities to integrate schools by the Missouri court system and had refused. Dean Arno Haack of Washington University stated, “There has been no problem in the classroom and absence of tension has been achieved.” 115 The Archdiocesan community reported that their survey of colored students at St. Louis University High School revealed colored students were satisfied with their experience. 116 The Archdiocese opened their doors to Black students when the St. Louis Public Schools district had denied Black students. Dean Haack went on to say that we are depending on the growth of the entire culture and in all racial matters. 117

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116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
St. Louis Public Schools’ Three-Step Plan

After decades of using misdeeds to fight desegregation, the St. Louis Public Schools were forced to open all of their schools to Black students because of \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}. The St. Louis Public Schools district could no longer hide behind the Missouri Constitution or commit deceitful deeds in order to preserve segregated schools. Superintendent Hickey’s decisions to close classes and the school district’s legal battles to suppress integration were all null and void as a result of the landmark decision. The St. Louis Public Schools district was not in a position to challenge the court system as they had in the past, and therefore they were obligated to desegregate the school system. As a result, the district announced that they had prepared a plan in anticipation of the \textit{Brown v. Board} decision. However, Daniel Schlafly, who was elected to the St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education in 1953, contradicted popular tales regarding St. Louis school desegregation. Schlafly stated, “I don’t remember any talk about integration when I ran for the school board that spring of 1953.”

In response to the 1954 United States Supreme Court \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} decision, the St. Louis Public Schools designed a Three Step Plan to desegregate the school system. The district had decided to comply rather than defy the Supreme Court decision. The Three Step Plan was approved June 22, 1954, during a special official board meeting. The plan was outlined as follows:

I. By the opening of schools next September, we shall have taken two steps:

\begin{footnote}{118 Schlafly, \textit{28 Years.}}
a. Integration at the Junior College and Teachers College levels. The Stowe Teachers and Junior College for Negroes and the Harris Teachers and Junior College for Whites will be combined into one institution. The new college will be housed in the Harris Building.

b. Integration of Special Schools that provide their services on a citywide rather than on a school district basis. Orthopedically handicapped students throughout St. Louis, regardless of race or color, will be assigned to the Elias Michael School. Deaf students will similarly be assigned to the Gallaudet School. Mentally retarded children will be assigned to the Special Schools serving school zones as at present, but without regard to race or color.

II. At the beginning of the second semester, February 1, 1955, we will take another step:

a. Integration of all the high schools under the Board’s control except the technical high schools. New high school district boundary lines will be drawn and published by November 15, 1954.

b. Integration of the Adult Education program, which is conducted in the high schools and buildings.

III. At the opening of the schools in September 1955, we will complete the process of integration. At that time, the following steps will be taken:

a. Integration of the technical high schools.

b. Integration of all regular elementary schools. We will publish new elementary schools district boundary lines by February 1, 1955. 119

In addition, the St. Louis Public High School Athletic League (PHL) would integrate their athletic programs: “The principals voted to invite Sumner, Vashon and Washington

Tech to participate in the league’s activities beginning September 1 (1954), as far as present scheduling will permit.” 120 The Three Step Plan was the St. Louis Public Schools’ valid attempt to desegregate the school system in response to the United States Supreme Court decision. The district’s Three Step Plan proposed a three-semester time line to desegregate the school system, which was a speedy timeline.

The school district added the following, “In devising this schedule, we have been influenced by a number of reasons which make a more rapid unification program questionable. 121 The SLPS school board presented five reasons: (1) administrative problems of setting up new school boundary lines, assigning pupils and teachers and moving supplies and equipment; (2) establishment of new regulations and policies to govern operation of the unified school system; (3) confusion for parents if all boundary lines in the city were revised simultaneously before students went back to school; (4) continuing shift in city population; and (5) evidence that the best way to integrated a large public system is in orderly steps as gleaned from President Eisenhower’s suggestion. 122 School board officials stated, “We believe that this schedule will secure for every public school child full, equal, and impartial use of our school facilities as rapidly as is practicable.” 123

Nationally, there were several defiant school districts that did not wish to conform to the United States Supreme Court Brown v. Board of Education decision. These school districts were rebellious and desired to preserve a segregated public school system regardless of the United States Supreme Court decision. For example, Virginia’s

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122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
Governor Stanley was very adamant in his stance for a segregated school system. In September 1954, three months after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, he stated “I shall use every legal means at my command to preserve a segregated school system in Virginia.” 124 The insolence toward the United States Supreme Court decision was very apparent in Virginia. “Governor Stanley used his post to appoint a 32-man Commission on Public Education in August 1954 to examine the United States Supreme Court decision.” 125 Virginia continued to evade the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by using the state legislature. “Speaker Blackburn Moore proposed the Moore Resolution to the general assembly that segregation should be declared the policy for Virginia for the school term 1956-1957.” 126 Virginia faced legal battles from the NAACP for years to come before desegregating their school system.

Likewise, Alabama was not ready to comply with the United States Supreme Court decision. Alabama had passed laws and raised pay for Black teachers as a way to preserve segregation prior to the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision. In addition, a 1955 pupil law was written to assist with the segregation of public schools. “The pupil law was designed to give local school boards the power to decide where students would attend school based on ability, availability of transportation and academic background.” 127 Alabama was unwavering in its commitment to a segregated school system. Two years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision Alabama passed two

125 Ibid.
laws to preserve a segregated school system: “In 1956 one law allowed school boards to close any school faced with integration and a law allowed parents to decide which schools their children would attend.” The next decade started with the same face of segregated schools. Alabama defied the United States Supreme Court decision for more than half a decade by continuing to operate segregated schools. Yet, beginning in 1963 the integration of Alabama Public Schools slowly commenced with several civil rights court cases: “Lee v. Macon County Board of Education and Birdie Mae Davis v. Board of School Commissioners of Mobile County, Alabama put in motion the first steps to integrated schools.” The Alabama school system fought for over a decade before finally giving in to the desegregation of public schools.

