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Anne Fraser Gregory

Bowdoin College, annegregory144@gmail.com

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"This is N.Y.C. Not Little Rock":
The Battle to Integrate New York City's Public Schools

An Honors Project for the Program of Africana Studies
by Anne Fraser Gregory

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Introduction

The integration of southern schools during the Civil Rights Movement was no small feat. On September 4, 1957—three years after the Supreme Court ruled that segregated education was inherently unequal in *Brown vs. The Board of Education*—nine black students attempted to enter the doors of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Recruited by Daisy Bates, president of Arkansas’ chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the nine students arrived on the first day of school to meet an angry white mob blocking their entry. Governor Orval Faubus himself had deployed the Arkansas National Guard to block the students, claiming it was for their own safety. Following the first thwarted attempt to enter the school, NAACP lawyers, including Thurgood Marshall, fought for a federal district court injunction that prevented Faubus from blocking the students again. Three weeks later, escorted by police, the nine students entered Central High, only to be rushed home by the same officers, fearing for their lives. Still fighting to integrate the high school, Martin Luther King Jr. sent a letter to president Dwight D. Eisenhower imploring him to support the “Little Rock Nine” enrolling at Central High. He wrote that failure to do so would “set the process of integration back fifty years,” insisting that this was, “a great opportunity for you and the federal government to back up the longings and aspirations of millions of peoples of good will and make law and order a reality.”¹ By September 25, the Army’s 101st Airborne Division was in Little Rock, escorting the nine students into the school. Before the 1958 school year, Governor Faubus closed the doors of all

¹ "Little Rock School Desegregation." Birmingham Campaign | The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute. September 04, 1957, accessed November 12, 2018.

four Little Rock high schools to avoid the federal mandate to integrate, only to have the Supreme Court order their reopening the following year.²

When one pictures the bitterly contested battles for racial equality in the 1950s and 60s, the picture is most often in the South. The Little Rock Nine story was a news sensation, as the nation watched these black adolescents march solemnly into Central High School while “an angry crowd of 400 white men and women jeered, booed and shouted, ‘go home, n*****s,’” and “several hundred militiamen, with guns slung over their shoulders, carrying gas masks and billy clubs, surrounded the school.”³ Over a thousand miles north of Little Rock, the New York City Board of Education clashed with Black activists who demanded equitable resources and opportunity for children of all races. And a decade after the Little Rock Nine fought their way through white mobs to attend their classes, Black and Latino children would push their way through crowds of white protestors blocking the entrance of Junior High 257 in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Brooklyn.

The *Brown* decision and its subsequent implementation offer an important question: Are segregated schools inherently evil, and is integration the only solution to unequal schools? The statistics that illustrate the effects of segregated schooling are indeed staggering. According to a 2016 Government Accountability Office study, the number of schools segregated along racial and economic lines doubled between 2000 and 2013. And at majority Black and Latino schools, students have fewer classes like math, science and college prep. In

² "Little Rock School Desegregation."

³ Benjamin Fine, "Arkansas Troops Bar Negro Pupils; Governor Defiant," *The New York Times*, September 1957, accessed November 12, 2018.

New York City, the achievement gap between Black and white students has continued to grow. In 2018, the National Assessment of Achievement Progress reported that 48 percent of white fourth-graders were proficient in math, while only 16 percent of black students met the standard. With a gap of 32 percentage points—growing 5 points since 2015—Black children in New York are consistently behind their white peers in academics.⁴

This opportunity gap continues to grow due to many factors, like housing segregation, discrepancies in school budgets and resources, and more. But as this gap grows, is school integration the best option for Black and Latino students to excel academically? To many Black historians and scholars of education, the answer is a resounding no. Thomas Sowell, dubbed “the intellectual fountainhead of the black conservatives” and “[President] Ronald Reagan’s favorite black intellectual,” by *Newsweek* in 1981, argues that all-black institutions with little funding have been historically successful. In his piece “The Education of Minority Children,” he focuses on the case study of Washington D.C.’s Dunbar High School. In 1899, Washington D.C. had four operating high schools: three white, one black. That year, Dunbar High School scored higher than two of the three white schools on standardized tests. While educational researchers have contended that those who perform well on standardized tests are middle class, Dunbar reflects the opposite reality. In 1892, of the 83 known occupations of Dunbar parents, 51 were laborers and one was a doctor. Sowell argues that historians and educational researchers refuse to acknowledge the successes of schools like Dunbar—self-selecting, academically rigorous, all-black public institutions—because test results and academic behavior of these students *suggest* that they fit a middle-class description. Between 1870 and 1955, the vast majority of its 12,000

⁴ Nicholas Rizzi, "Achievement Gap Widens For NYC Students Of Color: Report," Stone Mountain-Lithonia, GA Patch, April 10, 2018, accessed November 12, 2018.

students went onto higher education, many student attending Ivy League Universities and competitive liberal-arts colleges.

On the other end of the political spectrum sits Russell Rickford, a forty-three year old associate professor at Cornell University and author of *We Are an African People*. Rickford offers an Afro-centric, black nationalist perspective of all-black institutions, arguing Pan African Nationalist Schools of the 1950s and 60s were successful examples of segregated institutions that empowered Black youth to excel outside of a white scholastic environment.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Black and Latino parents parents grappled with this same question as they fought to desegregate the city's schools. The Brooklyn chapter of the NAACP—led in the late 1950s by Reverend Milton Galamison of Siloam Presbyterian Church—battled with the Board of Education to outline concrete integration plans for years. He and the NAACP insisted that the city redraw school district lines and bus black students to higher performing and better funded white schools.⁵ After leaving the NAACP, Galamison founded the Parents Workshop, an organization designed to empower Black and Latino parents to educate themselves about the New York City school system in order to demand high quality education for their children. They pushed the city to adopt a plan of school-pairing, where Black and white students from different neighborhoods would attend one institution, forcing the relocation of both Black and white children in order to create racial balance in schools.⁶ For integrationists like Galamison, the primary way to ensure educational equity was to have Black and white students sit side by side in the classroom, receiving the same resources, listening to the same lessons,

⁵ Adina Back, *Up South in New York: The 1950s School Desegregation Struggles*, PhD diss., Department of History, New York University, 1997 (New York, NY: New York University, 1997).

⁶ *ibid.*

and existing within the same conditions.

But for some, the battle to integrate New York City schools was a fruitless one. With a consistently hesitant Board of Education and continuous backlash from white parents—as seen in the Parents and Taxpayers group of 1963—some Black and Latino parents sought other means to ensure educational quality for their children. To them, integration rested on the assumption that Black children needed the proximity of white children to succeed academically. And for many parents and community leaders in 1960s New York City, this assumption perpetuated the conflation of “good schools” with “white schools.” As Harlem community leader Preston Wilcox asserted in 1966, “If one can believe that a predominantly ‘de facto segregated’ white school can be a ‘good school’, then, one must believe that a ‘de facto segregated’ and predominantly Negro and Puerto Rican school can also be a ‘good school.’”⁷ Rather than rely on the Board of Education to reluctantly grant Black children permission to attend white schools, parents turned to “community control” of schools as the best way to achieve educational equity. Neighborhood school boards attracted parents and local professionals to become involved in their district’s schools, and schools serving mostly black children turned to more Afro-centric curricula that better included and engaged its students.

This Honors Project will discuss segregated schooling in New York City during the 1950s and 60s, and the actors that fought to disrupt the system. Throughout this work, I will attempt to illustrate the power of *community* in New York City, for both good and evil, for equality and bigotry. Parents—Black, white, and Puerto Rican—function as key players in this story, as they

⁷ Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City 1805-1973: A History of the Public Schools as Battlefield of Social Change* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 293.

continually fought local and state Boards to access the education they believed to be rightfully theirs and their children's. I will also assert the notion that segregation was not solely a Southern issue: the similarities between the fight for school integration in both North and South are striking, and highlight the far reaches of prejudice in the nation both then and now. In the first chapter, I will discuss the efforts on the part of integrationist activists like Milton Galamison and Annie Stein. I will document their fight with the Board of Education to adopt concrete plans for school desegregation in the 1950s and 60s—a fight that culminated in the largest school boycott in the city's history. I argue that while integration seemed the only way to ensure educational equity and narrow the achievement gap between students, local control of schools would ensure that student needs were met. The second chapter will discuss white backlash against integration in New York, focusing on the Parents and Taxpayers organization of 1963. This chapter will illuminate the bigotry of white communities in the North that largely blocked any legislation that would desegregate schools. This chapter will further bolster the notion that intense bigotry on the part of white communities was not unique to the South. The third chapter will detail the "community control" movement of the late 1960s. Supporters of this movement emphasized the importance of local control of schools and rejected the negative connotations of "neighborhood schools" that failed to provide for their children. Rather, the community control movement encouraged parents and communities to become involved in the educational sector in order to meet the specific, local needs of a school that the Board of Education would never recognize. I argue that community control was a direct response to the failure of integration, and that it coincided with a the growth of Black Power and "self determination" rhetoric that emphasized the importance of racial pride.

In my conclusion, I will compare the educational landscape of the 1960s New York with the present day, documenting the transition from decentralized schooling of the 60s to a highly centralized form of school governance under Mayor Bloomberg. I will argue that centralization has not resulted in any resolution of the achievement gap, and that inequity continues to grow. In order to understand how New York City can improve public education for all children, it is integral to look at the “school wars,” as Diane Ravitch puts it, that changed New York schools forever.

The Players

There are many institutions and individuals involved in the history of New York City public schools. To fully understand the events surrounding desegregation, one must understand the central figures organizing around the issue.

One of the most significant players in the fight to integrate schools was the **New York City Board of Education**. Together, Mayors and city superintendents would engage (and refuse to engage) with the topic of integration throughout the 1950s and 60s. In the late 1950s, one of the most important figures in the fight to integrate Brooklyn’s Junior High School 258 was superintendent William Jansen, a man who insisted that the city’s “natural” segregation was “accidental.” He opposed integration and attempted to make JHS 258 a “separate but equal” institution.⁸ In 1959, new superintendent John Theobald would entertain the idea of integration by transferring 400 children out of overcrowded Bedford-Stuyvesant Schools and into underutilized white schools in Glendale, only to receive immense backlash from white Glendale parents and continue to stall on integration plans, insisting that massive transfers of students

⁸ Back, 107.

could no longer happen.⁹ Superintendent Bernard Donovan and Mayor John Lindsay would play the most major role in the 1960s fight for community control, as they worked with community activists in Harlem, Brooklyn, and Manhattan to create three experimental districts to test the outcome of local community board's governance of schools.

Leading the fight for integration was **Reverend Milton A. Galamison**. Within New York City, Galamison quickly rose to celebrity status in religious circles as a 25 year old preacher at the highly respected Siloam Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn.¹⁰ Galamison was a political pastor, delivering sermons that covered topics such as class exploitation and racism. He implored his audiences to actively fight against these injustices, asserting that it was their Christian responsibility to do so. He especially despised the de facto segregation in New York City public schools. Historian Lisa Yvette Waller asserted that Galamison's passion for school integration stemmed from his own experiences with bigotry growing up in Pennsylvania, his residence in Bedford Stuyvesant (where schools suffered from lack of funding), and his belief in Jesus Christ. She writes,

Galamison began the drive for racially integrated education because he believed that segregated schooling allowed for inferior housing, underemployment, and persistent poverty that African Americans faced. Indeed, he argued that the engineers of a racist American society intentionally used the substandard ghetto school as the tool for preventing the African American race from enjoying the national promise of liberty.¹¹

Known for his political preaching, Galamison soon grabbed the attention of journalist **Annie Stein** and NAACP member **Winston Craig** to join them in the fight to integrate New

⁹ Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 88.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Brandi N. Hinnant-Crawford, "Pulpit, Pews and Picket Lines: Galamison's Fight to Integrate NYC Schools and the Theology Behind It," *Black Theology* 14, no. 3 (2016).

York's Schools. In 1955, the NAACP elected Galamison to lead their Brooklyn Education Committee. With the help of Stein and Craig, Galamison founded the NAACP Schools Workshop, an organization committed to empowering Black parents to fight for educational quality Brooklyn.¹² In 1960, after leaving the NAACP, Galamison founded the "Parents' Workshop", which continuously published studies about potential integration plans, researched disparities in achievement, and largely educated parents and community members about educational policies that would affect them and their children.¹³ In 1964, Galamison led the largest school boycott in the history of New York City, keeping 464,000 children out of school on February 6.¹⁴

The United Federation of Teachers emerged from an amalgam of disparate teachers' unions in New York in 1960. Headed by **Albert Shanker**, a former math teacher at JHS 126 in Astoria in 1953, the UFT united 106 separate teacher groups into one unit that could engage the Board of Education in collective bargaining to better work conditions for teachers.¹⁵ Soon after forming in March of 1960, the UFT sent a list of demands to Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr. and superintendent Theobald, protesting for "raises, pay for a master's degree, duty-free lunches for elementary teachers, sick days for full-time subs and dues checkoff, so dues could be collected via payroll deductions, rather than by hand."¹⁶ When the Board refused to act on these demands, the UFT set a strike date for May 17, ironically on the Board's "Teacher Recognition Day." The

¹² Taylor.

¹³ Hinnant-Crawford, 197.

¹⁴ Heather Lewis, *New York City Public Schools from Brownsville to Bloomberg: Community Control and Its Legacy*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 24.

¹⁵ Neill S. Rosenfeld, "United Federation of Teachers: 50 Years," United Federation of Teachers (2010), 6.

¹⁶ Rosenfeld, 2.

UFT would continue to bargain with the Board of Education throughout the decade, putting forth lists of demands, and threatening to (often following through with) strike. By 1963, the UFT had succeeded in their bargaining tactics by securing “a \$995 across-the-board annual raise,” and “a master’s increment, a duty-free lunch for elementary teachers, rotation of teaching assignments, relief from non-teaching chores and a grievance system capped by binding arbitration.”¹⁷ Thus, a powerful force in New York Public schools, the UFT would play a major role in the city’s debates around integration and community control.

The Ford Foundation is a liberal philanthropic organization, headquartered in New York City since its founding in 1936. The Foundation’s main charge in its early years was to solve the “urban crisis” plaguing New York City, and to assist in the assimilation of migrant African Americans to the current social order. Because of the rapid “ghettoization” of impoverished Black communities in the city, the Ford Foundation sought ways to integrate neighborhoods, starting in the 1950s in a massive campaign to integrate Puerto Rican children into white public schools.¹⁸ With massive amounts of backlash from white communities, the Ford Foundation turned toward other options of providing quality education to Black and Puerto Rican Children. By 1966, under the leadership of Kennedy’s former National Security Advisor George McBundy, the Foundation had turned to ideas similar to “community control” as a way to uplift these communities from within rather than implying a top-down approach of integration. Coinciding with the era of Malcolm X’s “self-determination” growing in Black communities, McBundy seemed a radical activist rather than another white liberal bending to the rhetoric of “separate but

¹⁷ Rosenfeld, 5.

¹⁸ Karen Ferguson, "The Ford Foundation's Reform From Above in Ocean Hill-Brownsville," *Jacobin*, accessed November 12, 2018.

equal.”¹⁹ During Lindsay’s tenure as mayor, with demands for community control coming from black communities all over the city, the Board of Education turned to the Ford Foundation to assist in the establishment of three experimental districts. George McBundy’s aid in the process of decentralization was Mario Fantini, leader of the Foundation’s Division of Education and Research. He acted as the main channel of communication between the Foundation and Ocean Hill-Brownsville residents.²⁰

Lastly, the most influential player in the Ocean-Hill Brownsville experimental district was the **local governing board**. Made up of community leaders and parents, the board rose to power in 1967 with the establishment of the new district. Led by “Unit Administrator” Rhody McCoy, former principal of a “special service” school in Manhattan, the governing board exerted control over personnel, budgeting, and curricula in their district.²¹ Members included figures like Father John Powis, Reverend Herbert C. Oliver, Hattie Bishop, and Blanche Pile. These men and women were committed to the idea that local people were better equipped to govern their schools than a distant Board of Education. As Rhody McCoy insisted in 1996, thirty years after Ocean Hill-Brownsville, "Decentralization was a strategic move by those involved to defuse a tremendous and growing problem—the discontent of the people of New York with their schools. We decided what kind of curriculum we would teach and who would lead it. That’s community

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Lewis, 40.

control.’²² The power exerted by the governing board would erupt in 1968, as the board voted to transfer 19 teachers out of their district, enraging the UFT and spurring the 1968 Teachers Strike.

