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Boston and *Brown v Board of Education*: Understanding a Northern City's Resistance to Public School Desegregation

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Abstract: *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a landmark Supreme Court decision, calling for an end to the legal precedent of “separate by equal” in American schools. Unsurprisingly, southern states resisted the Supreme Court’s decision, and while there was some intervention by federal courts, some school districts remained segregated into the 1970s. Northern states, on the other hand, were often overlooked by the federal government, as the segregation that existed in the north was not legislated as it was in the South. The city of Boston was even cited in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case as an example city for successfully desegregating their public schools. Despite this, Boston Public Schools remained segregated for decades

after the *Brown* ruling. I assess Boston’s resistance to desegregate Boston Public Schools for 20 years following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling and argue that Boston's segregated schools were the result of federal neglect, segregated neighborhoods, and a racist School Committee.

Keywords: *Brown v. Board of Education*; Boston; desegregation; education; race

The United States has a deep history of racial discrimination and tension. Black people have been subjected to slavery, discriminatory laws, and violence for most of American history. The end of slavery and the ratification of the Reconstruction Amendments in 1865, 1868, and 1870 brought hope that was quickly squashed by Jim Crow laws throughout the country. The desegregation of the armed forces during World War Two brought renewed hope of equal treatment and desegregation at home once the war ended, but that did not occur. De jure and de facto segregation were found in every state in the country. However, in 1954, with the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, there was a renewed glimmer of hope for Black Americans. Black students now had the right and opportunity to attend previously white schools. Unsurprisingly, southern states in the United States resisted desegregation fervently and earned much of the media attention in the years following the court's ruling in *Brown*. The federal government focused much of its attention on the South, ensuring that states like Virginia adhered to the court ruling.

However, the South was not alone in resisting desegregation. Boston, Massachusetts has a long

and rich history, known for being the birthplace of the American Revolution and the ultimate symbol of freedom. Massachusetts was among the first in the nation to abolish the institution of slavery in 1783. Quickly, Boston became a beacon of hope for marginalized communities. Boston was the model example used in the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruling, as a city that had successfully integrated its public schools in 1855. Why is it, then, that it took additional court rulings 20 years after *Brown* for Boston, and many other northern and southern cities, to begin the process of desegregating their public school system? Geographically, Boston is structured in a way that resulted in the likely segregation of their public schools, despite the 1855 legislation banning segregated schools. As a result of redlining and discriminatory lending practices, residency in Boston became increasingly segregated, and with it, its school system. The issue surrounding school segregation was brought to the attention of the Boston School Committee countless times in the 20 years following *Brown*. The School Committee adamantly rejected the need to desegregate of Boston Public Schools (BPS) ultimately resulting in a lawsuit from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The resistance to desegregate Boston Public Schools for 20 years following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling should come as no surprise and was

the result of federal neglect, purposefully segregated neighborhoods, and a racist School Committee.

Boston's "Busing Crisis"

During the 1950s and 1960s in Boston, Black children received two-thirds the funding of white children: \$240 per Black student and \$340 per white student.¹ The blatant underfunding of Black schools and the overt segregation taking place across the city of Boston ultimately led to the NAACP filing the *Morgan v. Hennigan* lawsuit against the Boston School Committee in 1972. This lawsuit claimed that the Boston School Committee and city was in violation of the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act.² The state law outlawed racial imbalance in public schools, defining it as "the condition in which more than fifty percent of the pupils attending such school are non-white." Additionally, the law stated that "any non-white pupil attending any public school in which racial imbalance exists shall have the right to be transferred to and to attend any other school."³ In 1965, Boston had 44 schools within its district that fell into this category, but the Boston School Committee refused to develop or implement a plan to desegregate Boston's schools. The Massachusetts Federal District Court heard the 1972 *Morgan v. Hennigan* and in a decision shocking many Bostonians, Judge W. Arthur Garrity found that Boston was guilty of six constitutional violations.⁴ Judge

¹ Matthew Delmont, "The Lasting Legacy of the Busing Crisis," *The Atlantic*, June 28, 2019, Last accessed May 22, 2024. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/the-boston-busing-crisis-was-never-intended-to-work/474264/>.

² "Desegregation Busing," Encyclopedia of Boston (Boston Research Center), accessed August 1, 2022, https://bostonresearchcenter.org/projects_files/eob/single-entry-busing.html.

