

**Boston's Struggle in Black and Brown:
Racial Politics, Community Development, and Grassroots Organizing
1960-1985**

by

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DEDICATION

*For the love of my life, Raul,
who believed in me more than I believed in myself.
And for our three beautiful children,
Raul Jr., Amaya, and Lola,
who make all our struggles worth it.
I love and adore you all fiercely.*

*In loving memory of my father,
Jorgensen Grüssen Fernández,
who left the physical world too soon.
Siempre te amaré, Pa.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABCD	Action for Boston Community Redevelopment
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
APCROSS	Association Promoting Constitutional Rights of the Spanish-Speaking
BAQE	Black Advocates for Quality Education
BHA	Boston Housing Authority
BPG	Boardman Parents Group
BPS	Boston Public Schools
BRA	Boston Redevelopment Authority
BSC	Boston School Committee
BUF	Boston United Front
CHPA	Concerned Higginson Parents Association
CAUSE	Community Assembly for a United South End
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CPAC	Citywide Parents Advisory Council
ELL	English Language Learner
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESL	English as a Second Language
El Comité	El Comité Pro La Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe (The Committee in Defense of Bilingual Education)
ETC	Emergency Tenants Council
FHA	Federal Housing Administration
HEW	Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
HOLC	Home Owners Loan Corporation
HOPE	Hispanic Office of Planning and Development
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
IBA	Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (Puerto Rican Tenants in Action)
LAH	La Alianza Hispana (The Hispanic Alliance)
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
MAW	Mothers for Adequate Welfare
MBTA	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
MCAD	Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination
METCO	Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NSM	Northern Student Movement
NWRO	National Welfare Rights Organization
PRESS	Puerto Rican Entering and Settling Service
RMSC	Roxbury Multi-Service Center

RIA	Racial Imbalance Act
RDNPA	Roxbury - North Dorchester Parents Association
ROAR	Restore Our Alienable Rights
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SETC	South End Tenants Council
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SNAP	South End Neighborhood Action Program
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
TDC	Tenants Development Corporation
USES	United South End Settlements
VA	Veteran's Administration

MAP OF BOSTON NEIGHBORHOODS



ABSTRACT

“Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown” recovers the comparative and relational history of African American and Latino community development, racial and political identity formation, and mobilizations for racial justice in Boston from 1960 to 1985. Subjected to exclusion from Boston’s parochial political system built on white ethnic patronage, African Americans and Latinos faced parallel and intersecting struggles in the same segregated neighborhoods. Consequently, they began forging overlapping racial and political identities as poor, nonwhite, ethnoracial minorities during the 1960s and 1970s. These shared identities served as the basis for increasingly similar political visions and civil rights agendas centered on ideologies of self-determination, community control, and racial uplift.

The shared racial and political identities of African Americans and Latinos did not, however, automatically materialize into collaboration or formal multiethnic/multiracial organizing. While issues such as welfare, poverty, and housing drew these groups to work together, others such as education led them to break away and work independently. Additionally, the heterogeneous nature of these communities proved divisive at times, particularly along lines of class, gender, and nationality. This study considers periods, however brief, when African Americans and Latinos came together around common causes, pooling together their political power to form inclusive, multiethnic/multiracial organizations and movements. It also sheds light on some of the

obstacles black/brown Bostonians faced in forming and sustaining these political alliances and coalitions. Examining a number of conflicts that emerged within black-brown communities that threatened cooperation, this study also draws attention to moments when these diverse groups strategically chose to diverge and advance the struggle for racial justice on separate, parallel paths.

Studying black/brown community development (or “upbuilding”) and grassroots organizing in Boston during the 1960s and 1970s exposes the limits of the black-white binary racial frame for understanding racial politics in the postwar urban north. It urges us to consider both the power of multiethnic/multiracial organizing, as well as the difficulties inherent in creating and sustaining coalitions. Lastly, this study sheds light on contemporary race relations, helping to explain how the growing political power of Latinos in the United States has been and will continue to be shaped by African Americans.

INTRODUCTION

In May of 1960, the *Boston Globe* featured an article titled “The Negro in the Deep North: Puerto Rican Migration Creates New Tensions,” which detailed the growth of Puerto Rican migration into New York City in the post-World War II era. To some extent, it served as a cautionary tale to residents of other northern cities such as Boston with smaller, but rapidly increasing Puerto Rican populations. Intended to explain how this “swarm” of migrants fared in the current sociopolitical climate of the United States, the article explained that, upon arrival, Puerto Ricans were “usually classified as non-white” and often considered by white Americans to be “somewhat eccentric Negroes.” This viewpoint was common amongst white Americans who struggled to pinpoint the seemingly ambiguous racial identities of newly arrived Latino migrants. Unable to locate them within the nation’s racial hierarchy, most turned to simplistic comparisons, likening them to slightly different kinds of Spanish-speaking African Americans. Despite these widely held beliefs, the article argued, “The fact is that Puerto Ricans have nothing in common with Negroes except the same problems of poverty, housing, employment and general discrimination.” These two groups lived “cheek by jowl in the ghetto,” the article continued, however “there [was] virtually no social mixing – and there [was] often a great deal of tension.”¹

¹ Harry Ashmore, “The Negro in the Deep North” Puerto Rican Migration Creates New Tensions,” *Boston Globe*, May 16, 1960, 7.

Ten years later in May of 1970, the *Boston Globe* ran another article on Puerto Rican migration titled “The Puerto Rican Problem.” This article similarly compared African Americans and Latinos and emphasized differences between the two groups, though instead of New York City, it centered on Boston’s growing Puerto Rican population. “Blacks are fighting their own ground for rights they know to be justly theirs. They have organization and militancy,” the article contended. While the African American community had “hundreds of competent, strong leaders” across the nation, it explained, the Latino community did not organize as effectively because the migrants supposedly did not consider the United States their permanent home. “Nor do the Spanish-speaking have as strong a sense of community feeling as do the blacks,” the article concluded. Coming from different countries with only the Spanish language as a common tie, the article explained that Latinos found “it difficult to form united communities and strong organizations.”²

Despite the decade between these two *Globe* articles and the massive wave of Latino migration to the United States that ensued during this time, both shed light on the nation’s inability to easily identify this new, seemingly nonwhite population. Puerto Ricans, like many other migrants from across Latin America, did not fit neatly within the country’s existing black-white racial binary. These articles illuminate some of the complex, shifting, and, at times, contradictory racial discourses that developed as white Americans sought to make sense of new Latino migrants. The author of the first article draws attention to the ways in which African Americans and Puerto Ricans were similar, living in the same “ghettos” and facing many of the same struggles such as poverty and

² “The Puerto Rican problem,” *Boston Globe*, May 5, 1970, 17.

discrimination, while also emphasizing tensions, arguing they do not mix and have virtually “nothing in common.” In the second article, the author also draws comparisons between African Americans and Latinos. Making no mention of racial mixing or cooperation, instead the article focuses on how Latinos fall short in the struggle for civil rights compared to their more established and united black counterparts.

These articles shed light on several of the key themes raised by this dissertation: the ethnoracial formation of African Americans and Latinos in the postwar “deep north,” the relationship between these two groups in shared urban spaces, and how ethnoracial identities shaped black-brown politics and mobilizations for civil rights. In “Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown,” I challenge and complicate the notion posed by the first article that there was “no social mixing” among African Americans and Latinos in postwar northern cities. Instead, I examine how these two groups intersected, overlapped, engaged with one another, and formed communities. I also interrogate the second article’s claims that Latino communities in the urban north were less organized than their black counterparts. Utilizing the city of Boston as a case study, I ask: How did African Americans and Latinos construct their ethnoracial identities in the postwar era? How were these identities contested, negotiated, and constantly shifting or interpreted by one another? How were African Americans and Latinos racialized by white Bostonians and city/state officials and how did they fair in the city’s politics? How did black-brown communities and institutions emerge? And lastly, how did these communities organize movements for racial justice, develop shared civil rights agendas, collaborate, and/or form multiethnic/ multiracial coalitions?

Built on white ethnic patronage, Boston's exclusionary and parochial political system excluded African Americans and Latinos almost entirely in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to being barred from most public positions of political power, black/brown residents faced a declining local economy, as jobs followed white flight into the suburbs. With the added obstacle of racially based job discrimination, there were few possibilities for upward mobility.

Federal, state, and local city housing and banking officials also played a critical role in creating and maintaining racially segregated neighborhoods in Boston through restrictive covenants, red-lining, discriminatory lending practices, public housing policies, and urban renewal programs. Segregated neighborhoods in areas such as the South End, Roxbury, and Dorchester became the city's worst slums, where black/brown residents lived in extreme poverty. In these ghettos, African Americans and Latinos faced horrid living conditions in cramped, unsafe, and dilapidated buildings that frequently violated fire, sanitation, and building codes.

In addition to the inadequate and unaffordable housing, black/brown children went to segregated, poorly funded, overcrowded, and inequitable schools. Lastly, both groups experienced hostility and violence from white Bostonians and were the main targets of the city's police. Though there were some unique struggles faced by either African American or Latinos, by and large, the two groups lived in the same poor, segregated neighborhoods and experienced the same harsh daily realities in the city.

This dissertation is a multiethnic/multiracial study of African American and Latino communities in Boston that utilizes a "bottom-up" approach to examine what

historian Leslie Brown has called the process of “upbuilding.” I demonstrate the central roles of upbuilding and community organizing in black-brown communities in Boston's racial politics from 1960 through 1985. I consider how black/brown working-class local people, in particular, advocated for their family and community's needs and rights, established independent community institutions, and developed into activists. I illustrate how these everyday people centered their organizing on ideas of self-determination and community control, mobilized indigenous and external resources, and employed numerous strategies in the city's broader movements for racial justice.

I argue that African Americans and Latinos forged overlapping racial and political identities centered on their parallel and intersecting lived experiences as predominantly poor, nonwhite, ethnoracial others or minorities in the city of Boston during the 1960s and 1970s. While these shared identities often manifested into broadly similar political visions and civil rights agendas, they did not always materialize into collaboration or formal multiethnic/multiracial organizing. Some issues drew them to work together, while others pulled them apart to work on separate, parallel paths. Their shared fight against poverty and housing inequities, for example, provided some of the greatest opportunities for strategic multiethnic/multiracial cooperation. In this dissertation, I consider periods, however brief, when African Americans and Latinos came together around a common cause such as welfare or tenants' rights in their neighborhoods, pooling together their political power to form inclusive, multiethnic/multiracial organizations and movements. Yet coalition building and political alliances were hard to sustain. In exploring the ethnoracial and political development of these black-brown communities, I pay particular attention to how these processes were impacted by the

intersections of other identities such as gender, class, and nationality. My dissertation also begins to take form as a women's and feminist history, as it examines the gender politics of local movements and highlights the leading role of African American and Latina women activists.

“Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown” also exposes some of the divisions and conflicts that emerged within black-brown communities that threatened the stability of race-based coalitions, and sheds light on moments when these diverse groups strategically chose to advance the struggle for racial justice on separate, parallel paths. The movements for educational equality highlight factors such as language that pulled the African American and Latino communities apart to forge independent movements. Through each thematic chapter, I challenge the limited vocabularies of “conflict” and “coalition” and similar simplistic binaries such as “unity” versus “disunity” that have dominated the scholarship on black-brown relations. Instead, I provide a multilayered analysis that privileges the voices of marginalized groups and neither idealizes nor demonizes the idea of multiethnic/ multiracial unity or coalitions. I uncover the complex and often messy stories and nuances of a series of local black-brown movements for racial justice that have been effectively erased from Boston’s dominant historical narrative. Ultimately, my study exposes the limits of the black-white binary racial frame for understanding racial politics in the postwar urban north.

Historiography

This dissertation seeks to advance and bridge historiographical fields and methodologies that are not frequently in dialogue with one another. My study’s

intersectional framework engages with the fields of U.S., African American, Latina/o, women's, and social movement history, as well as Ethnic/Migration/Diaspora Studies, critical race theory, and urban studies. More specifically, I position my work at the intersection of the literature on racial formation, postwar urban community development, and social movements in the era following the "classical" civil rights movement.

This dissertation draws especially from and contributes to the social movement literature on northern struggles for civil rights.³ These historians illustrate the links between civil rights and Black Power, challenge the movement's declension story, and emphasize the importance of local studies (and "ordinary people") in explaining shifts from civil rights reforms to movements for economic and social justice. Others have critiqued the focus of "leading men" and asserted the role of women in local and national community organizing efforts. This project expands the concept of civil rights to consider other movements for racial justice in Boston by highlighting the role of everyday working class people (particularly women) and by examining black/brown

³ This work is best exemplified by the work of Martha Biondi, Matthew Countryman, Thomas Sugrue, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard. Many of these scholars, and others such as Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar and Peniel Joseph have not only shifted the regional scope of the civil rights movement away from the South but also expanded the periodization beyond the classical phase (1955-1965). For examples of this work, see: Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Matthew Countryman, *UpSouth: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Jeanne Theoharis, "'We Saved the City': Black Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960-1976" *Radical History Review* 81 (Fall 2001), 61-93; Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside of the South, 1940 - 1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, "Puerto Rico in Mi Corazón: The Young Lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican Nationalism in the U.S., 1966-1972." *Centro Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 148-169; Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights - Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

organizing in the city beyond what is typically marked as the end of the civil rights movement (1965) into the 1970s and 1980s. Yet despite the ways that these works have radically transformed the study of civil rights, the majority fail to recognize the role of Latinos in the movement(s), the links between African American and Latino activism, or the multiethnic/multiracial cooperation and coalitions that emerged. My dissertation intervenes in this historiography by filling these gaps.

By and large, the city of Boston has been invisible within civil rights historiography. Other than a few works written by former movement activists, there are no monographs dedicated to any of the African American or Latino movements of the 1960s or 1970s, let alone one that takes a comparative/relational or multiethnic/multiracial approach to explicitly examine Boston's black-brown community development, racial formation, or social movements.⁴ The only area of the city's recent racial history that has been explored in true depth is the literature that centers on the "busing crisis" of the 1970s. Books such as J. Anthony Lukas' *Common Ground*, Ronald Formisano's *Boston Against Busing*, Alan Lupo's *Liberty's Chosen Home* center on white Bostonians and their resistance to court-mandated school desegregation, obscuring African American and Latino activism.⁵ Historians such as Jeanne Theoharis, Matthew Delmont, and Tess Bundy have challenged these and produced scholarship that recovers

⁴ Mel King's *Chain of Change* and Jim Vrabel's *A People's History of the New Boston* are examples of such books, since both King and Vrabel were/are local community activists. It is important to note that they do examine other black social movements other than the issue of education in Boston, but do not provide an in-depth analysis of the role of the Latino community in these mobilizations. Mel King, *Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Jim Vrabel, *A People's History of the New Boston* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2014).

⁵ For an in-depth analysis of the historiography of school desegregation in Boston and the problematic ways it dominates the city's racial history, see chapter four.

the African American movement for educational justice.⁶ Yet even these critical counternarratives fall short of providing a complete picture of Boston during this era. They continue to center school desegregation as the most important site of resistance in Boston and further a black-white binary that renders Latinos invisible. This dissertation, the first full-length comparative study of African American and Latino activism in the Civil Rights and Black Power eras, decentralizes “busing” as the focus of Boston’s racial history and challenges this racial binary.

“Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown” also intervenes in the growing field of comparative civil rights and black-brown relations, a field of study that has recently surged in the last decade or so. A number of historians such as Brian Behnken have examined African American and Latino interactions.⁷ Yet these studies focus almost entirely on Mexican Americans in California and Texas, rarely considering Latinos of other nationalities. Pushing against the focus on Mexican Americans and this Southwest/West regional focus is a growing body of literature on African Americans and

⁶ Theoharis, “We Saved the City”; Jeanne Theoharis, “I’d Rather Go to School in the South’: How Boston’s School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm,” in Theoharis and Woodard, eds., *Freedom North*, 125-151; Jeanne Theoharis, “They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid’: Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston,” in Theoharis and Woodard, eds., *Groundwork*, 17-44; Mathew Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); Tess Bundy, “‘The schools are killing our kids!’: The African American Fight for Self-Determination in the Boston Public Schools, 1949-1985,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Maryland, 2014.

⁷ For examples of works that focus on Mexican American – African American relations in the Southwest / West, see: Brian Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Brian Behnken, ed., *The Struggle in Black and Brown: African American and Mexican American Relations during the Civil Rights Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Neil Foley, *Quest for Equality: The Failed Promise of Black-Brown Solidarity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); John Márquez, *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014); Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Josh Kun and Laura Pulido, eds., *Black and Brown in Los Angeles: Beyond Conflict and Coalition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Max Krochmal, *Blue Texas: The Making of a Multiracial Democratic Coalition in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Latinos (primarily Puerto Ricans) in the northern cities like New York and Chicago, which is where I situate my own work.⁸

Behnken writes that in the midst of this “explosion” in comparative or relational scholarship on African Americans and Latinos, two distinct camps have developed. One camp “tends to see Latino/as and blacks as inherently conflicted, while the other side views the two groups as naturally cooperative,”⁹ he explains. Emphasizing conflict, “failed” coalitions, or “missed opportunities,” works such as Neil Foley’s *Quest for Equality* falls into the first camp. “The history of African American and Mexican American civil rights activism in Texas and California during and after World War II reveals, more than anything,” Foley argues, “the missed opportunities and the failed promise of these groups to work together for economic rights and equal education.”¹⁰ Legal scholar Nicolás Vaca’s *Presumed Alliance* similarly emphasizes conflict, describing African American-Latino relations in negative terms as “troubled,” “conflicted,” and

⁸ For examples of works that focus on Latino – African American relations in the urban north, see: Sonia Song-Ha Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Jesse Hoffnang-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo And New York After 1950* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); Andrés Torres, *Between Melting Pot and Mosaic: African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the New York Political Economy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Frederick Opie, *Upsetting the Apple Cart: Black-Latino Coalitions in New York City From Protest to Public Office* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Andrew Diamond, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908-1969* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Johanna Fernandez, “Denise Oliver and the Young Lords Party: Stretching the Political Boundaries of Struggle,” in *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, eds. Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁹ Brian D. Behnken, ed. *Civil Rights and Beyond: African American and Latino/a Activism in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 4.

¹⁰ Foley, *Quest for Equality*, 19.

“divided.” Playing the “black–Latino blame game,” he argues that their individual competing interests impeded their ability to unite and build coalitions.¹¹

On the whole, John Márquez’s *Black-Brown Solidarity*, Frederick Opie’s *Upsetting the Apple Cart*, and Sonia Song-Ha Lee’s *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement* fall into the second camp, downplaying conflict in favor of cooperation and coalition. This dissertation engages most explicitly with Lee’s recent work. In her study of postwar New York City, Lee examines how the meanings of “blackness” and “Puerto Rican-ness” changed over time as a result of the social mobilizations that took place between these two groups. She writes, “Not only were Puerto Ricans and African Americans racialized as ‘non-white’ in parallel ways, but they also utilized their racial and ethnic identities as sites of political mobilization through mutual collaborations and contestations of power.”¹² Drawing from Roger Brubaker and Frederick Cooper’s critique that previous scholarship on “identity” placed too much emphasis on “boundary formation rather than boundary crossing, the constitution of groups rather than the development of networks,” Lee sees the formation of Puerto Ricans’ identities as constantly shifting and at the intersection of their understanding as people of color with African Americans, as Hispanic with Spanish-speaking groups, and as members of a distinct Puerto Rican nation. This dissertation expands on Lee’s theoretical framework to consider the specific circumstances in which African American and Latino ethnoracial identities were forged in Boston during the 1960s and 1970s since, as geographer Laura Pulido aptly explains, “the process by which a people becomes racialized is highly specific. The particulars of

¹¹ Nicolás Vaca, *The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict Between Latinos and Blacks and What It Means for America* (New York: Rayo, 2004).