Purpose

I believe that this Honors Project will shed light on the most pressing issue of our generation: educational inequity. Through creating equal opportunity for children to thrive in school, the United States can begin to chip away at the centuries of systemic racism that has denied people of color their basic human rights. New York City is the most potent example of the opportunity gap in the United States. With 1.1 million diverse students, and 1,400 plus public schools, low income children and students of color are often barred from succeeding in school.²³ One in five public high school and middle schools require entrance exams, or base their admissions on student GPA or standardized testing. These magnet schools are also the most high performing, and attract wealthier, white families to their districts, further segregating the city by race and socioeconomic class. I argue that this phenomenon has remained consistent since the city’s founding. I hope to give a comprehensive account of this history of segregation in the city in order to shed light on an issue that affects millions of children and families. Education is the backbone of our nation, and unequal education drives unequal opportunity.

²² Joseph Berger, "Seeking Change Where It All Began," The New York Times, December 20, 1996, accessed November 12, 2018.

²³ "Public School Districts in New York City," New York City Schools.

Chapter 1: The Board and the Boycott

“Hosanna to the disturbers and overthrowers of immoral and unresponsive government.”

-Milton Galamison, “On Disorderly Conduct.”²⁴

By the mid-1940s, the desire to desegregate New York City’s public schools permeated Black and Puerto Rican communities. With residential areas largely separated by race, the Board of Education’s neighborhood school model reflected the segregated realities of the city. In the post-war period, legislation like the 1944 Federal Aid Highway Act and the 1949 Federal Housing Act—which provided loans and affordable mortgages in the suburbs almost exclusively to white home buyers—triggered a period of white flight to the suburbs. Moreover, city “revitalization” projects—like Robert Moses’ 1949 “slum clearance” project under Title 1 of the Housing Act—created a policy of “Negro removal”. This resulted in the demolition of hundreds of apartment complexes and the displacement of around 320,000 people—overwhelmingly African American and Puerto Rican.²⁵ Many of these communities relocated to neighborhoods in Brooklyn like Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, and Crown Heights.

This segregated residential landscape had a predictable effect on neighborhood schools: they too became highly segregated. Across Brooklyn, Black and Puerto Rican schools consistently had poorer materials and facilities, and less prepared and more transient teachers. Throughout the 1940s, the NAACP reported countless instances of schools denying Black and Puerto Rican students basic resources, like permanent teachers or textbooks. Black students were

²⁴ Milton A. Galamison, “On Disorderly Conduct,” Siloam Presbyterian Church.

²⁵ Adina Back, “Blacks, Jews and the Struggle to Integrate Brooklyn’s Junior High School 258: A Cold War Story,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 2 (2001), 39.

also disproportionately tracked into CRMD (special education) classes because of “behavioral” issues. One parent told the NAACP that her children were denied textbooks by a bigoted teacher, his reason being, “because they destroyed them.”²⁶

As early as the 1920s, parents and community leaders fought against the treatment of their children in the city’s public schools; one group of Harlem mothers organized themselves into a group called the “Better Schools Club.” Educational activism was particularly present in Bed Stuy, as Black parents fought for improved school quality in their neighborhood in the 1930s and 40s. Founded in 1938, the Parent Teacher Association of PS 35 was especially active in this fight. Led by *Amsterdam News* columnist Maude Richardson, the PTA protested the Board of Education for a kindergarten, an evening school for the Bed Stuy community, and a new building to replace the 64-year old school.²⁷ Using Bed Stuy’s churches, parents, and community organizations, the PS 35 PTA successfully attracted widespread support at meetings and rallies at the First African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. In 1940, Ada B. Jackson took over the PTA, fighting for better resources for the school and again, a new building. In 1942, she led a group of parents to protest at the Board of Education’s headquarters to demand an updated structure to replace their antiquated facilities, illustrating the conditions of poorly resourced African American and Puerto Rican schools in Brooklyn, and the Board’s consistent dismissal of them.²⁸

To the Board of Education, *segregation* in the legal sense, did not exist in New York City.

Rather, as School Superintendent William Jansen contested in 1954, the *separation* of different

²⁶ Back, “Blacks, Jews and the Struggle,” 42-43.

²⁷ Taylor, 61.

²⁸ *ibid.*

racial groups in the city was “natural segregation,” and entirely “accidental.”²⁹ During the Civil Rights era of racial tension in the South, the Board of Education in the nation’s largest school district did not want to admit that segregation was a Northern issue as well. Altogether, the Board refused to even use the word “segregation,” using “separation” as an alternative that did not hold the legal implication of the former.³⁰ A “linguistic shift,” as Adina Back puts it, would illustrate the Board’s official recognition of segregation in their city schools.

By 1954, frustration with the Board of Education was at an all time high. In the wake of the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ruled that separate education was inherently unequal, the New York City Board faced an added pressure to address their educational inequity. That year, at the annual Urban League Dinner on February 15, Kenneth Clark—a renowned black psychologist known for his famed doll experiment that proved Black children formed an entrenched inferiority complex when segregated from white children—delivered a speech about the city’s school crisis.³¹ He explained that New York’s schools were in a “stage of educational decline,” reiterating the grievances brought up by Black and Puerto Rican parents in recent decades.³² He discussed school overcrowding, poor facilities, and most controversially, he accused the Board of purposefully gerrymandering school zones in order to exclude Black and Puerto Rican students from attending the best schools.³³ In one statement, he

²⁹ Adina Back, *Up South in New York: The 1950s School Desegregation Struggles*, PhD diss., Department of History, New York University, 1997 (New York, NY: New York University, 1997),107.

³⁰ Kristopher Burrell. “Would Brown Make It to New York City? The First Phase of the Battle for School Integration, 1954-1957.” (Hooks Institute Publications: October 2003), 3.

³¹ Burrell, 2.

³² Back, “Blacks, Jews and the Struggle,” 42.

³³ Back, 94-95.

seemed to call on Jansen directly, discussing the Board's tendency to deny Northern segregation as a legitimate claim: "Furthermore, the presence of segregation in the public schools in northern cities has been used by those who seek to maintain legal segregation in support of the contention that the pattern of racial segregation is a natural and normal thing in a community made up of people of different races."³⁴ He called on the Board to conduct a study of Black children's experience in school, pressuring the city to take direct action on the issue of unequal schooling.

At first, high ranking administrators on the Board of Education reacted aggressively toward Clark's incendiary comments. They attempted to discredit him by fully rejecting his claims, as Superintendent Jansen declared that "we deny completely that there is segregation other than the segregation caused by the fact that Harlem is so large."³⁵ Some even attempted to "red-bait" him by linking him to the Teachers Union, a known leftist organization. However, with both the recent Supreme Court ruling and Clark's public accusations looming overhead (coupled with Dr. Clark's prominent role in the *Brown* case) the Board could no longer ignore the reality of their declining school system.³⁶ To "show good faith," president of the Board of Education Colonel Arthur Levitt allowed Clark to conduct a study on the condition of mostly-Black schools in 1954.³⁷ Levitt pledged to "fight against ethnic discrimination in the New York City school system."³⁸ Mayor Robert Wagner also agreed to establish the Commission on

³⁴ Back, 93-94.

³⁵ Back, 96.

³⁶ Burrell, 2.

³⁷ Back, 94.

³⁸ Back, 104, footnote 33.

Intergroup Relations—a Board-directed committee solely for the purpose of integrating schools—co-chaired by the outgoing and incoming presidents of the Board.

In conjunction with the Public Education Association—an independent organization that advocated for the bettering of the city’s public schools—Clark set out to study the condition of Black and Puerto Rican children within the school system. In the fall of 1954, Clark and the PEA released their 24-page study to the public. In their research, they focused on the issues of gerrymandering and the discrepancies in educational opportunity, using the question: “Did schools with predominantly Black and Puerto Rican students offer an inferior education to their students?”³⁹ Firstly, the report found that schools were indeed highly segregated. According to the PEA, “71 percent of city schools were comprised of student populations that were either ninety or more percent white or ninety or more percent black and Puerto Rican.”⁴⁰

Moreover, the study wielded proof that segregated schools in mostly Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods were less able to provide quality education to their students. They found that on average, facilities used by Black and Puerto Rican schools were “older, less adequate and not maintained as facilities in predominantly white schools.”⁴¹ The buildings had less space per child, consistently larger class sizes, and fewer specialized rooms. The report also found, using teacher tenure and high turnover rates as measurements, that teachers at these schools were not as “competent” as their white counterparts.⁴² Moreover, schools in Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods were more likely to be labeled as “problem schools,” with more special education

³⁹ Back, 111.

⁴⁰ Burrell, 5.

⁴¹ Back, 111-112.

⁴² Back, 112.

classes and less gifted classes. And across the board, Black and Puerto Rican students had lower results on standardized testing in reading and arithmetic.⁴³

Yet, the Board chose to focus on the study's finding that districts were not necessarily zoned along racial lines. It largely ignored the issue of poorly-maintained schools that increased a growing achievement gap among Black and Puerto-Rican children.⁴⁴ To the Board, the task of intermingling students across neighborhood boundaries did not seem to fall under its purview. De facto segregation was "natural," and to disrupt that meant broken communities. Thus, the Board interpreted the report's findings as a reiteration of what they already knew: schools were segregated, but they were not *legally* segregated by the Board's drawing of district lines. The white public's reaction was similar. One headline in the *New York Times* from Leonard Buder declared, "City Schools Cleared In Segregation Study." Buder reported that "the committee said it had found no significant evidence to indicate that ethnic separation of pupils was seriously considered in drawing school boundary lines," virtually releasing the Board from its responsibility in segregating schools.⁴⁵ This public reaction infuriated Clark, as he responded, "That the Board of Education has been cleared is a misinterpretation of the report," insisting that "verbal tricks [had been] used to mislead the public."⁴⁶ Still, the Board saw the report as a victory in their quest to denounce segregation as a Northern issue.

⁴³ Back, 113.

⁴⁴ Back, 118.

⁴⁵ Leonard Buder, "City for Transfer Pupils This Fall for Integration; 8 Schools Paired; Rezoning and Shift of 6th and 9th Grades to Affect Others," *The New York Times*, May 29, 1964, 23.

⁴⁶ Burrell, 6.

In 1956, just one year after the PEA report, Black and Puerto Rican parents saw the planned opening of Junior High School 258 in Bed-Stuy as the Board's first test of their supposed commitment to integration. By the 1930s, Bedford-Stuyvesant housed the largest population of Black people in the city: by 1957, 66% of the Bedford-Stuyvesant population was Black.⁴⁷ Community members and parents recognized that the schools in their neighborhoods were not delivering a proper education to their children, and fought against de facto segregation of schools in 1940. Schools like PS 3 on Hancock and Bedford Avenues, and PS 44 on Throop Avenue were overcrowded, had shortened their school days from four to six hours because of teacher shortages, and denied hot lunches to their students because of inadequate facilities.⁴⁸ In light of these poor conditions, the Bedford-Stuyvesant School Council demanded integration in their neighborhood schools—a demand that the Board of Education ignored in the 1940s. In 1956, the Brooklyn branch of the NAACP—led by the Reverend Milton A. Galamison of Siloam Presbyterian Church and Annie Stein—wrote a memorandum addressed to the Board protesting the projected placement of JHS 258 and 61. They argued that 258 would ultimately serve a mostly Black population (98%), and 61 would be mostly white.⁴⁹ However, they pointed out that the two schools sat on either end of a twenty-block stretch of interracial housing, and insisted that the Board redraw district lines and offer transportation so that both schools could have integrated student bodies for the fall of 1956.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Back, 125.

⁴⁸ Back, 126.

⁴⁹ Back, 127.

⁵⁰ Back, "Blacks, Jews and the Struggle," 44.

Ignoring their calls for integration, the Board stayed the course for their 1957 opening of JHS 258. Though the new building was built of the “finest stone and steel,” it had the same problems that parents and community leaders had bemoaned for decades. The school had seven unfinished classrooms, a majority of substitute rather than permanent teachers, and a large number of slated teachers already requesting to be transferred to another school.⁵¹ What became clear was that the Board had no intention of integrating JHS 258. They simply disagreed with the NAACP’s zoning plan, with Jansen arguing that the school was “practically inaccessible to non-Negro pupils.”⁵² This case would mark the beginning of the Board’s empty promises of integration and hesitance to enact any large-scale rezoning plans to racially balance schools. This case also marks another instance in a long tradition of grassroots organizing in Brooklyn to better the condition of Black and Puerto Rican schools, as parents and community leaders continually fought for equal educational opportunity in their neighborhood. One of these community leaders on the front lines was Milton Galamison, a Presbyterian preacher in Bedford Stuyvesant.

Reverend Milton A. Galamison

Milton Galamison was born in 1923 in a racially divided Philadelphia. He grew up under the charge of his grandmother, Nellie, left by his father and largely estranged from his mother. Along with his grandmother, Galamison’s main social influence in his youth was church. His family attended St. Michael’s and All Angels, a small Episcopalian church. Their church life set a strong foundation for Galamison to feel supported by his community as a youth, even with his turbulent home life.

⁵¹ Back, “Blacks, Jews and the Struggle,” 46.

⁵² Back, “Blacks, Jews and the Struggle,” 57.

Throughout his childhood, Galamison experienced discrimination in different sectors of his life. He recalled sitting in segregated movie theaters as an adolescent, and enduring bullying by white boys when he crossed into the Italian section of his town, often called racial slurs. He even remembers being burned by a white man smoking a cigarette, merely for being black.⁵³ Galamison also experienced discrimination while in school: like his older brother, Galamison was tracked into vocational classes. However, due to clerical errors in his large public school, Galamison was accidentally placed into a college preparatory class where he excelled immensely. From high school, he continued onto St. Augustine School—a historical Black college in North Carolina—in 1940.⁵⁴

During his freshman year there, Galamison's inkling for political activism began to blossom. While the details surrounding the event are cloudy, it is clear that in 1940, Galamison led a hunger strike to protest the food and/or service in the dining halls. He insisted that after the strike, teachers were biased against him, and he decided to transfer out of the school after one year. He then moved onto Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. Lincoln, the first institution to offer Black scholars higher education, boasted and impressive alumni including Thurgood Marshall and Langston Hughes. There, he began his studies in the divinity program and graduated with honors in 1945.⁵⁵ Convinced by his professors to join Lincoln's divinity school due to his success as an undergraduate, Galamison stayed there until 1947. In this time, he

⁵³ Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 19.

⁵⁴ Taylor, 23.

⁵⁵ Taylor, 25.

became progressively more radicalized through the sharpening of his writing skills and his ability to articulate his childhood hardships.⁵⁶

In 1947, he began to preach at Presbytery Church in Princeton, New Jersey, delivering highly political sermons to his Black middle class audiences every Sunday. He consistently condemned racial discrimination and the classist nature of modern society, preaching that, “it’s hate that’s stupid and blind and without reason—like the way we suffer from the hate of some white people, who simply hate us without bothering to know us.”⁵⁷ He viewed religious figures in the Bible as social radicals who fought against injustice, arguing that Jesus was a man who stood up for oppressed peoples, and that his congregation should do the same.

