

## Making Desegregation Work: Citizen Participation and Bureaucratic Resistance in the Boston Public Schools, 1974–85

### Abstract

*Court-ordered desegregation of the Boston Public Schools in the 1970s has often been cast as an example of federal overreach that inflicted a disruptive “forced busing” plan on the city, generating only racial conflict and trauma while failing to ensure educational equality. Yet by encouraging citizen participation in developing and implementing plans for eliminating racism from the school system, the court order opened space for parents and community members to get involved in the public schools on an unprecedented scale. While some white Bostonians responded to desegregation with racist violence, others took advantage of the opportunities provided by the court order to press their vision for a more inclusive school system that would prepare children to live in an interracial democracy. Their efforts came up against an entrenched, self-interested bureaucracy that had no interest in sharing power or significantly reallocating educational resources. The struggles over education reform that played out in the offices of school administrators reveal the diverse interests and motivations that undermined school desegregation in Boston and allowed inequities to persist.*

### Introduction

Amid media coverage of angry white people throwing rocks at buses full of children, reports of fights and racial conflicts in newly integrated schools, and commentaries that depicted a city in crisis, a sun-colored pamphlet produced by the Citywide Parents Advisory Council (CPAC) presented a brighter side to court-ordered desegregation of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) in the 1970s. Titled *Parents Make a Difference!* and featuring an interracial group of adults and children on the cover, the pamphlet explained how the parent and community councils established by the court order were working to enhance education for all children in the system. Already, parents had secured new resources and improvements at a dozen schools around the city, and the councils were active in shaping implementation of the desegregation plan. Parent participation was crucial to ensuring quality education, CPAC asserted, and the council network

offered many opportunities for those seeking to influence decisions that affected their children.<sup>1</sup>

Encouraging parents and other citizens to take a more active role in the BPS was a central component of the plan, but one that critics of the court order largely ignored. The Boston School Committee (BSC) and the segregationist group Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR) denigrated District Court Judge W. Arthur Garrity Jr. for imposing “forced busing” on families and accused him of abrogating parents’ rights. Casting themselves as defenders of the city’s beleaguered working class, some political leaders excoriated middle-class suburbanites who supported desegregation but were themselves exempt from a plan that only applied to the inner city and left all-white schools in the larger metropolitan area untouched.<sup>2</sup> Like their counterparts in the South, segregationists in Boston railed against the tyranny of the federal government and lamented the loss of (mostly fictional) neighborhood schools attended by children who lived within walking distance. Framing desegregation as an edict passed down by dictatorial elites was a useful tactic for inciting resistance to the court order while shielding opponents from accusations of racism.<sup>3</sup>

Early accounts of Boston’s “busing crisis” noted the bigotry that lay beneath the surface of these arguments but did little to challenge the notion that the desegregation plan came with great costs and few concrete benefits for children or the city as a whole. Focusing on working-class white neighborhoods such as South Boston and Charlestown where much of the violence was concentrated, studies by Alan Lupo, J. Anthony Lukas, Emmett H. Buell, and Ronald P. Formisano highlight the class resentments as well as the racial antagonism expressed by parents who felt victimized by out-of-touch lawmakers and judges. These authors fault the court order for focusing too heavily on racial ratios and failing to acknowledge underlying economic inequities. A common theme running through these works is that poor white and Black families were equally afflicted by a plan that, according to Lupo, amounted to little more than shuffling children “from one lousy school to another, by telling oppressed whites and oppressed blacks that they must mingle for some greater social good.”<sup>4</sup>

More recent strands in the historiography have shifted the focus away from white reactions to desegregation and examined the antiracist activism of African American and Latinx residents in the decades leading up to the court order. As analyses by Jeanne F. Theoharis, Zebulon Vance Miletsky, and Tatiana M. F. Cruz have shown, desegregation did not come to the BPS through the autocratic actions of a lone federal judge. Rather, decades of lobbying and protests finally secured compliance with state and federal laws that mandated equal access to education. Viewing the struggles over desegregation through the eyes of families that had long been denied rights that white residents took for granted foregrounds the broader social justice goals that were at stake and decenters the complaints of more privileged citizens. Pushing back against scholars who explain racist violence as an outgrowth of class oppression, Theoharis warns against naturalizing such responses as the only ones possible on the part of working-class white people, noting that both opposition to and support for the court order cut across socio-economic groups.<sup>5</sup>

Examining citizen participation in the court-ordered councils shows that alternatives to the “reactionary populism” expressed by segregationists did

indeed exist.<sup>6</sup> While their racist neighbors protested and refused to comply with the desegregation plan, other white Bostonians joined efforts to make it work. People on both sides understood that Garrity's court order came at a pivotal time in the nation's efforts to ensure educational equity, giving events in Boston significance beyond the city. Supporters hoped Boston could become a model for successfully integrating urban school systems by encouraging citizen involvement and paying attention to the quality of education offered "at the end of the bus ride." Opponents warned that chaotic schools and an exodus of middle-class families lay in store for cities that were subjected to similar orders from the courts. With public support for racial justice already waning in the mid-1970s, the outcome of Boston's desegregation "ordeal" had national ramifications.<sup>7</sup>

The well-publicized activities of ROAR members and others who obstructed implementation of Garrity's orders convinced many Americans that federally mandated school integration was a mistake. Meanwhile, those who labored in support of desegregation were largely hidden from view, depriving citizens seeking to address persistent racial disparities in education then and now of potential frameworks for success. Excavating the experiences of Bostonians who worked across racial and class lines to improve education for all children provides a counternarrative to histories that focus on conflict and failure. It may also shed light on the conditions that are apt to foster such cooperation and those that can destroy positive efforts for systemic change. Tracing the rise, achievements, and limits of Boston's court-ordered parent and community councils reveals a piece of the story that is left unexamined in existing studies, which mention the councils only in passing and without noting their roots in local activism or their transformative possibilities.

The councils had their origins in an interracial education reform movement that pre-dated the 1970s and encompassed goals that went beyond desegregation. Court intervention enabled these activists to press their vision for remaking the school system through the cooperative efforts of families, teachers, administrators, political leaders, and communities, working for the benefit of all. By mandating citizen participation in developing and implementing plans for eliminating racism from the school system, Judge Garrity opened space for people to get involved in the public schools on an unprecedented scale. An extensive network of volunteer councils working at the school, district, and city levels was charged with monitoring progress toward desegregation and ensuring the delivery of quality education throughout the BPS. Early achievements offered some hope for those seeking to create an inclusive public school system that could better serve the needs of an interracial democracy. Over time, however, the obstructive tactics of administrators who preferred to maintain the status quo undermined reform efforts and embittered many council participants. Alongside the overt and violent opposition of ROAR, the quiet resistance of school system personnel presented major obstacles and increased the amount of labor required to make desegregation work. Moving the spotlight away from the racial conflicts that occurred in white working-class neighborhoods to examine the battles over education policy fought in the offices of the Boston School Department (BSD) illuminates how other, more powerful forces blocked social change in this era.