¹² Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement*, 4.

history, geography, the needs of capital, and the attributes of various populations all contribute.”¹³ While Lee’s work focuses exclusively on Puerto Ricans, my study broadens the scope to consider the diverse pan-Latino community. In doing so, I consider the role of nationality and other factors that influenced the identity formation of Latinos and, at times, caused divisions and intragroup tensions.

Behnken also warns scholars who adhere to either camp not to “make the mistake of seeing black-brown relations as a zero sum game, as either all good or bad.”¹⁴ Cooperation and conflict were not mutually exclusive terms. Gordon Mantler’s *Power to the Poor* embraces this notion, offering one of the most balanced and nuanced analyses of black-brown organizing available, one that reflects what he calls the “understudied complexity of the interracial and intra-racial politics among the nation’s two largest minorities.” For Mantler, “Moments of cooperation should be viewed for what they were: unique instances worthy of study but not to be held up automatically as the natural and desired outcome or goal of the era’s black and brown activists.”¹⁵ This dissertation similarly provides a complex, nuanced, and multilayered analysis of African American–Latino relations, one that both highlights moments of cooperation and coalition building as “unique instances worth of study,” but does not romanticize these nor dismiss tensions and disunity. In examining the reasons that Boston’s black and brown communities chose to forge separate movements at times, I demonstrate that some of these separate, parallel mobilizations were not rooted in the idea of “conflict” at all, but

¹³ Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 24.

¹⁴ Behnken, *Civil Rights and Beyond*, 4.

¹⁵ Gordon Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 6-7.

were actually strategic or the outcome of unique stakes in the specific issues. I also draw attention to the diverse, heterogenous nature of these black-brown communities, and highlighting the intersections of other identities like gender, class, and nation, which greatly shaped the broader movement for racial justice in Boston.

Methodology

This dissertation draws from a combination of oral history and archival sources. Given the limited written record of many poor and working-class African Americans and Latinos in Boston (though the archive is rapidly expanding as activists continue to donate their materials), oral history is central to my work. As a feminist scholar, in particular, oral history serves as a useful methodology for centering the experience of marginalized groups, and empowering them to voice their own experiences and take an active role in shaping history.¹⁶

My use oral history is greatly shaped by the work of feminist historian Maylei Blackwell. In *¡Chicana Power!*, Blackwell explains, “Oral’s history’s importance lies not only in the corrective it offers to masculinist and Eurocentric histories but also in the epistemological shift it can enact in inviting new voices into our interpretative and analytical reflections.”¹⁷ Her notion of “retrofitted memory” has been especially useful in my theoretical thinking. “Retrofitted memory,” as she defines it, is a form of countermemory that involves excavating both the dominant historical record and

¹⁶ For more on feminist oral history methodologies, see: Shana Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Mary Maynard and June Purvis, eds., *Researching Women’s Lives from a Feminist Perspective* (Bristol, PA: Taylor and Francis, 1994).

¹⁷ Maylei Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 38.

counterhegemonic articulations of history to “illuminate the suppressed knowledges of multiply oppressed subjects and thereby craft new visions of political subjectivity in and through narratives about the past.” Like Blackwell, my project takes pieces of discarded and overlooked histories of working-class black-brown communities and retrofits them into the historical record of Boston. “It is precisely within the gaps, interstices, silences, and crevices of the uneven narratives of domination,” Blackwell explains, “that possibilities lie for fracturing dominant narratives and creating spaces for new historical subjects to emerge.”¹⁸

Yet this dissertation is not simply about recovering the history of black-brown community development and grassroots movements for racial justice. Recognizing the role of memory as an inherently political act, my project intervenes into several scholarly discourses by questioning why and how these black-brown histories have been effectively erased from Boston’s historical record. To document these obscured narratives, I conducted oral history interviews with ten local organizers.¹⁹

Here it is important to note my own ethnographic positionality as a researcher and my relationships to my interviewees. Like many historians, my dissertation emerged from a personal place. My parents, Mayela and Jorge Fernández, immigrated

¹⁸ Blackwell, *Chicana Power!* 2-3, 90.

¹⁹ Note: I had initially planned to interview more than this number of activists for this project and did have some interested community members lined up. However, oral history, I discovered, is very difficult, time-consuming work: from finding contact information and establishing connections within the community, to organizing long interviews with busy and often sick elderly residents, to transcribing hours of audio. Given my timeframe, I opted to stop conducting oral histories until after my defense as part of my continued research and conversion of this dissertation into a book manuscript.

from Costa Rica to East Boston in 1971.²⁰ Neither Central Americans nor the neighborhood of East Boston are actually featured in this project at all since I chose to focus on the dominant Latino groups during the 1960s and 1970s and the neighborhoods with the largest concentration of black/brown people (and, at the time, East Boston was mostly white/ Italian). My father, however, found his first job in the city as a bookkeeper for a newly established social service organization called La Alianza Hispana (LAH).²¹ There he met the organization's director, Frieda Garcia, who is featured prominently in the story I tell. He also grew to know many leaders in the city's Latino community, becoming involved in other organizations like La Sociedad Latina and working later at ABCD (Action for Boston Community Development). Thus, Garcia responded enthusiastically to my request for an interview when she heard I was "Jorge's daughter." She was one of the first people I interviewed and proved crucial in connecting me with other participants and resources in the city.

Other activists who I interviewed who did not know my father as well as Garcia, seemed nonetheless excited to be interviewed by a perceived "insider." Many expressed excitement that a young Latina from Boston was completing a Ph.D. at all. This undoubtedly shaped the oral histories I conducted with those within the Latino

²⁰ When my parents became U.S. citizens through naturalization in 1983, my father decided he did not want white Americans calling him "George" instead of Jorge and opted to change his name. Inspired by his love for Scandinavian and German cultures, he legally changed his name to Jorgensen Grüssen Fernández.

²¹ It might be worth noting that my mother was a light-brown skinned woman with long, dark hair who, though racially ambiguous, presented as Italian for those unfamiliar with Latinos. My father's white skin, light eyes and hair afforded him the ability to "pass" as a white American in many situations, though his heavy accent easily revealed his immigrant identity. One of my favorite family stories he told me was from the 1970s when he worked briefly as a controller at Roxbury Community College. He was shocked when his car window was broken with a brick. His office was composed entirely of African Americans and they informed him that he had been targeted for vandalism because others thought he was a white man and should not have hired over a black candidate. After three separate attacks on his car, he grew scared and decided to quit. "If only they knew I was a new immigrant to the country!" he later joked.

community. Many of them switched quickly and naturally from English to Spanish and back throughout their interviews, seeming at ease that they could speak comfortably as they normally do and vocalizing that they felt I could relate to their experiences based on my own racial and cultural upbringing in Boston. Some participants took on a mentorship role in our conversations, advising me on my research and expressing true interest in documenting the history of Latinos in Boston, arguing that “we” had been left out of history for decades. While my identity as an “insider” in Boston’s Latino community afforded me respect with Latino participants, I had less success reaching African Americans in the activist community. That was, in part, due to the fact that many key black leaders had already passed away or were too elderly and ill to participate in interviews. Others did not respond to my many requests for interviews, which could have to do with my inability to get a leader equivalent to Frieda Garcia to “vouch for me” and stress the importance of my project. It could simply be that many were busy or had already been interviewed countless times for other projects. Nonetheless, my own racial position as an oral historian is important to consider.

In addition to the ten oral histories I conducted, I also relied heavily on oral histories found in the archives such as the Black Women Oral History Project at Harvard or the Concerned Higginson Parents Association Oral History Collection at UMASS Boston. These and similar oral history collections afforded me the critical opportunity to expand my study beyond the network of people who considered themselves leaders in movements to include the voices and experiences of “ordinary” people, particularly mothers of color, who were involved in these local struggles for racial justice.

In this dissertation I also rely heavily on newspaper accounts in both mainstream newspapers such as the *Boston Globe* as well as black publications such as the *Bay State Banner*. I was especially drawn to newspaper articles that featured interviews of poor and working-class black/brown residents and that captured their voices. The bulk of my archival research was conducted at the libraries at Northeastern University, Harvard University, and the University of Massachusetts – Boston, as well as the Boston City Archives. The key collections I utilize are the records of various black/ brown social service and political organizations in Boston as well as personal papers and archives of leading activists of color. I also reference city data in censuses and some local/state government documents.

Terminology

Selecting vocabulary to refer to ethnic and racial groups is a complex venture. Even the terms “ethnic” and “racial” themselves are complicated and refer to highly contested categories of identification. Thus, I favor the use of the term “ethnoracial” as a term that captures both ethnic and racial groups. This is especially important regarding the decades-long debate over whether “Latinos” can be considered a racial group or are simply an ethnic group. Building off this approach, I often use “multiethnic/multiracial” in a similar fashion.

I chose to use the terms “African American” and “black” interchangeably throughout this dissertation. The term “black” was frequently used to describe the diverse community of African descent in Boston, gaining popularity during the civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s. The term “black” or “black community”

included those from immigrant families from places across the black diaspora in the Caribbean. When relevant, I note when an individual had Caribbean ancestry though still identified as “black.” The term “black,” however, was rarely used to describe Latinos during this time, regardless of their skin tone.²²

Throughout this dissertation, I chose to use the term “Latino,” over the term “Hispanic,” which similarly poses a series of highly contested political implications. The term “Hispanic” reached official designation in the 1970 U.S. Census classifying any person of “Spanish origin or descent.” This term, as many scholars have noted, privileged the Spanish language and Latin America’s colonial ties to Spain. The term’s official description did not expand until 1990 to include those who identified as “Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Other Spanish/Hispanic origin.” The use of the term “Hispanic” today, I argue, is a rather narrow one that continues to flatten the diverse ethnoracial make up of Latin America, particularly obscuring those with Indigenous or African ancestry, or those who do not speak Spanish or claim Spanish heritage. “Latino,” however, emerged in the 1970s among grassroots groups as a progressive alternative to “Hispanic.” The term “Latino” refers to people originating from or having heritage related to Latin America. As a more inclusive umbrella term, “Latino” was preferred by many during this time (and still to this day) because it was a term that emerged within the community as a self-identification and was not imposed externally by the federal government. Linking people together through a shared geography of Latin America, it

²² Because my dissertation provides lengthy discussions of the complexities of Latino racial identity and analyzing why some Latino people identified as black or Afro-Latino though, I did have some concerns about using the term “black” interchangeably with “African American.” Ultimately, I decided it would be a useful and more concise way to refer to the group and to distinguish between how African American/black people and Latinos were racialized differently by white Americans.

also affirmed their pre-Hispanic identities, mixed race backgrounds, and diversity of languages.

I chose to use “Latino” as a broad category for people in Boston of Latin American descent, though it was not used as a racial designation in the city during the 1960 – 1985 era that this dissertation centers on. “Hispanic,” “Spanish,” “Spanish-speaking,” or “Spanish-surnamed” were much more common terms and often used interchangeably. By and large, individuals of Latin American descent did not self-identify as “Latino,” instead they utilized these broader categorizations or identified with a specific nationality (ie. “Puerto Rican,” “Dominican,” etc). When relevant, I highlight the terms that were used in Boston during this era, especially as it became a growing concern over whether Latinos should be racially classified as “white” or “black” or as their own racial category. While I often use the term “Latino community” to include migrants from various Latin American countries, it is important to point out that a majority of “Latinos” in Boston were Puerto Rican.²³

Throughout this dissertation I use both the terms “black/brown” and “black-brown.” The first term, “black/brown,” is utilized as a shorter alternative to African American/Latino. Thus, “black” describes African Americans and individuals of African descent and “brown” describes Latinos. “Black/brown” could be read as “black and

²³ It is also important to note that there has been much debate over the inherent masculinity of the term “Latino” (ending in “o”) and its presumed exclusion of non-men. This had led many to adopt the “Latina/o” alternative or, more recently, the gender inclusive term “Latinx.” I, however, do not impose these more contemporary terms on the historical figures of this dissertation. Instead, I use “Latina” to distinguish women of Latin American descent and “Latino” for men. I use “Latinos” or “Latino community” for groups, though clearly indicate one’s gender when relevant. I also use “Latinas” to refer to groups of women. Since my dissertation does not feature individuals who identified outside of the woman-man gender binary or those who were gender nonconforming, I opted not to use the term “Latinx.” Personally, I use the term “Latina” to identify myself as a woman of Latin American origin.

brown” as in the “black and brown movements.” Occasionally, I also use the term “black-brown” (with a hyphen), to emphasize instances of ethnoracial overlap. For example, I use “black-brown communities” to stress that African American and Latino communities were not entirely separate and did intersect into one. “Black-brown communities,” for example, refers to diverse shared spaces such as the South End, where African Americans and Latinos lived together. Other examples of this include instances when African Americans and Latinos did something together such as “black-brown leadership” or shared struggles such as a “black-brown movement.” I use it to highlight cooperation and coalition building. This emphasis is important, I argue, because “black/brown” (with a slash) could be misread as a divisive term - as “black” or “brown” - as if African Americans and Latinos were always operating on separate stages.

My use of the term “upbuilding” draws from the work of historian Leslie Brown. In *Upbuilding Black Durham*, Brown examines the process of black community building in Durham, North Carolina during the Jim Crow era, highlighting how gender (as well as class and generation) shaped the local “upbuilding” process. Borrowing from W. E. B. Du Bois who defines “upbuilding” as the “social and economic development” of black communities after slavery, Brown defines the concept of “upbuilding” as the “literal and figurative construction of the structures African Americans used to climb out of slavery.”²⁴ In this dissertation, “upbuilding” describes the development of community institutions and networks used by African Americans and Latinos towards racial uplift and justice in Boston. Examples of this include the formation of organizations like the

²⁴ Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 10.

Roxbury Multi-Service Center or La Alianza Hispana that sought to uplift the black-brown community through a variety of programs.

Lastly, I use terms to describe activists as “parent-organizers” or, more specifically, “mother-organizers.” I chose these to emphasize these individuals’ primary identification as parents or mothers first. For example, many of the women of color featured in this dissertation were not initially drawn into politics until issues started to negatively impact their personal lives, nor did they always consider themselves “activists.” Women who identified first as mothers and then as “organizers” formed hybrid identities as “mother-organizers.” I also use this to distinguish between professional activists or organizers whose careers were forged in civil rights organizations such as the NAACP. “Mother-organizers” saw their issues as directly linked to their families and everyday lives, often seeing “activists,” “organizers,” or “professionals” as outsiders in their movements or merely supports to their grassroots work on the ground. Similarly, I use “tenant-organizers” to privilege their main identity as tenants over activists.

Chapter Outline

“Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown” is organized thematically around issues such as welfare, poverty, housing, education, and local city politics. I decided to organize this project thematically as opposed to chronologically in order to emphasize the comparative and relational nature of my study of African American and Latino upbuilding and community organizing. As mentioned previously, my argument centers on how these two groups began to form overlapping racial and political identities based

on their similar and often intersecting experiences as predominantly poor nonwhite ethnoracial minorities in Boston. To this end, this dissertation is organized into five chapters, each exploring an issue faced by both African Americans and Latinos in the city and considers which problems drew them to cooperate or pulled them apart to work on separate, parallel paths.

While chronology is important, the majority of the movements analyzed in this dissertation reached their peak momentum between 1965 and 1975. Since the movements occurred simultaneously and often intersected with one another, it can be difficult to keep track of the sequence of events, especially during this ten-year span. To aid this process, I include a timeline at the end of each chapter of the major organizations, events, and movement milestones discussed within it. These timelines are not, by any means, complete chronologies of Boston's African American and Latino history; instead, they reflect the specific mobilizations I have chosen to focus on throughout my analysis.

Chapter one, "Grove Hall is Bound to Explode," examines how poor and working-class mothers of color navigated the changing racial and economic landscape of Boston's declining and increasingly segregated neighborhoods. In outlining the formation of Boston's "urban crisis," I draw attention to how women on AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) or "welfare mothers" came together to form Mothers for Adequate Welfare (MAW) and organize a grassroots movement for welfare rights. Despite its inability to effectively reach the Latino community or establish a diverse group of leaders, this history of MAW is important in understanding how poor and working-class black and Latina women began to forge overlapping racial and political identities

centered on their shared intersectional identities as both poor mothers and nonwhite ethnoracial minorities. Black/brown MAW organizers, I argue, began recognizing their parallel and overlapping experiences and seeing one another as allies in the struggle against the established white (racist) bureaucracies of Boston. The movement represented one of the earliest attempts at organizing beyond the black-white binary in the city of Boston.

Chapter two, “Upbuilding,” examines how middle-class African American and Latino social workers mobilized around the issue of poverty in Boston, focusing on their self-determined efforts to reform the existing welfare system as well as establish new, autonomous social service organizations. I argue that these struggles around poverty and the institutions that emerged out of them were the center of the upbuilding process in black-brown neighborhoods of Boston such as Roxbury and Dorchester, and ultimately formed the basis for their collective mobilizations. I consider the rise of new black-brown led social service organizations such as the Roxbury Multi-Service Center and La Alianza Hispana, who proved more effective than MAW organizers at developing an early multiethnic/multiracial coalition and cultivating diverse, more racially balanced leadership.

Chapter three, “We Shall Not Be Moved,” examines an issue closely related to the antipoverty movement - black-brown struggles for decent, affordable housing in Boston. I examine movements for tenants’ rights in Roxbury and then focus on three organizations that emerged in the South End during the 1960s: the South End Tenants Council (SETC), Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (Puerto Rican Tenants in Action or IBA), and an umbrella group, Community Assembly for a United South End (CAUSE). Similar to

the economic justice movement, the movement for equal housing forged by these organizations provided an opportunity for African Americans and Latinos to work together across ethnic/racial lines. Yet this opportunity did not always materialize into black-brown movements with participants of all ethnoracial groups equally represented. The common fight against the Boston Housing Authority (BHA)/ Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and urban renewal, in particular, brought African Americans and Latinos to cooperate, yet I argue these early coalitions were tenuous, complex, and often unbalanced, often representing one group's interests more than the other's. This is evident in the movements for tenant rights and fair housing that remained ethnoracially separate in terms of leadership, as African Americans and Latinos were not evenly represented as decision-makers or public spokespeople.