Well-known for his political sermons and highly regarded in religious communities, Galamison grabbed the attention of Siloam Presbyterian Church in 1948, after the death of its head paster Reverend George Stark. Siloam was one of the most exclusive Black institutions of the city, known for its distinguished congregation and its centric force in the Bed-Stuy community. At the age of 25 years old, Galamison began his career at Siloam and quickly rose to city stardom. Pushing along his career was his masters degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, which he received in 1949. His involvement in the radio programs *The Dumont Morning Chapel* and *Radio Chapel* also furthered his career, as he frequently appeared on the shows to deliver sermons, sometimes including political messages that commented on the poor treatment of “Indians, Mexicans, Negroes, [and] Women” in America.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Taylor, 26.

⁵⁷ Taylor, 28.

⁵⁸ Taylor, 34.

The NAACP Years

By 1954, Galamison had risen to prominence not only in the religious sector, but also in political circles in Brooklyn. When the Brooklyn Chapter of the NAACP heard about the plans for JHS 258 in 1955, they knew needed a renowned community leader to join their ranks. Since Galamison was a radically political preacher at the most influential church in Bed-Stuy—the projected home of JHS 258—he seemed the perfect candidate. That year, NAACP members Annie Stein and Winston Craig approached Galamison to join the Brooklyn branch, and Galamison gladly accepted. As he preached in his political sermons, Galamison believed that segregation psychologically damaged Black children because it told them that they were inferior, saying “We contend that within the framework of segregated education both white and Negro children are crippled emotionally and mentally, irreparably and for life.”⁵⁹ He argued that integration was the only way to ensure equal opportunity for all children in schools, and that it helped to break down class barriers that were oppressive and anti-democratic.⁶⁰

Having joined forces, the trio functioned as a cohesive unit, with each person serving a distinct purpose. Stein, the daughter of Russian emigres, had moved to New York City after helping to desegregate lunch counters in Washington DC in 1949.⁶¹ After moving to the city, Stein quickly became active in educational circles, joining a local PTA at the request of friend, and eventually becoming present of the JHS 246 PTA. Soon after, she joined the Brooklyn branch of the NAACP and turned her full attention to educational justice for all children. Within the trio, Stein was the statistician, publishing reports and newsletters on the state of educational

⁵⁹ Taylor, 60.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Back, "Blacks, Jews and the Struggle," 45.

inequity. Galamison, a talented and persuasive public speaker, was the frontman and spokesperson. Craig, the chair of the organization's Education Committee, functioned as an internal organizer, garnering support for the JHS 258 fight within the NAACP.⁶²

In 1955, Galamison, with Craig, became a co-chair of the Brooklyn branch's Education Committee and helped to establish the NAACP Schools Workshop, an interracial group dedicated to helping parents advocate for themselves and their children in Brooklyn schools.⁶³ By 1957, Galamison was the president of the Brooklyn chapter of the NAACP.⁶⁴ Throughout his tenure as president, Galamison ensured that the fight for school integration would remain at the forefront of the chapter, continuing to pursue the case of JHS 258. Outraged by the Board's hesitance to adopt any actual plans for integration, Galamison demanded that the Board rezone the districts around JHS 258. He warned that if the Workshop's demands were not met, the NAACP would call for Jansen's resignation. At the NAACP's national headquarters, though, high level administrators like president Roy Wilkins worried that Galamison's actions were becoming too radical and urged him to curtail his inflammatory comments.⁶⁵ Galamison remained persistent, though in his demands. He was especially angered by the fact that the Board of Education was more concerned about pleasing white teachers than Black children. In September of 1957, an integrationist grassroots organization called "Parents in Action Against Educational Discrimination" protested at City Hall, demanding an equal share of qualified teachers in Black and Puerto Rican communities. Appearing before the protesters, Mayor

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Back, "Blacks, Jews and the Struggle," 9.

⁶⁴ Taylor, 72.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

Wagner promised to schedule a meeting with Superintendent Jansen. However, just before the meeting, Jansen published a “Progress Report on Integration,” a vague report that claimed the Board’s purported integration of a number of schools.⁶⁶ However, during the meeting, Jansen refused to name the schools where the supposed integration had taken place. He also came under fire for not setting a timeline for teacher transfers, simply stating that he was “working on that.”⁶⁷ In response to the 1957 protests and stalling of teacher transfers, Galamison declared: “We must determine whether the New York City school system exists for the benefit of the children of New York City or whether it exists for the benefit of the professional staff.”⁶⁸

The Parents Workshop

Throughout his time in the NAACP, Galamison fought for school integration. And though the fight to end JHS 258 ended in disappointment, the case established Galamison as one of the most prominent educational activists in the city. After leaving the NAACP in 1958, Galamison embarked on a new chapter of his career: devoting his time to empowering Black and Puerto Rican parents—expanding the work he had begun in the Schools Workshop.⁶⁹ With Stein, Galamison founded the Parents Workshop in 1959. Their mission statement was clear:

To work for the integration for the schools of New York; [to work] for full and equal opportunity for learning for all the children of our city; to end all school discrimination against Negro and Puerto Rican children; and to preserve, improve, and expand our free and democratic public school system.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Taylor, 76.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Taylor, 77.

⁶⁹ Galamison left the NAACP in 1958, claiming that he had experienced organizational difficulty in the group. In a 1970 interview, Galamison explained that he felt hindered by the group’s “other interests which sometimes took precedence over that I thought ought to be given priority.” (Taylor, 88).

⁷⁰ Lisa Yvette Waller, “The pressures of the people: Milton A. Galamison, the parents’ workshop, and resistance to school integration in New York City, 1960–1963,” *Souls: Critical Journal of Black Politics & Culture* 1, no. 2 (1999), 33.

The organization believed that Black and Puerto Rican parents needed to take the initiative to overcome discrimination within the public school system. To do so, parents had to become well-versed in the issues of integration. Initially housed at Siloam, the group was poorly funded, with memberships offered at the rate of one dollar for individual boosters and ten dollars for PTAs, which composed a large number of the group.⁷¹ Mostly, meetings congregated in Brooklyn and Manhattan, but the group also had pockets in Queens and the Bronx.

Galamison and Stein's main charge was to develop leadership skills in parents, urging them to go to their local schools and inquire about their children's progress, regularly meet with teachers and officials, and demand to know how schools are improving standards.⁷² Moreover, one of the Workshop's central tenets was that *desegregation* was the most powerful way to ensure educational equity. The organization outlined this belief in a statement to parents: "The Parents Workshop for equality in NYC Schools is organized to help you and the children in your school by combining the efforts of all parents in search of full equality, desegregation and a better education for all children."⁷³ Galamison strongly believed that integration was the ultimate goal, arguing that "separate but equal" education was "fallacious and that no educational atmosphere, however comparable the physical equipment, can provide an equal education if it is separate."⁷⁴

In 1960, Galamison, Stein, and Parents' Workshop leader Thelma Hamilton started the Workshop's campaign to force the Board of Education create tangible integration plans. They

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Taylor, 98.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Taylor, 99.

requested to schedule a meeting with the new Superintendent Theobald for April 25. In anticipation of the meeting, Galamison and Stein encouraged parents to both write postcards to Theobald with their demands, and to attend the meeting.⁷⁵ On April 25, 1960, 200 parents protested at the Board of Education headquarters with the Parents Workshop. At the meeting, the parents expressed frustration at the lack of opportunity for their children in the current segregated school system. Galamison argued that the neighborhood school model only affirmed this segregation and widened the achievement gap. Along with Galamison, several women from PTAs in Bed-Stuy, Williamsburg, and Brownsville contested that Theobald's "timid gradualism," was more concerned with placating racists than making better schools for their children.⁷⁶ With their demands unmet, the Workshop spent the spring and summer of 1960 planning a mass sit-out and holding rallies to pressure the Board to integrate. Local leadership within the different chapters of the organization effectively recruited parents to help them spread the word about the sit-out. "Area captains" would receive a mailing list of churches and local organizations, and create distribution committees to stuff envelopes and disseminate information about integration activism. Support from local churches flooded in as well, as they offered to accommodate families who planned to sit out of schools. Their tactics succeed, as Theobald called a meeting with the Parents' Workshop one day before the official opening of the school year in September.⁷⁷ He agreed to implement a new integration program called Open Enrollment—a permissive zoning initiative that marked the Board's first official strategy to desegregate public schools. Open Enrollment meant that black children from overcrowded schools could attend a select

⁷⁵ Waller, 34.

⁷⁶ Waller, 35.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

number of underutilized white-majority schools. As a voluntary program, Black families had to elect to join the program, meaning that there would be no transfers of white pupils.⁷⁸

The Board initiated Open Enrollment as a pilot project in the fall of 1960, waiting until 1961 to fully implement the program across the city. The Board of Education's Central Zoning Unit selected participating schools based on the racial composition of the student body and rate of space utilization. For "receiving" elementary and junior highs, the schools had 75% or more "other" (white) students and were utilized below 90%. For "sending" schools, 90% or more of the students were Black or Puerto Rican. The sending students would receive an application from their school that their parents would need to fill out if they want to be transferred.⁷⁹ The Parents' Workshop worked relentlessly to make Open Enrollment work for their communities. The organization published reading scores and locations of receiving schools, publicized transportation routes, and offered assistance to families applying for the program. Galamison also established the Jefferson Avenue Educational Center at Siloam, offering remediation in reading and math so that participating students would have an easier adjustment to a more rigorous curriculum. One flier circulated to parents read:

THIS IS IMPORTANT! Most of the damage suffered by our children because of separate and unequal schools occurs in the elementary grades... compare the reading levels of the sending and receiving schools, and you will see the advantage of transferring your child.⁸⁰

While the Parents' Workshop worked tirelessly to make Open Enrollment a successful integration plan, Black student participation was limited. Overall, Black families were

⁷⁸ Podair, 24.

⁷⁹ Waller, 36.

⁸⁰ Waller, 39.

ambivalent about the program, arguing that transferring their children out of neighborhood schools meant that in order to succeed, children had to leave black communities. Parents also complained that Open Enrollment put the onus solely on them and their children to integrate schools, ignoring the responsibility of white families in the fight for educational equity. The program also created a kind of tokenism, forming a system in which a small number of the local schools' brightest students would transfer, reflecting poorly on their neighborhood.⁸¹ Moreover, parents claimed that they received limited information about Open Enrollment from their schools. Principals would often circulate Open Enrollment materials at times that there would be a low response, sometimes refusing to circulate materials entirely. Many school administrators similarly feared that transferring their brightest students would create a "brain drain" that would negatively affect their schools.⁸²

Another issue with Open Enrollment was the response from receiving schools. Black parents feared that their children would be bullied if they attended majority white schools, and often their fears were realized. In one Open Enrollment school in the Bronx, the thirty transferred students would have to enter the building through a side door and remained in their classroom all day—even having lunch and recess indoors and segregated from their white peers. Similarly, white parents from Flatbush reported that Black children were kept in one tiny section of the cafeteria. Wholly, the voluntary nature of Open Enrollment proved to be a massive barrier, as the Board of Education refused to recognize that white families in receiving schools might exhibit the same bigotry as white segregationists in the South.

⁸¹ Waller, 38.

⁸² *ibid.*

Already by 1963, parents and activists like Preston Wilcox—a professor of social work and Harlem resident— were disillusioned with Open Enrollment and sought new plans for bettering neighborhood schools. Hinting at the idea of “community control”, Wilcox condemned Open Enrollment, arguing that the plan demonized black schools and damaged communities. He argued that the solution to the school problem was to improve local schools, even if they remain segregated, proposing a plan to increase services and remedial programs in the Harlem-Yorkville area.⁸³ This growing sentiment was significant, as it signaled a desire for locally controlled schools years before the community control movement would fully manifest in the battle for IS 201.

By the fall of 1963, the Board of Education had abandoned Open Enrollment and moved onto a new plan called Free Choice Transfer. This plan allowed children from predominantly black and Puerto Rican schools to attend underutilized white schools, but this plan did not have strict designations for “sending” and “receiving” schools. Rather, any Black or Puerto Rican student could transfer to any underutilized white school. Still, this program had limited participation and failed to take shape because of its voluntary nature. Even the New York State Board of Education recognized these plans’ ineffectiveness, writing in a 1964 report entitled

Desegregating the Public Schools of New York City:

We must conclude that nothing undertaken by the New York City Board of Education since 1954, and nothing proposed since 1963, has contributed or will contribute in any meaningful degree to desegregating the public schools of the city. Each past report, each current plan, and each projected proposal is either not aimed at reducing segregation or is

⁸³ Waller, 40.

developed in too limited a fashion to stimulate even slight progress toward desegregation.”⁸⁴

Thus, activists began to turn away from voluntary programs, demanding school reorganization and *non-voluntary* plans that would force the movement of white students to create racially balanced schools.

For Milton Galamison, integration and educational equity meant the same thing: he believed that segregation psychologically damaged students of all races, as it asserted an inherent inferiority of Black children. In a 1964 interview, he declared,

My opinion is – and I’m trying to turn this over in my mind – my opinion is that the only real equality for Negroes in America is integration. That is, short of integration he has no equality. Short of his participation in the mainstream of American life in terms of the same education that everyone is getting, in terms of the same kind of housing everyone else is getting, in terms of the same kind of housing everyone else is getting, and in terms of the same kind of employment that everyone else is getting, he can’t have any kind of equality. And these areas of life are denied him basically, we feel, anyway, because of race.⁸⁵

His faith also spurred his actions around integration, as he believed that fighting for racial equality was his Christian duty. In his sermons, Galamison would often draw comparisons to the persecution of Christians to modern day discrimination against Black people. During a Christmas sermon in 1964, Galamison delivered a sermon about King Herod’s attempt to murder Jesus by conducting a mass slaughter of children. The sermon, entitled “What Child is This?” asserted that children were still being “slaughtered” by systemic racism and unequal schooling. He argued,

⁸⁴ Madeleine E. López, "New York, Puerto Ricans, and the Dilemmas of Integration," in *From the Grassroots to the Supreme Court: Brown v. Board of Education and American Democracy* (Duke University Press, 2004), 306.

⁸⁵ "Interview with Milton Galamison," interview by Robert Penn Warren, Robert Penn Warren's "Who Speaks for the Negro?" (1964).

There are those in our society who are coming to understand that not only are children being destroyed, but that destruction is connived and deliberate ... it is not an accident that 85 percent of our children are retarded in achievement. It is not an accident that our children are not motivated to learn. It is not an accident that the disproportionate amount of discipline problems are in our schools ...It's all a part of a gigantic and historic Herodian conspiracy to cripple and destroy our race.⁸⁶

Galamison stressed the importance of ensuring the best possible education for the children of his community. To the preacher, the only way to ensure equitable resources, teacher quality, facilities, and treatment of students was to have Black and white students sit side by side in the classroom as equals.⁸⁷

The Boycott

By 1963, the Board of Education felt the pressure to integrate schools from Galamison, the Parents Workshop, and other organizations in the city. During the summer of that year, Galamison organized and chaired the Citywide Committee for Integrated Schools which included the six city chapters of the NAACP, the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), the National Urban League, the Harlem Parents' Committee, and the Parent's Workshop for Equality.⁸⁸ Together, they threatened a boycott if their demands were not met institute a citywide integration plan with mass movements of students. By late 1963, Galamison had begun to get support from other groups, including the Harlem Parents Committee and the NAACP, who advised him to conduct a one day boycott of schools. For assistance, Galamison reached out to Bayard Rustin, an organizer in the 1940s for CORE and a former leader of the Young Communist League. Fearing the boycott's growing ranks, the Board of Education declared that

⁸⁶ Brandi N. Hinnant-Crawford, "Pulpit, Pews and Picket Lines: Galamisons Fight to Integrate NYC Schools and the Theology Behind It," *Black Theology* 14, no. 3 (2016), 203.

⁸⁷ Taylor, 60.

