TEACHER UNIONISM, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND THE DESEGREGATION OF

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By

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Court-ordered school desegregation in Boston in the 1970s is but one component of a larger movement to desegregate the schools that officially began in 1963. This dissertation places court-ordered desegregation in the context of the larger movement and links that story to one that has been mostly overlooked by those who have written about racial strife in Boston: the story of the teachers, the rise of their union, and the relationship between the civil rights and union rights struggles in the city. When the NAACP formally challenged the Boston School Committee over the issue of *de facto* segregation in 1963, teachers were mounting a campaign for collective bargaining rights. Over the ensuing years, teacher unionism developed alongside the movement to desegregate the public schools, and both movements ran along parallel tracks through much of the 1960s. During these years, both the civil rights movement and proponents of teacher unionism found a common adversary in the Boston School Committee. In the 1970s, the trajectory of the two movements intersected in the complicated arena of court-ordered school desegregation. The Boston Teachers Union took a neutral stance on student busing, but its defense of the traditional tenets of trade unionism, and seniority in particular, caused internal divisions, especially between older, white teachers and newer black hires. The layoffs of 710 white teachers in 1981, a consequence of shrinking enrollments due to “white flight,”
aggressively challenged the teachers’ collective bargaining agreement and prompted the union to fight to protect the seniority rights of its members, even if it meant a disproportionate loss of jobs for black teachers recently hired under court order. The fight over the senior teachers’ jobs in 1981, and the BTU’s failed campaign to have these teachers rehired, marked an important and defining clash between the union, court-ordered desegregation mandates, and race. Ultimately, the failure of the civil rights and union rights struggles to fully align their interests and strike an enduring alliance in the battle over the future of Boston schools in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to a legacy of missed opportunities for true reform.
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Professor Kazin and Professor Manning to read and offer their feedback within a very short timeframe showed a true generosity of spirit and intellect. I could not have gotten to this point without their support.

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1974, the first day of school for public school students in Boston was also the first day of court-ordered desegregation in the city’s public schools. On that day, students, teachers, and parents were dealing with the reality of transfers, buses, and violent protests to the desegregation plan. Many students got on a bus to get to a school across town, and many students stayed home. White protesters in South Boston threw rocks at buses carrying black students to South Boston High School, violence inside Hyde Park High School erupted between black and white students, and the overwhelming impression of the day was one of disorder and dysfunction.

It did not matter that, after a reasoned evaluation, those first days were assessed as quiet and well-ordered throughout the majority of Boston’s schools. The images recorded in South Boston alone provided seemingly irrefutable evidence of a city divided, a city caught in the grips of a battle over rights and race. This is the narrative that dominates the history of Boston school desegregation. The story begins on June 21, 1974, with the decision rendered by Judge W. Arthur Garrity of the U.S. District Court in the case of *Tallulah Morgan v. James W. Hennigan*. The Boston School Committee was found guilty of *de facto* segregation, and busing was ordered as one of the immediate remedies. After the court decision is described, the story usually follows the path of violence, of protest, of students riding buses and students staying out of school, of parents leading marches and anti-busing protests, of acts of racial violence, and of ineffective
leadership on many levels. This story has been written many times over.¹ And almost forty years later, it is far from forgotten in the minds of Bostonians.

This dissertation contributes a new perspective to the history of court-ordered school desegregation in Boston by placing it in the context of the larger movement to integrate the schools and linking that story to one that has been largely overlooked by those who have written about racial strife in the Boston schools: the story of the teachers, the rise of their union, and the relationship between the civil rights and union rights struggles in the city. This study begins in 1963, with the first formal challenge brought to the Boston School Committee by the Boston chapter of the NAACP regarding the city’s segregated schools. This challenge came at a time when Boston teachers, represented by two groups with competing ideologies, the Boston Teachers Union (Local 66 of the American Federation of Teachers) and the unaffiliated Boston Teachers Association, were mounting a campaign for collective bargaining rights.² Over the ensuing years, this study shows, teacher unionism developed alongside the movement to desegregate Boston’s public schools, as the overwhelmingly white teachers’ group channeled some of the authority-defying spirit of the civil rights struggle and drew inspiration from


teachers’ union victories in places like New York City to build a formidable movement of their own. Both movements ran along parallel tracks through much of the 1960s; in the 1970s, these two movements intersected in ways that would affect both the civil rights and union rights struggles for years afterward.3

This dissertation will follow the role of teachers and their union and of civil rights activists and their crusade to improve schools for students of color from 1963 through 1981, when a round of large-scale teacher layoffs were directed to remedy the problem of school overstaffing. The layoffs of 710 white teachers, a consequence of shrinking enrollments due to “white flight,” aggressively challenged the teachers’ collective bargaining agreement and prompted the union to fight to protect the seniority rights of its members, even if it meant a disproportionate loss of jobs for black teachers recently hired under court order. The fight over the senior teachers’ jobs in 1981, and the BTU’s failed campaign to have these teachers rehired, marked an important and defining clash between the union, court-ordered desegregation mandates, and race.

The tragic story of the failure of the civil rights and union rights struggles to fully align their interests and strike an enduring alliance in the battle over the future of Boston schools in the 1960s and 1970s has a great deal to teach us about the dimensions of a much larger failure. For the remainder of the twentieth century, urban America’s public school systems generally proved unable to balance union rights and civil rights effectively. Schools have failed to provide both an upwardly mobile professional identity and a workplace rule of law for the teachers who labored

3 One example of this parallel track occurred in 1965, when both movements marked major legislative victories within the span of a few months. The Racial Imbalance Act was passed by the Massachusetts legislature in August 1965, and collective bargaining for public employees passed in November 1965.
in the nations’ classrooms. And even as urban school districts like Boston became disproportionately attended by poor students of color, the distortions of structural racism continued to defy most school reform efforts. The current focus on achievement gaps often translates to school reform efforts that take a punitive stand toward teachers while being unable to remedy the larger social issues that constrain urban schools’ chances for widespread academic gains.

The fact that teachers have not received more attention in accounts of Boston school desegregation is puzzling, considering the essential involvement of teachers in the day-to-day operation and management of the schools. The presence of teachers is taken for granted in most accounts, but the fact is that the tumultuous 1974-75 school year almost began with a teachers’ strike. In the summer of 1974, the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) and the Boston School Committee failed to reach an agreement on the teachers’ new contract. Had the Boston Teachers Union not agreed to binding arbitration to settle its contract dispute with the Boston School Committee, that first day of school would have played out very differently. Striking teachers rather than anti-busing protestors might have been the lead story that day.

But Boston teachers did not strike that fall. They showed up to work, and as a result of court-ordered transfers, many were assigned to schools other than the ones they had left in the spring. These transfers were only the first in a series of clashes between teachers’ union rights and the court-ordered desegregation plan. Inside the schools, many teachers became mediators of both physical and verbal altercations. Outside the schools, the BTU pushed back against the work of Judge Garrity’s court, filing its own legal briefs and appeals to various rulings, and opposing hiring and transfer orders that conflicted with the union’s contract. The direct
involvement of teachers and their union in the developing legal process and their presence in every classroom placed teachers at the center of school desegregation. Nonetheless, teachers and the BTU are largely absent from most of the existing scholarship on this contentious era.

The scholarship that does focus on Boston teachers and the Boston Teachers Union is limited. Only one author, the eminent labor relations scholar Harry C. Katz, has studied the BTU in relation to school desegregation. In work now more than thirty years old, Katz examined the labor-management relationship in Boston and probed the unique circumstances of conducting that relationship in a school system under court order. His comparative study of the racial justice remedies undertaken in Los Angeles, Dade County, and Boston schools characterized the BTU position as adversarial in contrast to teacher’s attitudes in the other two school systems. He argued that teachers in Los Angeles and Dade County espoused a “spirit of compromise” that was absent among Boston’s teachers. It was not coincidence that the Boston teachers had a collective bargaining contract, while Los Angeles and Dade County teachers did not. Katz contended that “the security provided by their collective bargaining agreement…gave the Boston Teachers Union the freedom to engage in a combative relationship with the federal court.”

Katz’s discussion of the BTU during the Boston busing crisis is limited by his narrow time

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frame. He never examined the union’s work prior to 1974 or addressed the teacher layoffs in 1981 to make clear the long-range impact of the failure of the union and civil rights activists to successfully align their causes. His articles have raised important questions regarding the relationship between teacher unionism and school desegregation, but his work is not broad enough in scope or deep enough in content to offer more than provisional answers to these questions.

Joseph Cronin’s more recent work, Reforming Boston Schools, 1930-2006, is the lone study that makes teacher unionism a central part of an examination of the school system.\textsuperscript{6} Cronin’s research focuses on school reform and the various individuals and reform groups that sought to improve the schools. He identifies the Boston Teachers Union as one of those groups.\textsuperscript{7} Cronin includes a narrative of the BTU’s establishment as sole bargaining agent in 1965 and his work provides the first published account of contract negotiations from 1965-2006. With his focus on school reform, Cronin’s work contributes the case study of Boston to the ever expanding literature on school reform and the role of teacher unions.\textsuperscript{8} Despite this important

\textsuperscript{6} Joseph Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 1930-2006 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Cronin began his career as a teacher in Maryland before returning to his native Boston. As a Harvard University professor, he led studies of the Boston Public Schools before being appointed the Massachusetts Secretary of Education Affairs, a position he held from 1971-1975. He has been continuously involved with the Boston Public Schools in various professional and advisory positions since that time.

\textsuperscript{7} Cronin includes black parents, universities, and the business community as other major groups promoting reform within the school system during this period.

\textsuperscript{8} This field of scholarship has exploded over the last decade, with analyses of government reforms like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, and scholarship debating the role of teacher unions within school reform. Some works of note in this field are: William J. Reese, America’s Public Schools: From the Common School to “No Child Left Behind” (Baltimore: The John’s Hopkins University Press, 2011); Charles M. Payne, So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2008); Richard G. Neal, The Deserved Collapse of Public Schools: How We Have Been Hornswoggled and Bamboozled—Even Flummoxed and Hoodwinked—by Entrenched Educrats, Tyrannical Teacher Unions and Pandering Politicians (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2006); Robert Peterson and Michael Charney, eds., Transforming Teacher Unions: Fighting for Better Schools and Social Justice (Milwaukee, Wis.: Rethinking Schools Ltd., 1999); Tom Loveless, Conflicting Missions?: Teachers Unions and Educational Reform (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute,
contribution, Cronin fails to fully address the crucial intersection of race and teacher unionism within the schools in the 1960s and 1970s. For Cronin, it is the practice of collective bargaining, and not the complicated legacy of the 1960s and 1970s, that slowed school reform efforts in the 1990s and 2000s.

Other published literature does no more than drop tantalizing hints about the role of the teachers in the Boston school desegregation story. Ione Malloy’s book, *Southie Won’t Go: A Teacher’s Diary of the Desegregation of South Boston High School* (1986), is a chronicle of these years written by a teacher. Malloy taught at the school which was the epicenter of protest and violence during the first year of student busing. Her diary entries provide an intimate view of the many disruptions inside the school, from fights between students, to boycotts, to chronic tardiness and lengthy suspensions. Malloy, who was opposed to the busing plan, alternately characterizes Judge Garrity as clueless and deceitful. Though committed to her job, she was as upset about busing as many of the protesters on the street outside her classroom window, and believed that students were subjected to misery over a mere principle promoted by administrators who lived in the suburbs and knew nothing of the reality teachers faced in the schools. Malloy was offended by critics who argued that educating students was impossible in such an environment, but her own entries recreate a tense classroom atmosphere and detail frequent student absences; she describes an environment not conducive to teaching or learning. Her diary tells us something about the demands that Boston school desegregation placed on the shoulders

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of teachers, but she provides only one teacher’s view. Often her experiences were exceptional and her views were not shared by her colleagues.

Some works go so far as to contend that the teachers’ experience is largely immaterial to understanding Boston school desegregation. Even Robert Dentler and Marvin Scott, whose *Schools on Trial* includes an entire chapter on teachers, argue that “the desegregation plan did not affect teaching itself.”¹⁰ Dentler and Scott do not acknowledge the challenges and sacrifices teachers made during these years. As court-appointed experts and close advisors to Judge Garrity, Dentler and Scott describe improving conditions for teachers during these years, citing salary and seniority rights that remained intact, declining enrollments which eased the burden in the classroom, a humbled and weakened Boston School Committee, and teacher transfers that “liberated” teachers from “substandard, dungeonlike” facilities.¹¹ But their rosy description stands in stark contrast to Malloy’s account from the classroom and Katz’s analysis of court orders which constantly challenged aspects of the BTU contract. Citing few references, their presentation seems to reflect more on their investment in a successful outcome to the court’s desegregation plan than a desire to understand its impact on teachers or school district labor relations.

Ultimately, then, there is no definitive study of Boston teachers and their union, the BTU, during the long struggle for school desegregation. This study seeks to fill that gap. In doing so, it contributes usefully to two important areas of scholarship.

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¹¹ Ibid.
The first area concerns the growth of public employee unionism in general, teacher unionism in particular, and the relationship of both to the civil rights movement. While historians have now probed an immense terrain of civil rights activity within and beyond the South in the 1960s and 1970s, they have done a much poorer job of exploring the other social movement that was redefining urban American politics in these years: public employee unionism. It is not surprising that Boston teachers have received little attention given the limited existing scholarship on teachers and teacher unionism on a national level. After all, Marjorie Murphy’s *Blackboard Unions* (1990) is the most recent history of the nation’s two leading teachers’ organizations, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), and her book is now nearly twenty-five years old.\(^\text{12}\)

Unfortunately, historical literature on national trends in teacher unionism remains thin, though some notable events in teacher union history have been well covered. The 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville affair in New York City, which pitted the United Federation of Teachers against civil rights activists who sought local control of schools, is one such event.\(^\text{13}\) In addition, the histories of particular AFT locals, and the way these locals interacted with the civil rights movement in their specific urban area, have received more attention in recent years. Jonna

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Perrillo and Clarence Taylor examine the relationship between civil rights and teacher unionism, focusing on New York City teachers. ¹⁴ Works by René Luis Alvarez on the AFT-affiliated Philadelphia Federation of Teachers or Steve Golin on Newark teachers touch on this intersection, but it remains unclear whether the experiences they describe were representative or not. ¹⁵ As the existing literature suggests, Boston’s school problems were not unique, but mirrored patterns affecting other northern cities where the civil rights movement and teacher unionism developed alongside but generally not in partnership with each other. ¹⁶ Yet to date too little is known about teachers unions in racial conflicts outside of New York, Newark, or Philadelphia to allow historians to make any generalizations.

Further study of teachers’ unions is necessary to augment our understanding of public sector unions since the 1960s. Indeed, if it is necessary for us to integrate the experience of public workers into our narrative of post-World War II labor history to accurately understand that history, as Joseph McCartin has argued, it is likewise true that we cannot do so without coming to terms with the history of teachers’ unions, which were often at the forefront of public

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sector unionism. The trajectory of teachers’ unions closely matched that of public sector unionism in general. Understanding teacher union growth in the 1960s and the resistance that they first began to experience in the 1970s helps us better grasp the accomplishments, failures, and unrealized promise of public sector unionism.

The story of the BTU mirrors that of the unions of other teachers and public workers. The BTU experienced a surge of members in the 1960s, adding members to its roll at a time when the Boston was losing unionized industrial jobs. It ran into problems during the economic and political conflicts of the 1970s. And, by 1981, it was moving into a period of retrenchment as Reaganism pushed the nation’s political culture in a more conservative direction. The history of the BTU, then, gives us an important window into the dynamics that shaped public employee unionism in general during these decades.

Understanding public sector unionism and its relationship to the more densely studied civil rights struggle in turn allows us to better grasp the common dynamics that shaped these two movements, which arguably did the most to transform America in the 1960s and 70s. Public sector unionism and civil rights activism followed similar trajectories. Each employed tactics of civil disobedience and political activism to build large membership organizations, force political change, and win legislative reforms. Each relied on liberal allies to achieve their ends. Each arose in a context when economic growth and a rising concern for rights created a favorable political climate. And, each ran into increasing resistance after having made their biggest breakthroughs and once the favorable economic climate of the 1960s and early 1970s gave way to one of stagnation by the mid-1970s. Teachers unions and civil rights organizations often

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turned to each other for support in the early 1960s. Unions invoked the language of rights to
criticize laws that enforced “second class citizenship” on teachers by refusing to grant their right
to bargain collectively or strike. Civil rights activists in turn counted on contributions of money
and volunteers from organizations like the United Federation of Teachers to help them in the
fight for voting rights in the South. Yet these synergies and similarities never blossomed into a
firm alliance, as this dissertation argues, because the goals of these movements were never fully
aligned and because they drew on very different forms of liberalism whose conflicting
worldviews and priorities were not reconciled in the tumultuous years of the 1970s.

The second area of scholarship to which this dissertation contributes deals with 1970s
American urban history in general and the history of Boston in particular. Despite the fact that
Boston’s racial problems and segregated schools were not unique, the city’s collective response
to court-ordered desegregation solidified Boston’s image as a racist city. This is an image most
studies of this period address. J. Anthony Lukas’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Common Ground*
(1986), often the first book mentioned by those familiar with this era of Boston’s history, is no
exception. Lukas’s work dominates this field, using the stories of three families, two white,
one black, to personalize his presentation of school desegregation. The result is an extensive
analysis of the impact of those years on the city at large. Lukas presents the individual’s
experience of school desegregation; in doing so, he personalizes the sensational events and
headlines that dominated this era.

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It is important to note, however, that many black Bostonians do not deem *Common Ground* an accurate portrayal of the black experience during school desegregation, and maintain that the black family whose story Lukas chronicled in the book reinforced racial stereotypes. In addition, many local civil rights leaders believe that Lukas gave the longer fight for school desegregation so little attention as to denigrate the efforts of black Bostonians to integrate the schools. Ruth Batson, one of the leaders of the movement to desegregate the schools, stated that “When the book was first published, many of us who had labored long and hard in the battle for educational equity felt as if we had been cut off at our knees,” and that “Over the years, I have taken every opportunity to dispel the myths in *Common Ground* and to expose Lukas as a faulty historian. It had been [sic] like swimming against a strong tide....”\(^{20}\)

The other major studies of Boston school desegregation, though varied in approach, have one unifying theme: understanding white opposition to student busing. The earliest studies, Jon Hillson’s *Battle of Boston* (1977) and Alan Lupo’s *Liberty’s Chosen Home* (1977), were written while the city was still struggling with almost daily acts of racial violence and disruption in the schools over busing. Hillson and Lupo, both journalists, portray white anti-busers as unequivocally racist.\(^{21}\) The distinction that Lupo makes is his attempt to explain the development of this racism through an analysis of deeply entrenched ethnic and class conflict between the Yankee elite and Irish and Italian immigrants that dated back to the nineteenth

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This emphasis on ethnic division in Boston is the focus of a study written by Emmet Buell and Richard Brisbin Jr. in their *School Desegregation and Defended Neighborhoods* (1982). Buell and Brisbin use the analytic model of the “defended neighborhood” to emphasize the importance of social class, and specifically the strong opposition to government interference predominant in Boston’s white working class neighborhoods. While Buell and Brisbin do not exclude racial motives for opposition to busing, J. Brian Sheehan’s *The Boston School Integration Dispute* (1984) criticizes suburban elites for their self-righteous condemnation of working class whites as racists. Though Sheehan does not deny that racism was a major factor for opposition to student busing, he argues that the mantle of “racist” was used by the business elite, ensconced safely in suburbia and thus immune to busing orders, to immediately discredit white Bostonians’ opposition.

Three other studies analyze white opposition to school desegregation through a study of city leaders. In Michael Ross and William Berg’s study, “*I Respectfully Disagree With the Judge’s Order*” (1981), the focus is on the failure of elected officials to take a firm stand in support of student busing. From the quote by President Gerald R. Ford, that the authors use in their title, to the lack of firm support for desegregation by Mayor Kevin White, Ross and Berg credit a lack of clear leadership in giving the anti-busing movement false hope that the court’s orders could be overturned. D. Garth Taylor takes the leaders of the anti-busing movement to

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24 J. Brian Sheehan, *The Boston School Integration Dispute*, 70.

25 J. Michael Ross and William M. Berg, “*I Respectfully Disagree With the Judge’s Order*”, 11-12.
task in his *Public Opinion and Collective Action* (1986).\(^{26}\) Taylor argues that whites who felt powerless in the face of government intervention were manipulated by these anti-busing leaders who emphasized racial fears. A study by Stephen Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo* (1998), takes a comparative approach, concluding that school desegregation in Buffalo proceeded much more smoothly than it did in Boston due to the presence of black elected officials among Buffalo city leaders.\(^ {27}\) Boston had no blacks elected to municipal office in 1974. Taylor argues that elected officials in Buffalo helped to ease the desegregation process, and were more cooperative than their counterparts in Boston. To varying degrees, all three of these studies conclude that in the absence of strong municipal leadership in support of school desegregation, chaotic opposition reigned in Boston.

Ronald Formisano’s historical study, *Boston Against Busing* (1991), though critical of Lupo, Hillson, Sheehan, D. Garth Taylor, and Buell and Brisban for placing too strong an emphasis on white racism, draws upon many of these author’s earlier arguments.\(^ {28}\) Formisano uses class, ethnicity, and religion in his analysis of the anti-busing movement, and more than any of the earlier studies, he attempts to explain reasons other than racism for white opposition to student busing. Like other authors, he emphasizes deeply entrenched neighborhood boundaries and describes the anger of lower and working class whites who felt manipulated by the judicial system. But unlike earlier studies, he presents the anti-busing movement as more than a one-

\(^{27}\) Steven J.L. Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo*, 192.
\(^{28}\) Formisano’s *Boston Against Busing* was the first major study to examine the history of Boston school desegregation with a keener eye toward race, class, and ethnicity, and how those elements influenced school desegregation. Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
dimensional force, characterizing it as a form of “reactionary populism.” Formisano grants that some in the anti-busing movement were racist, but he argues that the majority of protestors were motivated by a sense of powerlessness.

While these authors make essential contributions to the history of Boston school desegregation, their focus on white resistance sets up busing as the focal point of the narrative. Certainly, busing was the dominant issue that polarized the community, as citizens reacted to a perceived physical threat to neighborhood turf. But presenting one component of the court’s plan as the overarching theme of school desegregation in Boston necessarily narrows their field of vision. As Ruth Batson’s earlier quotation suggests, the decision in Morgan v. Hennigan was the result of over a decade of formal challenges to the Boston School Committee organized by the black community and the NAACP. And though the despised busing plan dominated the remedies ordered by the court, other orders, such as matching feeder patterns in all city schools and imposing hiring orders to raise the number of black teachers in the school system brought additional large scale changes to the administration of the schools. The result of Morgan v. Hennigan was more than just student busing and white opposition. Court-ordered school

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29 Formisano uses the term “populist” to describe anti-busers, and he acknowledges that it was not a reformist movement, for anti-busers simply wanted a return to the status quo.

desegregation in Boston also raised workplace issues and demanded new patterns of employment and workplace authority.

The focus on white opposition also neglects the experience of the black community during the years of court involvement. And though a cursory review of the black community’s challenges to Boston’s segregated schools in the 1960s are usually included as background to discussing Morgan v. Hennigan, few studies have placed the focus entirely on those efforts. The result, according to Jeanne Theoharis, is that most authors present Boston school desegregation “as the result of a benevolent white judge instead of an organized black community.”

Even Lukas was, at times, susceptible to this fallacy. In an article he drafted while working on Common Ground, Lukas stated that “Blacks to be sure, took the initiative in the fight to desegregate Boston’s schools,” but “it was the Irish who introduced and enforced busing in Boston.” It is little wonder that some of Boston’s civil rights leaders felt affronted by Lukas’ work.

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32 Theoharis, “ ‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South,” 144.

The other problem that comes from focusing on white resistance is that it turns our attention away from the long-standing structural problems that led to racial inequality in the schools. Racial tensions were, of course, already high wherever blacks and whites attended school together, well before students were bused. The first black student boycott of the schools occurred in 1963, and black student protests over issues ranging from the dress code to disciplinary procedures led to multiple student boycotts and walkouts in the early 1970s. In addition, the issue of community control of the schools dominated separate racially charged episodes in 1968 and 1971. Written accounts of the schools during these years confirm the problem of race in Boston’s schools prior to *Morgan v. Hennigan*. Jonathan Kozol’s *Death at an Early Age* (1967) describes, in wrenching detail, the state of Boston’s predominantly black schools in the mid-1960s. Writing about his experience teaching a fourth grade class at the Gibson School in 1964, he describes a dilapidated and dangerous school building, an outdated curriculum, and an almost hopeless atmosphere. Peter Schrag’s *Village School Downtown* (1968) is a portrait of the Boston school system during the same time period. Schrag criticizes the Boston School Committee for its failure to acknowledge *de facto* segregation in the schools and his analysis includes enrollment levels, curriculum, and even a brief discussion of the teaching staff.

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34 Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967). Kozol was fired in the spring of his first year at the Gibson School for teaching a poem outside the official curriculum, Langston Hughes’s, “Ballad of the Landlord.”

35 Peter Schrag, *Village School Downtown: Boston Schools, Boston Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968). Schrag describes a teaching staff that is overwhelmingly dominated by native Boston Irish Catholics, all entering the profession from just a handful of local teacher colleges. He also characterizes many of the female teachers as “spinsters;” Boston had only begun to allow married women to retain their teaching positions in 1953. Kozol’s depiction of white teachers at the Gibson School is also unflattering; he describes a white teaching staff that is both unable and unwilling to understand the needs of black students.
But the schools were not the only area where racial tensions were felt in the city prior to school desegregation, as Boston experienced similar racial growing pains to those found in other Northern cities at the time.\footnote{See Thomas Sugrue, \textit{Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North} (New York: Random House, 2008). Sugrue presents the history of the Civil Rights movement in the cities, towns, and suburbs across the North. Two other works present a more focused case study of this same time period: Matthew Countryman, \textit{Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) and Craig Wilder, \textit{A Covenant With Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). See also Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespin, eds., \textit{The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).} For example, an urban renewal plan to create a “New Boston” transformed the city’s economic prospects in the 1950s and 1960s, but it also wreaked havoc on poor, working-class neighborhoods.\footnote{Boston’s urban renewal plan, promoted and begun in the 1950s by Mayor John B. Hynes and continued in the 1960s by Mayor John Collins aimed to change the city’s image from that of a hopeless backwater town to a thriving metropolis. See Thomas H. O’Connor, \textit{Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950-1970} (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993).} John B. Hynes, mayor of Boston from 1950 to 1960, unabashedly promoted slum clearance, and his administration was responsible for the destruction of entire neighborhoods, displacing poor, working-class Bostonians and increasing racial segregation in the city.\footnote{The West End, home to approximately twenty-three thousand ethnically diverse residents in the early 1950s, was completely demolished under the auspices of the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 1958. In \textit{Chain of Change}, Mel King recalls growing up in the South End, a similarly diverse neighborhood transformed by urban renewal.} At the same time Boston’s black population grew considerably, expanding from 3.1 percent in 1940 to 9.1 percent in 1960. By 1970, black Bostonians comprised 16.3 percent of the city’s population.\footnote{Thernstrom, \textit{The Other Bostonians}, 179.} Mayor Kevin White, elected in 1968, was more responsive to the black community than his predecessors, though his efforts to improve the housing situation for black residents transformed another long-established ethnic neighborhood in Boston. Mattapan, home to the city’s Jewish community and the area designated by the
Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group (B-Burg) for new mortgages for black citizens, witnessed the mass exodus of Jewish residents as new black homeowners settled in the neighborhood.40

The simultaneous development of Boston’s urban renewal program and the expansion of the black population resulted in the consolidation of black inner-city neighborhoods that witnessed riots in 1967 and 1968. In Boston Riots, Jack Tager describes a black population concentrated in urban ghettos and frustrated by discrimination and a lack of political power.41 He chronicles a four-day riot that began in 1967 with a sit-in demonstration by a group of welfare mothers in Roxbury over grievances regarding the welfare system. Tager also describes the riots that erupted the following year after the death of Martin Luther King, arguing that the use of violence “demonstrated the sense of despair and powerlessness of the black poor.”42 The problem of race, then, was hardly new to Boston in 1974.

Boston, like other major urban centers, was contending with multiple problems at the same time. Beginning in the 1950s, city leaders struggled with how to balance urban renewal, needed by the municipal government to generate economic growth, and urban poverty, exacerbated by the departure of industrial jobs to the outer suburbs. Even while the decisions of municipal leaders exacerbated black and white segregation in housing and education, as a northern city, Boston’s leaders still managed to claim that blacks enjoyed equal access to city services. Bostonians could point to the South and tout their own moral supremacy, but the actual

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42 Ibid., 184; Lukas’s Common Ground also chronicles the riots following the death of Dr. King.
experience of black citizens in 1950s and 1960s Boston contradicted any idea of equal rights. In this, Boston followed the same pattern as other large urban centers.

For Boston, the civil rights movement began in earnest with the fight to have the Boston School Committee acknowledge that *de facto* segregation existed in the schools. The committee’s resistance to such an admission fueled the civil rights movement, acting as a touchstone for all the city was failing to do for its black citizens. Within the same few years that this movement emerged, the BTU was elected as the sole bargaining agent for the city’s teachers. And though the union did not exclude black members, the teaching force was overwhelmingly white; the union could hardly be referred to as an interracial asset.43

Without doubt, the decision in *Morgan v. Hennigan* provoked a strong reaction among Bostonians. This dissertation will argue that the reaction of the city’s teachers roughly mirrored the division in the city at large. The Boston Teachers Union maintained a neutral response to school desegregation, and worked to use the spotlight on the schools to promote reforms in education. Yet while the BTU officially steered a moderate course and advocated reform, its defense of traditional tenets of trade unionism, like seniority, caused internal divisions, especially between older, white teachers and newer black hires. This is where teacher unionism and Boston’s civil rights movement collided.44

The dissertation is organized in five chapters. Chapter One will provide a brief overview of the Boston public schools and its teaching staff in the postwar years, and then focus on the

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43 Alan Gartner, chairman of Boston CORE, estimated in 1963 that out of 3,000 faculty member in the school system, only 30 to 40 were black. Alan Gartner, “Hearing to NAACP, June 11, 1963,” School Committee Minutes and Administrative Records, City of Boston Archives, Boston, Massachusetts, 56.

44 One recent work studying this conflict between labor rights and civil rights is Dennis Deslippe’s *Protesting Affirmative Action: The Struggle Over Equality After the Civil Rights Revolution.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). He doesn’t do an adequate job covering public sector unions; my work here adds to that hole in the literature.
conflict between the black community and the Boston School Committee over the existence of *de facto* segregation in Boston. Chapter Two will discuss the rise of the Boston Teacher’s Union, from early organizing efforts to the BTU’s election as sole bargaining agent for the city’s teachers in 1965. Chapter Three investigates racial problems in the schools in the late 1960s. This chapter will demonstrate how the trajectories of teacher unionism and the civil rights movement began to overlap in Boston, with the rise of community control. Chapter Four covers the years just prior to court-ordered busing, when the BTU was making its first attempts to assert itself more powerfully to the Boston School Committee and the black community was still calling for an end to *de facto* segregation. The complicated intersection of school reform based on civil rights and a teacher’s union committed to the tenets of trade unionism will be the focus of Chapter Five, which will discuss the years of court-ordered school desegregation and close with a discussion of the teacher lay-offs in 1981. The Epilogue will discuss the current state of race and teacher unionism in Boston’s schools. This chapter will also address this study’s place within the literature on school reform, failed school reform, and re-segregation of public schools.45

The violent images of an angry white citizenry that dominate the history of Boston school desegregation have led many to believe that Boston’s problems were unique. They were not. A slightly longer and more inclusive view of the history of school desegregation—and its intersection with the story of teacher unionism—reveals that, far from unique, Boston was strongly influenced by the two most significant social movements of the 1960s in ways that

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resembled the experiences of other urban centers. Understanding the ways that these two movements interacted with one another sheds light on one of the most important arenas of conflict in American political urban history since the 1960s: the politics of education.

In Boston, both the civil rights movement and proponents of teacher unionism found a common adversary in the Boston School Committee. But neither movement found common ground in this opposition, despite the fact that both school desegregation proponents and BTU members espoused the overall improvement of the schools as their bottom line. Many teachers took offense at the necessary criticism of the schools that came with the school desegregation movement, and the black community perceived the overwhelmingly white BTU as a blind proponent of job security without regard to the need for racial reform in the schools and within the staff. There was a clear measure of truth in the charges leveled against each movement.

The current state and future of public schools is subject to intense debate today. It is not the purview of this study to settle the issues that now define that debate. However, the pages that follow shed important light on the dual role that schools play as both areas of (or barriers to) educational opportunity and workplaces whose labor practices exert a powerful social influence well beyond the classroom. To that extent, it aspires to historicize a long-standing tension with which we must grapple if we are to align two worthy goals: reforming education in ways that help the most disadvantaged and preserving democratic traditions that honor the basic rights of workers to organize and bargain over the terms and conditions of their labor.
CHAPTER 1

THE FIGHT FOR SCHOOL INTEGRATION BEGINS: BOSTON SCHOOLS
IN THE EARLY 1960S

One notes that in Boston there are only 8,000-10,000 Negro children who must be dealt with. Therefore, we are not a New York, nor a Cleveland, nor a Chicago. It is for this reason that we feel that what should be developed is a ‘Boston Plan’ for complete school integration. We recognize that there will be many problems and disagreements that will have to be met, faced, and disposed of; but if we work together in good faith with diligence and honesty, we feel that it is possible to achieve in this city, known throughout the world as ‘The Cradle of Liberty,’ a more fully integrated school system.

--Statement presented to the Boston School Committee by the Education Committee, Boston Branch, NAACP, February 19, 1964

Of course, we have some lousy teachers, as you would have in any city. You have some people who are good and some who are not. But teachers for a long time have been very, very hostile, even black teachers, against those of us who have protested against education because they take it constantly that, “I’m not a good teacher.” But we’ve seen this thing breaking down because the younger teachers, particularly, come in all starry-eyed and wide-eyed, full of the new things they’re going to do. Pretty soon they find out that they either collaborate with the system or get out.

--Interview with community activist Ruth Batson, The Civil Rights Documentation Project, December 27, 1967

The campaign to achieve integrated schools in Boston was ten years old by the time the federal court ordered the school system to bus students in 1974. The history of the struggle in the 1960s is usually portrayed as prelude to the main event of student busing in the 1970s, but neither the opposition to school desegregation, nor the racial violence that accompanied it, began with court-ordered busing. The work of the black community and the obstinacy of the School

1 “Hearing to NAACP, June 11, 1963,” School Committee Minutes and Administrative Records, City of Boston Archives, Boston, Massachusetts.

Committee prior to 1973 reveals that race was a divisive issue for the city long before the federal court became involved. Considering the longer history of the fight to desegregate the schools, the violent protests in the 1970s were not the main event in the school desegregation battle, but only a final, desperate attempt by the anti-busing movement to avoid integration at any cost.

This chapter will focus on Boston’s early desegregation fight, which framed the civil rights movement in Boston and also drew the battle lines over student busing in the 1970s. The state of the schools in the early 1960s will be presented, followed by a discussion of the first formal challenge the NAACP made to the Boston School Committee in 1963. The refusal of the Boston School Committee to admit the existence of *de facto* segregation and the efforts of the black community to keep pressure on the school system will be followed by a description of the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act, passed in 1965 and flouted by the School Committee. The chapter will conclude with a look at how the black community worked to sustain its movement to desegregate the schools in an increasingly hostile atmosphere in which teachers largely played the role of bystanders.

In June 1963, at the time of the first formal meeting between the NAACP and the Boston School Committee, the school system was experiencing problems common to many urban education systems. Overcrowded schools, reading and math scores below the national average, and a deteriorating physical plant were only part of the problem. The schools also faced challenges unique to Boston. The School Committee, a five-member body elected at-large every two years, had a stronger reputation as a stepping stone to higher political office than as a body primarily concerned with the welfare of the students and schools. Older, single Irish women
largely comprised the teaching staff, and many observers accused the staff of being out-of-touch with student needs. Moreover, there was little diversity in the student bodies of individual schools. In a city divided into distinct ethnic neighborhoods, black students were no more likely to attend school with white students than Italians from East Boston would be inclined to mingle with the Irish of South Boston.

Boston historian Thomas O’Connor discussed the development of Boston’s ethnic neighborhoods in his *South Boston, My Hometown* (1994). He argues that the founding of distinct ethnic neighborhoods in 19th century Boston was as much an invention of native Bostonians, who were keen to see the “the poorest of the immigrants” move out of their “squalid shacks along the waterfront” and away from the heart of downtown Boston, as it was a product of new immigrants seeking a familiar ethnic community. O’Connor writes that Boston’s “city of neighborhoods” encouraged a strong clannishness in each urban district, as successive generations grew up in separate neighborhoods designed for different people with different backgrounds. “Well into the twentieth century,” according to O’Connor, “people in neighborhoods such as South Boston grew up with the knowledge and reassurance that this was the way it ought to be. [emphasis in the original]”

Boston’s black population was not nearly as large as it was in other major northern urban centers, but its growth in the postwar years was significant. Blacks comprised only 3.1 percent of the city’s population in 1940, and expanded to 9.1 percent in 1960, rising from just over 20,000 to just over 60,000 in twenty years. At the same time, the white population of the city

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4 Ibid., 127.
5 Ibid.
decreased as residents who could afford to move left for the suburbs. In the 1950s, the white population declined by 13 percent, and in the 1960s, it shrank an additional 8.1 percent. By 1970, as the total population continued to fall, the black population grew even larger, to 16.3 percent, or 104,707 out of the city’s total population of 641,071. This figure trails the percentage of blacks in other northern urban centers in 1970, such as New York’s 21.2 percent, Cleveland’s 38.3 percent, and Chicago’s 32.7 percent. Yet even though the percentage was smaller in Boston, the dramatic increase in the city’s black population between 1940 and 1970 was noticeable citywide.

The black population’s growth was particularly noticeable in the public schools. Tahi Mottl, who conducted interviews for her dissertation on black community activism in the 1960s, includes the quote of one black Bostonian who attended public schools in the decade after World War I. He stated, “There weren’t enough black kids to make a school. There might have been a school with a lot of black children in it, but there were also lots of whites, too. This is probably why you didn’t hear a lot of protest. There weren’t significant numbers of us.” By the 1960s, though, the black population rose high enough to create schools that were almost entirely black, a pattern encouraged by Boston’s strict neighborhood boundary lines and the fact that there were only a handful of areas that blacks claimed as their own.

A study commissioned to analyze racial imbalance in Massachusetts schools, based on a 1964 school census, determined that “most Negro children in Massachusetts attend

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7 Thernstrom, The Other Bostonians, 179.

8 Tahi Lani Mottl, “Social Conflict and Social Movements,” 72. Mottl did not use the names of any of her interview sources.
predominantly Negro schools while the overwhelming majority of white children attend schools that are either all white or have fewer than five nonwhite children enrolled.”

Furthermore, out of fifty-five schools pronounced “racially imbalanced” statewide, forty-five of those schools were in Boston. Indeed, an October 1965 city census revealed that there were 21,097 nonwhite students out of a total enrollment of 91,800, and of that nonwhite population, 16,308 students attended majority black schools. By the 1964-1965 school year, though the city population was roughly 12 percent black, black students comprised 23 percent of total enrollment, as many white children attended private and parochial schools.

In the early 1960s, black Bostonians were concentrated primarily in the South End, Roxbury, North Dorchester and Mattapan neighborhoods of the city. The residential patterns alone were enough to create segregated schools, but the system also had a mix of different feeder patterns that solidified segregation. Predominantly white elementary schools, for example, might run from 1st to 6th grade and feed into a predominantly white high school that included grades 7 through 12. Predominantly black schools, on the other hand, would be structured differently, perhaps running 1st through 5th grade, with students then entering a middle school before heading into a high school that began with grade 9. Patterns varied citywide, and Robert Dentler estimated that in the early 1960s, the school system included up to thirteen different grade structures. He suggests the feeder patterns initially developed as a way to ease overcrowding,
but black citizens saw in this seemingly haphazard system, an effort to manipulate the schools to ensure separate facilities for black and white students.

The majority of those facilities, the school buildings, were in serious disrepair in the 1960s. Mel King, a well-known, prominent black community activist in the city, described Boston’s school buildings as “the great relics of a distant age looming overhead like fortresses or jails.”

Jonathan Kozol, a young white teacher whose chronicle of working in a Roxbury school in 1964 would become a national bestseller, described teaching in a converted auditorium with inadequate partitions; Kozol also reported broken windows, unsanitary bathrooms and dangerous repairs throughout the school. These assessments were not new; Ruth Batson, a black community activist who was the chair of the local NAACP Boston chapter’s education committee in the early 1960s, recalled that the earliest complaints registered by black parents in the 1950s regarded the physical condition of the schools. According to Batson, “Many of the complaints centered around the safety of the schools. Some had auditoriums located on the top floor—all the floors and stairs were wooden. Parents said that the Custodian would soak these areas with oil in order to achieve a shine. The parents feared that this practice would cause a fire. There were no fire escapes and children would be trapped in the auditorium.”

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13 King was born in Boston’s South End neighborhood and has lived there his entire life. A community organizer and activist, King ran—unsuccessfully—for a seat on the Boston School Committee in 1962, 1963, and 1965. He served as a state representative from 1973-1982. King created the Community Fellows Program (CFP) in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT in 1970, and served as an adjunct professor and director of the CFP from 1970 to 1996. During his 1983 mayoral campaign, King developed the Rainbow Coalition theme that was then adopted by Jesse Jackson in his 1984 presidential campaign. Melvin H. King, “Boston Schools,” Bay State Banner, October 9, 1965, 1.

14 Kozol’s account, Death at an Early Age, received the 1968 National Book Award in Science, Philosophy, and Religion; since that time Kozol has established himself as a leading education writer and advocate for equal opportunities in public schools regardless of race or economic background.

15 Batson also served as the chairwoman of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) from 1963 to 1966. Between 1966 and 1970, she served first as assistant and then as executive director of the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO). She held several positions at Boston University.
In addition to the lack of proper maintenance of the school buildings, the administration failed to keep up with the need to build more schools. No new public high schools were built in the city of Boston between 1934 and 1973, and many of the 130 buildings built between 1870 and 1911 were still in use, and in a state of disrepair.\textsuperscript{16} Alan Gartner, chairman of Boston CORE, cited the 1962 Sargent Report on the physical condition of schools in his statement before the Boston School Committee in June 1963. The facts were striking; the report stated that “one-half of the elementary school buildings in Roxbury are more than 60 years old and one-quarter are over 75 years old.” Gartner continued, “For comparison we might note that 38% of the schools in the city as a whole are over 50 years old. Only three elementary school buildings have been constructed since World War I in Roxbury, and only one within the last 30 years.”\textsuperscript{17} Most of these schools did not include even a basic library, a lunch room, or a gymnasium.

School supplies were often scarce. Textbooks, where available, were often worn and dated. Journalist Peter Schrag wrote in his study of the school system, “At one predominantly Negro school a high-ranking administration official told complaining parents that textbooks were not really necessary as long as a teacher was in the classroom.”\textsuperscript{18} Ruth Batson also recalled one particular parent’s complaint: “A mother mailed me a copy of her son’s test paper and wrote on


\textsuperscript{17}Statement by Alan Gartner, Chairman of Boston CORE, “Hearing to NAACP, June 11, 1963,” School Committee Minutes, 52. The Sargent Report was a survey conducted in 1962 by the Harvard Center for Field Studies for the Boston Redevelopment Authority of buildings in the Roxbury-North Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston.

\textsuperscript{18}Peter Schrag, \textit{Village School Downtown}, 74.
the bottom ‘please turn over.’ I found that the test had been given on the back of a Krueger Beer order pad. The mother said that when she went up to the school to complain the teacher told her that she could not get supplies and was given these pads by a friend to use in the classroom.”

Although these problems were not unique to Boston, the city had its own set of challenges, beginning with its teaching staff. Schrag accused teachers of relying heavily on old-fashioned teaching methods, and compared the teachers to the dated school buildings, stating that “both have suffered, and survived, the ravages of time.” Robert Dentler and Marvin Scott were even less kind in their description; they characterized the teaching staff in the 1960s as “poorly prepared, underpaid, indifferently managed, and subject to manipulation as the carriers of the patronage support structure.” The authors also maintained that between the end of the Depression and through the 1960s, “the school staff became extremely inbred,” with about 90 percent of the staff trained at Boston Teachers College (the school was later named Boston State College). Almost all these teachers were born and raised in Boston, and “senior administrators were drawn either from those ranks or from a small elite of graduate students supplied by Boston College.” This led to an insular and mostly homogenous teacher force.

Of Boston’s approximately 4,000 teachers in 1965, two-thirds were women, one-fourth were over fifty-five years old, and the entire staff was almost completely white. Alan Gartner estimated in 1963 that there were 30 to 40 black teachers out of 3000 faculty members in the

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19 Batson, “The METCO Story,”
20 Schrag, Village School Downtown, 75.
21 Dentler and Scott, Schools on Trial, 9.
22 Ibid., 62.
23 Schrag, Village School Downtown, 75.
Adding in teaching assistants and support staff brought the number of black workers to around 125 out of a school staff of roughly 5,000, still a significantly low proportion. Clearly, the percentage of black teachers did not grow as rapidly as the percentage of black students had in the postwar years. The primary reason for this discrepancy was that many teaching jobs were patronage positions, an almost insurmountable hurdle for black teachers since blacks had yet to win many significant positions in city government. In the mid-1950s, one black teacher described the school staff in this manner: “Discrimination was clear. There were no black guidance counsellors [sic]; no black administrators; only a couple of assistant principals, all female; nobody on the board of superintendents; no black secretaries working for the school department; no lunchroom personnel; no blacks in civil service jobs; school nurses; few black janitors; no black attendance officers. Some of the jobs are patronage jobs and most of them pay good money. It was a closed shop, like the trades.”

For black teachers, these challenges in hiring persisted throughout the 1960s. In a 1966 letter to the editor of the *Bay State Banner*, a weekly newspaper that served Boston’s black community, a black teacher discussed the difficulty she faced in her attempt to be hired within the Boston Public Schools. She wrote, “At the school I am presently teaching, I asked other teachers if they know

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24 Gartner, “Hearing to NAACP, June 11, 1963,” School Committee Minutes, 56. Gartner’s estimate, though small, constitutes significant growth in black teacher numbers considering what Tahi Mottl found, in interviewing a black teacher who taught in the Boston Schools in the years following World War I. Mottl quoted this teacher, writing, “the woman could recall only two or three black teachers (all women) in the city of Boston.” Mottl, “Social Conflict and Social Movements,” 70. The school department did not keep official records on teacher hires and race until after the federal courts were involved, so only estimates are available in these earlier years; Gartner based his figures on the city census.


26 Mottl, “Social Conflict and Social Movements,” 84-85
of anyone who had gotten into the Boston School System. It turned out that one from this school had, two years ago. How? ‘Pull’ they quite frankly told me.”

The center of this political maze was the Boston School Committee. The committee, established in 1789 just after the state passed legislation requiring every town to support an elementary school, adapted often over the years to support changing political interests. The most recent formal change for the committee occurred in 1949, when the state legislature ruled that the committee include five members, each serving two year terms. The requirement that the members be elected at-large made it nearly impossible for the black community to elect one of its own to the board.

As the Irish came to dominate Boston politics and created their own machine in the early decades of the twentieth century, so too did they control the Boston School Committee. In fact, between 1942 and 1980 there were only four members who were not Irish, and between 1920 and 1980, all of the committee-appointed superintendents were Catholic; only one of these was not Irish. Schrag quoted a “leading critic” of the administration, “himself a Catholic,” who stated in 1965 that to succeed in the Boston schools, “you have to be a Catholic. It would be unthinkable to hire a non-Catholic as superintendent. This is a closed system. They never go outside and they never let outsiders in.” The insular nature of the school administration only contributed to its knee jerk defensiveness in the face of criticism, especially in the battle over desegregation.

29 Schrag, Village School Downtown, 56.
Throughout the 1960s, the Boston School Committee devoted most of their meeting time to school personnel matters. Public meetings were frequently delayed while committee members privately debated the superintendent’s recommendations on new hires and promotions. Teachers who attended committee members’ political fund-raisers, or sold tickets to these types of events, were better positioned for promotions within the system.\(^{30}\) According to Joseph Cronin, “The culture supported a school board that mainly made decisions about employees, their jobs, and careers.”\(^{31}\)

Not surprisingly, critics of the School Committee claimed it was seriously out of touch with the educational needs of Boston students. Yet despite the obvious problems in the schools, the committee continued to cite “our wonderful system” and “our dedicated teachers” seemingly more out of habit than out of sincerity. Mel King remarked that “whenever you criticize the schools you run into the old problem: Everybody has a brother or a cousin who works for the School Department, and they all think the schools are wonderful.”\(^{32}\) And if some of the teachers were criticized for being old-fashioned, certain members of the school board seemed completely out of touch with reality. When the NAACP first challenged the system’s segregated schools, Joseph Lee, a School Committee member since the early forties and the lone Yankee of the group, wrote in a letter to the state Commissioner of Education that Boston Public Schools have integrated schools in Roxbury “so perfectly that they are now practically all-colored.”\(^{33}\) Such a statement lends credence to two different observations of School Committee meetings in

\(^{30}\) These fund-raisers were sometimes described as receptions, birthday parties, or testimonials. Cronin, *Reforming Boston Schools*, 154.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 12.

the mid-1960s. In 1965, Mel King stated “There is such a bizarre, circus quality to the Committee meetings that a reasonable person could not make sense of them.” That same year, Schrag’s observation was that it was “impossible adequately to describe these meetings: they are, among other things, filled with lengthy ex cathedra declarations on almost every topic imaginable; they are frequently irrelevant, and they are constantly, pathetically, amusing.” But no matter how the meetings were characterized, the committee still wielded almost absolute power over the running of the city schools, and to the citizens who elected the members, the School Committee was their line of defense in the face of black citizens urging school integration and student busing.