³ MA, General Laws, Part 1, Title XII, Chapter 71, Section 37D. See also, "Desegregation Busing," Encyclopedia of Boston (Boston Research Center).

⁴ Jack Greenburg, Thomas F. Pettigrew, Susan Greenblatt, Walter McCann, and David A. Bennett, *Schools and the Courts, Volume 1: Desegregation* (Eugene, OR: ERIC ClearingHouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1979): 48, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED181526&site=eds>

Garrity ordered Boston Public Schools to implement a plan of desegregation in order to come into compliance with the Racial Imbalance Act (1965).⁵ The court-ordered plan came in multiple phases. Judge Garrity recognized that creating a plan for full integration in less than four months would be extremely difficult, necessitating a phased approach. The first phase of desegregation would follow an existing plan, created by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Phase Two would begin the following school year, allowing the court the ability to better develop a plan for desegregation.⁶ Phase One began the process of busing students to schools in different neighborhoods with the intent to equalize educational opportunities for all Boston Public Schools students. During the 1974-1975 school year, the city bused 18,000 students into other neighborhoods.⁷ As Phase One went into effect in September 1974, protests, boycotts, and clashes with the police ensued.

Many white Bostonians opposed the busing of students to schools they were unfamiliar with, and claimed it was unfair that children were forced to go to subpar schools. However, for decades following *Brown* the BPS school system bused white children to schools with more resources and better qualified teachers. The “crisis” of busing that ensued was portrayed as an issue of educational fairness and utilization of city resources. In actuality, the 1974 busing crisis was fundamentally

grounded in the issue of racism rather than the logistics of busing students. The busing crisis being rooted in the issue of racism should come as no surprise given Boston’s long history of racism toward perceived outsiders.⁸ In order to better understand the reputation Boston politicians have crafted, it is important to honestly reflect on the history of the city.

Boston’s Legacy as a Beacon of Hope and Liberty

Why is it that Boston holds such a strong reputation as a liberal and progressive city, when racial segregation has often been as entrenched as in the Jim Crow South? The answer lies in the national political image of Boston and Massachusetts. As president, John F. Kennedy, an Irish-Catholic Democrat from Boston, came to support the Civil Rights movement, although perhaps at first reluctantly. Many Bostonians, and others throughout the country, viewed Kennedy’s work as a reflection of liberal Boston, which was reinforced by Boston’s more recent voting pattern.⁹ In the same decade that Kennedy was elected to office, Edward Brooke became the first Black man since Reconstruction to be elected to the US Senate. Brooke served as a Republican Senator for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from 1967 to 1979.

In addition to the work done by Boston politicians, public opinion polls from 1966 also highlight that Massachusetts tended to feel more progressive in terms of equality for Black Americans.

⁵ Karen Clark, “Boston Desegregation: What Went Wrong?,” *The Clearing House* 51, no. 4 (1977): 457-59, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.libserv-prd.bridgew.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.30184960&site=eds-live>.

⁶ Clark, “Boston Desegregation: What Went Wrong?,” 457.

⁷ “Desegregation Busing,” *Encyclopedia of Boston* (Boston Research Center).

⁸ 1. “Nativism, Racism, and Immigration Restriction,” Global Boston, Boston College, April 2, 2021, <https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/nativism-and-racism/>.

⁹ Preston N. Williams and Robin W. Lovin, “Rights and Remedies: A Study of Desegregation in Boston,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 6, no.2 (1978): 137.

Massachusetts residents were split on the question as to whether the federal government was doing enough to support African American civil rights, whereas the nation strongly indicated that the federal government was doing too much in regard to civil rights.¹⁰ These polls indicated, again, that Boston was seemingly a more progressive city from a progressive state.¹¹ Yet, most people in Massachusetts also felt that racial segregation was a “southern problem” and their support for active federal intervention meant intervention elsewhere; they often ignored or were ignorant of the racial injustice in their own state. Furthermore, these sentiments were not even across the commonwealth or even across the city of Boston. Even if most Massachusetts residents felt that the federal government could do more for Black Americans, those in certain neighborhoods of Boston did not share these sentiments.

Politicians were not the only powerholders in Massachusetts in the years that followed the *Brown* ruling. Religious figures, particularly those from the Catholic Church, held significant influence over Boston’s residents. Boston’s Archbishop Richard Cardinal Cushing also set the tone for Boston’s seemingly socially accepting nature. In 1964 Cushing made it clear that he was committed to racial equality, and by extension, so was the Catholic Church.¹² This commitment was significant for a city that had been long

dominated by Irish Catholics.¹³ Some of these surface commitments to racial justice, coming from national political leaders and local religious leaders, covered longer and deeper trends of ethnic tension in Boston.