⁸⁸ Taylor, 121.

they would create a timetable and establish a policy integration council, but Galamison knew that yet another council and report would fail to institute any definitive integration plans, saying “Let us not be fooled by shallow counterfeit effort to create the illusion of good intention.”⁸⁹ In a four and a half hour meeting with Rustin and Galamison, the new Superintendent of Schools Dr. Calvin Gross promised to deliver a plan to integrate schools by December 1, 1963, with detailed explanations of the techniques they'll use to institute their plan.⁹⁰ On December 1, Gross failed to present any plans for integration. In a succinct yet ominous response, Galamison said that the Parents Workshop would “answer this breach of faith in due time,” signaling the inevitability of the boycott.⁹¹

Over the course of the following months, Galamison set to work spreading the word about the impending boycott. Throughout December and into the new year, Galamison held planning meetings at Siloam with local organizations and civil rights groups. He mobilized hoards of ordinary people to organize for the boycott, recruiting volunteers to work in boycott centers producing and distributing information about the boycott throughout the city. One of the most significant examples of grassroots organization was the establishment of over 500 Freedom Schools which would operate on February 3—the day of the boycott—from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.. Local residents, including licensed teachers, college students, and parents acted as teachers on the day of the boycott.⁹² The creation of these Freedom Schools won over parents who were skeptical of their children sitting out of school for the boycott. They also affirmed a strong connection between the Parents Workshop and their affiliated communities across the city.

⁸⁹ Taylor, 122.

⁹⁰ Taylor, 124.

⁹¹ Taylor, 125.

⁹² Taylor, 134.

Another key element in Galamison's organizing was his ability to utilize local churches for preparing the boycott. One flier distributed to churches read, "Be sure each minister in your area has leaflets by Saturday and is committed to distribute them on the day before the Boycott. Ask him to announce the Boycott from the Sunday pulpit—and make his church available as a Freedom School or Freedom Center."⁹³ He even used his own preaching to increase involvement in the series of boycotts he would plan that winter. In one sermon entitled "The Modern Rip Van Winkle" Galamison discussed individuals who were "sleeping through" the revolution in the city. He likened them to Jesus' disciples who fell asleep while they were supposed to keep watch to protect him, saying that his congregation's metaphorical sleeping was destructive to the children who needed help in the current school crisis:

Black children need to see black faces in textbooks. Black children need to see black principals administrating the schools. Black children need to read about black heroes in the history texts. Black children need to feel loved and respected and appreciated. The youngsters who have dropped out and joined the street gangs and surrendered to narcotics are not those who have failed in school. They are those whom the school has failed.⁹⁴

On January 29, four days before the boycott, the Board of Education submitted a plan for integration to the Citywide Committee as a last ditch effort to postpone the demonstration. But the report contained nothing new—it blamed segregation on housing and claimed that a mass movement of students would create "chaos."⁹⁵ They recognized that the vast majority of schools with shorter hours of instruction were Black and Puerto Rican, and they offered to bus those children to underutilized schools. They also offered to create a pairing program that would be tested in the fall of 1964, but not fully implemented until 1966. The Committee

⁹³ Hinnant-Crawford, 198.

⁹⁴ Hinnant-Crawford, 199.

⁹⁵ Taylor, 136.

rejected these proposals and kept the boycott date for February 3, perhaps further fueled in their anger after the Board's admission of guilt.⁹⁶ With the boycott and picket lines carefully orchestrated by Rustin—under instruction to have lines be “carried out in a quiet and orderly fashion”—parents and organizers were ready for the sit-out.

On February 3, 1964, the Board of Education estimated that approximately 464,361 students (around 45% of the city's total enrollment) stayed home from school.⁹⁷ Peaceful picket lines filled the streets at 400 schools around the city, and over 3,500 demonstrators marched to 110 Livingston Street singing freedom songs in the frigid February weather. Rustin and Galamison were thrilled by the results of the event, with Rustin declaring to reporters that “the boycott and the rent strike are fair warning that the civil rights revolution has reached out of the South and is now knocking at our own door.”⁹⁸

The boycott was a demonstration of the undeniable power of grassroots organizing. Rustin, the undisputed mastermind behind the intricacies of the protest, and Galamison, the frontman and voice of the people, had created the city's largest sit-out in history.⁹⁹ In an era of Civil Rights, Galamison appealed to the moral consciousness of New Yorkers who saw a glaring issue with their city's segregated schools. More importantly, Galamison utilized the power of parents who felt that they and their children were oppressed and ignored by the Board of Education. This demonstration proved that grassroots organizing against Jim Crow era institutions were not merely a Southern phenomenon. Even scholarship in recent decades posit

⁹⁶ Taylor, 137.

⁹⁷ Taylor, 142.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Waller, 32.

Northern cities as places in which “spontaneous” rioting or protesting against racial discrimination occurred. As Dorothy Newman, Nancy Amide, and Barbara Carter discussed in their 1978 work about Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant school protests: “Theirs was not the carefully organized and skillfully articulated protest of the nonviolent movement in the South. Thus was spontaneous.”¹⁰⁰ But as Waller argues, these scholars ignore the power of grassroots organizing and civil rights activism in the North, writing: “These analyses posit a passive, disorganized, inarticulate African American population in the urban North. They presume that Northern African Americans waited for the struggles of their Southern counterparts to bring them liberation.”¹⁰¹ School segregation was a Northern *and* a Southern issue, and Black and Puerto Rican parents in New York City recognized this fact. Believing that integrating schools was the only way to ensure an equitable distribution of teachers and resources, city leaders and parents organized to orchestrate one of the city’s largest protests in its centuries-long history.

¹⁰⁰ Waller, 32.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

Chapter 2: “Separation” Not “Segregation”

Directly following Kenneth Clark’s damning indictment of New York’s segregated schools, the Board of Education scrambled to address the issue at hand. Having publicly supported the outcome of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and insisting that segregation “damages the personalities” of black pupils, the Board had made clear their intention to equal the playing field for New York City students.¹⁰² However, the Board faced formidable barriers in creating and implementing integration plans throughout this city. The largest and most hostile of those barriers was white communities, tirelessly defending their right to neighborhood schools. Fearful of the Civil Rights Movement creeping up into their city and threatening their way of life, white parents sprung into action to protest any and all integration plans set forth by the Board. In the late 1950s, opposition to busing and school-pairing plans took center stage. By the mid-1960s, formalized institutions dedicated to maintaining segregated school sprung up in the outer-boroughs and grew exponentially in membership. This chapter will discuss three phases of white resistance to integration: first, the unwillingness of white communities and school officials—including the Board of Education—to recognize segregation as a problem in their city; second, white anti-busing and school pairing campaigns; and third, the foundation of the Parents and Taxpayers organization in 1963. I argue that the vehemence of white hostility toward integration confirms that the battle for school desegregation was not one solely fought in the South, and was equally as contested in Northern cities.

¹⁰² Podair, 22.

Sub-Commission Woes: Baker vs. Jansen

After the publication of the Board-Commissioned PEA study, President of the Board Arthur Levitt and Superintendent Jansen faced the issue of how to implement the study's recommendations while maintaining their denial of "segregation" as a Northern issue. Jansen, an avowed proponent of the neighborhood school model, was particularly obstinate in this regard. However, hoping to present the Board as more supportive toward desegregation efforts, Public Relations Assistant Paul Aron suggested that the Board "show good faith" and set up a commission to directly address concerns brought forth by the PEA study.¹⁰³ Thus, the Commission on Integration was born, consisting of nine Board members, twenty-three civic leaders (including Kenneth Clark and NAACP leader Ella Baker) and five supervisors. The Commission was co-chaired by Arthur Levitt, having just stepped down to become state controller, and his incoming replacement Charles Silver.¹⁰⁴

The Commission's goal was to develop recommendations for addressing problems that the PEA had pointed out. It had eight sub-commissions with five members each, created to focus on specific issues: zoning, educational standards and curriculum, guidance, educational stimulation and placement, teacher assignments and personnel, community relations and information, physical plant and maintenance liaison, and special committee on research and materials. Before implementing their recommendations, each sub-commission needed approval from the Board. The Board approved most recommendations by the Spring of 1956, but the

¹⁰³ Adina Back, *Up South in New York: The 1950s School Desegregation Struggles*, PhD diss., Department of History, New York University, 1997 (New York, NY: New York University, 1997), 108.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

Zoning Commission took significantly longer to agree on a recommendation: the Board didn't give approval until late February 1957.¹⁰⁵

The lag in approval was largely due to difference in opinion within the Zoning Commission. Coming head-to-head were Superintendent Jansen, opposed to even using the word "segregation" when referring to the state of city schools, and NAACP representative Ella Baker. Baker insisted that the Board be held accountable for school zoning, requesting explicit language outlining that this responsibility fall solely on the Board and not dispersed throughout the districts to be handled by Assistant Superintendents. She urged the Commission to create a Central Zoning Unit that would have the power to reshape districts as a direct arm of the central Board.¹⁰⁶ Jansen, resistant to the idea that the Board could even control segregation patterns in housing and school districts, insisted that doing so would be an "unnecessary slap at the Assistant Superintendents."¹⁰⁷ Adopting an unspoken policy of the Board, Jansen also maintained color-blind rhetoric that insisted school reform happen to relieve overcrowding, not necessarily to uplift Black students. Baker argued that in order to actually integrate schools, race needed to be a factor in rezoning districts. In their months-long battle, Baker succeeded in the commission's final report. After 4 drafts, the Board approved the recommendation for a Central Zoning Unit to which Assistant Superintendents would be answerable. Their recommendation called for the Central Zoning Unit to draw maps showing the racial composition of schools, and allow for selective bus transportation to promote integration.¹⁰⁸ Though Baker won in her pursuit of

¹⁰⁵ Back, 163.

¹⁰⁶ Back, 160.

¹⁰⁷ Back 161.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

creating this branch of the Board, implementing the Central Zoning Unit's re-districting would be a near-impossible task. Here, white parents and communities enter the story, refusing to comply with the Board's new policies and flooding Superintendent Jansen and President Silver with letters throughout 1957.

Parents' main concern was the notion of busing: both the busing of their children *out* of neighborhood schools, and the prospect of busing Black children *into* their district. The term "busing" began to appear in news reports and public hearings in 1957. The *Wall Street Journal* first warned white parents of this phenomenon directly after the Zoning Unit's recommendation to the Board, grossly overstating the plans and warning that white children would be sent to far corners of the city for schooling. Journalist Peter Bart warned, after 200 Black children were bused to P.S. 93 in the Bronx,

This is only the beginning. A 'master plan' to speed up the integration process for New York's 925,000 public school pupils has been drawn up by the subcommittee on zoning of the Board's Commission on Integration. If approved, the plan will take effect next September. It proposes extensive use of city-financed buses to create racially balanced schools and suggests that racial integration should be the sole objective of school zoning.¹⁰⁹

He added that the plans constituted an "enforced mass migration of school children."¹¹⁰ The *Associated Press* issued a similar report, claiming that "The nation's biggest city has gone beyond legal requirements that all races be admitted to schools on an equal basis, and is taking additional direct action to foster interracial student bodies. The move could set a trend."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Matthew F. Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 32.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Delmont, 33.

White Parents Respond

White parents acted quickly to counter the Zoning Unit's busing recommendations. In over 2000 letters sent to the Board of Education in 1957, parents berated the Board members: "Do you gentlemen honestly believe that you can then ship out children back to some slum school... to spend their lunch hours on streets that are civic cesspools...without a fight on your hands?"¹¹² One letter from an "Irate Parent" read, "Do you think that I and so many others like me moved to this neighborhood so that our [children] would be uprooted and have to travel to a place at an uncomfortable distance!"¹¹³ Other letters were more clear in their bigotry, with one parent writing, "The Negro is emerging from ignorance, savagery, disease and total lack of any culture. Is it necessary to foist the Negro on the White Americans for fair play?"¹¹⁴

Justifying their concern over busing, teacher organizations and parent groups stressed the logistical issues of sending their children to school far away from home: if a medical emergency were to occur, for instance, how could parents reach their child? The Teachers Alliance expressed this fear, challenging the Commission to picture the weight of tasking a teacher with an ailing child, "Which one of the Commission members has ever had the responsibility of caring for a nine year old with an acute attack of appendicitis while trying to reach a parent?"¹¹⁵ Parents also feared that their children might miss out on extracurricular opportunities in their neighborhood if they were to leave the district.¹¹⁶ Others were simply concerned about adding

¹¹² Delmont, 33.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Delmont, 34.

¹¹⁵ Back, 212.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

“to New York’s traffic woes.”¹¹⁷ Stoking even more controversy, the Teachers Alliance evoked Cold-War era Red-scare tactics, arguing that in the case of an atomic attack, bussed children would be so far away from home that they might be separated in a war-torn city.¹¹⁸

Another tactic white communities utilized to derail segregation was “Red-baiting.” Specifically, parents targeted the NAACP for its communist sympathies, arguing that re-zoning children was a communist plot to terrorize New York City schools. An article from *The Leader Observer* newspaper in Queens entitled “The Red Plot to ‘Rezone’ Your Children” claimed that “parents, alert and interested in the welfare of their children are puzzled,” adding, “they know that there is no segregation in NYC.”¹¹⁹ White parents in East Queens also received anonymously sent pamphlets with ominous titles like, “The Ugly Truth about the NAACP” and, “The Red Hand in New York Schools,” warning that the NAACP was a communist organization.¹²⁰

While white parents continued to justify their concerns in terms of logistics and fears of a communist hand in the system, the most salient motivation for protest in white communities was their perceived loss of power. The Board stepping in to divide up educational resources and thus spread opportunity to other demographics was a direct threat to white dominance in New York. Some parents advised the Board not to bow to “strong Negro pressure groups,” and one concerned citizen writing from Philadelphia warned, “Do not let the Negro politicians and

¹¹⁷ Back, 212

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Back, 227.

¹²⁰ Delmont, 33.

spellbinders mislead you.”¹²¹ Some were more overt in their racial stereotyping of Black students, and simply did not want their children socializing with those they deemed educationally inferior. One white parent, Mrs. Kolin, asserted, “There is no segregation in N.Y. City public schools, so why integration,” adding that desegregation of schools might “spread possible delinquency tendencies rather than arrest them.”¹²² This sentiment reflected both white communities’ perception of black children’s inherent behavior *and* a refusal to recognize segregation as a legitimate issue plaguing New York’s schools. Others framed their anger toward bussing around homeowner’s rights. Parents argued that they often chose their neighborhood because of the school, threatening to leave the district if busing were to take effect. This confirmed the Board’s fears that integration would drive the white middle class into the suburbs.

In response to threats from white parents, the Board was quick to clarify the specifics of their integration plans. In a meeting with over 700 white Queens parents, Jansen attempted to quell busing fears stoked by the media, saying, “These rumors are completely false. No such action is planned.”¹²³ The Board also validated white communities’ refusal to accept the term “segregation” into their lexicon when considering the nature of New York City schools. In memos entitled “Supplement to the Reports” sent out to parent organizations, the Board made their stance quite clear, stating, “There is no official segregation in NYC; it is outlawed by statute. However, there is a concentration of certain ethnic groups in some schools in NYC resulting from the residential patterns.”¹²⁴ Again, the Board asserted that remedying “natural”

¹²¹ Back, 214.

¹²² Back, 215.

¹²³ Delmont, 34.

¹²⁴ Back, 222.

segregated residential patterns was beyond the reach of the Board. In one meeting with white parents, Jansen assured that Board “[had] no intention whatsoever of long-distance busing or busing of children simply because of their color.”¹²⁵ It also assured that children would not be bussed from one borough to another; rather, the only busing would take place for kids in overcrowded schools transferring to local underutilized school. Again, this assurance affirmed color-blind rhetoric of the Board, as memos refused to recognize race as the defining factor in school transfers. Finally, the Board assured that all rezoning around neighborhood schools would depend on parent consolation, ensuring that the Board would bend to white community concerns over the disassembly of their local schools.