Chapters four and five shift away from moments of black-brown cooperation to examine the separate, parallel educational justice movements waged by African Americans and Latinos in Boston. Chapter four, "You Women Should be Home Washing Your Dishes," focuses on the 1960s in the years leading up to Judge Garrity's decision and court-mandated desegregation. I highlight the agency of ordinary parent-organizers who worked strategically in and outside the school system, employing numerous tactics in the pursuit of educational justice. I focus particularly on the leading role of working-class African American and Latina mothers. Though Latino organizers drew inspiration and organizing strategies from their African American counterparts, their educational activism emerged almost a decade later. The movements underwent similar courses and both centered on ideas of community control and self-determination, but diverged from

parallel tracks on the issue of language, since Latino activists centered their movement on the protection and expansion of bilingual education.

Chapter five, “‘Vamos a Ver’ / ‘Let’s Wait and See,’” begins where chapter four ends to explore how the black/ brown movements for educational justice took form in the 1970s around Garrity’s order and in the years following desegregation in 1974. My analysis challenges Boston’s dominant historical narrative centered on the “busing crisis” frame and its inherent black-white binary. In disrupting this story, I illustrate the limitations of this framework since “busing” did little to actually address the needs and demands of the diverse black-brown communities of Boston. I maintain busing was never central to black/brown parent-organizers visions of educational justice or desegregation. I thus examine the failed logic of Garrity’s desegregation plan and the chaotic storm new school assignments centered around “busing” caused poor black/ brown families. I draw attention to the experiences of Latino children, whose stories have never been told as part of the city’s “busing “ narrative at all.

My analysis considers how and why Latino children and their families were not interested in integrating into predominantly white schools, and instead, were more concerned about their own safety and protecting the bilingual education programs. Though the Latino campaign for bilingual education was disrupted by Garrity’s order, I illustrate how Latino parent-organizers ultimately pressured the court to adjust it to maintain its viability. Beyond this, I challenge the focus on “busing” in 1974 as the culminating point of black/brown movements for educational justice in the city. For example, the struggle for bilingual education in Boston, I illustrate, continued long after this and achieved some of its greatest successes when Latino parents expanded the

movement to include other immigrant groups and form new multiethnic/multiracial (and multilingual) coalitions.

In the epilogue, I briefly examine the shift away from grassroots organizing in Boston, as black/brown activist leaders increasingly entered local electoral politics in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. My analysis focuses on Mel King's 1983 mayoral campaign and challenges dominant declension narratives that maintain that movements for civil rights deteriorated by the end of the 1960s. I focus specifically on King's multiethnic/ multiracial Rainbow Coalition, which I argue represented the culminating intersection of the black-brown movements for economic, housing, and educational justice of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as draw broader conclusions on the lasting impacts of the movements and the interventions of this study.

CHAPTER ONE

“Grove Hall is Bound to Explode”: Black/Brown Mother-Organizers and the Movement for Welfare Rights

On June 2, 1967 a black mother-organizer declared on the steps of a local welfare office, “We’re here because we are sick and tired of the way the welfare department, and especially Grove Hall treats us.”²⁵ She was a spokeswoman and part of an interracial group of approximately thirty mothers called Mothers for Adequate Welfare (MAW) who staged a sit-in at the Grove Hall office of the Welfare Department on Blue Hill Avenue in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston. This peaceful protest quickly escalated, resulting into one of the city’s most infamous riots. This weekend of unrest revealed many of the heightened hostilities between the city’s welfare system and its poor and working-class black/brown residents. As the concentration of poverty grew among African Americans and Latinos in cities like Boston, the interactions between these black-brown communities and public institutions like welfare departments were often key sites of resistance and formed the roots of urban uprisings across the nation during the 1960s. Black and Latina women, in particular, faced distinct challenges in these poor neighborhoods. As Lisa Levenstein explains in her study of postwar Philadelphia, they not only suffered racial discrimination in housing and unemployment, but also gender discrimination. This was also true of black and brown women in Boston. Levenstein

²⁵ “Welfare,” *Bay State Banner*, June 3, 1967, 1.

continued, “Lack of child care hindered the acquisition of jobs; unemployment restricted access to health care; welfare assistance enabled women to care for children; domestic violence inhibited women’s abilities to pursue employment; dilapidated housing contributed to health problems; and public portrayals of African Americans as welfare ‘cheats’ and criminals created a social environment that impeded their access to jobs and housing.”²⁶

Government officials in Boston, however, rarely acknowledged these systemic challenges. Instead, they adhered to the “culture of poverty” and “underclass” discourses, which explained that migrants of color—whether from the U.S. South, Latin America, or the Caribbean—were much less likely to assimilate into mainstream American society than earlier European immigrants. These discourses were propagated by social scientists and public policymakers in the 1950s and 1960s in works such as Daniel Moynihan’s *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965) and Oscar Lewis’s *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty- San Juan and New York* (1966), which argued that the pathology fostered by the “culture of poverty” was self-perpetuating. Lewis, in particular, argued that the “culture of poverty” was unresponsive to government intervention and tended to be reproduced from one generation to the next. As historian Sonia Song-Ha Lee explains, this meant that poor black and brown people were viewed as incapable of improving their status, instead “their ‘pathological’ behavior [was] static.”²⁷ The culture of poverty discourse thus became a tool of racial

²⁶ Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 5-6.

²⁷ Sonia Song-Ha Lee, *Building A Latino Civil Rights Movement: Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and the Pursuit of Racial Justice in New York City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 43.

domination—a language used to blame black-brown communities (and particularly poor and working-class mothers) for lacking the economic and cultural resources necessary to succeed. Assumptions of black/brown familial dysfunction and cultural deficiency permeated all city agencies from the welfare and housing departments to the public school system. Boston’s white city officials shifted the blame onto individuals for their economic and social struggles, frequently denying the existence of residential segregation, racial discrimination in the labor market, inequitable schooling, and other systemic policies and inequalities that fueled the economic decline of the “inner city” and helped to form Boston’s black-brown ghettos. White officials even went to extreme lengths to defend and maintain the existing welfare system, at times calling upon a militarized police force to forcibly restrain passive peaceful protesters who demonstrated any signs of political dissent.

The history of the MAW protest sheds light on one of the many strategies utilized by poor and working-class people of color, particularly women, in their struggle for adequate and respectful government assistance in Boston. Arguing that they were not merely recipients of the state’s social services, these organizers publicly displayed their agency, demanding better treatment from city workers and advocating for an active role in the implementation of the assistance programs. This history also reveals one of the earliest attempts of interracial organizing among women of color in the city. MAW drew a diverse group of mother-organizers and the group’s attempt to reach out into the Latino community illustrates the growing interest in multiethnic/multiracial organizing beyond the black-white binary. However, the African American community was so well-organized during this time compared to the fairly new Latino community, that MAW’s

leadership remained primarily black.

In this chapter, I examine how poor and working-class mothers of color navigated the changing racial and economic landscape of Boston's declining and increasingly segregated neighborhoods. In outlining the formation of Boston's "urban crisis," I draw attention to how women on AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) or "welfare mothers" came together in their communities to discuss issues they had with their caseworkers and their inability to survive off the limited government benefits they received. As they formed a political consciousness, these black/brown women strategized how to become better advocates for themselves and one another and seek broader welfare reform in Boston. The resulting welfare rights movement represented one of the earliest attempts at organizing beyond the black-white binary in the city of Boston. Though the movement was unable to effectively reach the Latino community or establish a diverse group of leaders, this history is important in understanding how poor and working-class black and Latina women began to forge overlapping racial and political identities centered on their shared intersectional identities as both poor mothers and nonwhite ethnoracial minorities. Black/brown MAW organizers, I argue, began recognizing their parallel and overlapping experiences and seeing one another as allies in the struggle against the established white (racist) bureaucracies of Boston. These early intersecting identities and solidarities were later mirrored by middle class black/brown social workers in the broader movement for economic justice in Boston.

I. The Origins of Boston's "Urban Crisis"

Though the population of African Americans and Latinos in Boston never reached

the heights of other urban centers such as New York, a look at the city's shifting demographic patterns in the 1960s and 1970s reveals their significant presence in the city. In neighborhoods such as Roxbury and Dorchester, these groups became the clear majority, in large part due to patterns of housing discrimination and residential segregation, as well as the city's emerging urban renewal programs. This demographic data coupled with an examination of the persistent poverty sheds light upon the city's "urban crisis" as well as the growing need for government assistance programs like AFDC and other social services in black-brown neighborhoods.

Boston's African American population hovered at about 3% until World War II. The free black community that had settled in the north slope of the downtown Beacon Hill neighborhood in the 1800s moved at the turn of the century first to the South End and then eventually settling in Roxbury, especially "the hill" highland area south of Dudley Square. Following World War II, the black population quickly grew from 23,679 in 1940 to 40,057 in 1950, largely as a result of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South. Seeking to escape the harsh realities of Jim Crow, many southern blacks believed moving north would provide them with more freedom and opportunities for social mobility, though upon arriving they quickly realized that Boston was not living up to its name as the "Cradle of Liberty." These southerners, often called the "Homies" because they were always referring to their southern homes, were joined by migrants from across the black diaspora, particularly Caribbean and West Indian nations like Jamaica and Barbados. By 1960, the black population in Boston had grown to 63,165 and constituted between 9% and 10% of the city's total population. Then in 1970, it reached

104,707 people or 16.3%.²⁸

Latinos, on the other hand, were a smaller population than blacks in the city, yet grew quicker during this era. Though there was some small-scale yet steady Latino migration in the late 19th century due to commercial and political ties between New England and Puerto Rico, these were merely the roots for subsequent and much more significant migration into the Boston area that began in 1950. Since most migrants were rural agricultural workers in the farms of Western Massachusetts, many moved to Boston as the harvest ended either seasonally or to start new lives in the city. During the 1960s, growing numbers of Puerto Ricans settled into the more affordable neighborhoods of Boston seeking low-wage industrial or service sector jobs. Others migrated to Boston during this time from New York City and New Jersey, hoping to escape the problems associated with urban decay, while a small number came to Boston to take advantage of the city's numerous universities. It is important to note that while the Latino population in Boston was at least 40% Puerto Rican, other Latinos including Cubans, Dominicans, and some Central Americans, began arriving in late 1960s and 1970s seeking refuge from the political struggles in their home countries. This mass migration coincided with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act (also known as the Hart-Celler Act) of 1965 that abolished quotas based on national origin.²⁹

Most Latino migrants settled first in the South End area of Boston, which was historically considered a "little Ellis Island," as the city's port of entrance for immigrants.

²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 1970 and 1980.

²⁹ Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, "Saving the *Parcela*: A Short History of Boston's Puerto Rican Community," in *Puerto Rican Diaspora: Historical Perspectives*, eds. Carmen Teresa Whalen and Victor Vázquez-Hernández (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 200-226.

In 1970, the first year that the census started asking about Hispanic origin, 17,984 Latinos (labeled as “Hispanics”) were counted in Boston, of whom 7,335 (or 41%) were Puerto Rican.³⁰ According to the census, Latinos made up only 3% of the city’s total population. This, however, was an extremely modest approximation. Many Bostonians, social service organizations, city reports, school officials, and journalists alike estimated the total number of Latinos or “Spanish-speaking community” in Boston both to be significantly larger, between 30,000 and 40,000 people, and to be growing rapidly during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is important to note the difficulty in estimating the size of the Latino population during this era. Since Puerto Ricans were American citizens, many were not counted at all by immigration officials which skewed those official numbers, while others did not participate in census surveys. This data also does not account for many undocumented immigrants from the Caribbean and Central America, who lived discretely, many in constant fear of deportation. Though the language of some white journalists, for example, reflected underlying racialized fears of Puerto Rican “overpopulation,” it does not appear their estimates were inflated as they were substantiated by numerous other sources. In fact, it was Latinos and African Americans who worked in social service organizations and education who most adamantly argued that the Latino population in Boston was significantly higher than official records indicated.³¹

Latinos settled alongside African Americans in neighborhoods such as the South

³⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 1970.

³¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 1970; Task Force on Children Out of School, *The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 16-17; Armando Martinez, quoted in “Hub Programs Battle Giant Language Problem: New Doors Opening for Spanish-Speaking Children,” Phyllis W. Coons, *Boston Globe*, August 17, 1969, 67.

End, Roxbury, and Dorchester, which were undergoing demographic shifts due to patterns of “white flight.” Although Boston’s dominant historical narrative perpetuates the notion that conflicts over the court-ordered desegregation of public schools in 1974 caused white flight, in fact, a majority of whites left the city in the 1940s and 1950s lured by the booming technology, research, and development industry in the newly prosperous and thriving Massachusetts suburbs. While the prospect of new “high tech” jobs grew dramatically in suburban towns such as Waltham, Lexington, and Burlington during the 1950s, the number of jobs within city limits decreased at similar rates. Between 1947 and 1959, employment along Route 128 increased by 27,600 jobs, while in Boston the total number of jobs decreased by 17,500.³² The white suburbs provided the labor supply for these outlying suburban industries as the inner city labor force remained trapped in the few industries that remained.

By 1960, 97% of African Americans (and similarly high numbers of Latinos) in Boston lived in the neighborhoods of the South End, Roxbury, and North Dorchester, known as the “Black Boomerang.” Federal, state, and local housing and banking officials played a critical role in creating and maintaining the racially segregated neighborhoods in Boston through restrictive covenants, red-lining, discriminatory lending practices, and public housing policies. The Boston Housing Authority (BHA) was key in this, promoting residential segregation through its administration of the city’s large public

³² As the black population increased, an overwhelming majority were unskilled laborers. They faced decreased job opportunities in this new research and tech-based economy and competed for minimal wages. During the 1950s, industrial jobs in Boston declined from 112,000 to 50,000 and wholesale and retail jobs declined from 150,000 to 90,000. Mel King, *Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 25; Jeanne Theoharis, “We have to learn to define ourselves: Black teenagers, urban schools, writing and the politics of representation”, Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1996, 108.

housing program. The BHA established and maintained segregated public housing by explicitly assigning units based on race. This practice was supported by the racially segregated housing outlines in the 1938 Federal Housing Authority Underwriting Manual. In 1951, a report by the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) explained, “The pattern of racial segregation and discrimination in public housing in the City of Boston was set as early as 1940 at the beginning of the federal slum clearance program. By 1950 colored families were housed exclusively in two projects in the South End and in the wing of a third.”³³

By 1950, the Massachusetts State Legislature had moved to prohibit segregated housing practices yet discriminatory practices in the BHA continued. In addition to creating racially segregated public housing projects, local and state banking and housing officials, in collaboration with federal agencies such as the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), Veteran’s Administration (VA), and the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), promoted racial segregation in the private housing market in Boston by denying mortgage applications for homes in the most concentrated black-brown neighborhoods such as Roxbury. These were based on HOLC maps which marked these neighborhoods as blighted. White prospective homeowners shifted to purchase homes in the suburbs, leaving African Americans and Latinos with few housing options outside the “Black Boomerang.”

The city of Boston’s overall population declined greatly after 1950. That year, the city’s population of over 801,000 was at its highest point in history. By 1960, it had

³³ “Plaintiffs’ Findings,” Morgan v Hennigan, Papers of the NAACP, Library of Congress, Series V, Box 954, Folder 4-5, 253. Cited in Bundy, “The Schools are Killing our Kids!” 51.

suffered a loss of over 100,000 people (697, 197). The city's population continued to decline over the next two decades, reaching 641,071 in 1970 and its lowest point of 562,994 in 1980.³⁴

In the 1950s, Boston had unveiled its urban renewal plan and by the 1960s, it was in full swing. Its goals were to revitalize the city, boost its declining economy, and encourage white Bostonians to stay and settle. In many ways, city planners were successful at achieving these goals, but this fundamentally shaped neighborhoods like the South End. Though the neighborhood had been racially and economically diverse, efforts to gentrify eventually forced out poor and working-class residents of color, causing local housing activists to refer to the city's program as "urban removal" instead of urban renewal. Black political activist Mel King grew up in the South End and explained the impact of urban renewal on the city's black/brown populations:

The Master Plan for Boston had begun its job of forcing black people out of the South End and into Roxbury and Dorchester in order to accommodate the commercial and residential needs of Boston's banks, insurance companies, and, of course, MIT and Harvard...This systematic denial of jobs, housing, education and political representation by the Boston power structure came into full development in the creation of the "ghetto," for the image of the ghetto allowed the ruling elite to blame the black community for what they had systematically imposed upon us.³⁵

Though King focused on the black population affected by urban renewal, Latinos were also forced out of the South End. As he accurately explained, many moved next door to the neighborhood of Roxbury, where the local economy was in decline and housing was more affordable. By 1960, Roxbury was already the center of the black community, and

³⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980.

³⁵ Mel King, "Growing Up with the South End," *New Boston Review* (July/August 1981): 9-11.

blacks comprised almost 60% of the neighborhood's residents.³⁶ Latinos were becoming a significant presence in the neighborhood as well; by 1970, it was estimated that between 5,000 and 10,000 Latinos lived in Roxbury and that number rapidly grew throughout the decade.³⁷

African Americans and Latinos faced high rates of unemployment and poverty, inadequate housing, and underperforming schools in neighborhoods like Roxbury, which was often defined as Boston's greatest "slum." A 1966 study on the "ghetto social structure" of the city reported that Roxbury had a "disproportionate share of Boston's housing dilapidation, school deterioration reported crime, AFDC, and reported juvenile delinquency."³⁸ In 1970, the U.S. Census reported that 30% of Boston's Latinos lived in poverty, which was twice as high as the overall population. Despite the programs established in the 1960s by the War on Poverty, Roxbury remained the city's poorest neighborhood; it contained pockets of poverty that rivaled parts of the rural South.

II. Early Attempts at Building a Multiethnic/Multiracial Movement

For Boston's poorest African American and Latino residents in areas such as Roxbury and Dorchester, turning to welfare was a measure of last resort. Those who qualified for public assistance found themselves entangled in what many thought was one of the worst welfare systems in the nation. Massachusetts was the only state in the

³⁶ Sally Brewster Moulton, "Roxbury, Boston, and the Boston SMSA: Socioeconomic Trends 1960-1985," *New England Journal of Public Policy* 4:2 (June 1988).

³⁷ Rosemary Whiting, "An Overview of the Spanish Speaking Population in Boston," (Boston: City of Boston's Office of Public Service, 1969), 3. Cited in "The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston," Task Force on Children Out of School (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 16.

³⁸ Joe Feagin, *Ghetto Social Structure: A Survey of Black Bostonians* (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1974), 13.

country where each city and town dispersed welfare funds independently. This resulted in what the *Boston Globe* called a “an uneven river of local busybodies and red tape uncommon even for welfare, which is the Land of Red Tape.”³⁹ Black and brown women with children, in particular, struggled to navigate the complex bureaucratic system and received little support or respect from welfare workers whose job it was to assist them.