Unlike the outright defiance witnessed by other cities, the SLPS chose subtle misdeeds to preserve their segregated school system. Though the St. Louis Public Schools district did not lend itself to extremes, it employed other misleading deeds to prevent desegregation in the school district. The SLPS used the illusive strategies of neighborhood schooling, intact busing and containment to maintain a segregated school system as much as possible. However, in the beginning the St. Louis local media praised the SLPS Board of Education’s Three Step Plan to desegregate the schools. “In 1957 St. Louis was awarded ‘All-America City’ status by the National Municipal League and Look magazine for its progress during the first two years of school desegregation.” In addition, “In 1966 the city was cited as having the most ambitious program in eight northern cities due to the busing program.” St. Louis Public Schools received

128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
accolades from across the country for their desegregation plan yet still faced legal battles and protests for two decades after the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision.

**St. Louis Racial Background**

St. Louis City housing containment schemes and the school district’s boundaries in St. Louis city were originally separate entities as result of the United States Supreme Court case *Plessey v. Ferguson*. Missouri state laws required that the St. Louis Public Schools’ Board of Education provide a separate school system of equality for Black students, that is, until the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education*. School boundary lines were established for White schools, and separate lines were established for Black schools. However, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision the school district enrollment boundary lines merged Black and White students within one school system. The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling immediately altered the school district’s attendance boundary lines to include all students. However, the city government had planted the seeds for future school desegregation by managing the housing patterns throughout the city.

Racial segregation in the early 1900s was common throughout the United States including St. Louis. Racial separation was not hidden but very overt in cities like St. Louis, especially through the windows of housing and school patterns. The St. Louis city government went to extreme measures to pass a citywide segregation ordinance, in their language: “An ordinance to prevent ill feeling, conflict and collisions between the white and colored races in the City of St. Louis in city blocks occupied by both races and to preserve the public peace.”

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inevitably affected the future of school segregation. Housing ordinances racially segregated the City of St. Louis: “The terms of the ordinances were straightforward: they barred Blacks from purchasing a house or residing on blocks that were more than 75 percent White.” The St. Louis 1916 Segregation Ordinance prevented a race from moving to a city block that was inhabited by 75% of a different race. This segregation ordinance was destined to preserve segregated neighborhoods, which directly related to the city’s public school future. The city planned to remain segregated by the powers of city government. However, a Louisville, Kentucky, court case prevented the segregation ordinance from becoming law in St. Louis. The United States Supreme Court overturned the 1916 ordinance in *Buchanan v. Warley*, which stated that city ordinances prohibiting property sales to Black residents in all White or majority White neighborhoods violated the Fourteenth Amendment. In 1948 St. Louis witnessed another United States Supreme Court case concerning housing covenants. A St. Louis city resident purchased a home on a block that was part of a restrictive covenant and attempted to take possession, which prompted a landmark United States Supreme Court decision. The Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* that although the restrictive covenant was a private agreement, if the state becomes involved and state courts enforce racially restrictive housing covenants, this is a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Therefore, the United States Supreme Court reversed the judgment of the Supreme Court of Missouri, which had upheld the restrictive housing covenant. Nevertheless, housing segregation played a major part in the St. Louis Public Schools’ misdeeds.

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City Living Patterns

Monroe Billington, in an article in *The Journal of Negro Education* (1966), wrote, “After World War II, countless Blacks migrated from the South for better economic opportunities. Whites who preferred uniracial schools joined an already significant number of neighbors who were rushing to suburbs in St. Louis County.”¹³⁵ Blacks began to occupy the central corridor of the city from the Mississippi River to the Central West End. According to Dennis R. Judd, who wrote about residential segregation in St. Louis, “Orfield’s study demonstrated that the St. Louis metropolitan area was intensely segregated by race, that the degree of residential segregation had increased over time, and that governmental policies had been extremely influential in creating housing segregation.”¹³⁶ St. Louis city officials were certain to segregate the White and Black neighborhoods that generally reflected only one race.

White citizens and realtors were vested in housing covenants to ensure Blacks did not purchase homes in specific city locations. Furthermore, restrictive covenants assisted with preservation of segregated neighborhoods. “Realtors selling to African American buyers outside the restricted zone stood to lose their licenses.”¹³⁷ The United States Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kraemer* essentially prohibited racially restrictive housing covenants, but school district officials devised a neighborhood plan as a way to desegregate the school children. The neighborhood plan was dictated by the segregated housing patterns. According to Daniel Shlafly, a school board member, the business of

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resegregation through housing policies is but one of many examples of how the federal government fostered segregation. The district’s neighborhood plan used the same housing patterns that were meant to enclave Blacks in order to contain Black students in specific schools. As a result, the school district neighborhood plan reflected the city’s racial containment. Consequently, a large number of schools remained predominately one race for more than a decade after officials introduced the Three Step Plan. Ironically, today schools of predominantly one race still exist in the St. Louis Public Schools.

**Neighborhood Schooling**

*Brown v. Board of Education* did not impede the St. Louis Public Schools’ plan to segregate by constructing deceptive school boundary lines using neighborhoods as the guidelines. The United States Supreme Court ordered public schools to desegregate, but the SLPS used the segregated housing patterns to desegregate the school system:

“Government at all levels has continued to pursue policies that have promoted racial segregation in housing, in St. Louis and elsewhere, and they have failed to enact policies that would have the effect of reducing such segregation.”