Throughout the 1800s, immigrants moved into Boston, taking advantage of its Atlantic port and maritime connections and the employment opportunities that came from its early industrialization.¹⁴ Prior to this, Boston was perhaps the most homogeneous ethnic enclave in the young United States, populated and governed by an entrenched “Yankee” population. By the end of the nineteenth century, the once-powerful Yankee elite lost political power to the rising Irish Catholics majority. The Yankee elite had long discriminated against and segregated Irish immigrants, so when the Irish Catholics of Boston found themselves in positions of power, they turned their attention to discriminating against Black Bostonians, in the way that they had once been discriminated against.¹⁵ Historians have shown that during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and especially during the Civil War and Reconstruction, Boston’s Irish Catholics could establish their “whiteness” and claim relevancy in America’s democratic system by demeaning their Black neighbors; this trend is most highlighted by incidents such as the Boston draft riot of 1863, but was entwined in Bostonians daily lives via residential,

10 John F. Becker and Eugene E. Heaton, “The Election of Senator Edward W. Brooke,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1967): 352-3.

11 Williams and Lovin, “Rights and Remedies,” 137.

12 Williams and Lovin, “Rights and Remedies,” 138.

13 Williams and Lovin, “Rights and Remedies,” 138.

14 “First Wave, 1820-1880,” Global Boston (Boston College), last accessed August 10, 2022, <https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/eras-of-migration/test-page/#:~:text=Changing%20refugee%20policies%20and%20the,Boston%20a%20strikingly%20diverse%20population.>

15 Williams and Lovin, “Rights and Remedies,” 139.

employment, and educational discrimination. This historic tension between Boston's Irish Catholic population and Black population are fundamental to understanding Boston's resistance to desegregation following *Brown*.

***Roberts v. City of Boston* (1849) and Housing Discrimination**

The racial tension in Boston manifested itself, and contributed to, both residential and educational segregation across the city that also claimed to be home of the nation's foremost educational reformers, Horace Mann. Boston continued to deny Black Bostonians equal access to many areas of life, including public schooling.¹⁶ By the 1840s, segregation of public schools was so rampant in Boston that Black children had to walk past several schools before reaching the one they were allowed to attend. In 1849, the Massachusetts Supreme Court heard the case of *Roberts v. City of Boston*, in which Benjamin Roberts called for his daughter Sarah to be able to attend one of the five elementary schools she walked past before getting to her school. Despite a compelling argument made by attorney Charles Sumner, one of the nation's most outspoken abolitionists and future "radical Republican" in the US Congress, to desegregate Massachusetts public schools, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that "the continuance of the separate schools for colored children, and the regular attendance of all such children upon the schools, is not only legal and just, but

is best adapted to promote the education of that class of our population."¹⁷ Ironically, this Massachusetts court decision served as the precedent for infamous "separate but equal" decision in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, a case that history highlights as reflective of racial injustice in the American South. Boston, the cradle of liberty, had established the precedent for legalized segregation across the entire United States.

For years following the decision in the *Roberts v. City of Boston* (1849), Black Boston parents pressured the legislature to right the wrong. That pressure worked, and in 1855 Massachusetts passed legislation barring segregation in public schools in the Commonwealth.¹⁸ Yet, much like what would transpire following the *Brown* decision, local school boards and committees did all they could to resist desegregation. The residential discrimination that created de facto segregation was their greatest shield against the desegregation law.

While the 1855 legislation "desegregated" the Boston's public, like much of the North, residential discrimination created de facto segregation. Historian Zebulon Miletsky as recently noted that, "historically racially restrictive housing market, propelled redlining and discriminatory lending practices, prevented blacks from moving into areas" largely populated by working-class white people who owned their homes, like Hyde Park and West Roxbury.¹⁹ Black Bostonians were also excluded from poorer white working-class neighborhoods such as South Boston, East Boston,

¹⁶ Earl Smith, "Racism and the Boston Schools Crisis," *The Black Scholar* 6, no. 6 (1975): 37-41.

¹⁷ *Roberts v. The City of Boston*, 59 Mass. 198 (MA. 1849).

¹⁸ Zebulon Vance Miletsky, "Before Busing: Boston's Long Movement for Civil Rights and the Legacy of Jim Crow in the 'Cradle of Liberty,'" *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2 (2017): 207, doi: 10.1177/0096144216688280.