During the 1960s, the majority of Boston’s welfare workers were white women who received little to no training. Most had not received degrees in social work or any type of human services nor had experience working with diverse communities; instead they were the most competent clerks who had mastered the maze of paperwork required of each applicant. In a 1965 *Globe* series titled “The State of Welfare,” journalist Jean Dietz explained that “the vast majority of Massachusetts welfare workers are in late middle age, untrained for social work, and protected in their jobs by an outdated civil service law that discriminates against younger imaginative workers. The system is riddled with frustration - and low morale prevails among much of the personnel.”⁴⁰

The Grove Hall welfare office in Roxbury, in particular, lacked the resources necessary to serve the growing African American and Latino populations of the neighborhood. Whereas over 90% of the office’s caseload were black and brown mothers, fewer than 10% of the social workers were people of color. Applicants waited hours in the basement office to see overwhelmed caseworkers who had high caseloads of up to 100 families and so few supporting clerk-typists that they were unable to complete site visits or the necessary paperwork, often resulting in benefits being

³⁹ Jean Dietz, “Costs High, Progress Limited: Rehabilitation Still the Key,” *Boston Globe*, March 28, 1965, 42.

⁴⁰ Jean Dietz, “Aims Are High — Results Low,” *Boston Globe*, March 23, 1965, 2.

suddenly cut from families without notice. Jessie Herr, a caseworker at Grove Hall's welfare office explained, "We're overcrowded, understaffed, case loads are high, budgets inadequate, and social workers are bogged down with paperwork, releases, and forms to fill out."⁴¹ In the "Land of Red Tape" there was little time to get to know applicants or show concern for individual families' circumstances. Former caseworker Sumner McClain explained, "I was spending 90 percent of my time with paperwork, not people."⁴² Another caseworker echoed McClain's frustrations, "How can you help people you don't even have time to get to know? We don't have time to do anything except hand out the money and make out the forms." Dietz concluded, "the program is bogged down in a river of red tape and the welfare workers whose job it is to rehabilitate are too busy, instead, trying to keep from growing in it."⁴³ Some were so disillusioned with the system, they "stopped caring about the standards" or quality of service and merely gave up and quit.⁴⁴

With little to no support from white welfare workers, poor and working-class black/brown mothers in Boston began to forge their own movement for welfare reform in 1963 with Doris Bland at its head. At the time, Bland was a thirty-one-year-old black mother of five and budding activist who lived in North Dorchester.⁴⁵ Bland's interest in

⁴¹ Jessie Herr, quoted in Janet Riddell, "Social Workers Blame System for Roxbury Welfare Problem," *Boston Globe*, June 4, 1967, 18.

⁴² Sumner McClain, quoted in Riddell, "Social Workers Blame System for Roxbury Welfare Problem."

⁴³ Dietz, "Aims Are High — Results Low."

⁴⁴ Anonymous, quoted in Dietz, "Aims Are High — Results Low."

⁴⁵ Doris Bland was born in Canada in 1932 though little is known about her personal before she settled in the North Dorchester neighborhood of Boston. She left school after ninth grade and became a single mother of five children. She later married and had three more children. In 1964, Bland began organizing poor and working-class mothers, mobilizing women on her street into a rent strike because the landlord did not provide sufficient heat or water in their apartments. Then, from 1967-1969, she worked for the New Urban League and was a founder and treasurer of the Community School in Roxbury. She also served as a coordinator for tutoring programs sponsored by the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and was co-

activism aligned with increasing interest in welfare reform nationwide. As historian Felicia Kornbluh explains, the emerging welfare rights movement “attracted thousands of African American women who were committed to social change. It also attracted Puerto Rican women and other Latinas, white women, Native American women, and low-income men.” Kornbluh continued that thousands of public aid recipients made demands on the political system during the 1960s and 1970s, which “unsettled conventional power relationships based on sex, economic class, language, citizenship status, and race.”⁴⁶ It was no surprise that Bland drew inspiration from several other welfare mothers from cities outside Boston whom she met at a civil rights march. She then began learning about how the welfare system worked more effectively in other states. She later explained, “We found out that they were able to get things like surplus commodities in their homes, while people in Boston couldn’t.”⁴⁷ She met a dozen or so other local black welfare mothers at the Dudley Street Area Planning Action Council and organized meetings to discuss their concerns with the welfare system. These poor mothers had learned that President Johnson’s 1964 War on Poverty was a double-edged sword, as historian Annelise Orleck argues, since there were always strings attached to receiving federal benefits. Orleck writes, “Accepting cash relief, food stamps, and program funds from government agencies inevitably meant accepting government supervision. For welfare mothers, that supervision came in the form of caseworkers who

chairman of CORE’s housing committee. In 1968, she was appointed to the Massachusetts Health Advisory Committee by Governor Volpe and named to the Public Welfare Board by Mayor White. She died abruptly in 1970 at the age of thirty-eight following an asthma attack. “Mrs. Bland, welfare group founder, 38,” *Boston Globe*, January 24, 1970, 25.

⁴⁶ Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 2.

⁴⁷ Doris Bland, quoted in “MAWS Fight Welfare Woes,” *Bay State Banner*, March 14, 1968, 8.

asked prying and humiliating questions, searched their homes and belongings in midnight raids, and sometimes threatened to take away their children.”⁴⁸ Bland and the other mothers bonded over these issues and their identities as poor and working-class mothers. Interested in reform that would address some of their concerns, the black/brown mothers quickly shifted their identities to mother-organizers, forming a group which they named Mothers for Adequate Welfare (MAW). They elected Bland as the group’s first president.

From its inception, MAW was a multiethnic/multiracial group composed of African American, Latina, and white women, though led almost exclusively by black women. This was likely because Bland and other black women drew from their previous organizing experience and existing networks within the more established black community, particularly compared to the newer Latino migrant community. Bland explained it was always integrated because “welfare is not just a black problem - it’s everyone’s.” She emphasized MAW’s group-centered leadership strategy. Within the group, she explained, “every mother feels like a leader.” The group strived for peaceful cooperation and shared division of duties amongst all mother-organizers. Bland argued there was little internal tension. “We can’t afford to fight among ourselves when we’re fighting for human rights,” she explained. “What Welfare has done to us, we don’t want to do to each other.”⁴⁹

As the organization grew, they sought out help from local college students, particularly from a local chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), to conduct

⁴⁸ Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 4.

⁴⁹ Doris Bland, quoted in “MAWS Fight Welfare Woes.”

research and learn their rights. They eventually acquired a copy of the Massachusetts State Manual of Welfare. “All hell broke loose when we got hold of that,” Bland explained. “We found a lot of people weren’t getting the full budget they were entitled to.”⁵⁰ At first, MAW organizers simply sought out more welfare benefits. SDS organizer Marcia Butman recalled that the mothers had a difficult time talking with their caseworkers. “It wasn’t just because a lot of the recipients were poor, uneducated, and black and almost all of the caseworkers were better educated and white,” Butman explained. “It was that the caseworkers were just very difficult people. They would have been difficult for *anyone* to deal with.”⁵¹ Thus, MAW established a “buddy system.” MAW members would accompany new recipients to intake interviews. This new system proved effective and the organization continued to grow, with a core group of 200 and a mailing list of over 1,000.

In the spring of 1965, MAW staged one of its first demonstrations. Approximately 50 mother-organizers showed up at Mayor Collins’ City Hall office to demand the city speed up its distribution of surplus food. When their demand was not met, they staged a sit-in at the city’s Welfare Department Headquarters until the food was handed out. The following year, MAW built on its growing network to join a national protest for welfare rights. On July 1, 1966, around 50 MAW organizers and their children marched from the South End to the Boston Common. There, Doris Bland presented a list of demands to William Lally, the commissioner of Boston’s Welfare Department, as organizers

⁵⁰ Bland, quoted in “MAWS Fight Welfare Woes.”

⁵¹ Marcia Butman, quoted in Vrabel, *A People’s History of the New Boston*, 82-3. Emphasis in original.

surrounded the two with signs that read, “Lally Don’t Dally.”⁵² In an (albeit superficial) attempt to reach the Latino community and cross the black-white binary into the new, unfamiliar territory of multiethnic/multiracial and bilingual organizing, other signs had welfare demands written in Spanish.⁵³ The group called for affordable and quality childcare so that they could work, for private interviews with social workers, and for publishing all rules and regulations in one clear, accessible document.⁵⁴ The mother-organizers then marched to the State House to lobby for these demands.

Disappointed that state officials had not attended the rally, MAW organizers were pleasantly surprised when they ran into Governor John Volpe who courteously spent time listening to their concerns. Mother-organizer Constance Lew told the Governor, “We’ve been walking through life for so long. You have got to listen to these women’s demands.” Volpe promised them an appointment a week or so later and the women applauded him. They then marched downstairs to Attorney General Brooke’s office. Upon hearing that Brooke was away and would not return to his office, the mother-organizers sat peacefully in the hallway and began strategically singing “We Shall Overcome.” Promptly, the women were then invited into Brooke’s office and served a variety of snacks until he arrived ten minutes later and heard their concerns.⁵⁵ This demonstration set the stage for a series of sit-ins at the Grove Hall welfare office the following year in 1967. One caseworker who had recently quit working there, predicted

⁵² Elliot Freidman, “Welfare Mothers Cheer Volpe, Brooke,” *Boston Globe*, July 1, 1966, 1, 8.

⁵³ David W. Wilson, “The ‘New Left’ Rocks the Hill,” *Boston Globe*, July 2, 1966, 7.

⁵⁴ Vrabel, *A People’s History of the New Boston*, 84.

⁵⁵ Freidman, “Welfare Mothers Cheer Volpe, Brooke.”

upon his departure, "Grove Hall is bound to explode."⁵⁶

On May 22, 1967, MAW held a sit-in at the Roxbury office on Blue Hill Avenue to protest the conditions and mistreatment by welfare workers. The mother-organizers stayed overnight when their concerns were not heard. As mentioned previously, even the welfare workers were aware that the system was fundamentally flawed. One caseworker Jess Herr explained, "I can really understand the gripes of the mothers. We would love to be - and we should be - giving more and better services. But we simply can't under the present system."⁵⁷ Demonstrations continued the following weeks.

On Friday, June 2, MAW organizers refused to leave the Grove Hall welfare office until their concerns were addressed. According to the *Banner*, one anonymous mother-organizer declared, "We're here because we are sick and tired of the way the welfare department, and especially Grove Hall treats us." The MAW spokeswoman continued explaining what motivated the protest, "We're tired of being treated like criminals, of having to depend on suspicious and insulting social workers, and at being completely at the mercy of a department we have no control over."⁵⁸ Yet Boston's Welfare Director Daniel Cronin refused to come to the office to speak with the mothers. Feeling "totally ignored," the mother-organizers then decided to shift strategies. With bicycle chains they chained themselves to radiators and used the remaining chains to lock shut the main doors from both the inside and the outside, thus preventing fifty-eight welfare workers from leaving for the day.

While the decision to chain themselves and the doors was certainly bold, none of

⁵⁶ Sumner McClain, quoted in Riddell, "Social Workers Blame System for Roxbury Welfare Problem."

⁵⁷ Jessie Herr, quoted in Riddell, "Social Workers Blame System for Roxbury Welfare Problem," 18.

⁵⁸ "Welfare," *Bay State Banner*, 1.

the mothers expected such immense backlash. They still saw this move as part of their nonviolent direct action strategy, a symbolic gesture that would merely force welfare officials to listen to their concerns. At first, police officers inside the building were relatively courteous and patient, but their approach quickly changed when an elderly welfare worker fell ill and suddenly needed medical attention. The welfare workers called for assistance and Boston Mayor John Collins ordered the police to get her out and empty the building. When the officers could not easily cut the chains, they called for reinforcements. Welfare Director Cronin refused to enter through a window to negotiate with MAW activists or even communicate through loudspeakers from outside. As a large crowd of over 500 people gathered outside the building, over 30 policemen climbed up fire ladders and through the windows. According to MAW activist Katherine Moore, the officers did not ask the mothers to leave, nor did they warn them, or even arrest them. Instead, the police superintendent raised his hands and ordered the officers to “get ‘em. Beat them if you have to, but get them out of here.”⁵⁹ Others reported the officers shouted racial slurs, threatening to kill the mothers, even though many had small children by their sides. Wielding billy clubs, the police violently attacked protesters inside. One teenage onlooker reported that he witnessed a police officer beating a pregnant woman “like a drum.”⁶⁰ While demonstrators were dragged out of the building and arrested, supporters rushed inside to their aid and were also brutally beaten and injured. Onlookers began hurling a barrage of bricks, bottles, and rocks towards the police.

⁵⁹ “Police Riot in Grove Hall, Scores Injured,” *Bay State Banner*, June 3, 1967, 1.

⁶⁰ “Roxbury Residents Brutalized,” *Bay State Banner*, June 10, 1967, 3.

Things quickly escalated as hundreds more policemen arrived to the scene outfitted in riot gear. A full-scale riot ensued full of violence, stoned cars, smashed windows, and looted stores. The melee continued over night into early morning. On Saturday morning, families in Roxbury woke up to over fifteen blocks of their neighborhood destroyed and millions of dollars in property damage, particularly large parts of Blue Hill Avenue, which was a main commercial strip and the center of Boston's black community. Smaller incidents of violence, looting, arson, and destruction of property continued throughout the weekend. All in all, sixty-eight people were injured and over fifty were arrested. What had begun as a peaceful sit-in had turned into a "race riot," similar to other incidents of urban unrest that swept the nation during the 1960s. As Doris Bland later summarized, "That's what happens when you want to be heard and no one wants to listen."⁶¹

On Saturday, June 3, MAW held a press conference where Doris Bland denounced the violence but defended the mother-organizers and their demonstration. Then on Sunday, June 4, Mayor Collins held his own press conference equally condemning the violence as well as announcing the establishment of a new committee that would research and recommend ways to improve Boston's welfare system. "Unquestionably, improvements," Collins declared, "can be made in our welfare system on the local, state and national levels, and I shall ask the panel to study this." Using broad, subtle language, Collins then shifted to indirectly admonish the mother-organizers of MAW for "restricting the freedom of others" in such a way that resulted in personal injury and property damage to "innocent parties." He declared, "disorderly protests will not be

⁶¹ Doris Bland, quoted in "MAWS Fight Welfare Woes," *Bay State Banner*, March 14, 1968, 8.

tolerated in Boston.”⁶²

The following Monday, June 5, MAW presented Mayor Collins with a 48-hour ultimatum to correct the welfare abuses “or they would take another action.” Katheryn Moore, a spokeswoman or “messenger” for MAW delivered a new list of ten demands to City Hall. MAW also invited Collins to meet with them in Roxbury, but he refused, arguing as he had throughout the entire weekend that he conducted all the city’s business in City Hall.⁶³ Several MAW members cooperated, agreeing to meet with the Mayor and other city officials the following morning. But on Tuesday, June 6, MAW failed to show up for the scheduled meeting. After Collins waited for twenty minutes, he convened another press conference and abruptly announced that he would not run for reelection in the fall.

In a television address that Tuesday evening, Collins defended his legacy as mayor and particularly his emphasis on urban renewal, while taking aim at MAW and other activists in the city. He explained that he would continue to meet with “any responsible group” but again reiterated that “disorderly protests” would not be tolerated in Boston.⁶⁴ Historian Thomas O’Connor argued that it was precisely these kinds of direct action protests that led to Collins’ decision to leave office. “The activism took Collins by surprise,” O’Connor wrote. “He saw mothers chaining themselves to radiators and people dumping trash outside City Hall in protest. He just couldn’t understand this kind of behavior. It came as a revelation to him that suddenly politics was different... If this was the politics of the future, Collins was having none of it; he

⁶² “Collins Says Welfare Can Be Improved,” *Boston Globe*, June 5, 1967, 4.

⁶³ Elliot Friedman, “Mothers Give Hub Two Days to Act,” *Boston Globe*, June 6, 1967, 1, 20.

⁶⁴ “Mayor Hopes His Era Will be Called ‘Decade of Dedication,’” *Boston Globe*, June 7, 1967.

wasn't interested."⁶⁵ Yet Collins' departure as Mayor would not hinder black and Latina mothers from continuing to organize for welfare rights.

III. Does "Every Mother Feels Like a Leader"?: Challenges in Multiethnic/Multiracial Organizing

By the fall of 1967, MAW had become well-known in Boston and its increased membership reflected the growing interest of welfare mothers from areas of the city outside of Roxbury. MAW founded chapters in each Boston's black-brown neighborhoods and continued its outreach to the Latino community. In the South End, a growing of Latina mothers joined as members, yet found communication to be an issue since many of them could not speak English. These language divides motivated Janet Murray, a black family counselor at the United South End Settlements (USES), to help found an exclusively Spanish-speaking MAW chapter for the Latina mothers in October 1967. "Spanish-speaking MAWs" met regularly at Centro de Acción, a Latino community organization on Tremont Street in the South End.⁶⁶ Though the founding of this chapter illustrates one concrete example of MAW's early attempts at inclusive, multiethnic/multiracial organizing, it also demonstrates that African American and Latina mother-organizers faced linguistic struggles and eventually sought to create separate chapters to address this. It also underscores MAW's almost exclusively black leadership, since even the group of Latina Spanish-speaking women was presided over by Murray, an African American.

⁶⁵ Thomas O'Connor, quoted in Vrabell, *A People's History of the New Boston*, 88.

⁶⁶ John Killilea, "The South End: 'Puerto Rican Power!'" *Harvard Crimson*, November 16, 1967.

While MAW pushed for a bill in the Massachusetts legislature that would call for the state to take over responsibility for administering the welfare system, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) had expanded their broader movement, establishing a Boston chapter and hired professional organizers to come and work with welfare mothers. At first, this new group slighted the MAW leadership and years of organizing in the city, creating factions of welfare recipients. This was highlighted in August 1968 when both organizations held several weeks of demonstrations at various welfare offices across the city to help shape the new regulations being drawn up by the state. When the state welfare commission Robert Ott eventually agreed to include welfare recipients on local committees to recommend the guidelines for the new system, MAW ceased their protests and celebrated the victory. The NWRO group, however, refused to end its occupation of the Missions Hill welfare office, which undercut MAW's bargaining position. With such a clear split, the existing tensions grew and became more public.⁶⁷ Eventually though, support for NWRO's new organizing strategy died out and MAW continued its work as the premier welfare rights group in the city. Doris Bland was appointed to the Massachusetts Health Advisory Committee and named to the Public Welfare Board by Mayor Kevin White. She remained an active leader in the movement until her untimely death in 1970.

Conclusion

The brief, albeit complex, history of Boston's Mothers for Adequate Welfare sheds light on the many strategies utilized by poor and working-class women of color in their

⁶⁷ Vrabell, *A People's History of the New Boston*, 90.

struggle for adequate and respectful government assistance in Boston. They were not dysfunctional apolitical mothers lacking cultural values nor were they merely welfare recipients. They were organized activists who championed the ideas that every mother could be a leader in the movement for welfare rights. They were mother-organizers who demanded better treatment from city workers and advocated for an active role in the implementation and eventual overhaul of the city's assistance programs.

The Boston MAW history provides a local lens to the national movement on welfare rights that emerged during the 1960s. As Felicia Kornbluh explains in her study of the National Welfare Rights Organization, "at the center of their approach to politics was a vision of citizenship." She continued, "Welfare mothers and fathers politicized their relationships with consumer society and entered the public stage as increasingly empowered citizen-consumers."⁶⁸ While the War on Poverty had made enormous differences in low-income black/brown communities, Boston provides a case study of its limitations and inability to uplift most welfare recipients. Welfare mothers, in particular, grew increasingly frustrated, and in turn fashioned new political identities, organizations, and movements for reform.