The housing patterns were set by politicians and realtors who used discrimination to segregate the city of St. Louis. “The school board believed in ‘neighborhood schooling’ and contended that school authorities were not obligated to deliberately change the character of the neighborhood or its schools.” Therefore, the school district desegregation plan matched the pattern of segregated housing: “Students must attend the school in the district in which they live.”

Consequently, the decision by Superintendent Phillip Hickey and the school board to

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138 Schlafly, *28 Years.*
139 Judd, *The Role of Governmental Policies.*
140 Billington, “Public School Integration.”
use the neighborhood schools as school boundaries guaranteed future school segregation. The SLPS allowed the previous information to guide their desegregation plan. It was well documented that the city was segregated by race due to housing covenants and neighborhoods; however, the school district used the same racially segregated city maps to assign children to schools. “The creation of the neighborhood school policy meant the St. Louis school board not only allowed the segregated housing to guarantee segregated schools, but in some instances the board drew attendance zones to exclude black neighborhoods.”  

Why did the SLPS use segregated city maps to desegregate public schools?

The St. Louis city school board allowed White students to transfer from schools that became predominately Black north city schools. The St. Louis Public Schools’ permissive transfer rule allowed for students to transfer to other schools with available space. Ironically, White students faced little resistance to the transfer rule, but Blacks faced challenges when they wanted to transfer from their neighborhood schools. In addition, the rule did not provide transportation, which was more beneficial to “affluent White children” who did not wish to attend schools with Black children. “According to William Russell, a lawyer, the Blacks who wanted to transfer had a difficult time doing it, but there was no problems for White families to transfer their children into schools that were practically all-White.” These types of misdeeds were fixtures after the Brown v. Board of Education decision. Despite the Three-Step Plan and their public

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144 Wells and Crain, Stepping over the Color Line.
announcement of their intention to desegregate the school district, the school board continued their hypocrisy. Again, such behavior shows the misdeeds by the SLPS to remain a segregated school district regardless of local and federal court decisions.

**Similar Cases**

The St. Louis Public Schools participated in misdeeds by operating a de facto segregated system. De facto school segregation is a term describing all-Negro or all-White schools that reflect the surrounding housing patterns. St. Louis Public Schools and districts across the country used the housing patterns to remain segregated. *Brown v. Board of Education* was construed as prohibiting only school segregation based solely on race and as indicating that there is no constitutional prohibition against racial separation resulting from district boundaries based on nonracial criteria. Ironically, districts continued the use of housing patterns decades after *Brown v. Board of Education* until threatened by the federal government. Many smaller school districts, however, particularly in the South, desegregated in the 1960s after the federal government threatened to withhold Title I financial assistance to districts that continued to discriminate by race.

Black students throughout the United States were affected by school districts’ gerrymandering and containment schemes. For example, large cities such as Chicago used city neighborhoods to draw school attendance boundary lines. In addition, housing covenants played a major role in segregating school districts. White homeowners began

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146 Ibid.
using restrictive covenants to steer Blacks clear of their neighborhoods. In Chicago “the White residents of these communities were organized and well connected, and saw school segregation as a way to keep their neighborhoods White.” 148 The school board was not far behind with their ideological way of thinking. “As the historian Michael Homel has documented, in these neighborhoods the school board began to adjust attendance-area boundaries and feeder patterns in ways that kept Black and White students separate.” 149 As with many cities, Chicago segregated neighborhoods by constructing new public ghetto residences to preserve the separation of Blacks and Whites. “The same expressways and other ecological barriers that separated Black and White neighborhoods also made convenient and readily justifiable school boundaries. 150 Chicago went as far as to construct Black schools to contain Black students to assure they would not attend White schools. For example, according to Kathryn Neckerman, “In 1926, the Board of Education built a new school and assigned to it all the neighborhood’s Black students, even those who lived nearer to Esmond (an all-White school).” 151 In addition, school districts in cities such as St. Louis and Chicago used annexes, branches and portables to contain Blacks within specific areas of the cities. In Chicago “some schools housed the extra (Black) students in portable wooden classrooms, which were rat infested and difficult to heat and cool.” 152 Such disingenuous deeds were an essential component of the efforts of school districts such as Chicago and St. Louis to remain segregated districts.

149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
A short 95 miles to the north of Chicago was another school district similar to those of St. Louis and Chicago, the Milwaukee School District. The Milwaukee School District utilized similar disingenuous deeds. According to Jack Dougherty, the Milwaukee School District went a step further by assigning teachers to schools close to their homes, assuming all the Black teachers lived in Black neighborhoods. The actions of the school district were to continue education segregation. “Black children in Morton and West Chester walked past White-designated schools on their way to Black-designated schools every morning.” 153 According to Jack Dougherty, Lorraine Radtke, the school board president, disagreed that schools were segregated but admitted that there was segregation by geography perhaps but the district did not control that. Radtke went on to explain that the neighborhood school policy was a normal, natural procedure. The opposing argument is that neighborhood school policy and segregation are one and the same. The St. Louis Public Schools employed the same ideology as the Milwaukee School District after the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954.

The fact of the matter is that the SLPS continued their misdeeds to remain segregated. According to Wells and Cain, minor adjustments were made to the attendance boundaries as the SLPS stated in their Three-Step Plan. The SLPS Board of Education claimed in 1954 to reestablish boundary lines to assist with the desegregation plan but did not state how the boundaries would impact desegregation. There were no changes made to the forty-one white elementary schools, and in the remaining twelve, boundaries were redrawn to exclude Black neighborhoods. In addition, the school board

changed the high school feeder patterns to ensure that students attending black
elementary schools would enroll in either Sumner or Vashon. The boundaries of a White
high school, Southwest High School, were redrawn to exclude Blacks. The new
boundary lines did nothing to help in desegregating schools but further segregated the
school district.

