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**Jumping the Line**

Rev. Jesse Jackson: This issue goes to the heart of the 54th Supreme Court decision. What these parents have exposed is a two-tier educational system. In the 4th poorest city in the nation, in the face of the insurance capital of the Western world, these parents have exposed indeed a contradiction.

Narrator: Indeed an apparent contradiction. Hartford, Connecticut, according to the latest census a population of 136 thousand, economically sound, culturally alive, yes, but still suffering from many of the same problems plaguing most major urban centers.

And then there’s Bloomfield, Connecticut, population of only 18 thousand. In 1972, Bloomfield was lotted as the all-American city and in many Hartford circles, even to this day it’s thought of as a Mecca for homes, for salaries, and for education.

In April 1985, four parents, Saundra Foster, Elizabeth Brown, Claude Johnson, and Norma Wright were arrested. Arrested for sending their children across town lines to Bloomfield High School and they were charged with stealing an education.

Narrator [in interview]: I guess the natural question is, “Did you, did you, did you illegally send your son to school in Bloomfield?”

Saundra Foster: No I didn’t. Ahem. Excuse me. No I didn’t. Uh, he lived with a cousin there, who pays taxes to the town of Bloomfield.

Narrator: What did you tell authorities when they questioned you about the issue?

Saundra Foster: No authorities questioned me about the issue.

Narrator: Why did you send him to school in Bloomfield?

Saundra Foster: He was having difficulty with the Hartford school system. He hadn’t always gone to the Hartford school system. He had been in parochial school and he had been in Windsor schools. He had great difficulty adjusting to the Hartford school system. And at the point when he went to the Bloomfield school system it was… whether or not… back up a little bit. Trevor’s a good kid. Likes to go to school. Had no problems sending him to school. Uh, and for a child like that to say that they’re contemplating dropping out of school, it’s time to start thinking about alternatives.

Narrator: There is a school of thought that Hartford school system is inferior to a school system such as Bloomfield’s. In concept only. That people think it’s so and they act on those actions. Was that the case in yours and Trevor’s instance?

Saundra Foster: My personal feelings are that Hartford schools are geared for special education. They can handle children coming from just about anywhere but a child that does not need “special” or have special needs have difficulty being dealt with.

Narrator: What leads you to suspect that? I mean that’s, that’s a profound statement and I I wonder how you came to a-arrive at that.

Saundra Foster: My concept of my son when he went into the Hartford school system was that he had no problems learning. Going into 9th grade, my son had the metric system in prior years, probably in the 7th grade. Um, for him to go into a 9th grade class and not be able to learn biology before he could learn the metric system, because the rest of the class didn’t know it, seemed remedial to me. And to get him out of a class like that, was almost impossible. And for him to address the teacher, after being frustrated with the fact, was subordinate.

Narrator: It was, uh, experiences like that that made you decide to send Trevor to Bloomfield.

Saundra Foster: Some, uh, some of those experiences on top of the fact that he got into so much trouble with the Hartford school system or with Hartford High in general ‘til we appeared before the board, and they in turn, um, sent Trevor to an alternative education center. Which was not where he belonged.

Amando Cruz: To say that within an urban setting in an urban, uh, school you can not achieve, that’s erroneous. I can prove just by, uh, the youngsters who achieve here at Hartford Public High School that that’s a fallacy. Youngsters, uh, that struggle that, uh, have again some some educational reinforcement at home, and we provide some of that support here, are very successful a-and more successful, I would say, than some of the youngsters in suburbs. And you can see, uh, b-by our achievement scores that we’ve progressed. And I think it was a question of coming in into the Hartford Public High School and trying to assure a safe and orderly environment because many people paint the city schools as blackboard jungles, unruly vandalism. Once you say to youngsters, “This is your reality, education is your future.” And we have to work on this as a primary goal. Uh, and the school is is is, uh, given that effort. Uh, you you’re not going to see th-the particular wares of deplorably, or, uh, inferior, or mediocrity. You just won’t won’t won’t, uh, relate to those.

[cut to scene in classroom]

Teacher: Can we replace this combination with just one resistant and have a similar value?

Student [girl]: Yep, ‘cause it’s a series.

Teacher: Well then I’m seriously challenged.

Student [boy]: [inaudible]

[cut to Amando Cruz]

Amando Cruz: The time when Hartford Public High School is pulling itself up in the 80s. Statements that Hartford schools are deplorable begin to label all the schools in the in the city. And I find that to be very offensive and would rather have the person come and visit the school like Tom Condon, a reporter had done, like a stranger just walking into our classes, and he found the school to be very effective, youngsters to be warm, and a place where studying and learning were going on. I put that challenge to any any politician or anyone.

Narrator: The individual to whom Mr. Cruz refers, freshman state senator Frank Barrows, whose district straddles Bloomfield and Hartford.

Sen. Frank Barrows: Deplorable was a-a statement that I made because I felt that way at that time.

Reporter: So you don’t regret the statement, then.