This history of the Boston MAW movement also highlights one of the city's earliest instances of multiethnic/multiracial organizing. MAW's premature attempts to reach out to Latina mothers through their participation in protests and bilingual communications illustrate the growing interest in multiethnic/multiracial organizing beyond the black-white binary and English-speaking majority. This history also demonstrates how poor and working-class black and Latina women began to see their

⁶⁸ Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights*, 9-10, 13.

fates linked as allies in the struggle against the established white (racist) bureaucracies of Boston such as the welfare department. Yet despite MAW's aims, in reality, the group represented the interests of black welfare mothers above all others. The black community was well-established and activists such as Bland had already gained significant organizing experience and a reputation across the city; together these helped propel her and other black mothers to the forefront of MAW and the movement. Latina and white mother-organizers remained behind the scenes as participants.

Alongside mother-organizers in the struggle for welfare reform, social workers of color were also at the forefront of the antipoverty movement in Boston. In the following chapter, I explore how the complex intersecting identities and solidarities of MAW organizers were mirrored by middle class black/brown social workers. In a movement to combat poverty and upbuild black-brown communities, these social workers ultimately proved more effective than MAW organizers at developing an early model for multiethnic/ multiracial organizing and cultivating diverse, more racially balanced leadership.

**TABLE I.
TIMELINE OF WELFARE RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

1963	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mothers for Adequate Welfare (MAW) Founded
1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• President Johnson Introduced War on Poverty• Economic Opportunity Act Enacted
1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MAW's First Demonstration
1966	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MAW March to Boston Common & State House• National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) Founded
1967	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MAW's Welfare Sit-Ins at Grove Hall (Roxbury) & Riots• "Spanish-Speaking MAWs" Chapter Founded in South End
1968	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MAW Conflict with NWRO
1970	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MAW President Doris Bland died

CHAPTER TWO

“Upbuilding”: Black/Brown Social Worker “Crusaders” and the Antipoverty Movement

Alongside the mother-organizers in Mothers for Adequate Welfare, social workers of color were also at the forefront of a broader movement to address poverty in Boston. Differing ideologically from MAW organizers, they were less interested in welfare reform, instead turning inward to their own communities to devise alternative strategies for racial uplift adjacent to or even outside of the existing structures. Disillusioned with the current system, many black and Latino social worker organizers were propelled by what leading social worker and civil rights activist Whitney M. Young called an “atmosphere of righteous indignation, of divine discontent.”⁶⁹ In a compelling 1967 speech at the National Conference of Social Welfare, Young challenged the amassed social workers. “Somewhere along the line,” he argued, “something happened. In the zeal to become ‘professional’ the urgency of the challenge was lost. In the zeal to become professional and respectable, we lost, or rejected, the crusader label. Now, if ever there was a time, is the time for the crusader.”⁷⁰ Young’s call to action for social workers to embrace their roles as “crusaders” in the antipoverty movement was one that resonated

⁶⁹ Young was a highly regarded black social worker, well-known for his civil rights organizing in efforts such as the 1963 March on Washington and as Executive Director of the National Urban League, as well as President of the National Conference of Social Welfare.

⁷⁰ Whitney Young Jr., “Social Welfare’s Responsibility in Urban Affairs,” delivered at the National Conference of Social Welfare, Dallas TX, May 21, 1967.

with many social workers of color in Boston in the wake of the War on Poverty. As journalist J. Anthony Lukas aptly put it, “By the sixties, few who worked for such [social service] institutions regarded themselves as mere custodians for society’s unfortunates; stirred by that era’s activism, they had become advocates of a new social order.”⁷¹

As the city of Boston chronically failed to meet the growing needs of black-brown communities, social workers of colors emerged as local leaders, developing their own solutions to the “urban crisis.” Centering their organizing on ideas of self-help, community control, and racial uplift, these activists espoused an ideology that mirrored the primary ideals of the black and Puerto Rican nationalist traditions. With significant support from funds made available from the War on Poverty, these organizers established new organizations such as the Roxbury Multi-Service Center (RMSC) and La Alianza Hispana (LAH) to provide essential resources and services and to empower black-brown communities. These organizers saw the construction of social service organizations as an important part of the civil rights movement’s agenda. While studies of black/Latino interactions during the War on Poverty have primarily focused on how the federal program fostered racial essentialism and conflict, Boston’s story reveals otherwise.⁷² Much as historian Sonia Song-Ha Lee described in New York City, Boston’s black and Latino activists used the War on Poverty to mobilize both their own

⁷¹J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Random House, 1985), 428.

⁷² For example, see: Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A.* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008); Brian Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); William Clayson, “The War on Poverty and the Chicano Movement in Texas: Confronting ‘Tio Tomas’ and the ‘Gringo Pseudoliberals,’” in *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980*, eds. Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian (Athens: University of Georgia Press: 2011), 334-56.

communities and to facilitate the mobilization of one another's.⁷³ With encouragement and support from African Americans, Latinos in Boston built on the existing social service infrastructure and more established political networks in the black community, to help forge an intertwined antipoverty movement undergirded by black and Latino (primarily Puerto Rican) nationalist ideals.

This chapter examines how African Americans and Latinos mobilized around the issue of poverty in Boston, particularly focusing on their self-determined efforts to establish new, autonomous social service organizations. I argue that these struggles around poverty and the institutions that emerged from them were the center of the upbuilding process in black-brown neighborhoods of Boston such as Roxbury and Dorchester, and ultimately formed the basis for other collective mobilizations. As mentioned in the section on terminology in the introduction, my use of the term “upbuilding” draws from the work of Leslie Brown. Borrowing from W. E. B. Du Bois who defines “upbuilding” as the “social and economic development” of black communities after slavery, Brown defines the concept of “upbuilding” as the “literal and figurative construction of the structures African Americans used to climb out of slavery.”⁷⁴ For my purposes, “upbuilding” describes the development of community institutions and networks used by African Americans and Latinos towards racial uplift and justice in Boston. The institutions built during this formative era were used as centralized spaces for community activism and proved integral in the broader movement for racial justice.

⁷³ Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement*.

⁷⁴ Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham*, 10.

Through oral histories, I invoke the power of *testimonio* (or testimonies). The Latina Feminist Group defines the process of *testimonio* as a “crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure.”⁷⁵ The lived realities and racial experiences of Latinos, in particular, have been obscured throughout most of Boston’s history, but my research exposes the limits of the city’s dominant black/white racial binary order. Thus, in this chapter I use *testimonio* to theorize about the race-making processes of several key activists such as Hubert “Hubie” Jones, Alex Rodriguez, and Frieda Garcia. Utilizing the activist biographies of social workers, I consider the unique, but often overlapping issues faced by both African Americans and Latinos. Specifically, I examine how these two groups linked their struggles as poor and working-class people of color to develop a shared political vision that would become the basis for multiethnic/multiracial collaborations.

In Gordon Mantler’s study of the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign, he concludes that coalition building between African Americans and Mexican Americans revealed a “relationship between race-based identity politics and class-based coalition politics that was not antithetical, but mutually reinforcing.” He insists, “one could not exist without the other.”⁷⁶ Similarly, I argue that African Americans and Latinos in Boston began forging overlapping identities as poor, nonwhite ethnoracial minorities in the city’s ghettos in the 1960s. Unlike other more divisive issues such as education, the black-

⁷⁵ Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 2.

⁷⁶ Gordon Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 4.

brown common fight against poverty held the greatest potential for multiethnic/multiracial cooperation in Boston at this time. In fact, I argue that the black/brown social workers were much more effective than welfare mother-organizers at multiethnic/multiracial organizing.

While I highlight the possibilities afforded by this new, inclusive model for political organizing in the antipoverty movement, I do not aim to simplify complexities nor idealize the idea of multiethnic/multiracial unity. Coalition building was difficult and hard to sustain. To this end, I also expose some of the ethnic, class, nationality, and gender divisions and conflicts that emerged within black-brown communities that threatened the stability of race and class-based coalitions, as well as shed light on moments when these diverse groups strategically chose to advance the struggle for economic justice on separate but parallel paths. Through a multilayered analysis that privileges the voices of marginalized groups, I uncover the complex story of the local black-brown antipoverty movement that has been effectively erased from Boston's dominant historical narrative.

I. Upbuilding the Black-Brown Ghetto: Social Workers and Identity Formation in the War on Poverty

Social workers of color began organizing for change in Boston in the years immediately following World War II. As early as 1949, black social workers Muriel and Otto Snowden organized dialogues in Roxbury about the neighborhood's physical

decline and increased segregation.⁷⁷ From this emerged Freedom House, which they hoped would be an interracial center for community activism in the fight for neighborhood improvement, good schools, and harmony among diverse groups. Expanding its mission in the 1950s and early 1960s, Freedom House became the city's leading organization committed to racial equality and community empowerment. It became a meeting place for other groups and an integral part of the civil rights movement. Serving as an anchor for the black community during Boston's greatest racial conflicts such as urban riots following the 1967 MAW sit-in or the desegregation of schools in 1974, Freedom House earned a local moniker as Boston's "black pentagon."

The establishment of Freedom House and its pragmatic approach to racial uplift and empowerment marked the beginning of the upbuilding process in Boston's most concentrated black-brown community of Roxbury. As a grassroots organization that emerged from the concerns of self-determined black residents, Freedom House provided an early model of black leadership and multiracial (though exclusively black-white) coalition building. Yet by the mid 1960s, the organization could not fully address the needs of the growing African American and Latino communities on its own and other black and brown social workers stepped in to address the increased need for social

⁷⁷ Muriel S. Snowden was raised in a largely white middle-class neighborhood in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. She moved to Boston to attend Radcliffe College, where she graduated in 1938. She attended the New York School of Social Work from 1943-1945. She married Otto P. Snowden in 1944 and moved back to Boston where she became active in many civic organizations. She was executive director of the Cambridge Civic Unity Commission. Otto Phillip Snowden, on the other hand had deep family roots in Boston His family migrated from Virginia at the height of the Great Migration in the 1920. He grew up in Roxbury, graduated from Dorchester High School, and then briefly attend Harvard before leaving to help support his family during the Depression. He completed his Bachelor's degree at Howard University from 1933-1937. Like Muriel, he pursued graduate studies in social work at Boston University. He was director of St. Mark's Social Center before and after his military service in World War II. Upon founding Freedom House, he resigned to devote himself fully to the new organization. "Historical Note," Muriel S. and Otto P. Snowden Papers, Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections [hereafter: NU].

services.

Three social workers who led the charge to establish independent black-brown social service organizations in this era were Hubert “Hubie” Jones, Frieda Garcia, and Alex Rodriguez. Individually and together, they worked to provide essential resources and services and empower black-brown communities. As organizers, they saw the construction of social service organizations as an important part of the civil rights movement’s agenda and worked to form multiethnic/multiracial coalitions in the common fight against poverty. A biographical analysis of Jones’, Garcia’s, and Rodriguez’s personal histories and racial formation in New York and then in Boston shed light on how African Americans and Latinos began forming overlapping identities as ethnoracial others in the city. In turn, their racial and class-based identities fueled their activist strategies and formed the basis of an inclusive, multiethnic/multiracial community-organizing model. I must note that here I choose to explore these social worker-organizer lives as a way to explain the movement’s emerging coalitions politics, not to elevate their status as leaders nor privilege them more than other local activists.

* * *

Hubie Jones was born in 1933 in New York City. His parents, like many other African Americans at the time, were migrants from the South, his mother from South Carolina and his father from Missouri. In fact, when his mother was sixteen years old, she and her family packed up in the middle of the night after their neighbor was lynched and migrated north. His father was a Pullman porter who worked as an organizer and legal advocate for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union. He was close friends and coworkers with labor and civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph. Surrounded by such

prominent activists, Jones developed an early commitment to social justice. He was raised in the working-class African American neighborhood of the South Bronx, which was undergoing dramatic changes during this era, greatly affected by the influx of drugs and the rise of street gangs and growing crime. His father's labor organizing and his family's working-class background shaped Jones' identity long after he had left New York. His class-based identity went hand-in-hand with his racial one, and remained even later on when he experienced upward mobility through education and was often perceived by others as a "middle class professional."

In the South Bronx, Jones was also exposed to significant Latino migration, which preceded that of Boston. He worked in a Puerto Rican bodega in his neighborhood during high school and fostered key relationships and friendships with Puerto Ricans. He quickly realized at a young age that Latinos faced many of the same issues as blacks. At the 1930s and 1940s, most Latinos in New York were categorized as "black" and subject to the same segregation and discriminatory practices as their African American counterparts. Thus, Jones did not understand the growing competition and tensions between these groups in the city, which he later worked to not repeat in Boston. These early experiences and relationships shaped his growing racial and political ideologies and developing activist mind, which was then cultivated further in college.

At the City College of New York, Jones studied under the prominent black psychologist Kenneth Clark, whose research illustrated how segregation caused psychological damage to black children. Clark's research would contribute to the *Brown v Board of Education* case, laying the groundwork for the court's landmark 1954 decision that overturned segregation in public schools. Like his father and labor organizers like

Randolph, Clark had a profound impact on Jones, who came to believe that social work was the profession where he could not only help African American families but also create real social change. Thus, in 1955, upon graduating from college, Jones decided to pursue a Master's degree in Social Work and moved to Boston to attend Boston University.

As a social work student, Jones moved to a predominantly black neighborhood in the nearby city of Cambridge. He lived in a boarding house owned by a family friend for young black men who were attending graduate or professional school at Harvard but were not permitted to live on the racially segregated campus. Jones was inspired after he heard Martin Luther King, Jr. speak at Ford Forum Hall in 1956. He reflected over fifty years later that when he walked out, he "felt like he was levitating" and he maintains that this moment sealed his commitment to social justice.⁷⁸ After graduating from Boston University in 1957 with his Master's degree in Social Work, he worked in two social service organizations, the Boston Children's Service Association and Judge Baker's Guidance Center. Though he enjoyed his colleagues and found it rewarding to work with disabled children, he became restless after seven years. He later reflected, "Here I am working in Newton in the midst of the civil rights revolution... I just wanted to find a way to get to Roxbury, get to the center of it all."⁷⁹ Like most African Americans at this time, Jones knew that Roxbury was not only the center of the black community because of segregated housing practices, but also was the center of the freedom movement.

But it was not until 1963 that Jones began to take an active role in community

⁷⁸ Hubert Jones, Interview by Author, Newton, MA, March 16, 2013 [hereafter: Jones Interview].

⁷⁹ Ibid.

organizing. 1963 was a defining moment in Boston's civil rights history. As I explain in chapter four, this was a key year in the movement for school integration as the NAACP and community activists presented on the persistent educational inequalities in the school system in front of the all-white Boston Public School Committee. The committee refused to acknowledge any form of segregation or differential hiring within the schools, so community leaders turned to direct action, holding school boycotts and sit-ins. Hubie Jones was an active participant in this local movement to equalize education, yet began to think more broadly about the concerns of the black community, strategizing ways to organize a movement that addressed multiple issues at once.

In the spring of that year, Jones was speaking with one of his social worker friends about the civil rights protests occurring across the nation when he came up with an idea. He proposed that they should organize a one-day general strike on the city of Boston to protest all forms of racial discrimination in the city. His friend thought this was a great idea and connected him with Mel King, a colleague of his from the United South End Settlements (USES).⁸⁰ King served as the Youth Director of the USES and was an established community activist in the black community. King supported Jones' idea and together they began to organize the "STOP Day" boycott, which they planned for June 26, 1963. They called on all African Americans and their white allies to stay home from work and to refrain from shopping and riding the MBTA subway system. If they could not stay home because they feared retaliation from their employers, they could wear a black armband to express their solidarity. Despite the growing interest in the

⁸⁰ The USES was another social service agency in Boston that was largely led by African Americans. Like the RMSC, this agency focused on community building and provided essential resources and services to local residents, yet it focused specifically on the South End neighborhood.

“STOP Day,” some older, more established activists in the black community were displeased with Jones’ sudden rise to leadership and did not support the “STOP Day.” The NAACP in particular opposed the idea of a work stoppage, and instead called its own demonstration, a memorial to the recently slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers. Though Jones and King knew this was an effort to thwart their “STOP Day,” they decided to support the NAACP and, in a gesture of solidarity, they planned to march all the people who stayed at home for “STOP Day” to Evers’ memorial service. Jones and King led the march of almost 1,000 people down Columbus Avenue through the South End singing “Freedom, Freedom” and “We Shall Overcome” to the Boston Common.⁸¹

Organizing “STOP Day” and participating in the march was Jones’ public entrance into activism and its success motivated him to keep organizing within Boston’s black community. When he heard that a new social service agency was in the process of being established, he jumped at the opportunity to work there. He was hired as its first Assistant Director in 1965.

The Roxbury Multi-Service Center (RMSC) was a social service agency that emerged from the collaborative efforts of representatives from the Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD),⁸² the United Way, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), the City of Boston, and the Roxbury-North Dorchester community. The representatives of these groups and local community members began to develop a plan for a direct service project that would provide numerous resources and services to their

⁸¹ Jones Interview.

⁸² ABCD was particularly instrumental in the RMSC’s creation. ABCD was established in 1962 out of the mayor’s office to respond to the social problems created by the city’s recent urban renewal programs. Then, following the passing of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, which was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty and Great Society campaign, the city of Boston designated ABCD as its official antipoverty agency.

local community. The result of their work, "The Boston Youth Opportunity Project: a report and a proposal," was submitted by ABCD to the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime in December 1963. In November 1964, the RMSC was incorporated. One month later, RMSC opened its doors on 317 Blue Hill Avenue in Roxbury.

During its first three years of operation, the RMSC was devoted to stabilizing families in crisis by providing case-by-case intervention for both black families and individuals. Modeled after the 19th century settlement house, the RMSC's goal in 1964 was to demonstrate "that a variety of services could be integrated and coordinated under one roof and one administrative structure, resulting in the elimination of the fragmentation of individuals and families among a variety of social welfare and mental health agencies."⁸³ Initial programs were designed to respond to clients' immediate needs by providing emergency financial assistance, employment counseling and training, home development, neighborhood improvement, and assessment and counseling services.

In 1965, Frieda Garcia moved to Boston and, like Hubie Jones, was drawn to the Roxbury Multi-Service Center. Garcia was also a trained social worker and a New York transplant. A brief examination of Garcia's life sheds light on her racial and class identity formation, activist influences, and social work training. These would all shape her racial and political identity in Boston and are essential to understanding how she would later collaborate with Jones and other like-minded individuals to envision a multiethnic/

⁸³ Proposal for the Development of the Roxbury Multi-Service Center Over the Next Five Years: 1969-174," Roxbury Multi-Service Center Records, Box 1, Folder 68, NU.

multiracial coalition centered on issues of poverty.