¹⁹ Miletsky, "Before Busing," 211-21.

and Charlestown.²⁰ The exclusion from so many neighborhoods resulted in the emergence of almost exclusively Black neighborhoods.

While none of this was legally mandated, the reality of Boston's lending and housing situation resulted in an increasingly segregated city, where schools became segregated by default. Despite the seemingly obvious discrimination and racism, Miletsky writes that, "most of the city's white residents and those in positions of power refused to acknowledge Boston's historical investment in segregation."²¹ Boston's refusal to acknowledge its racism and upholding of segregation is part of the shock factor of the 1974 busing crisis. The reality is that Boston has been deeply oppressive, dating back to the early nineteenth century.

Federal and Legislative Neglect

Despite Boston's history of oppression and racism, the federal government focused much of its efforts following the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* on southern states. Southern politicians at the federal, state, and local level signed the infamous "Southern Manifesto" in 1956, making their "massive resistance" to the Court's order very public and necessitating action from the federal government. History textbooks showcase monumental events such as the desegregation stories of the "Little Rock Nine" (1957) and Ruby Bridges (1960), as well as key legislation such as the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the

Voting Rights Act (1965), shaping much of the public understanding of that history. Those stories trace how the federal government and other officials viewed the immediate aftermath of *Brown*. This national focus on desegregating southern schools meant that other problematic regions in the United States were largely ignored. The process of desegregating southern schools took decades, but, according to Leon Jones, by 1974 "schools in the South, where segregation had flourished, now [were] the least segregated in the country."²² In the wake of these victories, and with the new authority authorized by civil rights legislation, the federal government was able to collect data on segregation patterns and found that in 1972, nearly 56 percent of Black children in the North and West were attending schools that had 80 percent or more of Black enrollment.²³ By 1976, scholar Leon Jones concluded that in the Northeast, and specifically in New England, "the ethnicity of school enrollment was presumed to be no issue."²⁴ There was a popular presumption that the Northeast, and Boston, did not need to be monitored for school enrollment patterns. The assumption that the 1855 law had desegregated Boston's public schools in 1855 meant that the federal government could ignore the city in its racial justice campaign.²⁵ The federal and legislative neglect of northern states allowed Boston to continue its de facto segregation in the public school system for two decades following the federally mandated desegregation.

20 Miletsky, "Before Busing," 211-212.

21 Miletsky, "Before Busing," 215.

22 Leon Jones, "Brown Revisited: From Topeka, Kansas to Boston, Massachusetts," *Phylon* 37, no. 4 (1976): 354.

23 Jones, "Brown Revisited," 354.

24 Jones, "Brown Revisited," 354.

25 *Brown v. Board of Education*, Topeka (Supreme Court of the United States, May 17, 1954).

Redlining

Residency patterns in Boston, like many cities in the United States, result from discriminatory lending practices that segregate the city. From the 1940s through the 1970s, Boston's Black population increased from approximately 24,000 to 105,000.²⁶ Many cities saw an influx in Black migration in the years following World War Two, a phase known as the Second Great Migration. The phase came on the heels of the First Great Migration of the 1910s and 1920s as southern Blacks moved north in search of economic opportunity and an escape from Jim Crow political structures. Following World War Two, more Black southerners followed along a domestic chain migration pattern, increasing the Black population of nearly every northern and western city. Along with massive migration of Black families into Boston came the city's urban renewal projects, designed on the surface to address urban decay, but were at their heart detrimental to the city's Black population. Boston's school, housing, and banking authorities created a more segregated and racialized city through urban renewal policies and discriminatory lending practices.²⁷ Black families were segregated to particular areas in the city, such as Dorchester, Mattapan, and Roxbury. By creating a systemically segregated city, Boston's planners also further solidified a segregated school system. Students were not segregated by law, but rather by residential patterns. The de facto segregation found in Boston allowed the city to ignore the *Brown* ruling,

because the segregation taking place in Boston Public Schools was not legislated; rather it was the inevitable result of carefully fabricated structured circumstances.

South Boston

The policies of redlining and housing discrimination served to segregate and divide the city of Boston. Much of the city was divided along racial lines, but there were also rampant class divisions that existed. Many poor and working-class families, mainly Boston's Irish-Catholic population found residency in South Boston. Among this same population were also some of the fiercest resisters to busing following the 1974 court ruling. This was yet another manifestation of the historic tensions between Boston's Black and Irish Catholic populations.