## Boston Public Schools before the 1970s

Boston's public school system was the oldest in the nation, dating back to edicts issued by leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1640s requiring communities to provide young people with instruction in reading, writing, and religious values. The American Revolution pushed public education in a more secular direction, giving schools a new role in preparing citizens to live as free and independent members of a democratic republic.<sup>8</sup> In the nineteenth century, Massachusetts Board of Education secretary Horace Mann and other supporters of universal free education argued that public schools benefited the whole society by promoting shared values, breaking down class barriers, generating economic prosperity, and ensuring an informed citizenry.<sup>9</sup> Under the leadership of Mann and superintendent John D. Philbrick, school administration and instruction methods were modernized, and at the turn of the twentieth century the BPS was widely regarded as one of the best school systems in the nation. In the 1930s, financial constraints imposed by the Great Depression and the temptations offered to those who would use their positions for personal gain began to undermine educational quality. Political rather than educational concerns dominated administrators' decision making. The five-member BSC became a favorite domain for corrupt politicians to acquire power, distribute jobs and contracts to their friends, and use as a springboard for election to higher office. In 1944, a study of the BPS by the city's Finance Commission observed that the BSC operated without clear policies or plans and "without any adequate conception of the responsibilities of a public board or the obligations of public stewardship." Aging and unsafe buildings, outdated curricula based on rote learning, and an insular teaching corps all undermined effective instruction, leaving graduates ill-prepared for a rapidly changing economy and society.<sup>10</sup>

Parents who had concerns about Boston's public schools faced dismissive attitudes from teachers, principals, and system administrators. In the 1960s, young couple Louise and Larry Bonar joined a small group of other parents to push for changes in their local schools in Brighton, without much success. School officials thought "that was not any of our business," Louise Bonar explained. "We were just parents, providing the raw material, and how dare we ask them?"<sup>11</sup> In a letter to BPS superintendent William Ohrenberger in 1968, Larry Bonar complained that many principals took suggestions for reform as a personal affront and viewed citizens who were interested in what was happening in the schools as "troublemakers and subversives." Even parents who simply wanted to monitor their own child's progress could not do so because educators withheld "basic information they have every right to know."<sup>12</sup>

The only official avenue for participation was through the Home and School Association (HSA), an organization of parents and teachers that was funded and controlled by the BSC. In most schools, the HSA acted as a rubber stamp for principals and rarely challenged their authority. Teachers whose jobs and promotions depended on pleasing higher-level administrators avoided criticisms of the school system and generally voted the way their principals told them to. Parent members were expected to endorse whatever decisions were made by teachers and administrators.<sup>13</sup> A study conducted by Boston's League of Women Voters (LWV) in 1967 quoted BSC member Thomas Eisenstadt as saying that the HSA was a "company store" and that "no impetus for change or

innovation ever comes from the Association.” Noting that some other urban school systems allowed more meaningful parent participation than the BPS, the LWV advocated for mechanisms that gave citizens a greater voice in shaping school policy.<sup>14</sup>

For African Americans, the school system’s deficiencies were exacerbated by racism. White people dominated the BSC, the HSA, and the BSD, and school officials generally ignored concerns raised by Black residents regarding the education of their children.<sup>15</sup> Racial discrimination within the BPS intensified in the mid-twentieth century as policy makers responded to an influx of Black migrants from the South. Between 1940 and 1970, the city’s African American population increased from 23,679 to 104,707. Meanwhile, many white Bostonians moved to the suburbs or left the area altogether, reducing their number from 745,366 to 524,709.<sup>16</sup> As the proportion of Black children in the BPS increased to more than 30 percent in those decades, school officials grew alarmed. Fearing the loss of more white families from the system, the BSC adopted policies aimed at containing Black students within particular schools.<sup>17</sup>

Although a state law passed in 1855 prohibited schools from denying admission to anyone for racial or religious reasons, BPS administrators and urban planners used zoning, school siting, and enrollment policies to create an education system that segregated students almost as effectively as the Jim Crow South.<sup>18</sup> Reports prepared by the Boston branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1963 noted that Black students were concentrated in the city’s oldest and most dilapidated school buildings, enduring leaky roofs, broken plumbing, loose windows, and overcrowded classrooms. Children attending mostly Black schools scored lower than city averages on achievement tests that were administered each year in all grades.<sup>19</sup> Some teachers and principals openly expressed racist beliefs suggesting that African Americans failed to succeed academically because they were naturally unintelligent or did not value education.<sup>20</sup>

### **Boston’s Educational Reform Movement**

Black activists were not the only ones concerned about these conditions. The fight against Nazi Germany during World War II and the rise of the postwar civil rights movement convinced many white Bostonians of the need for a more egalitarian system of public education. Growing up and attending schools in the working-class, racially transitioning neighborhood of Roxbury, Henry Allen noticed the racism that permeated the BPS. After graduating from college in the mid-1960s, he remained in Roxbury as it became a predominantly African American community and supported school desegregation efforts. For Allen, equalizing educational opportunities for all children was “absolutely the right thing to do.”<sup>21</sup> Louise Bonar reached the same conclusion watching television coverage of the violent attacks on civil rights activists who participated in mass protests against segregation in the South. Bonar shocked her relatives and neighbors in Brighton by studying urban teaching at Simmons College, accepting a post at a mostly Black school, and actively seeking out opportunities for her family to interact with African Americans.<sup>22</sup>

While some parents fixated on the harm their children might suffer if they attended racially mixed schools, others viewed integration as an educational

necessity that benefited all students and the society as a whole. Louise and Larry Bonar were appalled by the racism and parochialism they saw in Brighton's mostly white schools and the effects that this stultification had on young minds. Children were not being taught to think or develop problem-solving skills but to obey authority, and any display of creativity or imagination was quickly stifled. Seeking a different type of education for their children, the Bonars joined Henry Allen and other parents to secure federal funding and BSC approval for the William Monroe Trotter Elementary School in Roxbury, an early magnet school that drew a diverse student body from throughout the city and some suburbs when it opened in 1969.<sup>23</sup> Unlike other white parents who cited concerns about safety or lower educational standards as reasons for opposing desegregation, those who founded the Trotter School viewed ensuring equal rights for African Americans and doing what was best for their own children as complementary rather than competing goals. Allen believed integration was "a question of absolute justice" and that "entwined in the very definition of a quality education is a diverse education, is people knowing and understanding different communities and cultures and learning from one another."<sup>24</sup>

These families' efforts on behalf of BPS children reflected nationwide trends that encouraged grassroots movements for social change across the political spectrum in the 1960s and 1970s. The civil rights movement, antiwar movement, and the feminist movement inspired progressive reformers and provided models for activism aimed at making institutions more responsive to constituents who were previously ignored. Community action programs established by the federal government's Great Society initiatives mandated that low-income people be included in designing projects that served their communities. Many Americans joined neighborhood organizations that tackled local issues such as inadequate public services, corrupt municipal governments, and urban renewal projects that threatened to destroy people's homes.<sup>25</sup> Both opponents and supporters of desegregation in Boston often had experience with earlier struggles that pitted them against the city's political elite. Louise Bonar recalled that change was "in the air" and that despite the challenges of starting a new interracial school in Roxbury, it did not seem unusual "to just take an idea and [say] 'We should do that, so let's do that.'"<sup>26</sup>