Frieda Garcia was born in 1933 in the Dominican Republic. Like most other Dominicans, her racial narrative began with navigating colorism and racism within her own family. Her mother was the darkest-skinned of four sisters and Garcia was well-aware of this difference early on. She later reflected that her aunts were “super white” with “pelo muerto” (dead hair). Garcia had always been referred to as a “negrita” or black person. She migrated to New York City in 1941 at the age of eight with her mother and her brother, seeking specialized care for his developmental disability. Garcia’s family was working-class, but her mother managed to find enough money to migrate, determined to seek refuge and independence in the U.S. far from Dominican culture that frowned upon her divorce and life as a single mother. The family moved around New York City but eventually settled on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. Given the wartime economy, Garcia’s mother was able to secure work as a seamstress, producing military garments. Like Jones, Garcia’s class-based identity forged in a single-parent household stayed with her even as she navigated higher education and experienced professionalization and upward mobility to become a “middle class” social worker.

As a child, Garcia learned English quickly and though she made friends with a few Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, she also fostered important relationships with African Americans and some from other immigrant groups, such as Italians, whom she felt had similar experiences to her. It was in this working-class immigrant neighborhood where she first learned how to navigate diverse urban spaces. Like her mother, Garcia sought her own independence and insisted on attending a boarding high school in 1948. Though they lived modestly, her mother worked extra to help pay for part of the tuition

costs. At Mount Saint Dominic Academy for Girls in Caldwell, New Jersey, Garcia went through an initial culture shock and cried for weeks feeling out of place in this wealthy, white privileged space. It was the first time she felt what it was like to “be American,” learning new foods and customs. Yet she eventually settled in and achieved academically. Garcia’s mother longed for her daughter to have a life better than her own in the factory and dreamed that she would eventually find professional work in an office as a secretary. Yet Garcia aspired to a different life for herself after high school, seeking a college degree with hopes to possibly pursue a career in social work.

Garcia began college at Fordham University in New York City but quickly dropped out in 1953 at the age of 20 when she married a middle-class Dominican man. In 1954, the couple settled for three years on her husband’s family farm in the Dominican Republic where she started a small school for the farmworkers. Eventually, the marriage fell apart and Garcia divorced and moved back to New York City to live with her mother. She worked briefly as a secretary and then decided to return to college. Garcia enrolled in the New School for Social Research and went part-time, as she also worked full-time at a small publishing agency. At work, Garcia met her second husband, a well-off white Jewish man and a recent college graduate of Columbia University. The two married in 1963. After six years of work, Garcia eventually earned her Bachelor’s Degree in 1964. Soon after, the new couple moved to Chicago so Garcia’s husband could pursue a Ph.D. in History.

In Chicago, Garcia found temporary work for six months at the University of Chicago as she studied for the social worker certification exam. Once she passed, she immediately began working for the Cook County Department of Welfare. Her casework

was largely with African American families struggling in extreme poverty. Her time in Chicago was a learning experience particularly in this moment of increased civil rights activism and urban unrest in the city. Then, in 1965, Garcia's husband was accepted as a transfer into graduate school at Harvard University so they moved to Boston.

Though Garcia had no idea what to expect in Boston, she hoped she could continue her career as a social worker, since she found it so rewarding in Chicago. She had written to the Boston Department of Welfare prior to moving, seeking out any open positions, but received no response. She had to retake the certification exam so she could work in Massachusetts, but knew that if hired she would be granted paid time off to study for it. Yet she struggled to find a job for the first few months. This surprised her because she felt qualified for any open position given her degree, the experience she had gained in Chicago, and the fact that she was bilingual. Garcia later maintained that her difficulty finding work was related to the discriminatory practices of the city's social service officials. She explained, "At that time the welfare [system], like the school system, was completely dominated by the Irish."⁸⁴ Eventually, she landed an interview, yet was taken aback when the white woman interviewing her spent almost the entire time asking her about her husband. The interviewer revealed certain racial prejudices, implying that a black-brown person like Garcia could not possibly be married to

⁸⁴ It is important to note that Garcia referred to the "Irish" loosely here and throughout her interviews, as do many Bostonians of color. In fact, the "Irish" as a term has come to represent a very distinct population of white working-class residents who have controlled most of the city's departments (welfare, schools, etc). Though many of these people may be of Irish descent, her use of this word is more indicative of her perception of a white Catholic population that benefitted from Irish Catholic political clout in the city. It also represented the population whose own personal bigoted and prejudiced beliefs were reflected in their racist and discriminatory systemic practices. Thus Garcia's use of "dominated by the Irish" speaks volumes to how Boston's residents of color understood power relations across the city. Frieda Garcia, Interview by Author, Boston, MA, March 1, 2013 [hereafter: Garcia Interview].

someone studying at Harvard. Despite her racialized attitude towards Garcia, she did end up hiring her.

In September 1965, after less than a year working for the Boston Department of Welfare, Garcia saw an ad for a social work position at the newly opened Roxbury Multi-Service Center. She was attracted to the possibility of serving the growing population of Latinos in Roxbury and recognized the immense need for social workers of color in this neighborhood, which was evident by the founding and increased activism of Mothers for Adequate Welfare who had staged the sit-in protests at Grove Hall the previous spring. Garcia realized that as a black Latina social worker, she could truly make a difference for women like these who were fed up with the white-controlled public assistance offices and longed for community control of these services. The RMSC was committed to hiring the most qualified social workers and did not typically consider applications from anyone who did not hold a Master's in Social Work. This, however, reflected a class bias that contradicted the organization's mission of community empowerment. Despite the fact that Garcia did not have this graduate degree, Jones pushed the board to take a chance on her. Since the RMSC needed staff members to respond to the needs of the rapidly growing Latino community of Roxbury, Garcia stood out as an applicant since she was experienced, fluent in Spanish, and familiar with the issues faced by newly arrived immigrants. She was hired and became one of the RMSC's two Spanish-speaking social workers and the agency's first "Coordinator of Spanish Programs."

As a brown-skinned woman with textured, unprocessed (natural) hair, it was difficult for many Bostonians to easily identify Garcia's race. One night in the late 1960s during one of the city's urban riots, for example, Garcia attempted to attend a meeting

organized by local African American activists but was asked at the door to remove her headscarf and show her hair to prove she was “really black.” She was surprised because she felt she already had established a reputation in the black community through her work at the RMSC yet she reluctantly showed her hair, passed the test and was admitted.⁸⁵ Moments like this illustrate how African Americans in Boston were unsure about how to racially classify Latinos. Many African Americans considered Garcia “Hispanic” or “Spanish-speaking,” but separated her from other Latinos because of her seeming lack of foreignness. Unlike recent migrants in the city, she spoke English fluently without an accent and was very Americanized, having migrated and become a U.S. citizen as a child.

Garcia did not fit neatly into the city’s black or Latino populations and this afforded her a unique opportunity to work in both groups and bring them together in her role at the RMSC. As a Dominican migrant in New York, she developed a distinct racial identity, which historian Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof explained:

While the new migrants took many paths to local racial identities, it is fair to say that Dominicans, as a group, became New Yorkers who, while held to be racially distinct from whites, were not simply collapsed into the existing categories of African American and Puerto Rican. Dominican became a kind of person one could be, in its own right. It also became a subset of both the broader category of Hispanic (or Latino) and even broader category of racial minority.⁸⁶

As was the case in New York, Garcia was not simply collapsed into the existing categories of African American and Puerto Rican in Boston. She was a Dominican who stood out in many ways from the rest of the Latino population in the city.

⁸⁵ Garcia Interview.

⁸⁶ Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York After 1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 99.

Garcia self-identified as a black Dominican and developed an increasing interest in her African heritage over the years. Within the Dominican Republic's racial classification system and hierarchies, Garcia had always been referred to as a "negrita" or black person, so this was not new status for her when she arrived in the United States. She embraced this identity and fostered alliances with African Americans based on shared blackness and a sense of racial and political solidarity. This identity was also fueled by her early working-class class identity. Later on, after divorcing her second husband in 1970, she developed a relationship with prominent African American civil rights activist Byron Rushing, who had been involved in many movements throughout the city. Her partnership with Rushing personified her commitment to black-brown unity and served as a public representation of her inclusive, multiethnic/multiracial politics. This also furthered her ability to work within predominantly black neighborhoods and with respected black activists.

Jones and Garcia were committed to serving both the African American and Latino populations of Roxbury. For two years, they worked in the Roxbury Multi-Service Center stabilizing black and brown families in crisis by providing case-by-case intervention and essential services. When Jones became the RMSC's Executive Director in 1967, he refocused the organization on addressing poverty, which he believed was the root of the neighborhood's inability to overcome social and economic barriers. Here he began to lead the charge in the greater black-brown antipoverty movement in the city. Jones espoused a new philosophy of self-determination through two types of programs: one aimed at community development and the other focused on individual needs. Community development programs included housing rehabilitation and ownership,

tenant advocacy programs, and crime and safety programs. Individual needs programs included assessment and counseling, programs for residents with mental health issues, and the establishment of a summer camp and afterschool enrichment programs for children. In the RMSC, Jones and Garcia also aided other organizations and local movements and provided support during the city's urban riots, which were prompted by events such as the MAW welfare rights demonstrations and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Over time, the organization began to focus on educational inequalities in the city. The RMSC developed a project to study Boston Public Schools and this highlights Jones and Garcia's ongoing commitment to addressing the needs of both blacks and Latinos in the neighborhood.

As I describe in more detail in chapter four, Jones and the RMSC staff organized the Task Force on Children that investigated the performance of the Boston Public Schools. In 1971, the Task Force published the report *The Way We Go To School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston* which revealed that 10,000 or more children were systematically excluded from Boston Public Schools or were warehoused in classrooms or schools that provided inferior or custodial care. The bulk of these children were "Spanish-speaking," mainly Puerto Rican. The report also stressed how exclusion from school led to unemployment, poverty, and juvenile delinquency among Latinos. To address this population in particular, the Task Force advocated for the hiring of Spanish-speaking teachers and assistants and the expansion of the city's bilingual education programs.

The report had a profound effect on the Boston Public Schools and on local and national laws. In 1971, Massachusetts passed the nation's first bilingual education law,

and in 1972 the first special education law, which served as the model for the first federal special education law, passed in 1975. The Task Force became known as the Massachusetts Advocacy Center, now called the Massachusetts Advocates for Children. This struggle for educational equality highlights Jones and Garcia's inclusive model of racial minority politics that addressed the specific needs of both the African American and Latino communities of the city. It also serves as a prime example of the organizing potential and power of their black-brown coalition, which was emerging in the Roxbury Multi-Service Center.

One key Latino leader in the Task Force was Alex Rodriguez, who was also a New York transplant, a social worker, and emerging activist leader in Boston during the 1960s. Rodriguez was born in 1941 in New York City to Puerto Rican migrant parents. The youngest of nine children, he grew up in a diverse working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn. His building was overcrowded with large Puerto Rican families, though there were many African Americans, Jews, and Middle Eastern immigrants on his street as well. As a child raised during the 1940s and 1950s, Rodriguez later argued there was little room to establish an individual racial identity, the rather simple black-white binary of New York City dictated ones' race. He explained, "You were either white or black. My mother was black, so I was black."⁸⁷ Even though he was light-skinned and could pass as many different races/ethnicities, he sported his "big, kinky hair" in a large afro which facilitated his black identity. He clarified repeatedly that his blackness was not a choice,

⁸⁷ At this moment in an over four-hour oral history, it is important to note that Alex Rodriguez turned to me (the author) and said, "You know you are black too. Doesn't matter your skin tone, there were no 'Latinos' or 'Hispanics.' You would've been considered black too." Alex Rodriguez, Skype Interview by Author, October 8, 2015 [hereafter: Rodriguez Interview].

it was thrust upon him and he embraced it, despite the obstacles that often came with it. “When you’re called the n-word all your life,” he explained, “when you’re discriminated against as a kid, when you’re not invited to certain parties, when you know what’s going on, when you know how you’re supposed to walk on the street, when you know which streets you can’t walk on, when you have to join a gang to protect yourself against the guys who were chasing you down the street yelling the ‘n-word,’ you know, it makes a solid impression on who you are.” He continued, “So when I had to choose my identification, I chose my mother’s identification. I didn’t care about the color of my skin.”⁸⁸ This statement highlights the complicated and often contradictory nature of racial identity formation. While Rodriguez claimed that his blackness was not a choice, he later explained that he “chose” his mother’s identification. By high school, Rodriguez had begun to forge key relationships with African Americans and developed an interest in the emerging civil rights movement. He began his activist work by forming a student group to boycott Woolworth’s stores in solidarity with the southern protests.

After graduating from Goddard College in Vermont and completing graduate work at Indiana University, Rodriguez moved to Boston in 1965 and settled into the South End neighborhood, where he dealt with the realities of segregated urban living. He explained that the small numbers of Afro-Latinos in the city during this time lived almost exclusively in the South End or Roxbury. He commented, “You couldn’t live in South Boston, you’d get killed there. You couldn’t live in white Dorchester, they would lynch you!” Like Frieda Garcia, he began organizing in the community as a social worker for black social service organizations like the United South End Settlements (USES) and the

⁸⁸ Rodriguez Interview.

Hattie B. Cooper Community Center. He later reflected that he did not feel his identity as a Puerto Rican or Latino social worker placed him as an outsider nor negatively impacted his work in these predominantly African American spaces. He explained, "I wasn't a Latino social worker. I was a social worker. I identified myself as black. I was black."⁸⁹ As he began developing relationships in Boston with other Puerto Ricans, he began to emerge as a leader in one of Boston's first Latino organizations, APCROSS. APCROSS, the Association Promoting Constitutional Rights of the Spanish-Speaking, was established in 1967 and worked to create a more powerful political presence for Puerto Ricans and Latinos in Boston, targeting agencies that were excluding Latinos. Rodriguez was one of the organization's founding members and leaders, helping to register Puerto Rican voters across the city and to secure funding to develop social service programs in the South End neighborhood. This Puerto Rican nationalist organization and others like it began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s and threatened efforts to organize across pan-Latino groups and form black-Latino coalitions.

II. Antipoverty Coalition Building & Crumbling

Though Hubie Jones made a significant effort to consider the Latino community in Roxbury by hiring Spanish-speaking social workers and through the Task Force, Frieda Garcia played a leading role in pushing the Roxbury Multi-Service Center to find concrete ways to address the specific needs of this population. In January 1970, Garcia made a presentation on the growth of the Latino population at the RMSC's Annual Board/Staff Institute and argued that the agency was not providing enough support to

⁸⁹ Rodriguez Interview.

meet the community's needs. After Garcia's presentation, the question became whether or not the RMSC should try to increase the number of bilingual staff members and work within the existing structure of the organization to meet the needs of the Latino population or to help the "Spanish-speaking" community create its own multi-service center. The answer to this question came soon after when Frieda Garcia became aware of a new group called the Spanish Alliance.

In 1968, Ana Maria Rodriguez and Betsy Tregar, ESL teachers at the Winthrop Elementary School in the neighboring area of Dorchester, organized the Spanish Alliance in response to the growing needs of their impoverished Latino students. When Garcia learned about this group, she brought it to the attention of Jones and the RMSC who all agreed that they should support this existing organization and help it become a separate Latino-run multi-service center. Jones and Garcia pushed the idea of a separate center strategically to seek out additional funding sources. Since there was not a Latino organization in Roxbury, both felt they could make a strong case for a new multi-service center and secure funding through the city's Model Cities Administration, which was established under President Johnson's Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966.

Unlike other Latino organizations in Boston like APCROSS, which were almost exclusively Puerto Rican, Garcia promoted a pan-Latino racial and political identity often termed "Hispanic" or "Spanish-speaking."⁹⁰ Rodriguez was a Mexican American woman

⁹⁰ In addition to APCROSS that was established in 1967, other predominantly Puerto Rican organizations that emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s in Boston included the Spanish Federation, IBA (Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion), La Sociedad Latina, the Puerto Rican Entering and Settling Service (PRESS), and the Hispanic Office of Planning and Development (HOPE).

from California so she also did not fit in the largely Puerto Rican community and Betsy Tregar was a white woman. Moreover, both women were committed to bringing together Latinos of different nationalities. Together the three established La Alianza Hispana (LAH) in 1970. The agency's name served as a testament to Garcia's vision and her commitment to this new, inclusive organizing model. Jones loaned Garcia out to act as LAH's first Director. In 1971, she sought out funds to set up a store front office, and using RMSC as a conduit, she secured a \$33,000 grant from the Boston's Model Cities Administration following a small sit-in at the Model Cities office. Though struggling financially, the RMSC also raised an additional \$8,000 for the new multi-service center, which illustrated Jones' commitment to Latinos in Boston and to the success of the LAH. This allowed the agency to expand its operations and services.

Even as the LAH began to gain administrative and fiscal autonomy from the RMSC, both boards remained committed to maintaining a meaningful relationship and supporting one another. Rodriguez, the LAH President, explained in a letter in 1971: "Our interest now is in maintaining and cultivating the relationship in order that the Black and Hispanic communities may move together on common concerns and interest."⁹¹ The organizations did not just support each other symbolically, but did so literally; the RMSC loaned offices to LAH's bookkeeping department. The two groups physically shared space and worked with one another. Also, the RMSC aided the organizational development of the LAH in numerous ways such as providing staff training. Staff members of both organizations even attended each other's board

⁹¹ Ana Maria Diamond (née Rodriguez) to John D. O'Bryant, September 20, 1971, Box 1, Folder 21, Coll. M55, La Alianza Hispana Records, NU.

meetings. Together, Garcia, Jones, the LAH, and the RMSC worked to uplift and empower the black-brown community of Roxbury.

The establishment of La Alianza Hispana out of the Roxbury Multi-Service Center and their continued support for one another was the center of Garcia and Jones' ongoing antipoverty coalition-building project and upbuilding process. They brought together leaders of the African American and Latino communities, promoting an inclusive model of ethnoracial minority politics. They also supported other political and social organizations and were both members of the Boston Black United Front (BUF), an umbrella group led by militant black nationalists. The BUF believed in black solidarity and promoted a black diasporic, internationalist consciousness that sought to unite African Americans and Afro-Latinos in Boston. Some even referred to Latinos as "Spanish speaking black brothers" and maintained they were all descendents from Africa. For example, the BUF's Political Director argued:

In reality if we use Africa as a measuring stick as to what is black, then our Caribbean brothers would qualify more than we. We are ONE PEOPLE. History is responsible for this. We cannot change it. What we can do is correct the ills that his history has created. Whether we are Afro-Americans, Dominicans, Jamaicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Haitian or whatever we are, we are BLACK.⁹²

This diasporic ideology attracted Jones and Garcia who were already promoting an inclusive multiethnic/multiracial, class-based political model. They provided space for and participated in the United Front's meetings and joined task forces and committees. They also rallied with them in protests against issues such as police brutality. They also

⁹² Obalajji Rust, "What is Black?" Box 1, Folder "Statement of Commitment, Demands, Purpose," Coll. SC 1, Boston Black United Front Records, Roxbury Community College. Emphasis in original.

played active roles in United Front events like “Black Solidarity Day Against Racism and Oppression,” held on Malcolm X’s birthday in May, where Jones even spoke and lead a workshop.⁹³ It is interesting to note that La Alianza Hispana even called the holiday “Black and Puerto Rican Solidarity Day” in its internal documents, which was a testament to how LAH viewed the United Front’s solidarity efforts.⁹⁴ While the BUF saw the day as one inclusive of all black and African descended peoples in the diasporic, internationalist sense, La Alianza drew a distinction between black and Puerto Ricans as different from one another but working in solidarity.