It is important to understand the mapping decline and school boundaries in the
city of St. Louis but more important to understand how decisions about mapping decline,
White flight and urban renewal directly affected the schools in the SLPS district and the
education of Blacks in the city of St. Louis. Between 1953 and 1963 Black student
enrollment doubled from 31,000 to 64,000 while the White student population decreased
by 12,000. The mapping decline and urban renewal dictated school boundaries, which
in turn dictated student placement, staffing, and school leadership as well as funding. As
the discriminatory nature of high school trade apprenticeships had demonstrated, the St.
Louis Board of Education was deeply involved in the racial oppression and economic
exploitation that plagued African Americans in the automated age. After a promising
start in the 1954-1955 academic year, the city’s progress toward school desegregation
had rapidly deteriorated. However, in 1959, Missouri’s Advisory Committee of the
Federal Commission on Civil Rights could claim that 95 percent of the state’s Black
children attended desegregated schools.

As Clarence Lang observes, “Thus, while legally sanctioned school segregation
had been abolished, Black St. Louisans now confronted a ‘de facto’ segregation

154 Wells and Crain, *Stepping over the Color Line*.
156 Ibid.
deliberately maintained by the gerrymandering of school district boundaries and arguments for ‘neighborhood schooling’ in areas that were majority white.” 157 The St. Louis Public Schools contended that neighborhood schooling was the formula for boundary lines, not race. But a decade after Brown v. Board of Education, of the 134 elementary schools in the city, 71 were completely Black and 50 were white. Cleveland, Roosevelt and Southwest High Schools were predominantly White, while Beaumont, Soldan, Sumner and Vashon were Black. 158

There is no definite research to correlate the decision of Brown v. Board of Education with White flight, but the decline of Whites from the city may provide some sort of indication. According to Ralph Reisner, writing in Law & Society Review (1967), “St. Louis City has suffered an absolute decline in population since World War II, a decline which was sharpest in the 1950-60 decade when a net loss of over 100,000 residents occurred. During the same period the suburban area around St. Louis experienced an increase in population in excess of 50%.” 159 Oddly, the city districts became less attractive within one to two years after integration in the city schools. “Comparing the percentage change of minority students nationwide with the 25 city school systems, the percentage of minority students (especially black and Hispanic students) since the late 1960s to the late 1980s has been 250% to 280% more in the 25 city school systems.” 160 The sharp decline in the numbers of Whites in the City of St. Louis, especially during the decade of 1950-1960 leading up to and including the Brown

157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
v. Board of Education decision, would seem to suggest a correlation between White flight and the United States Supreme Court’s decision to integrate the public schools. The St. Louis Public Schools, like other districts across the nation, responded to the Supreme Court’s decision by promoting their neighborhood school policy and essentially keeping in place de facto segregation.

**Containment**

After the Brown v. Board of Education decision, schools were constructed in the Black neighborhoods while the SLPS ignored the open classroom space in the White schools. Rather than busing Blacks to empty spaces in White schools and desegregating the school system following Brown v. Board of Education, the SLPS spent millions of dollars to contain Black students in north St. Louis. The influx of Blacks forced a response by the SLPS to create schools in the “projects.” The projects were housing experiments in urban areas throughout the country that enclaved Black residents. Many of the projects were low-rise buildings that catered to low-income residents with rent below the market rate. Later, the design would move to high-rise apartment buildings housing low-income minority families. The projects were notorious for criminal activity. They were over populated with large families in one dwelling. The Pruitt-Igo project was nationally recognized for its structure and its crime. It was located west of downtown St. Louis in the central corridor. The Darst-Webbe project was located a few blocks south of downtown and housed some of the hardest criminals. In 1955, Carr Lane and Peabody Schools were constructed in the middle of the Pruitt-Igo and Darst-Webbe projects, in line with the SLPS’s idea of Black containment in the city to ensure Black children were enclaved within the city housing patterns.
Schools were strategically constructed in the Black neighborhoods to ensure Black students did not leave their area and integrate with White students. These boundaries provided each school with a district that it would serve. According to the SLPS Board of Education, in drawing these boundaries consideration was paid to the best use of the facilities of a given school by the students living in the area of that school.\(^\text{161}\) The early boundary lines were drawn using these principles. As stated, earlier the city had been segregated; therefore, the school district would remain segregated using this plan of action by the SLPS. After *Brown v. Board of Education* new schools were generally constructed in north St. Louis where Black people resided. The St. Louis Public Schools district camouflaged their intention as one that was providing new schools and facilities to Black students. However, it was a misdeed to secure locations for Black students within their enclaved areas while preserving the segregation. By containing Blacks to their area, the district made certain that there could be no desegregation.

In 1960, according to board documents, the district would construct fourteen new elementary schools. All of the new schools were to be located in the north section of the city where Blacks resided in order to alleviate the overcrowding. Overcrowded Black schools had been an issue for the previous 20 years. However, the number of students in White schools remained far less than their capacity.