The Sub-Commission’s battle to implement these integration plans set the tone for the next ten years of educational strife. With a Board fearful of upsetting a powerful white middle class and resistant to admit that their city was indeed “segregated,” integration of schools continued to stall. Galamison and the Parents Workshop would fight the Board to take action in the coming years, but white resistance would continue to dominate in the Board’s eyes. This trend was especially salient in the battle over schools in the Glendale-Ridgewood section of Brooklyn.

Galamison and the Glendale Boycott

Two years following the Commission on Integration’s recommendation, the Board had taken little action in the way of desegregating schools. The NAACP’s 1959 report, the “Progress of the Integration Program,” reported that urban areas suffered from de facto segregation and

¹²⁵ Delmont, 34.

thus, inferior education. They pointed to inexperienced teachers and poor physical plants as further causes of this opportunity gap. In 1954, the PEA reported having 42 segregated elementary schools and 9 junior high schools in NYC. By 1959, that number had grown to 72 elementary and 12 junior high schools. Five years after the PEA report, Black and Puerto Rican parents still endured daily attacks on their children who were labeled as culturally inferior, put into nonacademic programs, and performed poorly in reading and math.¹²⁶

Black and Puerto Rican parents rightly blamed the Board for an increase in segregated schools. The Board had issued statement after statement informing the public of their intention to integrate schools, but were consistently hesitant to fully implement any concrete plans. In 1957, the Board adopted a plan for permissive zoning—permission to attend school other than your assigned school—but this only extended to high schools.¹²⁷ While the Commission on Integration recommended busing to racially balance schools, Jansen rejected, saying that such tactics should only occur when schools were overcrowded. Moreover, he required parental permission before any child could be transferred, effectively bowing to pressure from white parents to abandon race-based transfers altogether. In 1959, after three years of working with Black and Puerto Rican parents to transfer children, the NAACP published a report entitled “Progress of the Integration Program,” highlighting the little improvement in segregated schools. In a chapter entitled “The City Has Not Kept Faith,” the Report reads, “Instead of progress in the desegregation of the schools, the intervening years have brought rapid extension of segregated schooling. This has been accompanied by public statements by responsible officials justifying the

¹²⁶ Taylor, 80.

¹²⁷ Taylor, 81.

status quo under the euphemism of ‘neighborhood school.’”¹²⁸ It explained that only 90 transfers had taken place; schools were still segregated, and Black and Puerto Rican schools were immensely overcrowded. For example, P.S. 287 had 487 students without seats, and students received less than a full day of instruction.¹²⁹ 500 separate parents all signed petitions to transfer their students, and each one was denied by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Central Zoning, illustrating the Board’s hollow intent to ever alleviate overcrowding.

Following the rejection of parents’ pleas to transfer their children out of P.S. 287, Galamison informed President Charles Silver that parents of the school and NAACP would formally petition the board for transfers to underutilized schools. The NAACP also requested a meeting with Silver and board member Gardner Taylor to discuss broader issues of integration across the city. Pushing the Board further to recognize their hypocrisy, Galamison attached a letter reminding Silver that the Board had already agreed to transfer children out of overcrowded schools, and that the Central Zoning Unit had the authority to arrange these transfers.¹³⁰ At this point, 85% of segregated schools were overcrowded, with one-third housing 300 children above their capacity.

In response to Galamison’s plea, new Superintendent John Theobald agreed to transfer 400 students out of overcrowded schools in Bed-Stuy to Glendale, home to several underutilized white schools. However, adopting language similar to his predecessor Jansen, he assured the public that these transfers were simply to relieve overcrowding, not racially motivated.

¹²⁸ “Progress of the Integration Program In the Public Schools of the City of New York,” report (Brooklyn, NY: NAACP, 1959), 5.

¹²⁹ Taylor, 82.

¹³⁰ Taylor, 86.

Celebrating his success, Galamison hosted a rally at Siloam featuring guest speakers such as Adam Clayton Powell Jr. and a recorded message from Jackie Robinson.¹³¹

Hearing of the impending transfers, white Glendale parents sprung into action. In an attempt to protect their neighborhood schools, Glendale parents boycotted “Chock Full O’ Nuts” coffee, because its spokesperson Jackie Robinson was an avowed supporter of the transfers. To counter the boycott, Galamison called on both his congregation and other local churches to double their purchases of that coffee.¹³² Relentless in their mission, Glendale and Ridgewood parents organized taxpayer groups to protest the proposed transfers, marching 400 individuals to the Board of Education headquarters at 110 Livingston Street, bearing signs saying “Neighborhood schools for all,” “Bussing creates fussing,” and “We have just begun to fight.”¹³³ In addressing the protesters, Theobald stated, "By permitting parents of these children who are on doubled session, getting only four hours of instruction a day, to send them to schools within a 3.1 mile radius from their homes in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the Board of Education is not contradicting the concept of neighborhood schools in which we have always believed. I have said from the beginning that the transfer of these children would continue only until places were provided for them in new buildings planned for that Brooklyn area.”¹³⁴

Moving along with the plan, the Board transferred 400 children into Glendale-Ridgewood schools in 1959. The students bused to Glendale faced racial harassment, greeted with the phrase “Blacks go home” scrawled on the front and side of one Queens elementary school. Another

¹³¹ Taylor, 86.

¹³² *ibid.*

¹³³ Delmont, 39.

¹³⁴ Taylor, 86.

elementary school exhibited bigoted behavior when the principal ordered a search of all Black students for weapons based on false rumors from white parents.¹³⁵ Stein, visiting these schools to assess their progress, witnessed white parents picketing outside the front doors, even watching one parent spit on a child at P.S. 68 while a nearby police officer refused to act. White parents also protested the transfers by simply keeping their children at home, conducting a one day boycott that kept 40% of white Glendale children home. Stein reported that this tactic resulted in only one school having full attendance on the first day of the 1959 school year.¹³⁶

The vehemently hostile reaction from white parents toward desegregating schools illustrates the enormity of the Civil Rights Movement in New York City. Parents at this time even recognized this, drawing similarities between school integration in North and the South. One parent organization formed in 1957 called the “Parents in Actions Against Education Discrimination” was dubbed the “Little Rock Nine of Harlem” by the *Amsterdam News*.¹³⁷ And white hostility toward Black children entering their neighborhood schools would only escalate in the coming years. The largest and most powerful white anti-integration group would appear in the early 1960s, and force the Board to choose between equal educational opportunity or white dominance.

¹³⁵ Delmont, 39.

¹³⁶ Taylor, 87.

¹³⁷ Delmont, 37.

The Parents and Taxpayers Organization

By 1963, the Open Enrollment plan had been in the works for two years.¹³⁸ Galamison and the Parents Workshop had worked tirelessly to make Open Enrollment work for their community, but progress was slow moving. As evidenced by the previous chapters, the Board of Education had a very exploitable weakness: it was a very slow-to-act bureaucracy, and had never had a leader take the initiative to integrate public schools in a meaningful and efficient way. White parents saw this weakness and used it further stall integration plans, recognizing their power as the city's white middle class and threatening the Board with their potential departure. With this demographic opposing Open Enrollment, the Board was hesitant to make any meaningful actions toward desegregation.

In August of 1963, responding to the threat of boycotting from Galamison, the Board announced a new integration plan called Free Choice Transfer, which allowed any student in an overcrowded school to transfer.¹³⁹ The Board also announced the impending implementation of the "Princeton Plan," which would take shape in the fall. This plan called for school pairing, adjoining Black and white schools within close proximity of each other. It would also redraw district lines in order to create racially balanced schools. In Jackson Heights, Queens, race-based pairing would take place at JHS 275. The Princeton Plan intended for the junior high school to be one-third white, one-third Black, and one-third Puerto Rican.

Jackson Heights residents were not pleased with this plan. With a primarily Jewish and Italian population, Jackson Heights was home to civil servants, small business owners, and

¹³⁸ See Chapter 1 for more information on the Open Enrollment Plan.

¹³⁹ Again, see Chapter 1 for more information on Free Choice Transfer.

families who had a distinct desire for upward mobility. These residents regarded Black people as lacking ambition, and feared that integrated schools would drag down the achievement-oriented nature of the community. Thus, the Parents and Taxpayers organization was born in 1963, directly following the announcement of the Princeton Plan. Led by Bernard Kessler, a Jewish lawyer; Joan Addabbo, an Italian housewife; and Rosemary Gunning, an Irish community activist, their main charge was to protect neighborhood schools from Board interference.¹⁴⁰ In reality, their primary concern was protecting their power over New York's educational sector. As historian Matthew Delmont argues, the naming of the group "Parents and Taxpayers" effectively claimed that whites "occupied a higher level of citizenship than black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, who were also parents and taxpayers."¹⁴¹ The name also implied the importance of homeownership and community to these parents, who attempted to frame their anti-integration arguments in terms of homeowners' rights and a community nostalgia. One parent remarked, "I want my children to go to school where I went to school and that's just two blocks away."¹⁴² Other parents echoed this sense of ties to their community, with one saying, "This is my neighborhood. I was born and raised here. Just like my folks. There's a lot of second and third-generation families out here. It's a real neighborly place—not like New York City where nobody cares who lives next door and nobody owns their own home."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*. (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2002), 27.

¹⁴¹ Delmont, 26.

¹⁴² Podair, 28.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

While the PAT never took an official anti-Black student stance (they argued that they only opposed the busing of their children, not the busing in of Black children), their language regarding Black people suggested an intense bigotry behind the movement. One member commented, “I wouldn't live in Harlem for anything in the world. I'd scrub floors. I'd take in laundry. I'd get any kind of job and I know I'd succeed because in the United States anybody can do a anything if he tried hard enough... If a Negro lives in Harlem it's because he doesn't want to work hard enough to get out of that environment.”¹⁴⁴ This comment highlights the group's firmly-held belief in the reality of an “American Dream,” and that Black people were educationally behind because of their lack of ambition. Others believed that bringing Black children into their schools would decrease their child's educational ability, with one member stating, “I don't know why the Negroes are behind, but they are, and I don't want them hurting my child's chances in school.” Another member's bigotry was even more clear: “If I was God, what would I do to improve the lot of the Negro? I'd make everybody white.”¹⁴⁵

This community sentiment expressed by the PAT spread from Jackson Heights into other white outer-borough areas. By late 1963, there were over 100 chapters in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Growing to over 300,000 members, the group was quick to mobilize in their fight against integration. In March 1964, the PAT marched from the Brooklyn Board of Education headquarters to City Hall in Manhattan, calling for Mayor Wagner and Board of Education to abandon race-based pairing.¹⁴⁶ The rally drew over 10,000 parents bearing signs saying, “We oppose voluntary transfers,” “Keep our children in neighborhood schools,” “I will not put my

¹⁴⁴ Podair, 27.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Podair, 29.

children on a bus,” and, “We will not be bused.”¹⁴⁷ Capitalizing on the novelty of a white march in a Northern city the *New York Times* reported that “Most of the demonstrators were taking their case into the streets for the first time.” Reporters from NBC and ABC filmed streets with long lines of protesters, panning past scores of marchers as they crossed the Brooklyn Bridge and giving them national visibility. One mother, in an interview with NBC, asserted that the March was meant to imitate protest tactics traditionally used by Black populations: “We feel like we can prove as much as our opponents to use the same tactics. We have as much right as they do. These are our civil rights and we’re taking advantage of them.”¹⁴⁸ These parents had a recently executed model to follow, borrowing tactics from Galamison, Rustin, and the Parents Workshop, who had organized the largest Civil Rights demonstration in the history of the United States earlier that month.

In response to the national attention afforded to the PAT protest, Rustin and local Civil Rights groups sought ways to counter-protest. Rustin and Galamison made plans for a second school boycott to follow their massive success earlier in the month, saying “WE will be successful if we can top the anti-integration people by one person... I’ll be happy with 15,00 and one Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and whites.”¹⁴⁹ Doris Innis, a member of CORE, reflected on the PAT protest, and how it changed the course of the Civil Rights Movement in New York: “When 10,000 Queens white mothers showed up to picket city hall against integration, it was obvious we had to look for other solutions.”¹⁵⁰ Her sentiment was well-founded, as the novelty

¹⁴⁷ Delmont, 23.

¹⁴⁸ Delmont, 12.

¹⁴⁹ Delmont, 24.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

of white protest drew unprecedented attention to the battle over integrated schools in New York. Media outlets gave equal weight to the PAT protest and other Civil Rights protests in the city, including Galamison's massive school boycott. In specials aired around the PAT protest, reporters highlighted statements from both leader of the PAT Rosemary Gunning and Galamison. This tactic illustrated both sides of the argument as equal, making efforts to keep schools segregated seem much more reasonable in a northern context.¹⁵¹

The PAT's protest even came up during debates around the Civil Rights Act on Capitol Hill in 1964. Senator Absalom Robertson of Virginia read to colleagues from the news ticker from day of the protest, reporting, "Nearly 15,000 parents opposed to planned busing of their children for public school integration descended on city hall today in the largest civil demonstration there in years."¹⁵² South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond brought it up again in April, arguing that "In New York, where students were 'bused' around, such a howl went up that 15,000 people assembled in protest against the practice."¹⁵³ For these Southern white senators, Northern white protest highlighted that opposition to integration was happening across the nation. These senators argued that Northern cities were being protected from busing propositions, while their Southern states were targeted for integration. The PAT protest had a lasting effect on the Act, as an anti-busing provision made its way into the legislation.

In September 1964, the PAT organized a school boycott that kept 275,000 home, nearing the number accomplished by Galamison and Rustin.¹⁵⁴ One week after the boycott, the *New York*

¹⁵¹ Delmont, 48.

¹⁵² Delmont, 26.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Delmont, 48.

Times ran a story entitled “Poll Shows Whites in City Resent Civil Rights Drive,” reporting results from a survey commissioned to study the extent of “white backlash” sentiment in the city. Author Fred Powledge reported, “While denying deep-seated prejudice against Negroes,” the majority of white New Yorkers “said they believed the Negro civil rights movement had gone too far... and spoke of Negroes’ receiving ‘everything on a silver platter’ and of ‘reverse discrimination’ against whites.”¹⁵⁵

Late September 1964 saw the climax of the PAT’s anti-integration campaign, when the Board of Education announced an official pairing plan for Jackson Heights. In response, the PAT established a private school to avoid integration—the first instance of such an event within the modern civil rights movement in a northern city.¹⁵⁶ The PAT operated this separate elementary school for the entire 1964-65 school year and part of the next year, with PAT members and neighbors acting as faculty and staff. The Board of Education tried to close the school with threats of truancy against their children, but they could not close its doors until 1966, thanks to the school’s support from the hundreds of other chapters. While Jackson Heights was the only place to establish a separate school, white parents across the city reacted aggressively toward the Princeton Plan. During the 1964-65 academic year, 35% of white students in paired schools left for other neighborhoods—three times the percentage of non-paired schools.¹⁵⁷

In the end, their protests and threats against the Board of Education worked in halting progress of integration plans. “Traumatized” by the threat of massive white flight and resistance, the Board of Education cut back on the planned number of paired schools, while curtailing both

¹⁵⁵ Delmont, 48.

¹⁵⁶ Podair, 29.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

Open Enrollment and Free Choice Transfer options.¹⁵⁸ White community mobilization against integrating schools illustrates how strongly bigotry permeated New York City during the Civil Rights Movement. Northern white protest also drew such striking similarities to Southern white racists that, during the terrorization of Glendale students, a group of Black mothers staged a counter-protest bearing signs that said, “This is N.Y.C. not Little Rock.”¹⁵⁹ Black parents would soon have to find ways to cope with the Board’s inability to remedy the educational crisis at hand, as it seemed the white backlash would not cease. The next chapter will discuss steps taken by Black and Puerto Rican parents to ensure the best education for their children.