Yet, the black-brown antipoverty coalition fashioned by middle-class social workers of color like Hubie Jones and Frieda Garcia in new social service organizations like the RMSC and LAH, was in many ways ahead of its time in Boston. Coalition building was difficult and hard to sustain. This became evident as some African Americans and Latinos resisted and challenged its very existence. Some racial, ethnic, class, and gender divisions and conflicts emerged and threatened the stability of this race and class-based coalition.

One example of these divisions was the attempt to split La Alianza Hispana and the RMSC during negotiations for increased funding for LAH in 1971. The black director of the Boston Model Cities Program, Paul Parks, commented, “You know, the black community is going to be really angry if this group [Latinos] gets all this money,” referring to the \$500,000 grant LAH had secured. The Model Cities program was largely controlled by African Americans at this time and this statement revealed Parks’ concern

⁹³ “Agenda for Black Solidarity Day Against Racism and Repression Day,” May 19, 1970, Box 1, Folder “Black Solidarity Day,” Coll. SC 1, Boston Black United Front Records, Roxbury Community College.

⁹⁴ “Holidays,” Box 1, Folder 21, Coll. M55, La Alianza Hispana Records, NU.

about competition over funds between black and Latino organizations. This surprised Garcia, but before she could respond, Jones intervened: “What black community? Who are you talking about? What agencies?” Parks was taken aback by this since Jones represented the leading black agency in the city and the conversation ended there.⁹⁵ Jones’ gesture of solidarity illustrated his full support for Garcia and the LAH. This moment was a clear representation of his commitment to the Latino community of Roxbury and to the black-brown antipoverty coalition he had helped create. But it also reflected some feelings of separation between Latino and African American leaders. Puerto Rican APCROSS leader Tony Molina later reflected, “Boston in the early 70s was a very, very racist city.” He continued, “And unfortunately the racism didn’t only exist from whites against Latinos, but also the black community was against us, because they thought we were taking what belonged to them.”⁹⁶

The coalition’s greatest critics though were not, in fact, African Americans at all, but rather light-skinned Puerto Rican professionals of Boston, who privileged their nationalist identities. Growing feelings of bitterness surfaced over what they felt was a disproportionate amount of funding given to African American organizations from Boston’s War on Poverty programs. Leaders in organizations such as APCROSS and the Emergency Tenant’s Council (ETC)⁹⁷ were especially vocal about this arguing, “When

⁹⁵ Garcia, Interview by Author.

⁹⁶ Tony Molina, quoted in Blanca Bonilla and Veronica Wells, *Dos Idiomas, Una Comunidad/ Two Languages, One Community* (Center for Artistry and Scholarship: 2016).

⁹⁷ In 1965, the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) adopted the South End Renewal Plan, which intended to revitalize a largely Puerto Rican area called Parcel 19. The community faced displacement so activists organized a grassroots group called Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (Puerto Rican Tenants Association or IBA). In 1968, the group incorporated under the name Emergency Tenants Council of Parcel 19 (ETC). This struggle for affordable housing is outlined in the following chapter. “Historical Note,” Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción Records, NU.

you talk poverty money, you talk black money.”⁹⁸ While some animosity was directed at the government agencies distributing funds, much of it was directed at the African American community itself. Israel Feliciano, director of the ETC, explained to the *Globe*, “We have been used by the blacks. They use the Spanish name to say we are all black, and when they get the money none of it reaches us.”⁹⁹ Others echoed these concerns that the African American and Latino communities were grouped together and that this favored black residents. “Hell, the political structure in Massachusetts has decided the Puerto Rican and Spanish community is part of the black community,” Ivan Gonzalez argued.¹⁰⁰ “And that’s why we haven’t received any funds: they figured that when they gave to the black community they were giving to us, and that’s not true. What black agency has given us any money at all? None!”¹⁰¹

Many of these Puerto Rican male leaders were not only resentful of African Americans in the city, but also did not support Frieda Garcia because she was Dominican and were intimidated by the rapid growth and success of La Alianza Hispana and its ability to secure War on Poverty funding. One moment highlighted these inter-ethnic

⁹⁸ Alfredo DeJesus, quoted in Nathan Cobb, “How Boston’s Spanish speaking hope to emerge,” *Boston Globe*, December 20, 1970, A3.

⁹⁹ Israel Feliciano, quoted in Cobb, “How Boston’s Spanish speaking hope to emerge,” A3.

¹⁰⁰ Ivan Gonzalez was born and raised in Puerto Rico, working as an inventory control manager and labor leader in San Juan before migrating to New York City. He served three years as a U.S. marine and then moved to the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston in 1967 to work as a Small Business Specialist for the South End Neighborhood Action Program (SNAP). He was arrested on allegations of anarchy in 1967 and acquitted. Gonzalez co-founded APCROSS with Tony Molina and Alfredo DeJesus and, in 1968, was appointed as a special assistant to Mayor Kevin White, serving as a liaison between the city and the Latino community. Gonzalez was an outspoken, controversial leader who many argued wanted complete power over the Puerto Rican / Latino community of Boston. In a 1970 *Globe* article he was quoted saying, “I tried to emerge two years ago, but people here have the idea that power should be distributed equally.” He died in 1975 at the age of 39. Ivan Gonzalez, quoted in Cobb, “How Boston’s Spanish speaking hope to emerge,” A3. See also: Andrea Taylor, “Gonzalez Represents Puerto Ricans,” *Bay State Banner*, March 7, 1968, 1; “Gonzalez Named Aide to Sargent,” *Boston Globe*, August 13, 1969, 37; “Obituaries: Ivan Gonzales, at 39, Boston Hispanic Leader,” *Boston Globe*, October 1, 1975, 40.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

tensions. In a meeting at the Mayor's Office of Human Rights aimed to promote unity among different minority groups in the city, Garcia was asked to join a committee to study ways to improve race and ethnic relations. George "Chico" Muñoz, a Puerto Rican man who worked for this office for the Mayor and was a leader in APCROSS, adamantly opposed Garcia's appointment on the basis that she was not Puerto Rican and created a scene in the meeting. His public attack prompted Garcia to resign from the board of APCROSS. In her resignation letter she explained:

As an immigrant, I had come to expect a certain amount of discrimination from those people to whom I represented something foreign, something undesirable and second class. I never expected to meet this kind of discrimination from those who shared my language, my color, and in many ways my history... Board Members of APCROSS have used my Dominicanness as a weapon in attempts to undermine my effectiveness on behalf of the Spanish-Speaking community.¹⁰²

This moment demonstrates how Garcia, as a Dominican, was in some ways considered an outsider in the Latino community. While in some northern cities there were significant tensions and competitions between African Americans and Latinos, Garcia later reflected that she witnessed much larger divisions between Latino groups in Boston during this time. There were resentments between Latino groups over funding, and Garcia even heard rumors that some Puerto Rican leaders planned to intimidate her with a violent attack, but ultimately decided not to since they feared retaliation from the black community, who they assumed would defend her since she had always been an ally. There were other reasons that fueled the conflict between Garcia and other leaders.

In addition to her Dominican identity, she proudly identified as black, whereas

¹⁰² Letter, Frieda Garcia to Conchita Rodriguez, February 3, 1972, Box 11, Folder 34, Coll. M55, La Alianza Hispana Records, NU.

she argued that many light-skinned Puerto Rican leaders did not. Garcia explained that she felt that the conservative, “macho” Puerto Rican men who ran APCROSS defined largely as white Latinos. Since these organizations were led almost entirely by men, Garcia also felt strongly that her gender identity played a role in their disapproval, arguing that they were threatened by a woman in a leadership role. Betsy Tregar, who helped found La Alianza Hispana, explained that their initial success was due to these gendered stereotypes. She, Ana Maria Rodriguez, and Frieda Garcia were able to organize because APCROSS did not take them seriously. She explained, “Because we were the face that they saw, as three women, they didn’t see us as a threat. So we were able to get more established as a group before they got alarmed.” Later on, she explained, “What could three women do that could be any threat to these macho guys?”¹⁰³ Even Alex Rodriguez, a leader in APCROSS, agreed with this analysis. He explained that this was not the first time the organization sought to discredit women leaders pointing to the fact that not long before this interaction, the men of the group had fired their leader Jenny Rodriguez simply because she was a woman. Alex Rodriguez explained, “They were sexist to the hills! For these guys, women were supposed to be barefoot, naked, and in the kitchen. That’s where they came from. They were Neanderthals!”¹⁰⁴ Rodriguez tried to work with the APCROSS men but distanced himself from the misogynistic leaders of groups and struggled to see eye to eye on this issue of race and nationalism (since he, like Garcia, also identified as black and saw the value of pan-Latino and multiethnic/multiracial organizing).

¹⁰³ Betsy Tregar, Interview by Author, Cambridge MA, November 23, 2015 [hereafter: Tregar Interview].

¹⁰⁴ Rodriguez Interview.

Rodriguez explained though that the struggle for power in the Latino community extended beyond gender issues, “They wanted control because they thought that power came with those positions, that if you had those positions then you were the spokesperson for the neighborhood and for the community and you got on television and you got some perks.”¹⁰⁵ Betsy Tregar echoed this sentiment explaining the group “really wanted anything happening anyplace else to be a branch of APCROSS.”¹⁰⁶ She argued that the struggle for power and over turf was so strong that APCROSS had effectively stopped any potential organizing by other Latino groups in other neighborhoods like Jamaica Plain. Rodriguez argued that even when the entire room was full of light skinned or “white-passing” middle-class Puerto Rican men, there were still conflicts that arose that threatened their community work. Rodriguez explained that there was debate about what part of the island of Puerto Rico each member came from and that “you had to be from Aguadilla or San Juan” to be considered a “true” Puerto Rican in Boston.¹⁰⁷ Since Rodriguez was born in New York City (not on the island) and was not fluent in Spanish, he often lost some credibility or “authenticity” in these crowds. He was also married to a white woman, which distanced himself from the center of the Latino community but pushed him further into the heart of emerging multiethnic/multiracial coalition networks. His South End townhome became a center of black-brown middle-class professional social life and organizing, drawing a large array of leaders from across the African American, Latino, white, and Asian communities of Boston.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Tregar Interview.

¹⁰⁷ Rodriguez Interview.

Frieda Garcia, on the other hand, distanced herself from Puerto Rican organizations, and even began to experience tensions even within La Alianza Hispana. By the end of 1973, Garcia felt that many staff members of LAH wanted a Puerto Rican Director so she resigned and left in 1974. This sparked dramatic changes in the leadership of the organization as numerous staff members who were not Puerto Rican were fired or forced to resign. LAH, once a symbol of pan-Latino solidarity, became a Puerto Rican organization like most others in the city, led largely by light-skinned, middle-class men who privileged their identity as Puerto Rican nationalists over any broader coalitional one based on race, ethnicity, or class.

Though Jones had resigned from the Roxbury Multi-Service Center in 1971 to work in higher education, the agency continued to serve the Latino population of Roxbury and support La Alianza Hispana. It was not until LAH underwent the shift in leadership between 1974 and 1975 that this working relationship weakened. The conflicts and divisions between the Latino community contributed greatly to the demise of Garcia and Jones' original black-brown antipoverty coalition and they both moved onto new endeavors. Rodriguez, on the other hand, began shifting from grassroots organizing into local electoral politics.

Conclusion

The black-brown common fight against poverty held the greatest potential for multiethnic/multiracial cooperation in Boston during the 1960s. African American and Latino social workers like Jones, Garcia, and Rodriguez, all New York transplants who were raised as poor and working-class but found upward mobility in Boston, forged

overlapping ethnoracial and political identities in the city. Supporting one another, they sought to upbuild the black-brown communities of the city. In the wake of the city's "urban crisis," the history of the black-brown antipoverty movement reveals both a range of organizers as well as diverse strategies of protest and uplift. The emerging black-brown leadership utilized ideas of self-help and community control to develop their own social service organizations.

Although these multiethnic/multiracial collaborations and coalitions were unstable at times and threatened by divisions of class, race, nation, and gender, these struggles around poverty and the establishment of independent black-brown social service organizations were the center of the upbuilding process in black-brown neighborhoods of Boston such as Roxbury and Dorchester. This process was class-based as it was led by middle-class social workers but it was also a gendered one that privileged male leadership. The institutions ultimately formed the basis for their collective mobilizations as they were used as centralized spaces for community activism, while the activist networks formed proved integral in the city's broader movements for racial justice. In the next chapter, I examine an issue closely related to the antipoverty movement -black/brown struggles for decent, affordable housing in Boston.

**TABLE II.
TIMELINE OF UPBUILDING AND ANTIPOVERTY MOVEMENT**

1949	• Freedom House Founded
1962	• Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) Founded
1963	• “STOP Day” – Black Work Stoppage & March
1964	• Roxbury Multi-Service Center (RMSC) Founded • President Johnson Introduced War on Poverty • Economic Opportunity Act Enacted
1966	• Model Cities Administration Established Under President Johnson’s Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act
1967	• APCROSS (Association Promoting Constitutional Rights of the Spanish-Speaking) Founded • Hubie Jones Becomes RMSC Director
1968	• Spanish Alliance Founded
1970	• La Alianza Hispana (LAH) Founded
1971	• Hubie Jones Resigns as RMSC Director
1974	• Frieda Garcia Resigns as LAH Director

CHAPTER THREE

“We Shall Not Be Moved”: Black/Brown Housing Struggles and Movements for Tenants’ Rights

“I am stuck here and I will probably never get out,” an anonymous black “welfare mother” proclaimed to the *Bay State Banner* in 1965. In an attempt to expose the harsh realities of segregated public housing in Boston, the city’s leading African American newspaper had interviewed her and several others of the 200 families (approximately 800 residents) who lived in the Whittier Street Projects in Roxbury. “And since I can’t,” she continued, “I wish this place could be as good as it possibly could be because it is the only home I’ve got.”¹⁰⁸ This woman’s sentiments were echoed repeatedly by African Americans and Latinos across the city throughout the 1960s and 1970s, who realized that true upbuilding or community uplift would be impossible without decent, adequate, and affordable housing. As living conditions worsened in the “Black Boomerang” neighborhoods of the South End, Roxbury, and Dorchester, Boston’s poorest black and brown residents began coming together to discuss the deterioration, formulate plans of action, and mobilize.

Many black/brown residents began directing their frustrations and animosity directly towards Mayor John Collins for ignoring the deplorable conditions in their communities. Though Collins had relatively good working relationships with Boston’s

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous, quoted in “Whittier St. Project - Interview with Despair,” *Bay State Banner*, September 25, 1965, 1.

middle-class African American and Latino “professionals,” leaders such as Muriel and Otto Snowden, Ruth Batson, Alex Rodriguez, and George Muñoz, it appeared to many people of color that he was less interested in getting to know the city’s poorest residents or addressing their growing needs. By the mid-1960s, many of the most marginalized black-brown Bostonians, who had begun cultivating new identities as activists in the antipoverty and welfare rights movements, began working alongside black and Latino social service and civil rights organizations to pressure Collins and other city officials to provide immediate relief to the substandard housing crisis.

In December 1965, the board of directors of the Roxbury Multi-Service Center sent Mayor Collins an eight-page memo outlining the growing frustrations and tensions within the black community. The memo served as a warning to Collins predicting impending riots if “ghetto conditions” were not improved. The memo recommended eight immediate steps “to demonstrate to the Negro Community that the City, as personified by the Mayor, DOES KNOW that the Negro in Boston has special problems and DOES CARE.”¹⁰⁹ The first of these steps was a personal tour of Roxbury and North Dorchester’s most “blighted” and deteriorated streets. Organized by Hubie Jones, the tour included three stops where Collins would meet with community members to discuss their concerns. “We have planned this route so that Mayor Collins will get the full impact of the horrid conditions that exist in this ghetto,” Jones explained. “We will take him through areas where houses are about to crumble, where wrecks of abandoned cars

¹⁰⁹ Cited in “Collins on 2-Hour Trip Through Ghetto: Mayor to Tour Roxbury Slums Saturday,” *Bay State Banner*, February 5, 1966, 1. Emphasis in original.

desecrate vacant lots, where garbage clutters the streets and trash blocks sidewalks.”¹¹⁰ On February 5, 1966, Collins took the widely publicized two-hour tour through what many argued were the city’s worst slums. Following the tour, Collins agreed to have the streets cleaned up as soon as possible, yet as the *Banner* reported, a month passed and “nary a broom had touched the streets of Roxbury.”¹¹¹

Poor black/brown Bostonians kept the pressure on, increasing their efforts by circulating mimeographed leaflets in the streets of Boston calling on Collins to speak to them, to put an end to the “slums,” and to provide more frequent garbage collection services. Individuals and small groups began staging their own impromptu direct action protests. Collins was “frequently shocked and repelled by the character of these new demands, the stridency of the language with which they were expressed, and the unusual manner in which they were often presented,” historian Thomas O’Connor explained.¹¹² In March 1966, for example, six African American mothers from Roxbury held a three-hour sit-in with their children at Mayor Collins’ office in City Hall, protesting the infestation of roaches and rodents in their apartments and to demand the city furnish them with temporary housing, though eventually left without meeting with him. Days later, another group of Roxbury residents trucked a large pile of garbage from the streets of their neighborhood and dumped it on the front lawn of City Hall. Disgusted, Collins sharply criticized this action as a “rude and vulgar exhibition,” ordering a police

¹¹⁰ Hubert Jones, quoted in “Collins on 2-Hour Trip Through Ghetto,” 1.

¹¹¹ “Clean Up Roxbury” *Bay State Banner*, March 12, 1966, 4.

¹¹² Thomas O’Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950 to 1970* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), 237.

investigation of the incident.¹¹³ “The lesson to be learned,” the *Banner* explained, “is that if you have a grievance, if you become frustrated with conditions, do not go to the Mayor and ask for help --- rather, vent your frustration on the unlistening, unhearing white majority in some visible, powerful way.” The newspaper, acting as a voice for the black community, threatened, “unless conditions of unemployment, slum housing, dirty streets, raggedy school buildings, etc. are alleviated there will be trouble in Roxbury this summer.”¹¹⁴

In this chapter, I examine the “trouble” that ensued when Mayor Collins and other city officials continued to neglect and ignore black-brown communities. Living in shared and overlapping spaces in the city’s segregated ghettos, African American and Latino residents faced equally horrid living conditions in cramped, unsafe, and dilapidated buildings that frequently violated fire, sanitation, and building codes. These shared lived realities, I argue, linked African Americans and Latinos to one another as poor and working-class people of color. It also aided in the development of an increasingly shared political vision that formed the basis of multiethnic/multiracial organizations and mobilizations.