The NAACP’s first formal meeting with the Boston School Committee was on June 11, 1963. The Education Committee of the Boston branch had already approached the Massachusetts Commission Against Defamation and Attorney General Edward McCormack’s Advisory Committee on Civil Rights to seek support for their arguments as they brought their case to Superintendent Frederick Gillis. Yet when the Education Committee met privately with Superintendent Gillis in March 1962, its members were unable to convince him that Boston schools were segregated. After releasing its own report on the state of Boston schools in May 1963, which cited lower expenditures per student, lower test scores, and generally “deplorable”

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conditions in predominantly black schools, the Boston School Committee granted the Education Committee a hearing the following month.\(^{37}\)

Black parents’ dissatisfaction with the schools was not a new issue in the early 1960s. Ruth Batson had been listening to black parent complaints since the late 1940s. Batson, a parent with children in the Boston schools, recalled the events that led to her initial step toward activism:

I happened to be talking on the phone with this friend, who lived in a white section in Boston. Somehow or another—you know how parents turn and talk to children while they are on the phone—I heard her say something about a science project to her child. The child was in the same grade that my middle daughter was. So, I started to wonder why my daughter did not have a science project. When I questioned her and found that there was no such thing happening in her school, I went to the principal, I went to the teacher, and I was given the assurance that there was no such thing as a special curriculum for one school and not for the other. Then, a couple weeks after that, I noticed that my daughter had a science project. I felt that this was very good and that I had accomplished something. Then, my daughter began to complain that she couldn’t understand why she was the only one that had to have a science project. At first, I shrugged it off, because, when you have three little kids, you get busy, and you don’t have any money, and you just have enough problems trying to live; never mind getting into other things. But I couldn’t shake it; I couldn’t shake this thing.\(^{38}\)

The first school reform group she joined in the late 1940s was called the Parents Federation.

When the group was publicly denounced for admitting Communist members, it disbanded in the early 1950s.\(^{39}\) Batson then turned to the local branch of the NAACP, but was told by President Lionel Lindsay that the Education Committee’s duties only included counseling students for


\(^{38}\) Transcript of a Recorded Interview with Mrs. Ruth M. Batson, The Civil Rights Documentation Project, December 27, 1967, Ruth M. Batson Papers.

college and promoting scholarships. One day after her meeting with Lindsay, he called and asked her to head a subcommittee that would be called the Public School Committee.40

Given the overall decline of the schools, critics of the NAACP from both the black and white communities questioned why black parents would want their children to integrate white schools that were believed to be struggling as much as predominantly black schools. Schrag pronounced in his study that “Negroes have no corner on deprivation,” and that “in a system like Boston’s, almost every child is deprived.”41 Yet the problem, according to Batson, was that the school department claimed all students were treated the same citywide, and black parents knew that it was not true.42 Furthermore, in a speech given during the March for Civil Rights in Boston in 1965, which was attended by Martin Luther King, Jr., Batson stated plainly that “hard knocks and experience has taught us that where there is a majority of the white citizenry there is a majority of the concern.”43

At the June 1963 meeting, the Education Committee’s presentation included statements from representatives from many different organizations throughout the city. After the NAACP statement was read, five parents of children currently enrolled in the schools spoke, followed by three members of the clergy, Alan Gartner of CORE, Noel Day, Executive Director of St. Mark’s Social Center in Roxbury, Christopher Hayes, chairman of the Youth Education-Recreation

40 Ibid. In 1960, the Public School Committee was elevated as the main Education Committee, and the old Education Committee became a subcommittee.
41 Schrag, Village School Downtown, 77.
42 According to Batson, during the 1950s, most black parents thought the answer to the problems in their childrens’ schools was to organize on a school by school basis. But no matter the problem or the style of the approach, “the answer was always the same—there is no difference in the way we treat our white children.” Batson, “The METCO Story,” Ruth M. Batson Papers. See also O’Connell, “The Reform Group,” 137. He states, “In the relatively peaceful days before 1963, principals of the schools in the Negro areas of the city belonged to the NAACP. Members of the school system insisted there were no differences between children in the Boston public schools, and it appeared that no one had any clear idea of how many Negro children there were in the schools.”
Committee of the South End Planning Council, Herbert Gleason, president of Citizens for the Boston Public Schools, Sumner Rosen, American Veteran’s Committee, Julius Bernstein, Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Committee of the AFL-CIO, Howard Whiteside of the American Civil Liberties Union, Robert Segal of the Jewish Community Group, and Harry Elam of the Bay State Law Society. Each speaker emphasized the need to correct the inequalities in the schools, relating statistics, personal stories, and support for the NAACP’s arguments.

The NAACP’s statement included fourteen points that addressed the most serious concerns of black parents. Ruth Batson called them “demands,” stating “I know that the word demand is a word that is disliked by many public officials, but I am afraid that it is too late for pleading, begging, requesting, or even reasoning.” The first demand, calling for the recognition that de facto segregation existed in the schools, became the center of the debate between the two parties. Though the School Committee showed flexibility in responding to almost all the other points, the issue of de facto segregation was one both sides refused to drop. Over the next few years, mention of the phrase scared and infuriated white residents, and served as a rallying cry that spurred the desegregation movement in the black community.

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44 Batson told members of the School Committee that many parents she spoke to were hesitant to speak publicly, fearing reprisals against their children who were still in school. “Hearing to NAACP,” School Committee Minutes, June 11, 1963.

45 The fourteen points were as follows: (1) Public acknowledgement of de facto segregation; (2) a review of the system’s open enrollment plan; (3) human relations training for principals and teachers; (4) better training for prospective teachers; (5) teaching materials that included all races; (6) a developmental reading program for grades 1-8; (7) the reduction of class size and the hiring of more permanent teachers in the elementary schools; (8) expansion of guidance counseling and the hiring of new counselors; (9) expansion of vocational guidance programs; (10) an end to discrimination in the hiring of principals and teachers; (11) an investigation into the lack of black principals in the system; (12) a review of intelligence testing; (13) adoption of the Sargent Report; (14) the right to discuss the selection of a new superintendent. Batson, “Hearing to NAACP,” School Committee Minutes, June 11, 1963.

46 Ibid.
Despite overwhelming evidence revealing unequal treatment of students in predominantly white and predominantly black schools, the official response of the School Committee to the charge of *de facto* segregation was unequivocal denial. After the NAACP concluded its presentation, School Committee chairman Louise Day Hicks turned to Supt. Gillis for his opinion. She asked Dr. Gillis if he thought that *de facto* segregation existed. He replied with his own personal opinion that segregation is “something which is brought about legally.” Referring to ethnic neighborhood patterns in the city, he acknowledged that he knew what the background of students would be in each school before entering the building, stating, for example, “I know when I go into East Boston the parentage of the children who attend the East Boston schools.” After he listed the predominant ethnic background found in each Boston neighborhood, Chairman Hicks asked him, “That is your answer?” to which he replied, “That is a statement of fact.”

Hicks soon became the central figure in the School Committee’s resistance to integration. She grew up in South Boston, the daughter of a well-respected judge, William Day. Hicks entered law school in the 1950s at age 36 after having two children, and was one of only nine women in her law school class of 232 students at Boston University Law School. After graduation, she established a partnership with her brother and practiced law until running for the School Committee in 1961. Her campaign slogan was “The only mother on the ballot.” She was

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47 “Hearing to NAACP,” June 11, 1963, School Committee Minutes, 116-117.
politically ambitious, and the School Committee was a natural first step for her, as it was seen at the time as a springboard for higher office.\(^49\)

Hicks made her position clear at a special committee meeting held just a few days after the NAACP hearing: “We do not have segregated schools. We have never and do not now separate or set apart the Negro children from the white children. We do have schools which are predominantly Negro, the same as we have schools which are predominantly Irish, predominantly Italian or predominantly Chinese. However, any child is free to go to any school in this city providing there is a seat and providing that the parent will assume the responsibility of transportation.”\(^50\) She never publicly wavered from this stance.

Three other School Committee members were of like mind. Joseph Lee, a Harvard graduate and the lone Yankee of the group, descended from a Brahmin family and lived in the elite Beacon Hill neighborhood in downtown Boston.\(^51\) Lee was certain that all school children in Boston were treated exactly the same, and argued that “I think the objection, then, has been to the sameness, and it has been because it has been hard for some of the children who come from less prosperous homes to keep up with the schooling we try to give.”\(^52\) William O’Connor, a former Boston teacher, added that the school department was not a social agency and therefore could not adequately teach kids who came to school unprepared and were not supported at

\(^{49}\) She served on the School Committee until 1967, when she made a failed bid for mayor. She would go on to serve as a U.S. Congressman from 1971 to 1973, and a Boston City Council member from 1969-1971, and 1973-1981.

\(^{50}\) Hicks referred to the district’s open enrollment policy. “Hearing to Principals: Problems in Negro Districts,” June 14, 1963, School Committee Minutes, 1-2.

\(^{51}\) Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 60. Lee’s father, also named Joseph Lee, was active in many organizations in Boston, including the Immigration Restriction League.

\(^{52}\) “Hearing to Principals,” June 14, 1963, School Committee Minutes, 21.
home.\(^{53}\) As the debate over de facto segregation continued through the summer if 1963, Thomas Eisenstadt, a young attorney, said that the term \textit{de facto} segregation “means many things to many people. We’ve already agreed that some schools are predominantly Negro. Let’s not be bogged down in semantics.”\(^{54}\) While these committee members dug their heels in and only became more obstinate as the months wore on, Arthur Gartland came to be viewed as the voice of moderation, only because he consistently stated a willingness to discuss the issue of \textit{de facto} segregation with NAACP representatives. Gartland was an insurance executive who grew up in Boston, moved to a suburb, and then moved back to the city so that his son could attend the Boston Latin School.\(^{55}\)

The School Committee members, led by Hicks, also positioned themselves as the champions of school teachers in the face of criticism over school quality. In the course of the NAACP presentation, teachers and principals received some condemnation for their treatment of black pupils. Yvonne Monroe, who spoke on behalf of parents in the South End, told the School Committee “What hurts us most is the attitude of the teachers and principals in our schools. They feel that Negro children cannot learn, cannot be taught.”\(^{56}\) This echoed Ruth Batson’s statement, in which she recounted her attempt in the late 1950s to discuss the complaints of black parents with the principals of six predominantly black schools. Three of the principals denied that there were any problems in their schools, and the other three responses were hardly better, as Batson recalled:

\(^{53}\) Ibid.  
\(^{55}\) Cronin, \textit{Reforming Boston Schools}, 60. Boston Latin was (and continues to be) the crown jewel of Boston’s schools; it was founded in 1635 as the first public school in America.  
\(^{56}\) Statement of Mrs. Yvonne Monroe of the Mackey School, “Hearing to NAACP,” June 11, 1963, School Committee Minutes.
They tossed off the complaints parents had made and, in general, inferred that the NAACP was making a ‘mountain out of a molehill.’ One principal acknowledged that it could be true that his graduates, 99% Negro, might have difficulty in high school when competing with students from all over Boston, because he stated ‘Negroes do not make their kids learn.’ He said further that we should be like Jewish parents, and ‘see that our children learn.’ Another principal told me that she just didn't think that Negroes could learn at the same rate at which white children could learn. She had just left a school in Roslindale which was an all white school, and felt that she could come to this conclusion. Another principal very pleasant and affable, said that he saw no differences in children, and that he was sure that his attitude was reflected in his staff.57

Within the same statement, Batson emphasized that this attitude was not reflected by the entire faculty, and that the majority were working very hard under difficult conditions.

But the School Committee had already taken affront on behalf of the teachers. It was as if the committee members postured over the one issue they felt they could sincerely champion. The administration emphatically denied the charge that discrimination existed in hiring, instead praising the current staff at every opportunity. Superintendent Gillis’s response to the initial NAACP meeting was to tell school principals that “our admiration was heightened and increased as we learned more of the difficulties facing our teachers and our principals. Take that message back to your teachers and tell them that we are very, very proud of you and of your entire staff.”58 In the fall of 1963, as the committee continued to emphasize this issue, Batson released a statement which read, in part, “the Education Committee is most distressed about a persistent allegation which states that the NAACP has said that all teachers in Roxbury are inferior....we state emphatically that at no time has the NAACP said that teachers in Roxbury were inferior.”59

57 Batson, “Hearing to NAACP,” School Committee Minutes, June 11, 1963, 12.
58 “Hearing to Principals,” June 14, 1963, School Committee Minutes, 79.
The charge of teacher criticism would be leveled against the school integration movement for the next several years.

The NAACP kept pressure on the School Committee, assisting Rev. James Breeden, pastor of St. James’ Episcopal Church in Roxbury, in his effort to organize the first school boycott on June 18, 1963. Called the “Stay Out for Freedom Day,” approximately half of the 5000 black junior and senior high school students stayed out of school and instead attended “Freedom Schools.”61 While Superintendent Gillis called the boycott a failure, Noel Day stated that it “marked the beginning of the movement in Boston,” and called for “a large non-violent movement in the North.”62 And in one of the earliest examples of the fear-mongering speech Louise Day Hicks would use throughout the 1960s, she stated that she was “most understanding of the mothers who kept their children home because of fear of bodily harm.”63

The debate over de facto segregation continued over the summer of 1963 and into the fall, when the NAACP staged a high profile sit-in at the school department headquarters. The sit-in, which began September 5 and lasted 36 hours, was accompanied by picketing outside the school department. The demonstration appeared to unnerve School Committee members, especially Joseph Lee, who physically removed a sit-in protestor from his office. And in an apparent attempt to discredit the protestors, both Lee and Thomas Eisenstadt charged that most

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60 Rev. Breeden was also Vicar of Race Relations for his Episcopal diocese.
61 These “schools” were essentially one-day workshops for students participating in the boycott and were run by parents, ministers and community members. The curriculum included “Negro History, The Meaning of the Civil Rights Movement, the Role of the Individual in the Movement, and Freedom Songs.” “Timeline, NAACP Education Committee, June-September 1963,” Freedom House, Inc. Records; also see Seymour R. Linscott, “8260 Stay Out—But All Calm,” Boston Globe, June 19, 1963, 1,9. With a normal absenteeism rate of 2837, Linscott estimated that thousands of white students “took advantage of the Negro demonstration to skip school.”
63 Ibid.
of the demonstrators were from out of town. Eisenstadt called them “carpetbaggers” from Harlem and Birmingham whose goal was to create “disruption, ferment, and anxiety.” Kenneth Guscott, president of the NAACP’s Boston branch, vehemently denied this accusation and replied that Eisenstadt was running the “most vicious type of campaign” ever seen in the city. Recalling these months in a 1967 interview, Ruth Batson described the School Committee’s overall response as a wall of “bigotry and prejudice.” She continued, “I didn’t consider myself naive when we went before the Boston School Committee, but I was shocked. I really was. I think it’s a shock that it took me a little time to get over, because I did not expect the reaction that we got.”

The local NAACP branch turned its attention to the upcoming School Committee election, aware that the surest way to change the School Committee’s response would be to change the committee itself. Just two days before the primary vote, on September 22, 1963, black community leaders organized a March on Roxbury that drew thousands of participants. It was a time of rising emotions and frustrations for the black community. Medger Evers, the Mississippi civil rights activist, was murdered just a few months earlier, on June 12. The March on Washington had taken place on August 28th. And a church bombing in Birmingham, AL, killed four young black girls on September 15. The path of the march in Boston led participants to the dilapidated Sherwin Elementary School, a stark example of the facilities available to

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65 Ibid.
67 The *Boston Globe* reported that 6000 people marched, while the NAACP estimated there were 10,000 to 15,000 participants. Robert L. Levey, “6000 March for Rights in Boston,” September 23, 1963, 1; “Timeline, June-September 1963,” NAACP Education Committee, Freedom House, Inc., Records.
children in the predominantly black neighborhood. In front of the school, the marchers listened to several speakers, including local NAACP leaders Kenneth Guscott, Thomas Atkins, and Mel King, who was running for the School Committee for the second time.\footnote{King was a School Committee candidate in 1961; he finished seventh in the election for the five-member committee.} The fight over \textit{de facto} segregation dominated the speeches and the chants of marchers, but participants also voiced support for the national fight for civil rights and were clearly connected to that struggle. A moment of silence was observed for the four girls who were killed in the bombing of the 16\textsuperscript{th} Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, and a member of that church, attorney Orzel Billingsley, was a featured speaker. Mel King described the march in his book, \textit{Chain of Change}, as Boston’s response to the call handed down by Martin Luther King, Jr. at the March on Washington the previous month.\footnote{Mel King, \textit{Chain of Change}, 36.}

All speakers stressed the need to get black voters to the polls for the upcoming School Committee election. Atkins told the crowd, “In the last election less than 50 percent of Boston Negroes bothered, cared, or took the time to vote.”\footnote{Levey, “6000 March for Rights,” 1.} He continued, “We have not voted. We have not registered. That is why the Boston School Committee can insult us, can ignore us.”\footnote{Atkins was the local NAACP branch executive secretary. Ibid.}

Despite this call to action, black voters did not go to the polls in large numbers that Tuesday.\footnote{Low black voter turnout was not new in Boston. When Mel King ran for a School Committee position in 1961, he received more votes from the predominantly white wards in West Roxbury than he received in his home ward in predominantly black Roxbury. In a telling reversal of white voter sentiment, King placed last among eleven candidates in West Roxbury in the 1963 primary. Low black voter turnout was an additional challenge for the black candidates, since black citizens were outnumbered by white citizens to begin with. Ian Forman, “Old Friends Fail to Help,” \textit{Boston Globe}, September 26, 1963, 1.} Instead, in a dramatic demonstration of voter support, Louise Day Hicks received sixty-three out of every one hundred votes cast. The five incumbents received the top five vote totals; Arthur

\begin{footnotes}
\item[68] King was a School Committee candidate in 1961; he finished seventh in the election for the five-member committee.
\item[69] Mel King, \textit{Chain of Change}, 36.
\item[70] Levey, “6000 March for Rights,” 1.
\item[71] Atkins was the local NAACP branch executive secretary. Ibid.
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Gartland, the only incumbent endorsed by the NAACP, finished only slightly ahead of the sixth place candidate and received 38,000 fewer votes than Hicks.  

In his statement regarding the primary returns, Kenneth Guscott declared that Boston “no longer stands for the ideals of educational achievement, free exchange of ideas or fair play for minority groups.” But Guscott also stated that he hoped the primary would wake up those apathetic voters who had not given the issue of school segregation serious thought. When the votes were tallied in the November election, Guscott had his answer: all five incumbents were re-elected, and Louise Day Hicks received the most votes of any city candidate on the ballot that year. Mel King said that the election “made it abundantly clear that the hardest work lay ahead,” and he recalled that Boston’s black community was “forced to abandon our naïve notion that Boston whites wanted integration.”

The election results struck a blow to the black activists’ momentum. But the movement did not idle for long. Within a few months, the black community was organizing the city’s second one-day school boycott on February 26, 1964. As the planned date of the boycott approached, the School Committee sought a meeting with the NAACP leaders in an attempt to address the concerns of the black community and strike a preemptive truce that would end the boycott plans. But the School Committee could barely agree over an appropriate invitation, and the meeting seemed doomed before it even took place. Louise Day Hicks asserted that the committee was always willing to meet with NAACP leaders to discuss “educational concerns,”

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73 Thomas H. O’Connor, Building a New Boston, 207; King, Chain of Change, 36.
75 Hicks received close to 20,000 more votes than the top mayoral candidate received, or nearly 128,000 votes. O’Connor, Building a New Boston, 208.
76 King, Chain of Change, 36.
but stated that “if they want to discuss alleged racial imbalance or taking the children by bus all over the city, I’ll have no part of it.”

Hicks and William O’Connor were outvoted when the School Committee agreed to allow the NAACP to discuss de facto segregation. Eisenstadt, explaining his reversal in supporting a discussion about segregation, stated that “If Mrs. Hicks is so convinced de facto segregation does not exist I cannot understand her fear to discuss it with those who say we’re wrong.”

He continued, however, that racial discrimination did not exist in the Boston schools, and that it would be “difficult to persuade me that de facto segregation exists here.”

With such an inauspicious start, it is no surprise that the meeting between the School Committee and the NAACP, held on February 19, ended with no progress for either side. The school boycott proceeded as scheduled, and a “Boston Plan” submitted by the NAACP to study racial imbalance in the city was tabled by a committee vote of 4-1. On February 26, despite the urging of Governor Endicott Peabody and Boston Mayor John Collins, and despite the threat by Attorney General Edward Brooke that parents and organizers would be fined for their involvement, the city of Boston witnessed its second “Freedom Stay-Out” boycott of the public schools.

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79 Ibid.
80 The vote was held on motion by Arthur Gartland that the School Committee cooperate with the NAACP’s “Boston Plan.” But in a bizarre wrangling over procedure, Chairman O’Connor first ruled that Gartland’s motion was out of order, at which point a debate ensued over whether or not Gartland was, in fact, out of order. Finally, a vote was taken to decide this point, and by a vote of 3-2 it was ruled that Gartland’s motion was in order. After that, Eisenstadt moved to table Gartland’s motion, and the plan was officially rejected by all but Gartland. “Hearing to NAACP,” School Committee Minutes, February 19, 1964; Richard J. Connolly, “Board Rejects NAACP Plan,” Boston Globe, February 20, 1964, 1, 10.
An unnamed sixth grade teacher at the Mackey Elementary School, quoted in the *Boston Globe*, said that she didn’t know how many black students were absent from her classroom that day, because “I get so used to looking at them, I don’t notice whether they’re black or white.” Of the boycott, the teacher stated that “These little children are afraid,” and that “It’s a shame to drag them into it.” It is unclear how many Boston teachers supported or disapproved of the boycott; the *Boston Globe* only reported that there were many suburban teachers who volunteered in the Freedom Schools. Regardless of teacher opinion, it is clear that black community leaders were still struggling to keep their criticism of the schools from being interpreted as blanket criticism of all teachers in the city. A fact sheet produced by the NAACP prior to the boycott contained this question and answer: “Is the Stayout an attack on Boston teachers? Absolutely not. The great majority of teachers are doing excellent jobs under very difficult circumstances.” The separation of the two critiques nonetheless remained tenuous at best.

At the end of the day, the number of students who participated in the boycott was impressive: out of almost 93,000 students, the School Department reported that 20,571 were absent, compared to the average absenteeism rate of 10,000. Of those absentees, 9,000 students attended thirty-five “Freedom Schools” set up across the city and staffed by volunteers. Leaders of the boycott hailed the stay-out as a success, and Rev. Breeden, one of the main

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82 Ibid.
organizers, declared “We have a Freedom Movement in Boston at last.” White school leaders were skeptical. School Committee Chairman O’Connor stated that “I don’t think it produced any educational good.” Superintendent William Ohrenberger expressed his disapproval, stating that the boycott “was a regrettable loss to all involved,” and declared that “due to boycotts and other events of late, a color line is being drawn now that never before existed.” Yet it was clear that with the boycott, the black community reclaimed some of the momentum that had been lost the previous fall. In his book about black activism in Boston, Mel King recalled that the stay-out clearly demonstrated the black community’s ability to organize “on its own behalf,” adding that it forced both black and white Bostonians to take a stand.

Indeed, one day after the stay-out, the state Board of Education announced that it was forming a commission to conduct a state-wide study on racial imbalance. Dubbed the Kiernan Commission after Chairman Owen Kiernan, Massachusetts Commissioner of Education, it first met in March 1964. One year later, on April 15, 1965, the commission released its final report.

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87 Ibid., 2.
89 King, Chain of Change, 39.
91 The official name for the commission was the Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance and Education. Twenty-two members served on the commission, and two task forces made up of state employees and academics conducted research and presented reports and statistics to the commission. Kiernan personally recruited each of the twenty-two members. This group consisted of major academic leaders (including the presidents of Boston University, Tufts University, Boston College, Radcliffe College, and Northeastern), prominent black leaders (including attorney Herbert Tucker, Bishop Burgess of the Episcopal Church, and Muriel Snowden, a founder of Freedom House), religious leaders (including Rabbi Ehrmann of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis, Cardinal Richard J. Cushing, the archbishop of the Boston’s Catholic diocese, and Erwin Canham, editor of the Christian Science Monitor), and civic and business leaders (the president of the League of Women Voters, the Gillette Razor CEO, and the senior attorney for the Council of Christians and Jews). Joseph Cronin called it “an outstanding, presumably unassailable, panel of Massachusetts higher education, corporate, church, and civic leaders.” Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 79.
titled *Because It is Right—Educationally*. The report defined a school as “racially imbalanced” if more than fifty percent of its students were black. According to this standard, forty-five of Boston’s schools were racially imbalanced. The report also detailed the negative impact of racial separation in the schools. Among the remedies the report suggested was to enact state legislation that could enforce the elimination of racial imbalance through the withholding of state aid to those districts that failed to comply. 93

The report offered some hope to black activists who had spent the year unable to make any progress with the Boston School Committee. The Education Committee of the NAACP’s Boston branch immediately requested a new meeting with the School Committee to discuss the report. School Committee members Hicks, Lee, and O’Connor responded with their most unequivocal speeches to date. Hicks, referring to the paragraph in the Kiernan report that suggested student transfers could be a potential remedy for Boston, stated, “We have in our midst today a small band of racial agitators, non-native to Boston, and a few college radicals who have joined in a conspiracy to tell the people of Boston how to run their schools, their city, and their lives.” 94 O’Connor’s response was that the study still did not prove that racial imbalance was inherently harmful to children, and he concluded that “After 40 years in education, 25 of which were in the Negro area, I am very certain that moving them around is not going to make them learn any better.” 95 Lee commented that “white children do not want to be transported into

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92 This meant that a school could contain only white students and be considered racially balanced. Massachusetts State Board of Education, “Because it is Right—Educationally; A Summary of the Report of the Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance and Education,” April 1965. Freedom House, Inc. Records.
95 Ibid., 1.
schools with a large proportion of backward pupils from unprospering [sic] Negro families who will slow down their education.”

Eisenstadt, appearing now as a voice of reason, stated that he opposed busing but would carefully consider the Commission’s other suggestions. Only Gartland fully endorsed and supported the Kiernan Commission report. Less than twenty-four hours after the report was released, the committee rejected it by a vote of 3-2.

As the School Committee stood resolute against charges of racism, black community leaders prepared to welcome Martin Luther King, Jr., who would lead the March on Boston on April 23, 1965. An estimated 22,000 people participated in the protest. In his speech on Boston Common, Dr. King remarked that he came to Boston to “encourage” and not to “condemn” the city. He insisted that the “vision of the New Boston must extend into the heart of Roxbury,” and stated that “Boston must become a testing ground for the ideals of freedom.”

Rev. Ralph Abernathy also spoke, and emphasized that racial problems are found in cities nationwide. He stated, “We may live down South, but you live up South.” After the rally on Boston Common, Dr. King met with Mayor Collins and presented a fifteen point plan to correct racial inequality in the city’s housing projects and welfare programs.

The original plan for Dr. King’s visit also included a conference with the School Committee, and in the weeks prior to the march, Rev. Virgil Wood, president of the Massachusetts unit of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, attempted to arrange the meeting. However, negotiations between Rev. Wood and Hicks over the setting and the number of speakers quickly broke down. At issue was the requirement by the School Committee that Dr.

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King be the only speaker to address the committee; Rev. Wood requested that a local delegation accompany King and also be allowed to address the committee. Hicks maintained that the committee was only trying to follow “rules of procedure,” and it soon became obvious to Rev. Wood that there would be no way around the committee’s desire to completely control the proceedings. The meeting never happened.

The following day, referring to the overwhelming success of the march, Paul Parks commented that “Mrs. Hicks doesn’t run Boston.” However, he qualified his statement with the words, “At least I hope she doesn’t.” Over the next few years, as Louise Day Hicks worked with the Boston School Committee to present one obstacle after another in the path to school integration, her actions would challenge even that small amount of optimism.

The continued resistance of the Boston School Committee notwithstanding, NAACP branch leaders and members of the city’s black community had reason to be encouraged as the fall of 1965 approached. In August, a federal team investigating the Boston school system charged that the city’s schools practiced discrimination in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This charge carried the threat of the loss of federal aid, newly available under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Later that same month, on August 18, Governor John Volpe (R) signed the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act into law. Under this act, the first of its kind in the nation, school committees were required to submit annual reports on the racial background of its students. If any schools were found to be imbalanced, the local school

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committee was required to prepare and enforce a plan under the supervision of the State Board of Education. For districts that failed to comply within a timely manner, the state commissioner of education could order the suspension of state aid.\(^{102}\)

Optimism was high following the signing of the Racial Imbalance Act. Governor Volpe declared that “Today we write another page in the history of Massachusetts’ leadership in education with the signing of this bill guaranteeing truly equal educational opportunity to all our children.”\(^{103}\) Commissioner Kiernan stated his belief that school committees would work to ensure compliance with the law, and that the penalties would never need to be enforced. Paul Parks remarked that “The Legislature and the leaders deserve every credit possible for the enactment of this law which will bring an end to the ridiculous and time-consuming feud we’ve been having with the Boston School Committee.”\(^{104}\)

Boston School Committee members, engaged in their own internal battle, did not offer their usual immediate commentary. Since early August, the members had been debating how best to remedy overcrowding in Roxbury and Dorchester schools. There were two options available: the use of double sessions within each neighborhood or busing children to less crowded schools outside the neighborhood. The majority of the committee, led by Hicks, held firm to its opinion on the evils of busing. In fact, on August 6, the committee voted 3-2 to ban

\(^{102}\) The act used the same definition of racial imbalance used in the Kiernan Report: any school with a percentage of black students greater than fifty percent was considered imbalanced. “An Act to Eliminate or Reduce Racial Imbalance in the Public Schools of the Commonwealth, Chapter 641 of the Acts of 1965,” Freedom House, Inc., Northeastern University, Snell Library, Archives and Special Collections Department, Boston, Massachusetts. See also Smith, “Two Centuries and Twenty-four months,” 39; and Howard Husock, “Boston,” in Busing U.S.A., ed. Nicolaus Mills (New York: Teacher College Press, 1979), 340.


\(^{104}\) Ibid., 14.
“any further busing of children in any form for any reason under any conditions.” The committee stubbornly refused to accept any plan involving busing despite the urging from the governor, the mayor, the superintendent of the schools and parents’ groups. Multiple plans were proposed and rejected throughout the month of August, and the day before classes started, the superintendent’s office struggled to work out student assignments involving only the number of buses available for use during the previous year, thus sidestepping the School Committee’s ban on additional busing.

So at the same time that excitement built over the passage of the Racial Imbalance Act, the Boston School Committee demonstrated that it was more determined than ever to stand firm in its own opinion regarding school integration. The resolve of the School Committee was clearly illustrated in Mel King’s column for the Bay State Banner:

At a meeting of the Boston School Committee this Summer, the chairman complained that the people down in the streets were singing so loud that she had trouble hearing. She wanted to close the window except that it was a hot night and there was no air conditioning. There was some talk of installing air conditioning so that the School Committee wouldn’t be bothered next year with all that singing and carrying on from the people who wanted to tell the School Committee something.

King continued, “The School Committee doesn’t want to hear people and that’s the problem.” With the upcoming School Committee elections that fall, plans were again in motion within the black community to change the committee from the top down. Meanwhile, a different sort of school protest was planned by black parents for the new school year: the community’s own private busing plan, dubbed Operation Exodus.

107 Ibid.

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Operation Exodus was based on the school department policy of open enrollment, which allowed any student to fill any available seat citywide, provided that the student arrange his or her own transportation. The action was led by Ellen Jackson, a life-long resident of the Roxbury-North Dorchester area and a mother of five. The program was managed entirely by parent volunteers who organized bus schedules and held fundraisers to finance those buses, and the operation supported the transport of roughly 350 children in its first year. The first day of classes in September 1965 was not without controversy. Louise Day Hicks met a group of parents and students early in the morning at one of the program’s gathering sites to inform them that they would not be allowed transfers because none of the students had the proper yellow slips issued by their previous schools. Hicks, under police escort because of a death threat sent to Police Headquarters, was challenged by parents at the gathering. Confronted by one mother who pointedly asked, “What are you doing here?” Hicks maintained she was simply trying to ensure that proper procedure was followed. Hicks, who later referred to the program as “Operation Confusion,” saw the turmoil caused by the protest as a chance to assert her authority over those who sought change in the schools.

By the end of the school day, 85 students were enrolled in schools where they sought transfer, and leaders of Operation Exodus vowed to continue the work until the other 215 students were properly enrolled in open seats across the city. Only a few weeks later, the

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program included 350 students.\textsuperscript{110} Parents worked to raise roughly $1,200 every week to pay for the buses, and as the months wore on, community support only increased. The group acquired a donated store front in Roxbury and established a headquarters where it held its planning meetings, spearheaded fundraising efforts and supported after school tutoring sessions. Operation Exodus leaders held every conceivable type of fundraiser and received support both within and outside of the black community. Donations came from suburban groups, college student organizations, and even a benefit concert given by Eartha Kitt and Odetta. There were also mother’s marches and door-to-door collections.\textsuperscript{111} It was a massive and successful undertaking; it was also an excellent demonstration of black community resources.\textsuperscript{112}

The other prominent movement in the black community that fall was the drive to elect new candidates to the Boston School Committee. Mel King ran for the third time, and though no one thought that Louise Day Hicks could be kept from winning a seat, there was the hope that King could join Arthur Gartland and displace one of the other committee members. In the primary, King came in sixth place, and was cautiously optimistic that he could finish in the top five that November. One reason for optimism was that voter registration and rallies encouraging black citizens to vote in the primary made an impact: for the first time in history, a higher percentage of black voters than white voters cast a ballot in the primary. Still, Hicks received the most votes in the primary, and King recalled in \textit{Chain of Change} that while he attempted to focus


\textsuperscript{111} For example, it was announced in the \textit{Bay State Banner} that 350 mothers would be canvassing the Roxbury-North Dorchester neighborhood on November 19, 1965, in its second “Mother’s March” to collect donations. “Exodus Plans Mothers March,” \textit{Bay State Banner}, November 13, 1965.

\textsuperscript{112} Operation Exodus continued for six years, and supported as many as 1,100 students at its highest level. But by the early seventies, its busing program was eclipsed by METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity), the state-run busing program that transferred students across district lines.
on the poor performance of the schools, Hicks relied on the issue of busing and race to garner support.\textsuperscript{113} In the end, this tactic worked for her.

When the votes were tallied on the evening of November 2, 1965, the voters sent a dramatic message to those who were fighting for school integration: Louise Day Hicks finished in first place with 92,000 votes. The next leading candidate received just under 50,000 votes.\textsuperscript{114} And despite unprecedented voter turnout in predominantly black wards, reaching as high as ninety percent of registered voters in several of those wards, Mel King did not finish in the top five. If that was not enough of a blow to the black community, Arthur Gartland, the lone committee member who supported integration efforts, was also defeated. Garland was replaced by John McDonough, a member of a well-known Boston Irish family.\textsuperscript{115}

In his \textit{Bay State Banner} column the following week, Mel King concluded, “Never was the fact of numerical inferiority better demonstrated than in the election. Despite the unprecedented turnout of voters, it was demonstrated that in a city-wide election, if there is a race issue, the Negro voter alone will not be able to carry the day.”\textsuperscript{116} The impact had a palpable effect on the attitude of those fighting for civil rights and school integration. A few months later, at a meeting for a women’s group called Wednesdays in Mississippi (WIMS), the election was still prominent in the minds of black activists. A summary of the topics covered in the meeting included the following comments: “Underlying all discussion was the painful aftermath of the recent School Committee election. A feeling of hopelessness seemed to prevail among the

\textsuperscript{113} King, \textit{Chain of Change}, 44-45.
\textsuperscript{114} Schrag, \textit{Village School Downtown}, 17; Lukas, \textit{Common Ground}, 131.
\textsuperscript{115} McDonough’s brother Patrick was a former Boston City Council member, and his brother Joseph was an assistant principal in the Boston Public Schools.
Negro women who had worked so hard, and had overcome the problem of apathy which is so often discussed, by getting a tremendous proportion of the registered Negroes to vote. But they constitute only 9 percent of the population of greater Boston, and they realized the limits of their political power, unless they can change the minds of the white population.\textsuperscript{117} The shock over the vote lingered. Almost a year later, in an article regarding a new independently-run school being established in Roxbury, the \textit{Bay State Banner} appealed for support from “every citizen who was sickened by the School Committee election last fall.”\textsuperscript{118} The one bright spot was Operation Exodus’s continued success.

The Boston School Committee’s first plan to comply with the Racial Imbalance Act, submitted to the state board of education in December 1965, relied heavily on building new elementary schools and making additions to existing schools. In a letter from Hicks to Commissioner Kiernan, she stated that even with the implementation of the committee’s proposed plan, “Some schools located in the center of the non-white population of Boston will remain largely racially imbalanced.”\textsuperscript{119} The committee remained adamant that busing was not a viable option for the city. In the committee’s revised plan submitted in June 1966, the letter to Commissioner Kiernan contained these pointed remarks: “It is abundantly clear that no practical, feasible, or defensible plan, either of the School Committee’s devising or one devised by the State’s technical assistance task force can eliminate or even substantially reduce racial


\textsuperscript{118} “Community School to Open in Fall; New School For Children Organized By Local Parents’ Group,” \textit{Bay State Banner}, August 20, 1966, 3.

\textsuperscript{119} In fact, according to the terms of the Racial Imbalance Act, a school with a majority of white students was not considered “imbalanced.” Whether Hicks deliberately misunderstood the terms of the RIA or was simply misinformed is unknown—but neither possibility speaks well of her ability to lead the school committee through a resolution of the task at hand. Letter to Owen B. Kiernan, Commissioner of Education, from Louise Day Hicks, School Committee Chairman, December 22, 1965, Freedom House, Inc., Northeastern University.
imbalance in certain core schools of Boston. The only permanent solution will be found in the dissolution of the ghettos as a result of widespread implementation of fair housing and fair employment practices.”

This attempt to shift blame was only one of the committee’s delaying tactics.

Over the next few years, the School Committee used several different maneuvers to avoid compliance with the Racial Imbalance Act. In addition to an ongoing campaign to have the act repealed, the committee also sued in court over the act’s legality. The School Committee produced numerous drafts of compliance plans; each spaced many months apart, to lengthen the process of change. In one case, the committee submitted a plan that had already been rejected by the state Board of Education. But most effectively, the committee artfully exploited the original language of the Racial Imbalance Act. Four plans submitted by the Boston School Committee were accepted between 1966 and 1971, and with these plans the committee managed to achieve minimal compliance without actually desegregating a single school in the city. In fact, the schools became even more segregated during these years, with the number of racially imbalanced schools rising from forty-five in 1965 to sixty-two in 1971.

The Boston school committee’s efforts to dodge the requirements of the Racial Imbalance Act kept activists in the black community focused on school integration. But community activists and black parents soon realized that the Racial Imbalance Act would not be a quick fix to the problems in the schools. In addition to Operation Exodus, other plans were made to remove black students from the worst of the inner-city schools. The METCO busing plan, in which


121 Lukas, Common Ground, 132-133; Smith, “Two Centuries and Twenty-four Months,” 133; Jeanne Theoharis, “ ‘I’d Rather Go to School in the South’ ”.
Boston students were bused to suburban schools, began in 1965 and was directed by Ruth Batson. The plan was financed with federal both funds and a donation from the Carnegie Foundation, so neither Boston nor suburban school districts bore extra costs. It began with 220 students the first year and expanded to 2,500 students in the mid-1970s.  

Another alternative tactic was the creation of three independent community schools: The New School for Children and the Roxbury Community School opened in 1966, and the Highland Park Free School opened in 1968. In 1969, enrollment for the three schools totaled 520 students. Together with Operation Exodus and METCO, a number of students were able to avoid their assigned public school. But even with all the effort expended on these programs, by the late 1960s, the majority of black students in Boston were still attending overwhelmingly black schools under substandard conditions.

An investigation of the bitter language and controlling tactics of the School Committee during these years plainly foreshadows the disastrous results of court-ordered student busing in the 1970s. No citizen could claim to be shocked by the violence that erupted in South Boston in 1974, when ten years earlier, in the same neighborhood, the NAACP’s float in the St. Patrick’s Day parade was peppered with eggs, beer cans and bottles the entire length of the parade.

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123 For a description of the planning and development of these schools, see Jonathan Kozol, Free Schools (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1972).
route. During that parade, four white teenagers held up a sign that read “Go home nigger. Long live the spirit of independence in segregated Boston.” This was a clear case of explicit racial violence, but black citizens already knew in the 1960s that Boston’s reputation as a liberal city was undeserved, at least where racial matters were concerned. When Fannie Lou Hammer visited Boston in 1966 she commented, “I have made several speaking tours in the North, and believe me, the comments and remarks I’ve heard up here are as brutal and savage as anything I’ve faced on picket lines in the South. And if you think that isn’t true, you’re just kidding yourself.”

The Boston School Committee was conscious of this atmosphere and a handful of its members, led by Louise Day Hicks, manipulated racial fears to retain control of the school system. But at the same time the confrontation between the Education Committee of the NAACP and the Boston School Committee served as a catalyst for the school integration movement in 1960s Boston. The school integration movement, in turn, fueled the civil rights movement in the city. And though the battle in the early 1960s was hard fought, little was gained. The unwillingness of the elected School Committee to admit to inequality in the school system, coupled with the support these committee members enjoyed among the city’s voting population, dealt a serious blow to the ability of the black community to effect true change in the system.

Behind the fight for school integration was a drive by black citizens and parents to call attention to the extreme conditions under which black children in Boston were expected to learn.

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126 Ibid., 3.
This continued through the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, and with the rise of the black power movement and the movement for community control of the schools, new tactics were constantly in development.

Yet one issue remained unchanged: the desire of the Boston School Committee to control the course of the school system without outside interference. This included control of school assignments, school organizations, school budgets and school personnel. Not surprisingly then, the black community was not the only group that the School Committee clashed with in the early 1960s. Teachers had their own fight with the committee in these years, and this study will now turn to that chapter of Boston’s school history.
CHAPTER 2

TEACHERS’ RIGHTS: THE BTU AND THE FIGHT FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

It is a happy duty to report the continuing influx of new members, and a privilege of my office to welcome them to our fellowship. May their years be long in this most glorious of professions. If we didn’t love it so much, we could never work so hard for its betterment.

--Boston Teachers Union President Fred Reilly, March 1965

While the black community of Boston fought the Boston School Committee over the issue of de facto segregation in the early 1960s, the teachers of the city’s school system engaged the committee on a different front. At issue was collective bargaining and teacher representation. Two groups represented Boston teachers at that time: the Boston Teachers Union, Local 66 of the American Federation of Teachers, and the Boston Teachers Alliance, a professional organization not affiliated with a national group. In February 1964, the BTU formally requested collective bargaining rights for the city’s teachers, and asked the Boston School Committee to authorize the election of a bargaining agent. The committee refused to allow the election. It was not until collective bargaining for public employees was sure to pass as state law in the fall of 1965 that the committee relented; in the meantime, both the committee and the BTA argued that teachers did not need collective bargaining. Though the debate between the BTU and the School Committee was never as bitter as the black community’s fight over de facto segregation, the School Committee once again demonstrated its intention to retain its power where it could.

1 Fred Reilly, “From the President: Ideals and Goals for the Boston Teachers Union in 1965,” Boston Union Teacher (March 1965), 1.
This chapter will discuss the BTU’s successful campaign to become the sole bargaining agent for the city’s teachers. A brief history of teacher organizing in Boston prior to 1960 will be followed by a closer look at the debate over teacher unionism and collective bargaining in the early 1960s. When the BTU began its campaign for collective bargaining in 1963, it struggled to add members to its ranks and educate teachers about the benefits of unionism. Meanwhile, the BTA warned both teachers and the School Committee about the dangers of radical unionism that BTU leadership would bring to the school system. Ultimately, School Committee leaders need not have worried; the actions of the BTU in its first years as the teachers’ collective bargaining agent reflected a cautious and conservative sensibility, no doubt heavily influenced by older teachers who still dominated the cohort. This is particularly apparent in the way the union handled the issue of race and segregated schools, and the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the BTU’s response to the issue of de facto segregation.

Teacher organizing in Boston had its first brief surge in 1919. Boston had not been a part of the early wave of teacher organizing that occurred in Chicago and New York around the turn of the century. Instead, Boston’s teachers formed associations that were closer to social clubs than either a professional organization or a union. By 1919, there were twenty-seven different teacher clubs for the city’s three thousand teachers. Groups organized by grade level and subject taught, and divided into separate men’s and women’s groups. The membership of many of these clubs overlapped.

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Meanwhile, two national organizations, the National Education Association, a professional association, and the American Federation of Teachers, a union, actively competed for the allegiance of classroom teachers. By the end of 1919, the AFT succeeded in adding new Boston locals to its roster, but the majority of the city’s teacher groups did not unionize and did not affiliate with the NEA.

The lack of a competing national association did not make the path to unionization any smoother for Boston’s teachers. It was a challenge to determine the structure a teachers’ union should adopt, because the city’s teachers were not a cohesive unit and did not identify as such. Divisions between the various teacher groups mirrored the separation of the teaching staff throughout the city. The dividing lines between male and female teachers were the most distinct. Almost all elementary teachers were women, and while there were male and female high school teachers, the high schools were divided by sex, and the men and women teaching in high schools were largely divided as well. The pay scale was also a strong dividing point; the starting salary for a male high school teacher in 1919 was more than twice the amount of the starting salary for a female elementary school teacher. Women teaching in high schools earned more than their female colleagues in the lower grades, but less than their male counterparts. Each organization presented salary requests to the School Committee independent of other groups, a practice that reinforced teacher divisions and led to little progress for the staff as a whole.

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3 The NEA, established in 1857, had long been dominated by school administrators, but with the formation of the AFT in 1916, it began to actively recruit classroom teachers. See Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, Chapter 5, and Wayne Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), Chapter 6.

4 Kathleen Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize, 1919-1965,” 58. Boston was not unique in the extreme differences in its salary scale; Marjorie Murphy presents evidence that the difference in pay between high school and elementary school teachers in Chicago was similar to the situation in Boston. Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 89.
It was in this atmosphere that the Greater Boston Federation of Teachers (GBFT), Local 66 of the AFT, formed in April 1919. The union’s founders, a small group of male professors from Boston Labor College, wanted the GBFT to be the city’s sole teacher union and recruit teachers across all grade levels, but teachers were not interested in such a union. Boston teachers wanted to form multiple locals based on workplace divisions. In that spirit, between late May and mid-June of 1919, three other AFT locals formed: the Union of Boston High School Women Teachers, Local 85; the Union of Boston Women Teachers, Local 88; and the Boston Federation of Men Teachers, Local 100.

At the same time, two large teacher groups did not join the union movement: the Elementary School Teachers Club and the Boston Schoolmen’s Economic Association. During this early wave of teacher unionism in Boston, the debate over professionalism versus unionism, established by the competing NEA and AFT, was not the issue that kept teachers from joining unions in large numbers. There was simply a strong skepticism among teachers over the need for a union at all, added to doubts about the AFT’s pro-socialist tendencies and its support of equal pay for men and women.

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5 Boston Labor College (also referred to as Boston Trade Union College) had only just been established in February 1919. It was founded under the direction of the Boston Central Labor Union, Boston’s citywide AFL organization. The charter members included professors from Harvard, Yale and Columbia. Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 37.

6 The AFT leadership at the time also promoted the forming of multiple locals in large cities. AFT President Charles Stillman compared the total teacher membership in cities like Chicago and Washington, D.C., where there were multiple teacher unions, to the modest membership of New York City’s Local No. 5, which was the city’s sole union, to promote the idea of multiple locals in one jurisdiction. Ibid., 42.

7 Local 88 was comprised of elementary teachers, and Local 100 represented high school teachers.

8 The debate over conservatism versus radicalism was a divisive issue in the AFT during these years. President Charles Stillman worked to steer the union toward a conservative agenda and preserve that image, but in Boston, Local 66 had a radical image from the very beginning. Several founding members were part of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, an academic organization, and one member was reported to have been on the platform at a meeting of the IWW. These facts were especially troubling to teachers as the postwar red scare gained momentum in 1919. Murphy, Blackboard Unions, 104-107; Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 38-39; O’Neil, “Local No. 66: Looking Backward, Part I.”
Murphey found that the least powerful teachers group, the women elementary school teachers, and the most powerful group, the male high school teachers, were the most opposed to joining a union. The elementary school teachers feared for their job security if they joined a union with socialist sympathies, and the male high school teachers were worried about losing their advantage over women in salary.

Concurrently, the lack of a unified voice in addition to economic inflation brought on by World War I resulted in teacher salaries that were at an historic low across all grade levels. The School Committee had authorized slight wage increases in the preceding years, but these increases had not kept pace with wartime inflation. This was a problem for teachers nationwide, but was especially egregious in the city of Boston; teachers earned salaries at the bottom of the spectrum for teachers across Massachusetts, and school officials publicly admitted that the school system had a problem attracting new teachers because of the low salary levels. The inability of the school system to retain an adequate staff resulted in classroom overcrowding, so that Boston’s teachers had more students in their classrooms than ever before and received lower wages than their counterparts in surrounding communities.

By September 1919, the extreme working conditions forced Boston teachers to overcome their differences. For the first time in the city’s history, teachers created a united front and submitted a request to the School Committee for a $600 pay raise for all teachers. Even Local 85, whose members strongly supported equal pay for men and women, agreed to drop the issue temporarily in order to focus on a single across-the-

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9 Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 34.
board pay raise. The teachers’ work achieved mixed results, especially for the newly formed unions. The School Committee did award a raise in November 1919, but it fell short of the teachers’ request: women received a $384 raise, and the men received a $288 raise. The male teachers of Local 100, who were opposed to equal pay, were disappointed with the outcome of the salary requests. Even though the raises were modest, women teachers had received more than their male colleagues. Members of the elementary women’s union, Local 88, were pleased with the raise, and as a result, the union experienced a sharp decline in membership. Achieving the pay raise was a small victory for the teachers’ united front, but harmed the development of at least two of Boston’s locals.