Pruitt-Igoe Housing Projects
Darst-Webbe Housing Projects
Carr Lane School
1004 North Jefferson

Peabody School
1224 South 14th
New Northside Schools
Intact Busing

The St. Louis Public Schools district board members understood the federal and city government segregated housing. So why would they use housing to desegregate the schools? There were plenty of empty classrooms in White schools for Black students. However, the SLPS used a variety of strategies to create the appearance of segregation. For example, intact busing was another method approved by the district. The practice of intact busing was an example of the response to the growing numbers of African American students while the St. Louis Public Schools desired to preserve segregation. Intact busing was a system whereby north St. Louis Black teachers and students were transported by bus to south St. Louis White schools. Black students entered the White school buildings at a specific allotted time when White students and teachers were in class, assuring there was no interaction between the races. District officials provided separate classroom space for Black students within White schools. Black students and teachers had separate classrooms, lunch, recess, and dismissal times so that there was no contact between races. “For example, in 1961-1962 (seven years after the Brown v. Board of Education court decision) over 90% of transported children were Negro, and many of them went to all White schools, but they went as classroom units…moreover, the transported pupils used the school grounds and cafeteria facilities at times other than when the regular pupils used them.” 162 At the end of the school day, Black students and teachers were bused back to north St. Louis. Why did the SLPS approve such a plan?

SLPS Superintendent Hickey and the school board turned down requests to bus White students to Black schools stating, “It would be artificial and nothing could be

162 Billington, “Public School Integration.”
accomplished.” 163 Again, the school district displayed bias and misdeeds when confronted with segregating students. According to Wells and Crain, the SLPS bused nearly 5,000 Black students to south St. Louis White schools under intact busing rules. 164 This practice that was approved by Superintendent Hickey and the Board of Education was a clear tactic not to mix the races, which angered the Black community. The system clearly bused Black students to assist with desegregation but did not bus any White students.

Parents and Black organization leaders protested intact busing after the 1963 school year. They criticized the practice of busing Blacks to White schools and wanted to revamp the program. In response to the community leaders, the Board issued a statement that the transported (Black) pupils tended to show significantly lower achievement levels and higher chronological ages. The Board also stated that classroom integration of students with such marked differences would impede legitimate educational objectives. 165 Their statement was up to interpretation as to whether they were belittling Black students’ academic status.

The school district discontinued the intact busing plan during the 1963 summer. Nearly a decade after the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision, the St. Louis Public Schools had used devious tactics to remain a segregated school district. It is important to understand that the superintendent and school board leaders approved the plan of intact busing that promoted the segregation of students.

164 Wells and Crain, *Stepping over the Color Line*.
165 Reisner, “St. Louis.”
**Portables**

After intact busing was attacked by the Black community, the St. Louis Public Schools used another deceptive tactic. Board members approved the construction of transportable classroom units to relieve congestion in predominantly Black West End schools. Portables were another shifty tactic used by the board to contain Blacks to north St. Louis as opposed to desegregating the south side White schools. Again, parents and Black organizations protested and spoke out against the school district’s handling of Black students and confining them to a specific space. However, the use of portables in the Black neighborhood helped maintain the boundary lines where Blacks could attend school. South city White people were totally against integration and protested the move of Black students to their neighborhood schools. Though the school district had the empty space, it was more beneficial to build portable classrooms than bus Blacks to the White schools. The portable classrooms for the north St. Louis schools were small trailer-like structures located in the schoolyards. Again this was a way to alleviate the overcrowded Black schools in north St. Louis and thus avoid busing students to White schools and complying with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

The St. Louis Public Schools employed extreme measures while maintaining their segregated school district and keeping Blacks in north St. Louis. For example, the SLPS also rented space in churches in Black neighborhoods to house students. According to a Board of Education report, “Pursuant to authorization previously granted by the Board to secure suitable classroom facilities in overcrowded schools districts, and with the concurrence of the Superintendent of Instruction and the Commissioner of School

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166 *Lang, Grassroots at the Gateway.*
Buildings, it recommended the lease of three classrooms and related toilet facilities in the Union Memorial Methodist Church building, 1141 Belt Avenue." 167 Misdeeds continued to plague the SLPS ten years after the Brown v. Board of Education decision. Why would the SLPS district rent space in north St. Louis churches rather than fill empty classrooms in White school buildings in south St. Louis? The St. Louis Public Schools district was presented opportunities to desegregate schools prior to and after the 1954 Supreme Court decisions but declined to combine White and Black students. Why?

School Portables
June 30, 1962
Branches

In order to contain Blacks, the school district continued its deceitful tactics. The next ploy that the SLPS Board of Education used was adding what was called school branches for additional classroom space for Blacks. Again, ignoring the empty classroom space in south city White schools where Blacks could have desegregated the school system, branch schools were affiliated with specific north side schools (see map). The branch schools were peculiar in nature as the district decided to educate students in these small locations without cafeterias or gym spaces. This was an interesting concept because most branches were not suitable for elementary and middle school students. Cafeterias and gym space were important to the student population that the branches served. In addition to lack of facilities, the branch locations were not close enough to be seen by the main campus of the branch. These devious tactics were indeed not conducive to learning, nor did the branches provide learning facilities equal to those utilized by White south side students. Again, we ask if this was another misdeed by the St. Louis Public Schools to maintain a segregated school system.
Branch Schools
**Staffing Issues**

The disingenuous deeds of the St. Louis Public Schools history is also relevant to staff. The refusal to integrate staff as well as students dated back to the 1800s. “In June of 1875, the St. Louis School Board had considered briefly the possibility of hiring Black teachers, but the matter had been tabled.” 168 The representation of Black central office administrators and school leaders did not exist. Charlton Tandy led the charge that Blacks should teach black students. He was a leader of a local church and very influential in the Black community. Tandy and members of the community were outraged by the refusal of the St. Louis Public School Board of Education to hire Black teachers in the early stages of education. On March 18, 1877, the St. Louis School Board decided to hire Black teachers. In 1964 approximately 50% of the city's 3,611 teachers were Negro. “Ninety-one per cent of all Negro elementary school teachers were employed in schools with a 95-100% Negro enrollment, while less than 1% (12 people) teach in schools where the Negro or white minority is not less than 25%.” 169 Prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the idea of Black central school administrators was generally absent. Eventually, the swift admission of African American students into white space prompted a reaction to place Black administrators in leadership roles. “St. Louis was one of a handful of cities to propose—as a matter of municipal law and policy—formalizing racial segregation.” 170 The central school administration did not respond immediately to the increased enrollment of African Americans as evident by Black administrative appointments years later.

