

White Flight to Suburbs Turns Back The Clock

"The Supreme Court appears to be retreating" from promoting integration by allowing the continued existence of suburbs, a federal appeals court judge said he fears.

"Whites have taken the city limits as their protective shield against integration," said J. Skelly Wright, of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington

RETREAT

"For the courts to sanction such tactics is to turn back the clock to before Brown," the landmark 1954 Supreme Court school desegregation decision, Wright said.

Wright spoke to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's annual conference on the federal law prohibiting job discrimination

DISCRIMINATION

The existence of suburbs causes racial job discrimination, he argued, by restricting black and other minority youths to inner city schools — which are not good enough to give them the education they need to compete economically — and by encouraging establishment of businesses in the suburbs, difficult for jobless ghetto dwellers to reach.

He said he fears that two recent Supreme Court decisions indicate the high court is "wavering and retreating from inevitably controversial decisions" on behalf of minorities.

The high court appears to have taken a stand tolerating suburbs, Wright said. The white flight to the suburbs will be halted only when they are abolished, forced to merge with the central cities into single metropolitan governments, he said.

TWO CIVILIZATIONS

"We are setting up two geographically, politically and economically distinct civilizations," he said.

The laws that suburbs pass to keep housing quality up and preserve open space also prevent construction of cheap housing for the poor, he said.

This constitutes "residential discrimination that breeds both educational and job discrimination," he said.

"The judiciary must assure that the political process does not tread on the rights of minorities. It is from this role that the Supreme Court appears to be retreating. It is this retreat that worries me as a judge," he said.