On the heels of the pay raise came another serious challenge for Boston’s fledgling AFT locals. The Boston Policeman’s Strike in the fall of 1919, which ended in the firing of all police officers who struck, sent municipal union organizers reeling. Only one year later, in September 1920, Local 100 returned its charter to the AFT, citing the AFT’s position on equal pay, in addition to what the local considered to be favoritism shown to the city’s female teachers, as the reason for leaving the union. Murphey argues that these same issues led to the demise of the elementary school women’s local as

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13 The strike was disastrous on all fronts. With the police on strike, riots broke out and looting was rampant; Governor Calvin Coolidge called out the state guard to quell a mob of 15,000, and troopers fired into the crowd, killing nine people and wounding twenty-three others. See Joseph E. Slater, Public Workers: Government Employee Unions, the Law, and the State, 1900-1962 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 13-38, and Murphy, Blackboard Unions, 109. In the aftermath of the Boston Policeman’s strike, Murphy reports that Samuel Gompers strongly encouraged AFT president Stillman to include a no-strike clause in the AFT constitution. Teachers refused to add such a clause to the constitution, but passed the Pittsburgh Principles, which endorsed a no-strike position. According to Slater, the adoption of a no-strike clause was encouraged in public employee unions across the board.
well, which also relinquished its charter that fall.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, the GBFT, still with only a handful of members, returned its charter. With its public ties to socialism, the original Local 66 never appealed to teachers as a viable choice.

By the end of 1920, only Local 85 remained active in Boston. Murphey states the union sought to remain in the background; it worked with other groups, rather than trying to displace them, mainly to avoid public scrutiny and criticism.\textsuperscript{16} The union continued its work for equal pay for the next five years before it too returned its charter to the AFT, citing low membership as the primary reason for returning its charter. In fact, when members voted to return the charter in May 1925, the union counted only 16 members out of a staff of around 4,000 teachers. An antiunion atmosphere nationwide, together with a combination of local factors, including pay raises in the fall of 1920 and the spring of 1921, the presence of a high school women’s club that was considered a powerful force, and ironically, the lack of opposition toward union organizing from the School Committee all worked to hasten Local 85’s decline.\textsuperscript{17}

Boston was not unique in the failure of its early AFT locals. The national AFT, which counted over 10,000 members at the start of 1919, claimed only 4,237 members in 1920.\textsuperscript{18} The AFT lost 1,000 more members in 1921, and during the same year, Samuel Gompers cut off the AFL’s subsidy for the AFT and fired the union’s five organizers.

\textsuperscript{15} Those members who remained in Local 88 felt little solidarity with Local 85 on the issue of equal pay. With virtually no male teachers at the elementary level, there was no male salary that the women sought to equal. In addition, the non-union Elementary Teachers Club attracted a much larger membership and was considered to be just as effective a representative as the union. Kathleen Murphey, “Gender Barriers to Forming a Teachers Union in Boston,” \textit{Historical Journal of Massachusetts} (Summer, 1993), 72-73.

\textsuperscript{16} Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 73. The aftermath of the Boston Policeman’s strike was still prominent in the minds of citizens and it would remain so for years to come.

\textsuperscript{17} Wayne Urban argues, “Teachers, who had never embraced organized labor wholeheartedly, were in a poor position to stem the antiunion tide.” Urban, “Teacher Activism,” 194.

\textsuperscript{18} Murphey, \textit{Blackboard Unions}, 107-108.
According to Marjorie Murphy, the Boston Policemen’s strike was a major factor in Gompers’ decision. In the aftermath of the policemen’s strike the lack of support for public employee unions compelled Gompers to sacrifice the teachers union in the interest of broader trade union goals.\textsuperscript{19} In Boston, the teachers did not join the movement again until the 1930s.

As public schools suffered the devastating financial effects of the Great Depression, the 1930s was a time of new growth for teacher unions, both for the national AFT and for teachers in Boston.\textsuperscript{20} In 1936, the AFT granted a new charter to a group of thirteen teachers from the greater Boston area. Local 441, the Boston Federation of Teachers, set out to address some of the most serious problems facing the city’s teachers, such as the School Committee practice of hiring very few permanent teachers per year. This cost-cutting measure, adopted in the late 1920s, meant that educated and qualified teachers were hired on a substitute basis instead, and earned a daily wage of five dollars in the mid-1930s, less than two-thirds of a permanent teacher’s salary.\textsuperscript{21} Substitute teachers were laid-off at the end of every third year for one full year, a practice that made substitute teachers unable to establish tenure in the system. Also troubling to the BFT

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 109. The disastrous Boston police strike had a negative impact on public employee unions in general. As Joseph Slater details in his book, “The rate of unionization in the public sector, which had risen rapidly in the preceding years, now stagnated, hovering just below the 1921 rate of 7.2 percent for nearly all the 1920s. It finally inched past 8 percent in 1929 and 1930, but the momentum that was once so strong had dissipated.” Slater, \textit{Public Workers}, 36.

\textsuperscript{20} Marjorie Murphy argues, “The depression years...were key to the transformation of the AFT from a feminist and gadfly union to the bread-and-butter union that emerged in the early sixties.” \textit{Blackboard Unions}, 123.

\textsuperscript{21} O’Neil, “Local No. 66: Looking Backward,” Part II, \textit{The Boston Union Teacher} (February 1975), 3. The hiring of substitutes was also used in New York City as a cost-cutting tool until 1935, when the NY state commissioner of education order the system to hire full-time employees. Murphy, \textit{Blackboard Unions}, 134-135.
was the passage, in June 1935, of a loyalty oath requirement for Massachusetts teachers.\textsuperscript{22} In addition, before the union’s charter was even one year old, a hiring scandal erupted and further revealed the challenges the BFT faced.

In December 1935, ten newly trained teachers revealed that they had been approached by an individual who promised appointments as permanent teachers for a fee of $150.\textsuperscript{23} Though two Boston men with connections to School Committee members were indicted in a subsequent investigation, the Grand Jury rendered no convictions; the court decision rendered only criticism, and revealed that the School Committee often shared detailed information about school appointments and contracts with close friends. Even though the scandal played out on the front page of Boston’s newspapers, it had little negative impact on the School Committee, which by this time was controlled by its majority-Irish members.\textsuperscript{24} The hiring scandal made plain the cronyism and insular nature of the School Committee’s inner workings, and the lack of outrage in the city over such practices revealed the public acceptance of the system.

Local 441, which sought teachers of all grade levels, including university-level professors and trade school employees, had its work cut out for it. Several founding members had union experience, but not in Boston; the founders’ lack of knowledge about the city’s history led it to request information from the AFT about the city’s earlier

\textsuperscript{22} The loyalty oath requirement bolsters Slater’s argument that the specter of the Boston police strike continued to cause problems for public employees. While industrial workers received a boon in the passage of the Wagner Act in July 1935, public sector workers were still made to tread cautiously. Slater writes, “National public sector unions formed in the 1930s, such as AFSCME and the American Federation of Government Employees adopted similar no-strike rules. Into the 1960s, neither the AFL nor the CIO would approve of any strikes by government employees.” Slater, \textit{Public Workers}, 36.


\textsuperscript{24} During the 1930s, Irish nepotism and cronyism within the Boston Public Schools was undeniable, as the majority of appointments for higher positions were now awarded to Irish teachers, a practice which lingered into the 1960s. Ibid., 72.
locals. Despite this obvious display of outsider status in a city that valued local connections and homogeneity, the local moved forward and slowly began to add members. One of Local 441’s first goals was the repeal of the loyalty oath, and it worked together with other AFT locals in the state, as well as several state labor organizations, to get a repeal bill passed in the state legislature. The BFT addressed other workplace issues, like the use of cadets, or teachers-in-training, in the schools. The use of cadets was a cost-cutting measure utilized by the school department; the BFT undertook a study of the impact of cadets on the system and created a questionnaire for all teachers about the conditions in individual schools. The study raised the union’s profile in the city, and by the end of 1938, though the BFT claimed only 68 members, it was fiscally sound and active on several fronts, even endorsing a gubernatorial candidate that year and criticizing Boston’s inadequate social welfare measures. In 1939, fifty new members joined the BFT.

Despite Local 441’s continued growth and activism, newer members began to complain in the early forties that the union was not primarily concerned with the bread-and-butter issues of classroom teachers. A division grew within the union between the older leaders and a newer group of members, mostly comprised of high school women teachers. The faction representing the newer members did not agree with the union leadership’s left-leaning political involvement, and desired a union comprised solely of Boston’s classroom teachers. These competing ideologies came to the fore in an October

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25 In the request for information, the BFT referred vaguely to “the former Boston local which went out of existence after the Police strike ten or fifteen years ago.” Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 109-110.
26 The legislature passed the repeal bill in 1937. This success was short-lived; Governor Curley vetoed the bill, which put an end to the repeal campaign. Ibid., 112. Murphey does not list the individual locals that worked on the repeal campaign, but notes that the locals formed the Massachusetts Council of Teachers Unions, the forerunner of the current Massachusetts Federation of Teachers.
27 Murphey, “Gender Barriers to Forming a Teachers Union,” 74.
1944 meeting, which was attended by a member of the AFT executive council. The classroom teachers kept a close count of the members of their group in attendance, especially as people began walking out of the long meeting. As soon as the classroom teachers had a majority attendance, they called for a vote to revoke the charter of Local 441 and replace it with a charter for Boston teachers only. The classroom teachers prevailed by one vote, and for the next two months an angry debate took place between members of Local 441 and teachers who sought a union comprised solely of Boston’s classroom teachers. In December, Local 441 formally surrendered its charter, citing the heterogeneity of its union, in addition to its liberal and international perspective as the reasons that it did not appeal to Boston classroom teachers. A few months later, the AFT’s Executive Council awarded Boston teachers its new charter; it adopted the number of Boston’s first local, 66, and named itself the Boston Teachers Union.

The BTU was open to all Boston public school teachers, although it did not remain the sole citywide organization open to teachers of all grade levels for long. Boston still had a large number of active teacher clubs at this time, and in the spring of 1946 a group of male and female teachers from across the city formed the Boston Teachers Alliance (BTA), a non-union group not affiliated with a national association. The Boston Teachers Alliance quickly emerged as the BTU’s rival in its quest for teachers’ support, and in fact, far outpaced the union’s membership numbers. The BTU

29 Unlike during the organizing efforts in 1919, the AFT supported the idea of one union for all the city’s teachers. Murphey, “Gender Barriers to Forming a Teacher Union,” 75.
30 A group of school principals, the Elementary Teachers Association, and the Schoolmen’s Economic Association were the Founders of the BTA, intended as an umbrella group uniting non-unionized teachers and administrators. Cronin, Reforming Boston’s Schools, 42. See also O’Connell, “The Reform Group,” 85; Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 191.
31 Teachers who were accustomed to being a member of a club found that BTA membership was complimentary to their existing club membership. The BTA immediately signed up the lion’s share of
disparagingly referred to the BTA as a “company union,” but both the BTU and the BTA promoted many of the same issues, such as equal pay and the single salary scale, as did other teacher clubs that remained active.\textsuperscript{32}

In 1947, the issue of equal pay for teachers was put on a referendum for the city’s voters to decide. After the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers accomplished the goal of getting the issue on the ballot, the public campaign for votes was heavily promoted by the BTU. That fall, Bostonians passed the equal pay referendum by a large margin.\textsuperscript{33} This victory for teachers marked the first in a series of legislative victories that teachers won over the next decade.\textsuperscript{34} The next major accomplishment for Boston’s teachers was the amendment of the teacher tenure law in 1953 to allow married teachers to retain their jobs. The previous campaign to lift the married teacher ban occurred in the early forties and ended with a decisive rejection by the School Committee in 1944.\textsuperscript{35} The League of Women Voters made the amendment of the teacher tenure law its main legislative goal for 1953; it lobbied state legislators directly to gain support for the amendment.

During these early years for Local 66, the union added members slowly but steadily. The BTU began with forty-one members in 1945 and grew to include 275

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32 Cronin, Reforming Boston’s Schools, 42.
33 Ibid.
34 As the BTA took stances on individual issues, membership waxed and waned. In 1948, the BTA lost approximately 1000 members, mostly high school teachers, due to its support for the single salary scale. Ibid.
35 The BTA did not involve itself in this campaign even though a number of BTA members endorsed equal pay. In addition, despite the opposition of male teachers to equal pay, Martha O’Neil stated that the number of male teachers was higher after the passage of equal pay, because the school system was no longer able to hire female teachers simply to save money. O’Neil, “Local 66: Looking Backward,” Part IV, Boston Union Teacher (April 1975), 3; Murphey, “Gender Barriers to Forming a Teachers Union,” 76.
36 A number of laws passed in the early 1950s that improved working conditions, such as a law requiring the school department to inform non-tenured teachers by April 1\textsuperscript{st} of their status for the coming year, a law requiring professionals to screen children’s hearing and vision (a job previously required of teachers), and a statute giving teachers who contracted tuberculosis a two year leave of absence. O’Neil, “Local No. 66: Looking Backward, Part III” and “Local No. 66: Looking Backward, Part IV”; Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 223.
37 Murphey, “Gender Barriers to Forming a Teachers Union,” 80.
members by 1950.\textsuperscript{36} The membership numbers remained between 250 and 300 well into the fifties. Female high school teachers dominated the union in its early years. Male teachers and elementary school teachers, though welcome to join, were reluctant to embrace the union. As Helen Leonard, an elementary teacher that Murphey interviewed, recalled, the union was “the sort of thing nice people stayed away from.”\textsuperscript{37} The Boston Teachers Alliance, on the other hand, enjoyed much higher membership numbers, and claimed a paid membership of two thousand teachers throughout the fifties.\textsuperscript{38} Though not affiliated with the NEA, it espoused the ideal of elevating professionalism over the tenets of unionism, and was therefore popular with the conservative teaching staff.

A competitive tension developed between the two groups, and got stronger in the late 1950s as BTU leadership set its sights on becoming the representative for all the city’s teachers. A letter sent to BTA President Mary O’Riordan in 1957 by three members of the BTU’s Merger Committee stated, “In Boston teachers find themselves at the crossroads. We union members cannot move forward without greater numbers. In the Alliance you have greater numbers but you lack the community backing and the political leverage power to make your program a reality. We feel, therefore, that this is an opportune time for all Boston teachers, particularly Alliance leadership, to review the merits of joining a national teacher union movement.”\textsuperscript{39} Several months later, in an open letter to Boston teachers, BTA President O’Riordan offered thinly veiled criticism of the BTU, stating, “If the Alliance has been anything in its eleven years of existence it has

\textsuperscript{36} There were roughly 4,000 teachers in school system during these years. Murphey reports that the BTU’s numbers remained steady throughout most of the fifties, until membership began increasing dramatically in the last few years of the decade. Ibid., 178-179.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 198.

\textsuperscript{38} O’Connell, “The Reform Group,” 89.

\textsuperscript{39} Letter to Mary M. O’Riordan from Jim Doherty, Eleanor Fallon, and Arthur Hartin (Merger Committee, BTU), September 7, 1956, Massachusetts Federation of Teachers Collection.
been a professional organization of which the teaching profession may be proud. We have had our victories and our defeats, but in victory or defeat our honor has been unsullied.\textsuperscript{40} The difference in perspective between the two groups mirrored the national debate between the NEA and the AFT; the NEA warned that teachers would lose the respect of the community once it embraced the tenets of trade unionism, and the AFT argued the opposite, claiming that achieving greater rights for teachers would garner them the respect befitting their positions.\textsuperscript{41}

The same year that Riordan wrote to the city’s teachers, BTA anger over the Boston School Committee’s approval of a pay raise for high school teachers led to a third major legislative victory for Boston’s teachers. The BTA had long supported a single-salary scale for all teachers. The existing salary scale was a complex system reinforced by years of small groups of teachers informally negotiating salaries independently with the School Committee.\textsuperscript{42} A major study conducted in 1944 by the Boston Finance Commission found that there were ninety-one different personnel designations for the teaching staff, with 35 different salary grades. For administrative level staff, there were fifty different salary grades.\textsuperscript{43} After the pay raises for the high school teachers were granted, the BTA sought the removal from office of the three School Committee members who had voted for the pay raise. In the School Committee election in the fall of 1957, the BTA endorsed a slate of candidates who supported the single-salary scale,

\textsuperscript{40} Letter to Boston Teachers from Mary M. O’Riordan, President of Boston Teachers Alliance, 1957, Massachusetts Federation of Teachers Collection.  
\textsuperscript{41} Murphy, \textit{Blackboard Unions}, 209-210.  
\textsuperscript{42} Although there was technically no formal collective bargaining for teachers in Boston before the mid-1960s, teachers’ organizations, like other public sector union groups in cities around the country, had found ways to informally lobby for wage increases and other gains. For more on this phenomenon, see Joseph E. Slater, \textit{Public Workers}.  
\textsuperscript{43} O’Connell, “The Reform Group,” 82.
while campaigning against the three members opposed to the issue. On election day, the three candidates that the BTA opposed all lost their campaigns.\(^{44}\)

The passage of the single salary scale removed the last great divisive workplace issue among teachers in Boston. Differences in salary, which historically divided elementary and high school teachers, became a non-issue. In addition, with the passage of equal pay and the lifting of the married teacher ban, the gender issues that split the men and women into separate camps disappeared.\(^{45}\) The last major division, between teachers who joined the BTU and those who supported the BTA, became the center of debate among teachers in the early 1960s.

As BTA leadership sat back to enjoy the achievement of the single salary scale after a hard-fought campaign, the BTU experienced a surge in membership. From membership totals ranging from 250 to 300 throughout most of the fifties, the union grew to include 450 teachers by 1959.\(^{46}\) The growing numbers added to the union’s momentum, and the BTU launched a campaign in 1962 to establish a sick-leave policy.\(^{47}\) Union leaders knew they needed help with their campaign, and at the AFT convention in August 1962, BTU representatives approached the UAW representative in attendance, Nicholas Zonarich, with a request for support. Marian Ego, a BTU delegate, argued that

\(^{44}\)Joseph Lee, one of the defeated candidates, was not kept down for long. He was elected again in 1959 and continued on the school committee through the 1960s. O’Connell argues that Lee remained bitter about his 1957 defeat; Lee accused teachers of pinning lists of candidates to children’s clothing so that it would not be missed by the parents. Ibid, 90-91.

\(^{45}\)Murphey, “Gender Barriers to Forming a Teachers Union,” 85.

\(^{46}\)Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 179. Both Murphey and O’Connell argue that after 1957, the BTA lost much of its organizational dynamism, and as its activism declined, the BTU filled that void. O’Connell, “The Reform Group,” 91.

\(^{47}\)At the time, teachers had no sick-leave; instead, for every day of work teachers missed, they would lose half a day’s wages. The union sought a policy giving teachers fifteen paid sick days per years, and giving teachers with at least five years of experience a bank of ninety sick days. O’Neil, “Local No. 66: Looking Backward, Part III,” Boston Union Teacher (June 15, 1975), 3.
it was a critical moment for Boston’s teachers. The BTU was growing, she stated, but still only represented a fraction of all teachers. In addition, there was strong evidence that the NEA was launching efforts to establish its own local in Boston. Zonarich, an administrative assistant to Walter Reuther, pledged his support, and within a few months the BTU received a working budget, campaign materials and an organizer who had been trained by the United Steel Workers. Recalling the aid the BTU received for its campaign, Ego stated, “People who worked with their hands paid for Boston teachers to secure working benefits.”

Lucille Swaim, the organizer sent by Zonarich, led the teachers of Local 66 in an aggressive sick-leave campaign. BTU leaders learned effective publicity tactics that raised the union’s profile in the city, and with that development, union membership also continued to rise. Swaim, who expected the Boston School Committee to reject the sick-leave requests, and then translate teacher anger over this failure into a vigorous campaign for collective bargaining, was surprised when the School Committee approved the policy. The School Committee even supported the BTU when Mayor John Collins (D) refused to honor the new agreement. The mayor relented after the union sued the city, and the highly publicized fight with the Mayor Collins gave teachers two big boosts: first, the struggle with the mayor built solidarity among teachers, and, second, the public support the School Committee gave to the BTU raised the union’s level of respectability among the general public. William O’Connell, who served as the local’s president from 1958-

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48 A few months prior to the convention, Marian Ego was working on publicity for a conference for teachers, and was only able to track down a complete list of Boston’s teachers from one source: the NEA. Ego, quoted in Murphey’s dissertation, states that after she saw this list she was convinced that the NEA was prepared to move into Boston. Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 229.

1960, recalled the momentum given to the union by this alliance. He stated, “The BTU and the BSC were fighting as equals on the same side of the issue. This was a natural lead-in to collective bargaining.” And indeed, the drive to achieve collective bargaining was the BTU’s next major operation.

The campaign for collective bargaining began in earnest in the fall of 1963. The timing of this campaign placed Boston among other northern urban centers that established AFT locals as collective bargaining agents in the early 1960s. During these years, AFT representation was chosen in New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Philadelphia. The gains won through collective action in other cities, as in the prominently successful strike of New York City’s teachers in 1962, was surely observed by teachers in Boston. And just as in other cities across the country, the debate in Boston continued to center around the NEA argument that unionism would destroy professionalism.

Between 1963 and 1965, Local 66’s monthly newsletter, *The Boston Union Teacher*, was dominated by articles that stressed the need to achieve collective bargaining rights and urged members to extol the virtues of unionism to non-member colleagues. Louis Sullivan wrote in 1963 that teachers could only “attain the status which befits his professional value,” by being “legally empowered to formulate in union with the school administration, conditions which affect not only their own status, but also the atmosphere

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50 Ibid. The BTA, meanwhile, had not supported the BTU sick-leave campaign; BTA leadership argued that teachers actually lost sick leave time when the School Committee approved fifteen days of paid leave per year, because the previous policy had allowed teachers up to ninety days of absence (though teacher’s lost half of a day’s pay for every absence).

51 In New York City, teachers held a collective bargaining election in the spring of 1961; Detroit’s election was held in May 1964; Philadelphia’s election came in February 1965. In Chicago, the Chicago Teachers Union endorsed its collective bargaining agreement with the Board of Education in 1964.

Murphy, *Blackboard Unions*, 215, 224.

52 Ibid., 215-218; Cronin, *Reforming Boston Schools*, 43.
in which they practice their profession.” The BTA was not opposed to negotiating these issues with the School Committee; after all, the organization had done so for many years. The BTA was opposed to union representation for the city’s teachers. And though the Alliance was not affiliated with the NEA, it borrowed the national group’s method of bypassing the AFT and directly attacking the AFL-CIO. BTA President Patricia Nolan argued before the Boston School Committee that the Alliance was opposed to the tactics of the AFL-CIO, and specifically the use of the strike. Nolan criticized the AFL-CIO, stating that it was not a teacher organization, and that “they look upon education as an industry,” only inviting teachers to join their ranks to boost sagging membership numbers.

Invoking the specter of the strike was an effective tactic against unionization, for it called to mind the disastrous Boston police strike of 1919. Many teachers had direct knowledge of the strike; William O’Connell’s father had been a Boston policeman and had lost his job because of the strike. O’Connell viewed the 1919 strike through his father’s involvement, and recalled that “it was a very souring experience for him the way…certain members of the leadership betrayed the men.” According to O’Connell, memories of the policemen strike combined with the conservative attitude of most teachers in Boston accounted for the union’s low numbers throughout the 1950s. He recalled that “Many teachers at that time had nothing to do with the union simply because they felt, many of them had come from working class and union backgrounds, and if you recall, the late twenties and thirties, how painful that experience was in trying to unionize

54 For an example of an NEA attack on the AFL-CIO, see description of NEA President William Carr’s speech at the 1962 NEA Convention, Murphy, Blackboard Unions, 222-223.
55 “Conference Minutes,” February 10, 1964, School Committee Minutes, 52.
56 Ibid.
In the early 1960s, the BTU’s collective bargaining campaign began to change teachers’ minds about unionization. Between 1963 and 1965, the percentage of teachers in the BTU rose sharply, nearly doubling for junior high and high school teachers. By the end of 1964, BTA and BTU membership claimed similar numbers, between 1,000 and 1,300 members each.\footnote{This statement was made during Murphey’s interview with O’Connell. Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 236.}

At that time, the only collective bargaining statute in Massachusetts, passed in 1960, stated that municipal employees in the state had the right to bargain only if the municipality adopted the law. And so, in early 1964, the BTU sought approval from the Boston School Committee to hold an election to select a bargaining agent for the city’s teachers. At a School Committee meeting on February 10, 1964, both the BTA and the BTU were granted a hearing to argue the merits of electing a bargaining agent. While the BTA debated the merits of collective bargaining and warned the committee of the tactics the union might use if granted such rights, the BTU focused on the argument that the current system was dysfunctional for teachers. Fred Reilly, BTU President, argued “The procedure we now have is not a healthy one in which one organization fights against another organization. Both are working for good causes, those affecting the education of the children.” He added, “We ask not that you give up any of your rights but...\footnote{The reference to percentages is taken from Alan Rosenthal’s “The Strength of Teacher Organizations: Factors Influencing Membership in Two Large Cities,” \textit{Sociology of Education} 39 (Autumn, 1966), 368. Rosenthal’s figures were obtained from payroll information, from teachers using dues check-off. Between 1963 and 1965, BTU membership rose from 12 to 18 percent for elementary teachers, from 24 to 43 percent for junior high teachers, and from 17 to 31 percent for high school teachers. The second figure, of 1,000 to 1,300 members for each organization, is cited in Marshall Donley, Jr.’s \textit{Power to the Teacher} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 145. These numbers match closely with Patricia Nolan’s figure for BTA numbers, cited as “over 1,000” at the February 1964 meeting with the Boston School Committee. The BTU’s official numbers during these years are more difficult to determine; even a graph illustrating the rise in union membership between 1945 and 1965, published in the \textit{Boston Union Teacher’s} May-June 1965 issue, fails to reveal exact numbers, but instead depicts a percentage which doubled between 1963 and 1965, which corroborate Rosenthal’s findings.}
rather that you share some of your responsibility in the area of hours, wages, and working conditions.”

He also cited President Kennedy’s Executive Order 10988 and Pope John XXIII’s encyclical *Mater et Magistra* to bolster the case for collective bargaining.

Reilly referred to the efforts of teachers in other cities, namely Milwaukee, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and Philadelphia, where collective bargaining campaigns were also underway, to demonstrate the national trend he hoped Boston would soon join.

Mark Dalton, Executive Secretary of the BTA, countered these arguments and stated, “We think we have been dealt with fairly. We think that progress has been made in the past, and we think that progress will be made in the future.” He reiterated BTA President Nolan’s warnings over the union’s potential use of the strike, and raised questions about the legality of collective bargaining in the absence of a state law mandating its use for public employees. He added his own warning about the influence of the AFL-CIO, and stated that, if an election was held, “I think the Alliance will win, but we may not be able to compete with Walter Reuther’s thousands and thousands of dollars.”

William O’Connell of the BTU argued directly in opposition to Dalton’s portrait of an amiable teacher-School Committee relationship. He cited a request for a hearing that the BTU’s Salary Chairman had made to the Boston School Committee the previous month. The School Committee denied the hearing, citing the BTU’s meeting

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60 President Kennedy’s Executive Order 10988, issued in January 1962, gave federal employees the right to organize and bargain collectively. Pope John XXIII’s encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, produced in 1961, was quoted at length by Reilly, including the following passage: “As it is evident to all in our day associations of workers have become widespread and for the most part have been given legal status within individual countries and across national boundaries. Those bodies no longer recruit workers for purpose of strife but rather for pursuing a common aim, and this is achieved especially by collective bargaining between associations of workers and those of management [emphasis added].” Ibid., 4.
61 Ibid., 73.
62 Ibid., 70.
with the school department’s salary adjustment board during which the board refused to hear the union’s request. O’Connell continued, “I am sure that it was not the intention of anyone to humiliate and degrade classroom teachers in this way, yet this is what will frequently happen when instead of professional democracy, i.e, collective bargaining for teachers, you have no effective system for teacher-employer relations.”

The committee members’ response to the BTU request for an election revealed that the majority of the members were concerned about how collective bargaining would work, and had serious doubts about the need for collective bargaining in general. Committee Chair Louise Day Hicks voiced concerns over the fact that the School Committee created its budget on the basis of funds allocated by the mayor’s office. Hicks first argued that agreements set up between the bargaining agent and the committee might not be honored by the mayor if the overall budget was not approved. BTU representative O’Connell responded that in this instance, the burden would fall to the bargaining agent and the committee to appeal the mayor’s decision, and should that fail, to renegotiate the terms of the contract within the budget constraints. But Hicks appeared unswayed, and suggested that collective bargaining with teachers could drain the resources the committee allocated for the students. She stated, “You see, it would worry me, Mr. O’Connell, that when we set up our budget and after it is sent back to us by the Mayor we would have in our budget certain educational programs for our children that would be most necessary for the educational welfare of the children of the city of Boston but perhaps if the bargaining agent would demand more money how would we be expected to pay it—by taking from our programs that we had already set up for our

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63 Ibid., 12.
64 John Collins, who had opposed the teachers and School Committee over teachers’ sick leave a couple of years earlier, was still the mayor at this time.
The suggestion here, of course, was that teachers were acting from a selfish impulse without regard to student needs.

Committeeman Joseph Lee’s response addressed what he saw as the primary hazard of collective bargaining: one teacher group dominating the other. His statements reveal discrepancies between the committee’s and the BTU’s perceptions of past negotiations. He argued that collective bargaining would not improve the position of teachers, because teachers had been treated fairly in the past. He referred favorably to the BTA, but of the BTU, he stated, “I noticed in the magazine of the Union references made to the teacher having to beg the School Committee for a salary and being at the mercy of the School Committee. Actually, it’s much more the other way around.” He argued that teachers can always take advantage of their “extreme mobility” and move to other districts that offer better wages.

Committeeman Eisenstadt’s comments revealed the School Committee interest in retaining complete control over salary negotiations. He stated that wrangling over the budget with the mayor would essentially involve the mayor in “salary-making deliberations,” which has been “the exclusive task of the School Committee.” Eisenstadt also wondered if agreeing to the election meant that the committee was endorsing collective bargaining. O’Connell replied that the election would only select a bargaining agent, and that the committee would then have to decide whether or not it

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65 Ibid., 17.
66 Ibid, 50.
67 Boston teachers were historically underpaid, with wages lagging behind salaries earned by teachers in other urban areas in Massachusetts. See Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 44, 154; and Murphey, Boston Teachers Organize, 35-36. Boston teachers’ base salaries were also lower than base salaries in other urban centers across the country. Statistics listed in the Boston Union Teacher in 1967 ranked Boston’s base teacher wage 16th out of large cities nationwide. William J. Mallen, “Boston’s Minimum Salary and Pay Differentials Seen As Dismal Record,” Boston Union Teacher (January-February 1967), 3.
would agree to collective bargaining. Of course, both the School Committee and BTU leaders knew that the election of a bargaining agent would lead to the quest for collective bargaining rights; the BTU’s attempt to emphasize a distinction between the two did not convince committee members that there was a clear separation.

The School Committee continued to debate the election as if it was an endorsement of collective bargaining, and raised concerns over union tactics. Eisenstadt turned to BTU attorney Arthur Goldman and questioned what the union would do if the School Committee were unable to uphold its end of the contract, due to budget constraints or other issues. In fact, Eisenstadt asked the same question several different ways, and Goldman gave several replies, citing organizational pressures, such as publicity, or action within the court system to bring about the committee’s cooperation. Goldman’s circumspect answers only encouraged more questions from Eisenstadt, until Goldman replied, “What you are clearly asking, Mr. Eisenstadt, is would there be a strike.” Eisenstadt answered “No,” and at that point Hicks stepped in and asked the crowd to “observe proper decorum,” revealing the atmosphere in the hall among union members present. Finally, Eisenstadt asked what could be done, short of a strike, to achieve agreement between the parties in the event of an impasse. Goldman cited mediation or arbitration as successful tools in collective bargaining in other cites.

Throughout the meeting, Louise Day Hicks continued to appear confounded by how collective bargaining would work at all. She went beyond the use of strike, and instead suggested that collective bargaining itself was a “militant tactic.” She asked Goldman if he would agree to this characterization, and he replied, “Well, as a matter of semantics I am not sure we would be talking about the same use of the same word. I

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69 Ibid., 23-24.
think it is a determined procedure by the teachers of the Boston school system—that they are convinced that it is important for their welfare and the welfare of the schools to have an organization represent them for the purpose of collective bargaining. If that is in your terms militant, then I suppose I would agree.”\(^{70}\) Hicks’s eagerness to claim collective bargaining as militant and characterize teachers as potentially taking money away from children’s programs reveals her personal reluctance to endorse collective bargaining. Her interest in arguing that the School Committee would not be able to bargain successfully within the budget constraints was her one appeal to the logistics of collective bargaining.

It was not until the School Committee’s April 16, 1964 meeting that Committeeman Arthur Gartland called for a vote on the issue of allowing the election. This meeting revealed the mindset of Gartland and William O’Connor, the two committee members who did not submit questions to the BTU at the February meeting. Gartland stated, “I don’t expect that there is a hideous specter of collective bargaining that is going to upset the whole system. I expect, rather, that as time goes by we shall find we are going to have professional negotiation and that it’s far better to grasp time by the forelock and go at it constructively, not negatively, with the expectation that either legal sanctions or moral sanctions will keep teachers through their representatives in line with reason and good policy and similarly will affect the School Committee.”\(^{71}\)

O’Connor, on the other hand, was not concerned with the details of collective bargaining; he opposed the idea of collective bargaining for public employees at all. He argued that in industry workers contributed to the growing profits of a firm and were thereby entitled to reap benefits from that profit. “In school there is no monetary profit to increase,” he

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 27.

\(^{71}\) “Conference Minutes,” April 16, 1964, School Committee Minutes, 111.
stated, “and the hours of work have been established by state law.” Later in the meeting, O’Connor referred to the current system of negotiating with the teachers, and stated, “If it hasn’t proven defective, then I see no point in changing it.”

Hicks and Lee reiterated many of the same arguments they made at the February meeting, but Eisenstadt argued in favor of allowing the election and approving collective bargaining. He referred to the earlier comments of committee members who argued that teachers were already well represented through the Board of Superintendents and the administrative staff at the School Department. Eisenstadt argued, “Well, it must be borne in mind that these individuals represent management, if we want to analogize this situation with that that exists in private industry. And where does labor or employees properly speak through the voices of management? This is highly irregular, highly illogical.” He went further even, and suggested that the committee could benefit from the insight of teachers’ experience to the greater benefit of Boston’s schools.

Though the committee members debated the issue at length, not one of the five members appeared to be persuaded to change their minds on the issue of the election. Hicks continued to maintain her doubts regarding the process of collective bargaining, and both O’Connor and Lee argued that collective bargaining was simply not necessary. Gartland and Eisenstadt, both in favor of allowing the election and collective bargaining for teachers, were the only members that argued that the current system was flawed. Ultimately, Hicks stated that there was still much to study on the matter and moved to table the issue. Following her lead, the committee voted 3-2 to table the issue.

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72 Ibid., 96.
73 Ibid., 115.
74 Ibid., 118.
After the unsuccessful hearing with the School Committee, an internal debate developed in the BTU over how best to promote collective bargaining. The tactics proposed by Lucille Swaim, the organizer who helped the union in its successful sick leave campaign, were not universally accepted by all teachers in the union. Fred Reilly, BTU president from 1963-1969, stated that Swaim “was very competent. I didn’t get along with her, but she was very competent.”

He continued,

She was way ahead of us for how we could accept union things. And it caused quite a bit of friction. She immediately wanted to carry banners and picket. Well, we weren’t ready for that. She wanted to do these way-out things in Boston that most of us knew couldn’t be done at the time. So there was so much trouble in the executive board that they asked to have her relieved….You see, you had at the time a predominantly Irish community here, that just didn’t take things as they come.

Swaim sought to organize a fast-paced campaign, with constant meetings, demonstrations, and lobbying, a campaign not supported by the more conservative union members. According to BTU historian Martha O’Neil, President Reilly culled his support within the union from these members, who were mostly elementary school teachers. Swaim was soon replaced by another organizer, and the collective bargaining campaign continued, though at a slower pace.

Reilly’s reference to the predominantly Irish community in Boston is readily apparent in a reading of union newsletters from this time. During the collective bargaining campaign, the vast majority of teachers were not only Irish, but Catholic as well, and the newsletter was not above making frank appeals to this widely shared heritage. The March 1965 *Boston Union Teacher* was printed on green paper, and the

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75 Murphey, “Boston Teachers Organize,” 235.
76 Ibid.
77 O’Neil’s history of the BTU that was published as six article installments in the *Boston Union Teacher* in 1975.
Editorial column stated that, “The soft hue of the stock we use in this issue may serve to remind our readers of the Glorious Apostle whose Day we celebrate during this month.”

The editorial continued, and discussed the current divisions among teachers as it stated “We, too, may use the shamrock as Patrick did to illustrate how three may fuse into one. The leaves of True Believers, Dissidents, and Indifferents spring from one stem, but each grows in a different direction.”

Also during these years, the newsletter was quick to refer to Pope John XXIII’s *Mater et Magistra*, and first printed excerpts of the encyclical in January 1964, shortly after the collective bargaining campaign began. There were also references to “the late beloved Al Smith,” the Catholic presidential candidate in 1928, and to the idea that publicly elected officials owed an obligation to God “because He is the Arbiter of right and wrong.”

Catholicism influenced the BTA as well; one of the reasons that the BTA never affiliated with the NEA was because the national organization was perceived as anti-Catholic.

Strategies to convince fellow teachers of the need for collective bargaining dominated the BTU newsletter articles during these years. One of the common arguments the union promoted was that collective bargaining would allow teachers a structured platform and a designated time during which to negotiate salary and benefits, leaving time for teachers to address other issues in the schools. An article titled, “Collective Bargaining: Democracy With Efficiency” in the union newsletter stated that “it is the only answer, the only solution toward improving discipline, bettering working

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79 Ibid.
81 O’Connell, “The Reform Group,” 120-121.
conditions and class size, gaining duty-free lunch periods, and dealing with all the other problems which still confront us."82 The headlines dominating the *Boston Globe* in the early 1960s over the battle to integrate the public schools were never explicitly referred to in the union’s newsletter. Rather, references were made to overcrowding, the poor state of the physical plant, and discipline problems among students, all of which could be addressed, the union argued, if teachers gained collective bargaining rights. Collective Bargaining Committee Chairman Arthur Hartin wrote in the May-June 1965 *Boston Union Teacher* that, “Certainly in 1965, there remains no valid excuse for the denial of the teachers’ right to decide whether or not they wish to engage in collective bargaining, and if so, who will represent them. It is the obvious way to settle current dissension on many matters.”83

As the 1965 School Committee election neared, the BTU did not endorse any candidates, a clear reflection of the union’s frustration over the committee’s continued refusal to agree to a collective bargaining election. This was the School Committee election that witnessed the resounding defeat of any candidates remotely sympathetic to the issue of *de facto* segregation. Even though many teachers supported the committee majority which stood in opposition to student busing, the BTU could not endorse Hicks, O’Connell, or Lee because of their position on collective bargaining. Arthur Gartland, who supported the right of teachers to hold an election, had also established his reputation as a supporter of black parents who campaigned for school integration. BTU president Reilly predicted as early as June 1965 that Gartland would not be re-elected in the fall. According to O’Connell, “Reilly said members should support Gartland for his

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support of bargaining, but it seemed clear that Reilly doubted they would.”

Eisenstadt was the only incumbent who was both pro-collective bargaining and anti-busing, but ultimately, the union made no endorsements.

In October 1965, one month before the Boston School Committee election, Louise Day Hicks reversed her opinion on collective bargaining. There is no indication that Hicks reversed her position due to the upcoming election. After all, she was riding a wave of voter support, having received the most votes of any candidate in the preliminary elections held in September. The more likely motivation for her changed opinion was the confluence of two developments. The first was the imminent passage of a state law allowing collective bargaining for public employees, and her desire to demonstrate voluntary, rather than forced, support for Boston’s teachers. The second was the rising demand for school integration, against which she was seeking allies. The simultaneous emergence of these circumstances led Hicks to reverse herself in a way that would allow her to defend the anti-integration cause as pro-teacher. One year earlier, Hick’s characterized teachers as potentially seeking money allocated for children’s programs and called collective bargaining a “militant tactic.” Now, she championed the plight of classroom teachers. At a School Committee meeting held October 4, 1965, Hicks revealed that she had changed her mind about collective bargaining after long and careful consideration of the matter. She stated:

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85 Ibid., 225. O’Connell reported that the BTA made no endorsements because of “internal strife” over which candidates to support, but he did not elaborate further.
86 Legislation allowing collective bargaining for public employees was passed on November 17, 1965. Teachers credited the AFSCME almost exclusively for this accomplishment, the fruition of a campaign that stretched back over ten years. “Collective Bargaining Bill Enacted into State Law,” Massachusetts Union Teacher 13, no. 1 (December 1965), 1, 7; Margaret M. Callahan, “The State Affiliate—The Massachusetts Federation of Teachers,” Boston Union Teacher (April 1965), 7.
Public education in America is currently under severe attack. This is especially true of public education in the great urban areas of the North. The target for these attacks has often been, here in Boston and elsewhere, the classroom teacher. These accusations are untrue, unfair, and seriously depressive to the morale of your teachers who labor so conscientiously in the disadvantaged areas of our city. I feel that the teachers are in need of a unified organization and a unified voice which will rally to the defense of classroom teachers everywhere….I view collective bargaining as the vehicle which will provide this single voice.  

Hicks did not mention the collective bargaining bill which would become law in a matter of weeks. Instead, she pivoted to make a virtue out of necessity by striking an alliance with Boston’s teachers. She did not have to spell out the nature of the “severe attack” and the “untrue, unfair” accusations that were at that moment being directed against “public education in the great urban areas of the North.” Her supporters understood that this was a reference to the integration campaigns that were then underway. Not only did Hicks position herself as a defender of teachers, she connected it to the ongoing battle over school integration, and made no mention of the collective bargaining law which was set to become law within a matter of weeks. After Hicks’s comments, the committee voted, and the combined votes of Hicks, Gartland, and Eisenstadt now created the majority necessary for teachers to win the right to hold an election.

The teachers’ election was held just over one month later, on November 9, 1965. Supervised by the State Labor Relations Board, the polls were open at the Boston Arena from seven in the morning until eight in the evening.  

There were two questions on the ballot, and the first, whether teachers should elect a single bargaining agent, passed 2,718 to 41 in favor of the election. The second question asked teachers to choose the

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88 The Boston Arena was a centrally located sporting venue, the original home of the Boston Bruins and the Boston Celtics.
bargaining agent; the BTU garnered 1,602 votes, and the BTA received 1,116 votes.  

Around three-quarters of the city’s teachers voted, including two hundred who cast their votes by candlelight after the electricity went out at 5:20 P.M. An “overjoyed” President Reilly declared that “It was the elementary teachers’ vote that brought the union home.” He credited a recent and decisive shift in allegiance among elementary teachers, and noted that over the past month 102 new members had joined the union. Reilly also acknowledged that many teachers who were not affiliated with the BTU had nonetheless voted for union representation, and he heralded this “new era” for Boston’s teachers.

The union intensified its campaign in those final weeks between the School Committee vote and the collective bargaining election, with multiple direct mailings to teachers and citywide publicity. In addition, the BTU Social Committee organized multiple gatherings for teachers, events where teachers mingled with the union’s president and executive committee and rubbed elbows with AFT representatives Sally Parker and Rose Claffey. Each of these “social” events added new teachers to the BTU’s membership rolls; in one week alone, three such events were credited with recruiting one hundred new members. The BTA, on the other hand, most likely suffered due to its lack of affiliation with a national organization. While the BTU received advice and encouragement from AFT leaders, and drew on the financial support from the national to offer teachers things like free coffee and parking on election day, the BTA stood only on

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90 November 9, 1965 was also the night of a massive power outage in the Northeast.
92 Fred Reilly, “President’s Message,” Boston Union Teacher (November 1965), 2.
93 Frank DiLorenzo, “BTU Social Season in Full Swing,” Boston Union Teacher (November 1965), 4.
its more conservative, anti-union principles. And while the BTU most likely did outspend the BTA in the final weeks before the election, the union also already had a collective bargaining campaign that it had managed for over two years. After the School Committee vote in early October, the union only had to increase the intensity of its campaign, and not produce one from scratch.

The victory of the BTU in the bargaining election showed that a strong majority of teachers were in agreement on the issue of collective bargaining and the need for a union. But this unity over the issue of collective bargaining and the elation that BTU leaders felt in the wake of its victory did not equate to teacher unity regarding all school issues, as both conservative and activist groups within the union struggled to work together. Nor did the momentum the union sustained in its collective bargaining campaign automatically translate into an active and engaged membership in the months after the election. As the BTU wrestled with ways to sustain a high level of interest among teachers in the day-to-day business of a union, the increasing intensity of the debate over _de facto_ segregation became an issue that was impossible to ignore, despite the union’s best efforts to do just that.

Conservative BTU president Fred Reilly steered the union through its first years as collective bargaining agent, and under his leadership the union chose not to take an official position on the issue of school segregation. This lack of action on the issue of civil rights was in sharp contrast to the work of the AFT, which had long supported the civil rights movement. The AFT’s support for civil rights movement dated back to the 1920s; the issue of school integration was formally addressed for the first time at the

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94 Donley, _Power to the Teacher_, 145.
union’s 1947 convention. By 1951, the AFT Executive Council approved a clause that
the union would no longer accept new charters from segregated locals, a problematic
stipulation in southern states where teachers faced dismissal for joining integrated
groups. In 1955, the AFT went further, and demanded that every local integrate or face
the revocation of its charter. This order led to the loss of more than four thousand AFT
members, and contributed to a decline in other locals.

The AFT closely allied itself with the civil rights movement, and enjoyed the
support of the NAACP, the Urban League and the Congress of Racial Equality. In the
summer of 1963, during the same months that the Boston branch of the NAACP began its
dispute with the Boston School Committee over de facto segregation, the AFT sent
teachers to Prince Edward County in Virginia, where schools had been closed to
circumvent desegregation orders. The national also worked on a resolution supporting
the Freedom Riders in the South, and provided buses and resources to organizers of the
August 1963 March on Washington.

The national was committed to civil rights in both word and deed, but that did not
translate into an active, pro-civil rights attitude on the local level in Boston. Local 66
offered no public statement regarding the debate over de facto segregation as the Boston
School Committee publicly wrangled with local civil rights leaders. Behind the scenes,
however, over a period of four months beginning in September 1963, a delegation of six
teachers from the BTU met regularly with the Education Committee of the Boston branch

95 Louisiana teachers were barred from joining integrated groups, and in Georgia, teachers could
not publicly support the Brown decision. Even in states without specific laws, teachers often faced
dismissal for becoming involved with integrated associations. Murphy, Blackboard Unions, 197-198.
96 This move toward immediate integration was certainly connected to the AFL-CIO merger in
February 1955. Ibid., 198-200; See also Rolland Dewing, “The American Federation of Teachers and
97 Murphy, Blackboard Unions, 207-208.
of the NAACP. One of the participating teachers, William O’Connell, recalled that the meetings progressed in a positive atmosphere, and that the teachers were open to the Education Committee’s arguments, while the NAACP members, including Ruth Batson, Mel King, and Thomas Atkins, demonstrated a patient resolve to convince the teachers of the need to publicly address *de facto* segregation in the schools. When these meetings began, the majority of the six teachers agreed with the position of Superintendent Gillis, who argued that the black community faced the same challenges as other immigrant groups had faced in the past, and would have to confront these obstacles in their own way. But by the end of the four months, five of the six teachers agreed with the NAACP position regarding the existence of *de facto* segregation in Boston’s public schools.

Despite the positive dialogue fostered between the teachers’ delegation and the city’s civil rights leaders, the BTU remained officially silent on the issue of racial imbalance in the schools. Surprisingly, this was at the request of the same teachers who had become convinced that *de facto* segregation was indeed a problem. Members of the small delegation could not convince many of their fellow teachers of the negative results caused by racial imbalance in the schools, and feared that if the BTU were forced to endorse any statement, its members might endorse a conservative position. Both conservative and activist camps within the union chose the path of least resistance: silence.

Divided by the issue of *de facto* segregation, Local 66 and the NAACP’s Boston branch never gained the common ground necessary to work on school reform together. There is no small irony in the fact that many reforms that the BTU supported overlapped

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99 Ibid., 240-241.
with the Fourteen Points endorsed by the Education Committee of the Boston branch of the NAACP. At the heart of this missed opportunity was the belief supported by the BTU and the AFT that efforts to promote school reform in Boston were hindered, not by race, but primarily because of the extreme financial limitations placed on the school system in Boston.

An AFT document on Civil Rights written in 1965 referred to reforms promoted by the BTU and stated that “Many items are and have long been recognized as necessary by the Boston School Committee,” but that “fiscal limitations” kept the committee from implementing such reforms. The paper concluded that “Within the framework of teacher organizations we must all work to improve the financial support of education so as to ultimately alter many of the present conditions which are detrimental to both teacher and educational welfare.” A speech by Carl Megel, who delivered an address to the BTU on the occasion of Local 66’s 20th anniversary in 1965, discussed the challenge of school funding without reference to the issue of school integration or race in Boston’s schools. Instead, he focused on the positive changes the recently-passed Elementary and Secondary Education Act might bring nationwide, so that “under-privileged boys and girls across the nation may be able to receive the benefits of quality education.”

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100 BTU President Reilly referenced the BTU’s “Action Program for Teachers” in a March 1965 union newsletter article as having been introduced in 1962, yet “with over 100 items never publicly considered by the committee.” Fred Reilly, “From the President: Ideals and Goals for the Boston Teachers Union in 1965,” Boston Union Teacher (March 1965), 1. Though BTU records contained no official list of the items listed in the Action Program, it is referenced in relation to the NAACP Education Committee’s Fourteen Points in an AFT position paper that stated “It is significant that a majority of the items included in the NAACP program are also included in the Action Program of the Boston Teachers Union.” “AFT: Civil Rights Issues,” Massachusetts Federation of Teachers Collection.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

suggestion here is that given proper funding, every school system would stop at nothing to
give all students a quality education.

But Boston’s civil rights leaders, who had battled almost constantly with the
Boston School Committee since June 1963, harbored no such confidence in the inherent
goodness of local school leaders. Rather, the campaign to legitimize claims of *de facto*
segregation indicated quite the opposite: that the Boston School Committee vehemently
denied all accusations of segregation or inequality in the schools despite ample evidence
to the contrary. The committee brushed aside the claims of the Education Committee of
the NAACP’s Boston branch and denounced the state’s Kiernan Commission when it
found racial imbalance in forty-five of Boston’s schools. The School Committee’s
defense of a system that the black community considered inherently unequal and the state
recognized as racially imbalanced only legitimized doubts that the committee wanted the
best education for all the city’s students.