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168 Gersman 1972
169 Reisner 1967.
Summary

The St. Louis Public Schools used misleading tactics for more than a decade to remain a segregated school district. The Brown v. Board of Education decision did challenge the school district’s philosophy but expanded their tactics to continue to segregate schools. The previously mentioned misdeeds expressed the district’s subtle segregation practices without exposing their true philosophies. The superintendent and the board of education continued to conspire through creative ways to keep Black and White students separate, such as closing classes, initiating intact busing, and constructing portable classrooms. These methods did not violate the United States Supreme Court decision but nevertheless crossed the line. However, the Black community rallied against each misdeed to protect their students’ education rights. Through protest and legal action the Black community was able to dismiss each transgression. The Black community weathered the school district’s storm but later fought the biggest battle in the history of the St. Louis Public Schools. The fight concerned the same issues of the past with a parent fighting against the overcrowding of the north St. Louis schools.

Chapter 5: History Repeats

The St. Louis Public Schools had a controversial history surrounding desegregation in education for more than a century. Initially Missouri outlawed the education of Black citizens and threatened anyone who attempted to educate Black people. The 1847 anti-literacy law passed by the Missouri General Assembly called for
the arrest and fines for anyone who attempted to educate Blacks. This dark, deep-rooted history remained embedded in Missouri and in the St. Louis Public Schools’ educational philosophy with regard to Black children. In 1896 the United States Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* altered Missouri’s stance on the education of Black students. *Plessy v. Ferguson* forced Missouri and the St. Louis Public Schools to allow space and provide Black students with an equal education. St. Louis Public Schools abided by the law but devised methods to ensure two separate school systems within one district. Through those methods they were able to support their philosophy and belief system regardless of court proceedings. Blacks were provided less than an equal education and less than equal facilities by the state of Missouri and the St. Louis Public Schools. The St. Louis Public Schools had no intention of providing an equal educational experience for Black children in the city of St. Louis.

Later, the 1945 Missouri Constitution delivered an additional setback to Missouri Black students with the written law that reaffirmed separate schooling for Black and White children. This version of the Missouri Constitution became a major defense for the St. Louis Public Schools and their quest to remain a segregated school system. The St. Louis Public Schools used the 1945 Missouri Constitution to resist Black citizens’ protests and legal battles. St. Louis Black parents challenged the negligence by the St. Louis Board of Education, citing unequal facilities and educational opportunities for their children, but they were not successful. The school district waved the 1945 decision as their shield in the courts to support all their decisions with regard to Black education. The Missouri Circuit Court and the Missouri Supreme Court did render decisions that would allow the St. Louis Public Schools to educate Blacks and Whites in the same
school. The Missouri Courts supported the allegations that the St. Louis Public Schools violated the United States Supreme Court’s separate but equal decision. However, the St. Louis Public Schools used transgressions to maneuver their way out of integrating White and Black students. For example, the 1950 Missouri Supreme Court decision to allow Blacks to attend an all-White Hadley Technical High School in order to take a class in aeromechanics was a step towards desegregation in the St. Louis Public Schools. However, the school district decided to eliminate the class rather than desegregate. The deceitful tactic used to eliminate a class rather than offer the possibility of integration was the beginning of conniving schemes used to covertly segregate Black and White students.

The United States Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was a major victory for Black students across the country and a defeat for the St. Louis Public Schools. The United States Supreme Court decision forever changed the laws of public education but did not change the ideology of school boards across the country. For example, the St. Louis Public Schools designed a Three Step Plan that promised to desegregate schools within two years. However, hidden tactics used in the plan, such as the neighborhood school policy, were deceitful. The neighborhood school policy assigned students to schools based on segregated housing patterns. Although it was well documented that housing patterns in the city of St. Louis were definitely segregated, the district used the same patterns to desegregate the schools. As a result, the school district resembled the city’s segregated landscape. This was a continuation of the St. Louis Public Schools’ philosophy to remain a segregated school system without regard for local, state and federal court decisions. In addition, the Three Step Plan stated that the two teachers colleges, Harris Teachers College for White students and Stowe Teachers
College for Black students, would merge. The schools merged at the Harris Teachers College location to continue the work of education. Students were joined together by location but were not joined by name. The combined school kept the name Harris Teachers College, named for William Torrey Harris, a White Superintendent of Instruction in the St. Louis Public Schools. Stowe Teachers College began as a part of Sumner High School, but in 1929 its name was changed in honor of the novelist and abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe. The Stowe name was not added as part of the merger. Harris Teachers College was the official name and printed on degree programs until 1977. It was not until 1977, in response to many requests from the community, that the name was officially changed to Harris-Stowe College to resemble the 1954 Three Step Plan. This is but one of the misdeeds by the St. Louis Public Schools.

The St. Louis Public Schools’ plans to segregate schools through different methods continued for decades. In addition to neighborhood schooling, containment was one more scheme to preserve a segregated school system. The school district constructed beautiful new school buildings in north St. Louis. These were state-of-the-art structures at the time of construction and were pillars in the neighborhood. However, the locations of the new schools assured that Black students remained in their settings without having to share classrooms with White students. Furthermore, the school district constructed branch buildings and portables to further contain Black students—just another misdeed performed by the school district.