Although Black activists led the struggle for desegregation, a diverse coalition of labor, religious, and civic organizations supported these efforts. At a public hearing held at the request of the NAACP in June 1963, BSC members heard from representatives of dozens of groups urging them to end school segregation in the city. Ruth Batson of the NAACP's Education Committee provided a detailed account of research findings that demonstrated clear patterns of racial discrimination in the BPS. Labor leader Julius Bernstein outlined the role that working people had played in advocating for public schools since the nineteenth century and called on the committee to fulfill "the promise of American democracy" by ensuring equal educational opportunities for African Americans. Sumner Rosen of the American Veterans' Committee decried the lack of transparency that characterized the relationship between school administrators and the community, calling on the BSC to restore trust through better communication and accountability. Spokespeople for the Massachusetts Council of Churches, the Congress of Racial Equality, Citizens for the Boston Public Schools, the Bay State Law Society, and other organizations sounded similar

themes, highlighting the racial disparities and bureaucratic indifference that undermined education for all children in the system.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the evidence amassed by reformers, the all-white BSC denied that it discriminated against African Americans. Committee members cited residential segregation, parents' preference for sending children to schools close to their homes, and the cultural backgrounds of Black students—anything but the decisions made by themselves—as reasons for the problems cited by their critics.<sup>28</sup> Committee chair Louise Day Hicks leveraged her opposition to desegregation and defense of “neighborhood schools” to enhance her political career, winning election to the city council in 1969 and going on to serve a term in the U.S. House of Representatives in the early 1970s.<sup>29</sup> Most other committee members also maintained an intransigent stance and refused to admit that racism was a problem in the BPS. In March 1965, Joseph Lee argued that the BSC had always acted with the best interests of African Americans at heart and contrasted the welcoming atmosphere in Boston with the exclusionary tactics of suburban communities that aimed to keep them out. According to Lee, the concentration of Black students in certain schools proved there was no discrimination, since no self-respecting racist would allow white students to be “submerged by Negro majorities in 45 Boston schools.”<sup>30</sup>

Continued pressure from civil rights activists who organized school stay-outs, mass demonstrations, vigils, and a visit to the city by Martin Luther King Jr. failed to move the committee. The NAACP and its allies had more success with state education leaders, who agreed to study the extent and effects of “racial imbalance” (a euphemism used to describe segregation that seemed unintentional rather than mandated by law) in Massachusetts schools and issued a report in April 1965 recommending action.<sup>31</sup> In August, the legislature passed the Racial Imbalance Act (RIA) and ordered districts that contained imbalanced schools to develop plans for addressing the problem.<sup>32</sup> Still, the BSC declined to act. For the next decade, the committee repeatedly filed inadequate plans that were rejected by the board of education, forfeiting millions of dollars in state funds that could have been used to enhance education and ease the transition to integrated schools. Meanwhile, residential segregation and the number of imbalanced schools in Boston increased. Between 1964 and 1972, white enrollment in the BPS dropped from 70,703 to 63,798 and nonwhite enrollment increased from 21,097 to 33,429, pushing the number of imbalanced schools to sixty-four.<sup>33</sup> Instead of adopting state officials' suggestions for integrating the schools, however, BSC members used the shifting demographics to justify their inaction, arguing that redistricting and other recommended changes would only lead to more white flight from the system. The committee's stonewalling eventually made it impossible to draw up effective plans without including busing among the tools used to comply with the law. When state officials drew up such a plan for desegregating Boston's schools in November 1972, the BSC refused to implement it and instead challenged it in court.<sup>34</sup>

As the committee continued to block reform efforts, an interracial alliance began to coalesce around efforts to elect progressive candidates to the BSC and ensure more citizen involvement in policy decisions. In 1970, a directory of organizations concerned with the state of public education in Boston listed more than a hundred neighborhood organizations, social service agencies, parent groups, civic associations, educational and cultural institutions, and other

entities representing every social demographic and geographical area of the city. Activists from a broad cross-section of these organizations formed the City-Wide Educational Coalition (CWEC) in January 1972. Executive director Mary Ellen Smith was a white teacher who was fired along with five others for supporting protests by Black students and parents at the Christopher Gibson School in 1968, and the group included others who were active in earlier reform efforts as well.<sup>35</sup> Members developed a “Community Agenda for the Boston Public Schools” that asserted the need to “utilize the creative skills of parents, teachers, students, and community residents in the development and execution of school policy.” More cooperation between the BSD and the broader community, improved services for bilingual and special education students, initiatives to hire more racially diverse teachers and administrators, and an end to racial and gender discrimination were needed to ensure high-quality education in the BPS. School desegregation was essential, CWEC stated, “because it is law, because it is good educational practice and because it is necessary to building a cohesive society.”<sup>36</sup>

In the early 1970s reformers pressed the BSC to create parent and community advisory councils in each school and district. Committee members expressed mild support for the idea, but it ultimately fell by the wayside as finding ways to prevent or delay desegregation consumed their attention.<sup>37</sup> Frustrated by the BSC’s intransigence and inadequate enforcement of the RIA, a group of Black parents filed a lawsuit in federal court in March 1972. No longer content to acquiesce in the pretense that racial imbalance was accidental or caused by forces beyond school officials’ control, the plaintiffs’ legal team charged the BSC with violating the Fourteenth Amendment by deliberately maintaining a segregated school system that denied Black children an equal education.<sup>38</sup>

### Federal Tyranny, or Opportunity?

Judge Garrity’s ruling in the case, filed on June 21, 1974, brought the weight of the federal government down on the side of racial justice. The 152-page decision rejected the BSC’s professions of innocence and carefully documented how school officials discriminated against African Americans. Responding to claims that BSC policies aimed to preserve neighborhood schools in accordance with parents’ preferences, Garrity observed that exceptions were commonly granted to enable white students to avoid attending mostly Black schools that were closer to their homes. Even if parents’ concerns were genuine, he noted, they did not relieve the committee of its legal responsibility to desegregate the schools. As a temporary measure, Garrity ordered the BSC to implement the state desegregation plan for the 1974–75 school year (Phase I). He then gave the defendants until December to develop a long-term plan for integrating the school system, effective in fall 1975 (Phase II).<sup>39</sup>

Garrity’s decision came at the high point of federal efforts to end racism in public education. For more than a decade after the Supreme Court declared the South’s segregated schools unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), most school districts refused to comply with the ruling, necessitating further action by Congress and the courts. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 empowered federal agencies to withhold funds from school systems that failed to



eliminate racial discrimination, and Supreme Court rulings in several cases between 1968 and 1971 clarified that ineffective desegregation plans must be replaced with measures (including busing, if necessary) that actually worked. Meanwhile, the federal district courts issued divided opinions on whether the law required school systems outside the South to take similar action. The Supreme Court settled that question in *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1* (1973), upholding a finding that school officials had deliberately segregated some schools and ordering the entire district to desegregate.<sup>40</sup> The BSC's actions were similar to those used by the school board in Denver, and Garrity cited several aspects of the *Keyes* case in his own ruling.<sup>41</sup> The trajectory of federal court decisions alarmed opponents of school desegregation in Boston and elsewhere. Expressing her determination to continue the fight against "forced busing of our school children," Louise Day Hicks told a supporter in Florida: "As Boston goes, so will the entire nation and we just cannot allow that to happen."<sup>42</sup>