¹⁵⁸ Podair, 30.

¹⁵⁹ Delmont, 39.

Chapter 3: Community Control and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis

“If the white man turns out to be the villain in this story, such is the testimony of history.” -Les Campbell, 1968.¹⁶⁰

“We must determine whether the New York City school system exists for the benefit of the children of New York City or whether it exists for the benefit of the professional staff.”-Milton Galamison, 1957.¹⁶¹

“If one can believe that a predominantly ‘de facto segregated’ white school can be a ‘good school’, then, one must believe that a ‘de facto segregated’ and predominately Negro and Puerto Rican school can also be a ‘good school.’”-Preston Wilcox.¹⁶²

In the wake of failed protests and wavering attempts to integrate on the part of the Board of Education, Black parents expressed frustration about the displacement of their own children from neighborhood schools and into white enclaves. Though Galamison’s 1964 boycott was regarded as a success in its magnitude—with over 464,000 students (44.8% of the public school population) sitting out of school to protest the Board of Education’s failure to integrate—Black and Puerto Rican parents saw little improvement in their city’s schools.¹⁶³ The Board’s resistance to integration was arguably heightened by the boycott, as superintendent Bernard Donovan remarked that the boycott was a “lawless course of action” and that he would not

¹⁶⁰ Charles Isaacs, “A JHS 271,” *The New York Times*, November 24, 1968.

¹⁶¹ Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 77.

¹⁶² Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City 1805-1973: A History of the Public Schools as Battlefield of Social Change* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 293.

¹⁶³ Heather Lewis, *New York City Public Schools from Brownsville to Bloomberg: Community control and Its Legacy*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 24.

“react one inch” to the demands of parents and community members.¹⁶⁴ Even Galamison, arguably the staunchest integrationist of the era, felt disheartened by the progress of desegregating schools, saying in a 1964 interview that

New York City has not made meaningful steps in the direction of desegregating the school system. They are hedging and avoiding and procrastinating, and managing all kinds of efforts which are not bringing about the timely and the planned desegregation of the school system. They feel free to place the onus for integration on some Negroes in terms of open enrollment, but they do not feel that white children apparently should be inconvenienced in any way to help bring about a desegregated classroom, and this is the thing that distresses me.¹⁶⁵

Integrationist rhetoric had dominated the landscape of educational equity for over a decade. But with a resistant Board and numerous unsuccessful integration plans, Black parents saw the need for a new route toward scholastic equity that would increase quality of school for their children without reinforcing the notion that Black children must attend white schools in order to succeed. Jerald Podair describes this dissatisfaction with school integration plans. He notes that busing Black students out of their neighborhoods generated among parents “the feeling that to receive anything good you must leave Negro neighborhoods.”¹⁶⁶ While battles with the Board of Education continued to drag on well into the 1960s, Black parental focus shifted onto improving the schools in their own neighborhoods, and having a greater say in their makeup. This shift in thought and desire to create locally-run schools manifested in the community control movement of the late 1960s.

¹⁶⁴ Taylor, 139.

¹⁶⁵ "Interview with Milton Galamison." Interview by Robert Penn Warren. Robert Penn Warren's "Who Speaks for the Negro?" June 17, 1964. Accessed December 9, 2018.

¹⁶⁶ Jerald Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*. (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2002), 25.

Community control as a concept is a significant movement toward an entirely different form of activism from integration. Community control was a direct response to the failure of integration, and the continued backlash from white communities refusing to allow integrated schooling. The movement was a way to reclaim the role of neighborhood schools in a way that would empower Black and Puerto Rican communities to invest themselves in the future of their children. Neighborhood schools of the past were segregated, dilapidated, and failed to provide quality education to Black and Puerto Rican children. But community-controlled schools were institutions governed by the people, and tuned into the localized needs of communities that were underrepresented and ignored by the white-washed Board of Education.

Intermediate School 201

The desire for community control of schools was most apparent in the case of Harlem's Intermediate School 201. In the Spring of 1966, The Board of Education's integration efforts took shape in the "Allen Plan," which promised to integrate schools in areas where interracial mingling could happen without a mass movement of students—on the border of Black and white neighborhoods. Harlem's Intermediate School 201 (for fifth through eighth graders) would be the first racially integrated school opened under the Allen Plan. The Board intended to build the school close to the East River on far edge of Harlem, making it accessible to whites from Astoria and Long Island City.¹⁶⁷ The Board then initiated a summer-long campaign in Astoria and Long Island City to recruit white students to the school, distributing over 10,000 fliers that advertised a chance for "successful living in a democratic, multi-cultural

¹⁶⁷ Podair, 34.

and multi-racial city.”¹⁶⁸ Still, white parents did not want to send their children to an integrated school. The plans for the building relocated back to central Harlem. Thus, before the official opening, the Board of Education revealed that the school would be entirely Black and Puerto Rican. As district superintendent Daniel Schreiber said, “Yes, I.S. 201 will be integrated—50% Negro and 50% Puerto Rican.”¹⁶⁹ This move enraged local parents. The Board of Education promised them a racially integrated school, and in a broader sense, to create increased opportunity for their children to succeed. Organizing into an Ad Hoc I.S. 201 Committee, parents protested the school plans by writing to Superintendent Donovan. In January 1966, Harlem Parents Committee leader Isaiah Robinson wrote Donovan, asserting that the “50-50” tactic to make the school seem integrated “will attract the strongest, most militant protest from this organization and others allied with us in the struggle for real racial integration of New York City Schools.” He warned that this move would “turn IS 201 into a battleground.”¹⁷⁰ Ignoring their pleas and continuing with his plan to open the segregated school, superintendent Donovan appointed Stanley Lisser, a white liberal integrationist, as Principal without consulting IS 201 parents, angering them even more.¹⁷¹

Within EQUAL—a racially diverse organization previously committed to integration—parents began to tinker with the idea of community control. In a 1966 EQUAL meeting, Harlem Parents Committee leader Isaiah Robinson jokingly proposed that parents should accept segregation and run their own schools—an idea that would change the course of educational

¹⁶⁸ Podair, 34.

¹⁶⁹ Lewis, 24.

¹⁷⁰ Ravnich, 295.

¹⁷¹ Podair, 35.

history in New York City forever.¹⁷² One white EQUAL member recalled the events of the meeting:

Isaiah Robinson suggested, almost as a joke, that since white children would not be sent into Harlem schools and Black children were not being invited downtown in any meaningful numbers, maybe the Blacks had better accept segregation and run their own schools. A jolt of recognition stung all of us: Isaiah's joke was a prophecy . It is hard to get across the sudden sadness we all felt. We were close, loving friends. Now we had to agree to separate because the society would not recognize our marriage and, one way or another, the Black children had to be legitimized.¹⁷³

Reacting to the community organization evidenced by the Ad Hoc Parents Council and a growing disillusionment with integrationist rhetoric, Preston Wilcox (the leader of Harlem's Massive Economic Neighborhood Development civil rights organization, or "MEND") saw an opportunity to rally parents around the idea of community control. In the winter of 1966, he circulated a position paper called "To Be Black and Be Successful" which outlined for IS 201 to become an experimental district under the control of a community members. He called for a "School-Community Committee" that would be made up of local people and selected by students and parents. The committee would have broad control over personnel and instituting new programs within the school. Wholly, the Committee's main charge would be to engage the local community in their neighborhood schools.

In March 1966, the Ad Hoc Parent Council met with superintendent Donovan to present the Wilcox plan, only to be rejected. A month later, during another meeting with Donovan and Mayor Lindsay, Wilcox proposed a revised plan that gave the Committee the power to hire a principal. He argued that in order for the principal to be accountable to the community and fully understand the specialized needs of the school, he must be selected by local people. This

¹⁷² Podair, 35.

¹⁷³ Podair, 35.

sentiment was a persistent one in this fight for community control, as Black activists contended that Black society and white society were indeed so different that a white principal could never properly lead an all-black school.

During the spring and summer of 1966, Harlem parents had all but abandoned integration as their course of action for IS 201. Empowered by the Wilcox plan, parents were convinced that community control of schools would ensure educational quality for their children. In the summer of 1966 Livingston Wingate, Ad Hoc member and executive director of HARYOU-ACT, Harlem's largest anti-property organization, declared that "We must no longer pursue the myth that integrated education is equated with quality education."¹⁷⁴

On September 12, 1966—the scheduled opening day of IS 201—parents and activists flooded the Harlem streets to protest the segregated, air-condition-less, windowless school. Parent Sarah Frierson, president of the African American Parent Teacher Association at PS 179 in Harlem, was one of these parent protesters. Her children were planning to attend this school on its opening day, as she thought, like many others at the time, that her schools would improve in funding and teacher quality if white children were bused in. When it became clear that IS 201 would not be integrated, she became a community organizer for educational equity. She argued that only way to improve Harlem schools was to get parents involved and have them fight for more than elusive integration plans. On the opening day of 201, she and other Black and Puerto Rican parents pressured city officials to delay the opening until they published an actual plan for improving IS 201.¹⁷⁵ This protest attracted members from the Harlem Parents Committee,

¹⁷⁴ Ravitch, 298.

¹⁷⁵ Lewis, 24-25.

EQUAL, MEND, HARYOU-ACT, CORE, SNCC, and the African American Teachers Association.¹⁷⁶ They protested for community-controlled schools, a Black Principal, and a local board. They formed a “Parent-Community Negotiating Council” to communicate these demands to the Board of Education. Though Lisser was able to keep his job due to the immense negotiating power of the United Federation of Teachers—arguably the most powerful entity at the time in New York’s education system—the fight for community control of IS 201 marked a dramatic shift in thinking for Black parents who recognized the discrepancies in education between their children and white children. Annie Stein, wrote of the IS 201 case:

With school reform now open for discussion, Black and Puerto Rican community groups came to realize—it was almost inevitable—that tinkering with a bureaucracy would not bring education to their children. If they wanted a school system responsive to their aspirations, a system which did not blame its professional failings on the children it failed, they would get it only by running the schools themselves.¹⁷⁷

By December 1966, with the Board of Education still refusing to address overcrowded and unsuccessful schools, parents and community leaders from Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods took over the Board of Education’s Brooklyn Headquarters to protest the poor conditions of their schools.¹⁷⁸ As parent Lillian Wagner explained at the demonstration, the city’s higher income districts across the board had higher salaried teachers, and this attracted a more qualified staff. In 1966, one in five elementary and junior high students citywide was reading two years behind grade level, and a two to five year achievement gap existed between

¹⁷⁶ Podair, 35.

¹⁷⁷ Annie Stein, "The Real Story Behind the Crisis in the NY Schools," *The Public Life* 1, no. 1 (October 21, 1968), 2.

¹⁷⁸ Lewis, 1.

students in Black and Puerto Rican schools and students in majority white schools.¹⁷⁹ As the Board members hastily attempted to exit the meeting in response to these accusations, the protesters proudly occupied the empty Board seats and declared themselves the “People’s Board of Education.” Over the next two days, the People’s Board remained in the headquarters to draft a statement that called for teacher and administration accountability, and an increased focus on employing locals as Teaching Assistants in their schools.¹⁸⁰

These demands were a drastic departure from the widely-supported calls for school integration in years past. Two years earlier, Presbyterian pastor and activist Milton A. Galamison led the city’s largest ever school boycott to protest the Board’s segregationist policies. Now the president of the “People’s Board of Education” and the founder of the Citywide Coalition for Community Control, Galamison argued that integration was no longer the solution to providing quality education to Black and Puerto Rican students. Rather, he believed that parents and community members should push the Board of Education to grant greater rights for community control of schools. Heather Lewis articulates the inception of this new educational activism: “Community control was proposed as a grassroots antidote to the Board’s call for yet another task force report on the problems of education in disadvantaged areas.”¹⁸¹ It was apparent that the Board of Education would never institute the city-wide population shifts through busing or redrawing of district lines to achieve true educational integration. Thus, parents argued that local communities knew the individual needs of their neighborhoods and demanded the right to make decisions (in budgeting, in teacher screenings) regarding their children’s schools through local

¹⁷⁹ Lewis, 2.

¹⁸⁰ Lewis, 2.

¹⁸¹ Lewis, 3.

governing boards. For Galamison’s “People’s Board,” community engagement in school issues from parents across socioeconomic status was necessary to ensure *all* community members would have a voice.

Finally in November, after months of negotiations between parents and city officials throughout 1967, the Board of Education—in conjunction with George McBundy of the Ford Foundation—agreed to set up three experimental districts to test the effectiveness of community control. The Board of Education granted these experimental districts the right to elect their own school governing boards, which would make decisions about curriculum, teaching strategies, resource allocation, budgeting, and personnel.¹⁸² The ultimate purpose of the experiment was to ensure that parents could “come up with plans that reflect their own felt needs for the education of their children.”¹⁸³ They established one district in Harlem, one on the Lower East Side called Two Bridges, and one combining the neighborhoods of Ocean Hill and Brownsville in Brooklyn.¹⁸⁴ All three of these districts represented an opportunity to build on existing community involvement in schools. In Ocean Hill-Brownsville, parents organized themselves into an independent school board—Local School Board No. 17; in Harlem, parents from IS 201 created the Ad Hoc Council to directly engage with the Board of Education; in Two Bridges, community organizations including The Two Bridges Neighborhood Council (TBNC) and the Lower Eastside Neighborhoods Association (LENA) sought to improve education in their

¹⁸² Lewis, 37.

¹⁸³ Lewis, 27.

¹⁸⁴ Lewis, 31.

community and instituted programs to engage parents in local schools.¹⁸⁵

Ocean Hill-Brownsville

Ocean Hill and Brownsville are adjacent neighborhoods in Brooklyn. In 1966, the two communities served a similar demographic of largely Black and Puerto Rican families as a result of white flight in the early 1960s. Outside of the overcrowding and poor facilities in their schools, Ocean Hill-Brownsville had a host of issues that plagued the community: the district had an overwhelmingly young population, with 45% of the community aged under 21. And of those over the age of 25, the majority only had an average education of eight years, illustrating the lack of knowledge about educational quality and school governance among the Ocean Hill-Brownsville population.¹⁸⁶ With a massive population of school age children, Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools could not accommodate the neighborhood demographic. While the population was overwhelmingly young and largely uneducated, the residents of Ocean Hill-Brownsville provided ample evidence of commitment to their neighborhood schools before the official opening of experimental district. To the Board of Education, Ocean Hill-Brownsville was the perfect candidate for the community control experiment. In 1967, the Board of Education had combined Ocean Hill-Brownsville with the very white neighborhood of East Flatbush into one district Number 17 in an attempt to integrate the neighborhood's schools. But this move merely

¹⁸⁵ Maia S. Merin, *The "other" Community Control: The Two Bridges Demonstration District and the Challenges of School Reform, 1965–1975*, PhD diss., New York University, 2014 (New York, NY: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015), 81.

¹⁸⁶ Lewis, 36.

created an overwhelmingly white school board that ignored the Ocean Hill-Brownsville voices of Black and Puerto Rican parents. In response to this, Ocean Hill-Brownsville parents created their own independent, unofficial school board called “School Board No. 17” which included Milton Galamison. Moreover, the “People’s Board of Education” incident in 1966 proved that Ocean Hill-Brownsville parents were intent on gaining locally controlled schools for their children.¹⁸⁷

The Board of Education’s support for community control was largely due to the approval from two major city actors: Mayor John Lindsay and surprisingly, the UFT. Mayor John Lindsay—serving the city from 1966 to 1973—grew up in a white upper-class family on the upper east side. Throughout his mayoral career, he displayed a concern for underprivileged communities. He feared that New York City was becoming increasingly segregated, saying, “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one white—separate and unequal.”¹⁸⁸ Attempting to integrate schools across segregated neighborhoods, though, proved to be a nearly impossible task. As was evident in the case of the Parents and Taxpayers group, his strategies angered a hostile white middle class. They felt that the Board of Education was ignoring their children in a system that prioritized integration for the benefit of black children. Thus, Lindsay liked the idea of community control, because it offered a solution to educational inequity that would avoid mass movement of students across the city, address the concerns of Black and Puerto Rican parents, and quell the anger of white parents.