As the debate over *de facto* segregation wore on, criticism leveled against the
city’s predominantly black schools created an almost insurmountable impasse between
teachers and civil rights leaders. As Boston School Committee members repeatedly
referred to “our dedicated teachers” and used every opportunity to demonstrate its
protection of teachers against the black community’s criticism, black leaders walked a
fine line between criticism of the schools and condemnation of the teachers. Meanwhile,
the *Boston Union Teacher* began to run articles that referred to the unfair portrayal of
teachers in the local media. One article in the January 1965 newsletter argued that the
media’s concern over Boston schools came in “periodic waves,” and stated, “How ironic
it is that these flurries of worries so seldom make any attempt to voice the thoughts of the
teachers, whose life labor is this educational well-being!" Here the union lashed out at the media and not at civil rights leaders who were the source of the critique. Whether this was due to a disregard for the seriousness of the debate over racial imbalance or an attempt to remain neutral by focusing complaints on an easier target, is unclear.

On an individual level, though, many teachers took school criticism personally. As civil rights activist Ruth Batson recalled,

This is one of the things I feel awfully badly about, the part I had to play in the protest, because I have a lot of respect for teachers generally, for the profession. What Mrs. Hicks did was take our protest and transfer it into a condemnation of teachers. What we were doing was condemning a system which would not allow a teacher to be at her best, or his best. Of course, we have some lousy teachers, as you would have in any city. You have some people who are good and some who are not. But teachers for a long time have been very, very hostile, even black teachers, against those of us who have protested against education because they take it constantly that, 'I'm not a good teacher.'

School administrators had ample opportunity to insert themselves into this breach. Referring to charges leveled against teachers in the local media, Superintendent Ohrenberger jumped to the teachers’ defense in July 1965, stating “The dedicated men and women who labor daily with professional skill and infinite patience in the predominantly Negro schools of Boston are shocked and demoralized by these irrational and unwarranted attacks. I deplore the tactics of those who attempt to lace the entire problem of race relations upon education.”

The Boston School Committee, whose members immediately moved to defend teachers when the first charges of de facto segregation were directed at the school system in 1963, continued to act as figurative

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104 “The Press and Boston’s Schools,” Boston Union Teacher (January 1965), 2.
protectors when it was convenient. For example, when Louise Day Hicks changed her committee vote in the fall of 1965 to allow a collective bargaining election, she credited this change of heart to the criticism heaped upon teachers, trying at the same time to smooth over her prior opposition to collective bargaining and position herself as the champion of teachers.

It was not simply criticism of the schools, though, but criticism by parties that teachers considered to be outside the sphere of education that deepened the divide between teachers and civil rights advocates. An editorial printed in the *Boston Union Teacher* in September 1967 contained the following: “The fact remains that the bulk of Boston’s residents and the residents of other cities and towns who rely upon our local news media for their information are still presented with the image of Boston’s typical school as a neglected and dilapidated bastille, administered by dolts, and staffed by sadists. Those who know (may their tribe increase) have the proof that it ‘just ain’t so.’”

The irony here is that teachers had been calling for school reform for years, and publicly acknowledged shortcomings within the system. The BTU submitted its “Action Program” to the Boston School Committee in 1962, and presented a lengthy list of items to improve the schools as it negotiated its first contract with the committee in 1966. In addition to salary requests, the BTU called for a host of educational reforms, ranging from the need to place limits on class size and create a remedial reading program, to the need for libraries in every school, to specific requests for new school construction, new furniture in classrooms, and even the need for adequate rest room facilities within each school. Teachers may have felt the media exaggerated the poor state of the schools,

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but teachers also acknowledged that the system had many problems. At the same time, teachers believed themselves to be the authority on the situation inside the schools, and rankled at criticism of the schools from parties who were not in the classrooms on a daily basis. This is one of the major roadblocks that prevented teachers and black community leaders from working together on shared goals.

This defensive mentality was clearly demonstrated after Jonathan Kozol published his memoir of a year he spent as a temporary teacher in the Boston schools. Kozol taught a fourth grade class at the Gibson School in Dorchester from September 1964 to the following Spring of 1965, when he was dismissed for failing to follow curriculum guidelines in the classroom. The Gibson was a predominantly black school, and the primary reason for Kozol’s dismissal was based on his introduction of Langston Hughes’ “Ballad of the Landlord” to his students. Kozol published his account of that year of teaching, *Death at an Early Age*, in 1967. The book describes an overcrowded, physically deteriorating school staffed by teachers who were alternately described as unable to adequately meet the needs of students or simply unwilling to meet the daunting challenges found in this urban school. Describing the veteran teachers at this school, whom Kozol regularly observed as part of his training, he wrote, “I cannot say that I learned anything at all except how to suppress and pulverize any sparks of humanity or independence or originality in children.”

As news of Kozol’s dismissal was reported in the spring of 1965, one teacher wrote an angry letter to the *Boston Globe* attacking Kozol for implying that the fourth grade course of study was inadequate. As he closed his letter he identified himself, stating, “I’m one of the Boston teachers who can’t stand

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109 Kozol, *Death at an Early Age*, 14.
to see my system get a knife in the back.”\(^{110}\) After *Death at an Early Age* was published, BTU president Fred Reilly used his column in the *Boston Union Teacher* to dismiss Kozol as an imposter with no real knowledge of the Boston school system. Reilly wrote, “The reader should bear in mind that the Boston Public Schools encompass about two hundred schools, almost 4,500 teachers, and about 93,000 pupils. How valid are the judgments of one who has served for 160 days in about four schools in the capacity of a temporary teacher, and came into reasonably constant contact with about fifteen teachers? The reader may draw his own conclusions.”\(^{111}\) Reilly also questioned Kozol’s motives, stating that if conditions were truly as bad as described in the book, Kozol should have felt compelled to speak out earlier.

The next issue of the *Boston Union Teacher* published two letters to the Editor, one praising Reilly’s previous column and one condemning it. Reilly noted, however, that of the “scores of letters” he received, the “overwhelming majority” were favorable.\(^ {112}\) The favorable letter, signed by a group of teachers from the Roger Clapp School, wished that more people could read Reilly’s column, for “Many people are prone to believe the half-truths contained in Mr. Kozol’s publications.”\(^ {113}\) John Page, a teacher at the Boston Latin School, criticized Reilly’s column, and deemed it “parochial, unwarranted, and unnecessary.” Page continued, “It seems to me that the Union and the President should be fighting against educational narrow-mindedness rather than


\(^{111}\) Fred Reilly, “President’s Message,” *Boston Union Teacher* (September-October 1967), 2.

\(^{112}\) Fred Reilly, “President’s Message,” *Boston Union Teacher* (November-December 1967), 2.

exhibiting it.”

Page’s criticism notwithstanding, it appears that a majority of teachers were more outraged by Kozol’s words than by Reilly’s critique.

As the problem of racial imbalance continued to dominate headlines into the late-1960s, furor over *Death at an Early Age* would become just one more component in the larger debate over race unfolding in the schools. The Boston School Committee continued to hold its ground regarding racial imbalance even as state funds were withheld from the Boston school system because of the committee’s refusal to submit an integration plan in accordance with the Racial Imbalance Act. Meanwhile, the BTU maintained its neutral position on school integration publicly, while internally it acknowledged a problem with member apathy barely one year after Local 66 won the collective bargaining election. Fred Reilly wrote in January 1967 that “Complacency and indolence could cause us to lose much of what we have gained, to fail in our quest for further benefits. Our reason for concern in this field arises from the disappointingly small number of votes returned to this office in the recent balloting and the dearth of willing hands that appear at the office to assist in performing the day-to-day tasks that must be done.”

Teachers approved their first union contract just about six months prior to Reilly’s comments.

The BTU achieved moderate salary gains in its first two contracts, signed in July 1966 and July 1967, respectively. Though Boston’s teacher salaries still lagged behind the wages received by teachers in other major urban centers, each contract provided

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increases deemed acceptable by the city’s teachers. In addition, in the 1967-68 contract, teachers were granted such requests as a duty-free lunch period, and improved provisions for teacher leave. The union was gaining ground on a professional level, yet the language of the negotiation committee suggested that teachers still felt abused by the current atmosphere of criticism of the public schools. In the Fall of 1966, the Chairman of the BTU Negotiation team wrote, “Those to whom the people entrust the minds of their children, and to whom the nation and commonwealth confide the training of our future citizens, can not properly carry out this sacred trust and at the same time tolerate condescension or intimidation from whatever direction it may come. To be true to our profession we must be true to ourselves.” There can be little doubt that the “condescension” and “intimidation” came from the continuing battle over de facto segregation. And yet the BTU still did not attack Boston’s civil rights leaders directly.

By the late 1960s, this type of vague reference to teacher criticism gave way to a more direct discussion of problems facing the school system. Among these were challenges stemming from increased acts of racial violence in the schools and the emergence of the community control issue. The number of racially imbalanced schools in the city of Boston increased after the passage of the Racial Imbalance Act, and growing frustration in the black community led to more student protests and classroom disruptions. Controversy over student discipline soon followed. The BTU’s

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119 Boston added two schools to its list of imbalanced schools only one year after the passage of the Racial Imbalance Act. The number would continue to grow into the early 1970s. “New State Listing for Racial Imbalance,” Bay State Banner, November 12, 1966, 2.
relationship with the School Committee moved onto tenuous ground, as further contract negotiations fell short of union demands and Boston teachers staged their first strike in 1970. The Boston Public Schools were entering an unstable period in the years prior to the landmark court decision which would force integration on the city, and teachers were in the middle of almost every issue.
CHAPTER 3


We’re going to let them know that we own this city. It is our city, we’re going to act like we own it and then we will own it.
—Rev. Virgil Wood, Director of the Blue Hill Protestant Center in Roxbury and Massachusetts unit president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, June 17, 1966.¹

On graduation day at the Patrick T. Campbell Junior High School in June 1966, 140 diplomas were to be distributed to graduating students. The Campbell school was 97 percent black; only three graduates that year were white. According to long-standing practice regarding all junior high and high school graduations, a member of the Boston School Committee was sent to attend the ceremony. That year, Louise Day Hicks took a place on the stage at the Campbell school. She later described her appearance at the school as mere chance, since all other committee members were busy that afternoon. But the black community saw her appearance as a deliberate provocation, attending the graduation of an overwhelmingly black school even as she denied the existence of de facto segregation and fought implementation of the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act. During the ceremony, Rev. Virgil Wood entered the hall and shouted to the school’s principal, “Mr. Principal, would you have invited Hitler into a synagogue?”² A chorus of “No” was heard from the audience, and then Rev. Wood pointed at Hicks and called out, “We don’t want that woman here, she is not wanted in our school, she is the Hitler of Boston!”³

² “Who Was Wrong At Graduation?” Bay State Banner, June 25, 1966, 1.
³ Ibid. This was not Rev. Wood’s first public confrontation with Louise Day Hicks. See Chapter One for more on the clergy’s involvement in the debate over school segregation.
The Campbell school graduation incident marked the beginning of a shift toward more direct and confrontational tactics employed by the black community in the school segregation debate. At the same time, the late 1960s saw an increase in racial incidents in the schools, and this chapter will examine the ways that teachers, the Boston Teachers Union, and the black community navigated that shifting landscape. As the School Committee dug in its heels and fought the Racial Imbalance Act in the courts, teachers learned to flex their collective bargaining muscles and civil rights leaders looked to new methods to effect school change. Community control became an important goal for black leaders, which led to conflict with the BTU, as teachers sought to protect their collective bargaining gains and promote their own goals for school reform. The dispute over community control did nothing to improve the already tenuous relationship between the union and the black community.

These years were an ideal time for the two movements—teacher unionism and civil rights—to foster mutual goals. But that did not happen. The inability of the two movements to stake out a common alliance is clear by the end of the decade. Meanwhile, the School Committee, which remained adamant in its refusal to bus students to integrate the schools, continued to refuse to concede that de facto segregation had caused the problems in the first place. As the School Committee, the teachers union, and black leaders fought for power within the system, no one would emerge a clear victor. The issue of race would not go away. In the early 1970s, there was little hope that the school system would be able to solve its problems on its own.
Prior to the start of the graduation ceremony at the Campbell school, there were indications that not all would run smoothly. As the School Committee representative, Hicks normally would have presented the diplomas to each graduate, but when word of her attendance leaked, parents complained to the principal. Alice Yancey, president of the Campbell Home and School Association, the Boston public school version of the PTA, sent a certified letter to Hicks telling her that it would be in the “best interests” of the children if she stayed away from the graduation. In addition, parents called the principal’s office and warned that their children might tear up their diplomas if presented to them by Hicks. In response, it was decided that the principal would distribute the diplomas; Louise Day Hicks decided to bring a police escort.

After Wood’s initial confrontation, he took the stage and led the audience in a series of questions. The questions, “Is Mrs. Hicks interested in our children?”, and “Does she belong here today?” were met with shouts of “no” from the audience, and when Rev. Wood asked, “What do you want to say to Mrs. Hicks?”, the audience chanted “Go home.” After a momentary pause, Rev. Wood then stated, “The principal of this school—who doesn’t live in this community—just asked me to leave.” The emphasis on the principal’s “outsider” status is notable here for two reasons: it suggested that the white principal was not concerned with the welfare of the school’s black students, and it foreshadowed the fight over appointing black principals for majority black schools, which took place eighteen months later.

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4 For an additional description of the incident, see Lukas, Common Ground, 115-116.
5 “Who Was Wrong At Graduation?”, 5.
6 Rev. Wood’s appearance was also prompted by parents. He stated, “Some of the mothers contacted me when they heard she was going to be at the graduation, and I decided to go along to take a look.” Stephen Zorn, “Surprised by Wood, Says Mrs. Hicks,” Boston Globe, June 19, 1966, 12.
Police forcibly removed Rev. Wood from the stage, and four policemen carried him into a back corridor, followed by members of the audience who pushed forward to protest Wood’s removal. Confusion erupted; a twenty-gallon trash barrel was thrown on the stage, and Hicks was surrounded by police officers and escorted out of the hall. Outrage over the incident rippled through the black community and was publicly addressed by members of the clergy. In a sermon at the Arlington Street Church the following Sunday, Rev. Jack Mendelsohn stated, “Mrs. Hicks is not a criminal, she is a disaster from whom society needs protection.”8 He continued, “Mrs. Hicks is a sick person. She must be. Only a sick person would deliberately build a political career by exploiting the primitive prejudices of the majority white community and goading the deepening frustrations of the minority Negro community.”9 Rev. Vernon Carter of the All Saints Lutheran Church in the South End stated that “The Negro people of Boston are being driven to a state of fury by Mrs. Hicks.”10 Meanwhile, Hicks, who had displayed little reaction at the graduation, expressed only surprise at the turn of events, claiming that she had attended graduations at several majority-black schools in the past without any trouble.

This was not the only high-profile incident at the Campbell school in 1966. In early December, two student assaults on teachers garnered media attention after a district court judge partially blamed the assaults on the School Committee for creating “ghetto schools.” Paul Connelly, a twenty-three year old provisional teacher, suffered a broken nose and a black eye when he tried to break up a fight between two students in a corridor of the Campbell school on December 7. Mary Johnson, a fifty year old assistant

8 “Rev. Mendelsohn: Calls Hicks ‘Sick’,” Bay State Banner, July 2, 1966, 3.
9 Ibid.
principal, was attacked by a student in the school’s cafeteria on December 2, and missed over a week of work after the assault. These were not isolated incidents. Testifying in Dorchester District Court, Connelly stated that this was the second time a student had attacked him in the past three weeks, and that “There have been several other assaults on teachers” since the start of the school year.\textsuperscript{11} School Committee Chairman Thomas Eisenstadt rushed to the teachers’ defense and called for the maximum allowable punishment for the students, to send “a dramatic warning to other free-fisted punks in our schools.”\textsuperscript{12} Eisenstadt continued, “We cannot stand idly by and tolerate the wholesale pummeling of our teachers by ruffians who lack respect for authority and law.”\textsuperscript{13} He gave the teachers paid leave to recuperate.

At the students’ hearing Judge Jerome Troy blamed the School Committee for creating the conditions which led to the assaults. He stated, “Here is the perfect illustration of the retardation of our School Committee. If there were fewer ghetto schools, these things would be less apt to occur. I hope someone will pull the committee, kicking and screaming, into the year 1967 before it costs Boston taxpayers more money and more heartaches.”\textsuperscript{14} Adding to the already dramatic public rhetoric, Supt. Ohrenberger charged that Judge Troy’s remarks could “jeopardize the welfare and very lives of the teachers of this city.”\textsuperscript{15} Committeeman Joseph Lee issued his own comments, and remarked that “We are being mauled, and Judge Troy accuses us of being the maulers…Judge Troy ought to put himself in jail.”\textsuperscript{16} Committeeman John McDonough

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] Ibid.
\item[14] Ibid.
\item[15] Ibid.
\item[16] Ibid.
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took the blame and placed it squarely on Judge Troy’s shoulders. McDonough’s reply to Troy’s criticism was that “If the judge had been a little firmer with Mr. Wood following the Patrick Campbell School graduation riot last June, it would have avoided many of the troubles that we have in Roxbury schools today.”

The finger-pointing in the press far overshadowed the reported assaults. And school administrators found ever more targets to blame. At a School Committee meeting on December 19, the committee voted unanimously to institute internal changes at the school to quell repeated incidents of violence. At this meeting Supt. Ohrenberger blamed community leaders, presumably those criticizing the schools, for poor student morale. Referring to “misguided religious, political and educational leaders,” he stated that “All respect for teachers, all respect for authority, has been squeezed out of these children. Those irresponsible members of this community, white and non-white, who launched and continued this campaign of vilification can now witness the fruits of their labors.”

Referring to the students, Ohrenberger claimed that “They have been for so long told that their teachers are inferior that they now believe it. They have been for so long told that their teachers are discriminating against them they now believe it. They have been so long told that the School Committee and the school department are anti-Negro that they now believe it, and cannot help but show their resentment. Neither can they help but express their hostilities and antagonisms toward the teachers whom they believe to be discriminatory and inferior.”

School officials absolved themselves of blame for any

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17 Judge Troy Raps School Committee,” 1.


racial incidents in the schools, and claimed that instead of racially imbalanced schools, it was the campaign to end imbalance that was to blame for the teacher assaults.

Ironically, the teachers who had been attacked were the only people who did not publicly criticize the schools in the verbal sparring that followed the students’ court appearance. Though Johnston stated that “I just can’t believe, or understand, why this happened,” both she and Connelly blamed a small group of students for causing the bulk of the Campbell school’s problems. The two teachers stressed that every school has its own group of troublemakers, and affirmed that the majority of their students are “great kids.” Johnston and Connelly also praised their fellow teachers as “some of the best, most devoted in Boston.”

Contrasting these comments with those of Chairman Eisenstadt’s or Judge Troy’s demonstrates the range of attitudes toward racial problems in the schools. The teachers painted neither students nor school system with a broad brush, and cited general disciplinary problems that occurred system-wide. School Committee members and Supt. Ohrenberger blamed “outside agitators” for inciting racial turmoil. Only Associate Superintendent Thomas Meagher offered more measured public comments. Like the assaulted teachers, Meagher blamed a small group of students for violent outbreaks, but he also stressed a need for more experienced teachers at the Campbell. In his remarks to the School Committee, he stated that “I was pleasantly surprised when I visited the school. The classes were some of the finest I have seen. If we could get twenty-five top teachers we could clear the situation up in two or three months.”

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20 Botwright, 3.  
21 Ibid.
Neither the assaulted teachers nor Associate Supt. Meagher classified the incident in racial terms. It was discipline, not race, that was the problem.

The continuing dialogue created an opportunity for the BTU to advocate for school reform. Following the assaults, BTU Executive Secretary Lou Vangel noted that for the last three years, teacher turnover was around forty percent annually at the Campbell school. He attributed the bulk of the turnover to teachers who had been given one-year provisional assignments and who then resigned only a few weeks or months into the term. Vangel commented that “Unless something is done in this court to offer protection for teachers, we won’t be able to recruit teachers for this school.”²³ At the School Committee’s December 19 meeting, Vangel went further and stated that teacher assaults were not isolated to the Campbell school, even though students committing assaults represented “a small minority of the population.”²⁴ At the same meeting, union representatives proposed several ideas for reforming the Campbell, many of which overlapped with the ideas of committee members, such as redesigning the curriculum and hiring additional teachers. The union also made a dramatic demand to the School Committee: immediate expulsion for any student who attacked or threatened a teacher. The measure was rejected by the committee, but the BTU’s request for zero tolerance revealed that, despite the assessment offered by Johnston and Connelly, workplace safety was a serious concern.

By the close of the December 19th meeting, the School Committee laid down a plan to correct the problems at the Campbell school. The curriculum would be redesigned, extra teachers and teacher’s aides would be hired, and experienced teachers

²² Ibid., 39.
²³ Botwright, 3. The numbers on turnover refer to a staff of fifty teachers for 670 students.
²⁴ “Conference Minutes,” December 19, 1966, School Committee Minutes, 16.
would replace temporary teachers. In addition, pending endorsement of the BTU, the School Committee offered $1,000 annual bonus pay for teachers at the school. The offer of “combat pay” was supported by twenty Campbell school teachers in a petition that circulated between late December and early January. The petition listed the problems affecting schools in “disadvantaged areas” and proposed improvements for the Campbell and other struggling schools. The teacher-crafted document also declared that problems were escalating in Boston’s schools and stated “we feel that they are by-products of Racial Imbalance as it exists in our system.”

Departing from the comments of the assaulted teachers, the teachers’ joint statement directly cited race as a factor in the school’s problems.

Despite the Campbell teachers support, the BTU membership voted against the endorsement of “combat pay” in January 1967. By mail-in ballot, 591 voted against extra pay, and 494 voted for the incentive. In total, the votes tallied less than half of the 2400 that had been mailed to union members. The fact that only a minority of the membership was concerned enough to return their ballots suggests that a good number of teachers either did not care or did not feel affected by the issue. In addition, of the minority that was interested in the issue, the group was closely divided on “combat pay.” The failure of the measure publicly signaled that the union remained committed to the

25 Such bonuses were referred to as “combat pay,” a term coined by Albert Shanker, who at that time was president of the United Federation of Teachers, New York City’s AFT local. Shanker claimed that the phrase was meant to criticize the incentive; he argued that troubled schools needed more help than would be gained by the hiring of experienced teachers. Betram G. Waters, “Combat Pay a ‘Gimmick,’ School Union Head Says,” Boston Globe, January 15, 1967, 9.
27 Ibid., 2.
single-salary scale, even while the majority of teachers at so-called “combat schools” supported the pay bonuses.\textsuperscript{29}

The division on the issue of “combat pay” reveals the difference in perspective among union members based on their site of employment, and it also suggests that BTU leadership was neither able to motivate its members to vote or to craft a position that would encourage unity on the issue. Boston Globe reporter Bertram Waters suggested that the vote broke down between younger members, who supported the bonuses, and older members, who were opposed to the measure. A couple of intertwining factors could be to blame here: older members were concerned with protecting the salaries they had achieved through years of experience, and these members were not willing to risk their salaries at the expense of a bonus for new teachers. Adding to this sentiment, these new teachers were working in the same inner-city schools where the older teachers had already put in their own time before being transferred up and out to schools outside of the inner-city. This vote reveals the ongoing identity crisis that would remain a part of the union for several years to come. The union was comprised of members across a wide spectrum of ages, backgrounds, and years of education, and further complicated by differences in identity based on the site of employment.

The school year progressed without further headline-grabbing racial incidents in the schools, though problems persisted beneath the media glare. The Boston School Committee, after over a year of wrangling with the state Board of Education, had its first

\textsuperscript{29} The idea for pay bonuses had first been proposed more than six months prior, in June 1966. “Boston School System Remains Complex,” Bay State Banner, January 14, 1967, 1.
plan to comply with the Racial Imbalance Act approved in March.\textsuperscript{30} Meanwhile, the School Committee continued to fight the Racial Imbalance Law in the courts. After the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court upheld the constitutionality of the law in a June 9 decision, the School Committee voted 4-1 to take their case to the U.S. Supreme Court.\textsuperscript{31} Jonathan Kozol’s \textit{Death at an Early Age} was published in the summer of 1967, and the widespread attention received by the book laid bare the problems in Boston’s schools for readers nationwide. Though the BTU and Boston’s teachers criticized Kozol’s findings, black community leaders knew the problems were still pervasive and continued to press for change. That fall, Boston School Committee elections were overshadowed by Louise Day Hicks’s defeat in the mayoral race and the election of Thomas Atkins to city council. Atkins was Boston’s first black city council member elected under the at-large system.\textsuperscript{32}

In the campaign for mayor, Hicks was defeated by Kevin White, who garnered 53 percent of the vote and beat Hicks by 12,429 votes. White received an overwhelming percentage of the black vote, and he ran close to even with Hicks in majority white districts.\textsuperscript{33} The defeat of Hicks along with the election of Atkins to city council gave many black citizens hope that the city would enter a new, more peaceful phase in race relations. Rene Giles, a Dorchester resident, stated, “I was under the impression that

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\textsuperscript{30} The approval of this plan followed the rejection of several earlier plans and enabled the release of millions of dollars in funding contingent on the presentation of an acceptable plan. Smith, “Two Centuries and Twenty-Four Months,” 39.

\textsuperscript{31} School Committee member Eisenstadt was the lone dissenting vote. Eisenstadt argued that it was a waste of funds to fight the law further ($10,000 had been spent challenging the law in state courts, and he estimated that a Supreme Court case would cost $20,000 more), because the Supreme Court would undoubtedly uphold the Mass. law. “Committee Okays Busing But Fights Imbalance Law,” \textit{Bay State Banner}, June 22, 1967, 1.

\textsuperscript{32} Boston abolished district council elections in 1951.

there were a great number of bigots in Boston. But apparently there aren’t as many after all.”

Paul Parks commented, “To see Tom win means that perhaps we can crack the door and see there is some hope for the Negro community.”

Still, Kevin White’s victory was by no means a landslide, and Louise Day Hicks still had a large number of supporters in the city, one of whom commented on election night, “The little people, that’s who lost, the little people.”

Though overshadowed by the mayoral race, the School Committee elections offered a stark contrast to the results of the 1965 election. In 1965, Hicks received the most votes, and her totals dwarfed those of the other elected members. In 1967, Thomas Eisenstadt, a member often associated with standing in opposition to Hicks, earned the most votes. Also significant was the fact that incumbent William O’Connor, an outspoken critic of integration, was defeated. With the departure of Louise Day Hicks and John McDonough to the mayoral campaign, three new members joined incumbents Eisenstadt and Joseph Lee: attorneys John Kerrigan and Paul Tierney, and Paul McDevitt, a 25 year-old teacher. Although this election did not provide the same racial undercurrent as the 1965 election, when Mel King was defeated despite heavy turnout in majority black voting wards, it is difficult to read too much into the results. The campaign was described as “distinguished by its lack of voter interest,” and immediate

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36 Jeremiah V. Murphy, “‘Your Finest Hour,’ Her Supporters Said,” Boston Globe, November 8, 1966, 23; Howard Husock argues that with this election, it was clear that there was “a hard-core Hicks constituency, but it was not a majority of the electorate.” She ran strongest among lower-income whites. Husock, “Boston,” in Busing U.S.A., ed. Nicolaus Mills (New York, Columbia University Press, 1979), 344.
37 Bertram G. Waters, “School Committee; Enter: Three New Faces,” Boston Globe, November 8, 1966, 1, 24. McDevitt’s win was credited to his “highly visible campaign in a year dominated by the mayoralty contest.” McDevitt was also the first name listed on the ballot, a placement which has historically given a boost to candidates with names placed at the top of the list. It is not clear as to whether McDevitt was involved in the BTU or if the union endorsed him as one of its candidates.
analysis pointed to the fact that Kerrigan was a well-known city hall employee (he had served as secretary to Boston Mayor John Collins and assistant corporation counsel for the city from 1960 to 1967), Tierney was the brother of the Parks Commissioner, and McDevitt was listed first on the ballot. There were no black candidates on the School Committee ballot, and with the absence of Hicks as a polarizing figure, attention focused on other city races.

The new committee members would not be tested on their handling of the issue of race and school integration until after they were installed in January 1968. Before the end of 1967, another development brought black community leaders back in front of the Boston School Committee, this time advocating that the committee name a new elementary school after the early twentieth-century African American civil rights activist William Monroe Trotter. In December 1967, construction had barely begun on the site on Humboldt Avenue for a school intended as a magnet school and built with funds released by the state on the condition that the school would be racially balanced. The Boston School Committee passed a motion to name the school in the predominantly black Roxbury neighborhood after Joseph Lee, Sr., father of the current School Committee member. A campaign began immediately within the black community to have school named for Trotter. The Bay State Banner reported that there had been periodic petitions for the last 20 years to name a Roxbury school after Trotter, and Melnea Cass, then Vice President of the Boston Equal Rights League, approached Committeemen Eisenstadt and Lee after the meeting in which the Lee, Sr., motion was

39 William Monroe Trotter (1870-1934) was a graduate of English High School and Harvard University, founder of the Guardian and the Boston Equal Rights League.
passed. Cass explained that she did not have a problem with naming a school after Lee, Sr., but that this particular school, situated in the middle of a predominantly black community, should be named for Trotter. Cass reported that both men were “amenable and understanding,” and that both pledged they would support efforts to name the school after Trotter.  

The naming of the Humboldt Avenue school marked the first time the principles of community control were publicly embraced by black leaders. A committee was formed, the Community Education Council, and its first goal was to convince the School Committee that the new school should be named for Trotter. Headed by Ellen Jackson, founder of Operation Exodus, the ad hoc committee was founded with a $15,000 grant from a private New York-based organization. The CEC was intended to be a “community school board independent of the Boston School Committee,” and would be composed of parents, community leaders, and others affected by the schools in Dorchester, Roxbury, and the South End. Members of this committee were granted a hearing before the Boston School Committee on December 18, 1967. 

Though the Boston School Committee ultimately agreed to name the Humboldt Avenue school after Trotter, the December 18 hearing was marked by dramatic and charged language from black community leaders. Ralph Banks, a representative of the Boston Equal Rights League and a man who knew Trotter personally, noted in his statement that there were schools across the city named for Irish and Italian men, but not one for a black man. He continued that other cities had schools named after black men, including Crispus Attucks, but that Attucks was not even honored in the city where he

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died. Toward the end of his remarks, Banks stated, “This is…supposed to be the Athens of America. We don’t judge a man by his color. So let’s get on, let’s stop this foolishness up in the ghetto. Can’t you give us that little recognition? My God, what do you want from us?”  

Ellen Jackson followed Banks with her own statement, in which she invoked Louise Day Hicks’ well-known catchphrase, “You know where I stand.”

Jackson remarked, “There’s a saying that seems to be very popular around this town, ‘You know were we stand.’ That is the first thing we would like you to know. I think you all do—especially after listening to him because what he says is really the feeling of the black community. We are not begging, we intend to share in the control of what happens in our community from here on in—you know how we stand.”

Against this claim that there was an urgent need for a school to be named after a black man, Committee members Lee and Hicks made arguments to retain the original name. Lee argued that since the enrollment of this school would follow the guidelines of the Racial Imbalance Law, meaning that it would not have more than fifty percent black student enrollment, that the committee should wait and see if the law would be amended, and then name other schools after prominent black leaders. Hicks maintained that the school was already named after a “deserving individual.”  

Both committee members were accused of making racist arguments. By the end of the hearing, Joseph Lee stated his willingness to have another newly-constructed school named after his father, and the

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42 “Conference Minutes,” December 18, 1967, School Committee Minutes, 93-94.
43 Hicks used this phrase first in her 1965 School Committee campaign and again in her 1967 mayoral campaign. It was widely interpreted by both white and black audiences to affirm her committed opposition to any form of school integration. As Kevin White recalled, it “was a code word for saying to the hearer, ‘I’m antiblack, and we will not let them dislodge us from our neighborhoods or our schools or our points of power in the city government.’” Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer with Sarah Flynn, Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement From the 1950s through the 1980s (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 594-595.
44 “Conference Minutes,” December 18, 1967, School Committee Minutes, 94.
committee agreed to reverse its earlier decision. The Humboldt Avenue school, by unanimous vote, would be named after William Monroe Trotter.

At the last School Committee meeting of 1967, Chairman McDonough offered his interpretation on the progress of the past year. He stated, “I would characterize the year 1967 as being one of conciliation, a year in which a bridge was erected to span the chasm of distrust which colored our relations with the State Board of Education and the Negro Community.”  McDonough also congratulated the committee on its relationship with teachers, and remarked that “The Committee’s reasonable and fair attitude towards its employees and their bargaining representatives gave us a city free of labor strife and assured each classroom of a teacher on opening day in September. Of all the large cities in America, we were almost unique in these two achievements.”

Events of the next two years would challenge this optimism and prove it extremely shortsighted.

Less than two months into the new year, the School Committee faced its first serious challenge from the BTU. On February 14, 1968, an overwhelming majority of BTU members attended a special session to vote on the School Committee’s salary offer for the 1968-1969 school year. The BTU Negotiating Committee had been working with the School Committee on the new contract since the fall, but had reached an impasse on the salary issue. The membership meeting was called to endorse the Negotiating Committee’s rejection of the current salary offer. By unanimous vote, the teachers in attendance rejected the offer of $400 to $500 raises, marking the first time in the union’s short collective bargaining history that negotiations failed to produce an acceptable

The number of teachers in attendance was significant as well. President Fred Reilly wrote in the *Boston Union Teacher* that “Within our memory we have had no other meeting with so many present,” and that it was due to an “intensive campaign…to ensure an impressive attendance figure.” Reilly pronounced that the unanimous vote proved “that Local 66 is composed of good members.” Overall, the message within several articles of the same union newspaper was that union members needed to remain resolute in their quest to improve salary and working conditions. *Boston Union Teacher* editor A.J. Madden warned that if teachers lose their resolve in the face of pressure from the School Committee, “we have failed our professional responsibility.”

The contract dispute was settled in March. For the first time, a two-year contract was agreed upon, and for the 1968-1969 school year, teachers received salary increases ranging from $500-$800. Teachers were to receive another salary increase in the 1969-1970 school year, and with that raise their salaries would rank in the top five for teacher salaries in the nation’s twenty-five largest cities. Other negotiating victories were the extension and expansion of the current Duty Free Lunch program, limits on class sizes, and the rejection of a half-hour school day extension. At the School Committee meeting in which members voted to accept the new contract, BTU representative Louis Vangel thanked the School Committee for the “many, many hours” spent in negotiations. He stated, “I know that these sessions have been long. They have been staggered, and at

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50 Ibid. The implication was that dissension or debate would have only come from “bad” members.
52 In 1965, Boston teacher salaries ranked 21st out of that list of teacher salaries from the same 25 cities. William Mallen, “Membership to Vote on 2 Year Contract,” *Boston Union Teacher* (March-April 1968), 1, 4.
times tempers flared, but I think the result of this agreement is the important thing.”

Vangel expressed a desire to focus on a renewed, amicable relationship with the School Committee.

Fred Reilly told the School Committee that the successful contract negotiation “shows that we are leading the nation in effective communications between our School Committee and the Union, which represents the teachers.” In the Boston Union Teacher, he wrote that “Boston plays a leadership role among the large cities of the United States in the area of finalizing contracts without a strike.” Reilly, ever the conservative, was proud of this distinction. What is important to note about the negotiations, though, was that teachers were willing to mobilize over a contract dispute. Successful negotiations precluded even the discussion of a strike, but the rejection of the committee’s initial offer was the first time that the teachers said “No” to the Committee during the collective bargaining process. It would not be the last time.

While the BTU was satisfied with the final outcome of contract negotiations in the opening months of 1968, the relationship between the School Committee and the black community was only worsening. Calls for school integration shifted to the background as the movement for community control of the schools became increasingly prominent. Key incidents in the Fall of 1968 would put the spotlight on black advocates of community control, but the movement really began months earlier, and followed a similar trajectory to prominence as that seen in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district in New York City, where the introduction of a community control experiment led to bitter

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54 Ibid.
conflict between the black community and the teachers union.\textsuperscript{56} The creation of the King-Timilty Advisory Council in the spring of 1968 created the first official outlet for advocates of community control, though it operated in conflict with the Boston School Committee from its inception.

The “King” in the King-Timilty Advisory Council was the re-named Campbell school, so named in the week following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968. The city of Boston did not experience the same large-scale rioting that took place in other major cities like Detroit, Newark, and Washington, D.C., but it was not free of violence, some of which was directed at the schools. On April 5, a group described as around 800 “black youths” marched on the Jeremiah Burke High School, burned the flag flying outside at half staff, and burned another flag inside the school. Media reports indicated that two teachers were escorted from the school by police because of safety concerns.\textsuperscript{57} This was not the only incidence of violence, but it was the only event to occur on school property. A combination of efforts, including black citizens’ patrols, police restraint, and strong leadership from Mayor Kevin White and city council member Thomas Atkins were credited with the low level of violence in the days following King’s assassination.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Boston’s movement for community control occurred independently and concurrently with the events happening in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district in Brooklyn, New York. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville incident has been the topic of several major studies. Those consulted include Diane Ravitch, \textit{The Great School Wars: 1805-1973}; Philip Taft, \textit{United They Teach: The Story of the UFT}; Marjorie Murphy, \textit{Blackboard Unions}, especially chapter twelve; Jerald Podair, \textit{The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis}.

\textsuperscript{57} Unfortunately, no other details of the incident were released. Alan Lupo, “In Boston…Tension, But Self-Control,” \textit{Boston Globe}, April 6, 1968, 1, 20.

\textsuperscript{58} One specific action often cited as a major factor in helping the city avert widespread rioting was Mayor White and Councilman Atkin’s scramble to ensure that James Brown’s concert at Boston Garden on April 5 went ahead as scheduled. Boston Garden officials initially cancelled the concert after the assassination, but White and Atkins worked quickly to ensure not only that the concert went on as planned, but that it was broadcast live on a local television station. After the live showing, the concert was immediately re-broadcast, keeping a large part of the city population home, in front of their televisions. See
Only a few months earlier, the School Committee named its first school in honor of a black man as a direct result of community pressure; now the committee immediately moved to rename one of the city’s schools in honor of Martin Luther King. At a special session of the School Committee on April 11, the committee voted 4-1 to rename the Patrick T. Campbell Middle School the Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School. Paul Tierney cast the sole vote against the name change, but apparently, he was not the only member with reservations about making such a statement. Committee member Paul McDevitt made the initial proposal, despite being cautioned by colleague John Kerrigan that such a move would hurt him politically. As McDevitt recalled, Kerrigan told him that “This is going to hurt you, this being up-front and appearing to be pro-black. You are going to jeopardize your re-election so long as you are up front on this issue. Try to make some conservative statements so white voters will not get the perception that you have been leaning toward pro-busing.” In fact, McDevitt was not re-elected in 1969, though whether or not this is a direct result of a “pro-black” image is unclear. What is clear is that the re-naming of the school did not ensure improved relations between the committee and the black community. And it certainly solved no problems at the newly-named school.

The King-Timilty Advisory Council had its roots in the problems plaguing the Campbell school in the 1966-1967 school year. Assaults on teachers, discipline problems and continued academic shortcomings led a group of parents to create a coalition with

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59 The record of this special meeting does not include any suggestion of why Tierney was the sole vote against the name change; his opposition is puzzling given that even Kerrigan, who never wanted to show any sign of conciliation to the black community, voted for the name change. “Conference Minutes,” April 11, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 97.

60 Husock, “Boston,” 343.
community leaders to address the specific needs at the school in the fall of 1967. By the spring of 1968, this group also included parents from the Timilty school, a predominantly black junior high school, and the focus of the group became greater community involvement in the schools. When Federal Title III funds became available to Boston, the parents' group worked with the Office of Program Development in the School Department to create a proposal for a federally-funded program to alleviate the problems at the two schools. In a series of six meetings that began in April 1968, a proposal was crafted that called for the creation of an elected “parent-community advisory council” to work on specific programs to improve conditions. The council would hire a director, two assistants, and educational consultants—all paid positions—to craft new programs for the schools.

The proposal was submitted to the School Committee at a meeting on May 9. Though the plan was approved in a 3-2 vote, the wording was changed in several places to ensure that the School Committee retained ultimate control over curriculum matters. Before the approval passed, School Committee members Eisenstadt and Kerrigan made clear their own opinions on the creation of a paid advisory council that would work independently of the School Department. Kerrigan flatly pronounced that community participation was being “bought” with federal funds. And later in the meeting, when several members in the audience had their hands raised to make comments, Eisenstadt said, “Yes, I see the hands of those who would benefit from the salaries paid by this project.”

Though it was not an auspicious start for relations with the School

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Committee, federal grant monies were awarded soon after, and the King-Timilty Advisory Council began meeting weekly.\textsuperscript{62}

The BTU offered no specific argument either for or against the King-Timilty Advisory Council, but the union opposed any move toward community control. An editorial in the \textit{Boston Union Teacher}’s May-June 1968 issue stated that the BTU “has always been in favor of all avenues to increased parental cooperation,” but that “parents working with educators is very different from community intimidation of teachers leading to mutual mistrust, anxiety, and recrimination.”\textsuperscript{63} The editorial continued, “There seems to be a new education gimmick every year but there is no short cut to learning. Those who sincerely wish to improve the Boston schools realize that there is no substitute for more money, smaller classes, and a climate conducive to the learning process.”\textsuperscript{64} The union promoted school reform, but believed that teachers, as school insiders with classroom experience, should be the reformers.

Teachers still felt unfairly criticized in the press, and a panel discussion conducted by the Citizens For the Boston Schools and the Boston College Law School on May 15 illustrated that continuing conflict. The panel discussion topic was, “Do Our Schools Make Sense?” The majority of panelists answered a resounding “No.”\textsuperscript{65} The BTU was not asked to participate in the panel, but had an answer for teacher critics:

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\textsuperscript{62} As discussed earlier, the Campbell school had been renamed the Martin Luther King Middle School. For more on the creation of the King-Timilty Council, see “Statement for Parents: Some History on the Present Condition of Education at the M. L. King School, prepared by The New Urban League of Greater Boston,” undated, Freedom House, Inc., Records.

\textsuperscript{63} A.J. Madden, “Editorial: Community Control,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (May-June 1968), 2.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.

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The non-professionals who are most truly and sincerely concerned with the problems of the urban schools would do well to recognize that their most useful and sincere allies are the teachers in those same urban schools. It is indeed poor strategy as well as rankest ingratitude, to pursue a policy of harassment and vilification of teachers.66

Teachers wanted to be the reformers, and they would not accept that they might have been a part of the problem.

On May 16, one week after the Boston School Committee approved the creation of the King-Timilty Advisory Council, it held its regular meeting at Boston Technical High School. It was the first of several meetings planned to be held at city schools to create a more open link with the community. The reaction in the predominantly black neighborhood surrounding Technical High was not positive. Notices were circulated in the community urging people to boycott the School Committee meeting, and as committee members attempted to complete regular business, loud protests outside the school and people talking in the audience prevented the members from hearing one another. At one point Joseph Lee commented, “I can’t hear anything over the noise so far....surely these voices appearing all around the room make for intolerable confusion, make it almost impossible for me to hear what anyone is saying, and I presume for anyone to hear what I am saying.”67 Eisenstadt was clearly frustrated and voiced his own opinion on the protest. He stated, “I think there are some people in the community and outside the community who capitalize on perpetuation of strife and turmoil and controversy.”68

67 “Conference Minutes,” May 16, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 15.
68 Ibid., 7. The meeting was televised, and Eisenstadt further downplayed the protests to the television viewers as he stated, “I don’t want listeners to get the idea that this demonstration involves anything more than a handful of people who enjoy the coverage they are getting on t.v.” The Boston Globe reported that there were around 75 protesters outside the high school. Nina McCain, “Black Group Routs Hub School Board,” Boston Globe, May 17, 1968, 1, 25.
The School Committee was in the midst of debating various facets of a hot lunch distribution program when a member of the audience interrupted them and stated, “The people have decided that they would not like this to go on any further, that they are tired of having you plan for them. They want to plan for themselves, and they don’t want this to continue.” Several people in attendance voiced frustration that the meeting was not addressing school issues of serious concern in the black community, such as corporal punishment. Eisenstadt sought to assure the crowd that if the meeting was allowed to progress, issues of direct concern to the black community would come up on the agenda. After one more attempt to continue the hot lunch discussion, the committee voted to adjourn to its headquarters at 15 Beacon Street. Before leaving, Kerrigan proclaimed “We are being intimidated, and I as an elected official of the entire City of Boston am appalled at this treatment.” McDevitt expressed regret. He concluded that it was “unfortunate” that “our major purpose for coming to Roxbury to alleviate any tensions within the community has had the reverse effect.”

The relationship between community and committee remained tense into the summer. Events that happened elsewhere in the nation contributed to this atmosphere. The summer of 1968 witnessed the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the rising militancy of the student anti-war movement, and the Poor People’s Campaign and march on Washington. At a July 15, 1968 meeting, Committeeman Paul Tierney suggested in an uncharacteristically conciliatory moment that the names of two new principals for the King and Timilty schools be submitted to the King-Timilty Advisory Council for

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69 “Conference Minutes,” May 16, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 17.
70 Ibid., 24.
71 Ibid., 25.
approval, to start the process with a “spirit of cooperation.”\textsuperscript{72} The other four committee members adamantly opposed this action. Eisenstadt declared, “I will strenuously oppose giving the Advisory Board this kind of power. I think we made a mistake by giving as much authority and the power to control those two schools in the first instance.”\textsuperscript{73} He further concluded, “I am not prepared to subject our duly examined and qualified administrators to the screening by a bunch of amateurs who perhaps have more enthusiasm than ability.”\textsuperscript{74} In the face of united opposition, Tierney withdrew his proposal.

The School Committee filled the principal vacancies just as they had in the past: they utilized their rating list, a list used to fill school administrative positions, and installed two white men to assume the posts.\textsuperscript{75} Once the appointments of John J. Kelley to the King School and Cornelius Cronin to the Timilty School became public, there were immediate objections in the black community. Operation Exodus, the Citizens for the Boston Schools, and the Regional Education Laboratory of the Education Development Center released the following joint statement: “We wish to express our extreme indignation and outrage in regard to the racist decision of the School Committee to appoint new white principals to the King and Timilty schools. With all due respect to the accreditation of these two gentlemen, this move is not in keeping with the current trend and move seeking to effect radical, innovative change in black ghetto schools.”\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{72} “Conference Minutes,” July 15, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 190.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 195.
\textsuperscript{75} The names on the rating list were of school employees who had submitted applications for administrative posts. The persons on the list had already gone through tests and interviews to determine their eligibility; if they passed, their names were added to the list. Names were added in the order in which applications were received, so people on the list were waiting, in turn, for their promotions.
\textsuperscript{76} “Community Demands Black Principals,” Bay State Banner, August 1, 1968, 1.
Despite this criticism, the School Committee refused to reconsider the appointments, stating that there were no black school administrators in line for promotion. While Paul Tierney and Paul McDevitt supported a plan to recruit black administrators outside the city of Boston, Eisenstadt argued that the Superintendent had the sole right to nominate personnel, and that the School Committee could not work around that rule. A meeting between Superintendent Ohrenberger and the King-Timilty Council during the last week of August brought no resolution to the conflict, and there were indications that if the white principals remained in place, black community leaders would call a boycott of the two schools.  

On the day before schools opened in September 1968, Superintendent Ohrenberger presented a plan to avert a showdown. He proposed to move Kelly and Cronin, the two white principals, to other schools, and appoint two black men as acting principals while a search was conducted to fill the posts with permanent replacements. Ohrenberger told the committee that “During the last seventy-two hours I have received information from indisputable sources that serious, extremely perilous and potentially explosive steps are being planned to prevent the opening of school in the Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School and the James P. Timilty Junior High on Wednesday,” He added that “violent and tragic consequences are more than likely to result,” and concluded, “I cannot permit departmental rules, policies or regulations, despite their validity, to stand in the way of a peaceful resolution of this most serious crisis.”  

78 “Conference Minutes,” September 3, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 1.  
79 Ibid., 2.
By a 3-2 vote, Ohrenberger’s proposal passed; Eisenstadt and Kerrigan voted against the measure.\textsuperscript{80} Eisenstadt told committee members that “We can get Negro principals. We can get them by recruiting more Negro teachers to the City of Boston, thus increasing the chance for their promotion in the same manner and in the same way and according to the same set of standards and rules as everybody else in this school system aspiring to promotion has to abide by.”\textsuperscript{81} As the committee debated the issue, and it became clear that the measure would pass, Kerrigan became increasingly frustrated and offered his opinion on the situation. He stated, “The councils are sowing the worst kinds of seeds of bigotry into the minds of children in the most formative period of their lives.”

Referring to President John F. Kennedy and Senator Edward Brooke as symbols of a nation rising above prejudice, he continued: “Now finally in our country when the tide is changing, when merit is the thing necessary to attain success, when we have elected a Catholic president, when we have elected a black United States Senator, when one’s relation, race or the color of his skin is no longer important, they would set us back.”\textsuperscript{82}

Kerrigan’s critics, those opposing the placement of the two white principals, were satisfied with the outcome. A spokesman for the King-Timilty Advisory Council told a reporter after the meeting that “This is the first time we have come out of that room smiling. We are very happy people today.”\textsuperscript{83} After the appointments, John A. Joyce, the newly-named Acting Principal at the King school, stated that “I know the school, I know the children, I know the teachers…I feel we’ll be able to do what a school is supposed to

\textsuperscript{80} When details of Ohrenberger’s proposal were made public prior to the School Committee meeting, McDevitt and Tierney indicated they would offer their support. During the meeting, Lee stated that he supported the proposal because he thought it was the only way to keep the federally-financed King-Timilty project running.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 23. Kerrigan was referring to the election of Edward W. Brooke to the U.S. Senate in November 1966. Brooke was the first black senator elected since the era of Reconstruction.
do for its pupils.” He tempered his optimism with a serious message, and stated that “I hope my parents will give much better cooperation to the teachers than has been exhibited in the past.” David Owens, the Acting Principal at the Timilty School, also displayed a cautious optimism when he remarked that “I hope we can bring about a great degree of sensitivity on the part of the community, the school, and the pupil.”