Among segregationists in Boston, the decision sparked outrage. An unsigned letter to Garrity asked, "Who elected you to play God with my children? . . . Law by decree smack's of Big Brother Hitler style."<sup>43</sup> State senator William M. Bulger of South Boston reinforced such sentiments in a response to a WCVB-TV editorial that condemned the violent responses of some citizens in his district and encouraged peaceful acceptance of the judge's ruling. "South Boston parents are fighting for their most basic natural rights," Bulger stated. Like many of his constituents, the senator viewed the court order as "an outrageous interference with a parent's natural right to be responsible for the upbringing and education of children."<sup>44</sup> Other critics of the court order pointed out that Garrity lived and sent his own children to school in suburban Wellesley, so he would not have to suffer the consequences of his decision.<sup>45</sup> These arguments served to delegitimize Garrity and justify lawless responses to his desegregation orders. Convinced that the threat of federal tyranny and the imposition of an unjust ruling by an elitist outsider warranted forceful opposition, segregationists urged families not to send their children to school and threatened those who did. Throughout the late 1970s, parents and students who complied with the law endured verbal harassment, death threats, vandalism of their property, and physical attacks.<sup>46</sup>

As widespread as such opposition seemed, it was by no means universal. Henry Allen was elated by the decision and thought it was a "just and moral thing to have happen and was long overdue."<sup>47</sup> In an opinion piece written for her local newspaper, Brighton resident Laura Ross praised the judge for upholding the law and exposing how the BSC's racist manipulations deflected attention from "the poor quality of all public schools in the city."<sup>48</sup> Similarly, a former teacher from Dorchester interrupted the stream of hate mail that Garrity received to congratulate him on saying publicly what everyone knew: that Boston schools were terrible and doing little to educate children. She had worked in the BPS for six years but quit when she could "no longer stand being part of a system doing so much harm and so little good for pupils . . . a system where politics, promotions, and paychecks have long since supplanted education as the principal concern of the school committee, the administrators, and many teachers."<sup>49</sup>

Supporters of the court order saw Garrity's decision as a chance to enact a more inclusive and democratic vision for their city rather than an oppressive

federal diktat. Segregation undermined the learning conditions of all children, not just African American children, and racially integrated schools were essential for preparing the next generation for success. A flyer highlighting the potential benefits of the desegregation plan noted, "With integration, our children can learn to live together in our multi-racial, multi-national society. With integration, it will be possible for black and white parents, facing basically the same problems, to work together to insure that EVERY Boston school provides a quality education for ALL our children." For too long, politicians had played on racial fears to deflect attention from problems that existed in the schools instead of coming up with solutions. The court ruling provided an opportunity for citizens to press school officials to do better and prioritize the education of children over their own political ambitions.<sup>50</sup>

Reformers believed that empowering parents and other stakeholders to take a more active role in the BPS was essential to improving the quality of education. Shortly after Garrity announced his decision, supporters urged him to create a mechanism for citizen participation to assist with integration efforts and encourage broader changes within the school system. Some activists highlighted the positive role played by the Community Education Council (CEC) in Denver as that city moved to implement its own desegregation plan. The council's forty-one members included representatives from area churches, businesses, labor unions, educational institutions, and community organizations who were appointed by District Court Judge William Doyle to help monitor progress toward integration and ensure peaceful execution of the plan.<sup>51</sup> After traveling to Denver to meet with council members in November 1974, Boston community organizers Patrick Jones and Percy Wilson reported favorably on what they had seen and learned. In a letter to Garrity, Jones stated that the citywide council "made the critical difference in Denver and we feel strongly that the absence of such a responsible group of leaders in Boston has impeded the smooth implementation of desegregation here."<sup>52</sup>

Garrity was receptive to the idea of increasing citizen participation in the BPS. After the Boston Teachers Union requested court action on measures to alleviate racial tensions in September 1974, the judge ordered the BSC and superintendent of schools to establish Racial-Ethnic Parent Councils (REPCs) and Racial-Ethnic Student Councils (RESCs) in schools with ten or more white and Black students enrolled. The REPCs were elected by parents of children attending each school and included an equal number of white and Black representatives (three each for elementary schools, four each for middle schools, and five each for high schools). Representation was also provided for Asian American and Latinx parents at schools where sixty or more pupils from those groups were enrolled. Parent council duties included working to resolve racial conflicts; fostering communication among parents, students, teachers, and administrators; and promoting a sense of "understanding and common purpose" in the community. The same order created CPAC, a fourteen-member body made up of an equal number of white and Black parent representatives drawn from the REPCs in each of the city's six school districts, plus one Asian American and one Latinx representative who were elected at large.<sup>53</sup>

When the BSC failed to develop an acceptable desegregation plan of its own to replace the state plan that was in effect during Phase I, Garrity appointed a panel of masters and experts to assist the court in crafting a new Phase II plan.

The panel reviewed and incorporated elements from various proposals put forward by the plaintiffs and defendants to the case as well as other interested parties, including community groups.<sup>54</sup> Supporters of citizen involvement in the schools continued to lobby for the inclusion of councils for this purpose, arguing that they could help generate broad support for the plan and ensure its success.<sup>55</sup> The report of the masters submitted to the judge and parties for review in March 1975 included recommendations for ensuring citizen participation in Phase II through parent and community councils formed to assist with implementation.<sup>56</sup>

Garrity incorporated these suggestions into the final version of the plan. Far from being a meaningless numbers game based on racial quotas imposed by clueless suburban elites, as opponents claimed, Phase II laid out a design for the public schools in line with the ideals of the city's grassroots education reform movement. In an introduction outlining the rationale for federal intervention to end racial discrimination, Garrity explained that the plan also aimed to improve the overall quality of education in the BPS. White as well as Black students suffered from outdated curricula, deteriorating buildings, and poor academic performance, he noted, and attempts to improve the system had been thwarted by school officials' commitment to segregation. Phase II provided an opportunity to restore "a vision for an equitable and effective public school system . . . that will be free, universal, inclusive, and sound in ways that meet the educational needs and aspirations of all of Boston's citizens," he asserted.<sup>57</sup>

The plan created eight community school districts where school assignments were based on parents' preferences within parameters needed to ensure desegregation. It also included a citywide school district (District IX) made up of magnet schools that were open to everyone. These schools used the lure of special programs and curricular themes to attract students and achieve integration. Schools in both the community and magnet districts benefited from pairings with area colleges, universities, businesses, and cultural institutions that provided access to resources beyond those typically provided by the BSD. The range of options that were available meant parents' decisions could now be based on whether their children's educational needs were met rather than the racial composition of particular schools. As the judge emphasized, Phase II aimed not just to ensure that students from diverse backgrounds attended school together but to improve "the quality of education available in Boston's public schools for all students whatever their race or ethnic origin."<sup>58</sup> Court experts Robert Dentler and Marvin Scott observed that the plan showed "a deeper, more positive concern with *educational* reform than any previous federal court case."<sup>59</sup>