Sen. Frank Barrows: I regret the statement deplorable. I should’ve used another word, maybe.

[cut to scene involving Sen. Frank Barrows and woman]

Woman: Don’t knock the school system because I’m telling you, right here and now… [Sen. Frank Barrows inaudible] No, let me tell you something, honey, the school can’t do what the home hasn’t already done.

Sen. Frank Barrows: I’m not trying to tear down the school system. I’m trying to help it. I want to see it at its best. If there is kids that, uh, that’s leaving the school system, let’s find out why they’re leaving the school system.

[cut to scene in classroom]

Teacher: [inaudible] Here, very good.

[cut to Sen. Frank Barrows]

Sen. Frank Barrows: So, last 100 years, people have been crossing lines. And when I was going to school, people still were crossing lines, so, it’s it’s nothing new. But I I think, uh, that Bloomfield just said, “Hey, you know, we’re tired of of the children coming into our school system.” So called getting a free a-education. I’m trying to figure out who’s in control. Who’s running Bloomfield? It seems like the Board of Education doesn’t have control. Or what’s going on it seems like the police department, whenever they want to make an arrest, they just go out and say, “Well here’s a person,” and they’ll arrest them. They’re actually following people around. You know, it’s like the big brother.

Narrator: Of the 25 or more cases brought before the Board of Education, only 4 went beyond the regular disenrollment process. But who gave the order to pursue arrest warrants? Was it the Bloomfield Board of Education? Or was it the Bloomfield police department? Who was really in control?

Narrator [in interview]: There were no arrests in the 10-12 years of this procedure until the 1985 case. What happened?

Superintendant Herbert Chester: Well, uh, without, uh, conferring with the Board of Education, the police department decided that they would, uh, press for an arrest warrant, uh, initiated by them, uh, and, then, you know the rest of the story. But the Board of Education nor the school administration had, uh, no input into that decision to, uh, make an arrest.

Narrator: From whom, from whence came the order to make the arrest?

Chief Philip Lincoln: Well that would be my responsibility. Just as soon as, uh, as we had the agreement that it appeared as though that we had a serious violation of law. And certainly I would have directed this arrest. The difference came this time when that one of our rosters, thinking, casually mentioned that in this opinion this was actually a theft of services and we deal with this particular offense, you know, throughout the year, in various respects. And after thinking that over, it appeared as though he might be right. But I'm, uh, uh, a little bit chagrined to think that for 17 years, uh, I had been acquainted with the problem and, uh, uh, basically had some investigations made, and so forth, each one of those years and never thought of the fact that there was a criminal law involved.

Narrator: There were 30 parents involved in, in a block pertaining to the investigations that were launched. They chose four parents, two and two, and arrested them. Why do you think?

Att.M. Donald Cardwell: My assessment is that somebody was naive enough to believe that if they used the arrest process, rather than the typical disenrollment hearing which they had used for 10 years, that the word would go out that it's dangerous to cross the line into Bloomfield, that people would be scared away. I'd believe they got just the opposite result. How does one steal free public education? When you educate the poor people in one group, the middle class people in another group, and the upper-class people in the other third group, something unfair is happening to the poor, to the children of the poor.

Narrator: You've heard, of course, of William Shockley, his bizarre theory of the intellectual inferiority of some people. There are those who believe that kind of thing and who would say, "What else do you expect except that they might finish at the bottom or near the bottom. They're non-whites."

Att.M. Donald Cardwell: Race is not a factor. When the children or the young boys and girls all come from the same socioeconomic background that is poverty, then that mix, as an all-poverty mix, does hamper the development of that young student and twelve years of education where the boy on your right, and the girl on your left, and the person in front of you, and the person behind you all comes from a poverty background impacts on that learning process and unfortunately in a negative way. It's not a matter of color, it's a matter of dollars.

Narrator: Can economics and social conditions influence educational development? Is the character of a community a factor? In Hartford, for example, the average family income is about 14 thousand dollars, one third of the population lives below the poverty level, and half of the households are headed by single parents. 1 in 2 adults has a high school diploma and about 1 in 10 has a college degree. Bloomfield, on the other hand, is a city where the average family income is almost double that of Hartford's. Single parenting and poverty are not major issues. 3 in every 4 adults have a high school diploma and 1 in every 4 has a college degree. What does this contrast mean to children growing up in these communities?

Dr. James Comer: I think that, uh, there is a problem to some extent in the way some children are reared because there are stresses on the family, uh, economic stresses, social stresses, adjustment stresses of various kinds, uh, but those can be compensated for in school if there was an effort on the part of all school systems to really find out what it is the low income children need, or children out of the socioeconomic mainstream, uh, children who are not exposed to the kinds of activities and demands and, uh, that the school present them. Uh, unless there's an effort to provide those in school, many children will will just simply not develop to a level that's necessary to be successful in school. You know, if we ran banks and manufacturing firms the way we run schools, uh, banks and manufacturing firms would be in very big trouble.