The mood was far from optimistic at the meeting the BTU held for its membership directly after the September 3rd School Committee meeting. At the two-hour meeting, described in the *Boston Globe* as a “stormy session…marked by several shouting matches,” the membership voted to officially oppose the School Committee’s approval of Ohrenberger’s proposal. A motion to boycott the two schools was presented but ultimately withdrawn. BTU Executive Secretary Lou Vangel emphasized the fact that the School Committee vote did not violate the union contract, but more conservative members were opposed to the fact that the rating system was abandoned under community pressure. George McGrimley, a long-standing union conservative, argued that it was the BTU’s “business to enforce the contract, and not to get involved in this community thing.” Supporters of the appointments argued that the school committee compromise was in the spirit of the AFT’s recent proclamation supporting community involvement. And Spencer MacDonald, a teacher and chairman of the King-Timilty

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84 The two black men named acting principals were both assistant principals at the King school. “John A. Joyce—Firm Discipline,” *Boston Globe*, September 4, 1968, 14.
85 Ibid.
87 McCain, 14.
88 Geneva Murray, an elementary school teacher, argued that the AFT had gone on record the previous week supporting “greater community responsibility, involvement and representation.” Ibid.
Advisory Coalition, urged teachers not to set themselves apart from Roxbury parents, and asked, “When will we have the courage to say yes?”\textsuperscript{89}

Coverage of the BTU membership’s debate in the \textit{Boston Globe} reveals significant divisions that were not always covered in the union’s newsletter. The \textit{Boston Union Teacher}’s report on the meeting described a somewhat sedate version of the same event. The vote opposing Ohrenberger’s proposal was described as opposition to “any action of the School Committee which might be discriminatory to all those who are on rated lists.”\textsuperscript{90} The article praised Committee members Eisenstadt and Kerrigan, who opposed the proposal, and accused Committee members Lee, Tierney, McDevitt, and Supt. Ohrenberger of ignoring the rights of teachers.\textsuperscript{91} The unnamed author of the article also related that at the recent convention of the Massachusetts State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, held during the same week the BTU voiced its official opposition, the “overwhelming majority of delegates” supported the union’s actions. The author continued, “All delegates to whom we talked were disturbed and upset by what appears to be a slap in the face to collective bargaining, the right of the individual to better himself under a union contract, and the denial of the civil rights of a large segment of the teaching force.”\textsuperscript{92} While the \textit{Boston Globe} reported debate that was equally passionate on both sides of the issue, the editorial board of the Union newsletter emphasized a conservative outlook. The article closed with a warning that “This is the first step toward

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{90} “Do We Need Black Principals?”, \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (November 1968), 5.

\textsuperscript{91} At the School Committee meeting, Eisenstadt had vowed that teachers would be protected from violence in his argument to retain the white principals. He stated that the city would “meet force with force….if it is going to take a hundred police officers to keep our teachers safe, they are going to be kept safe.” “Conference Minutes,” September 3, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 10.

\textsuperscript{92} “Do We Need Black Principals?”, \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (November 1968), 5. The convention of the Massachusetts State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, was held September 4-6, 1968.
community control. Let us urge our members to demand that Mr. Lee, Mr. McDevitt, and Mr. Tierney travel no farther on this dangerous road.”93

The same issue of the Boston Union Teacher carried a small announcement that revealed that the membership was perhaps not as unified as the editorial board suggested. A paragraph that announced the appointment of member Mike O’Neill as Sergeant-at-Arms, a newly created position, carried this description of his duties: “Mike and his deputies will have the responsibility of checking at the door at general membership meetings to insure that those entering are union members as well as removing those unruly disruptive members who have become more numerous of late.”94 This is the only hint that the September 3 meeting carried any notes of discord.

As soon as the King-Timilty principal appointments were resolved, parents at the Christopher Gibson School, another predominantly black school, called for their own black principal appointment.95 On the first day of school, twenty-five members of the Committee of Concerned Parents for the Gibson School entered the building and announced that they were taking control of the school. The group appointed its own principal, Ben Scott, and sent its own teachers into classrooms.96 Principal Mary McLaughlin was informed by the group that Scott would replace her, and when she refused to leave, Scott pulled up a chair alongside her. Superintendent Ohrenberger, when informed of these events, decided to keep the school open and sent assistant

93 Ibid.
94 “New Office Created,” Boston Union Teacher (November 1968), 2.
95 The Gibson school was an elementary school whose students fed into the King School.
96 Ben Scott, a chemist, was described in the Boston Globe as “a Morehouse College graduate employed in a Boston chemical firm” and also as the “head of the Community Education Council.” Nina McCain, “6 Teachers Barred—Pupils Still Out,” Boston Globe, September 6, 1968, 3; Nina McCain, “School Board Suspends 6 Gibson Teachers,” Boston Globe, September 7, 1968, 5.
superintendent Thomas McAuliffe to the school to work on a compromise with those in charge of the protest.\footnote{At the liberation school, children were taught lessons in black history and culture. Nina McCain, “Black Parents Move In On Dorchester School,”\textit{Boston Globe}, September 5, 1968, 6.}

Numerous leaders within the schools and from the black community went to the Gibson school that day to take their own measure of events. It was reported that Eisenstadt got into a loud argument with members of the Concerned Parents in the principal’s office, and Kerrigan appeared later in the day demanding that the school be closed.\footnote{Ibid.} Mel King, head of the Urban League, and Ellen Jackson, director of Operation Exodus, were among black community leaders at the school during the day. The BTU’s Lou Vangel also arrived at the school to observe the situation. Although the protest was peaceful, this was the first time a black organization physically asserted control over a Boston school. It was only the beginning of the troubles to face the Boston schools that fall.

The next day, September 5, Scott and other parents, along with six teachers from the Gibson school, led nearly 200 children from the courtyard of the school to Shaw House, where a liberation school was set up.\footnote{Scott had been threatened with arrest if he entered the Gibson school. Shaw House was a community service agency six blocks from the school; the 200 children were among 700 enrolled students at the school. Nina McCain and John A. Robinson, “Parents Urge Gibson School Boycott,”\textit{Boston Globe}, September 6, 1968, 1.} Almost immediately, School Committee Chairman Eisenstadt called for a dismissal hearing for the six teachers who participated in the walkout. The six teachers, all young white women, defended their actions, with one explaining that she had chosen “between the building and the children. Our responsibility and our obligation can be placed nowhere else but with the child.”\footnote{Larry Van Dyne, “Why Did 6 Teachers Walk Out?”,\textit{Boston Globe}, September 6, 1968, 14. The six teachers were named in the \textit{Boston Globe} as Mrs. Charna Heiko, Mrs. Anne DeCanio, Miss Mary}
explanation as to why the teachers remained at Shaw House with the students, the five teachers issued a joint statement that read in part, “Having already committed ourselves to the teaching profession we felt it our responsibility to remain with and deal with the education of those children who have been assigned to us.”

Eisenstadt charged that when they left the school, it was a violation of their contract. On Friday, September 6, the six teachers were met at the door of the Gibson and informed by Vice Principal William Collins that they were not allowed back inside the school and must instead report to School Department headquarters, where each was suspended and removed from the payroll.

That afternoon the six teachers requested a meeting with Lou Vangel at which they sought information about the union’s grievance procedures. It was unclear how the BTU would respond in this conflict; the union was meant to be the teachers’ advocate in employment issues, yet the union was opposed to community control and the membership had gone on record just a few days earlier condemning the appointment of the two acting principals at the King and Timilty schools. In addition, none of the six suspended teachers were tenured, which meant that the School Committee could fire them without even granting a hearing.

On the same day that the teachers were suspended, the State Labor Council supported a resolution introduced by BTU President Fred Reilly that condemned the Gibson protest. The State Labor Council went on record “as protesting the acts of groups

Ellen Smith, Mrs. Sandra Fenton, Mrs. Connie Egan, and Miss Mary McDonough. Nina McCain, “Suspended Teachers’ Sketches,” Boston Globe, September 7, 1968, 5. The most experienced of these teachers was entering her fourth year of teaching; three of the teachers were in their first year at the Gibson.


disobeying the statute of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts” and “supporting the protection of the children and teachers of the City of Boston.”

Despite this pronouncement, teachers proved yet again that not all members fell in lock step with the conservative BTU leadership. After the Gibson school walkout, twenty-one of twenty-five teachers at the school signed a statement in support of “the concept of community control of the schools.” School officials dismissed the report, claiming that teachers had been unduly pressured to sign the statement, but one Boston Globe reporter, conducting an informal poll of the Gibson teachers, found that most were “in sympathy with parents.”

Jonathan Kozol, whose Death At An Early Age chronicled his experience teaching at the Gibson school in 1965, found the developments “exciting,” and said that “it may just be possible that a new, unfrightened generation is going to put the whole history of Hicks and Eisenstadt and 19th-century education in the past.” The Gibson school did indeed employ a majority of younger teachers, and experienced the same high turnover rate as witnessed at other predominantly black schools. Of the entire Gibson staff, only seven had taught at the school the previous year.

Ultimately, the six teachers prepared their legal defense independently of the union. On September 11, the School Committee ruled 4-1 that the suspensions of the six teachers would continue for one month, and that their contracts would be terminated by

the end of that month. The teachers would be granted a hearing before the terminations became effective. The hearing was scheduled for September 25.

One week into the school year, protests at the Gibson school continued. About half of the enrolled students were present at the Gibson daily, and the other half still attended the Liberation School at Shaw House. But within a few days, 350 out of 480 enrolled students were back at the Gibson, and school officials announced that attendance was almost back to normal. Though attendance fell at the Liberation School, it remained open, and a partial boycott continued into the next week. By the latter half of that week, September 18th and 19th, volunteers from the Liberation School, including six Catholic priests, were picketing the Gibson School.

In the days leading up to the Gibson school teachers’ hearing with the School Committee, a new protest emerged at a different school and over a different issue. On September 17th, two black students at English High School were suspended for wearing dashikis in violation of the shirt-and-tie dress code. On Friday morning, a group of two hundred black students calling themselves the Black Student Union gathered outside the high school while a small delegation of this group presented a list of ten student demands to English High’s principal, Dr. Joseph Malone. Among the demands was the

107 Paul Tierney cast the only dissenting vote, arguing that he would not vote for termination until the teachers were allowed to explain their actions. “September 11, 1968,” Proceedings of the School Committee of the City of Boston, 1968 (Boston: City of Boston Printing Section, 1968), 283.


109 King, Chain of Change, 119; Lukas, Common Ground, 112.
reinstatement of the two suspended students, implementation of a new rule allowing black students to wear African dress, and recognition of the Black Student Union. Not all ten demands were satisfied, but Principal Malone agreed to recognize the Black Student Union and allow African dress. Malone also agreed not to pursue trespassing charges against the two suspended students, and to work on their return to the school. Malone’s decision was met by loud cheers from the students demonstrating outside, and he was praised by black community leaders.

But all was not resolved. Before the start of classes Monday morning, a joint statement of the English High faculty was read over the speaker system. The teachers’ statement criticized the decision of Principal Malone to recognize the Black Student Union, and declared that “Racism has no part in the long and proud tradition of English High School.” The teachers emphasized that their objections had nothing to do with dress codes, but that the “Establishment of racially-exclusive, school-sponsored student unions and the forcing upon a public high school of discriminatory policies by agitators in the street are issues which run counter to our American tradition.” Shortly after the statement was read, Associate Superintendent Louis Welsh announced that he would take

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110 The racial demographics of English High began to shift dramatically in 1968, when the School Committee changed school feeder patterns due to a lack of high schools for boys in Roxbury. In 1967-68, 18.5% of the 1200 enrolled students were black. The entering class in 1968-69 was 56.5% black, and in 1969-70 the entering class was 76% black. By 1972-73, the student body was 81% black. Michael T. Tierney, “Fire at the Door: The Black Student Union Movement at Boston English High School, 1968-1971” (Boston: William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts, 1987), 9-10. See also Larry Van Dyne, “African Garb OK at English,” Boston Globe, September 21, 1968, 4.


112 Ibid.
charge of English High’s “community relations,” and that regarding the “alleged agreements” made last Friday, the Black Student Union would not be recognized.\footnote{113}{Larry Van Dyne, “English High Bans Black Student Club,” \textit{Boston Globe}, September 24, 1968, 11.}

Protests began anew at English High School early Tuesday, and sporadic violence marked the day at schools across the city. Students gathered outside Brighton High School as well, and after a small grass fire started outside the school, protesters temporarily blocked the passage of three fire trucks, and some threw rocks as the trucks eventually passed. The Fire Department reported sixteen false fire alarms in schools across the city, and there were other reports of broken windows, ammonia bombs thrown inside schools, and teacher assaults. Outside English High the crowd of five hundred was almost evenly divided between black and white students; a few white students burned neckties in protest of the dress code. Outraged School Committee Chairman Eisenstadt requested the deployment of the National Guard, but his request was denied.

Student protests continued on Wednesday, and a black student rally that began at Franklin Park and ended at the Jeremiah Burke High School led to accusations of violence from both students and police. It was reported that students threw rocks at police, and students accused police of brutality in a confrontation that ended at the hospital for nine police officers and eight civilians.\footnote{114}{Dan Queen, “School Crisis Draws Blood,” \textit{Bay State Banner}, October 4, 1968, 1; Robert A. Jordan, “Student Protest Turns Into Clashes,” \textit{Boston Globe}, September 26, 1968, 1.} At the regularly scheduled School Committee meeting that night, Ohrenberger told the committee that it was a “difficult day and a sad day.”\footnote{115}{“Conference Minutes,” September 25, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 72.}

The September 25\textsuperscript{th} School Committee meeting was to have begun with a hearing for the six suspended Gibson school teachers, but Eisenstadt postponed the hearing, as
the teachers were in the midst of pursuing legal action against the School Committee.\textsuperscript{116}

After regular business was concluded, the committee heard a report from Ohrenberger on the events of the day, and then granted a hearing to a group of black students in attendance. Glen Grayson, one of the English High students suspended the previous week for violating the school dress code, told the committee that “we would like a recognized black student union in English High school where you have already set up a white student union because you only teach white things.”\textsuperscript{117} While McDevitt agreed that more courses on Black history and culture were needed, Lee maintained that the committee was already working on that as fast as was possible. The students also complained of police brutality against black protesters, and Eisenstadt countered that there were five policemen still in the hospital dealing with injuries sustained during the day.

The dialog between the students and the committee only deteriorated as the hearing continued and black community leaders made their own statements. Rev. Vernon Carter complained to the committee about teachers’ attitudes toward black students. He stated, “I want to propose that school teachers cease and desist from calling black students who wear their native dress ‘black niggers,’” and asked “that teachers cease and desist from saying to black students that they can’t wear their hair naturally and that this is not permitted in their schools. This is being said to many of our students.”\textsuperscript{118} Lou Vangel, also in attendance, took immediate offense. Vangel stated, “In behalf of those

\textsuperscript{116} Attorneys for the teachers appeared at Suffolk County Superior Court earlier in the day objecting to the fact that the School Committee hearing was to be closed to the public. Judge Walter McLaughlin ordered both parties to come before him the following Monday. “Conference Minutes,” September 25, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 7.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 80-81.

\textsuperscript{118} Eisenstadt asked for the names of students making these accusations, and Rev. Carter said he did not have the names, but “could secure witnesses.” Ibid., 96.
who are concerned, I wish Reverend Carter would name names because I think to make an accusation like that libels the whole teaching staff. I think that the teaching staff in Boston has shown how courageous it is in these last trying days, and I think it is very unfair. I think it is totally unfair for them to be victimized."¹¹¹⁹ Eisenstadt stepped in and promised the students that if an accusation were brought to him in private, he would call an investigation. At this, several audience members called out, “We don’t believe you anymore.”¹²⁰ The committee voted to adjourn the meeting after repeated requests to the audience for specific motions were not met with concrete proposals. School Committee members felt under attack, and the students felt their complaints were not taken seriously; it was yet another unproductive hearing.

The next day, Thursday, September 26th, student protests spread to East Boston High School, where a crowd of five hundred white students marched in protest of conditions at the school ranging from inadequate facilities to the dress code.¹²¹ Elsewhere, the student absentee rate ran close to normal except at predominantly black high schools, where the School Department reported a fifty to sixty percent absentee rate.¹²² Student protests did not continue at other schools, but random acts of violence committed by black youths were reported throughout the day. In Roxbury, car and store

¹¹¹⁹ Ibid., 96.
¹²⁰ Ibid., 97.
¹²¹ Out of an enrollment of 1,130 students at East Boston, only 23 were black. Protesters complained that the black students were given privileges not given to white students, and it was reported that some students chanted “Two, Four, Six, Eight, Eastie wants to segregate.” “Eastie Students Ask Better Showers, Lighting and Desks,” Boston Evening Globe, September 27, 1968, 8.
¹²² Absences Hit 50-60% in 13 Hub Schools,” Boston Globe, September 27, 1968, 9.
windows were smashed, one car was overturned and set on fire, and two different cars carrying white passengers were the targets of rock throwers.\textsuperscript{123}

On Friday, no incidents were reported at city schools, and attendance was higher, though not back to normal, at predominantly black high schools. Mayor White announced the creation of a committee that would conduct a study of the student unrest, and made several statements critical of conditions in the schools for both black and white students.\textsuperscript{124} While critical of the schools, the mayor also stated on Friday that “It is tragically preposterous, intolerable and hard to believe that this old and civilized city should be poised on the ragged edge of racial hatred and violence over the superficial problems of school clothes and school organizations.”\textsuperscript{125} Considering the battles waged at the city’s schools over race in the previous five years, this statement was at best naïve. The outbreak of violence demonstrated how tenuous the hold on order truly was in the schools. And it would be demonstrated again, at another predominantly black school, before another month passed.

Meanwhile, the response of the BTU came in the form of three proposals for the schools. Endorsed at a membership meeting on September 28, the union proposed that the faculty have power to close a school if conditions are deemed threatening to students and teachers. In addition, members supported the proposal that school should be cancelled the day following any incidents that would place students and faculty in danger.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} One of the cars was occupied by a Catholic priest who had driven students home from a Catholic school; he and occupants of the other car were injured by flying glass. Robert A. Jordan and John A. Robinson, “Violence Subsides After Police, Youths Clash,” \textit{Boston Globe}, September 27, 1968, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Of the student protests, White said that the “confrontation threatens to obscure the fact that Boston’s white students as well as black have been cheated.” David Ellis and Nina McCain, “White Chooses 6 for Probe of Schools,” \textit{Boston Globe}, September 28, 1968, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{125} “White Supports Police In City’s Disturbances,” \textit{Boston Globe}, September 27, 1968, 23.
\end{itemize}
Finally, the union pledged its support of a “student organization for all students.” These proposals reflect teachers’ concern with violence in the schools, as well as their stance in opposition to Black student unions. Echoing the statement of the English High faculty, but with more urgency, John Reilly, editor of the Boston Union Teacher, offered these remarks: “The black student organization would bring in speakers of its own choosing with no check by school personnel as to whom these speakers might be. Are we ready for Stokeley Carmichael in our assembly halls? The black student organization would use the name of the Boston Public Schools to support a racist group. Can we afford racism, black or white, in the new Boston? The union member who is a thinking union member must answer an unqualified ‘NO’ to these questions.” Neither the proposals nor the issue of black student unions would be quickly resolved.

At the King School on October 23rd, students vandalized the school after a false fire alarm was sounded early in the school day. Four other false fire alarms were made before John Joyce, the acting principal, closed the school early and students left around noon. Before the students left, it was reported that groups of students roamed the hallways, broke classroom windows, overturned food containers in the cafeteria, looted supplies in the school gym, and threw rocks at firefighters who responded to the false alarms. A report credited to the teachers stated “the building was in chaos.” That night, at an emergency hearing before the School Committee, teachers requested that the King school be closed the next day.

The teachers’ request was not granted because, as Eisenstadt explained, the committee did not want to set a precedent. Teachers stressed that police had not offered adequate protection that day, and after the committee’s decision was announced, one teacher shouted “I wish you had the guts to be there with us.” Lou Vangel asked that teachers be allowed to close the school if it was not deemed safe, but was told that School Department officials would be in attendance to make that judgment. The School Committee would not relinquish any of its power. Armando Martinez, the BTU Building Representative at the King, said that “teachers are caught in the middle between two great forces—the political, economic and social conditions in the ghetto and the forces created by the bureaucratic educational structure.” Even if the teachers had the power to fix the problems at the school, they could not implement reform without School Committee approval.

Though the next school day did not witness a repeat of Wednesday’s violence, attendance was only around fifty-five percent at the King school. Minor disruptions continued, and within the week, Acting Principal Joyce told a reporter, “I am discouraged and almost defeated. The school is understaffed with teachers and we haven’t been in control of the building since September.” Within two weeks, Joyce resigned as acting principal, citing “nervous exhaustion.” Over the next several months, the King school was subjected to periodic closures as administrators tried

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129 Lee was the only committee member who agreed with the teachers about the school closure.
130 “Conference Minutes,” October 23, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 52.
132 Dan Queen, “King Principal Faces Problems,” Bay State Banner, November 5, 1968, 1.
133 After Joyce’s resignation, School Committee member Kerrigan concluded that he had been right to oppose Joyce’s appointment. He stated, “Since a majority of the school committee capitulated to threats and appointed Mr. Joyce, the atmosphere has been anything but conducive to good education.” Dan Queen, “King School to Have Cabinet Administration,” Bay State Banner, November 14, 1968, 1.
unsuccessfully to quell student disruptions. King teachers, black community leaders, and
the School Committee cited various reasons for the troubles, from a lack of parental
involvement, to the departure of the school’s best students, to the influence of agitators
outside the schools. Whatever the cause, none of the parties in a position to fix the King
were able to offer a solution. The School Committee continued to take disciplinary
problems at face value, and tacitly refused to confront the issue of race in the schools.

As it had been doing since 1963, the School Committee insisted that all students,
regardless of race, were treated equally and had the same access to a good education. Yet
the events in the fall of 1968 indicated that Boston’s schools were in the midst of a
prolonged period of instability centering on race and community control. Still, Boston
School Committee members made comments that proved they were not completely in
touch with the situation inside the schools. Joseph Lee, well known for bizarre and
inflammatory statements, told reporters in the aftermath of student protests citywide that
“The Boston school system is the best in the country.” And Eisenstadt, evaluating his
tenure as chairman in 1968, claimed that “Although the year 1968 has been marked by
controversy and turbulence, it has been nevertheless one of educational progress.”
Eisenstadt continued, “This is not to say that our system is without faults. However, as
long as we maintain the open-mindedness, the flexibility and the spirit of cooperation
with all facets of the community as we have done this past year, we shall continue to
enjoy progress toward the goal of educational excellence we all seek for the Boston

\[135\] “Conference Minutes,” December 30, 1968, School Committee Minutes, 1.
Public Schools.\textsuperscript{136} For the black community, Eisenstadt’s evaluation of the past year had no basis in reality.

Protest and violent acts at predominantly black schools continued into the new year, but one episode from the fall soon came to a close. On January 6, 1969, the firings of the six Gibson school teachers were upheld in a Suffolk Superior Court ruling.\textsuperscript{137} The teachers never sought the initiation of a grievance suit through the BTU. In turn, the BTU made no statements either condemning or supporting the actions of the six teachers. A few days after the judge’s decision, AFT President David Selden sent a letter to BTU President Fred Reilly thanking him for the “clippings” regarding the Gibson teacher firings. Selden told Reilly, “I believe the Judge rendered the only decision open to him.”\textsuperscript{138} Selden continued, “Rose Claffey spoke to me about the Gibson School affair when it first occurred, and we both agreed that this kind of action could not be supported. On the other hand, many idealistic teachers are attracted to such social causes.”\textsuperscript{139} He advised Reilly not to alienate members sympathetic to black parent demands, and to allow younger members to “share leadership.” Whether or not Reilly heeded Selden’s advice is unclear; only a small band of teachers continued to support the six who were fired.\textsuperscript{140}

Fifty members of the Concerned Parents of the Gibson School arrived at School Committee headquarters on January 14 to deliver their petition seeking reinstatement of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[136] Ibid.
\item[138] “Letter to Fred Reilly from David Selden, President, AFT, January 9, 1968,” Massachusetts Federation of Teachers Collection.
\item[139] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
the fired teachers. The petition included three thousand signatures. Bill Owens, head of the Concerned Parents, presented the papers to the newly-elected School Committee Chairman Kerrigan after a heated exchange.\textsuperscript{141} When Owens asked Kerrigan what he was going to do with the petitions, Kerrigan replied, “Well, if it gets cold, I’ll burn them to keep warm.”\textsuperscript{142} Another member of Concerned Parents told Kerrigan that she was worried about the safety of her children in the Boston Public Schools. Kerrigan told her to send her kids to private school. Already known for his insensitivity regarding matters of concern in the black community, Kerrigan proved once again that he could not be swayed in any way to support community demands.\textsuperscript{143} The committee held one final vote on the teacher firings, to determine if the teachers should get a hearing before the committee. The January 21st vote was the same as the original vote to suspend, 4-1 against a hearing.

Racial incidents in the schools assumed a more sporadic pace in spring 1969. In March, approaching the one-year anniversary of the creation of the King-Timilty Advisory Council, elections were held to appoint new members. Parents of children enrolled at the King and Timilty schools were eligible to vote. Out of 2700 eligible parents, eight hundred registered to vote, and only 119 actually cast votes. An editorial in the \textit{Bay State Banner} called the turnout “a disgrace to the community.”\textsuperscript{144} The editorial urged parents to become more involved, and warned that “Black youth is on the rampage today. They know that no one cares, so they strike out. Society does not respect their

\textsuperscript{141} Formisano, \textit{Boston Against Busing}, 55.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} Danice Bordett, “Concerned Parents Rebuffed by Committee,” \textit{Bay State Banner}, January 23, 1969, 1.
needs, so they do not respect society.” The election turnout vindicated teachers who had long complained about the lack of parental involvement in some of the most troubled schools. The poor turnout also indicated that the community control movement had waned considerably since the fall. Given the turmoil in the King school, it is not surprising that parents would lose interest in the King-Timilty Advisory Council. While some goals, like the push for more black principals and the need for greater sensitivity in white teachers, continued to be rallying issues in the black community, black community leaders assumed a more reactive than proactive stance toward school reform in 1969.

At the same time, a black teachers’ association rose in prominence. The group dated back to 1962, and began with informal gatherings of about ten teachers. The group began meeting regularly in 1964, and after Martin Luther King’s visit to Boston in April 1965, added forty black teachers to its membership and formally established the Massachusetts Negro Educators Association. Under the leadership of John O’Bryant, a guidance counselor at English High and Rollins Griffith, who was an assistant principal at the Solomon Lewis Junior High, the MNEA grew to over two hundred members by January 1968. In 1969, the Black Male Caucus of the association met with Superintendent Ohrenberger and discussed the hiring and promotion of black educators within the Boston schools. In a written statement, the caucus listed a number of grievances, including the low number of blacks in administrative positions and the failure

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145 Ibid.
146 Citing this low number, John D. O’Bryant, who worked as a counselor at Boston Technical High School in the early sixties, explained, “Some black teachers were afraid to get together…to organize at that time. There was some kind of fear about public organizing.” Bob Hayden, “B.E.A.M.: Some History of the Early Years,” 8, Freedom House, Inc., Records.
147 Though the group was established in Boston, black teachers statewide were invited to join. The Massachusetts Negro Educators Association changed its name to Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts in 1972. According to Hayden, this change was prompted by the need to appeal to younger black teachers in the system. Ibid., 9. See also Robert C. Hayden, African-Americans in Boston: More Than 350 Years (Boston: Trustees of the Boston Public Library, 1991), 55.
to give necessary authority to John Joyce and David Owens in their appointments at the King and Timilty schools. The statement also charged that “Because the Boston Public Schools are absolutely controlled by the white power structure, it cannot possibly affect [sic] the kind of changes needed to eradicate racism.”148 The caucus also listed a number of black appointments at different levels its members demanded from the school department.

Dissatisfied with the lack of formal action from the school department, the MNEA organized a day-long workshop for black teachers on May 29, 1969. The meeting was held on a school day. Griffith claimed it was not a boycott; he explained it was a teacher’s prerogative to take a day off. Over one hundred fifty teachers attended the workshop to discuss the challenges black teachers and students faced in Boston.149 After the meeting, Griffith stated that “Black teachers are being used by the system, but they are not being compensated for all the work they are doing, while being overlooked for administrative posts.”150 Griffith urged all black teachers to only fulfill their paid duties. He also reiterated the hiring demands of the Black Caucus, and called for the promotion of black administrators in a percentage equal to that of the black student population.

There was no formal statement from the BTU regarding the black teacher stay-out, but a group calling itself the Reform Caucus of the Boston Teachers Union issued a statement in support of the MNEA. Co-chairman Myles Striar called the rating system “one of the many failures of the Boston School administration,” and stated that it was

148 Ibid., 8.
150 Ibid.
“antiquated” and “rampant with nepotism and favoritism.” The Reform Caucus called for promotions based solely on a candidate’s qualifications, candidates taken from within or outside of the system. The release of this formal statement, though a small demonstration, reveals that just as black teachers were becoming better organized, so too were teachers who were unafraid to acknowledge the problem of race in the schools.

The black teacher stayout did not result in a dramatic increase in the promotion of blacks to administrative posts, but it did lead to at least one: in September, the King School opened with a new black principal, Rollins Griffith. Griffith was appointed despite the fact that he was not on the rating list. The fall of 1969 also witnessed the opening of the Trotter School, the first school enrolled according to the rules of the Racial Imbalance Law; black students could comprise no more than fifty percent of the student body. The continued incidents at the Solomon Lewenberg school in Mattapan, plagued with troubles for over a year, led teachers, parents, and school administrators to again seek ways to correct the school’s course. The widespread unrest that occurred in the fall of 1968 did not surface again, but lingering problems at many schools continued to erode hope for improved schools in the black community.

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151 Steve Kurkjian, “Hub Black Teachers to Meet,” *Boston Globe*, May 29, 1969, 19. This is the only reference to the Reform Caucus available in the records; the *Boston Union Teacher* made no mention of the group, and it is unclear how many teachers were involved.

152 Kerrigan objected the appointment; Eisenstadt reasoned that the King-Timilty Council could no longer blame problems at the King on a white principal. “Conference Minutes,” July 17, 1969, School Committee Minutes, 50-51; “Griffith to Head King School this Fall,” *Bay State Banner*, July 24, 1969, 1, 6.

153 There was a last-minute scramble to place black students after the School Department promised enrollment to 434 black children, but changed the maximum number to 370 just before the start of school. This led to resentment among black parents who were angry that the law prevented more black students from enrolling. See “William Munroe Trotter School Opens Amid Controversy,” *Bay State Banner*, September 4, 1969, 1; Larry Van Dyne, “Trotter School Opens Quietly,” *Boston Evening Globe*, September 3, 1969; “Conference Minutes,” August 27, 1969, School Committee Records.

154 Due to a rapidly changing neighborhood composition, the Lewenberg was almost entirely enrolled with black students. In 1964, black students comprised barely ten percent of the student body. Larry Van Dyne, “Migration Brings Lewenberg Problems,” November 19, 1969, 28. For earlier problems, see Danice Bordett, “Parents Worried by Expulsions at Mattapan School,” *Bay State Banner*, March 6, 1969, 1; “Conference Minutes,” April 29, 1969, School Committee Records.
The BTU elected John Reilly as president in June 1969; he defeated Michael J. O’Neill, the candidate endorsed by departing President Fred Reilly. At the time, John Reilly was a member of the Collective Bargaining Committee and the editor of the Boston Union Teacher; O’Neill served as the chairman of the Collective Bargaining Committee. The candidates had been given the chance to publish a printed statement in the Boston Union Teacher and O’Neill’s statement did not reference any union issues; instead, he cited his “experience, integrity, responsibility, and vision,” as well as his endorsement by Fred Reilly, as the reasons he should be the next president. John Reilly’s statement pledged a “forward-looking program for improvement,” including the appointment of an “advisory cabinet,” “orderly membership meetings,” and one year salary contracts. John Reilly also promised that as president he would be available to all members.

There is nothing in the Boston Union Teacher to suggest a contentious atmosphere surrounding this election, yet union member John Doherty distributed an open letter to all other BTU members on the day of the election, claiming that Fred Reilly had sent his own letter to elementary teachers warning them that an “ultra militant group” was trying to “fragmentize” the union. Doherty wrote that “If Mr. Fred Reilly means that his opposition is against the two year contract which doesn’t even cover the cost of living increase, he is absolutely correct in that charge.” Doherty urged members to vote for John Reilly and called for all teachers to think of themselves as one united group, instead of as elementary, junior high, or high school teachers. It appears that a vote for

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156 Ibid.
157 Letter to BTU members from John P. Doherty, undated, Massachusetts Federation of Teachers Collection.
158 Ibid.
John Reilly represented a vote for a slightly new direction for the union, at a time when many teachers were unhappy with the two year contract.

Changes in leadership, combined with the continuing addition of new members, led to some notable differences in union tactics.\(^{159}\) On October 31, 1969, the BTU announced an alliance with the King-Timilty Advisory Board to work on school reform. A major goal of the alliance was to pressure the School Committee for back pay owed to teachers who spent extra hours tutoring students. But the alliance also called for several new programs city-wide, including paid training for teachers in “remedial and developmental reading, and in bilingual education,” a paid group planning time period for teachers in all schools that could be used for tutoring and course planning, a hot lunch program in all schools, full-time “pupil adjustment counselors” for schools that need this help, and a “cadet intern program (similar to the police cadet program) to train attendance supervisors.”\(^{160}\) Both groups also urged the School Committee to revamp the teacher rating system. BTU President John Reilly stated that this was the first time the union had worked with a community group, and added, “I would like to broadcast an appeal to all the parents of Boston. By law the School Committee has to listen to us. We need the ideas and suggestions of parents.”\(^{161}\) The alliance provided a rare instance of cooperation between teachers and the black community, especially in the presentation of a united front in opposition to the School Committee. This united front did not last long. Debate

\(^{159}\) Another departure from the top ranks of leadership was Lou Vangel, who resigned his position as Executive Secretary in November, after serving the union in that capacity for six years. Vangel left to become the Field Representative for the NEA in the New England area. He urged members to keep an open line of communication with the community. “Vangel Resigns,” *Boston Union Teacher* (November 1969), 1, 3.


over corporal punishment only a few months later demonstrated the limits of unity where two parties claimed the same goals from entirely different perspectives.

School Committee elections that fall resulted in the re-election of Kerrigan, Tierney, and Lee. Kerrigan received the most votes. McDevitt was not re-elected, and Eisenstadt was running in the county sheriff’s race, which he won. Two new members joined the incumbents: former State Senator James Hennigan and a former member of the Governor’s Council, John Craven. The first notable act of the new committee in February 1970 was to abolish corporal punishment in the schools. The BTU opposed this move, setting teachers up for criticism from black community leaders, who had long called for an end to corporal punishment. The union, however, was primarily concerned with ever-increasing rates of teacher assaults and linked the issue to teacher safety.\footnote{The BTU estimated there were 220 teacher assaults during the 1968-1969 school year, based on reported assaults. “Teacher Assaults on Increase,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (September 1969), 1.}

President John Reilly argued that the Code of Discipline had already been eroded in some areas, and that the union would not endorse the removal of corporal punishment. Reilly reasoned that “The vast majority do not use it. They want to have it there as the ultimate weapon if they do have to use it. In general, I would say the majority of the teachers don’t use it…..It’s frowned upon in many cases by the administration of the particular building. It’s been outright forbidden in cases by some principals.”\footnote{“Conference Minutes,” February 3, 1970, School Committee Minutes, 89.} Despite assurances that use of the rattan cane was rare, the BTU’s insistence on retaining it at all only validated black criticism of white teachers.\footnote{Freedom House, “Press Release: Attitudes of Teachers in the Public Schools,” February 16, 1971, Freedom House, Inc., Records.}

The debate over corporal punishment highlights the shifting school landscape that teachers, School Committee members, and black community leaders navigated during
these years. Each party had its own agenda; where two might ally against the other on one issue, the dynamic could shift rapidly depending on the item under discussion. And the BTU, growing increasingly frustrated over its contract negotiations with the School Committee, could ill afford to alienate any members of the community in the Spring of 1970, when it would conduct its first ever teacher strike.

On March 24, 1970, the BTU staged a one-day event the union called a “Professional Day Boycott.” This was the first time the BTU organized an official action to stay off the job. Contract negotiations with the School Committee, underway since the fall, had thus far failed to produce agreement on salary, and the BTU wanted the issue decided prior to the School Committee’s April 6th budget deadline. Teachers had been picketing School Committee headquarters since March 16th without any resolution on the salary issue. On March 22nd, the day teachers voted to strike, the School Committee’s best salary offer was an eight percent raise for all groups, and it vowed it could offer nothing higher. The union argued that such a raise barely covered a cost-of-living increase; teachers voted to reject that offer, and then voted to stage the one-day strike.

An attempt by the School Committee to obtain an injunction against the strike failed, though as public employees, teachers were already barred from striking under the state’s collective bargaining law.

Just prior to the one-day strike, BTU President John Reilly declared that “The school situation in Boston has become so intolerable that we have to find some way to

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166 The BTU held a voice vote, which bothered some members opposed to the strike. Nina McCain, “3415 Hub Teachers Strike; 1564 disagree, Go to Class,” *Boston Globe*, March 25, 1970, 40.
The teachers achieved that goal: twenty-five schools were forced to close, including fourteen of seventeen high schools. Sixty percent of students either stayed home or were forced to miss class when schools closed. Seventy percent, or 3,415 teachers, picketed outside schools for two hours before attending a union meeting at a city hotel and then marching on School Committee headquarters. Though 1,564 teachers did not participate in the strike, the number who did participate was impressive, given that the union claimed 3,500 members.

Participation was strongest among high school teachers and weakest among elementary school teachers, the traditional dividing line for more militant versus more conservative teachers. At South Boston High School, out of one hundred and four teachers, only five reported to work that day. But at the Andrew Elementary School, only a few blocks away from South Boston High, forty-two out of fifty-three teachers were in school during the strike. Echoes of the BTU’s original collective bargaining campaign in the early sixties can be felt in these numbers, as high school teachers continued to be the group most willing to exercise all options within the union’s capacity.

On the evening of March 24, Superintendent Ohrenberger stated “This has been a sad day in the history of the Boston public schools.” School Committee members’ reactions ranged from resolute to angry. Craven felt the committee was under attack, while Kerrigan urged the committee to take steps to prevent strikes in the future. Lee

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168 This was the second time Ohrenberger made this pronouncement; the first instance was after citywide student disturbances in September 1968 as discussed earlier in the chapter. Larry Van Dyne and Jay Davis, “Teacher Strike: 56,400 Pupil Miss Class,” *Boston Globe*, March 25, 1970.
observed that “there is no doubt that devoted teachers are trying to push their devoted service at us.”

Suffolk County Superior Court Judge Harry Kalus issued an injunction the day after the strike barring further work stoppages. In his ruling, Judge Kalus stated that “Such a boycott as took place could and did affect the safety of the teachers who were on the job and the students and general public.” On the day of the strike, it was reported that “roaming bands of students” committed minor acts of vandalism citywide. Inside English High School, students overturned desks, chairs, and lockers before school officials cleared the building.

Despite the rash of student vandalism and the court injunction, the BTU deemed the day a success. John Reilly told teachers that “I think we showed everyone that we don’t want to hang around and wait for the crumbs off the table. We’re showing by our action today that we mean business.” With this strike, the BTU demonstrated that Boston would not be spared the militant tactics already employed by teachers in other cities, and John Reilly proved that he was not afraid to make bold decisions.

In the BTU newspaper, the contrast between reports on contract negotiations in 1968 and 1970 is unmistakable. In 1968 President Fred Reilly wrote with an air of pride as he complimented the membership for resolving the contract without a strike. In early 1970, even before the original impasse between the School Committee and the Union, articles in the *Boston Union Teacher* openly advocated the use of strikes. One such

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169 “Conference Minutes,” March 31, 1970, School Committee Minutes, 35.
171 Van Dyne and Davis, “Teacher Strike,” 1.
172 BTU members could hardly have been immune to the influence of the increasing frequency of teacher strikes elsewhere. In New England alone, seven school systems began the 1969-1970 school year with a teacher strike. The seven teacher strikes occurred in New Bedford, MA; Manchester, NH; North Providence, RI; and New London, Groton, New Britain and East Haven, CT.
article urged that the state law restricting strikes by public employees be overturned. Editor Charles McGowan wrote that “The right to strike is an important right for any employee since it is his strongest weapon against injustices by his employer.” He also wrote that “Teachers are now starting to realize that strikes are often the only way to force penny-pinching school boards to make educational improvements and pay teachers the salaries they deserve.” President John Reilly pointed to recent gains by unions in New York, Providence, and Newark, and told members that “We must be unafraid of contempt citations, fearless in the face of threats, willing to oppose unjust laws and to suffer the unjust punitive measures sanctioned by those laws.” It was a new direction for the union, but one in step with changes affecting teacher unions and other public sector unions around the country in those tumultuous years.

The BTU and the School Committee continued their efforts to reach an agreement, but one month later, when there was still no acceptable offer, teachers again voted to strike. Meanwhile, minor racial incidents in the schools, beginning with a confrontation between black and white students at Hyde Park High School in January and continuing with protests over the suspension of black students at English High in April, furnished the backdrop against which Boston teachers found a new militancy. With the second strike, teachers would assert their power by breaking the law. While teachers

moved forward by breaking the law, leaders in the black community were realizing that they would have to embrace the law and turn to the legal system to solve the problem of Boston’s still segregated schools.
CHAPTER 4

BOSTON’S PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON THE EVE OF COURT-ORDERED BUSING

In Boston we were always able to rationalize that conditions in Boston, although not good, were certainly better than those in other cities, especially New York City, Chicago and Detroit. However, violence is increasing so much recently that these analogies no longer are balms to our beleaguered teachers.

—John Doherty, BTU President, March 1973.1

Court-ordered school desegregation dominates the narrative of Boston’s public schools in the 1970s. For Bostonians who maintain that the court’s remedy ruined Boston’s schools, the years and months prior to September 1974 remain in memory as a sort of calm before the storm. But the early 1970s were far from peaceful for the city’s schools. Racial incidents inside the schools, regular occurrences by the close of the 1960s, continued in the new decade. Stalled contract negotiations between the BTU and the School Committee in the spring of 1970 led to two teacher strikes: a one-day boycott in March, followed by a thirteen-day strike in May. One year later, a group of black students staged their own high-profile strike to protest the treatment of black students in the schools. Meanwhile, the Boston School Committee maintained its opposition to busing to integrate the schools, and in direct defiance of the Racial Imbalance Law, the committee allowed a new elementary school to open in the fall of 1971 with a predominantly black student enrollment. Bostonians who were opposed to the enforcement of the Racial Imbalance Law found their position bolstered by the School Committee, while black parents and leaders of the Boston branch of the NAACP, now with a very strong case against the School Committee, filed a lawsuit in U.S. District

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This chapter focuses on the Boston public school system in the early 1970s. The thirteen-day teacher strike in May 1970 and the black student strike in 1971 demonstrate a growing militancy for these two groups, even while teachers and the black community at large still managed to sidestep a true alliance to effect school reform or work in concert against the School Committee. Growing pains developed as well, in the form of internal conflicts over the direction of teacher activism between conservative and more radical union members. The striking black students, who adapted the ideology of the Black Power movement in Boston, organized an effective strike that nevertheless did not translate into a lasting youth movement. And while the School Committee wrangled with teachers and students, it also faced growing challenges from state and federal authorities. The committee’s continued defiance in the face of these growing pressures demonstrated its arrogance and determination to retain control, even in the face of financial penalties and legal threats. The committee’s actions ensured a dramatic showdown over student busing, and the events of these years defined the course of the school system for the remainder of the decade.

In the opening months of 1970 stalled contract negotiations between the BTU and the School Committee led to the teachers’ Professional Day boycott on March 24, 1970. After the boycott, contract negotiations for the 1970-1971 school year resumed, but the boycott had not improved the relationship between the two groups; just one week after the boycott BTU President John Reilly publicly called the School Committee

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2 The suit was filed on March 15, 1972, by the Harvard Center for Law and Education against the Boston School Committee on behalf of a group of 15 parents and their 43 children.
“irresponsible,” and committee member John Craven characterized Reilly as one “who would willingly go to jail as a martyr in his quest to be the national head of the National Federated Teachers Union.” The atmosphere was hardly conducive to amicable negotiations, and there were many issues still unresolved. Along with the major issue of teacher salary, the BTU also wanted to include education reforms that would in turn improve working conditions.

Specific reforms the union wanted to achieve included the hiring of more remedial reading teachers and special subject teachers in twenty elementary school districts. In discussing educational reforms, the union had to walk a fine line between advocacy and criticism, and the union was not always successful. The implication that the School Committee was not doing all it could for the schools was not lost on its members. Committee member James Hennigan stated that “The thing I really take issue with the Union on is the fact that they are trying to say that the Boston School Committee is not interested in quality education and in doing the innovative plans which we are presently undertaking and which we hope, if the city gives us that additional $20 million budget down there at City Hall, we will be able to undertake.” Ultimately, the School Committee argued that it could fund salary raises or reforms, but not both.

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3 Craven most likely meant the American Federation of Teachers. “Conference Minutes,” March 31, 1970, School Committee Minutes and Administrative Records, 30.
4 During a School Committee meeting on April 4, 1970, that focused on staffing needs, the School Committee refused to even discuss educational issues with the union. BTU President Reilly tried to enter a discussion on staffing numbers with the union’s projection for the number of librarians needed in the schools. Joseph Lee ruled that Reilly was out of order, and continued, “If you are taking up the time of the Committee on a matter that has got nothing to do with what you give us or what we give you but rather has to do with what the School Committee gives to the children, I will rule that is out of order. What you have done, Mr. Reilly, is make yourself a member of the School Committee without being elected. You are discussing problems that have to do with how we run our schools and what services we provide for the teachers…. If the Committee wants to have a hearing here with you about your good ideas about the schools, that is a worthy objective; but if you are here in a bargaining session, this has nothing to do with bargaining.” “Conference Minutes,” April 4, 1970, School Committee Minutes, 64-65.
5 “Conference Minutes,” March 31, 1970, School Committee Minutes, 39.
By the end of April, the union lowered its previous salary demand by $500 across all salary steps; the committee now offered a two-year contract with a raise of $500 across all salary steps in the second year.\textsuperscript{6} Even with these concessions, the parties were still divided. The union planned a meeting on April 29 to vote on the committee’s latest offer, and a strike vote was also planned in the event that members rejected the contract.

Prior to the BTU meeting on April 29, the School Committee called its own emergency meeting to discuss the possibility of a teacher strike. Committee members expressed anger and defiance through most of the meeting. Paul Tierney stated that, “As far as I am concerned, it’s time to stand up and say ‘No’ to those irresponsible leaders who threaten the School Committee with an unlawful strike if we don’t meet their unreasonable demands. I, for one, will not negotiate under the threat of unlawful action being taken.”\textsuperscript{7} John Kerrigan also wanted the Committee to stand its ground, stating that if the offer were raised in reaction to the threat of a strike, “then we are bowing to threats and we are leaving the door open to every militant organization of dissidents in the city to threaten the School Committee.”\textsuperscript{8} The meaning of Kerrigan’s warning was certainly not lost on other committee members at a time when the schools were facing challenges on a number of fronts.

For its part, the union was not above using the concern over race relations in the schools as leverage in its dealings with the School Committee. BTU Executive Secretary Mike O’Neill, in attendance at the emergency School Committee meeting, urged the

\textsuperscript{6} The last offer that teachers had rejected started at $7,600 and went up to $12,200 at the top salary step. The offer teachers voted on April 29 carried the same amounts as in the previous offer for the ’70-’71 school year, and ranged from $8,100 to $12,900 for the ’71-’72 school year. The BTU negotiating team called for a one year contract ranging from $8,100 to $13,600.

\textsuperscript{7} “Conference Minutes,” April 29, 1970, School Committee Minutes, 8.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 7.
members to take action to avert a teacher strike for the sake of stability in the schools. O’Neill warned the committee that it was the “eleventh hour of a crisis,” and that a teacher strike would “upset the school system for many reasons.” O’Neill continued, “We have the racial issue to confront ourselves with. It certainly will confront us. Many of the schools throughout Dorchester-Roxbury-Jamaica Plain, some of the high schools—English and Jamaica Plain—have problems racially, even without this fear of a strike. We know that they are going to get greater if we do go out. I think we should be concerned here with a settlement.” The reference to racial problems in the schools was surely a scare tactic, but the committee knew it was not an empty threat.

Craven and Hennigan were the only committee members who remained willing to negotiate despite the threat of a teacher strike. Hennigan argued that police officers and firefighters both received raises, and that teachers were entitled to a raise as well. Yet Craven, while still willing to negotiate, did not conceal his disdain for BTU President Reilly. Craven said that Reilly was “hell-bent on provoking a strike,” and added that Reilly was “using the 4,500 school teachers in Boston and the 90,000 Boston school children to further his own ambitions and would love to imitate Albert Shanker of New York and go to jail for contempt of court.” The undercurrent of fear that teacher strikes would become common in Boston was apparent throughout this committee meeting; committee members were divided and ultimately did not raise the salary offer prior to the teachers’ meeting.

At the BTU membership meeting later that same day, teachers voted to reject the

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9 Ibid., 44.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 5.
offer of the two-year contract, and then voted 1132 to 707 to strike.\textsuperscript{12} The strike was
planned to begin on Friday May 1\textsuperscript{st} to give the negotiating teams one more day to come
up with an agreeable compromise over the disputed terms of the contract. Although the
union further lowered its salary demands so that the issue of salary was even closer to
resolution, the issue of special subject teachers and a requirement that teachers add 15
minutes to the period of time spent at school at the end of the day were cited as the most
contentious issues still unresolved.\textsuperscript{13} Even with the knowledge of a certain strike, the
extra day of negotiations did not lead to resolution.