For the United Federation of Teachers, community control was initially a threat to their influence over city schools. First founded as the Teachers Guild in the 1930s, the UFT began

¹⁸⁷ Podair, 73.

¹⁸⁸ Podair, 36.

its career as a socialist, “anti-supervisor” group that preached socially progressive school reform. By 1966, though, the UFT had become its own bureaucratic institution; 30,000 members strong, it virtually co-ran the city's schools with the Board of Education. Superintendent Donovan and UFT President Albert Shanker were “familiar and cooperative.”¹⁸⁹ To the UFT, community control meant decentralization of New York City schools. This meant that rather than negotiating with one central Board of Education—a friendly institution to the UFT—it would have to deal with many smaller school boards in order to wield any influence.

However, the UFT saw an opportunity in the experimental Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. In negotiating with the new district’s local boards, the UFT hoped to designate all eight new Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools as More Effective Schools (MES).¹⁹⁰ The UFT designed the MES program to mitigate the effects of poor school conditions in impoverished neighborhoods by mimicking small, private suburban schools that had “radically smaller classes maximum 22 instead of 31 or more), the innovation of prekindergarten, and support services for students, including clusters of expert teachers, psychologists, social workers and community coordinators.”¹⁹¹ Because MES schools had more specialized programs, they required more teachers and specialists, often warranting 2-3 more teachers per class.¹⁹² If Shanker and the UFT could successfully designate all eight Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools as MES, they could continue to influence hiring and personnel issues in the experimental districts by ensuring multiple positions per school for UFT teachers.

¹⁸⁹ Podair, 43.

¹⁹⁰ Podair, 81.

¹⁹¹ Neill S. Rosenfeld, "United Federation of Teachers: 50 Years," United Federation of Teachers, 2010, 6.

¹⁹² Podair, 73.

The UFT and Ocean Hill-Brownsville residents spent the summer months planning the new school system for their district. Again, the UFT's main charge was to designate all eight schools as MES. Shanker and the UFT expected the local board to exert limited control over school governance, hoping that Donovan would eventually appoint a district superintendent.¹⁹³ But Mario Fantini, the education liaison for the Ford Foundation, worked with Ocean Hill-Brownsville residents to ensure that their governing board would have legitimate control over hiring, firing, budgeting, facilities, and curricula. Sidestepping both the UFT and Superintendent Donovan, the Ford Foundation offered a \$40,000 grant for the Ocean Hill-Brownsville project, routing the funds through local Reverend John Powis' Our Lady of Presentation Church, and the Institute for Community Studies at Queens College, an organization aiding in setting up the experimental district. Their plan was to make the district as separate as possible from Donovan and the UFT. While Donovan did admit that Fantini's empowerment of the governing board was moving too "definitively," he never reprimanded the governing board or the Ford Foundation for their actions. He feared accusations of racism, especially after the IS 201 controversy in 1967. Thus, Ocean Hill-Brownsville residents, with the ICS and the Ford Foundation, set off to create an elected board, a unit administrator, and plan of operation by September.¹⁹⁴

Once popularly elected by community residents, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville governing board sought to address issues of overcrowding, dilapidated facilities, teacher absenteeism and turnover, and poor achievement of its students. Board leaders like Blanche Pile and Hattie Bishop were well-versed in the issues of community organization, and brought these skills to the

¹⁹³ Podair, 82.

¹⁹⁴ Podair, 83.

table while fighting to increase institutional quality in Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools. Pile, an early supporter of the Independent Local School Board of District 17 in 1966, was a parent who knew how to inquire about accountability from city officials.¹⁹⁵ In 1966, she requested information about the reading scores in her district and was denied access, illustrating her willingness to demand quality in community schools. Bishop, another parent, conducted her own research about student achievement in the district and discovered that Ocean Hill-Brownsville students were reading 3-4 years below grade level.¹⁹⁶

Before the official opening of the district, parents appointed former “special service” school principal Rhody McCoy as the superintendent for the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district. As an advisor for the board during the summer months, he proved a formidable leader in the effort to increase the district’s school quality. His main charge was to empower parents across class lines to “defend their political and educational positions” and engage in professional development to create a community of effective leaders.¹⁹⁷ He encouraged parents to practice their public speaking skills, develop plans to run effective meetings, and publicize the work in their district to the press. His focus was on creating a governing community that eschewed the “selfish attitudes and desires to emerge as leaders” often found in PTAs and in bureaucratic institutions like the Board of Education.¹⁹⁸ He also emphasized the importance of young people in the district’s decision making. As president of the governing board Herbert Oliver recalled, sometimes board meetings would attract up to 800 people, encouraging communication and

¹⁹⁵ Lewis, 37.

¹⁹⁶ Lewis, 38.

¹⁹⁷ Lewis, 40.

¹⁹⁸ Lewis, 41.

responsive policymaking in local schools.¹⁹⁹ For McCoy, board meetings were an incredible representation of the community's commitment to local education. He recalled: "Oh, It was a joy to go to a board meeting. Not only were the board members present, but the community folk was sitting around. And they had as much input as the board members. And it was always on a positive note—how do we help the youngsters?"²⁰⁰

The teachers of Ocean Hill-Brownsville also felt the community enrichment taking place in the experimental district's classrooms. At JHS 271, teacher Charles Isaacs recognized the district's emphasis on a strong faculty connection to students and their parents. He also commented on the power of a community rallying behind a school that prioritizes Black student success—a concept that the Board of Education and former neighborhood schools never did:

If we succeed where others have failed, the explanation will not lie in minor reforms of a decadent educational system. If the children learn now, it will be because they want to more than ever before. It will be because they do feel the sense of community which is developing, and because their parents now participate actively in their education. They know that their teachers have faith in them, and more important of all, they are learning to have faith in themselves.²⁰¹

Before the experimental district, four out of five teachers in Ocean Hill-Brownsville were white. After the emergence of community control, young Black teachers flocked to the district, creating an environment where Black students felt more at home. Eighth grade student Karriema Jordan commented on this shift in teaching staff, "You felt more accepted. You

¹⁹⁹ Lewis, 41.

²⁰⁰ "Interview with Rhody McCoy," interview by Louis Massiah, *Eyes on the Prize Interviews*, October 12, 1988, accessed November 13, 2018.

²⁰¹ Charles Isaacs, "A JHS 271," *The New York Times*, November 24, 1968.

weren't the outsider in your own school. They were a part of your environment. I mean they were Black, you can identify with them. And they can identify with you."²⁰²

Community control of Ocean Hill-Brownsville also resulted in an increased focus on Afro-centric education and cultural awareness for its students. Classrooms now included discussions around African heritage and racial pride. Karriema also noticed this change in curriculum, commenting that Black teachers "broadened our perspective of looking at things. We were no longer members of small community called Ocean Hill-Brownsville. We were broadened to W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey [...] We became international, and it was a good thing because Black people are the third world and the third world is much larger than European history."²⁰³

Les Campbell, another teacher from JHS 271, taught African American history in the experimental district. Throughout his teaching career, the Board of Education labeled him as a "Black militant," and he continually faced accusations of teaching racial hatred in his classroom. He was suspicious of the "white liberals" he saw emerging in the fight for equitable education, and was a firm believer in the notion that Black people should control their own lives and fate.²⁰⁴ At JHS 271, he taught a class about the origins of Africana civilizations: the building of Ancient Egyptian monuments, the eventual European invasion that wrenched Africans from their homes, and the enslavement of Black people in America. He once commented on this curriculum that

²⁰² *Eyes on the Prize*, "(Part Nine) Power! 1967-1968," PBS, January 21, 1987–March 5, 1990.

²⁰³ *Eyes on the Prize*.

²⁰⁴ Isaacs, "A JHS 271."

“if the white man turns out to be the villain in this story, such is the testimony of history.”²⁰⁵

According to Shanker, Afro-centric education contributed to the issue of bigotry in schools, giving the UFT more reason to turn against the experimental districts and lay the foundation for the Board of Education to become skeptical of its purpose and goals.

While the board itself was successful in many regards in creating a cohesive governing unit, they would soon meet immense challenges in their clashes with the United Federation of Teachers.

UFT Clashes

In September 1967, tensions between the UFT and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville governing board continued to heighten. The UFT had proposed a clause that would give teachers the right to permanently remove a “disruptive child” from their classroom without consulting the student or parents. Moreover, they protested the Board of Education for more schools with an MES designation in order to create more job opportunities for UFT teachers. Shanker also hoped to institute a policy that would eliminate performance reviews for teachers after three years of experience: in effect, teachers would not be held accountable for lesson plans, classroom decorum, or criticism from administrators.²⁰⁶ Black and Puerto Rican parents were horrified by these demands. To them, the disruptive child clause was proof that UFT teachers did not care to teach poor, misunderstood children. When the Board of Education hesitated in granting these requests, the UFT called for a mass resignation of teachers on September 11, 1967. In the largest

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Lewis, 43-44.

school district in the country, this 1967 strike forced schools to close for almost three weeks. Teachers protested under the slogans “Children need the chance to learn” and “Teachers want the chance to teach,” implying that “disruptive children” hinder the entire schooling process and should be removed from public schools entirely.²⁰⁷

In response to the impending UFT strike, Ocean Hill-Brownsville board member Dolores Torres vowed to keep the district’s schools open—a move that angered the UFT and its Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers.²⁰⁸ Moreover, Rhody McCoy’s appointment of five new principals from outside the city’s Examination lists (including the city’s first Asian and first Puerto Rican principals, and two Black principals) was a direct refusal to follow the city’s “merit system” and seek special approval from the State Commissioner of Education. To the UFT, this was a blatant disregard of protocol.²⁰⁹ During the summer before the 1967-68 school year, McCoy and Reverend John Powis hosted luncheons at each of the eight schools to garner support for the new principals and teacher representatives for the governing board. But they were met with intense hostility from teachers who refused to vote on representatives in protest of the governing board. Eventually, African American teachers would elect representatives to the board, but hostility between the UFT teachers and governing board members would continue to mount.²¹⁰ While the strike was divisive and surely disruptive to the newly establish Ocean Hill-Brownsville district, it had unintended positive outcomes. During these three weeks, board

²⁰⁷ Lewis, 44.

²⁰⁸ Lewis, 44.

²⁰⁹ Dorothy Hart Hirshon, "Report on Three Demonstration Projects in the City Schools from the New York City Commission in Human Rights," Citizens Commission on Human Rights Newsletter, March 1968, 11.

²¹⁰ Lewis, 45.

members and Ocean Hill-Brownsville residents filled the open positions left by striking UFT members and volunteered at schools. By doing so, these board members became even more confident about the effectiveness of the experimental district, seeing the effects of parent and community engagement in the schools first-hand.²¹¹ In a 1988 interview, Rhody McCoy reflected on the power of parent involvement, saying, “The parents, when they manned the classrooms during the strike, their eyes opened, their hearts opened, and they began to understand, or believe, or break that myth that there was something mystical about teaching, and that they were qualified.”²¹² After the “mass resignation” came to a close in early October, the UFT officially revoked its support of the experimental districts and continued to pressure the Board of Education to weaken the power of the governing board. Soon, UFT teachers’ resentment of the board and district would erupt in the spring of 1968.

Teacher Transfers

In March 1968, Rhody McCoy placed an item on the governing board’s agenda that would change the city’s educational history forever. He proposed that thirteen teachers and six assistant principals be transferred out of the district, insisting that “they had demonstrated that they were opposed to the experiment.”²¹³ Dolores Torres similarly noted that these teachers often attempted to divide Black and Puerto Rican children, saying “We have people that are telling the Black children that the Puerto Ricans are against the Blacks. We have to take steps to keep these people out, to make sure these people are now allowed in to miseducate our kids, because if we

²¹¹ Lewis, 45-46.

²¹² "Interview with Rhody McCoy."

²¹³ *Eyes on the Prize*.

allow this, we are condoning it because we're paying their salary."²¹⁴ After holding a public meeting attended by community members, the board voted to transfer the 19 teachers out of the district on May 7, 1968.

While this decision was shocking to the transferred teachers, some Ocean Hill-Brownsville community members had felt a growing disdain for white teachers since the fall of the 1967. Parent Elaine Rooke, a member of Brownsville Community Corporation, initially supported the white principal of JHS 271, Jack Bloomfield. However, even with improving test scores in the school, Rooke believed that her children were being prepped for blue-collar jobs that did not exist in her neighborhood, as Ocean Hill-Brownsville's unemployment rate had risen to 22%. She also argued that white teachers in general had a "bad attitude," and were too quick to rush out of the neighborhood at the end of the school day to retreat to their own white communities.²¹⁵ She insisted that white teachers were too different from her children to properly teach and represent them in the classroom. These teachers dressed differently, spoke differently, and didn't live in the community. To Rooke, white teachers were condescending to Black and Puerto Rican children, and were more interested in promotions and eventual high-paying administrative positions than teaching her children. So, by late 1967, Rooke and other Ocean Hill-Brownsville parents were suspicious of white (many of them UFT) teachers.²¹⁶

In response to these transfers, the UFT demanded that the governing board reinstate the 19 teachers, claiming that it was illegal to remove them from the district. When the teachers attempted to come back to school following their transfer letter from the governing board,

²¹⁴ *Eyes on the Prize*, 44:12.

²¹⁵ Podair, 73.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*

community members blocked them from entering the JHS 271 building.²¹⁷ Fred Nauman, one of the transferred teachers, claimed that he was never informed of any issues in his teaching, saying that he was dumbfounded. He argued that if “sabotaging the project [...] means questioning some of the actions of the governing board, then we must be guilty of this.”²¹⁸ Following the transfers, 350 union teachers walked out of Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools to support the dismissed teachers, but the community vowed to keep the schools open and maintain control of the board.²¹⁹

By September 1968, a new school year, the local board still refused to take back the dismissed teachers. Thus, the UFT called for another citywide strike, halting the education of over one million children. However, in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Black and white teachers crossed the picket lines in defiance of the union in order to ensure that students would continue to receive an education regardless of the UFT. The scene at Ocean Hill-Brownsville was one of chaos and confusion, with an aggressive police presence and UFT strikers screaming accusations of “race hatred” at children and teachers as they entered the school doors.²²⁰ Student Karriema Jordan remembered, “You look up and on the rooftops, and across the street from the school the cops were with their helmet gear, and the playground was converted into a precinct, and walking up to the school you have just mass confusion. You have the community people out there, you have the UFT—you were just amazed.”²²¹ McCoy was frustrated by the strike and the

²¹⁷ Lewis, 52.

²¹⁸ *Eyes on the Prize*.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ *ibid.*

²²¹ *Eyes on the Prize*.

actions of the UFT in response to the transfers, publicly declaring, “We are also saddened by the fact that for the past week the educational establishment of this city has supported the so-called procedural rights of 19 people above the just demands and educational needs of 9000 children.”²²² Teacher Edgar Morris expressed a similar sentiment, angered by the fact that the wellbeing of students was not being prioritized by striking teachers: “I came into the district because I want to be accountable to the community. If I’m not doing a good job then I want them to kick me out. See, this is the only way that we’re going to bring about any change. We have to be accountable to someone, and in the New York City school system, there’s no problems, nobody gets fired.”²²³

This battle was a question of *priorities* in New York City schools. What was more important: the rights of underrepresented children and parents, or the rights of the teachers at the front of the classroom? It was also a battle of who had the final say in school governance: a strong central board swayed by the power of the UFT, or local communities? While the strike was a hotbed for parent-teacher conflict, it was also a unifying factor for the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community. Teacher Les Campbell noticed this trend, saying that “groups came together at rallies and meetings surrounding Ocean Hill-Brownsville—it was an issue that whether you were poor, or in the NAACP, or the Urban League, or the BPP, or the Republic of New Africa, you could rally around this community’s issue. Everybody understood the importance of Black children receiving a quality education.”²²⁴

²²² Lewis, 52-53.