### Citizen Participation

Though the order placed responsibility for eliminating segregation with school officials, Garrity aimed to deploy the talents and expertise of other residents as well in achieving this goal. To supplement the school-level and citywide parent councils established earlier, Phase II enabled broader community participation through the Citywide Coordinating Council (CCC) and Community District Advisory Councils (CDACs) established in each of the nine school districts created by the plan.<sup>60</sup> By enlisting citizens representing the various stakeholders in public education beyond the families directly served by

the schools, Garrity hoped to ensure a strong base of support that could mobilize the political and financial resources needed to transform the BPS.<sup>61</sup> The scope of parent and community participation built into the plan at every level set Boston apart from earlier desegregation cases. Although the CCC was intended to be a temporary monitoring body similar to the CEC in Denver, Garrity and his supporters envisioned the REPCs, CDACs, and CPAC as permanent fixtures that could carry on the work of ensuring equal opportunities for all children after the court's supervision ended.<sup>62</sup>

The court chose forty-two civic leaders reflecting the economic, social, and political diversity of the city to serve on the CCC. Among the appointees were many people who were active in earlier education reform activities, including Ruth Batson, Julius Bernstein, Louise Bonar, and Mary Ellen Smith. Other members had backgrounds in areas such as business, higher education, religious organizations, and social service agencies.<sup>63</sup> The CCC informed the public about the purpose and benefits of school desegregation, monitored compliance with the court order, mediated problems, and made regular reports to the judge on progress the city was making toward educational equity.<sup>64</sup> In January and February 1976, the council held public hearings to give residents in each district an opportunity to provide feedback regarding their experiences with Phase II and make suggestions for improving its implementation. Although ROAR activists disrupted some of the meetings, other citizens appreciated the chance to make their views known and offered recommendations for solving problems with transportation, student-teacher ratios, and the poor condition of some facilities. In a letter thanking the CCC for holding the hearings, teacher Phyllis Conlon praised the group for helping to address long-standing problems in the school system. "In my particular school, issues that were brought up at that meeting were investigated the very next day," she reported. "Lights that had been broken were fixed and an aide was assigned to my overcrowded classroom. Believe me, with this extra help, the quality of education in my class has certainly improved."<sup>65</sup>

The CDACs provided another mechanism for citizens to enact reforms. Each district-level council had twenty members and contained a mix of parents and non-parents with an interest or expertise in education. The REPCs and RESCs in each district elected ten parents and two students to serve on their local CDAC. The remaining eight members might be teachers, school officials, university professors or administrators, police, clergy, business owners, labor leaders, or community activists who were nominated by the CCC and appointed by the court. These councils acted as advisory groups to district superintendents. Garrity intended CDACs to serve as places where "parents, students, school staff and others involved in education . . . can meet to discuss the educational needs of the district and to monitor the peaceful desegregation of the district's schools."<sup>66</sup>

Contradicting critics' complaints regarding Garrity's dictatorial tendencies, the court's efforts to ensure broad participation in decision-making democratized the school system and provided ways for citizens' voices to be heard. During Phase I, CWEC staff members who helped to set up REPCs observed that the parents who attended meetings typically identified an array of issues apart from desegregation that merited attention, such as the need for new textbooks, equipment, and educational programs.<sup>67</sup> In March 1976 Mary Ellen Smith informed

Judge Garrity that the councils “allowed parents to get involved in the Boston public schools in a way that was never before possible. Parents are increasingly demanding answers from the School Department as to why their schools lack books, teachers, etc.—sometimes they even get responses.”<sup>68</sup> One year later, a CCC report noted how new forms of citizen involvement challenged the dominance of the BSC and HSA over the school system, forcing administrators to take more diverse interests into account. “A previously closed, hierarchical structure is being shaken by the prospect of a more open, democratic model that demands effective participation by all those who have a stake in public schools,” the report stated.<sup>69</sup> Another description of the councils observed that their membership and activities encompassed “nearly the entire economic, geographic, and racial, ethnic, linguistic range of this city. Poor single parents serve alongside university professors; non-english speaking immigrants sit with savvy black and white community activists; representatives of the business and university communities, too, share in the lives of these councils.”<sup>70</sup>

Some parents who participated in the council network had initially opposed the court order but changed their views after working with other families in their children’s new schools. Jane Margulis of Savin Hill was nervous about sending her daughter to school in Columbia Point, a predominantly African American and Latinx community. She decided to overcome her fears by organizing a coffee meeting and inviting other parents so they could get to know each other. “I wasn’t going to feel safe unless I knew people there,” she told a reporter. “I figured we could make a deal—you take care of my kids and I’ll take care of yours.” Her efforts succeeded in building trust and facilitated the success of the school’s REPC. Over the next several years, Margulis served on the REPC, the CCC, and CPAC in addition to working as a neighborhood coordinator for CWEC. Similarly, Moss Hill parent Frank McDonough was not pleased when he learned that his children were assigned to a school in Jamaica Plain. Working with the REPC helped the family adjust to the situation, though, and McDonough was also heartened by his son’s reaction to the news that they were going to attend a new school in a community where many students spoke Spanish: “Gee, Dad, maybe I can learn Spanish.”<sup>71</sup>

Not least among the benefits of the court order was that it gave the BSD access to state and federal funds that were available to assist school systems with desegregation. Throughout the city, parent councils developed proposals and secured money for various projects to improve the quality of their schools, including library enhancements, tutoring programs, and other initiatives.<sup>72</sup> Schools where councils were able to forge cooperative relationships among parents, principals, and teachers demonstrated that desegregation could occur peacefully and with significant benefits for everyone. At public hearings held by the CCC in April 1977, REPC members from several schools explained how parents, school staff, and community members worked together to create high-quality educational programs and a welcoming, safe atmosphere for all children whether they lived locally or were bused in from other neighborhoods. Iris Stroud stated that at the Maurice J. Tobin Elementary School in Roxbury, children were comfortable, happy, learning, and in no hurry to go home at the end of the day. When her own daughter left for kindergarten each morning, Stroud knew she was going to a place where she would receive “the same love for those couple of hours at school that she will get at home.”<sup>73</sup>

## Bureaucratic Resistance

Not everyone welcomed the infusion of new people, ideas, and pressures for reform. During the first year of Phase II, observers reported seeing “severe problems of delay, secretive rather than helpful practices, and instances of condescending attitudes by school department personnel towards parents and outside agencies which wanted to help.”<sup>74</sup> Education reformer John D. O’Bryant, who became the first African American to serve on the BSC in 1977, noted the aversion some committee members displayed toward citizen participation. “Even with the court order, in the beginning it was still difficult for parents to have access because the School Committee was in non-compliance and they avoided parents whenever they had the opportunity,” he stated.<sup>75</sup> In a report to Garrity in November, the CCC confirmed that the BSC continued to obstruct implementation of his orders and listed several areas where the committee had yet to meet its obligations, including improvements to educational programs and community participation.<sup>76</sup>

The same report expressed little confidence in the abilities of system administrators to competently carry out the desegregation plan “or indeed to implement any policy which requires comprehensive management.”<sup>77</sup> To be fair to the BSD, the task of overhauling the school system would have been challenging under any circumstances, and it was further hamstrung by the BSC’s hostility toward the project. The committee was slow to approve funds and staffing needed to adequately prepare parents, teachers, and administrators. Some employees who were hired because of their political connections rather than their qualifications were terrible at their jobs. Reliable information regarding basic factors such as enrollments, demographic data, and classroom capacities was hard to find, which played havoc with the student assignment process. The BSC also fired several administrators who tried in good faith to carry out the court’s orders, discouraging others from being too cooperative.<sup>78</sup>

Within the BSD fear of repercussions, bureaucratic lethargy, lax oversight, and lack of interest in ensuring the success of Phase II were powerful obstacles to change.<sup>79</sup> Administrator John Coakley acknowledged in March 1976 that many staff members were apprehensive about the effects of the plan and reluctant to modify the way the system had operated for decades. “Practices, habits of years standing are being altered,” he observed. “Change is no simple matter.”<sup>80</sup> More concretely, closer scrutiny by parents, community members, and the court threatened opportunities for patronage and graft that some employees used to enrich themselves.<sup>81</sup> The machinations of BSD personnel who were determined to maintain control over the system was a source of endless frustration among parents and community members seeking to improve education. Citizen volunteers often found that council participation became a form of arduous labor, requiring huge expenditures of time and energy by those attempting to realize the full potential of the court order.