South Boston emerged as the epicenter of racism and exclusionary tactics. For people perceived as outsiders, South Boston was a dangerous place. South Boston, "Southie," was made up of poor, white Irish-Catholics who actively supported the de facto segregation of BPS and the city at large.²⁸ In 1976, Jane Hornburger, a Black professor of Education at Boston University, wrote that white residents of South Boston, "boasted in 1847 that 'not a single colored family lived among them.'"²⁹ By the time of the busing crisis, South Boston residents had targeted and attacked Black people for more than a century. In addition to targeting Black people, Hornburger noted that Southie residents "firebombed 50 Puerto Rican families" and "a two-

26 Tess Bundy, "'Revolutions Happen through Young People!': The Black Student Movement in Boston Public Schools, 1968-1974," *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2 (2017): 276.

27 Bundy, "'Revolutions Happen through Young People!'" 275.

28 Jane M. Hornburger, "Deep are the Roots: Busing in Boston," *The Journal of Negro Education* 45, no. 3 (1976) 235.

29 Hornburger, "Deep are the Roots," 236.

year-old Puerto Rican boy was found hanging from a basketball net in a playground.”³⁰ While South Boston is only one neighborhood in Boston, and may be an extreme example, it does illustrate that racism was rampant in the North throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In many ways, Boston was not a safe city for Black residents, and many white residents made it known that they opposed the increasing Black population in the city. One way of upholding racist structures was to elect people to the School Committee that would maintain the de facto segregation found throughout the city and within the school system.

Boston School Committee and City Officials

Theoretically, the 1855 law desegregated Boston Public Schools and overturned the state’s supreme judicial court’s *Roberts v City of Boston* ruling. Nonetheless, the verbiage of Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw’s opinion in *Roberts* allowed the Boston School Committee to make all decisions surrounding who attended which schools in Boston.³¹ The most pervasive argument made by the Boston School Committee was that because Boston did not have any segregation policies in writing (there was no legal segregation in the public schools), the School Committee had nothing to fix. The School Committee relied heavily on the fact that Boston was a city shaped by de facto segregation rather than legal segregation. Prior to the 1954 *Brown* ruling, Black Bostonian parents had fought with the Boston

School Committee for educational justice. From the 1940s through the 1970s, Black Bostonians advocated for better-quality schools, educators, and materials for Black students in the city.³² Throughout these decades, the School Committee and the Superintendent of Schools blamed Black parents and Black students for the underachievement of students in predominantly Black schools. The 1962-63 Annual Superintendent’s Report for the City of Boston was explicit about this. In Superintendent Frederick Gillis’ introduction he wrote that, “Negro parents lacking aspirational goals cannot be expected to offer incentive to their children” and that if “the home is without reading materials, if there is no discussion of current events, if there is no quiet corner where a child may study, then the role of the school in the life of children from such homes must differ in curriculum, in terms of expected educational outcomes.”³³ The report rejected a multitude of claims from the NAACP and continued to argue that because BPS had no written segregation policy, there was nothing to be fixed. The superintendent’s report, much like those of his southern colleagues, also argued that the Supreme Court itself overstepped with the *Brown* ruling: “The Supreme Court, in engaging in social engineering, belittles itself, and makes a travesty of government by the consent of the majority, when, as a result of its decision, one petitioner can impose her will upon millions of people.”³⁴ Such a “states’ rights” claim would have been hardly cheered by many southern

³⁰ Hornburger, “Deep are the Roots,” 236.

³¹ Leonard W. Levy, and Harlan B. Phillips, “The Roberts Case: Source of the ‘Separate but Equal’ Doctrine,” *American Historical Review* 56, no. 3 (1951): 515.

³² Bundy, “‘Revolutions Happen through Young People!’” 274.

³³ Frederick J. Gillis, *Annual Report of the Superintendent: 1962-63* (Boston, MA: Boston Public Schools, 1963), 18.

³⁴ Gillis, *Annual Report of the Superintendent*, 21.

politicians and educational leaders of the time, and highlights the racism entrenched in the BPS school system and its leaders.