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The preceding research has painted a picture of a stubborn school district unwilling to desegregate their school system. The St. Louis Public Schools’ willingness to fight to remain segregated is well documented. Several episodes pre-\textit{Brown v. Board of Education} witnessed Circuit Court and Supreme Court decisions which provided a clear path to desegregate the school system. Nonetheless, the school district stood behind the 1945 Missouri Constitution and refused to educate Black and White students in the same setting. After the United States Supreme Court decision in \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}, the St. Louis Public Schools developed innovative methods to support a de facto segregated school system. The continued misconduct by the St. Louis Board of Education eventually elicited civil unrest within the Black community. Parents and local civic organizations began to challenge SLPS policy makers concerning their segregation tactics. Although the district altered some of their practices, the public schools remained for the most part segregated more than two decades after the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision had established that separate schooling for White and Black children violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Through battles with parents and civic organizations, however, the school district continued to maintain that it was a desegregated school district and was acting in the best interest of all students.

Civic organizations and parents continued their protests against segregated schools, but the calls for change were unsuccessful. A parent group seized an opportunity to raise the awareness of local and state officials in order to change the landscape of segregation forever in the St. Louis Public Schools. Their charge was strong and powerful to combat school inequities and mass overcrowding in the Black schools. Chapter Four illustrated the overpopulated Black schools in north St. Louis. The district
erected schools in north St. Louis to contain Blacks in those specific areas, but the school buildings were not equipped to handle the influx of Black citizens in the city. At this time, the schools in north St. Louis could not seat all of the Black children moving into the area. Blacks were moving into north St. Louis at an enormous rate while Whites were moving out. There has been no recorded documentation that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision prompted White flight from the city, but the two occurred during the same time frame.

The result of all the previous transgressions by the St. Louis Public Schools was a lawsuit by a group of north St. Louis parents against the St. Louis Public Schools and the state of Missouri. The group of parents began to complain that students were not receiving an equal opportunity. The SLPS continued to build schools in the Black neighborhoods to appease the strong White parent contingent on the south side that opposed desegregation. During a meeting, the parent of one White Boy Scout from the south side of St. Louis stated that if the district bused “niggers” into the school he would quit the program, for which he received loud applause.172 His sentiments were registered by the support in the audience and in south St. Louis. Therefore, the school district continued to build new buildings and contain Black students, but the schools in north St. Louis were still overcrowded. The overpopulated schools became unbearable for some north side parents. Yeatman School, which enrolled Black students, was built in 1968 in the middle of north St. Louis. Yeatman School was popular and well received by Black parents but was overcrowded. As a result, the SLPS bused Black students from the

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Yeatman neighborhood to other Black schools, bypassing White schools that had classroom space available. Parents were disappointed to hear their students were bused to old, derelict buildings while passing schools better suited for education. According to Wells and Crain, Black parents were not trying to get their children into schools with White children but rather wanted to return to their all-Black neighborhood school.173 Yeatman parents formed a group to address their concerns with the St. Louis Board of Education. After deliberations with the Board of Education failed, parents had no choice but to file a lawsuit. In February 1972 Concerned Parents of North St. Louis, founded by Minnie Liddell, filed a class action lawsuit against the Board of Education of the City of St. Louis in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri.174 These parents filed the lawsuit against the St. Louis Public Schools for violating the Fourteenth Amendment and for racial discrimination. The parents were dealt a devastating blow at the end of the court battle. The court battle took place over the course of three months, and the court ruled in favor of the St. Louis Public Schools. Though distraught, the filing parents continued their fight, taking it to the Missouri Court of Appeals. There they struck gold with a reversal of the decision by the Court of Appeals.

Ironically, these court battles transpired nearly two decades after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. Two decades earlier the St. Louis Public Schools’ Three Step Plan had been presented to the public as a plan to end segregation within two years. It was praised by the local and national media for its proactive approach to desegregation

174 Gerald W. Heaney and Susan Uchitelle, Unending Struggle: The Long Road to an Equal Education in St. Louis (St. Louis, MO: Reedy Press, 2004).
of the St. Louis Public Schools. However, the Three Step Plan faced protest action from the time it was written in the 1950s until the 1972 Liddell court case. Years of neglect and imprudent desegregation plans finally came to light with the new charges.

The St. Louis Public Schools continued to fight the ruling in the Liddell case, which ordered them to end the segregated school district. The courts asked that the district present a plan to eliminate the segregated district in a timely manner. Again, we are speaking two decades after Brown v. Board of Education and the Three Step Plan. According to Wells and Crain, by 1972 more than 70% of the students in the St. Louis Public Schools were separated by race, and by 1978 the Missouri Department of Education found that 90% of students in the city of St. Louis attended an all-Black school. The data shows that the SLPS Three Step Plan did not desegregate schools as it had promised. This would be the second time the court system ordered, directly or indirectly, the school district to submit a plan to desegregate schools. If the 1954 Three Step Plan was so praiseworthy, then why was the court system asking the SLPS to submit another plan two decades later? This means the district used their power to maintain a segregated system for two decades after the United States Supreme Court Brown v. Board of Education decision.

The official case of Liddell v. Board of Education of the City of St. Louis lasted nearly a decade before it was resolved. The St. Louis Public Schools defended their involvement or intentions to remain a segregated school system throughout the court case. Along the way, one of the five parents invited the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to defend their students along with private

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175 Wells and Crain, Stepping over the Color Line.
counsel. The NAACP has been involved with protest and legal actions against the St. Louis Public Schools for the last half a century because of their misdeeds towards Blacks. Not only was the St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education a target of the lawsuit, but also, with the addition of the NAACP, the St. Louis County school districts were added to the lawsuit. Investigations and studies of segregation were completed on the entire school region. This ongoing battle against the St. Louis Public Schools and their deceitful tactics was about to come to an end. The decisions of the St. Louis Public Schools to close classes, implement neighborhood schooling, construct new schools, portables, and annexes in north St. Louis, and initiate intact busing were questionable choices.