Administrative resistance was most evident at the local school level, manifesting in bitter struggles between principals and parents over the activities of REPCs. A report from CDAC VII on developments during the first year of Phase II stated that many of the district’s REPCs were not performing very well because of “the general failure of school officials to place much importance in the work of these councils.”<sup>82</sup> Parents were willing and eager to be involved, but

they received no encouragement or support from school authorities who preferred not to include them in decision making. At the Blackstone Square School, it proved difficult for the REPC to function at all.<sup>83</sup> Blackstone REPC co-chair Patricia Young and secretary Katherine Knight reported that school staff obstructed their work by failing to inform parents of meetings, taking no action on their concerns, and preventing them from forming a committee of parents and teachers to address racial conflicts among the students. Young and Knight believed these tactics were designed to demoralize council members, in hopes they would abandon efforts to improve conditions at the school.<sup>84</sup>

Staff of the CCC observed that similar problems existed at other schools throughout the city. The BSC and district superintendents neglected the court-ordered councils and did not encourage people to participate in them. This lack of support from upper administration meant principals “felt free to ignore or actively thwart the work of the REPC’s.” Some principals refused to meet with the parent councils and denied them access to mailing lists and other information they needed to function effectively. “REPC members, in some schools, have been made to feel as if they are trespassers and interlopers,” the CCC report stated. “Their right to enter the school has been challenged, their interest in their children’s educations have not been welcomed, but resisted by the building administrators.” The interracial parent councils were supposed to help foster mutual understanding and a sense of common purpose, the CCC pointed out, but this was hard to do at schools where principals accorded them no respect, used racial slurs to refer to some members, and showed little regard for the safety or education of the children placed in their care.<sup>85</sup>

The district-level councils also encountered hostility to their activities. Members of CDAC VII reported in March 1976 that the district superintendent had moved from overt antagonism toward the council to treating them with indifference, rarely seeking or taking any advice they offered. Under the heading “Entrenched Opposition to the Plan,” they wrote: “Although it is hard to draw a line between incompetence and non-compliance with the Court order in most single instances, the overall picture of non-supportive actions in so many areas can only lead to the conclusion of a pervasive, institutionalized resistance to the desegregation plan and the persistence of the feeling that this resistance will lead to its ultimate defeat.”<sup>86</sup> School officials subtly undermined citizen participation by failing to provide needed information, setting impossibly short deadlines for councils to provide input into decisions, and then disregarding that input once it was received.<sup>87</sup> In March 1977, CCC staff observed that although BPS superintendent Marion Fahey had issued several circulars advocating parent involvement and BSD cooperation with the councils, most administrators remained unsupportive and seemed to be “awaiting the day that parents ‘go away’ with the expectation that the citizen input structures will disappear when the U.S. District Court relinquishes its role.”<sup>88</sup>

Some administrative resistance stemmed from genuine disagreements over the proper place of parents and community members in the schools. Even as education reformers were urging Garrity to include mechanisms for citizen participation in crafting the Phase II desegregation plan, school officials pushed back against the idea. A statement adopted by the Boston Elementary Principals Association in April 1975 warned that its members were “unalterably opposed to any suggestion which places community councils or similar groups in a

decision-making or administrative role.” Though they welcomed advice and interest from others, they asserted, legal responsibility and therefore ultimate authority over the schools lay with them.<sup>89</sup> As frequently as council members complained about administrators’ efforts to keep them out of the schools, principals and teachers complained about intrusions into their workspace by lay people who were not qualified to interpret what they saw. Boston Teachers Union president Henry Robinson opposed giving parents a role in hiring and evaluating teachers because they lacked the appropriate expertise. “If someone is going to evaluate me then that person should be really an expert, or should be better than I am,” he explained. “Because . . . how can they tell what I’m doing is right or wrong. We want the parents to get involved. But there’s a difference between getting involved and taking over.”<sup>90</sup>

In conflicts between school officials and citizen stakeholders over their appropriate spheres of influence, Garrity favored an expansive interpretation of council responsibilities. A memorandum and orders issued in September 1977 made clear that the councils’ efforts to improve conditions in the schools were appropriate and reflected the court’s intent. Noting that previous orders relating to the citizen participation network all assumed a broad mandate for the court-ordered councils, Garrity asserted: “All matters which are apt to facilitate or hinder the desegregation process in particular schools or districts or citywide are appropriate subject matters for citizen concern and action.”<sup>91</sup> With encouragement from the court, the list of activities that school-level councils were involved in grew to include the creation of transportation and safety teams, crafting policies regarding student discipline, reviewing curricular programs and materials, helping to develop proposals for new programs, screening applicants for administrative positions, and fighting for needed repairs at their schools. As one observer noted, REPCs were “involved with almost every aspect of the educational life of their schools. . . . The parent councils are developing their own definitions of what is their business and what is not.”<sup>92</sup>

### Disillusionment and Decline of the Councils

Despite the court’s support for citizen participation in the school system, council members continued to face obstacles to their efforts. Citizen volunteers often donated hundreds of hours of labor to projects that were later nixed by administrators. In 1976, for example, parents who served on screening committees to evaluate applicants and recommend finalists for principal positions in their districts diligently read through copious amounts of material, sat through long meetings, and endured patronizing treatment from BSD personnel, only to have their recommendations ignored by the board of superintendents and the BSC. A report prepared by CWEC noted that the selection procedures discouraged meaningful participation by parents and favored incumbents who were known by the superintendents.<sup>93</sup> Several parents expressed their frustration with the process at a BSC meeting in August. One woman wondered why she and others on her committee had put so much effort into choosing a principal if the person they recommended—unanimously—was not going to be hired. “I spent a lot of time at these screening committee meetings, and I went early and picked up my reports so I could read about everything. . . . Then I find out I might as well not have been there at all,” she stated.<sup>94</sup>



Experiences like these caused many people to drop out of the councils and discouraged others from becoming involved. Peter Driscoll, a CDAC coordinator who had been in the fight for education reform for eleven years, resigned in May 1979 after finally exhausting his ability to shoulder “the incredible amount of work which is required to make even small progress.”<sup>95</sup> The same month, the REPC at the Henry Grew School disbanded and parents began withdrawing their children from the school after months of complaining about the conduct of its principal yielded no action from the BSD.<sup>96</sup> Observers who noted that parent participation in the BPS was waning attributed the decline to continued opposition from system administrators and the difficulty of securing meaningful changes. An editorial that appeared in the *Boston Globe* in February 1981 explained, “The general weakness of the current parent structure is attributable to its lack of real power. Might as well stay home as venture out to a night meeting to advise someone who doesn’t have to listen.”<sup>97</sup>