The teacher strike began Friday, May 1. It was only the second time Boston’s
teachers walked off the job; it was also the second strike that spring. This time, instead
of calling it a one-day “Professional Day Boycott,” as the union coined the strike on
March 24, this new action was planned as a strike of undetermined length. The BTU
announced that the strike would continue until teachers received a better offer on both
salary and educational items. The strike coincided with a wave of public sector worker
militancy that swept across the country in 1970. As Joseph McCartin has noted, the
number of public sector strikes had risen steadily from 15 in 1958 to 411 by 1969.
However, public sector union militancy broke all records in 1970. During the first three
months of the year, strikes erupted in 28 school systems around the country. As
happened in many of those cases, the Boston School Committee stated it would not open

\textsuperscript{12} The fact that the margin was relatively close suggests that the union still struggled with its
ability to rally the large majority of members to its common cause. The union claimed approximately 3,500
members at this time. Nina McCain, “Hub Teachers Strike Today But Schools Will Stay Open,” \textit{Boston
Globe}, May 1, 1970, 1.
\textsuperscript{13} The union now demanded a minimum starting salary of $7600 against the School Committee’s
offer of $7800.
negotiations again until teachers returned to work.¹⁴

Superintendent Ohrenberger announced that all schools would open at their normally scheduled times on May 1st, and appealed to parents to send their children to school. Ohrenberger added that he had been working with the Boston Police and stated, “I have taken necessary steps to provide for the safety of all pupils.”¹⁵ Parents did not necessarily take him at his word: out of approximately 92,000 students, 53,760 official student absences were recorded on that first strike day. The School Department noted that sixty-five percent of high school teachers, seventy-seven percent of junior high teachers, and thirty-five percent of elementary school teachers stayed off the job that day, while the BTU reported that seventy-two percent of high school teachers and eighty-seven percent of junior high teachers struck the schools.¹⁶ According to the School Department, about half of all teachers participated in the strike; the union cited the participation level at sixty percent. Twenty-two schools were officially closed, including twelve out of eighteen high schools. Meanwhile, the union reported that one hundred schools had been forced to close.¹⁷ The BTU charged that the discrepancy in numbers was due to the School Department practice of counting schools that opened on time as operational, even if a school was forced to close early. It was reported that in some schools listed as remaining open, only a few teachers led a small group of students.¹⁸

Student absences and the number of teachers on strike remained at around the

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¹⁶ Dueling sets of numbers were also reported after the Professional Day boycott in March. McCain, “Teacher Strike Shuts 22 Hub Schools,” Boston Globe, May 2, 1970, 1.
¹⁷ There were 196 schools in the city’s system.
¹⁸ The listing of schools as open had the dual purpose of attempting to deemphasize the effect of the strike while remaining in compliance with state attendance laws. The official closure of a large number of schools would require adding days to the end of the school year. Joseph M. Harvey and Nina McCain, “Hub Teachers in Court; 12 Schools Still Closed,” Boston Globe, May 5, 1970, 23.
same levels throughout the thirteen days of the strike. The School Department worked to ensure that more schools were able to be noted as officially “open,” even if that meant that only a handful of teachers and students were present. Ohrenberger released a statement to parents on May 6 and explained that he was keeping the schools open for the teachers who continue to “faithfully and courageously” report to the classrooms, and because closing the schools would cause the system to lose $150,000 a day in state aid.\textsuperscript{19} The fact is that almost all the city’s high schools and junior high schools were effectively shut down due to the high rate of high school and junior high school teacher participation in the strike. English High School had the highest teacher participation rate. Only two teachers reported to work on May 1, and English High was the only school that remained officially closed throughout the entire strike. Principals at the Patrick Gavin Junior High and the Woodrow Wilson Junior High noted attendance levels for teachers at six of sixty, and six of fifty-nine, respectively.\textsuperscript{20} Elementary school teachers participated on a much lower scale, though teachers at predominantly black elementary schools walked off the job at a higher rate than teachers at predominantly white schools. The principal of Lewenberg Elementary, a predominantly black school, said that only 19 of 61 teachers were present on May 1.\textsuperscript{21}

Mayor White called the teacher strike “a tragic mistake.” He deemed the latest School Committee salary offer as “reasonable” considering the “severe financial crisis” of the city.\textsuperscript{22} Meanwhile, State Education Commissioner Neil Sullivan entered the

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22}Harvey and McCain, “Hub Teachers in Court,” 18. Mayor White was also frustrated with the minor role he had in approving teacher contracts and pay. In October 1970, he “promoted a Home Rule commission report urging the legislature to allow Boston to vote on abolishing the elected School
negotiation process as a third party, “to communicate positions between the two groups” and make recommendations for compromise on the unresolved issues between the School Committee and the BTU. Sullivan spent two weeks working with both sides before he voluntarily withdrew his participation just before the strike ended. Parents in Boston were “angry but quiet” according to Joseph Cronin, and the Home and School Association (Boston’s version of a parent-teacher organization) “said little.” The one exception was a rally organized by parents of Boston Latin students; the strike protest meeting was attended by 600 parents. Other parents picketed alongside teachers, and Pixie Palladino, a parent from East Boston, who would go on to become a leader of the anti-busing movement both as a protestor and a member of the School Committee, addressed a teacher rally on May 7 and told teachers that “You have the backing of the parents 100 percent.” The mixed reaction of parents surely fell along predictable lines: those parents who already wanted reforms in the schools were willing to support the teachers against the School Committee, and those parents who were generally happy with the system were annoyed with the disruptions caused by the strike.

Nine members of the BTU’s negotiating committee, under a court injunction that forbade them to strike, were not publicly participating in the strike during the day. Undeterred, school administrators immediately began to compile a list of teachers

Committee and to let the mayor run schools as a city agency.” Joseph M. Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 157.
25 Ibid.
27 The court injunction was issued one day after the March 24th strike.
picketing outside schools; by the afternoon, contempt charges were filed in Suffolk County Superior Court against ten teachers, who were ordered to appear in court Monday morning. The union immediately charged that the teachers were “apparently chosen at random,” in “an effort to intimidate other teachers.” 28 In the courtroom that Monday morning, Judge Henry Kalus ordered summonses for the nine officers of the BTU, stating that he was “not going to engage in selective punishment and not going to hold ten teachers in contempt for the entire group.” 29 While attorneys for the School Department claimed that the officers’ participation in the strike might not be provable in court, Judge Kalus ordered summonses for reporters who attended a BTU press conference, persons who could provide testimony about Pres. Reilly’s public statements. The hearing on contempt charges for the nine officers began on Tuesday, May 5.

That same day, the state Board of Conciliation and Arbitration issued a call for both parties to submit their disagreements to binding arbitration. As a prerequisite for arbitration, board chairman George Romanos stated that teachers must agree in writing to return to their classrooms, and the School Committee must agree to allow all striking teachers to return to work. The BTU agreed to arbitration; the School Committee rejected the offer, and argued that the union could not sustain the strike. At the committee’s meeting on the afternoon of May 5, Lee, Tierney, and Kerrigan maintained that the teacher strike was forced upon the union membership by a small group of radical teachers. They also questioned the union’s vote that rejected the latest salary offer, after it was reported that the vote, taken by a show of hands, was observed to be very close. Committee member Tierney, convinced that teachers would now accept the latest salary

offer if given another chance to vote, proposed that the School Department conduct a new vote at city hall; the proposal passed 4-1. In addition, the committee noted the petition of the Elementary Teachers Club, which was collecting signatures to call a union membership meeting at which a written vote on the salary offer could be conducted. Tierney encouraged his fellow members to continue to oppose arbitration as he stated, “I think we should hold the line. They are splitting apart very seriously now. I think it’s going into our favor.”

Division among teachers was perhaps not as dramatic as Tierney concluded, but strike participation continued to hover somewhere between fifty and sixty percent. One factor in this division was in the perceived emphasis on salary demands over educational issues. President Reilly publicly maintained that educational issues were just as important as salary demands, but some members complained that the actual treatment of these issues was unequal, and an attempt to make educational demands binding issues during negotiation was voted down in a general membership meeting. Steven Shnider, a first year provisional teacher at the King school, stated that “There’s a lot of sentiment that the union is not really fighting for the educational demands: $200 you just don’t strike for.” Shnider argued that it was this sentiment that kept some teachers from striking; he claimed that many more teachers would strike if educational improvements were given priority. But another striking teacher seemed to emphasize that it was education reform that striking teachers were indeed most interested in when he argued, “I’ve already lost that salary raise in missed pay.”

30 “Conference Minutes,” May 5, 1970, School Committee Minutes, 43.
32 The quoted teacher was not named. Harvey and McCain, “Hub Teachers in Court,” 23.
Other teachers claimed a third reason to strike, illustrated in remarks from a history teacher at Dorchester High School. John Palmieri, interviewed as he picketed his high school, stated, “It’s about time teachers stood up and took over direction of their destiny. We’re sick and tired of being told what to do. We’re the ones who deal with the kids every day, who have rapport with them, not the School Committee or the people at 15 Beacon St. They’re totally insensitive, out of touch with the kids, and yet they’re the ones who make all the decisions. We want the teachers to start having a say in the running of the schools.”

The direct call for “teacher power” was a new element for teacher unionism in Boston, though it was far from new for other teacher unions, and was certainly demonstrated in a wave of teacher strikes occurring across the Northeast at this time, which included a high-profile teacher strike in Newark, New Jersey.

A large influx of younger teachers influenced this new attitude toward teacher power. Since 1960, the average age of a teacher in Boston had fallen from fifty-six to thirty-eight. Younger teachers were far more likely to participate in the strike than older teachers. Thirty-year old John Palmieri was described as “a prototype of the new breed of union member,” a young teacher “no longer willing to accept ‘the system.’” And though Palmieri, like Shnider, found the union imperfect, he maintained his loyalty to the BTU and argued that the “union has gotten us where we are today.”

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34 Strike votes were passed in seven New England communities at the start of the 1969-1970 school year, including New Bedford, MA. The other communities were Manchester, NH, North Providence, RI, and New London, Groton, New Britain and East Haven, CT. The three-week Newark teachers strike in 1970 is covered in Steve Golin’s work, The Newark Teacher Strikes. Golin’s presentation of the 1970 strike provides a stark counterpoint to the 1970 BTU strike, as the Newark teachers formed a united front with a clear and consistent message.
37 Ibid.
Teachers not participating in the strike showed less regard for the union, as a group of four non-striking Dorchester High School teachers explained. Speaking to a reporter on the condition of anonymity, the group of three women and one man claimed that the membership had been “manipulated” into a strike mentality by BTU leaders, who then “rigged” the vote on School Committee offers and pushed forward with the strike vote. The non-striking male teacher stated, “They had already made up their minds to strike before they took that vote. I don’t feel the union represents me.” A young female teacher in this non-striking group offered a more diplomatic account; she tempered her own statement of disappointment in the union leadership with the claim that the School Committee “almost dared us to go on strike.”

Teachers who perceived a change in the union leadership’s willingness to strike also could have been responding to a recent change in the way the BTU chose its negotiating team. This was the first union contract for which an elected, rather than an appointed, negotiating team represented the membership. And the majority of the group’s elected members were younger, male high school teachers, a category of teachers known to be the most militant. Negotiators for the School Committee noticed a difference as well, and claimed that this elected group was harder to work with than the appointed groups of years past.

Though the strike was perceived by the School Committee and a large percentage of teachers as a radical act, the higher salaries and the types of educational reforms the teachers asked for were not radical. And in fact, most teachers agreed on the issues of salary and the specific school reforms. But agreement on the issues did not guarantee

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
agreement on the action teachers should take to achieve their goals. Both groups of
teachers, those who walked the picket line and those who remained on the job, used their
support of the issues to justify their actions, thus illustrating the complicated nature of a
teacher strike. The intangible product that teachers worked for—education—made the
issue of working conditions and salary that much more open to varied opinion and
debate.

On Wednesday, May 6th, BTU officers were found guilty of criminal contempt of
court and President John Reilly was sentenced to thirty days in jail. The union was also
fined $4,000, with an additional $1,000 fine for every day that teachers remained on
strike. Following the decision, the union’s Executive Board issued a statement that read,
in part, “The jailing of Mr. Reilly and the heavy fines against the Boston Teachers Union
have served only to strengthen our cause to win a fair and just settlement.” At a union
rally the next day, union leaders and representatives of the AFT were met with the cheers
and applause of two thousand striking teachers. AFT representative Ken Mieson
declared that teachers were not striking for two or three hundred extra dollars in salary,
but for educational improvements. It was reported that this statement garnered Mieson a
standing ovation. It was further reported that striking teachers showed every sign of
committing themselves to a long term strike.

As the strike entered its sixth day, State Education Commissioner Neil Sullivan
continued to work to end the impasse by meeting separately with the School Committee

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42 Jay Davis, “Sullivan, Both Sides Meet in Teacher Row,” Boston Globe, May 7, 1970, 6. AFT President David Selden, only recently released from jail in connection with the Newark Teachers Strike, had been in Boston earlier in the week. He was to lead a rally at City Hall followed by a march on School Headquarters on May 5th. The rally and march were called off at the request of police, who were dealing with a massive demonstration on the Boston Common in response to the Kent State University shootings.
and the BTU’s negotiating team. Meanwhile, Elementary Teachers Club president Helen Pecevich announced that her group had collected over three hundred and fifty signatures, the number required to call a union membership meeting. The number of striking teachers remained the same, and the union added new demands to its list: the union now requested that days be added to the school year to allow striking teachers to recover lost pay, and that an “agency fee” be imposed on the system’s non-union teachers to offset contract negotiation expenses. As the school week ended, the impasse continued.

As a new school week began, the BTU reported that 2,416 teachers were out of school, and 1,868 were still on the job. While the School Department reported that only one high school—English High—was forced to remain closed, the union categorized more than one hundred schools as “inoperative” due to low student attendance or teacher absence levels above fifty percent. Student absences remained at approximately the same level as had been recorded since the beginning of the strike: out of roughly 92,000 pupils, an average of 55,000 absences were reported daily. Acts of vandalism were reported at Boston Latin High School on the first day of the strike, but the schools had been free of any acts of student violence since that day.

At the School Committee’s May 12 meeting, Chairman Joseph Lee moved that all striking teachers be fired. Referring to the striking teachers, Lee stated that “these people have no respect for law. They are filthy of tongue. They are dealing in obscenities. With lying lips they tell children that schools are closed when they are not

43 According to union regulations, the meeting could occur no sooner than seven days from the submission of the request.
44 This was after the committee’s most recent unsuccessful attempt to bring charges against a new, randomly chosen group of teachers. On Monday, May 11, thirty-seven members of the BTU were in court in response to contempt charges filed against them by the School Committee the previous Friday. Judge Kalus dismissed the charges, and stated that he would not “allow the court to be used as a medium for maneuvering on either side.” “Both Sides Lectured in Teachers’ Strike,” Boston Evening Globe, May 11, 1970, 3.
closed, and in that way have turned thousands of children away.” He continued, “It would be tragic if they returned to our schools. It would be a disaster. The children now are utterly confused and disillusioned.” Shouts of “Boo” and hissing from audience members were reported in the meeting minutes, though no teachers formally addressed the committee during the meeting. Ultimately, Lee was the only committee member who voted in support of firing the strikers, but the unbridled rancor of his speech signaled a new low in the committee’s rhetoric.

As the strike entered its tenth day, the BTU held a membership meeting on May 13 and conducted a vote over whether or not to continue the strike. The vote, supervised by Commission of Education staff members, was conducted by secret ballot following an informal voice vote. Of the written ballots, 1,389 were in favor and 259 were against continuing the strike. Two hundred fewer votes were recorded in this balloting than in the original vote to strike, and the overall number represented less than half of the union’s 3500 members. BTU Vice President Thomas Cavanaugh claimed that between 2,200 and 2,500 teachers were in attendance, but that after the voice vote was deemed overwhelmingly in favor of continuing the strike, many teachers left before the paper balloting took place. School Committee member Kerrigan doubted the validity of the claim, and he argued that “Teachers were harassed, insulted and afraid to go to this meeting,” and further stated that it was not properly advertised and that teachers did not know Sullivan would supervise it. Teachers in attendance denied the harassment of non-striking teachers, and described a calm and orderly session in which all teachers were

45 “Conference Minutes,” May 12, 1970, School Committee Minutes, 134.
46 Ibid., 135.
48 Ibid., 17.
listened to with respect. School Committee opposition was accomplishing what the BTU could not do on its own: galvanize the ranks to support the strike by large majority.

The next strike day brought a significant new development: the BTU endorsed the demands of the Massachusetts Negro Educators Association, and the MNEA in turn pledged its support of the strike. A voice vote conducted at the membership meeting on May 14 was reported to be almost unanimous in favor of supporting MNEA demands for more black administrators in the schools. No figures were given on attendance at this meeting, and Vice President Cavanaugh clarified that these demands would not be added to current negotiations with the School Committee. But the symbolic value of the vote was not lost union members. Myles Striar, chairman of the BTU’s Reform Caucus, called the vote “the finest moment I have experienced in a BTU meeting. It made it unmistakably clear to all the citizens of Boston that Boston teachers care deeply about the concerns of black people of this city.”

Joseph Hart, president of the MNEA and a teacher at the Lewis School in Roxbury, expressed optimism that the vote would increase the participation of black teachers in the strike. Hart explained that many black teachers had not yet supported the strike because they did not believe the BTU supported black teachers.

Unfortunately, the symbolic value of this alliance, and the hope it generated

49 The MNEA had been growing in membership and took an increasingly vocal stance in the late 1960s, leading up to the one day stay-out (dubbed a “workshop”) for black teachers and students in May 1969. In April 1970, the MNEA presented a position paper to the Negotiating Committee of the BTU, citing “the great inequities that exist between the opportunities accorded black teachers and white teachers in areas of recruitment, appointment and promotion within the BPS.” The paper continued, “We stand unalterably opposed to current practices and policies...that such policies and practices account for gross discrimination against black professionals, black non-professionals, black students, the black community and other minorities in the city of Boston.” Hayden, “B.E.A.M.: Some History of the Early Years.”

50 Davis, “Teachers Back Black Educators,” Boston Evening Globe, May 14, 1970, 28. The Reform Caucus of the BTU had only recently been established with the following goals: a commitment to “civil rights, better libraries, smaller classes, and to making faculty senates work.” See also Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 156.
among black and white teachers, was its only legacy. It does not appear that there was any lasting relationship of public, mutual support between the two groups. In reality, there was not much chance for forward momentum when it was made clear, even before the BTU voice vote, that MNEA demands would not be added to the negotiations. As Joseph Cronin explained, “it was late in the bargaining process and teachers of color amounted to only 5 percent of the 4,200 teachers.”

There is no indication that BTU support was not given in good faith, but frankly, union priorities at that specific moment were spread thin across many other goals. With no records indicating that the union followed through with continued support of the MNEA’s position, this public alliance was brief.

Teacher participation in the strike was never reported according to race, and so it is difficult to verify the support or lack of support given by black teachers. It does appear, however, that the black community offered general support for striking teachers. The Bay State Banner’s “Roving Camera” column for its May 14 edition posed the question, “What do you think of the Teacher Strike?” to six random black Bostonians. Five of the six voiced their support for striking teachers, and the lone dissenter of the group only questioned the timing, and not the validity, of the strike. Mary Perry of Dorchester stated that “As long as they can do this without violence, I believe their demands are justified.”

James Washington of Roxbury asserted, “I approve of the stand they are taking. I believe the teachers are trying to develop the student into a full, useful citizen and for general overall education. The teacher needs better conditions to relate to

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51 Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 156.
52 Bob Hale, “Roving Camera,” Bay State Banner, May 14, 1970, 5. The Bay State Banner was a weekly publication at this time; the May 14th edition was the first edition to offer coverage of and community reaction to the BTU strike.
the students and PTA."\footnote{Ibid.} A letter to the editor one week later referred to “overwhelming community support of the strike.”\footnote{Jean McGuire and Jewell Vanderhoop, “To the Editor,” \textit{Bay State Banner}, May 21, 1970, 4.} The letter, which asked the reader to support the striking teachers and condemned non-striking teachers, also referred to black teachers not participating in the strike as “selfish,” and “part of the problem.”\footnote{Ibid.} 

As the strike wore on, striking teachers cited ever-increasing solidarity within the union and a stronger commitment to school reform than at the outset of the strike.\footnote{In a \textit{Globe} article that did not name specific teachers, but referred to a group of “younger teachers,” it was reported that this group noted a “marked shift in membership” toward support of educational reforms. Davis, “Teachers Vote to Stay Out,” \textit{Boston Globe}, May 14, 1970, 17.} Even so, the commitment to educational reform is hard to quantify. For all the talk of the need to improve the schools, the BTU remained adamantly opposed to certain reform issues, such as adding fifteen minutes to the end of the after school period, fifteen minutes which were promoted by the School Committee as time to meet one-on-one with students and parents. Teachers objected to adding extra time to the school day when the proposed salary raise barely covered the cost of living increase, let alone a longer work day. And while teachers in Boston were asked to choose between higher salaries and school reform, teachers in Los Angeles made their choice: a four-week teacher strike ended in the second week of May when teachers voted to forfeit their raises in order to fund reforms.\footnote{Sam Enriquez, “In 1970 Strike, Students Partied but Teachers Lost Battle, and Pay,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, May 13, 1989.} The emphasis on school reform in the Boston teacher strike, while undoubtedly genuine for many teachers, could have also been part of the union’s campaign to sustain support for the strike among teachers and among the community at large. One unnamed teacher stated, “It would look bad, depriving kids of 11 days of
education for a couple of hundred bucks.”

As another school week began on May 18, the commitment to stay out of the schools remained strong for striking teachers, even as the union actively sought resolution. On that Monday, as teachers completed their twelfth day on strike, the BTU proposed that all unresolved contract issues be submitted to binding arbitration. At a teacher’s strike rally that afternoon, it was reported that over 1,000 teachers cheered the arbitration proposal, while members of the union’s negotiating committee assured members that demands for makeup days and the collection of an agency fee from all teachers were now “top priority.” Ending the strike and resolving the issue of being allowed to make up missed days solved the immediate needs of teachers; educational reforms would be sorted out in arbitration later. If some teachers felt they were forced to compromise on their demands, it was not apparent from the mood at the rally. In fact, Ken Mieson, the AFT representative who had been offering support to the BTU, warned teachers during the strike’s first few days that they would not achieve all of their demands this year. Mieson told teachers that the payoff would be felt at the bargaining table the following year. The strike would prove that teachers were “a force to be reckoned with” and could “paralyze” the schools if their demands were not negotiated in good faith in the future. If the goal was to demonstrate teacher power, the union had already proven its point.

The following day, Committee member Paul Tierney submitted his own proposal for binding arbitration to the BTU. Tierney proposed the appointment of a three-member arbitration panel, and he also called for the addition of two extra days at the end

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58 Nina McCain, “Boston Teachers Union has Made its Point.”
59 Ibid.
of the year, days that striking teachers requested to recover a portion of their lost pay.\footnote{60} At a BTU meeting that afternoon, about two-thirds of teachers in attendance voted in favor of Tierney’s proposal, with 965 in favor and 296 opposed.\footnote{61} The BTU negotiating committee unanimously approved Tierney’s proposal, and the union’s Executive Committee voted 15-7 in favor of arbitration.

Taking a closer look at these votes reveals significant doubt and division over the issue of arbitration. The Executive Committee included the eight members of the negotiating team. Subtracting those members from the vote shows an even split among remaining members. And before the Executive Committee voted, one of its members, Allen Cohen, went so far as to admit to a reporter, “I don’t know whether I’m for it or against it. I’m totally confused.”\footnote{62} If the union leadership was confused, that offered little hope that a clear message would be sent to the membership. At the membership meeting, the proposal was presented to members along with a warning from Corporation Counsel Attorney Herbert Gleason, who stated that the School Committee was not legally allowed to enter into binding arbitration. In addition, a letter from President Reilly, still in jail, was read aloud to members. Along with Ken Meison, Reilly opposed Tierney’s proposal, and argued that it was too risky a step because it offered no concrete assurances on the issues of make-up days and the agency fee. The less than united front shown by union leadership, complicated most certainly by the lack of a consistent and clear strike goal, created confusion for many members. In fact, several members who voted against

\footnote{60} The two “extra” days had already been calculated into the school year as “snow days,” but were never used. \footnote{61} Jay David and Nina McCain, “Teachers’ Strike Ends with Arbitration,” \textit{Boston Globe}, May 20, 1970. \footnote{62} Nina McCain, “Teachers Back in Class; Union Leader Released,” \textit{Boston Evening Globe}, May 20, 1970, 44.
the proposal did so based solely on the questionable legality of arbitration, and not on unfulfilled union demands.\footnote{Based on comments of teachers leaving the membership meeting as reported in the \textit{Boston Globe.} David and McCain, “Teachers Strike Ends.”} That less than half of the teachers out on strike even voted on the proposal suggests widespread uncertainty amongst the teachers over the most beneficial course of action. In the absence of a unified, consistent message from union leadership, the ability of the BTU to sustain an even longer strike was doubtful.

In order to officially submit negotiations to arbitration and end the strike, one hurdle remained: Tierney needed the support of his fellow School Committee members. Because Tierney stood with members Lee and Kerrigan in previous votes opposing arbitration, it was expected that his newfound support would swing the vote in favor of arbitration. At the School Committee meeting on the evening of May 19, that was indeed the case. By a 3-2 vote, the committee agreed to binding arbitration to resolve its contract negotiations with the BTU. Of course, debate before the vote was not without controversy; as John Doherty from the BTU negotiating team stood to address the committee, Kerrigan declared that, “I oppose any leader of a contract-breaking union, a law-defying union, and a court-defying union appearing before our Committee. To do so would, in my opinion, degrade us to the lowest depth.”\footnote{“Committee Minutes,” May 19, 1970, School Committee Minutes, 43.} As Doherty prepared to address the committee over these objections, both Kerrigan and Lee left the room and returned at the conclusion of Doherty’s remarks.

Despite their objections, Kerrigan and Lee were out-voted. Binding arbitration was approved; teachers returned to their classrooms the following morning, and BTU President Reilly was released from jail. The School Committee and the BTU had ten days to continue negotiations before unresolved issues were submitted to arbitration. The
issue of the legality of arbitration was still a major point of contention, but both the committee and the BTU agreed to move ahead with the process. The BTU chose Lucille Swaim, the AFT organizer who had worked with the BTU on its collective bargaining campaign in the 1960s, as their arbitration representative. The School Committee chose Joseph Barresi, director of the Municipal research bureau, and the state Board of Conciliation and Arbitration chose the third arbitrator, University of New Hampshire President John McConnell.

The school year closed without further incident and with the two voluntary attendance days, a concession the School Committee granted prior to arbitration. In early August, the arbitration panel submitted its decision. On salary, the panel recommended a schedule ranging from $7,600 to $12,900 across nine salary steps. This represented a $600 raise of the minimum salary and a $1600 raise at the top salary step. But it was reported that most teachers would receive a raise somewhere between $1200 and $2900 due to the increases at each step level. The panel also endorsed the collection of an agency fee from all teachers, a nominal monthly fee that would support the union’s collective bargaining activities. On educational reforms, recommendations came close but did not fulfill all the BTU’s demands. For example, the union requested twenty specialists in music, art, and science, and the panel recommended fifteen. The union requested two remedial reading teachers in every junior high and high school; the panel recommended one reading teacher. Despite the disparity on these and other educational reforms...
items, BTU President Reilly deemed the settlement “fair and equitable.”67 Joseph Barresi, the School Committee’s chosen arbitrator, called the recommendation on teacher salaries “excessive, unreasonable, and unjustified.”68

Though both the BTU and the School Committee ultimately approved the settlement, the School Committee did not immediately accept the recommendations. Over the summer, Corporation Counsel submitted an argument that the School Committee could not legally place its authority in the hands of arbitrators. Joseph Lee and John Kerrigan, who opposed arbitration from the beginning, maintained that the committee was not required to automatically approve the arbitrated decision. When the decision was ultimately approved by a 3-2 vote at the August 25 School Committee meeting, Chairman Lee declared, “Gentleman, you now no longer have a chairman…I just resigned.”69 Teachers in attendance broke out in spontaneous applause.

With School Committee approval, teachers finally had their contract for the 1970-1971 school year. Despite Ken Mieson’s pronouncement that the School Committee would take teachers’ demands more seriously in the future, difficult and contentious contract negotiations followed for several years.70 The strike also laid bare the BTU’s growing pains as it navigated a newer, more militant path. The numbers on strike participation alone illustrate that Boston teachers were still divided in significant ways.

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69 Kerrigan convinced Lee to reconsider his resignation, stating at one point, “You’re not going to give the leadership of the committee to three people who just gave their right of office away.” “Committee Minutes,” August 25, 1970, School Committee Minutes; Nina McCain, “Boston School Committee OKs Teachers’ Contract,” *Boston Globe*, August 26, 1970, 3.
70 Contract negotiations for the following year, which began in February 1971, proceeded very slowly, and the BTU claimed that the School Committee kept rescheduling meetings in order to stall the process. A mediator was appointed to facilitate negotiations, and by April the mediator declared an impasse and recommended fact finding to resolve the contract. Fact finding proceeded in May and June, but the contract was not settled until January 1972.
The long-standing differences between elementary school teachers and those teaching at junior high and high schools persisted, and by the early seventies the influx of younger teachers added a new dividing line between older, established teachers, and more militant newcomers. Despite the lack of united support for the strike, the BTU still demonstrated that it could command a large enough percentage of teachers to cripple the system, but the willingness of those same teachers to enter into binding arbitration showed that militancy had its limits in Boston.

Allan Cohen, the BTU Executive Board member who professed he was “totally confused” prior to the vote over arbitration, announced his resignation from the Executive Board and the termination of his union membership. In an open letter to teachers, he wrote, “It is fundamental that the use of binding arbitration to settle contract disputes is contrary to every labor principle of collective bargaining. Indeed, it threatens the whole theory of collective bargaining for teachers in the Commonwealth. The use of such an approach in our current school crisis can only be construed as an admission of failure.”

Cohen argued, “The leadership and the structure of the Union has [sic] made it impossible for the professional educator to be served and heard,” and that, “It was hoped that the Union would provide the needed direction for achieving meaningful and improved education in Boston. It has failed.” He announced the formation of the Professional Educators of Boston, affiliated with the Massachusetts Teachers Association and the NEA. The organization never established a significant presence in the city, but Cohen’s remarks reveal the frustration for some of Boston’s teachers in the wake of the

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71 Open letter to Boston Teachers from Allan S. Cohen, June 15, 1970, Massachusetts Federation of Teachers Collection.
strike. There were teachers opposed to the strike from the beginning, and then there were teachers like Cohen who felt that the union had given up too much of its power by committing to binding arbitration. This diversity in opinion only emphasized the fact that Boston’s teachers, even unionized teachers, could not be broadly characterized.

The new school year opened in September 1970 amid relative calm. Parents and teachers welcomed the tentative peace, after the community control issues at the King and Timilty schools in September 1968, and the fight over black and white student enrollment at the Trotter school in September 1969. But the problems of racial imbalance and the School Committee’s minimal compliance with the Racial Imbalance Law remained constant sources of tension in Boston. Statewide, racially imbalanced schools had only grown in number since the passage of the 1965 law, when 58 schools were deemed imbalanced. In Boston, the number of schools where over half the student population was black had risen by fifteen since 1965. The number of minority students who participated in METCO continued to rise, and the 1,375 students bused to suburban schools that fall represented an increase of 260 students over the previous year. METCO officials announced that over 1,000 students were turned away from the program due to a lack of space and funding.

Boston’s open enrollment policy, which allowed students to transfer to any other school with an open seat, continued to be utilized by Operation Exodus to bus black children from overcrowded schools in black neighborhoods to schools with open space.

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73 “Imbalance: In the State, as in Boston, There’s Little Improvement,” Boston Globe, August 30, 1970, 1.
74 Wanda Jordan, “METCO starts years with 1375 students,” Bay State Banner, September 17, 1970, 2.
across Boston. Always at odds with the School Department over enrollment figures, Exodus provided the lone incident of racial protest that September when a group of black mothers from Roxbury and Dorchester disputed enrollment levels at the Washington Irving Junior High in Roslindale, a predominantly white, middle-class neighborhood. The mothers refused to leave the school until they spoke to the assistant superintendent for that district, Florence Hawkins. After being told that Hawkins was ill, a war of words devolved into a shoving match before the mothers decided to take their case directly to the School Department. But the School Department was a dead end for the women, as officials insisted there were no more open seats at the Irving.  

At the same time, the State Board of Education was conducting a study of the Open Enrollment policy, and on October 27, 1970, the board voted unanimously to change the rules for student transfers. Beginning in the fall of 1971, the Boston School Department would have to compile a list of vacancies to be held for minority students. Students would only be allowed to transfer to a new school if the transfers served to decrease racial imbalance. Though the School Committee touted the open enrollment policy as one of its programs to racially balance the schools, State Education Commissioner Neil Sullivan cited the rising number of imbalanced schools in Boston in his argument that open enrollment was a failed policy. Of six thousand students who participated in open enrollment, about half were black. The Solomon Lewenberg Junior High School, which switched from a predominantly white school to an overwhelmingly black school over the past five years, was cited as evidence of how the open enrollment policy was used by white parents to circumvent integration. School Committee

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Chairman Joseph Lee called Sullivan a “racial snob” who could not “bear to see a Negro
majority within a school.”

This move by the state board signaled another attempt to force the city into
compliance with the Racial Imbalance Law. The School Committee vowed it would not
comply with the order. At an impasse, the state board voted in May to withhold state
funding due to the lack of compliance, but in August, the School Committee relented and
agreed to abide by the state’s open enrollment rules. The funding was released. The
School Committee’s fourth plan to integrate the Boston public schools in accordance with
the Racial Imbalance Law was approved by the state board on August 31, 1971. The
committee remained in minimal compliance with the law.

The School Committee’s power struggle with the State Board of Education was
not the only challenge it faced in the 1970-71 school year. In January 1971, the Black
Student Federation called for a citywide black student boycott. Black students wanted
the School Committee to recruit more black teachers and black guidance counselors, they
demanded courses on black history taught by black teachers, they sought to end the
harassment of black students, especially students wishing to wear dashikis to school, and
they called for an independent commission to study racial patterns in the schools. This
call for a black student boycott came amidst a growing incidence of racial unrest in
Boston’s high schools; the *Boston Union Teacher* reported cited incidents of racial unrest
at five Boston high schools in January 1971. On January 21, an incident at English
High involving an alleged theft by two black students triggered a black-student sit-in in

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78 Ralph R. Smith, “Two Centuries and Twenty-Four Months,” 49.
80 “Student Unrest Hits Many High Schools,” *Boston Union Teacher* (February 1971), 1.
the school’s auditorium. A few students were injured in physical altercations between black and white students, and some minor property damage was reported. The following day, as black students returned to the auditorium, the English High Faculty petitioned the Boston School Committee to close the school for two days. During the two days, the administration and faculty would work on a plan to address the problems at the school.

John Doherty, a teacher at English High, citing the alleged theft, stated that “Everyone agrees that this was a catalyst that brought a long festering boil to a head. If it wasn’t this incident it was inevitable that it would have been something else.” James Dailey, English High’s headmaster, cited the rapid change of racial composition at the school as one issue. Thirty-five percent of the senior class was black, while eighty percent of English High freshmen were black. Dailey told the School Committee that black students complained to him about curriculum as well as the low number of black teachers at the school. Predictably, committee members Joseph Lee and John Kerrigan voted against officially closing the school for any amount of time. Faculty members complained that this opposition was due to the fact that English was a heavily unionized school, and cited past school closures that were granted without extensive debate. Ultimately, the committee agreed to the school closure, and regular operations did not resume at English High for six days. In John Doherty’s evaluation of the incident, he wondered if complex racial problems could ever be solved in a school setting, and rightly

83 Only three teachers out of a staff of seventy-seven at English High were black. Nina McCain, “School board shuts English High,” Boston Globe, January 23, 1971. Headmaster Dailey advocated hiring more black faculty, with the goal of having a faculty that was 50% black to better reflect the school’s demographics. See Tierney, “Fire at the Door,” 28. Black teachers comprised about 7 percent of the teaching force at that time. See “Memorandum and Orders on Faculty Recruiting and Hiring, January 28, 1975,” W. Arthur Garrity Jr.: Papers on the Boston School Desegregation Case, 1972-1997, Healey Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts.
predicted, “These questions will be with us for a long time.”

On January 29, black students conducted a sit-in at Dorchester High School that led to early-dismissal, and at Technical High School, a group of black students publicized a list of demands that called for the creation of an interracial student council. The first large-scale black student walk-out occurred the following week. On February 4, approximately six hundred black students left school to attend a meeting at the Roxbury YMCA organized by the Black Student Federation. The overwhelming complaint at the meeting referenced the dearth of black faculty members and racism among white faculty members. In response, BTU President Reilly charged that outsiders were running the protest. The School Committee refused to meet with striking students until they returned to class, an echo of the committee’s stance during the BTU strike. In addition to the call for more black teachers and guidance counselors and the independent study of racial patterns in the schools, the students now demanded amnesty for all striking students.

The following week, as the strike continued, between one-third and one-quarter of the city’s five thousand black students were staying out of school. As white student absenteeism rose and disruptions such as false fire alarms plagued the city’s high schools, the School Committee called for police protection inside the schools. The committee

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85 The students were further supported by “groups of black parents and organizations, including the Black United Front, the New Urban Leagues, the Massachusetts Negro Education Association, and the NAACP.” Tierny, “Fire at the Door,” 30-31.
also called for a “check-off” system that would bar students involved in previous incidents from entering their schools, and voted unanimously to bar segregated student groups from meeting inside schools. The school system’s week-long winter vacation holiday did not alter strike participation once classes resumed, and a high school student conference held at Boston University on February 25 led to the creation of a new list of twenty-two specific demands. Superintendent Ohrenberger and Paul Tierney both attended the conference and pledged that the School Committee would address these issues at its next meeting.\textsuperscript{90}

On March 2, the School Committee held an open meeting at Faneuil Hall to address the racial crisis in the schools. The meeting began with close to two hours of speeches by the committee members about the crisis. The floor was then opened to comments from students and parents, but after only forty-five minutes, the meeting devolved into a shouting match when those in attendance perceived that the committee was cutting off speakers who voiced any direct criticism of the committee.\textsuperscript{91} The students in attendance walked out en masse. The committee voted on the five original demands of the Black Student Federation, and approved the hiring of more black teachers and guidance counselors, the creation of more black studies courses, and voted to take steps to end the harassment of black students in the schools. The committee did not approve of conducting a school study or granting amnesty to striking students.\textsuperscript{92}

Despite the committee’s willingness to meet student demands on some points, the


meeting carried charged language on both sides of the hall. Tierney vowed, “There will be no student control of our schools,” and Craven later echoed this statement, and proposed the committee stand firm against the striking students. Superintendent Ohrenberger urged students, “Do not be deluded by the wave that is sweeping this country. Quite fortunately, you are dominated by very, very few that are not only causing the trouble here but have caused the trouble in every large city in America.” Incredibly, school administrators still relied on the long-standing committee position that “outside agitators” caused most of the racial problems in the schools. Kerrigan told the students, “Why can’t you listen? You are being used. There are those who would love to see a confrontation between the students and the School Committee.”

Just as the BTU had used rising racial tension as leverage when it presented its demands to the School Committee in April 1970, black students now cited the BTU’s strike in an effort to legitimize their protest. Of the students who were allowed to speak at the March 2 open meeting, Tom Morrison of English High was most direct in his reference to the BTU strike from the previous year. When committee member Craven talked about expulsion for striking students, Morrison stated, “The Teachers Union was in many ways threatened by different administrators and other ways by the School Committee. May I also remind you that they got what they wanted?” He continued, “May I also point out to you the fact, Mr. Craven, that last year during the teachers’ strike you voted to negotiate with them and you voted to arbitrate with them? You did not vote

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93 Chairman Lee had his usual outrageous comment as well: he received several shouts from the audience over his use of the word “negro.” As students chanted “B-L-A-C-K”, Lee responded, “All blacks aren’t black; sometimes they are chestnut color. I am not white like this paper. I’m eggshell color.” “Conference Minutes,” March 2, 1971, School Committee Minutes, 103.
94 Ibid., 79; 117.
95 Ibid., 125.
96 Ibid., 127.
Other students brought up incidents of racial harassment in the schools, and were instructed to take those complaints to their headmasters. When Ohrenberger told students, “You gain absolutely nothing by staying out of school,” a voice from the audience shouted, “We gain nothing by being in school.”

The student protesters aroused significant sympathy from Boston teachers. During the meeting, a group of teachers calling themselves the Ad Hoc Committee of Teachers Supporting Students read their statement to the School Committee. The group stated that “The schools are divisive,” and that “The children in Boston are being tracked for low-paying jobs, the draft, and early pregnancy.” The report on the March 2 meeting in the *Boston Union Teacher* argued, “Many of the student demands are just and their basis lies in the persistent refusal of school committees and mayors over the years to deal with fundamental problems in the system.” Indeed, many of the student demands, such as improvements to school facilities and curriculum changes, were already endorsed by the union. But not all teachers sympathized with the protest. At the March 10 membership meeting, it was reported that some teachers did not want to endorse the student demands because it would “give legitimacy to the strike action.” Apparently, they saw no irony in taking this stand only ten months after staging their own strike. The March 10 membership meeting was recessed with the issue of endorsing the students’ demands still on the floor; the vote was postponed until the next meeting.

At the March 22 meeting, BTU members endorsed those demands, as well as the

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97 Ibid., 121.
98 Ibid., 124.
100 McGowan, “After the Conference.”
need for more black teachers, and an evaluation of the school system by a union-approved committee. The BTU also endorsed full amnesty for all striking students, including an allowance for the students to make up work at the discretion of the teacher. At the same time, union members supported police presence in the schools, and concluded that complaints about teacher harassment must follow established grievance procedures at the individual school.

The BTU stance on the student demands, especially regarding the use of police and student grievances, reinforced the teachers’ emphasis on discipline in the schools. Teachers had been quite vocal over the past few years about the problem of discipline, and the BTU often took a hard line on disciplinary procedures. The position on student amnesty, meanwhile, tempered that hard line and created an endorsement of striking students that was mostly positive.

The student strike continued, and was addressed once more by the School Committee when it conducted its weekly meeting at the Trotter School on April 28. The committee maintained its position against amnesty for striking students, and did not offer any further concessions. Meanwhile, though there was never a formal end to the strike, student absentee rates fell toward the end of the school year. In June, the creation of a new coalition called the Black Student Union was announced. Leaders of the BSU claimed that the school strike was far from over because of the impasse with the

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102 As demonstrated in BTU objections to ending the use of corporal punishment, passed in January 1970.
104 Tierney found that the “informal agreement not to hold students responsible for their absence was apparently honored; students interviewed 15 years later recall getting basically the same grades they were getting before the strike began, without having to make up three months of work. Not do graduation rolls from that year show an appreciable decline in the number of students graduating from English High.” Tierney, “Fire at the Door,” 31.
School Committee, and vowed that the strike would continue, if need be, into the new school year. By this time the School Committee was embroiled in its conflict with the State Board of Education, and the summer months were filled with work on a new school integration plan. By September, the black student strike gave way to the demands of a different angry crowd: white parents.

The School Committee’s integration plan, approved by the State Board of Education on August 28, 1971, included a commitment to follow the board’s rules on open enrollment and the redistricting of four schools in Dorchester. One of the schools, a junior high named the Joseph Lee (after the committee member’s father), was built with state aid on the condition that the school would be racially balanced. When construction began, the school was located along a line that separated black and white neighborhoods in Dorchester, and racial balance seemed achievable. By the time the school was completed, the neighborhood surrounding the Lee had transitioned into a predominantly black area. Under the redistricting plan, a number of white students who previously attended the Fifield and O’Hearn schools in Dorchester would be sent to the new Lee school. In some cases, those newly assigned students would have to be bused.

White parents vowed to fight the redistricting that would reassign approximately four hundred white children to the Lee school. Tierney, who was the current School Committee chairman, told parents that “We have submitted plan after plan all summer, and they (the board) have refused them time after time. This was not a free choice. It
was something we had to do to ensure fiscal responsibility. It was done reluctantly."

White parents maintained that the neighborhood where the Lee was located was not safe for their children. Rev. Leonard Burke, pastor of St. Matthew’s Catholic Church in Dorchester and a priest who worked with the white parents’ group to oppose the redistricting, told the School Committee, “I would not feel safe there myself.” The night before the first day of school, a group of white parents confronted the School Committee at its weekly meeting. Parents urged the committee to change the policy, but the 3-2 majority that approved the plan remained firm. At one point, a parent called out from the audience, “Our kids are going to the Fifield. I’ll stand on that. We’ll go to jail or anywhere else if we have to.”

While white parents vowed to keep their kids out of the Lee school, black parents fought to get their children enrolled. The Lee school was brand new, with modern facilities that included a gym, a pool, and a theater. One black mother who lived with her children in the Franklin Field housing project directly behind the Lee said, “Your mouth waters when you look at it.” But the rules of the Racial Imbalance Law meant that many black neighborhood children had not been assigned to the school. On the first day of school 1,105 students, 585 white and 525 non-white, were to attend the Lee. Of the 585 white students, 124 were reported in attendance, while 535 black children were

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105 Approval of the School Committee plan meant that the State Board released $21.3 million in state funds that had been withheld since May. Nina McCain, “State Approves Boston Schools’ Race Balance Plan,” Boston Globe, September 1, 1971, 12.


107 Committee members Lee and Kerrigan opposed the redistricting plan; Hennigan and Tierney were in favor, and Craven cast the swing vote that led to the plan’s approval.


109 Nina McCain, “Busing in Boston is easier said than done,” Boston Globe, September 12, 1971, 64; Formisano, 51.
Dozens of other black children who attempted to enroll that day were turned away. Close to four hundred reassigned white students returned to the Fifield and O’Hearn schools; they were permitted to attend classes but were not re-enrolled. At the O’Hearn school, ninety-six reassigned white students returned to the school, and forty-seven black students, who were brought there in an Operation Exodus bus, were turned away because all the seats were filled. A shouting match between white and black parents outside the O’Hearn school was the only disturbance of the day.

The one point of agreement for blacks and whites was that the Racial Imbalance Law was deeply flawed. Fifield school principal Ralph DiMattia called it a “stupid” law, and city councilman Thomas Atkins, who had been involved with the integration fight for close to a decade, called the law unworkable after a visit to the Lee school. Speaking to a group of black parents outside the Lee, Atkins said, “The city and the state have fiddled around so long with the law, it makes no sense to implement it now.” Louise Day Hicks, a longtime opponent of the law and now a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, declared, “Our children are the innocent victims of a racial imbalance law which must be repealed.” Even State Education Commissioner Neil Sullivan, who had worked with the state board to force the School Committee into compliance with the law, hinted that modifications to the law could come in the near future.

The future of the Racial Imbalance Law was uncertain, but the School Committee still had to contend with the enrollment mess caused by the redistricting plan. On

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112 “Conference Minutes,” September 7, 1971, School Committee Minutes.
September 21, 1971, the committee held a meeting in the auditorium of the Ahern School in Dorchester. The two hundred and fifty seat auditorium was filled to capacity, and dozens of other parents crowded around loud speakers set up on the school’s playground. At the start of the meeting, Craven announced that his previous vote in favor of the redistricting plan was based on erroneous information given to him by the school department’s Educational Planning Center. He affirmed his opposition to “forced busing,” which would be necessary to balance the Lee school. Craven then introduced a motion, to massive applause, that would allow reassigned white students to remain at the Fifield and O’Hearn schools and give children living close to the Lee school the option to attend their neighborhood school.

Craven now joined Kerrigan and Lee, and together they voted 3-2 to reverse the redistricting order. Referring to Craven, Kerrigan declared, “He has helped us say to Mr. Sullivan today that at least three members of this School Committee will not be his stooges, will stand up for the people of Boston.” Lee referred to the reversal as “1776 all over again,” and parents and community leaders like Louise Day Hicks and Father

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114 Paul Laurino, “Bussing in Dorchester: The Night the School Committee Came to Town,” The Red Pencil 3, no. 1 (October 1971), 14. Laurino provides a vivid account of the meeting, from the muttered comments of parents standing near him in the stifling auditorium, to his description of the mob of parents outside the school and the “housewives in curlers, slippers and robes,” who observed it all from the porches of nearby three-decker houses.

115 Craven never mentioned the specific erroneous information, and Associate Superintendent Herbert Hambleton denied that the planning center’s figures were inaccurate. Hambleton only allowed that the figures on white enrollment were based on numbers from December 1970, and therefore could have been slightly inaccurate. Hambleton argued that the committee could have drawn white students from across the city to maintain racial balance. There was much speculation that Craven’s change of heart related to the fact that he was running for city council and had finished very poorly in the primary. If that was the case, then it did not help him much; Craven was not elected to the city council that November.


Burke praised the School Committee’s decision. Committee member James Hennigan, who supported compliance with the Racial Imbalance Law, predicted that the committee’s reversal would send the issue into immediate litigation. Hennigan told his fellow members, “The judiciary, with their power of equity and their power of redistricting has been handed the ball. We have opened the spectrum and said, ‘We can’t resolve this. We can’t perform our duty and obligation.’”

The State Board of Education was quick to respond: on September 28, the board voted to withhold $14 million in state aid, to withhold approval of $200 million in school construction projects, and to file suit against the School Committee to force the passage of a satisfactory school desegregation plan. In response, the School Committee filed suit in Superior Court on October 26 that challenged the withholding of funds, and scrambled to secure a loan and collect early taxes to keep the schools open. But if the lack of concern shown by the editors of the *Boston Union Teacher* is any indication, it seems that the withholding of state funds was more of an inconvenience than a disaster for Boston’s schools. Among the many articles on contract negotiations published between the October 1971 and June 1972, not one mentioned the impact of the loss of state funding. It was not until September 1972 that the Superior Court returned its ruling: the court deemed the School Committee to be in minimal compliance with the Racial Imbalance Law and ordered the State Board to release the funds. The ruling further concluded that the board acted arbitrarily when it cut off funding based on one School

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Committee vote rather than on the aggregate of all the committee’s actions. The School Committee was ordered to craft a new plan to integrate the schools. But time was running out. The failure of the Superior Court to uphold the State Board of Education’s actions and the further delay in developing an integration plan that resulted from that decision would ultimately speed the entry of federal courts into the Boston school controversy, a development that by 1974 would decisively alter the complex political dynamics that were already threatening to spin out of control.

While the School Committee brought suit in court and continued its maneuvers to avoid full compliance with the Racial Imbalance Law, incidents of racial violence marred several schools in the fall of 1971. Racial tension at Hyde Park High School reached a critical point at the end of September, when an alleged attack on a group of white female students by a group of black female students led to minor violence inside the school. On September 30, the day after the alleged attack, black students assembled outside the school in order to enter as a group, and police broke up minor skirmishes between black and white students before classes even began. School administrators physically separated blacks and whites inside the school and dismissed the black students at 10 a.m.; the white students were asked to remain in the school. Despite the immediate formation of a biracial student council to address the problems, the school remained on high alert for trouble over the next week, though many students, including almost all black students, simply stayed out of school.