The refusal to recognize inequality in BPS while blaming Black students and their families for underperformance continued well into the 1960s. At a Boston School Committee meeting in 1964, Chairman William O'Connor said that there was "no inferior education in our schools. What we have been getting is an inferior type of student."³⁵ The Boston School Committee actively worked to divide the city of Boston and its schools into white and Black zones, where white schools had "good" students and Black schools had "bad" students. The School Committee's perpetuation of this rhetoric won the councilors seats in many elections and allowed Boston Public Schools to remain a place of overt segregation. The 1963 landslide reelection of School Committee Chairwoman Louisa Day Hicks reflected the way Bostonians felt about de facto segregation. After her victory, Hicks stated that "the people of Boston have given their answer to the de facto segregation question."³⁶ Her victory speech could have been delivered in Norfolk, Virginia or Birmingham, Alabama. These statements and reports illustrate that desegregation was not a southern issue, nor a northern one, it was one that transcended state borders and regional identities. Taking a national-level view of resistance to desegregation, by including cities like Boston in that history, shows that resistance emerged where and when such desegregation would have fundamentally changed the demographics of a school. Such would have been the case in Boston during

the 1960s, as much as it would have in some parts of the South, and as such Boston was not ready to move progressively to a more desegregated society despite its image as a bastion of liberal progressivism. While many factors contributed to Boston's long avoidance of desegregation of their public schools, the overt avoidance, denial, and discrimination displayed by the Boston School Committee undoubtedly shoulders the vast majority of the blame.

Boston's resistance to the *Brown v Board of Education* ruling is not a shocking one. Boston was deeply segregated due to redlining and discriminatory lending practices, which made segregated schools an inevitability. In the decades preceding *Brown*, white residents and the school committee fiercely resisted efforts to desegregate the BPS. The federal neglect that was seen throughout much of the North only partially explains how the city managed to remain segregated for 20 years after the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional. The deeper answers lie in the neighborhood of South Boston and its residents' explicit support for Boston School Committee members maintaining the status quo. South Boston residents, many of whom held racist beliefs, fought vehemently against losing "their schools." Ultimately, the School Committee shoulders the blame for Boston's continued school segregation efforts throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. To find one single explanation of how the beacon of liberty remained segregated within their school system is impossible, but when looking at city structure, federal neglect, and a racist School Committee, the answer becomes quite clear. As a city,

³⁵ Bundy, "Revolutions Happen through Young People!" 275.

³⁶ Delmont, "The Lasting Legacy of the Busing Crisis."

Boston is deeply rooted in its racism and willingly resisted desegregation as long as it could.

Afterward

In the decades following Boston's busing crisis, the city, along with countless others, have abandoned the policy of busing. Many view busing as a failed effort to desegregate schools. In the decades following busing, many white families moved out of Boston and into the surrounding suburbs. The white flight that occurred resulted in declining tax revenue and further underfunding of increasingly poor and segregated schools. Throughout the country, school segregation is once again a focal issue in school politics. In Boston, it is difficult to desegregate their public schools, because only 15 percent of the school population is white throughout the district.³⁷ In the years following the busing crisis, the demographic makeup of Boston changed drastically. Since the 1970s Boston's school aged population (5-17) has dropped ten percent from what it was at the time of the busing crisis.³⁸ The drastic change in Boston's demographic makeup emerged in the early 2000s when the cost of living began to rise. Middle-class white families struggled to make ends meet and left the city in favor of owning homes in the suburbs. This second-wave of white flight serves to explain the lack of white students in BPS. Families of color were not fortunate enough to relocate to suburbs due to continued discriminatory lending practices and the effects of generational poverty caused by redlining.³⁹

Boston Public Schools continue to remain segregated spaces, and while it could be argued that *Brown* failed at desegregating schools, it would be more accurate to say that *Brown* alone could not reverse decades of systemic racism and classism that permeate the city of Boston.

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Note on Author: Emma Wells completed her Master of Arts in Teaching (History) in 2024. Her paper was completed under the mentorship of Dr. Andrew Holman. She plans to continue teaching high school history and conducting research in the realm of gender history, socio-politics, and genocide studies.

³⁷ "Massachusetts School and District Profiles," Enrollment Data (2021-22) - Boston (00350000), accessed August 8, 2022, <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00350000&orgtypecode=5>.

³⁸ Max Larkin, "As Boston Grows in Wealth and Diversity, Many Schools Are 'Intensely Segregated,'" WBUR News (WBUR, January 22, 2020), <https://www.wbur.org/news/2020/01/22/boston-foundation-bps-race-income-inequities>.

³⁹ Larkin, "As Boston Grows in Wealth and Diversity, Many Schools Are 'Intensely Segregated.'"

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