Other constraints added to council members’ growing reluctance to expend precious time and energy on activities that held such little reward. Many participants found it hard to fit council membership into other commitments such as work, childcare, and family time. Those who did not own cars incurred significant unreimbursed expenses to attend meetings outside their immediate neighborhoods, and some people were afraid to venture into parts of the city where they felt unwelcome.<sup>98</sup> School officials’ preference for holding meetings during their regular working hours conflicted with the needs of parents who had day jobs of their own and could not afford to take time off work to attend.<sup>99</sup> The CCC noted the obstacles to participation faced by working-class families, reporting to the court that the financial burdens of council membership discouraged many people from becoming involved.<sup>100</sup>

In the late 1970s and early 1980s economic recession, stagnant incomes, rising inflation, and committee fatigue further eroded citizen participation. Council members who once had the luxury of being full-time volunteers, spending their days harassing recalcitrant school administrators and their evenings attending committee meetings, now had to find paid jobs to help support their families.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, the school system was hurt by budget cuts, falling enrollments, school closings, and teacher layoffs that undermined the achievements of earlier years. In November 1980, Massachusetts voters approved Proposition 2 1/2, a ballot measure that capped property taxes and reduced local governments’ ability to fund public services. The Boston city council cut its budget by 25 percent and laid off thousands of workers, with devastating consequences for the BPS.<sup>102</sup> Superintendent Paul Kennedy’s assessment of the budget constraints the system faced for the 1982 financial year indicated how far out of reach the goals of earlier educational reformers now seemed. In contrast to the vision of educational excellence for every child laid out in the Phase II desegregation plan, Kennedy framed the central challenge merely as providing “essential service within the limits of the will and the ability of the public to pay.”<sup>103</sup>

### Explaining Failure

As hopes for transforming the BPS into an integrated, broadly supported, and universally excellent school system faded, political leaders found a

convenient scapegoat in Judge Garrity. As Robert Dentler observed, the BSC and city council generally refused to act on anything related to desegregation unless directly ordered to by the judge, then accused Garrity of overreaching his authority when he tried to ensure compliance. This in turn allowed administrators to evade responsibility by contending that the system was being run by the court rather than themselves.<sup>104</sup> Some parents interviewed by CWEC in the 1980s were convinced that Garrity had single-handedly destroyed the city's public schools. "None of my kids had any problems in public school until busing," one parent stated.<sup>105</sup> Others believed the court order had only exacerbated racial tensions and worsened the quality of education in the BPS. Several parents thought it was good that Garrity was preparing to end the court's involvement because "he was the one that screwed it up" and "made a mess of things."<sup>106</sup>

In contrast, Bostonians who were more closely involved with implementing the desegregation plan placed blame for the problems afflicting the schools squarely on administrators. "Forced busing is not ruining our schools, it's liars, cheaters & deceitful people in high office who refuse to accept parents into their kingdom for fear of being caught in their malicious schemes," wrote one disheartened REPC member.<sup>107</sup> Tired of the constant excuses and buck-passing they heard from BSD staff, CDAC IX co-chairs Henry Allen and Isaac Adar asserted that the real problem was school officials' mismanagement of the BPS. "Until such time as solid educational concerns become the first item of business on the school department's agenda, the system will continue to follow the downward spiral which it has been pursuing over the many years prior to and following the Court Order," they stated.<sup>108</sup>

Surveys of parents who pulled their children out of the BPS showed that many complaints other than "busing" factored into their decisions. Chronic underfunding of programs and uncertainty created by budget cuts and school closings were hard for many people to take. Some parents felt worn down by constantly having to fight for resources in a system in which no one seemed to care whether their children learned or not. "Bad education, instability and teacher lay-offs have made me leave, and it will take too long for it to improve for my children to come back," one parent explained. "Boston is not interested in education, they only care for cutting taxes," concluded another.<sup>109</sup>

For families whose limited finances did not allow them any alternatives, the BPS continued to underdeliver. In 1985, the same year that Garrity issued final orders extricating the court from the case and allowing the parties to negotiate further modifications without his involvement, CWEC conducted a series of interviews with parents that revealed persistent deficiencies in the school system. Participants noted the poor physical condition of the schools their children attended and the challenges to teaching and learning posed by buildings with peeling paint, leaks, and broken equipment.<sup>110</sup> A Latinx parent who thought the court had played a positive role in pushing the BPS to address such problems expressed concern that the judge was leaving the case, fearing that "there won't be anybody responsible enough" to maintain the improvements made in educational quality, parent access, and desegregation.<sup>111</sup>

At the national level, support for federal intervention on behalf of racial justice waned as narratives framing such efforts as misguided disasters prevailed. Funding for programs to assist with school integration dried up during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who favored limiting the government's role.<sup>112</sup>

Responding to criticisms of the administration's backtracking on civil rights, Assistant Attorney General William Bradford Reynolds echoed the views of segregationists who argued that federal initiatives had failed. "In city after city, we have seen the courts' preoccupation with busing drive large numbers of students from the public schools, in many instances increasing, rather than decreasing, racial isolation," he claimed. Along with many other Americans, Reagan and his advisors saw no reason to continue with "a remedy whose ineffectiveness is so manifest."<sup>113</sup> In subsequent decades, the Supreme Court reversed course as well, handing down decisions that allowed school systems to resegregate.<sup>114</sup>

In Boston and other cities, low-income African American and Latinx students made up the majority of children in public schools while middle-class families left or sent their children to private schools instead. A study undertaken in 1995 found BPS families facing many of the same challenges that existed in the 1960s: poor-quality education, racial discrimination, confusing policies and procedures, and school officials who were unresponsive to parents' concerns. Some remnants of the court-ordered councils still existed, but they were not very effective. Even if they wanted to, many parents found it hard to get involved in council activities because of low incomes, lack of transportation, work and family commitments, language difficulties, and other obstacles.<sup>115</sup> Under these circumstances, few people could muster the time, energy, and financial resources to fill the gaps left by persistent underfunding and political indifference toward public education.

## Conclusion

These outcomes were not the inevitable result of liberal social engineering by an arrogant federal judge, as segregationists claimed. Between 1974 and 1985, court-ordered desegregation in the BPS strengthened a grassroots education reform movement dedicated to increasing parent and community participation in the public schools. The school, district, and citywide councils created by the desegregation plan empowered a cadre of citizen volunteers to secure improvements in the quality of instruction and pressure administrators to include a broader spectrum of constituents in decision making. The interracial and cross-class coalitions built during this decade demonstrate the range of reactions to desegregation that existed beyond violent opposition or abandonment of the public schools. Strong federal enforcement of civil rights laws, an inclusive approach that recognized the whole community's stake in public education, opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to interact and cooperate with each other, and citizens who were willing and able to get involved were among the factors that encouraged progress toward educational equity in this decade. Achievements at schools where principals and teachers worked with instead of against council members showed that peaceful integration and educational enhancements occurred under the court order.