The Student Biracial Committee called for increased racial sensitivity and blamed

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120 By the time the ruling came down, the board was withholding $52 million. Brian Sheehan, *The Boston School Integration Dispute*, 88-89; Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, 59; Lukas, *Common Ground*, 219; Smith, “Two Centuries and Twenty-Four Months,” 41.
121 There were only about 225 black students at Hyde Park High school out of a student body of 1600. S.T. Curwood, “Hyde Park H.S. blacks charge mistreatment,” *Bay State Banner*, October 7, 1971, 1.
many of the problems at the school on the “spreading of malicious rumors.” The Hyde Park faculty attributed the disturbances to a small number of students, and claimed that about forty out of 1,600 students were troublemakers. Still, teachers acknowledged that unrest had spread throughout the school’s student population. According to one teacher, “Most of the kids here are really good. But they’re agitated over the situation.”

Leonora Connors, spokeswoman for the Hyde Park faculty senate, complained that the situation at the school made it impossible to teach, especially when teachers were busy confiscating “guns, knives, clubs and scissors” from students. Mayor White urged the School Committee to hire more teacher aides to maintain order inside the school.

Newly-elected BTU President John Doherty blamed “a small minority of chronic malcontents,” for the Hyde Park incidents and assaults on teachers and students at four other schools that fall. Doherty also announced the creation of a BTU Committee on Troubled Schools, but maintained that teachers alone could not solve the problems in the schools, problems that he predicted “will be with us for a while.”

Union leaders urged the School Committee to take a proactive approach to the prevention of student violence; one union suggestion was to hire an appropriate number of teacher aides prior to a school crisis. But violence in the schools and racial unrest were not new issues; the stopgap measures and calls to action of the previous seven years had not quelled growing

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123 This response, reminiscent of the reaction to teacher assaults at the Campbell school in 1966, suggests a sensitivity toward interpreting racial incidents that did not always correspond with the prevailing rhetoric from either the school administration or the BTU. Diane White, “School Board, Superintendent refuse to shut Hyde Park High,” *Boston Globe*, October 1, 1971, 3.
124 Doherty described Hyde Park High School as “on the brink of wholesale riot.” He also listed Girls High School, Girls Trade, Jeremiah Burke High School, and the Martin Luther King middle school as troubled schools that fall. John P. Doherty, “President’s Message: School Disruptions,” *Boston Union Teacher* (October 1971), 2.
125 Ibid.
problems.

Teachers’ concerns centered on the erosion of their authority and the disruption of the education process caused by racial unrest. Teachers complained that they often had to use their contractually-guaranteed free periods performing “guard duty,” keeping an eye on fire alarms and monitoring school entrances.¹²⁶ Frustrated teachers at the Mary E. Curley School issued a joint statement in November decrying “students who feel they can do just about anything outside of murder and get away with it.” At the November 10 BTU membership meeting, the union voted to endorse the teachers’ statement, which proposed that either student attendance become voluntary, or a teacher’s right to discipline be reinstated, thus restoring teachers’ authority.¹²⁷ By March 1973, the BTU called for increased security to ensure safety inside schools, which would in turn create a stable atmosphere for education. Though the union accused the School Committee of maintaining a solely reactive posture to student unrest, the BTU did not appear to have any better plans to address the root cause of racial disputes between students. But teachers had a greater sense of urgency, for violence inside the schools was a basic job safety issue, and the disruption of classes was inextricably linked to job performance. The rights of teachers were the union’s number one priority.

Even with racial unrest in several schools and a teacher contract that was still not settled in the fall of 1971, the BTU proudly claimed responsibility for the election of a new School Committee in November. The three candidates that the union endorsed,

¹²⁶ “Guard Duty,” Boston Union Teacher (November 1971), 2.
¹²⁷ Many teachers maintained that the Code of Discipline had been revised so much in recent years that teachers were powerless to impose meaningful discipline. “Crisis at Mary E. Curly,” Boston Union Teacher (December 1971), 2.
BTU member Paul Ellison, James Hennigan, and former school committee member John McDonough were elected, and Joseph Lee, whom the union worked to defeat, was not re-elected. Incumbents Paul Tierney and John Kerrigan were re-elected. BTU President John Doherty proclaimed that the election “demonstrates what teachers can do when they have a righteous cause and work at it.” Doherty also stated that under this new committee, teachers might have a chance for true collective bargaining once again.

New school committee members would assume their positions after January 1, 1972, but the pressure to comply with school integration remained. In December, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare completed its one-year study of the Boston schools. The study concluded that there existed “two separate, racially identifiable subsystems” in Boston and that the schools were operating in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. A letter from Stanley Pottinger, director of the Office for Civil Rights, to Superintendent Ohrenberger stated that the two subsystems kept “non-white children in predominantly non-white schools at critical steps in the educational process.”

The School Committee would be given a chance to exhaust all voluntary options for compliance before federal aid was withheld from the schools. But even without a current of urgency underlying the charges, the School Committee was now challenged on both the state and federal level. School Committee Chairman Tierney adamantly denied that the committee ever took deliberate steps to segregate the schools, and while Pottinger did not level that charge, he maintained that the committee “should

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128 Ellison was a thirty-year-old teacher at Boston Technical High School; Lee had finished second in the primary, but ended up in sixth place in the general election. Judith Brody, “3 keep school board jobs; 20-year veteran Lee is out,” Boston Globe, November 3, 1971, 14.
129 “School Committee Victory,” Boston Union Teacher (November 1971), 1.
have been aware of it.”

One of the major conclusions of the HEW study, that separate grade structures were maintained for black and white students, was a charge leveled against the School Committee by the local NAACP branch almost nine years earlier, in June 1963. By the fall of 1971, black parents, already frustrated on the local and state level, and further emboldened by the Lee school opening that fall, moved to file suit in federal court. Thomas Atkins recalled that “the efforts at the state level were so clearly thwarted that the feeling was if relief is going to come it will come only at the federal level….It was a simple—not very quick—process of elimination.” According to Melnea Cass, a leading black community activist in Boston, “It was just a suit, brought to open it up and let the court know that we still want it done, see? That’s all.”

In March 1972, lawyers from the Harvard Center for Law and Education filed a class action lawsuit in federal court on behalf of fourteen black parents and their children. The suit charged that the School Committee knowingly violated the rights of the plaintiffs guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Tallulah Morgan, a twenty-four year old mother of three, became lead plaintiff, and the case of Morgan v. Hennigan was assigned to Judge J. Arthur Garrity. Judge Garrity issued his decision in June 1974, and student busing to integrate the schools began that

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132 In 1970-71, the HEW study found that 71 percent of students in a K-5, 6-8, 9-12 and K-8, 9-12 pattern were non-white, while 76 percent of students in a K-6, 7-9, 10-12 pattern were white.
133 Hampton, *Voices of Freedom*, 591.
136 Morgan v. Hennigan, 379 F. Supp. 410 (D.C. Mass., June 21, 1974). The named defendant in the case was James Hennigan, who was the current School Committee chairman.
Though the Garrity decision was met with shock and defiance by anti-busing protesters, court-ordered student busing was ordered for the fall of 1974 prior to the ruling in *Morgan v. Hennigan*. The State Board of Education, though forced to release state funds to the Boston schools in the fall of 1972, had not backed down on enforcement of the Racial Imbalance Law. In the spring of 1973, the board rejected the School Committee’s most recent integration plan, and instead moved to apply the integration plan crafted by the board’s Task Force on Racial Imbalance. 137 The Revised Short Term Plan to Reduce Racial Imbalance was challenged by the School Committee and a review of the plan was ordered by the Supreme Judicial Court (SJC). In October 1973, the SJC ordered the School Committee to adopt the board’s integration plan in the fall of 1974. After the ruling, the nascent anti-busing movement intensified with dramatic results; on April 3, 1974, between fifteen and twenty-five thousand demonstrators converged on Boston Common to demand the repeal of the Racial Imbalance Act. Anti-busers hoped that repealing the law would nullify the SCJ’s orders to implement the board’s integration plan. All of this occurred prior to Garrity’s ruling in *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

The BTU also opposed the board’s integration plan and specifically objected to the proposed “system-wide grade re-organization” that would necessitate the reassignment of between 1,000 and 2,000 teachers. The union argued this reorganization would not fix the problems of racial imbalance, and official statements stressed that the

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137 The School Committee’s November 1972 plan would reduce the number of imbalanced schools in Boston from sixty-one to forty-two by redistricting and reorganizing the grade structure; the State Board’s plan would reduce the number of imbalanced schools in the city from sixty-one to thirty-one by busing an additional 2,000 students.
BTU’s primary objection was that the plan was bad educationally. But no matter what the union’s public position was, the most pressing issue within the BTU was that teacher reassignments would be highly objectionable to teachers who had earned their assignments with their years of seniority. If the integration plan were implemented, it would wreak havoc on the promotion system teachers had utilized for years, and BTU leaders believed it would both undermine the union’s collective bargaining gains and sow discord within the union. Publicly, though, the BTU continued to stress that the plan was bad educationally. In his “President’s Report” published in the April 1973 *Boston Union Teacher*, President Doherty criticized the board for failing to consult parents, teachers, and community groups, and predicted “widespread resistance” to enforcement of the plan. Doherty listed a number of problems with the plan, including concerns about overcrowding, student safety, and the lack of time for teachers and administrators to plan for enforcement. The BTU’s concerns about teacher reassignment and other aspects of the plan were so strong that it sided with the School Committee during the plan’s review that spring, even as the union criticized the committee for stalling teacher contract negotiations. BTU leaders saw no contradiction in this. The union’s primary goal was to protect teachers’ jobs and rights, they believed. Thus, there is no evidence that they felt any irony in their support for the School Committee in the midst of contentious and negative collective bargaining sessions.\footnote{In fact, Doherty’s praise of the committee’s opposition to the board’s integration plan was printed directly underneath a report on stalled contract negotiations. Doherty, “President’s Report,” 4; Frank Stevens, “BSC Adopts Negative Mood, Talks Stalled,” *Boston Union Teacher* (April 1973), 4.}

Though BTU opposition to the plan remained unchanged, when the plan’s enforcement appeared to be inevitable, the union promoted a proactive approach to the

\footnote{138 John Doherty, “President’s Report—Racial Imbalance Law,” *Boston Union Teacher* (April 1973), 1, 4.}
changes. By January 1974, union leaders acknowledged that implementation of the plan “seems almost certain.”\textsuperscript{140} In recognition of that fact, the membership voted to establish a subcommittee to study implementation of the integration plan. The subcommittee was charged to work on a plan for equitable teacher transfers, new curricula, and “human relations” workshops for teachers.\textsuperscript{141} President Doherty urged teachers to be a “positive, constructive force,” and stated, “Although an eleventh hour intervention cannot be absolutely ruled out, it would be folly for the B.T.U. or any other organization not to prepare for a redistricting plan on the hope that it will not be implemented.”\textsuperscript{142} As the anti-busing movement intensified, the BTU listed its two priorities: the creation of a positive educational environment, and the protection of teacher’s contract rights.

The fight over the implementation of an integration plan was not the only issue teachers struggled with during these years. Violence inside the schools was a constant concern for teachers. In 1972, the School Committee passed a BTU proposal for longer student suspensions and forced transfers for students who assaulted teachers. The faculty of the Mary Curley School, which first demanded greater security inside its school in the fall of 1971, finally won a pledge from the School Committee for six additional security aides in February 1973.\textsuperscript{143} Meanwhile, the union continued to blame “outsiders” for most of the violence in the schools, whether they were “agitators” who disrupted the

\textsuperscript{140} Joan Buckley, “Editorial: A Need to Know,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (January 1974), 1.

\textsuperscript{141} The membership passed this vote in December 1973, and also endorsed the position that the state pay for the cost of implementing integration. “Committee Set,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (January 1974), 3.

\textsuperscript{142} John Doherty, “President’s Report—Implementation,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (January 1974), 3.

\textsuperscript{143} A series of assaults, fires and riots were reported in the Curley school in the fall of 1972. Charles E. McGowan, “Field Rep Parleys Prove Effective,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (February 1973), 2; Steve Young, “Faculty Senate Seen ‘Grassroots Unionism,’” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (March 1973), 2.
school day, or non-students who entered the schools to commit petty theft. Above all, teachers maintained that their power to discipline should not be compromised, and called for greater financial aid from the state to ensure security in the schools.\textsuperscript{144}

Meanwhile, the internal division between BTU members who prioritized education reform over salary in contract negotiations persisted. In the spring of 1971 a group of Boston teachers opened The Teacher Center, described as a sort of “teacher’s lounge” and curriculum resource center. The center operated out of a Dorchester storefront, and was managed by a young group of teachers who prioritized education reform.\textsuperscript{145} Active members of The Teacher Center were also BTU members, though most were critical of the union’s overriding emphasis on salary during contract negotiations. Steve Glickel charged that many members believed the BTU was only interested in “job security, fatter pay checks, and easier work days. The children and their communities are given no priority at all.”\textsuperscript{146} Glickel praised the new direction of the BTU’s Education Committee, which transitioned from a committee concerned with internal teacher education to an education policy committee between 1970 and 1971. Though the center closed after four years due to a drop in financial support and staff levels, its successful operation in the early 1970s provides a window on one source of internal conflict in the BTU.

The BTU’s major external conflict during these years was strong opposition at the bargaining table. A worsening financial climate for the city, caused by declining tax

\textsuperscript{144} John Doherty, “President’s Report—Violence in Schools,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (March 1973), 1, 4.

\textsuperscript{145} The group consisted of fifteen teachers, none of whom had more than five years experience teaching in Boston; most had just one or two years of experience. It is also interesting to note that most of the teachers in the group were not raised in Boston, and were not educated at the normal “feeder” schools like State College or Boston College. Walter Popper, “Teacher Center,” \textit{The Red Pencil} 3, no. 2 (January 1972), 6-7.

\textsuperscript{146} Steve Glickel, “BTU Education Committee,” \textit{From the Teachers’ Room} (December 1972), 6.
revenues and cutbacks in federal funding led to school budget cuts, worsening an already contentious bargaining relationship between the BTU and the School Committee.\textsuperscript{147}

Contract negotiations moved at a very slow pace; the contract for the 1971-1972 school year was resolved in January 1972, and the contract for the 1973-1974 school year was not resolved until after three thousand teachers staged a rally at City Hall on October 31, 1973 to secure funding for the negotiated contract. One week later, a committee formed by Mayor White to review the budget found additional funds to support the contract. The BTU praised teachers who participated in the rally, and concluded that the demonstration forced the “mayor and the School Committee to find in five minutes what they hadn’t looked for in nine months.”\textsuperscript{148}

Leaders from The Teacher Center also commended teachers on their demonstration, but argued that contract gains were paltry, and that School Committee intransigence meant that teachers were forced to fight for collective bargaining rights at the expense of real contract gains.\textsuperscript{149}

And despite the demonstration of solidarity on October 31, 1973, the \textit{Boston Union Teacher} carried almost constant references to the need for more active and involved members. Referring to the efforts of teachers during the 1970 strike, Arthur Krozy asked in April 1973, “What has happened since that day?”, and accused too many teachers of adopting a “business as usual” attitude of complacency.\textsuperscript{150} John Doherty told members in October 1973 that “it really is not enough to simply pay your dues and let the

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\textsuperscript{149} Marya Levenson, “Contract Problems,” \textit{Notes From the Teachers’ Room} 2, no. 1 (November 1973), 1.
\textsuperscript{150} Arthur Krozy, “Do You Remember?”, \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (April 1973), 2.
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union perform the traditional services of a labor organization.”

And even though teachers won funding for their contract in November 1973, BTU Secretary Joan Buckley admonished members for the fact that many schools failed to elect a Building Representative. Buckley wrote, “It is vigilance that maintains a contract. If you are not guarding your own rights…then the contract is meaningless.”

The Teacher Center newsletter, *Notes From the Teachers’ Room*, also cited the problem of teacher apathy. In an article that discussed the October 31, 1973 rally, BTU member Marya Levenson reported that over the past two years, it was rare for more than two or three hundred teachers to attend BTU meetings. And yet even as Levenson praised the “strong” leadership of current BTU officers, she warned that “strong leadership can be very dangerous if the membership is not actively controlling the direction of the union.”

The same could have been said about the school structure in general.

This chapter opened with an account of the BTU’s May 1970 strike. The School Committee’s actions in the months surrounding the strike foreshadowed the challenges the schools would face in the years to come. The committee was defiant when challenged, fiercely protective of its control over the schools, and blindly confident that its members always had teachers’ and students’ best interests at heart. Indeed, the School Committee demonstrated these qualities time and again, whether facing students, teachers, or state authorities. Neither the teacher’s union nor student protestors were able


153 Marya Levenson, “Contract Problems.”
to make much headway when committee members exerted their will with little fear of personal repercussions. In the end, neither the union nor the civil rights protestors built enough power in Boston to take over the school committee. Although Joseph Lee was forced off the committee in the 1971 election, his partner in opposing both integration and détente with the BTU, John Kerrigan, was returned to the committee with a large majority of votes. And as long as the majority of Boston voters supported opposition to the Racial Imbalance Law, the School Committee remained on its collision course with the legal system.

In the end, organized teachers, civil rights activists, and student protestors alike encountered intractable obstacles to their most cherished goals. In the case of the teachers, some of these obstacles were internal. Boston’s teachers reflected the same attitudes and ideologies as found in the city at large, and the BTU’s failure to organize its members around a unified message only emphasized these disagreements. While teachers in Newark in 1970 formed a united front that trumped racial and social divisions, teachers in Boston still found more reasons to divide than unite.\footnote{See Golin, \textit{The Newark Teacher Strikes}.} Black students, meanwhile, presented a coherent message, but that message did not resonate across the city’s racial divide enough to produce real change. Michael Tierney, in his report on the black student union movement, “Fire At the Door,” cited “the inherent limitations of schools as arenas of empowerment,” to explain one reason why the black youth movement did not last.\footnote{Tierney, “Fire At the Door,” 4-5.} In Boston, the existing limitations of schools and the inability of both teachers and students to bridge the issue of race proved a tricky atmosphere in which to effect any kind of reform.

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154 See Golin, \textit{The Newark Teacher Strikes}.  \\
155 Tierney, “Fire At the Door,” 4-5.
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It is interesting to note that BTU President John Doherty’s evaluation of the schools, quoted at the beginning of the chapter, bears a distinct resemblance to the words of civil rights activist Ruth Batson one decade earlier, in which she cited the population of blacks in Boston as being much lower than in other northern cities. Though Doherty and Batson were making completely different points, the notion that Boston’s “problems” were not like those of other northern cities conjured a sense of uniqueness that the city did not quite deserve. Both the civil rights movement and the teacher’s labor movement came to Boston through the prism of the city’s history and ethnic composition. But neither the challenges that faced Boston’s teachers, nor those that confronted its black population were unique. They were experienced to a greater or lesser degree than in other northern cities. The notion that Boston could somehow be the exception in the midst of sweeping changes nationwide would not prove true. When court-ordered busing began in 1974, Bostonians had their own distinct response, but it was not something the city was proud to own. BTU member apathy was no longer an option.
CHAPTER 5

COURT-ORDERED SCHOOL DESEGREGATION COMES TO BOSTON

We have said that although we disagree with many of the ramifications of the court order, we dedicate ourselves to seeing that it is peacefully implemented. We have retained and will continue to retain the right to challenge, legally and politically, any part of the order that threatens the rights of teachers or adversely affects the education of Boston students.

—Henry Robinson, BTU President, June 1976

On the last day of the school year in June 1974, federal court Judge W. Arthur Garrity issued his ruling in the case of *Morgan v. Hennigan*. The black parent plaintiffs got the answer they had waited for since filing suit in March 1972: Garrity ruled that the Boston School Committee deliberately created a dual school system for black and white students. The judgment officially validated the plaintiffs’ claims of school segregation and vindicated black parents and community leaders who had fought the School Committee on this issue for ten years. It was a major setback for those in the anti-busing movement. Parents opposed to busing students to integrate Boston’s schools had spent months working through the state courts in a fight against the implementation of the state’s desegregation plan. Garrity’s ruling negated any progress the anti-busers had made in state court. Shortly after issuing his ruling, Garrity issued orders that the state plan be implemented that fall, and that the School Committee begin formulating a plan for the 1975-1976 school year.

Garrity’s ruling brought a swift end to the School Committee’s nine-year fight against student busing. Teachers and parents had grown accustomed to the legal

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wrangling that had kept the school system in minimal compliance with the state’s Racial Imbalance Law. Yet even before the ruling, most parties involved with the schools knew that the time for compliance was running out. While the anti-busing movement sprang into action and redoubled its efforts opposing integration plans, the teacher’s union began to prepare its members for the reality of school desegregation. BTU Secretary Joan Buckley wrote on the first page of the *Boston Union Teacher* in January 1974 that “Implementation of the Racial Imbalance Plan seems almost certain.”² In the same issue, President John Doherty cautioned teachers that “We face a difficult and critical time next September,” and he warned teachers that they should not hope for a “last minute intervention.”³ Despite the active anti-busing movement, which many Bostonians hoped would grant the schools one more reprieve from compliance, teachers knew that the state’s desegregation plan would likely have gone into effect even without Garrity’s ruling.

This chapter will focus on the school system under court order, and how the court order affected Boston’s teachers. The union had won bargaining rights less than ten years prior to the start of school desegregation began, and the burden of balancing court orders with contract negotiations and teachers’ rights only exacerbated the young union’s growing pains. At the same time, declining school enrollments attributed to school desegregation led to the constant threat of teacher layoffs, and hiring orders issued by Judge Garrity undermined the teachers’ contract with the School Committee. As the BTU sought to protect teachers’ seniority, the union was constantly fighting the court over transfers, layoffs, and promotions. Though Garrity sympathized with teachers and

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worked to leave the BTU contract undisturbed, orders for the hiring of black teachers were the exception to this rule. The layoff of 710 tenured white teachers in 1981 was the final blow to the BTU’s defense of seniority; despite a protracted legal battle, those jobs were not recovered. The basic union tenet of seniority was simply incompatible with court-ordered teacher integration.

The immediate response to Garrity’s ruling in *Morgan v. Hennigan* was mixed. Predictably, School Committee Chairman John Kerrigan pronounced that he was “just completely outraged by the whole thing.”4 One week after the ruling, the School Committee voted to appeal the decision against the advice of its attorneys. Both Kerrigan and Louise Day Hicks fanned the flames of dissent among anti-busers, and vowed to continue to fight student busing.5 Anti-busing organizations such as ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights) called for a school boycott.6

In the black community, there was no large-scale celebration or outcry, but simply a general sense of satisfaction tempered by the knowledge that the real work was yet to come. Many in the black community were wary of the state’s integration plan, especially the pairing of Roxbury and South Boston high schools, but Paul Parks indicated a sense of relief that the community could now focus exclusively on better education for black children. Addressing black parents, Parks emphasized that integration was necessary

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5 Hicks had been continuously involved in politics since her days on the Boston School Committee in the 1960s. After losing the mayoral election to Kevin White in 1967, Hicks won a seat on the Boston City Council in 1969, and was elected to represent the 9th Congressional District in Congress from 1971 to 1973. She lost her Congressional re-election bid in 1973, but won a seat on the Boston City Council again that same year, and served four consecutive terms until 1981. See Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, Chapter 3.
6 Formisano’s *Boston Against Busing* provides the most thorough examination of the anti-busing movement. For a different type of account, see J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground*. Lukas’s work gives a first-hand account of how the anti-busing movement was experienced on the streets of South Boston and Charlestown, through his chronicle of the lives of the Twymon and McGoff families.
“not because our black children cannot learn in all black schools,” but that “as long as whites are in control of the school system,” black children would not receive an equitable education without first “becoming more integrated in the school system.” According to Parks, the time for fighting over community control was over. With the court order soon in effect, he settled his support on integration. Thomas Atkins, recently named president of the Boston chapter of the NAACP, was also an early and vocal supporter of the court order.

The Boston Teachers Union adopted a neutral stance toward both Judge Garrity and his ruling, which President John Doherty explained would prevent the union from alienating large segments of the city and allow the BTU to continue to work with people on both sides of the issue. He described the two different views of Judge Garrity in the *Boston Union Teacher*:

> On the one hand, he has been pictured as a brave jurist upholding the Constitution and insisting on the rule of law in spite of the objections of the overwhelming majority of Bostonians. On the other hand, he is seen as an arrogant dictator, who has taken away freedom of choice from Boston teachers and parents and whose actions have done irreparable harm to the Boston school system and to the city itself. I would submit that the truth is somewhere between these extremes.

Whether these two viewpoints were actually “extremes” is debatable, but what is clear is that Doherty was seeking a middle path. Doherty expressed regret that Judge Garrity chose to implement the state plan to integrate the schools, which the union was on record against, rather than seek input from the teachers and the community for a new plan. He stressed that any objection to the plan’s implementation should be fought within the

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7 Ibid.
courts and not inside the schools. Doherty wrote that “Despite the fact that many of the incidents cited by the judge may be challenged, it seems to be the legal consensus that the Judge has presented a strong case for his finding and it will be difficult to overturn his decision in the appeal process.” Doherty was trying to encourage teachers not to hope for a reversal of the court’s ruling, but to fight for a better solution and work toward a plan through the legal channels available to the teachers.

Still, there were major hurdles for the union even before the school year began. Within days of the verdict, the BTU unsuccessfully petitioned Judge Garrity to delay the implementation of the state plan for one year so that it could be revised. Next, the BTU challenged certain provisions of Judge Garrity’s hiring orders. The initial hiring orders of July 31, 1974 were intended to correct racial imbalance among teachers, and established an ultimate goal of attaining a twenty percent black teaching staff. In the 1973-1974 school year, only 7.1% percent of all teachers were black. In order to reach the goal of 20%, Garrity ordered that 280 black teachers be hired immediately; after that, black teachers were to be hired on a one-to-one ratio with white teachers until the 20% goal was met. At that time, there were already 135 black teachers on the waiting list for permanent placements; this left 145 black teachers to hire. Garrity designated three recruiters within the School Department, all of whom would be able to recruit out-of-state and hire black teachers on the spot. This circumvented the normal interview and rating

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10 Doherty, “President’s Report,” 1.
11 Garrity based his goal of a 20% black teaching staff on the percentage of black students in the school system at that time; the hiring of 280 black teachers would elevate the percentage of black teachers to 10.7% for the 74-75 school year. “Order on Faculty Desegregation, July 31, 1974,” Judge Garrity: Boston Schools Case, Joseph P. Healey Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Mass; Harry C. Katz, “The Boston Teachers Union and the Desegregation Process,” 492-493.
process teachers had to endure.\footnote{Cathy Kornovich, “Garrity applies one to one formula to teacher selection,” \textit{Bay State Banner}, August 8, 1974, 1, 22; Recruiters from BEAM allied with the school department recruiters and travelled together in August 1974, “Statement of the Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts,” Garrity Papers.}

The BTU presented no formal objection to the hiring of black teachers or the recruitment process. Instead, the union focused on the second part of Garrity’s hiring orders, which dealt with “experience imbalance.” A portion of Garrity’s ruling in \textit{Morgan v. Hennigan} declared that the schools in the city’s poorest areas were overwhelmed with teachers who had little experience, and his hiring orders included provisions for the transfer of teachers to rectify this discrepancy. Traditionally, the newest, and therefore least experienced, teachers would be sent to the schools considered to be the least desirable. In almost all cases, these were predominantly black schools. Once a teacher had a few years’ experience, that teacher could then request a transfer to a “better” school.

Teacher transfers were based on seniority, which Garrity’s orders disregarded. The hiring orders stated the average experience of teachers citywide at any given grade level should be the same at all schools. The practical implication was that “No future voluntary transfer of any teacher increasing segregation or increasing experience imbalance at black schools shall be allowed except on a showing of reasonable need by the teacher.”\footnote{“Order on Faculty Desegregation, July 31, 1974.”} This order led to the immediate reassignment of 205 teachers, despite the BTU’s motion for relief.\footnote{Joan Buckley, “Judge to Rule on Staff,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (October 1974), 1.} The only school that received a reprieve from teacher reassignment was the Trotter magnet school. Under the orders, fifteen out of eighteen black faculty members would have been transferred to other schools. Many of these black teachers had been at the school since its opening in 1969. The teachers appealed to
Garrity, and testified that they had special training suited uniquely to the Trotter school. Garrity lessened the number of reassigned teachers to six, but also stated that if enough qualified white teachers could be found, the remainder of the fifteen black teachers would be transferred anyway.  

Referring to involuntary teacher reassignments, Garrity stated, “That is one of the costs of the desegregation plan.” Of course, teachers who had been reassigned felt these “costs” were placed unfairly on their shoulders. In October 1974 the *Boston Union Teacher* published an article written by high school teacher Millicent Silverstein, who wrote about her shock at being transferred to Dorchester High School. She wrote, “Hadn’t I signed a contract to teach and hadn’t I waited my turn to transfer to the Girls’ Latin School only to be arbitrarily told now I had to teach elsewhere?” According to Silverstein, she had played by the “old rules,” rules that no longer applied. When the BTU’s motion for relief on behalf of transferred teachers was denied, the teachers could either report for the new assignments or lose their position entirely. Silverstein resolved that despite the forced transfer, “I shall work hard.”

Further complicating matters for teachers, by September the BTU and the School Committee still had not to come to agreement on the teachers’ contract. With the existing challenge of student busing sure to lead to problems inside the schools, teachers voted on September 3rd to submit all unresolved issues to binding arbitration. The school year

16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 The arbitrated decision was not announced until January, and it wasn’t until late February 1975 that the School Committee accepted the terms. “Memorandum of Agreement, August 28, 1974,” Garrity Papers; Frank Stevens, “Promptness? And Arbitration,” *Boston Union Teacher* (November 1974), 1; Stevens, “City Balks on Interim Award,” *Boston Union Teacher* (February 1975), 1.
began on September 13th with anti-busing protests and school disruptions, and without a teachers’ contract. The acts of violence, racism, and the marches and protests outside the schools have been well documented.²⁰ Inside the schools, work conditions varied for the city’s teachers. Many teachers, like those at South Boston High School, found their school surrounded by police and protesters and their classrooms virtually empty. Black teachers assigned to schools in South Boston carpooled under police escort from the nearby union headquarters every day as a safety precaution.²¹ Other teachers found that their schools were only slightly affected by the court order.

That fall, the Boston Union Teacher devoted space in each issue to reports from individual schools. These reports demonstrate the wide variety of reactions to student busing and integration. While the situation at South Boston High School was volatile, the high school it was partnered with—Roxbury—was undisturbed by protest. White students assigned to Roxbury High School simply did not show up. Before the year began, the assigned enrollment at Roxbury High was 950 students: 400 non-white and 550 white. On October 1st, the enrollment numbers were 336 non-white and 36 white.²² At Dorchester High School, the site of racial problems between black and white students in years past, teacher Paul Nevin reported that the general attitude of students was that “We’ve already had our troubles here. It’s not going to happen again.”²³

²⁰ See Formisano, Boston Against Busing; Lukas, Common Ground; Hillson, The Battle of Boston; Lupo, Liberty’s Chosen Home.

²¹ Police escorted black teachers between BTU headquarters at the Bayside Mall in Dorchester and their South Boston schools during the first two years of desegregation (1974/1975 and 1975/1976), discontinued escorts in the fall of 1976 (black teachers still carpooled without an escort), and reinstated the escort on April 23, 1979, after a black teacher was assaulted on a South Boston street while walking to a subway station after school. See the Affidavit of Joseph M. McDonough, Exhibit I, “School Defendants’ Response in Opposition to the Motion of the Boston Teachers’ Union for Order to Compensate Certain Teachers for Salary Deducted by School Defendants,” Garrity Papers.


Both English High School and Hyde Park High School reported frequent problems inside the schools. At English High teachers contended with false fire alarms almost daily; at Hyde Park, disruptions were serious enough to warrant police presence inside the school.\(^{24}\) In contrast, at Brighton High School the main complaint was overcrowding. Teacher Marya Levenson theorized that “Perhaps the reason we have not had racial tensions in our school is because our students come from the South End and Brighton, two neighborhoods that are more racially integrated than other parts of Boston.”\(^ {25}\) At the Oliver Wendell Holmes Middle School, teacher R.P. Largess also reported a quiet start to the school year. But Largess noted with irony that “the tremendous fascination the world displayed in the fire alarms, fights, stabbings, etc. which afflicted other Boston schools seemed to us interesting, considering that when we were plagued with the same conditions in 1969-1971, we were heartily ignored.”\(^ {26}\)

The overriding theme of the teacher reports from the schools was that any success was achieved through the hard work and dedication of the teachers. The AFT leadership acknowledged that hard work as well; Al Shanker, the longtime leader of New York City’s United Federation of Teachers who had just been elected as national AFT President in August, commented that “The Boston Teachers Union has been doing a heroic job in keeping Boston schools open and in demanding the safety of teachers and the students.”\(^ {27}\) In response to a request for aid from BTU President John Doherty, the AFT commissioned a task force in October 1974 “to assist the local with ideas and

\(^{24}\) B.E. Edestein, “Police At Hyde Park High,” *Boston Union Teacher* (November 1974), 3; Chris Lane, “English High: The Sound’s the Scene,” *Boston Union Teacher* (November 1974), 3


strategies to bring about a lasting peace in the Boston schools.”

The BTU’s situation was known to other AFT locals as well. Eugene Didier, the AFT Southern Regional Director, wrote to John Doherty that “Your unselfish willingness to delay the completion of negotiations and to submit same to binding arbitration is appreciated by all Locals in the Southern Region. The cause of quality education for all has been enhanced by your actions.”

The AFT Task Force assisted the BTU in the creation of its “Boston Plan” for cities, announced on November 25, 1974. The plan was sent to President Ford, though it was never acknowledged by him, as a proposal for dealing with the problems of large cities. The text of the “Boston Plan” states, “The Union has for a long time been on record supporting the concept of quality integrated education.” The BTU argued that the problems facing urban education were inseparable from the problems in other sectors like housing and employment. The union called for a plan to address all these factors, and proposed Boston as the pilot city in a federal program to create “a total, comprehensive, and unified attempt to solve the problems of urban America.”

The BTU had long been on record arguing that the schools could not fix the complicated

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28 Ibid.
29 Letter to John P. Doherty, BTU President, from Eugene J. Didier, AFT Southern Regional Director, November 6, 1974, American Federation of Teachers Office of the President: Albert Shanker Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.
30 The plan was developed and written with the support of Mayor White, who “made his staff available to assist in researching and developing the plan.” “Boston Teachers Urge Reforms as a Way to Solve Desegregation Crisis,” American Teacher (December 1974), 6.
31 At the AFT National Convention the following summer, then newly-elected BTU President Henry Robinson noted that “we actually did send a committee down to Jerry Ford in Washington, and he slammed the door in our face.” See “1975 convention Proceedings and Tally of Delegates’ Votes,” 82, American Federation of Teachers Collection.
33 The BTU called for an operation at the federal level to send a task force of “economists, sociologists, educational experts, housing experts, etc.” to “study the problem of Boston and make recommendations directly to the President for implementation.” Ibid.
problems created by poverty and racism; this plan was another incarnation of that argument.

The “Boston Plan” contained no practical steps that could have been included in the court’s desegregation plan, and it was never adopted on a federal level. For the BTU, a comprehensive approach to education reform was an ambitious but admirable goal, and one that showed that the union was willing to assert itself into broader urban reform plans. But realistically, the plan had no possible way of being effective enough, soon enough, to be a positive factor in the immediate crisis in the schools. Years of stall tactics and delays on the part of the Boston School Committee led to a situation where the immediate need for a remedy trumped the possibility of larger reforms that could have had the potential for lasting, positive change. The creation of the “Boston Plan” was a means for the union to add its voice to the debate without taking a stand on the most divisive component of court-ordered desegregation: student busing.

The AFT Task Force produced its own report on the situation in Boston in early December. It found that “The leadership of our AFT Local is working very hard to bring together all of the opposing sides and work out a plan to integrate the schools in Boston.”34 It was a positive evaluation, and constituted an endorsement of the local’s handling of desegregation. Though the promotion of its “Boston Plan” proved ineffective, the BTU still managed to establish its own neutral message during turbulent times. The union performed best in crafting its message of support for school desegregation while balancing that support with criticism of the desegregation plan. With this stance, BTU leaders were able to please most of the membership. This ability

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to retain some sort of middle ground kept the union relevant on both sides of the debate, and in a divided city, with a divided union membership, such leadership cannot be overlooked.

By the middle of the school year, though, the union was showing signs of strain. In January, BTU President Doherty addressed criticism leveled at the city’s teachers from people on both sides of the busing issue, including serious charges that teachers had covered up assaults inside the schools and were also too quick to suspend students. Doherty wrote that “the contradictory nature of these charges reinforces the misinformation and confusion that abounds in Boston and its schools.” Doherty issued an unconditional denial that any teacher was guilty of misconduct. Such charges were not new; teachers had been accused of treating black and white students differently in past school years. But because the union saw its teachers as the glue holding the school system together, the charges most likely rankled more than before, as evidenced by Doherty’s brisk denial. In addition, the union’s rancorous relationship with the School Committee persisted. Many teachers blamed the School Committee for intentionally fomenting racial troubles, which kept the city “preoccupied with race.” Steve Glickel argued that while the city remained focused on race, it was nearly impossible for the union to garner community support for union demands.

Inside the schools, conditions still varied widely for the teachers. The situation was still most serious at South Boston High School. On December 11, 1974, a white student, Michael Faith, was stabbed by James White, a black student, in a hallway inside

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36 Ibid., 7.
the school. The high school was closed for one month, and reopened with metal
detectors at its entrance. Student disturbances and minor riots still plagued Hyde Park
High School. On an individual level, black teachers struggled at predominantly white
schools. A black teacher named Helen Bailey, newly assigned to Charlestown High
School, appealed directly to Judge Garrity when she was reprimanded for her inability to
control the students in her classroom. Bailey explained that “Due to the racial crisis I
have not applied harsh discipline nor pressure for fear of bringing about bad feelings that
are just below the surface in the community.”38 She also reported “verbal harassment and
insults” from white students, and that she feared for her personal safety.39

Some school employees reported racial tension between students. A woman
working as a transitional aide at South Boston High School wrote Judge Garrity that the
situation at the “school is a very, very sad story. The aides, both black and white, get
along extremely well but for the students it’s a completely different case. There is
positively no communication between the black and white children.”40 In another letter to
Garrity, a teacher wrote that “during the sixties I did not notice any obvious feeling
between black and white students,” but that after returning as a substitute teacher in the
1974-1975 school year, “was saddened to see the very strong feelings now obviously
apparent between the black and white students who are forced to attend classes
together.”41 Another letter writer who identified himself as an administrator at the
Charles Mackey School in the South End, credited the positive achievements at his
school to a “hard working, cohesive staff,” yet noted the challenges that busing created

39 Ibid.
40 Letter from a Transitional Aid to Judge Garrity, January 12, 1975, Garrity Papers.
41 Letter from a substitute teacher to Judge Garrity, April 1975, Garrity Papers.
for teachers. He wrote, “First, the teachers had difficulty maintaining continuity due to fluctuating attendance; second, the teachers had difficulty maintaining order in the class because there was little or no way to discipline the children who were bused—they could not be kept for detention, and most of their parents would not come to the South End to talk to us; and third, it was difficult to build up school spirit when we could not involve the bused children in sports and other after-school activities.”

In contrast, a teacher at Jamaica Plain High School reported that it was largely unaffected by school desegregation, because the school had been racially balanced prior to the court order. As the school year progressed, other schools that had experienced disruptions in September reported progress. Mary McTernan, a teacher at the Bunker Hill Elementary School in Charlestown, reported that “On the surface, the classroom situations are ‘back to normal’; however, there is great apprehension as to what the next academic year may bring.” By the spring, many teachers’ “Reports From the Schools” in the Boston Union Teacher made no reference at all to busing or desegregation, and instead used the space to announce the programs featured at individual schools.

The School Committee, meanwhile, continued on its path of defiance during these early months of court-ordered desegregation. The committee was given until December 16th to create its own desegregation plan for the 1975-1976 school year. A desegregation plan crafted by the School Department was rejected by the committee on December 16 in a 3-2 vote. Kerrigan, who had vowed the previous summer that he would never vote for

\[\text{\footnotesize 42 The Mackey School was a junior high school. Letter from a school administrator to Judge Garrity, August 2, 1975, Garrity Papers.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 43 Ibid.}\]
any plan than included student busing, remained true to his word. He and his fellow dissenters, Paul Ellison and James McDonough, were threatened with contempt of court unless they produced a new plan by January 7, 1975. When the three directed the School Department to craft a new plan without busing, Garrity found them to be in minimum compliance with his orders and the School Committee once again maneuvered its way around fulfilling its duties.

In February 1975, Garrity assumed the responsibility of crafting the plan for the second year of desegregation, or Phase 2, as it was commonly called. The judge assembled a group of four “masters,” court-appointed experts who were charged with the responsibility of crafting a plan that could be accepted by the majority of the city. The panel included Jacob L. Spiegel, retired Massachusetts Supreme Court Justice, Edward J. McCormack, Jr., former State Attorney General prominent as a leader in the Boston Irish community, Francis Keppel, former U.S. Commissioner on Education, and Charles V. Willie, a black Harvard sociology professor.\(^{46}\) The master’s plan was presented March 21\(^{st}\), though Garrity asked two academic experts, Robert Dentler and Marvin Scott to revise certain components. Dentler and Scott were both sociologists at Boston University; at the time, Dentler was dean of the School of Education, and Scott was an associate dean in the School of Education.\(^ {47}\) On May 10, 1975, the final Phase 2 plan was announced amid much criticism. It was clear that upheaval in the schools and across the city would continue into another school year.

The BTU had its own critique of the Phase 2 plan. When the master’s plan was


\(^{47}\) Dentler and Scott co-authored a book on their experience working with Garrity on the desegregation plan. See Robert A. Dentler and Marvin B. Scott, *Schools on Trial.*
announced, the BTU appealed for a one-year delay to allow for proper planning, just as it had sought to delay the implementation of the state plan in the fall of 1974. The union argued that there was not enough time between the spring and fall to foster community support for the plan. In fact, Marvin Scott wrote that when he met with 300 BTU Building Representatives in March to discuss the master’s plan, his description “stirred the audience into a snarling, cursing mob of furious teachers.”\footnote{Ibid., 189.} The BTU was no happier with the plan revised by Dentler and Scott, and detailed the union’s objection in the April 1975 Boston Union Teacher. Criticizing the plan’s “almost total lack of specificity,” the BTU expressed serious concerns over the plan’s student enrollment numbers, the number of teachers needed, the role of proposed partnerships with local colleges and universities, and the authority given to proposed “community district councils.”\footnote{“Desegregation: Union’s Response,” Boston Union Teacher (April 1975), 1.}

Unlike the objections raised by community groups, anti-busers, and the NAACP, the BTU’s objections to the Phase 2 plan did not include reference to the number of students bused or the schools involved. Instead, all of the BTU objections centered on the issue of job security. Enrollment levels affected the number of teachers needed on staff, and any partnerships with either colleges or community councils could impair or usurp the authority of teachers within their own schools. The creation of this plan combined with increasing references to white flight in the spring of 1975 marked the beginning of serious concerns over job security for teachers. The union was no longer focused on involuntary teacher transfers alone; the number of available jobs was in jeopardy.
In June, union membership elected Henry Robinson as the new BTU president. Robinson taught at the William E. Russell Elementary School in Dorchester, and had served as the Executive Vice President for the past four years. Noted as a popular sixth grade teacher at his school, he also had a son in the Boston Public Schools who rode a bus every day to an elementary school in a predominantly black neighborhood. Robinson previously served as a member of the union’s negotiating team, the executive board, and served as a delegate at AFT conventions. In his candidate’s statement, he noted that as Executive Vice President, his “primary function was the processing and resolution of grievances,” and that he “resolved hundreds of grievances to the satisfaction of our members.” Noting his years as a leader in the union he declared, “I am the Only candidate with the necessary experience to face the problems which the BTU president will be required to resolve in the upcoming term” [emphasis in the original]. With his years of service, Robinson’s election was essentially an endorsement of the current BTU leadership. His opponent, Stephen Berlandi, was a much younger teacher who had no prior leadership experience within the union; he presented no radical message with which to challenge Robinson. When the votes were tallied, the count was 1,148-246 in favor of Robinson. Out of roughly five thousand union members, the turnout was deemed “moderate,” but it was also noted to be the “largest number that has ever voted” in a union election.

In one of Henry Robinson’s first actions as president, he wrote AFT president Al Shanker to request a private meeting at the upcoming AFT convention. In the letter,

51 Ibid.
52 “Robinson, Buckley, Kelly—The Victors,” Boston Union Teacher (June 15, 1975), 1.
53 Ibid.
Robinson referred “to serious financial problems” the union faced as a result of school desegregation, and Shanker replied that he would indeed set aside time at the convention to discuss this issue.\(^{54}\) This was not the first time that extraordinary events placed a strain on BTU finances; during the teachers’ strike in 1970, the BTU received a loan from the AFT, a loan which it struggled to repay.\(^{55}\) Robinson’s letter attests to the fact that the BTU was still a local of modest means. The extra financial costs of operating under court order were a financial burden for Local 66.

At the AFT convention in July, a lengthy debate centered on the wording of a resolution supporting desegregation in Boston. The resolution supported by the Black Caucus called for the AFT to support desegregation in Boston “by means of busing.” An alternative version, backed by BTU delegates and Al Shanker, supported desegregation but did not use the word “busing.”\(^{56}\) Shanker argued that “our membership, black and white, is not united on the question of busing.”\(^{57}\) Shanker further declared that the AFT had not yet researched the best way to desegregate the schools, and therefore could not endorse busing. Henry Robinson and Joan Buckley, BTU Executive Vice President, contended that the language of the resolution should be positive; an endorsement of busing had the potential to be divisive. Buckley urged AFT delegates “to give us positive support, so that we can go back to our city and we can continue to try to provide


\(^{55}\) During the May 1970 strike, “The national AFT sent two organizers, lent money to strikers, paid the $13,000 in fines, and replenished the empty BTU treasury with $2,000 after the strike.” Joseph M. Cronin, *Reforming Boston Schools*, 156.


leadership that we haven’t gotten from our politicians.”

Shanker’s refusal to fully endorse busing as a remedy was rooted in his opposition to the use of racial quotas to redress inequality caused by racial discrimination. This position garnered much attention during the Ocean Hill-Brownsville affair, which led to a UFT strike in 1968 to protest the termination of thirteen teachers without due process. At that time Shanker stated “This is a strike to protect black teachers against white racists in white communities and white teachers against black racists in black communities.” Shanker was not opposed to affirmative action, and believed in the idea of racial equality and the need to take measures to fix instances of racial injustice. But instead of racial quotas, he endorsed universal nondiscrimination and affirmative action policies based on economic criteria. Busing based solely on race was not in alignment with this philosophy. This suited the BTU leadership’s aim of avoiding a divisive endorsement of busing.

In defense of Boston’s teachers, Henry Robinson argued that teachers in other locals did not truly understand the situation in Boston, because media reports did not reveal the whole story. Robinson argued that the BTU had accomplished “many good things to further the cause of integration,” and as an example referred to “a school that could have been a trouble spot” if not for teachers who “brought blacks and whites

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60 Kahlenberg, Tough Liberal, 221.
together.\textsuperscript{62} He touted the BTU’s creation of the “Boston Plan” as evidence of the local’s serious consideration of the problems inherent in solving racial inequality in the schools. Shanker, who positioned himself on the floor to participate in the continued debate, attempted to narrow the discussion down to the most practical terms. He told the Boston delegates that “your own members are very divided,” and argued that the court order was creating enough trouble for Local 66, and a resolution which would further pit “one teacher against another” should not pass.\textsuperscript{63} Ultimately, delegates endorsed the resolution written without reference to busing.

In September 1975, Boston teachers found themselves in familiar position: on the eve of a new school year, teachers did not yet have a settled contract with the School Committee. Once again, teachers voted to work without a contract. But in contrast to the previous school year, negotiations were to continue, and teachers also passed a motion to go on strike September 22 if the contract was still unresolved.\textsuperscript{64} Henry Robinson stated that the vote to work without a contract was passed in order to support parents and students. “We want a safe opening of schools,” Robinson told reporters.\textsuperscript{65} In the meantime, the BTU filed a complaint with the state Labor Relations Commission which charged that the School Committee refused to bargain in good faith.

The following week, schools opened on September 8 under Phase 2 of court-ordered desegregation. But even prior to the start of school, protest plans were

\textsuperscript{63} Al Shanker, “1975 convention Proceedings and Tally of Delegates’ Votes,” 85.
\textsuperscript{64} Approximately 3,000 of the city’s 5,000 teachers participated in the vote, which was unanimous. Frank Stevens, “Committee Moves Backward,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (September 15, 1975), 1.
underway, and acts of racism had already occurred in certain areas of the city. Gladys Tarver, a black teacher at a Hyde Park elementary school, reported that her car windows were smashed and the car’s wheels damaged while she attended teacher orientation at the school. In order to ensure the safety of black teachers, the BTU requested special transportation for any teacher who was concerned for his or her safety.66 At a Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts (BEAM)-sponsored program on September 7, black teachers were told that safe conduct was a priority.67 School Department representative George Fallon announced that they were entitled to special transportation and police escorts to and from their schools.68

Elsewhere, the BTU fostered a proactive public message. The union pledged its support for several components of the Phase 2 plan, including the partnerships with universities and other educational initiatives. On the first day of school, BTU Field Representative Ed Doherty told reporters that teachers’ general strategy in the face of disruptive protests would be to adhere to their lesson plans. Soon, Doherty reasoned, word would spread that teachers were giving assignments and proceeding with lessons, just like in any other year. The message was that despite what could happen outside the schools, the teachers would “be doing everything they can in class to get education going.”69

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66 The request for transportation was made to Judge Garrity, who ordered the School Department to coordinate transport details. Paul Nevin, “Phase II Begins,” Boston Union Teacher (September 15, 1975), 4.
67 BEAM was formerly known as the MNEA (Massachusetts Negro Educators Association). The association changed its name in 1972 to “reflect the changing times and the need to involve more of the younger black teachers who had begun to enter the system.” BEAM worked closely with community groups and closely followed and supported the implementation of hiring orders. BEAM also worked to recruit black teachers to the school system. Hayden, “B.E.A.M.: Some History of the Early Years.”
Just like the previous school year, the 1975-1976 school year opened with a wide range of conditions at city schools. Well-organized protests continued outside South Boston High School, even while the media turned most of its attention to the situation at Charlestown High School. Charlestown High, which had been exempted from large-scale student integration the previous year, now rivaled South Boston in the size, scale and virulence of demonstrations. In contrast, the main complaint at other schools was low attendance, as many parents kept their children home on the first days of school, fearing wide-scale violence. Attendance grew every day of that first week, from 59% citywide on Monday to over 70% by Friday. Despite the situation at South Boston and Charlestown high schools, the Citywide Coordinating Council reported generally peaceful conditions elsewhere.