²²³ *Eyes on the Prize*.

²²⁴ *Eyes on the Prize*, 46:15.

The scene at Ocean Hill-Brownsville dragged on for seven months, with community members and the governing board refusing to reinstate the teachers, and the UFT insisting that the board's actions were illegal. By October 1968, the Board of Education had suspended the Ocean Hill-Brownsville community board, and Donovan had dismissed Rhody McCoy as unit administrator. Soon after, the Board of Education entirely eliminated the community control experiment, forcing Black and Puerto Rican parents to stage a mass protest of the Board, calling the fight a "struggle against educational colonialism."²²⁵

The events at Ocean Hill-Brownsville and the fight for community control are essential components in understanding educational equity. So many of the questions raised by Ocean Hill-Brownsville community members, UFT representatives, and the Board of Education are questions that plague our current education system. Who can best represent a wide range of students in the classroom? How do schools combat racial and economic segregation? Is this segregation a problem, or can it be beneficial to learning? Or, is it like Albert Shanker put it when he argued that any segregated education creates norms of narrow-mindedness, bigotry, and cultural isolation? The fight for community control was also a fight between communities and teachers, posing the question of *who* should govern schools—a strong central Board of Education creating standards that should reach every school, or a community board that is more tuned into the localized needs of the students?

Understanding community control will help to illuminate the issues our current administration faces while trying to racially integrate schools. This battle over education

²²⁵ *Eyes on the Prize*, 52:51

governance will certainly inform the way parents, teachers, and administrators today see their role in American schools.

Epilogue

In 1969, after the fall of the three experimental districts, the New York State legislature passed a school decentralization law establishing 32 community school districts with elected school boards that were administratively and politically decentralized.²²⁶ The 1969 law explains that the new districts must constitute a “suitable size for efficiency, a convenient location for pupil attendance, a ‘reasonable’ number of pupils, and ‘heterogeneity’ (ethnic and socioeconomic mixture) of pupil population.”²²⁷ In hiring, creating curricula, and forming the new schools and districts, administrators were also required to take into account the “common and special educational needs of the communities and children involved,” fulfilling one of the explicit goals of community control. The law also replaced the central Board of Education with a smaller “City Board” comprised of seven publicly elected officials and a chancellor of education, who would continue to run the management of the city’s high schools.²²⁸ Local community boards, however, were responsible for educational policy in elementary and middle schools within their district.

For almost 20 years following the policy change, local professionals and parents in some of the city’s poorest communities worked to increase Black and Latino student achievement in their districts. They became teachers, principals, and administrators, sometimes remaining in their respective districts for much longer periods than those who participated in the community control experiment. One Black activist, J. Jerome Harris, became the superintendent for Bedford

²²⁶ Heather Lewis, *New York City Public Schools from Brownsville to Bloomberg: Community control and Its Legacy*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 7.

²²⁷ New York City Office of Education Affairs, *A Summary of the 1969 School Decentralization Law for New York City*, passed by the New York Legislature April 30, 1969. Retrieved from ERIC database. ED042828.

²²⁸ *ibid.*

Stuyvesant. Through tremendous resistance, he and other dedicated school administrators were able to implement some goals of the community control experiment—creating smaller schools; integrating bilingual, multicultural, and arts education into the curriculum; raising academic standards; and encouraging teacher-led reform.²²⁹

However, the city suffered under an economic recession in the 1970s. Subsequently, progress in the way of education reform suffered right along with it. Urban centers were becoming more and more neglected by the federal government, leaving school districts with fewer resources. By 1975, the city's lawyers were in State Supreme Court filing a bankruptcy petition.²³⁰ The city was in shambles, and it showed: maintenance of parks, public housing, and transportation plummeted, illustrating the city's declining quality of life. Public schools especially suffered, as massive staff cutbacks tore through the city, and curricula was pared down its barest bones.²³¹

The recession of the 1970s had a disproportionate effect on Black and Latino communities, as their housing burned, city services shrank, and budgets in their schools plummeted. Along with financial repression, Black and Latino communities experienced heightened social stifling at this time. For instance, the Black Panthers suffered from severe repression from police brutality, and the infiltration of drugs in poor communities.²³² Moreover,

²²⁹ Lewis, 7.

²³⁰ Ralph Blumenthal, "Recalling New York at the Brink of Bankruptcy," *New York Times*, December 05, 2002, accessed April 26, 2019.

²³¹ Lewis, 8.

²³² *ibid.*

in contrast to other issues plaguing the city like housing, and health care, education seemed a less pressing matter to be addressed, and was set largely set aside.

By the 1990s, the city's decentralized system came under strict scrutiny by public officials, the media, and education advocates who demanded an immediate return to centralized control. Come 2002, Mayor Bloomberg persuaded the state legislature to abolish community school boards and entirely restructure the city's Department of Education. Calling the seven member city-board a "rinky dinky candy store" where all the owners are involved in "setting the price on every tube of deodorant," Bloomberg painted the city's education system as disorganized, ineffectual, and politically paralyzed.²³³ During his mayoral tenure, Bloomberg completely dismantled the community system, terminated hundreds of citywide and local administrators, and threw away local district records, effectively erasing their histories.

It's late June, 2018. Richard Carranza, the newly appointed chancellor of education arrives at Harlem's Frederick Douglass Academy to a parent-packed cafeteria. The topic of the town-hall style meeting? Desegregating the city's schools. It's here that Carranza poses the question on everybody's minds, a question that has plagued the city for over fifty years: "It's important that we put the real issue on the table, and the issue on the table is this: in one of the

²³³ Lewis, 9.

most diverse cities in not America but the world, and in the largest school district in America, a school district that is public, are opportunities really open for all people?”²³⁴

The answer is a resounding no. Lately, conversations about desegregating the city’s schools have picked back up among education reformers, administrators, and city residents who see the glaring disparities in opportunity between white and non-white children. This achievement gap is perhaps most evident among the city’s top public high schools, particularly the number one-ranked high school: Stuyvesant. In 2014, a *New York Times* headline read, “Seven black students have been offered a chance to start classes at Stuyvesant High School in September,” out of 952 total offers.²³⁵ Five years later, almost to the day, the *New York Times* published an eerily similar article, with the headline, “Only 7 Black Students Got Into N.Y.’s Most Selective High School, Out of 895 Spots.”²³⁶ In order to gain admission to one of the city’s top eight public schools, eighth graders must perform exceedingly well on a city-specific standardized test called the Specialized High School Admission Test (SHSAT). In fact, the SHSAT is the *sole* admission factor for these schools. In 2019, 27,000 eight grade students took the test, with 4,798 receiving offers to specialized high schools. Of those given offers, 10.5% were Black and Latino, though NYC’s public schools demographic is 66% Black and Latino.²³⁷

To David Kirkland, a professor of urban education and executive director of New York

²³⁴ Adam Harris, "New York City High Schools' Endless Segregation Problem," *The Atlantic*, March 20, 2019, accessed April 25, 2019.

²³⁵ Harris, "New York City High Schools' Endless Segregation Problem."

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ *ibid.*

University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, this discrepancy in admission is a clear message:

The symbolic weight of the egregious disparity in enrollment when it comes to specialized high schools, it says to black and brown populations— particularly the black and brown families of students—that there is something wrong with your students, that they're intellectually inferior, that they're intellectually less than, and that symbolic argument to those students carries weight throughout the system.²³⁸

Carranza felt similarly, and his response was immediate and concise. Following the Department of Education's publication of 2019 high school admission statistics, he gave a statement saying that the city was “once again confronted by an unacceptable status quo at our specialized high schools. We need to eliminate the single test for specialized high-school admissions now.”²³⁹

However, not all parents share Carranza's same fervor about integrating New York City's schools. In April of 2019, parents at P.S. 199, a mostly white, wealthy middle school on the Upper West Side, held a similar town-hall style meeting; but the shouts filling the cafeteria were far from pro-integrationist rhetoric. Parents were outraged by a proposed change to their schools that would increase diversity. The new policy would require each of the 17 local middle schools to reserve a quarter of its seats for students scoring below grade level on state English and math exams (the large majority of these students are Black and Latino). White parents argued that their high performing students would suffer from this policy, and in turn be shut out of the most desirable middle and high schools in the city. One parent lamented,

You're talking about telling an 11-year-old, “You worked your butt off and you didn't get that, what you needed and wanted.” You're telling them, “You're going to go to a school

²³⁸ Rachel Leah, "The Entrenched Segregation of New York City's Public High Schools," Salon, March 25, 2019, accessed April 25, 2019.

²³⁹ Harris, "New York City High Schools' Endless Segregation Problem.”

that is not going to educate you in the same way that you've been educated. Life sucks!" Is that what the DOE wants to say?²⁴⁰

Distraught by parents' comments, local Principal Henry Zymeck chimed in, saying,

There are kids that are tremendously disadvantaged, that I would love to be able to offer — somebody mentioned \$5,000-worth of tutoring for to raise their test scores. And to compare these students and say, "My already-advantage kid needs more advantage! They need to be kept away from those kids!" is tremendously offensive to me.²⁴¹

These community gatherings are eerily reminiscent of the countless meetings held by school administrators and parents throughout the 1950s and 60s. Black and Latino communities, then and now, are confused and upset by the current state of their children's public education. White parents, territorial and hostile to change, believe that they and their children worked to get where they are, and deserve the quality of the education in their neighborhood. Bringing underperforming Black and Latino students into their schools to take their children's spots feels like a punishment for no justifiable reason. It is strikingly clear that the city is stuck in the same story that began back in 1954, after *Brown v. Board of Education*. While the question of how New York can integrate its schools still looms over the Board of Education, one larger question remains: is integration the best path toward educational equity?

To K.A. Dilday, a parent and executive editor at *City Lab*, the answer is no. Dilday lives in Central Harlem—an area with a 30% poverty rate—with her husband and nine year-old daughter. She insists that the general public believes that she lives this way because racism "did the dirty" to her. Rather, she claims agency in her decision to live there: "I chose not to have my daughter tested to enter kindergarten in the gifted and talented programs that feed to specialized

²⁴⁰ Lindsey Christ, "Student Diversity Push Upsets Some Parents at UWS School," *NY1 Spectrum News*, April 25, 2018, accessed April 25, 2019.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*

high schools. Nor do I want her to attend a specialized high school. I am choosing for my daughter to be ‘left behind.’”²⁴² For Dilday, editorials in the *New York Times* that lament the lack of Black students in their schools reaffirm a hierarchy and narrow definition of success that ignores the strength of neighborhood schools and community ties. She insists that these top high schools are not the only path to academic and social achievement, and that editorials continually insist that if a school or neighborhood is largely Black and Latino, it must be bad. She writes of these assumptions made by others,

Our lives are diminished because we are ‘shut out’ of specialized high schools; our lives are limited because we live in majority black and brown neighborhoods. Our proximity to too many poor people, after having started life in middle-class communities, is evidence of slippage.²⁴³

Echoing the tune of Black and Puerto Rican parents at the helm of community control, Dilday asserts that not every Black and Latino institution is inherently inferior.

Jumping back to 1995, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas expressed a similar belief. In the case *Missouri v. Jenkins (93-1823)*, 515 U.S. 70 (1995), a federal district court found the Kansas City school district and state of Missouri guilty in operating an unconstitutionally segregated school system. To facilitate a detailed desegregation program, the Court ordered that the school district impose a new tax to raise the necessary funds. In essence, the Court was encouraging the Kansas City School District to improve its “desegregative attractiveness,” remedy the issue of white flight from its schools, and bring white families back into the city. However, the Supreme Court saw this tax levy as a judicial overstep, and reversed

²⁴² K.A. Dilday, "The Fight to Integrate New York City’s Specialized Schools Is Misguided," *CityLab*, October 19, 2018, accessed April 25, 2019.

²⁴³ *ibid.*

the order. Thomas, in a concurring opinion, expressed his continued disbelief of the nation's willingness to see all-Black institutions as inherently lesser. He wrote,

It never ceases to amaze me that the courts are so willing to assume that anything that is predominantly black must be inferior [...] In effect, the court found that racial imbalances constituted an ongoing constitutional violation that continued to inflict harm on black students. This position appears to rest upon the idea that any school that is black is inferior, and that blacks cannot succeed without the benefit of the company of whites.²⁴⁴

Thomas' words beg the question: are efforts to integrate often misguided, reinforcing the stereotype that Black children *need* the proximity of white children to excel academically? To both him and community control activists, the answer was and is yes. Integrationist rhetoric, especially when espoused by white education reformers, often affirms the incorrect notion that Black and Latino children are inherently inferior when it comes to academics. However, when considering the future of public education in New York City, is integration a necessary step toward rectifying systemic inequalities in the city? When considering this question, one must not forget the findings of Kenneth Clark's seminal doll study, proving that segregated education *does* often inflict psychological harm and create pervasive inferiority complexes for black school children. Even community control activists recognized the potential greatness of integrated education, with Paul J. Cooper—executive editor of *The Brownsville Counsellor* writing in a 1968 Op-Ed entitled “Strategy for Victory”

It is with a great sense of pride that we see displayed throughout the community proclaiming that ‘Black is Beautiful.’ It is equally important for our young people especially, not to gain the impression that this is the only color that is beautiful. We believe that nothing is more beautiful than a united community of Blacks, Puerto Ricans, and whites working together to improve the oppressive conditions which affect

²⁴⁴ Clarence Thomas, "Missouri v. Jenkins, 515 U.S. 70 (1995), Concurring Opinion." *Legal Information Institute*, June 12, 1995.

them all ²⁴⁵.

Thus, New York City faces the unique challenge of creating a more equitable educational landscape by increasing opportunities for integration while recognizing that Black and Latino communities in the city can and do effectively educate children in ways that specifically address local needs. New York City must also recognize that the Black-white achievement gap is largely due to disparities in *funding* and quality *personnel*, not inherent academic ability. For example, Robert Dreeben and colleagues at the University of Chicago conducted studies detailing Black students' access to educational opportunities. In a comparative study of 300 Chicago first graders, Dreeben found that Black and white students who had similar instruction achieved comparable levels of reading skill. But he also found that,

the quality of instruction given African-American students was, on average, much lower than that given white students, thus creating a racial gap in aggregate achievement at the end of first grade. In fact, the highest-ability group in Dreeben's sample was in a school in a low-income African-American neighborhood. These children, though, learned less during first grade than their white counterparts because their teacher was unable to provide the challenging instruction they deserved.²⁴⁶

Thus, while integration might be *one* way to remedy educational inequity—as white students receive better resources and higher levels of funding than their black counterparts—it is not the *only* remedy. All-Black public education *can* be a successful enterprise, with the proper resources, teaching, administration, social responsibility, and community values pushing it forward. Like community control advocates begged the city to see in the late 1960s, all-Black public education is not inherently inferior. It is often, in fact, a source of empowerment for

²⁴⁵ Paul J. Cooper, "Strategy for Victory," *The Brownsville Counsellor*, October 1968.

²⁴⁶ Linda Darling-Hammond, "Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education," *Brookings*, March 1, 1998.

students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Looking forward, the city's Department of Education, when addressing these issues and making necessary changes to their system, will have to consider closely the wise words of Reverend Milton Galamison:

One minister once said this: 'Change is one of the most perilous things in the world. There is only one thing I can think of more dangerous—not to change: to go out into a new era of international relationships and still cling to old nationalistic ideas, to go out into a new industrial order implemented with machinery and still cling to the laissez faire individualism of the eighteenth century.' These are the very things of which we are guilty.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Milton A. Galamison, "Men to Match this Hour" Siloam Presbyterian Church, New York, NY. January 27, 1952.

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