The St. Louis Public Schools denied their involvement in the continuing segregation for nearly three decades. According to the St. Louis Public Schools, the misdeeds listed in Chapter Four of this dissertation were the result of circumstance. However, Missouri courts decided there was more than circumstance at work. In 1980, Board of Education of the City of St. Louis (City Board) and the State of Missouri (defendants) were found liable for the establishment and maintenance of a racially segregated public school system within the City of St. Louis, in violation of plaintiff class members' constitutional rights.  

“Constitutional violator” was the term used in the court memorandum to describe the school system of the St. Louis Public Schools. The label of constitutional violator was a strong statement affixed to a school district once praised for their desegregation plan and implementation. Judge James Meredith was quoted as saying, “Segregation is present, as a matter of fact, in the Public School System

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176 Liddell et al., v. Board of Education of the City of St. Louis, State of Missouri et al., 1983.
of the City of St. Louis.” In addition, he found that the primary reason for the racial imbalance in the school system was the adherence to a neighborhood schools policy, the same policy the school district was adamant about employing after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The *Liddell v. Board of Education of the City of St. Louis* case exposed deceitful tactics used by the St. Louis Public Schools after *Brown v. Board of Education*.

The court ordered a new desegregation plan for all school districts in the region, which included St. Louis city and county. The plan included busing Black students to St. Louis city and county school districts. City and county school districts had to change their attendance policies to accommodate the new desegregation plan. This need for a new plan was the direct result of the St. Louis Public Schools’ actions after the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision.

Why is this case relevant to the disingenuous deeds associated with the St. Louis Public Schools? The Liddell case provided a microscopic lens over the misdeeds implemented by the St. Louis Public Schools for more than two decades. Due to the Liddell case, the school district received a court order to complete a new desegregation plan. The same district which was praised for their 1954 desegregation plan was now directed by the courts to produce another plan. If St. Louis Public Schools’ original desegregation plan had genuinely been implemented, there would have been no need for a court-ordered desegregation plan in 1983, almost 30 years later. The Liddell case was proof of the hidden segregation agenda of the St. Louis Public Schools.

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177 Wells and Crain, *Stepping over the Color Line.*
178 Heaney and Uchitelle, *Unending Struggle.*
As a result of the St. Louis Public Schools’ misdeeds and the Liddell case, St. Louis area school districts had to participate in a desegregation plan. First, the SLPS had to desegregate schools within the school district. The desegregation plan that was edited several times included students and staff. Magnet schools (with school specialties) were added to attract White students. The magnet schools specialize in visual and performing arts, STEM subjects, international studies, and leadership training, to name a few.

In addition, St. Louis County schools were forced to participate in the desegregation plan. Students had the chance to volunteer to participate in the program. The Voluntarily Interschool Cooperation (VIC) program was established to handle student transfers between the city and the county. Black students would attend suburban schools, and White students would attend city schools. However, the number of White students attending city schools was far less than the number of Blacks attending suburban schools. In the long run, this new program was more damaging to the St. Louis Public Schools than the original school desegregation program would have been. Black students were bused to the suburban White schools through the program, taking with them a trail of tax dollars for the receiving school districts. White school districts received the average cost of educating a student in their particular district. According to Gerald W. Heaney and Susan Uchitelle, suburban districts could make a profit from hosting transfer students and then use the extra funds to benefit their school district. 179 The addition of Black pupils meant additional funds for suburban school districts that were used to construct new facilities. At the same time, funds were dwindling in the St. Louis Public Schools district, and the facilities began to follow suit. The loss of revenue reduced the

179 Ibid.
ability to upgrade facilities that had been constructed during the first half of the century. Suburban schools became more appealing due to newer facilities, better staffing and more opportunities. The main stay for suburban schools was the explosion of their athletic programs. After the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Public High School League (PHL) had dominated and produced many of the area’s top athletes. However, the VIC program began to attract top athletes to the suburban schools, which now benefited from Black students not only financially but athletically as well.

While these events were taking place, the St. Louis Public Schools were becoming once again segregated. Although the magnet schools had provided a racial balance for a couple of years, schools would eventually face segregation. Magnet schools were designed to integrate the St. Louis Public Schools, but that result did not last long. Many of the magnet schools rarely received Whites from the county, and city White students were opting for private schools. Even city schools that were primarily White schools began to change over the course of time. For example, Roosevelt High School, once an all-White school that was integrated in 1983, faced many race riots according to students. By 1995, the school was more than 90% Black. Magnet and comprehensive high schools were taking the same racial form in the 1990s. Schools were becoming segregated again due to White flight and private school enrollment.

Today segregation is alive and well just as it was prior to the Liddell case. Schools in north St. Louis service predominantly Black students. North St. Louis schools today, whether magnet or comprehensive, are more than 95% Black or minority students with some experiencing 100% non-White students. The same schools that were in question when Minnie Liddell filed her lawsuit are schools that today fall into this
category. Yeatman School, the center of controversy in the Liddell case, today has 100% minority students. History repeats itself with the modern day segregation of schools. The schools in north St. Louis, once segregated by law, today are segregated all over again. (See maps)
Elementary Schools  

Current > 95% Minority
Elementary Schools

Current > 95% Minority
Elementary Schools

Current > 95% Minority
Middle Schools

Current > 95% Minority
High Schools

Current > 95% Minority
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