Negotiations continued between the BTU and the School Committee, and on September 16th union members rejected the offer of a four percent pay raise. The BTU stood firm on its request for a ten percent raise, and also objected to the committee’s demand that teachers lengthen their school day by thirty minutes. In an attempt to establish public support for a potential strike, the BTU ran an advertisement in the Boston Globe on September 17. The ad emphasized the union’s fight for special programs and downplayed references to salary. Signed by Henry Robinson, the ad criticized the School Committee’s actions over the past five years. It read in part: “We are not attempting to disrupt the delicate calm of the Boston schools in these tense days. But, after 5 years of what has amounted to meaningless bargaining by the Boston School Committee, can the

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70 See Formisano, Boston Against Busing, 104-105.
71 James Worsham, “Most Schools in Boston Again Have a Calm Phase 2 Day,” Boston Globe, September 12, 1975, 22.
teachers be expected to tolerate their hypocrisy any longer?” 73 The BTU requested understanding and support, because the “only safeguard to the quality of Boston Schools are the teachers.” 74 In contrast, the daily articles regarding the impasse in negotiations reported that salary and length of day were the major points of contention. The ad was a clear attempt to take control of the union’s message.

On September 18, the School Committee raised its salary offer to six percent, and called for one extra hour of unpaid work per week. The BTU lowered its salary demand to nine percent, and proposed one extra hour of work per month at the normal hourly wage. With the deadline for a teachers’ strike only days away, the black parent plaintiffs in the desegregation case petitioned Judge Garrity to issue a federal strike injunction. Garrity refused to issue the injunction, but a state Superior Court judge issued his own injunction. 75 Teachers risked fines and jail terms if they carried through with the strike. Despite the injunction, teachers voted on September 21 76 to strike. The School Committee’s final offer of a six percent pay raise, forty-five minutes of extra time per week, and job security for permanent and tenured teachers for one year was rejected by a membership vote. It was estimated that the vote to move ahead with the strike was approved by a ten to one margin. 76

On September 22, the first day of the strike, over ninety percent of teachers stayed out of the classroom. 77 Only eighteen percent of enrolled students were counted in attendance, a figure which remained stable throughout the five-day strike. Support was

74 Ibid.
strong among union members, but it was reported in the *Boston Globe* that the general mood of the strikers was subdued. Teachers that reporter Curtis Wilkie spoke to expressed regret over the disruption of the Phase 2 plan, but blamed the School Committee for the strike. One teacher speaking on condition of anonymity stated that “The school committee’s not going to offer us anything equitable because the school committee will do anything possible to thwart Phase 2.” 78 Other teachers insisted that the strike was about educational issues and not salary. A young female teacher stated that the “media was missing the point. The salary doesn’t make that much difference. The basic issue is educational. You can’t teach with 35 to 40 kids in a classroom.” 79

The Black Caucus of the BTU, newly formed at the time of the strike, strongly supported the action. But the approximately 500 black teachers working in the schools that fall were divided; some black teachers supported union goals, while others worried about the effect of a strike on the court’s desegregation plan. 80 On the first day of the strike, around 200 black teachers convened at Freedom House as BEAM leaders called for a vote to cross picket lines in the interest of teaching those black children who would continue to report to school. The measure passed, though half of the black teachers present did not even vote. It was reported that even those black teachers that did support crossing the picket line sympathized with union demands; most were union members. 81

There was a general atmosphere of public support, even while most Bostonians acknowledged the difficult timing of the strike. The BTU enjoyed the support of other

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79 Ibid.
80 Cronin, *Reforming Boston’s Schools*, 159.
81 There is no figure on precisely how many black teachers actually crossed the picket line. James Worsham, “Teachers’ Strike in 2d Day; Two Face Court,” *Boston Globe*, September 23, 1975, 12.
unions like the Teamsters, who refused to deliver milk to schools during the strike. It was reported that the Trotter School Parents Association and the Biracial Council called upon the Boston School Committee to official close the schools during the strike, but supported teacher demands. The association’s president, Henry Allen, stated that “We support the educational proposals of the Boston Teachers Union because they would benefit the quality of our children’s education and we urge the Boston School Committee to negotiate rapidly and in good faith.”

On September 23, Henry Robinson and Joan Buckley were found in contempt of court by Superior Court Judge Samuel Adams. Fines of $5,000 were placed on the union for every day teachers remained on strike. Judge Garrity ordered contract negotiations to continue for twelve hours a day until the strike was resolved. Garrity also changed the status of the BTU’s involvement in the desegregation case from “Intervener” to “Defendant.” This meant that the union was now subject to all of Garrity’s orders.

Despite the legal maneuvers, teacher participation in the strike remained at ninety percent. The union printed another advertisement in the Boston Globe on September 25 that explained the issues that were yet to be settled. The bulk of this second ad explained the union’s objection to the request to add time to the teacher’s work day. The ad also condemned the School Committee for failing to support the educational programs necessary for the city’s school children. Again, the issue of salary was largely downplayed. It appears that the union may have learned a lesson from its strike in 1970, when the overall message was muddled to the point where many union members were unclear on the exact contract priority.

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82 Cronin, Reforming Boston’s Schools, 159.
83 Joseph M. Harvey and James Worsham, “Fine Increased to $25,000 a Day for Boston Teachers,” Boston Globe, September 26, 1975, 18.
By the end of the school week, Judge Adams raised the daily fines imposed on the union to $25,000. Judge Garrity barred the BTU from participating in court proceedings in the desegregation case until teachers ended their strike. The BTU announced a rally on Sunday, September 29 with AFT President Al Shanker. Over one thousand Boston teachers attended the rally, during which Shanker urged teachers not to “accept a contract they don’t want.” Shanker praised the union for working during the crucial opening weeks of the school year, and reassured teachers that their contract demands were fully justified, and were in fact a “modest effort” to retain privileges that teachers already had.

Teachers braced themselves for the start of another week on strike, but in the wee hours of the morning on September 29, negotiations were settled on all major points. Close to 2,500 teachers returned to their classrooms that very day; Tuesday, September 30th, marked the official end to the week-long strike. School Committee Chairman John McDonough deemed the contract to be “fair and reasonable,” while BTU President Robinson said the union “won most of its issues.” The union’s major concession was on the demand for additional unpaid work hours per month; teachers would now be expected to spend an extra two and half hours monthly on duties such as parent or staff meetings and student tutoring. A major victory for the union came in a job security clause for tenured and permanently appointed teachers. A portion of provisional teachers were also given job security for one year; with student enrollment in flux, and the number of

85 Ibid., 5.
86 “Permanent” teachers were considered “tenured” when they had completed three years of service; “provisional” teachers were hired on one-year contracts only.
staff under scrutiny, teachers were very pleased with this item.\textsuperscript{87}

Overall, the strike was a victory for the BTU. The union proved it could command a show of force among its teachers, even during a sensitive time for the schools. The BTU also proved it was capable of managing and communicating its public message during a teacher strike.\textsuperscript{88} On October 3, teachers ratified the new contract by a 2-1 margin. Student attendance rebounded to pre-strike levels, and so did protests and sporadic incidents of violence inside the schools. The schools did not exactly return to normal; but the school year progressed positively in most areas according to the city’s new normal.

Amidst the dramatic events of September came a quieter, but no less dramatic shift in teacher hiring practices. Beginning in September 1975, new teachers were only offered provisional contracts. Labor relations scholar Harry Katz, who analyzed the possible reasons for this shift in a 1980 study, offered two possible motives for this change in policy. The first motive was based on practical concerns, such as uncertain enrollment levels and as a means to cut costs. The second motive was based on race. Judge Garrity had entered an amendment to his original hiring orders in January 1975, and among the changes was a provision that allowed the school department to rehire provisional teachers without adhering to the one-to-one hiring ratio for black and white teachers. Katz’s analysis revealed that many white provisional teachers were rehired three years in a row; at that point, the teachers achieved tenure and any cost-cutting gains

\textsuperscript{87} Teachers first dealt with charges of overstaffing that fall. See John Maher and Steve Glickel, “Are the Schools Overstaffed?”, \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (September 15, 1975), 2.

\textsuperscript{88} “Boston Victorious After 5-Day Walkout,” \textit{Massachusetts Union Teacher} (September-October 1975), 1,3
were lost. Katz argued that the rehiring of provisional teachers allowed the school department to skirt the one-to-one hiring rule, while still acting in accordance with the court’s hiring orders.  

Following a complaint by plaintiffs in the case, Judge Garrity further amended his hiring orders to close this loop hole in July of 1978. Garrity wrote that the allowance for the rehiring of provisional teachers had been meant to be the exception to the rule, but that “Instead it turned out to be the exception which swallowed the rule.” Garrity refused to find that this shift in hiring practice had been a willful attempt to flout the spirit of the original hiring orders, for it would “serve no constructive purpose.” Instead, Garrity simply removed the language regarding provisional teachers from the orders, reaffirmed the one-to-one hiring ratio, and added a new stipulation that required the percentage of black teachers to advance by 1½% every year until the 20% goal was achieved. The percentages of black teachers during these years reflected the impact of the various incarnations of the hiring orders. Between the 1974-1975 school year and the 1977-1978 school year, the overall percentage of black teachers rose from 10.4% to 12.6%. After Garrity revised his orders in the summer of 1978, the percentage of black teachers jumped to 15.6% for the 1978-1979 school year.

If the BTU was opposed to the September 1975 hiring shift, it offered no formal
complaint. Katz’s study offered an unsympathetic indictment of the union on this point; he argued that the BTU was solely concerned with job security for its most senior teachers, and tacitly supported the creation of a permanent class of provisional teachers that would be the first casualties in any reduction in staff. Katz further suggested that the union was unconcerned with the plight of black provisional teachers. While the BTU offered no formal written statement on the hiring of provisional teachers, two of the union’s actions weaken the case for Katz’s theory.

First, even though the BTU could not secure job security clauses for all of its provisional teachers in its 1975-1976 contract, it did work to secure the jobs of a portion of provisional teachers. Second, among the items proposed by the BTU’s negotiating team for the 1976-1977 contract was a demand that called for the “immediate hiring of permanent teachers for all permanent teaching positions.”94 In fact, the BTU’s adherence to the principles of seniority where hiring and transfer issues were concerned would leave tenured teachers little to fear from newly hired teachers, no matter their contract status. After all, provisional teachers rehired three years in a row achieved tenured status anyway; and a reliance on seniority gave the union no reason to need a standing “sub-class” of teachers to ensure the job security of more experienced teachers.

Nevertheless, the BTU’s strict support of seniority placed the union at odds with Garrity’s court over issues of hiring and transfers, and this stance led to problems within the union as well, as black teachers sought their own voice within the union. Rayleen Craig, a member of the Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women, wrote to Judge Garrity in November 1975 listing her concerns over the hiring of black teachers on a

provisional basis. She complained to Garrity that the Black Caucus of the BTU was not receiving any support on this issue from BTU leadership, “whose main interest is in protecting the rights of teachers with seniority.”\textsuperscript{95} The exact nature of what occurred between the Black Caucus and BTU leadership that fall is unclear, but in a document distributed by the Black Caucus in August 1977, it appears that not much had changed for black teachers two years later.

The document, formatted as a series of questions and answers, decried BTU leadership for failing to promote black teachers as candidates, for failing to address the issues raised by the Black Caucus, and for failing to support the Black Caucus in general.\textsuperscript{96} Among the list of issues raised was the absence of black teachers in prominent union positions. Since the start of desegregation, not one black teacher had served on the executive board, and in the 1976-1977 school year, only 3 out of 100 elected positions were held by black members. At union headquarters, only one paid employee—a secretary—was black. Interestingly, shortly after the Black Caucus distributed this document, John D. O’Bryant was elected as the first black member of the Boston School Committee.\textsuperscript{97} O’Bryant’s election was a significant victory for the black community, yet within the union, black teachers were still struggling to assert their position. Though the number of black teachers in the system was on the rise, the influence of black teachers within the union was still limited.

The irony of the BTU’s call for a strict adherence to seniority was the fact that,

\textsuperscript{95} Letter from Rayleen M. Craig, Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women, to W. Arthur Garrity, November 21, 1975, Garrity Papers.
\textsuperscript{97} O’Bryant, one of the founder of the Massachusetts Negro Educators Association (later renamed the Black Educator’s Alliance of Massachusetts), had run for a seat on the School Committee in 1975 and lost. His election happened at a time when committee members were still elected at-large, which made his election all the more significant. Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 160.
historically, the principle of seniority was something that black workers had fought for as a protection against discrimination. It meant that layoffs would be based on experience, not on color. Speaking at the 1975 AFT convention, Bayard Rustin reminded convention goers of that fact. Rustin, president of the A. Philip Randolph Institute at the time, credited the Urban League and the NAACP with fighting for the principle of seniority. He continued, “Furthermore, if there is any black man in this room who is in favor of breaking seniority lines, I want him to raise his hand if the proposition is that he himself must give up that job to a black woman who has five years’ less seniority.”98 This remark was met with laughter and applause from audience members. He concluded, “By that example you see that any effort at breaking seniority lines has to have the following consequences: poor against other poor; white against black; ethnic group against ethnic group; men against women; youth against the aged; and workers against workers.”99 This type of blind support for seniority was not uncontested by the late 1970s, but the argument bolstered the cause of the BTU as it worked to protect the jobs of white senior teachers.

Part of the BTU’s problem had to do with the language it used to defend senior teachers, as seen in a memorandum the BTU filed in Garrity’s court in December 1978. In this document, the union objected to the “excessing” of senior teachers before less experienced black teachers.100 The memo read, in part: “According to the School Committee, the black teacher is immune from the normal labor relations standards of seniority, merely because of his color. The Committee has failed to demonstrate to the

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99 Ibid.
100 In Boston, “excessing” was one step above being laid-off. If a teaching position was eliminated, for example, due to declining enrollments, that teacher could be placed in the excess pool until he or she was reassigned.
Union any Order of this Court...which supports the sweeping position taken by the Committee. Such a position may be easy to administer, but it has the effect of polarizing the faculty based upon color. In short, white teachers may be excessed from their school involuntarily based upon their seniority, while black teachers enjoy immunity from any excessing.” The problem was that the distribution of black and white teachers along the scale of seniority was heavily disproportionate. A large majority of black teachers had been hired within the past three years and therefore had the least experience; the most senior teachers were overwhelmingly white. The BTU’s strict defense of seniority was, in a sense, a defense of white teachers’ interests.

Katz also accused the BTU of clinging to seniority as a means to promote the case of conservative senior members. Katz wrote that, “The BTU’s actions, as in the seniority vs. affirmative action dispute, can be explained as part of the union’s efforts to protect the interests of the traditional and politically dominant membership.”101 But simply crediting members’ conservatism is too simple a deduction. Adherence to the principle of seniority, a cornerstone of labor union practice, cannot be dismissed as a political maneuver. Without question, the BTU was trying to protect jobs; but more fundamentally, it was trying to protect the very principles that the union was founded on, principles that teachers relied on. Historically, the principle of seniority helped stabilize the internal politics of unions because it provided a clear, straightforward system for the allotment of benefits, or the lack thereof. Without the guiding hand of seniority, the unions were vulnerable to internal political problems. The problem for the BTU was that the school system had perpetuated clear and systemic racial discrimination, but the union

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rightly took no responsibility for creating that system and felt it should not have to pay the price for its remedy. Unfortunately for the BTU, endorsing seniority was tantamount to endorsing the perpetuation of a broken and racially divisive system, but union members also believed that discarding seniority was a devastating blow to the union’s integrity.102

As the schools continued to operate under court order, the situation inside some of the schools remained challenging. Generally, the schools that were most troubled at the beginning of desegregation continued to have major problems. Judge Garrity was so appalled by the conditions inside South Boston High School when he toured in the spring of 1976 that he placed the school under receivership and appointed his own headmaster in hopes of turning the school around. Major riots between black and white students disrupted school for days at Hyde Park High School in January 1976 and April 1978. In Charlestown in September 1979, a football player from Jamaica Plain High School was shot and paralyzed while playing against the Charlestown High team.103 In schools where race issues were calmer, the worries of teachers moved toward ever-declining school enrollments.

The relationship between the BTU and the Boston School Committee, which for years was on shaky ground, did not improve during these years. In fact, unproductive contract negotiations continued to be a thorn in the union’s side. In the fall of 1976, the BTU agreed to enter into mediation when the contract was still not resolved by October.

102 Nancy MacLean provides an historical analysis of the positive and negative implications of the use of seniority for black workers in her book, Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Once again, union leaders accused the School Committee of refusing to bargain in good faith. In the 1977-1978 contract, members were largely dissatisfied when teachers were only awarded a small bonus instead of a salary raise.

In August 1978, contract negotiations were stalled over the issue of salary, class size, and the removal of a long-standing clause that allowed the BTU to bargain over items not covered in the contract. On the first day of the school year, teachers voted unanimously to reject the committee’s latest offer, which included a five percent pay raise. Teachers also voted, 1,000-700, to delay a possible strike until September 14 and return to work while negotiations continued. On September 14, the BTU executive board presented the School Committee’s best and final offer to union membership, and recommended that teachers reject the contract. After a voice vote was deemed too close to call, members voted by secret ballot and approved the contract, 1708-1353. Union leaders were stunned. When the vote tally was announced to teachers waiting outside BTU headquarters, fights broke out between opposing sides and police were called to the scene.

In an interview the following day, Henry Robinson said that he was “dejected” over the fact that “the membership thought it was a good contract—and it wasn’t.” He also expressed bitter disappointment that the School Committee’s idea of an overcrowded

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104 See Joan Buckley, “School Committee Sabotage,” Boston Union Teacher (October 1976), 1; Frank Stevens, “Dilemma: Union or Not?”, Boston Union Teacher (October 1976), 2; “Bargaining Has Been No Bargain,” Boston Union Teacher (January 1976), 1, 2.
105 For example, if the School Committee wanted to impose a dress code or make a curriculum change after the contract was settled, the committee would have to bargain with the union over it.
classroom (thirty-six students) was acceptable to union members. Robinson concluded
that teachers did not fully understand the issues, and said, “People who are active in the
union and come to the regular meetings—they support positions like class size. The
once-a-year people who come out just to vote on the contract are not as keen on the
issues, not as informed, and that’s why they voted not to strike.” The Boston Globe
praised teachers for refusing to strike over “essentially petty differences.” School
Committee chairman David Finnegan expressed his appreciation for “teachers, who,
despite union pressures, demonstrated responsibility and showed that their primary
interest is the education of children.”

In a letter to the Bay State Banner, teacher Anita Teeter took exception to the all
of these evaluations. She found Robinson insulting, and the Boston Globe and Finnegan
condescending. She explained the reason why she voted to accept the contract,
describing it as a decision to avoid a strike, rather than an endorsement of the contract.
She argued that union members were given an impossible choice: “Rejecting the offer
meant depriving the children of education by a strike, and accepting the offer meant
selling out the children to huge classes.” Teeter explained it as an “agonizing”
choice.

In further remarks after the contract endorsement, Robinson also acknowledged
that the “disenchantment of black teachers” in the union also contributed to the members’
vote. In a telephone interview with a Boston Globe reporter, Robinson stated that “too

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109 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
few black teachers were involved in the ‘mainstream’ of union activities,” and that none of the executive board members or any members of the aide council were black.\footnote{Roughly half of the teacher aides were black. Ibid.}

Robinson offered no remedy for this problem, other than the need to start an “educational process” to ensure all members were familiar with the relevant issues.\footnote{Ibid.} The fact that black teachers played an influential role and clearly chose the contract over a strike echoed the sentiments of black teachers during the 1975 strike. In 1975, black teachers were conflicted over placing union demands over their support of school desegregation and it continued to be a divisive issue.

At special meeting held at BTU headquarters on September 20, members of the negotiating team, with the support of Henry Robinson, passed a motion calling for an AFT investigation into allegations of unethical conduct by members of the negotiating team. One outspoken member of the team, Ron Murphy, claimed that an inside deal had been made between certain other members of the team and David Finnegan, chairman of the Boston School Committee. Other negotiating team members categorically denied the charges, but the membership still endorsed the motion for an AFT investigation.\footnote{See Thomas Gosnell, “Editorial: A Report on the AFT Investigation,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (February 1979), 1; Ron Murphy, “Ron Murphy Hollers ‘Foul,’” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (February 1979), 1; Virginia Tisei, “Political Exploitation of a Union,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (February 1979), 1.} It was a sensitive time within the union hall, with many members still upset over the passage of the teacher contract. The AFT investigation, it was hoped, could settle the question of where exactly the union had gone wrong.

An AFT executive council investigative committee spent two days in December interviewing sixteen officers and members of the BTU. The committee’s report was released in January 1979, and it concluded that the charges of unethical conduct were
unsubstantiated. The report stated that “none of those interviewed could offer conclusive
evidence of wrong-doing by anyone involved in the negotiating process. All who made
allegations stated that they were making them based on rumors or on feelings that
something was wrong.” But even though AFT investigators found no evidence of
deliberate wrong-doing, it presented several other conclusions as to why negotiations
ended unfavorably. First, investigators concluded that “internal local politics” negatively
influenced members of the negotiating team and inhibited the bargaining process. Next, the investigators concluded that bargaining was hampered by the lack of a “clearly
identified spokesperson.” The report further stated that “There is a general
misunderstanding of the bargaining process by some members of the Negotiating Team,”
and that the team “lacks the discipline and singleness of purpose necessary for the
efficient conduct of negotiations.” Finally, investigators concluded that the ratification
meeting was “poorly planned” and poorly conducted.

The competency of the negotiating team was denigrated; teachers now had a
scapegoat for their poor contract. The BTU offered no rebuttal for the benefit of its
members. There seemed to be a general attitude that the whole process, from
negotiations, to the membership vote, to the AFT investigation, was a debacle best left in
the past. The BTU still had much work to do as it faced a school landscape that was
changing rapidly. In the early months of 1979, declining school enrollments led to the
first announcement of school closures.

On January 19, 1979, the School Committee, in conjunction with state and city

119 Ibid., 5.
120 Ibid.
representatives, submitted a proposal to develop a Unified Facilities Plan (UFP). The UFP was a plan to “develop guidelines and criteria for school closings and reutilization of school facilities, new constructions and renovations.”\textsuperscript{121} The development of such a plan had been mandated by Judge Garrity to evaluate the use of school facilities in light of declining student enrollments. In September 1972, there were roughly 90,000 students attending Boston Public schools; enrollment fell to 82,000 in 1974 and 71,000 in 1976. By the end of the 1979-1980 school year, there were 67,500 students enrolled in the schools.\textsuperscript{122}

Declining enrollments were keenly felt in some schools. A letter signed by the faculty of the Harvard-Kent School in Charlestown noted a drastic decrease in the number of students. The letter, dated June, 19, 1978, stated “Over the past three years we have seen our enrollment decrease from approximately 800 to a projected ’78-’79 enrollment of 387—which we know is higher than will actually be returning.”\textsuperscript{123} Between 1970 and 1980, Charlestown’s population fell from 15,400 to 13,400, and much of that drop represented the loss of families with children.\textsuperscript{124} In addition to the population loss, parents who could afford to do so placed their children in parochial schools, a move that exacerbated the decline of students enrolled in public schools.\textsuperscript{125}

White student levels in the Boston public schools saw a sharp decrease in the 1970s. In 1973, about 60 percent of Boston public school students were white, and by

\textsuperscript{121} Virginia Tisei, “Vice-President’s Report,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (February 1979), 4.
\textsuperscript{122} For figures and a discussion of white flight, see Lukas, \textit{Common Ground}, 649-650 and Formisano, \textit{Boston Against Busing}, 208-211. Cronin provides a breakdown of population loss by neighborhood in \textit{Reforming Boston Schools}, 112-113.
\textsuperscript{124} Cronin, \textit{Reforming Boston’s Schools}, 112.
\textsuperscript{125} Formisano, \textit{Boston Against Busing}, 210.
1980 that figure was 35 percent. At the same time, the percentage of very poor families tripled between 1970 and 1980. Edward Doherty, who would serve as BTU president in the 1980s, noted that “We’ve lost, to a very large extent, a middle-class constituency for public schools, middle class of all races.” An editorial in the Boston Union Teacher in March 1980 lamented the departure of the white middle class and inflation that negated pay raises. After five years of court-ordered desegregation, issues of reform were “irrelevant” in the face of these challenges; the editorial proclaimed that the “mission” of the school system was “fragmented and dissipated—both programmatically and administratively.”

After a year of work on proposals for school closures, which witnessed Judge Garrity, the BTU, and lawyers for the plaintiffs objecting to various incarnations of the plan, a UFP decision was issued on March 21, 1980. In May, Judge Garrity officially ordered the closure of 13 schools. Teachers were still unhappy with the planned closures, and vowed to continue to challenge the process the school department used to determine excess seats. The union was particularly critical that there was no educational plan in place to offset the disruptions caused by school closings. Union leaders were slightly mollified that number of closures was far less than the 47 schools the School Committee had recommended for closure the previous fall, but vowed that “we will continue to fight for the rights of students, parents, and teachers to quality

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126 Formisano, Boston Against Busing, 210-211. Of the total population, 75 percent were white in 1970; by 1980, the city was 66 percent white. Robert A. Dentler, “The Boston School Desegregation Plan,” 62.
130 The BTU thought the numbers of excess seats were inflated.
Now that school closings were becoming reality, Judge Garrity, the plaintiffs, and the BTU supported a common cause: minimal disruption of the school system. Garrity and the plaintiffs wanted to ensure the continuation of the desegregation plan, and teachers were interested in saving jobs. Black parents petitioned Garrity to delay the order to allow more time to prepare for the closings’ impact; Garrity agreed and postponed the enactment of the UFP plan for one year. The school budget was already strained, and Superintendent Robert Wood had planned on the closings to provide some financial relief. The School Committee warned the BTU that teacher layoffs were inevitable, even as the union argued that schools were understaffed.132

The knowledge of impending layoffs was a concern for the black teachers who belonged to BEAM. In a letter to the newly-elected BTU President Kathleen Kelley that July, Deborah Dancey, Chairwoman of the BEAM Teachers Committee wrote that “BEAM strongly opposes the reduction in force of teachers.”133 The BTU agreed on this point, of course, but in the event of layoffs, the union still adhered to the seniority principle. Dancey wrote that “BEAM believes that the reduction in force must be done in a manner that is consistent with faculty desegregation orders of the court,” and that “BEAM does not support reduction in force by seniority only.”134

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131 Kelley, “U.F.P. Decision.”
132 The BTU cited class sizes “in the mid to upper 30s, insufficient staff for reading programs, a lack of specialists at the elementary level, and no elementary planning time” as it argued the need for more teachers. Kathleen Kelley, “From the Table...A Report on Negotiations,” Boston Union Teacher (July 1980), 5.
133 Letter to Kathleen Kelley, president of BTU, from Deborah D. Dancy, Chairwoman, Teachers Committee, Black Educators’ Alliance of Massachusetts, Inc., July 25, 1980, Freedom House, Inc., Records. Kathleen Kelley was elected BTU president in June. She was the first woman, and first elementary school teacher, to hold this post.
134 Ibid.
reveals the continued involvement of BEAM and also highlights the fact that BTU support for seniority was well known as a major issue for the union.

Amid this growing financial crisis, the BTU negotiated a new three-year contract before the start of the school year in September 1980. Teachers were to receive a 7 percent raise (they had asked for 15%) and job security for tenured teachers through June 1982. The pay raises cost the city $15 million, but Mayor Kevin White did not appropriate new funds to the school budget to cover this increase. Instead, the school system was given $195 million, the budget it had operated on for the past two years, and well below the $242 million budget it was running. The BTU challenged the Mayor and worked alongside the School Committee to pressure him into fully funding the school budget. This fight ultimately led to a state Supreme Court decision that upheld the teacher contract. Mayor White was forced to come up with the funds for the teacher raises, even while he reduced other school spending funds to keep the city’s schools open through the end of the school year.

Even as Boston faced great strain in funding its municipal budget, Massachusetts voters passed a binding referendum in November 1980 that rolled back local property taxes to 2½ percent of assessed values, and limited future property tax increases to 2½ percent per year, regardless of the rate of inflation. In its first year, Proposition 2½ led to a loss of $96 million in revenue for the city of Boston. That amount was equal to the total budgets of the fire department, city health services, and the public works

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135 Kelley, “From the Table,” 5; Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 162-163.
137 “Funding Battle,” Boston Union Teacher, 10.
138 Cronin, Reforming Boston's Schools, 163-164.
It would prove disastrous for teachers.

In early 1981, the Boston School Committee began to prepare for budget cuts in 1981-1982 school year, and petitioned the District Court to allow the dismissal of tenured teachers despite the job security clause in the teachers’ contract. In April, termination letters were sent to 2,300 teachers. The expectation was that many of those teachers would in fact still have a job in the fall of 1981, but the School Department needed the figures supplied by school principals at the end of the school year in order to determine the exact number of teachers needed to staff the schools.

In May, long-anticipated school closings were finally approved by Judge Garrity. But instead of the 13 schools approved (with closings put on hold) the previous year, the stark reality of budget shortfalls under Proposition 2½ now meant that 27 schools would close. The BTU insisted that the closings represented savings of only a tiny portion of the overall budget, and black parent plaintiffs still argued that “projected overcrowding and loss of programs and services would effectively deny Black children equal educational services.” But Garrity could no longer stave off school closures in the face of declining enrollments and serious budget constraints.

In June, two key rulings in District Court set the course of teacher layoffs. On June 2, Judge Garrity ordered that any teacher layoffs retain the current percentage of

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142 Ibid.
black teachers in the system.\textsuperscript{143} This order released the School Committee from organizing layoffs according to seniority, or as the union described it, permitted the dismissal of teachers “on the basis of race rather than seniority.”\textsuperscript{144} On the heels of this order came a ruling on the School Committee petition to allow for the dismissal of tenured teachers. Judge Thomas Morse handed down his decision on June 16, and ruled that despite the job security clause in the BTU’s contract, the union could not force the School Committee to retain teachers at the expense of providing students with an adequate education.\textsuperscript{145} Morse noted, “The job-security clause furthers no discernible educational policy,” though he urged the School Committee to still seek additional funds so that it could honor the terms of the contract.\textsuperscript{146} The two District Court decisions were a double blow for union leaders who had been working to ensure the School Committee honored the collective bargaining agreement—first in funding pay raises, then honoring job security—for close to a year.\textsuperscript{147}

In August, the Boston School Committee announced the official number of layoffs for the 1981-1982 school year. At an August 18 meeting with nearly 1,000 teachers in attendance, the committee approved the termination of 960 teachers, which constituted nearly one-fifth of the teaching staff. Of the 960, 710 were tenured teachers, and 250 were provisional teachers. The recently-hired school superintendent, Robert R. Spillane, said that it might be possible to rehire 120 to 125 of the dismissed teachers once the school budget was further scrutinized. All of the laid-off tenured teachers were white.

\textsuperscript{144} “Questions and Answers on the Boston Case,” Albert Shanker Collection.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Kathy Kelley, “The Morse Decision: Another Battle to Wage,” \textit{Boston Union Teacher} (July 1981), 1.
The BTU noted that some of these teachers had seniority dating back to 1969, and that on the day that official layoff notices were sent, the School Committee “announced a recruitment drive for new black teachers.”

At a press conference outside union headquarters on August 27, Kathleen Kelley announced the BTU Executive Board recommendation that teachers vote to go on strike September 8. This was the day before the new school year was set to begin. She stated, “Our contract has been violated. Our good-faith agreement has been breached. Programs for children have been eliminated. And the school system, quite frankly, is being destroyed.” Kelley added that there was a “tremendous amount of trauma among the members” and that she believed the members would “stick together in this.”

Robert Marshall, vice president of BEAM, did not agree with Kelley’s assessment. He said that the majority of black teachers were opposed to a strike and would continue to work even if a strike was called. Marshall was intent that black teachers and students “not be used as sacrificial lambs in this situation.”

Teachers convened on September 7th to vote on a strike action. At the meeting, the BTU Executive Board amended its earlier recommendation and called for a strike starting in two weeks. Members voted 1736 to 1570 to postpone an official decision on the strike. When members convened again on September 20, the motion to strike was defeated 1404 to 836. Most of the opposition to strike came from black teachers and

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148 “Questions and Answers on the Boston Case,” 2.
150 Ibid.
153 Kenneth J. Cooper, “Cheers, Bitterness at Teachers’ Meeting,” 1; Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 166.
older members, while the bulk of supporters were the laid-off teachers. After the vote totals were announced, one laid-off teacher took the podium to denounce those teachers opposed to a strike. He said, “You have voted with your voice to execute this union. You have no courage; you have no voice; you have no soul.” He led other laid-off teachers out of the hall, many dejected but still defiant. A teacher with 11 years of seniority commented that she was laid off for her “race and seniority,” but that there are some things “far worse than being unemployed; one of them is fear, one of them is a loss of dignity.”

A black teacher with three years of seniority, who opposed the strike, stated “It’s time to support affirmative action, if you want a united union. Until that happens, the minority population cannot support a strike.” This was the fundamental issue of division; black teachers had offered support for the strike if the union stopped pursuing an appeal of the District Court decision that protected black teachers from layoffs. That proposal was loudly rejected in a voice vote taken after members defeated the strike measure. It is unclear how many white teachers supported affirmative action, though presumable it was only a small minority. In the July edition of the Boston Union Teacher, 27 white teachers signed a letter to the editor in support of Judge Garrity’s ruling. The teachers argued that the union had wasted time fighting for affirmative action, when it should have been working to protect teachers’ jobs. They also cited a lack of community support for the union “principally because we are seen by parents of color and progressive white parents as part of the problem of racism in Boston, not as part of

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154 Cooper, “Cheers, Bitterness,” 1.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
the solution.”

The union’s failure to unify its members on the issue of seniority reveals the limits of that principle in light of the unique constraints placed upon the Boston Public Schools. Court-ordered school desegregation, declining school enrollments, and the passage of Prop. 2½ created a situation by 1981 in which almost any stance on union principles could be negated. When the School Committee was released from its agreed-upon contractual obligations by the courts, it proved that no collective bargaining agreement for teachers would be placed above the needs of court-ordered desegregation. The union chose to dig in its heels on the principle of seniority and use that as its guiding stance. The major problem for the BTU, of course, was that it had not laid any groundwork for racial unity prior to the teacher layoffs. Had black teachers felt supported or been involved in the ranks of union leadership, the union might have been able to rally support behind the laid-off teachers.

With the strike action rejected, the BTU continued to work on its appeal in the courts. As union argued,

None of the black teachers now benefitting from the layoff plan have been found by any court to be victims of discrimination. On the contrary, most of the black teachers in the Boston school system were hired under a quota system which, rather than discriminate against them, actually gave them preference. Likewise, no white teacher is accused of any wrongdoing. Neither the white teachers nor the union has been responsible for any constitutional violations. On February 17, 1982, the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the decision of the District Court. In its decision, the court held that this issue was not whether black teachers were victims of racial discrimination. Rather, the issue centered on the rights of “school

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158 “Questions and Answers on the Boston Case,” 2.
children as a legal class which are being protected.”

The BTU continued to fight for the laid-off teachers, with the support of A. Philip Randolph Institute, the University Center for Rational Alternatives, and the Public Employees Department of the AFL-CIO. The union appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court twice, and twice the court refused to hear its case charging reverse discrimination. The 710 white tenured teachers were never reinstated.

At the 1979 AFT convention, members passed the following resolution: “that this AFT convention encourages its locals and state federations to work together with affirmative action supporters in their communities to protect seniority and affirmative action gains by preventing layoffs.” It was a simple idea. If no jobs were lost, there would never be the debate over whether to conduct layoffs according to seniority or affirmative action. Such a resolution, however, had no practical basis in reality, especially in Boston. Enrollment had significantly declined over the past decade. In addition, the fiscal crises meant that the system had to be economized and made more efficient. Ironically, the requirements of the desegregation court order sheltered teachers from these economic realities for a time. School closings were initially postponed due to concerns that such closings would disrupt the terms of the court order.

The union began its work under court order with a proactive stance, but a few years later, the myriad challenges coming from the schools and the courts put the union in a reactive posture. It was not a position of strength. The union’s misstep over the teacher’s contract in the fall of 1978, and its failure to unify all members, regardless of

159 Ibid., 3.
160 Cronin, Reforming Boston Schools, 165.
race, revealed the limits of its power within the schools and the challenges it faced as the membership grew more diverse. This is not to say that had the union been more robust in 1981, it could have saved the jobs of those senior teachers. With the school system in the hands of the federal court, there were extraordinary limits already placed on the BTU. It is unclear what the union’s path would have been had the School Committee desegregated the schools years earlier, without the need for judicial intervention.
EPILOGUE

Today, we as a community face the most important and impactful decisions in the history of this city, and the complexity and urgency of this important work requires an unwavering and singular focus, and a resolve to do what must be done to ensure all of our children’s future for generations to come.

--Carole Johnson, Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools, September 24, 2012

In the spring of 2012, Mayor Thomas Menino appointed an advisory committee to examine the student assignment system in the Boston Public Schools. The existing student assignment plan was 23 years old and designed to keep the city in compliance with court-ordered racial balancing of the schools. The system involved a complicated lottery system and a heavy reliance on cross-town busing. Mayor Menino was interested in a plan that would bolster communities in the city by allowing more students to attend schools closer to home. Many Boston neighborhoods are more diverse now than in the 1970s, the Mayor argued, and by assigning students to schools closer to their homes, the city could still support racial balance and reduce the 80 million dollars it spends annually on busing. The advisory committee was charged with submitting a new student assignment plan to the School Committee. Menino hopes that a new plan will be implemented in the fall of 2014.

News of a possible end to the extensive use of cross-town busing was met with

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2 Menino (D) was in his fifth term as mayor after serving five terms as a city councilor. The advisory committee is formally referred to as the External Advisory Committee (EAC), and comprised of 27 members with a range of backgrounds; there are civic leaders, business leaders, religious leaders, current and former parents of students, and a current teacher. To see the names and backgrounds of the committee members see “Members of the EAC,” http://bostonschoolchoice.org/external-advisory-committee/members-of-the-eac/ (February 2013).
3 In Menino’s “State of the City” address in January 2013, he stated, “To those who are understandably wary of the city’s history around school choice, recall the words of Representative and historian Byron Rushing. In a Roxbury auditorium last March he said, ‘To get this right we are not going back to anything. We are creating something new.’” See “Mayor Thomas M. Menino, State of the City Address, January 29, 2013” http://www.cityofboston.gov/Images_Documents/SOTC%202013_tcm3-35774.pdf (January 29, 2013).
skepticism by many parents of Boston school children.⁴ Though the current system of student assignments is much maligned, Bostonians are equally leery of a solution that may limit access to the best schools in the city. Performance is not equal at all Boston’s schools, and though many neighborhoods are more diverse, certain pockets of the city still struggle with the pervasive issue of poverty. The BTU took a guarded approach toward any potential plan, and focused on informing its members about the issues, including a Harvard study that concluded several of the potential plans would increase inequity in the schools.⁵ The union stressed the fact that the budget savings resulting from revised busing patterns would be minimal and that the focus instead should be on improving the quality of all schools. In November of 2012, the union praised the “transparency” of the School Department regarding the advisory committee’s work and directed teachers to the School Department’s website for further information.⁶

The story of Boston teachers and the desegregation battles of the 1960s and 1970s was shaped by the turbulent convergence of two revolutions—the civil rights movement and public sector unionism. By the early 21st century the energy behind these revolutions had been diffused as new challenges arose. The nature of the debate over student school assignment has changed dramatically in the nearly forty years since black parents petitioned the Boston School Committee to desegregate the public schools. In the early 1960s, the key words were “predominantly black” and “predominantly white” schools; the key words now are “high-performing” and “low-performing” schools. Due to the availability of standardized test score

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data under the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, it is easy for parents to pinpoint the schools with higher standardized test scores, and parents are wary of any new plan that will restrict their potential access to the few schools in the city that are considered “high-performing.” In the 1960s, black parents cited the better resources, better teachers, and better infrastructure at predominantly white schools. In 2012, parents refer to the results of standards-based tests.

Another key change in dynamic is that school administrators no longer defend the school system as providing the best possible education for all students, as the School Committee did in the 1960s. The quote from Superintendent Carole Johnson speaks directly to this change. Her message, and the urgency conveyed by her words, however, is not new. This quote could have easily been used by a teacher, parent, or school administrator in any of the past five decades. The message rarely changes: children deserve the best possible education available, and providing that education is a task of utmost importance that leaves its mark on this generation, and generations to come. It is always urgent, always essential, and always something to be improved upon.

In the fall of 2012, the Boston Teachers Union and the School Department reached agreement on a new teacher contract, ending twenty-seven months of negotiations. The final impasse in negotiations was based on a new measure that would use student test scores to evaluate teacher performance. After Mayor Menino called upon the state Department of Labor Relations to intervene, the BTU agreed to the use of a state prototype for teacher evaluations. With this evaluation system, an unsatisfactory performance rating could prevent a teacher from receiving a pay raise, and this negative rating will remove some of the usual safeguards in place to protect tenured teachers from dismissal. In return, the School Department dropped its push to lengthen the school day by 45 minutes and agreed to reduce class sizes in grades 6 and 9. BTU
President Richard Stutman called the contract “good for students, fair to members, and affordable for the city.”\(^7\) The fact that negotiations took twenty-seven months, though, speaks to a continued struggle on the part of the union and the School Department to bargain with any sort of expediency.

The key words Stutman used—good, fair, and affordable—had resonance in 2012 for two key reasons. Over the past few years, the economic recession forced state and municipal governments to cut budgets where possible, and unions have come under attack as a force standing in the way of balanced budgets and reasonable wage increases. We need look no further than the way public employees were treated by Governor Scott Walker in Wisconsin. Walker crafted a law in early 2011 effectively banning collective bargaining for public employees, including teachers, and forcing those employees to pay more for their pension and health benefits.\(^8\) Additionally, the increasing call to make bonuses or wage increases dependent on teacher evaluations have put teachers in a difficult position. No teacher would argue that inferior teachers should be rewarded, but evaluation systems in a school are complicated at best, since teachers inevitably have different groups of students who struggle with different sets of challenges. When the Chicago Teachers Union went on strike for seven days in September 2012, this call for teacher evaluation was a major issue in the protest. The combined effect of an economic recession and the push to connect teacher pay to teacher evaluations has eroded the collective bargaining power of teacher unions across the country.

The predominance of standards-based testing to measure school quality has changed the landscape of school reform efforts. In the 1960s and 1970s, black parents in Boston believed in

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\(^8\) The law only allows employees to bargain solely for wage increases at no greater than the rate of inflation and disallows bargaining on any other workplace issues. The law was deemed unconstitutional as it pertained to school districts and local government workers by Dane County Circuit Judge Juan Cola in September 2012; the case will most likely proceed to the Wisconsin Supreme Court.
the idea that equal access to the city’s public schools could still fulfill the democratic promise of individual mobility. Yet poor white parents in Boston already knew what scholars like David Tyack argued, when he wrote about the unequal outcomes of public education in his 1974 book, *The One Best System.* For sure, some students could, through public education, improve their socioeconomic standing. But for most students, Tyack contended, public school bureaucracies often perpetuated social and economic inequities. Even in Boston, where the growth of Irish political power in the 20th century replicated itself in the running of the schools, poor Irish students were still at a disadvantage. As Michael Patrick McDonald wrote in his memoir of growing up in South Boston in the 1970s, the anti-busing protesters believed their fight “was about poor people being told that they have to do things that rich people don’t have to do. Our mothers couldn’t get over people thinking that we had something in our schools that blacks in Roxbury didn’t have.”

The story of Boston and the role its School Committee played as the school system’s arbiter of power during this era complicates the narrative of the political power struggle in the schools put forth by Diane Ravitch in her influential book, which told the story of New York City’s battles over teacher unionism and racial politics, *The Great School Wars* (1974). In Boston, as this dissertation argues, efforts to promote change in the schools played out as power struggles between the two groups chronicled here (black education activists and teachers) and a confrontational School Committee. There was no system of administrative decentralization in Boston and the committee fought fiercely against any attempt at this. Instead of reform efforts coming from school administrators, Boston’s School Committee blindly clung to the notion that

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the schools provided the same level of education to all students. Criticism of the schools was criticism of the committee, and not to be tolerated. When formally challenged by the NAACP in the 1963, the committee argued that racially-imbalanced schools were the product of housing patterns and little else. Students who struggled academically struggled due to the difficult negative effects of poverty. But that was only part of the story. The Boston School Committee, through manipulation of the feeder patterns of schools, exacerbated racial segregation in schools that would already have been imbalanced due to the city’s distinct ethnic neighborhoods. The committee’s intractable stance toward the need for racial integration, and the stall tactics it utilized against the NAACP’s efforts and the state’s Racial Imbalance Law only exacerbated the explosion of hostility toward court-ordered busing. Had the committee handled integration as a process that could have been gradually built over a period of years, and without the immediate imposition of busing and student reassignments on short notice, the collective trauma on Boston citizens might have been avoided. There most likely would have always been some sort of trauma, but better planning and a gradual integration might have mitigated the extreme racially-charged riots of the mid-1970s.

Some Bostonians still argue that Boston’s schools were “better” prior to the arrival of teacher unionism and court-ordered desegregation. This study refutes that popular opinion. Neither the BTU nor Judge Garrity and his orders to desegregate the schools ruined the Boston Public School system. Rather, the system was dealing with a scarcity of resources and serious, citywide racial incidents prior to collective bargaining and court-ordered desegregation. Clearly, the current situation in the Boston Public Schools, with its complicated student assignment system, has its roots in the desegregation court orders of the 1970s. But Judge Garrity is not the villain in this narrative. The Boston School Committee amply fills that role.
In *The Great School Wars*, Ravitch states, “One of the persistent ironies of reform is the impossibility of predicting the full consequences of change; every school war has had outcomes which were unintended and in many cases, unwanted.”12 This is clearly seen in the re-segregation of Boston’s schools, an unintended consequence of white flight exacerbated by court-ordered busing. In 1973, Boston public school students were 60 percent white; by 1980, white students made up 35 percent of overall enrollment. In the 2011-2012 school year, the total student body was 13 percent white.13 For teachers, Judge Garrity’s goal of achieving a staff that was 20 percent black was first realized after the teacher layoffs in 1981. Those levels have been fairly consistent. It was the one intended consequence that has remained fairly stable. In the 2011-2012 school year, 23 percent of teachers were black.14

Busing in Boston was necessary to integrate the schools in the 1970s, and could not have been achieved without a radical revision to student assignments in the city. But once it became clear that even integrated schools in Boston were unable to provide widespread opportunities for upward mobility, it was too late to step back and seek a different remedy. Teachers knew that reforms to improve educational quality were vital, and cited those needs in its strikes in 1970 and 1975. Yet once the union was put into a reactive posture while the system operated under court order, and when it failed to fully racially integrate its own members in a meaningful way, reform efforts fell behind the greater priority of protecting teachers’ jobs. The growing fiscal crisis in the late 1970s further prevented the union from fully asserting itself as an agent for reform.

This dissertation examined the simultaneous rise of two rights movements in Boston:

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14 “Boston Public Schools at a Glance 2011-2012.”
teacher unionism and the movement to desegregate the public schools. Both movements began
in earnest in the mid-1960s and faced a School Committee that was intent on retaining its own
power. Both the union and the movement to desegregate the schools evolved in the years
immediately preceding court-ordered school desegregation, as teacher activism gained its own
footing and black community leaders tried various tactics to thwart the School Committee. The
two movements shared the goal of school reform and the need to improve infrastructure and
resources, but could not bridge the divide caused by disagreements over community control,
accusations of racism among the teaching staff, and in later years, affirmative action.

This study contributes the story of Boston’s teachers to the history of teacher unions in
general, and ties Boston’s teachers to the larger trend of public sector employee unionism in the
1960s and 1970s. Boston’s teachers, though a more conservative, homogenous, and older cohort
than seen in teacher groups in New York and Newark, nevertheless followed the national trend
of seeking and attaining collective bargaining rights in the 1960s, proving the power and
influence of the national movement. And though Boston’s teachers were dealt a unique set of
circumstances in the 1970s—bargaining for teacher contracts with a school system operating
under court order—the union was not immune to the fiscal crisis that affected public sector
unions in other areas of the country in the late 1970s. Ironically, the court orders, and the need to
retain a certain level of staffing to implement those orders, shielded Boston’s teachers for a time
from the economic realities of shrinking municipal budgets. Massachusetts’ voters’ approval of
Proposition 2½ in 1980, which limited property tax increases, forced the hand of Judge Garrity in
1981, who could no longer postpone the need for school closures and layoffs.

This is where Boston’s teacher union history is tied to larger trends in urban history. The
exodus of the middle class from urban centers, combined with a deepening fiscal crisis and an
overall decline in white student enrollment, changed the landscape of the schools forever. More studies like this are necessary if we are to fully comprehend the impact of these years on both teacher unionism and the work of school reform today.

While many leaders, including Mayor Menino, cite the benefits of returning to the neighborhood school model, black community leaders remain wary. Schools continue to perform unequally, especially in neighborhoods where the majority of residents live at or below the poverty level. Whatever new school assignment plan is adopted, it is certain that there is no magic bullet for school reform in Boston. Schools, as large bureaucracies, are not inherently flexible to change. When school systems single out the teachers union as the agent that must change first, as is the current national trend, it makes the union a scapegoat. Demanding better employee performance without a concomitant improvement of working conditions and a deeper engagement with the social forces that perpetuate inequality in our cities is a recipe for failure.
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