At the same time, possibilities for remaking the BPS were constrained by the large number of school officials who were reluctant to relinquish control over educational resources. Obstruction by BSC members and BSD administrators posed significant challenges to council members' efforts and ultimately blocked meaningful reforms. Opponents of the court order played on class resentments to deflect the ire of BPS parents away from themselves and onto a

suburban judge from Wellesley, eliding their own responsibility for the school system's failures. Framing this era as one of chaos and trauma caused by a heavy-handed federal mandate that ignored local concerns does a disservice to Judge Garrity and to those Bostonians who sincerely tried to make desegregation work. Assessments of court-ordered desegregation in Boston must acknowledge the possibilities for citizen participation fostered by the Phase II plan and the wall of bureaucratic resistance that shattered every proposal for reimagining the city's public education system thrown its way.

## Endnotes

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1. Citywide Parents Advisory Council (CPAC), *Parents Make a Difference!*, [late 1970s], file 87, box 4, Patricia Corcoran Papers (PCP), City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division.

2. School committee members Louise Day Hicks and John Kerrigan frequently engaged in this tactic, as did lawmakers who represented Boston in the state legislature. Although a metropolitan plan that integrated city and suburban schools might have made desegregation more effective, the Supreme Court's decision in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) meant it was not possible to order such a plan for Boston. See Emmett H. Buell Jr., *School Desegregation and Defended Neighborhoods: The Boston Controversy* (Lexington, 1982), 80, 102; Robert A. Dentler and Marvin B. Scott, *Schools on Trial: An Inside Account of the Boston Desegregation Case* (Cambridge, 1981), 122; and J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York, 1985), 242.

3. For some analyses of the ways that colorblind rhetoric defending local control, family values, and small government enabled white parents to deny any racist intent even as they acted to maintain segregated schools, see Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, 2006); Matthew Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (Oakland, 2016); Ansley T. Erickson, *Making the Unequal Metropolis: School Desegregation and Its Limits* (Chicago, 2016); and Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York, 2018).

4. Alan Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston* (Boston, 1977), 151; Buell, *School Desegregation and Defended Neighborhoods*; Lukas, *Common Ground*; Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, 1991). Adam R. Nelson's more recent book, *The Elusive Ideal: Equal Educational Opportunity and the Federal Role in Boston's Public Schools, 1950–1985* (Chicago, 2005) examines school desegregation in the broader context of federal education policy and its intersections with action at the state and local level. His conclusions regarding the implementation and impact of the court order largely reiterate those of earlier studies.

5. Jeanne F. Theoharis, "We Saved the City': Black Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960–1976," *Radical History Review* 81 (2001): 61–93; Zebulon Vance Miletsky, "Before Busing: Boston's Long Movement for Civil Rights and the Legacy of Jim Crow in

the ‘Cradle of Liberty,’” *Journal of Urban History* 43 (2017): 204–17; Tatiana M. F. Cruz, “‘We Took ‘Em On’: The Latino Movement for Educational Justice in Boston, 1965–1980,” *Journal of Urban History* 43 (2017): 235–55.

6. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 3. Formisano uses this term to refer to the combination of race and class resentments that motivated many opponents of the court order.

7. “Statement of ‘Assembly for Justice,’” September 30, 1974, 1, file 1300, box 38, Freedom House, Inc. Records (FHR), Snell Library, Northeastern University; Richard S. Burdick, “Boston’s Ordeal Over Integration, Pt. 16,” WCVB-TV 5 Editorial, October 29, [1974], 1, file 8, ser. L1c, box 37, Judge W. Arthur Garrity Jr. Chambers Papers on the Boston Schools Desegregation Case (WAGP), University Archives and Special Collections, Joseph P. Healey Library, University of Massachusetts Boston.

8. Joel Spring, *The American School: From the Puritans to No Child Left Behind* (New York, 2008), 15, 30–37, 78–88.

9. Horace Mann, “Tenth Annual Report to the Massachusetts Board of Education” (1846), in *The School in the United States: A Documentary History*, ed. James W. Fraser (New York, 2001), 52–54; American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, *Labor: Champion of Public Education* (Washington, 1970), 3–4, 7.

10. Lukas, *Common Ground*, 122; Dentler and Scott, *Schools on Trial*, 14–17; Finance Commission of the City of Boston, *A Digest of the Report of the Boston School Survey* (Boston, 1944), 1–5, 20–23, 27–28, 34–35, 39, 48–49, 53, esp. 4.

11. Louise Bonar, interview by author, April 28, 2018, MP3 audio recording, in author’s possession.

12. Laurence C. Bonar to William Ohrenberger, [ca. May/June 1968], 1–2, file 33, box 8, Louise Bonar and Carol Wolfe Collection of Boston Education Materials (LBCWC), John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

13. Peter Schrag, *Village School Downtown: Politics and Education—A Boston Report* (Boston, 1967), 139–41; Bonar interview.

14. Boston League of Women Voters, “Study of the Boston Home and School Association,” [1967], 5, 9–10, esp. 5, file 7, ser. III, box 1, Edward Blackman Papers, University Archives and Special Collections, Joseph P. Healey Library, University of Massachusetts Boston.

15. Hattie Dudley, “Home and School Explained,” CDAC *Speak Out* [Community District Advisory Council (CDAC)] I newsletter, [late 1970s?], [2], file 87, box 4, PCP.

16. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population*, vol. II: *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 3: *Kansas–Michigan* (Washington, 1943), 670 (Table 35); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population*, vol II: *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 23: *Massachusetts* (Washington, 1973), 62 (Table 23).

17. “Comparative Census Figures 1964–1971,” encl. in Victor A. McInnis to Chairman and Members of the School Committee, Superintendent of Schools, and Board of Superintendents, memorandum, November 2, 1971, 1, and Joseph Lee, “Racial Ratios,” Speech to School Committee, March 3, 1965, [draft?], 3, 6–7, both in file 55, box 7, Joseph Lee Papers (JLP), Boston Athenaeum.

18. Theoharis, “‘We Saved the City,’” 65–66; *Morgan v. Hennigan*, 379 F. Supp. 410, 415, 424–25, 469–74 (1974). For a discussion of the ways urban policy makers in other cities reinforced racial inequality through decisions that generated segregated neighborhoods and schools, see Erickson, *Making the Unequal Metropolis*, chap. 4.

19. Paul Parks, "A Statement on the Education of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools," May 22, 1963, 1–2, file 1309, box 38, FHR.
20. Ruth Batson, "Statement to the Boston School Committee," June 11, 1963, 1, file 1309, box 38, FHR.
21. Henry L. Allen, interview by Rhea Ramjohn, Feb. 28, 2005, transcript, 3–6, 8, 24, esp. 24, OH-42, John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project (JJMOHP), John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University (accessed online at <https://moakleyarchive.omeka.net/collections/show/1>).
22. Bonar interview.
23. Bonar interview; Ned Schofield, "Interview with Mr. William Brennan," March 6, 1971, 1, file 63, box 52, Center for Law and Education: *Morgan v. Hennigan* Case Records (CLER), University Archives and Special Collections, Joseph P. Healey Library, University of Massachusetts Boston; Allen interview, 8n8.
24. Allen interview, 11.
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