Narrator: The Bloomfield-Hartford residency case has brought to light a broader problem. Was it a black/white issue? Was it an issue of the haves and have nots? It might well have been both, but there's one question that remains unanswered. Is the Hartford school system doing a good job of educating its youth? We put this question to the one individual who could give definitive answers: Hartford school superintendent, Hernan Lafontaine. Mr. Lafontaine refused to discuss the state of Hartford public schools with us. One who was willing to talk, Connecticut education commissioner Gerald Terozzi.

Gerald Terozzi: I believe Connecticut as a state can be proud of it's educational acheivements. But then I step back and worry about my two Connecticuts. I still see a significant, uh, discrepancy between children who reside in the poor community, communities of the state. Not just urban, it's also the poor rural communities as well, and and to me this goes beyond the race issue. It's it's a its really an economic issue, it's rich and poor; and I am concerned that children of the poor need so many more resources, support service, so much more attention. And unless and until we can provide that attention, and unless and until the state recognizes that it must look at the state as a totality and not just as suburban, rural, urban, we will continue to have that problem.

Dr. James Comer: It's something that social scientists call social lag. Uh, you have changes, uh, technological, scientific changes, and so on, um, that really require institutions to change in certain ways. And those institutions haven't changed, uh, because of the social lag. You have educators being trained in certain ways and that's the way we do it, and so they continue to train them in that way. You have, uh, school boards and school systems running schools in certain ways and that's the way we do it, so they continue to run them in that way. Uh, teachers teaching certain ways and that's they way they do it, so they keep doing it, even though the population changes. Uh, the needs of the population changes dramatically and they keep doing it, so that there's been a lag at every level in responding to the nature of the problem. We must also adjust the program to meet the needs, the psychological, social, uh, cognitive development needs of low-income children. And, and we haven't done it primarily because of social lag and [inaudible] of institutions, systems, individuals, to respond to the changes.

Narrator: Is there a problem of low expectation among teachers when it comes to the way they view low-income students?

Dr. James Comer: There is a problem. On the other hand, uh, out of stress that there are many very good teachers. Black and white, uh, in inner city, uh um, at every level, and very concerned people at every level. But there are too many who assume that low-income minority group children cannot learn well. Many don't understand the communities they're in, uh, and don't understand the learning problem from a developmental stand-point. Because teachers were taught to teach, uh, and the assumption was that the children had all developed to a certain point, and they all had the same opportunity to develop, uh, and they were not prepared to deal with children who had a different kind of development. A development that might have prepared them to perform well, uh, outside of school, not inside school.

Att.M. Donald Cardwell: I had a case recently where I represented a young man who went into the tenth grade at Bulkeley, and yet after extensive testing, which I ordered as part of his defense, we found that he read and wrote at a level of the fourth month of the first grade. Without question, the teachers who were charged with the responsibilty to that individual did a poor job, a completely unacceptable job.

Narrator: Doctor you say you can understand the parents who send their children out to another school system. But what about the law? What about the law that says that you cannot send your children to a school system where you don't pay taxes?

Dr. James Comer: I am not a lawyer, uh and I, and I really can't speak to the law, but I can say that it's morally wrong, uh, not to provide an education for young people that will allow them to, uh, be competitive for the best jobs their talents and skills would allow them to take. Uh, and to be able to rear their families in the future, and take care of themselves in the future. It's immoral, it's wrong, and that's the condition that we have right now.

[cut to scene at courthouse with Foster and Cardwell]

Att.M. Donald Cardwell: We don't believe that the case should end at this juncture, but, uh, we're gonna have to decide what the next step is, and, uh, we're working on that right now.

Narrator [as a reporter]: Ms. Foster, are you, are you in favor of filing suit?

Ms. Foster: I'm still not thinking on that end.

Narrator: Well OK, what are you feelings about the decision today? Are they well? Like the state's decision not to proceed.

Ms. Foster: Well, I feel good about the criminal charges being dropped, dismissed.

Narrator: Uh-hum.

Reporter 1: Are you sending Trevor back to Hartford school or Trevor back to Bloomfield?

Narrator: Trevor, Trevor what are your feelings?

Ms. Foster: It's nice to hear that she's not a criminal anymore. I have no more comments.

Narrator: What would be purpose of filing a suit?

Att.M. Donald Cardwell: Well, what we'll be looking at is first of all, whether or not there was false arrest here. Did they have probable cause to arrest this lady? Uh, the representations made by the state this morning were interesting. And, uh, also, uh, this case is important, uh, the quality of education in urban centers is significant for all of us in the United States today. And the issue just can't go away, so what we're gonna do is keep the issue alive. Now, uh, I don't know whether the court room is the appropriate forum to keep it alive but it must be kept alive. The consciousness of this in America has been lifted a little bit; we wanna keep that momentum going.

Narrator: I didn't hear the answer of where you're gonna go to school [to Trevor].

Ms. Foster: He's enrolled in Hartford school system at this point.

Narrator: You're gonna stay there, huh.

Reporter 1: What about next year?

Ms. Foster: We have to see what next year brings.