Similar to the broad economic justice movement which encompassed movements for welfare rights and social services, the struggle for decent, affordable housing in Boston provided an opportunity for African Americans and Latinos to work together across ethnic/racial lines. Yet this opportunity was just that- an opportunity. It did not automatically materialize into black-brown movements with participants of all

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ “Clean Up Roxbury,” 4.

ethnoracial groups equally represented. While the common fight against the Boston Housing Authority (BHA)/ Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and urban renewal, in particular, brought African Americans and Latinos to cooperate, I argue these early coalitions were tenuous, complex, and often unbalanced, frequently representing one group's interests more than the other's. This is evident in the movements for tenant rights and fair housing that remained ethnoracially separate in terms of leadership, as African Americans and Latinos were not evenly represented as decision-makers or public spokespeople. In Roxbury and Dorchester, for example, the movements were led by African Americans, whereas in the South End, some organizations were led almost exclusively by African Americans and others by Latinos (most of which were Puerto Rican). Almost all of the organizations were led by men.

I begin by briefly examining the earliest movements for tenant rights in Roxbury and then focus my analysis on three organizations that emerged in the South End during the 1960s to advocate for decent and affordable housing in Boston: the South End Tenants' Council (SETC), *Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción* (Puerto Rican Tenants in Action or IBA),¹¹⁵ and an umbrella group, Community Assembly for a United South End (CAUSE). Since the South End neighborhood was the most ethnoracially and socioeconomically diverse one in the city during the 1960s, it comes as no surprise that it was the main site for early multiethnic/multiracial organizing and these three groups best exemplify this new, inclusive organizing strategy.

¹¹⁵ *Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción* became incorporated as the Emergency Tenants Council or ETC in 1968 and then returned to its original name in 1974.

I. Becoming Tenant-Organizers in Roxbury

The movement for decent, adequate, and affordable housing in Boston emerged in the mid-1960s when the city's poorest black and brown residents began organizing around tenants' rights in the most deteriorated neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and the South End. Like their hostile relationships with welfare workers illustrated in chapter one, many of these residents were growing weary of being mistreated by slumlords and city housing officials. Yet these tenants were inexperienced activists and unsure how to organize or advocate for themselves. They turned inward in their communities to black-brown social service organizations, such as the Roxbury Multi-Service Center, to help them formulate plans of action. Black tenants sought out experienced professional organizers in the local chapters of national civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), who encouraged them to first discuss their concerns with their individual landlords. When landlords did not respond, however, tenants filed complaints with the city's various housing and health agencies. Developing new public identities as tenant-organizers, then they began exposing the horrid conditions of their apartments to the media. They welcomed journalists and civil rights organizers into their homes to document and photograph the violations of fire, health, and building codes. This helped build public support for their emerging movement and put added pressure on individual landlords to address their demands.

In February 1964, NAACP and CORE leaders, on behalf of tenants, took the housing crisis to the public by announcing plans for a potential rent strike in Roxbury,

should landlords and city agencies continue ignoring their growing concerns. “Roxbury is sick and tired of being the refuse center for the city,” explained Thomas Atkins, Executive Secretary of the Boston’s NAACP branch, to the *Globe*. He continued, “We’re not going to accept responsibility for a slum we didn’t make.”¹¹⁶ Boston’s NAACP President Kenneth Guscott echoed Atkins’ statement the following month: “We’re going to urge people to hold back their rent until landlords meet the building code requirements of the city.” He declared, “We’re going to take the profit out of ghettoized living.”¹¹⁷

Taking the “profit out of ghettoized living,” tenants began withholding rent checks from absentee slumlords, setting off the broader movement for tenant rights in Boston. African American tenants who lived on Waumbek and Warren Streets in Roxbury were some of the first to organize. In early 1964, they brought their concerns to Joel and Ethel Rubin, white landlords of Mark Realty Company who managed the various properties they lived in, but the couple dismissed their concerns and were slow to respond to requests for repairs. In response, the tenants filed formal complaints with the city. In April 1964, inspectors for the city’s Office of Neighborhood Improvement found more than 160 violations of fire, sanitation, and building codes. Violations included infestations of rats, roaches, and other vermin, the absence of heat and fire escapes, faulty electrical wiring, falling plaster, leaking roofs, broken windows, and accumulated garbage in shared spaces, among others. Salvatore Messina, the agency’s director, told tenants and CORE leaders in an April 10th meeting that he expected a large

¹¹⁶ Thomas Atkins, quoted in “Rent Strike Threatened in Roxbury,” *Boston Globe*, February 28, 1964, 4.

¹¹⁷ Kenneth Guscott, quoted in Robert Levey, “New Targets for NAACP,” *Boston Globe*, March 2, 1964, 1.

majority of the violations could be easily remedied within weeks. By the end of the month, however, no action was taken to remedy these violations so tenants began to organize a formal protest. With CORE's support, they began sending letters to the landlords demanding change as well as picketing outside their office on Warren Street, carrying signs that read "Get rid of rats, roaches and Rubin."¹¹⁸

On May 1, 1964, twenty-one black families in Roxbury supported by CORE had decided to take the protest to the next level, initiating what Chairman Alan Gartner called "the first major rent strike of its kind in Boston."¹¹⁹ Though there had been small cases of rent withholding prior to this, few were able to bring together such large numbers of tenants into a mass movement. Nearly \$2,000 in rent was held in escrow in an account set up by Reverend James Breeden, a "trustee" for the money. By May 10, Ethel Rubin, on behalf of her bedridden husband, began sending eviction notices to at least 16 of the 21 striking families, arguing the rent strike was illegal. Gartner was seemingly cooperative, explaining that he would instruct Rev. Breeden to immediately turn over the rent checks to Rubin if she completed the necessary repairs. If not, he warned, CORE would take the issue to court to argue that the landlords were "not meeting their part of the bargain and [were] not entitled to their rent."¹²⁰

The Roxbury rent strike proved successful as the Rubins eventually conceded to the tenants' demands within a few weeks, cleaning up the buildings and completing the repairs to bring the apartments up to code. The city's first major mobilization for

¹¹⁸ "Negro 'Rent-Strikers' Face Eviction from Roxbury Homes," *Boston Globe*, May 10, 1964, 17.

¹¹⁹ Allan Gartner, quoted in "Demand Housing Improvement: Roxbury Rent Strike Starts," *Boston Globe*, May 5, 1964, 13.

¹²⁰ "Negro 'Rent-Strikers' Face Eviction from Roxbury Homes."

tenants' rights raised awareness of the housing crisis in Boston. The movement also drew national political attention when the Massachusetts State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights conducted a study on the "civil rights problems" of the residents of Boston's black-brown ghettos. In two informal public meetings in March and April 1966, the Committee heard from more than sixty residents, as well as civil rights organizers who lived and worked in these communities. Finding that there was little to no integration in public housing and that the most recent census showed that almost 50% of all black housing in the city was dilapidated or deteriorating compared to 18% of white housing, it was no surprise that the housing concerns of black/brown residents were featured prominently in the Committee's resulting report which was titled *The Voice of the Ghetto* and released in July 1967.

The Committee's report documented "feelings of alienation, bitterness, discouragement, and hopelessness were evident in the statements of almost every person" in Boston's black-brown ghettos.¹²¹ A. Robert Phillips, a "community worker" in Roxbury explained, "I have lived in Roxbury for the better part of my life and I am increasingly shocked at the blatant disrespect and disregard the city of Boston has shown for the citizens of Roxbury."¹²² Sadelle Sacks, director of Boston's Fair Housing, explained that the short supply of low-cost housing in areas such as Roxbury forced many families to pay more than they could afford. Landlords also discriminated against welfare recipients, denying housing applications of African Americans simply due to their race or lying to prospective black tenants about apartments vacancies. "For the

¹²¹ Massachusetts State Advisory Board, *The Voice of the Ghetto: Report on Two Boston Neighborhood Meetings*, July 1967.

¹²² A. Robert Phillips, quoted in *The Voice of the Ghetto*, 7-8.

tenant, there is resentment over the high rents, the lack of communication with the landlord and the lack of services,” Sacks explained. “Most tenants in Roxbury don’t even know who their landlord is.”¹²³

The Roxbury rent strike and increasing media coverage of housing issues helped to inspire other poor and working-class black/brown Bostonians to advocate for tenant rights in their own neighborhoods. Yet the victory had no real impact on poor Latino tenants who lived in that very same neighborhood who similarly struggled with absentee slumlords. With the highest concentration of African Americans in the city and the site of the most prominent black civil rights and social service organizations, Roxbury was a decidedly black space and center of the African American community in Boston. Though Latinos increasingly moved into the neighborhood in the late 1960s and early 1970s, community organizing efforts were led almost exclusively by African American activists and primarily reflected the interests of the black community. Roxbury was arguably a space less conducive to cross-racial organizing during the 1960s. The South End, however, was a much more diverse neighborhood with a larger concentration of Latinos so it proved more favorable as a breeding ground for multiethnic/ multiracial collaboration in the movement for tenants’ rights.

II. Black-Led Coalition Building in the South End

The black-brown struggle for equitable housing and tenants’ rights in Boston began to build momentum in the mid-1960s, taking off most explosively in the South End neighborhood. This did not come as a surprise to many Bostonians, as the

¹²³ Sadelle Sacks, quoted in *The Voice of the Ghetto*, 15.

neighborhood was the center of Boston's urban renewal program, which increasingly displaced poor and working-class African Americans and Latinos. Since the turn-of-the-century, the South End was a racially and ethnically diverse community. It was also one of the city's densest, most poverty-stricken areas and largely in need of renovation. Though many of the buildings were 19th century brownstowns that were deteriorating, they were quite large townhomes on beautiful tree-lined streets and retained some charming qualities. With some neighborhood clean up and building rehabilitation, the area had tremendous market value. Urban planners quickly realized the South End's potential for gentrification. Walking distance from downtown Boston's commercial and business district, and in close proximity to Interstate Highway 93, planners were also drawn to the South End's ideal location, as well as the availability of space to construct new industrial and corporate facilities. Thus the neighborhood was selected for the city's very first urban renewal project, which began in 1955 in the "New York Streets" area between Harrison Avenue, Albany Street, Dover Street, and Motte Street.

Providing little to no notice to the area's residents, the Boston Housing Authority razed the land to make way for a new plant for the *Boston Herald Traveler* newspaper as part of a larger vision to bring factories into the declining city center. Longtime community activist Mel King grew up in the New York Streets area and explained that the newspaper published a series of articles to promote the redevelopment plan, prior to purchasing the land. Labeling the area "Skid Row" and streets as slums "depersonalized the issue, and blocked out any understanding of the impact urban renewal would have on the lives of the people, like my family and friends, living there, and provided a rationale for replacing 'undesireable' elements of Boston with less

troublesome 'light industry,'" King argued.¹²⁴ His wife, Joyce King, also grew up in the New York Streets area. She argued the project demonstrated the lack of political power Boston's residents held. "They just did it. There were no community meetings or anything like that," she explained. "So people just moved out. Everybody went in different directions once the neighborhood said, 'You gotta get out.'"¹²⁵ The destruction of the New York Streets sent a clear message to poor and working-class residents of color that the city of Boston prioritized economic development over their communities. As urban renewal programs continued to target the South End in the 1960s, African Americans and Latinos rallied to protest development projects that called for the destruction of their homes and community institutions.

As in the antipoverty movement, African American social workers like Theodore "Ted" Parrish emerged as the leading activists in the South End movements for fair housing. Parrish moved from Chapel Hill, North Carolina to New England to attend Brown University. Following graduation, he moved to Boston in 1957 and became a youth counselor at the United South End Settlements (USES), later becoming head of the organization's Youth Opportunity Center. In May 1968, Parrish helped organize tenants in more than twenty of the sixty buildings owned by three brothers, Joseph, Israel, and Raphael Mindick. Over 700 African American, Latino, and white tenants formed themselves into a multiethnic/multiracial group called the South End Tenants Council (SETC). Though the group was diverse, two African American men from the South led it: Leon Williams was the SETC Chairman and Parrish served as the treasurer and

¹²⁴ King, *Chain of Change*, 21.

¹²⁵ Joyce King, quoted in Tess Bundy, "'The Schools are Killing our Kids!'" 53.

spokesman.¹²⁶ The *Globe* described the SETC as “an inarticulate, loose knit group of people” who shared “nothing more than a common fear that they were about to be forced out of their community by urban renewal and high rents and were powerless to do anything about it.”¹²⁷

The Mindick family epitomized the title of “slumlords” and their tenants argued they lived in “conditions not fit for dogs much less human beings.”¹²⁸ At first, the SETC filed formal complaints with the city against the Mindicks, prompting several inspections and hundreds of housing code violations. Yet city housing’s maze of red tape, like the welfare system, proved inefficient at resolving the issue. The Mindicks would not address the highly unsanitary buildings full of rat and roach infestations. While the residents maintained that the horrid conditions led to increased criminal activity, prostitution, and drugs, the Mindicks countered these accusations redirecting blame at the residents themselves for throwing garbage out of windows and damaging buildings.¹²⁹ The conditions of the Mindicks building did, in fact, reflect the city’s neglect of the entire South End neighborhood as well as their own. Puerto Rican organizer Alex Rodriguez moved there from New York in 1965. “The South End was a slum. The South End was a rundown slum and it was getting worse not better,” Rodriguez later reflected. “There were fires all around the community, there was filth on the street, the streets were loaded with garbage... you had to go through a gondola of prostitutes... it was not

¹²⁶ Little has been documented about Leon Williams other than he was an African American man who moved to Boston from Virginia in 1967 in his mid twenties, where he immediately began organizing around tenant rights after experiencing his own struggles with housing in the South End. Viola Osgood, “S. End Tenants Given More Independence,” *Boston Globe*, June 4, 1969, 2.

¹²⁷ Viola Osgood, “Parrish leaving Hub just a bit less angry,” *Boston Globe*, August 2, 1970, 29.

¹²⁸ Osgood, “S. End Tenants Given More Independence,” 2.

¹²⁹ “Rabbinical Court Takes Over in Alleged ‘Slumlord’ Case,” *Bay State Banner*, August 8, 1968, 1.

nice.”¹³⁰ When the Mindicks exhibited unresponsiveness and inaction in addressing their concerns, the SETC tenant-organizers began picketing outside their realty office and the brothers’ homes. It was only when the SETC began planning a demonstration outside the Dorchester synagogue where one of the brothers was a cantor that Rabbi Judea Miller stepped in. Miller was chairman of the Social Action Committee of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis who recognized the Mindick properties were “disgusting” and suggested the SETC take the grievances to the local Rabbinical Court of Justice.¹³¹

After three months of negotiations, on August 5, 1968, the Rabbinical Court brokered an agreement between the Mindicks and the SETC tenants where both parties signed. Among the basic provisions of the agreement were daily custodial services, snow removal, satisfactory lighting, hot and cold running water, and the maintenance of a 68-degree minimum temperature throughout the day.¹³² The Mindicks, however, did not uphold their end of the agreement, continuing to neglect their properties for six months following the settlement. In response, the SETC tenant-organizers initiated a mass rent strike beginning on February 14, 1969. A few weeks later, the Rabbinical Court fined the Mindicks \$48,000 for violating the agreement. The tenants withheld their rents for more than nine weeks before the Mindicks opted to sell thirty-four of their properties in May 1969 to the Boston Redevelopment Authority. In a historic win for the South End’s poorest black/brown residents, the SETC set up their own community development corporation, the Tenants Development Corporation (TDC). They then persuaded the

¹³⁰ Rodriguez Interview.

¹³¹ Established during medieval times, the Rabinnical courts typically dealt disputes between Jews. Vrabel, *A People’s History of the New Boston*, 132.

¹³² “Rabbinical Court Takes Over in Alleged ‘Slumlord’ Case,” 1.

BRA to turn over fifty-six of the former Mindick properties to the community corporation. The TDC, in turn, renovated the properties into 285 units of affordable housing for low-income families. As historian Jim Vrabel aptly summarized, “What started out as a rent strike by tenants against their landlords ended with the tenants becoming their own landlords.”¹³³ Needless to say, poor African Americans and Latinos in the South End had not only developed identities as organizers and forged a successful movement for tenants’ rights, but they effectively emerged as powerful political players who could radically shape housing in Boston.

In the fall of 1969, Leon Williams and Ted Parrish built off the success in the Mindick case, leading the SETC to carefully select absentee slumlords as targets in a new squatters movement to highlight the continued need for low-income housing in the city. “Squatting,” Parrish explained to the *Globe*, “allows you to carefully choose the people you strike, it lets the people know who is making the money, and it has a therapeutic effect by giving people control over the places where they live.”¹³⁴ In September, several council leaders broke into a vacant apartment at 22 Yarmouth Street and installed one mother-organizer, Genine Williams, to occupy the space with her three children. They offered the landlord \$60 for the one-bedroom apartment, but he refused, arguing he had planned to rent it out for \$195 a month. He evicted Williams but as soon as she left, the SETC installed another “squatter” to take her place.¹³⁵

Two weeks after the Yarmouth Street occupation, Williams, Parrish, and the SETC

¹³³ Vrabel, *A People’s History of the New Boston*, 133.

¹³⁴ Ted Parrish, quoted in Deckle McLean, “Boston Squatters: ‘Instant housing’-a weapon of the urban poor, a tactic of desperation in the battle between the have and have-nots,” *Boston Globe*, December 7, 1969, A8.

¹³⁵ Lukas, *Common Ground*, 431.

spread the squatters' movement to another South End Property at 694 Tremont Street. This time they installed a multiethnic/multiracial group of six tenant-organizer families with children to occupy the building. The building was formerly a low-income housing unit with apartments priced between \$60 to \$75 a month, but was suddenly converted into expensive apartments. The black and Latino families barricaded the doors and settled into the apartments, even establishing committees to keep the building clean and defend it. When the manager sought to serve eviction notices and have police forcibly remove the tenant-organizers, a violent confrontation ensued where one policeman was injured and four activists, including Parrish, were arrested. "Poor people must have a place to live," Parrish explained, following his release from jail.¹³⁶ Standing below the squatters' motto, "Human Rights over Property Rights," Parrish declared, "We're not moving, because nobody is coming in here to force us out of our community."¹³⁷ The organizers requested a meeting with the building owners and city officials to work towards a peaceful resolution. "We aren't asking to stay here free," Parrish explained. "We're willing to pay 25 percent of our salaries."¹³⁸ A rent of \$175 a month, however, exceeded that percentage of income for most black/brown families in the city.

Following the confrontation with the police, the SETC drew crowds of its tenant-organizer members to protest outside of the 694 Tremont Street apartment building and at the landlord's home, even placing garbage on his front steps to pressure him into action. Ultimately, the SETC proved successful once again, as the six black/brown

¹³⁶ Ted Parrish, quoted in Thom Shepard, "Squatters to Keep South End House," *Boston Globe*, October 13, 1969, 3

¹³⁷ Ted Parrish, quoted in Lukas, *Common Ground*, 433.

¹³⁸ Parrish, quoted in Shepard, "Squatters to Keep South End House," 3.

families came to terms with the landlord, who allowed them to remain in the building, supported by leased housing grants from the Boston Housing Authority. This was another major victory for the South End's poorest black/brown residents.

Despite the success of the SETC in leading the movement for tenant rights in the South End, the organization had only begun to realize the full potential of black-brown organizing. The group was certainly diverse and multiethnic/multiracial with African Americans and Latinos both participating as tenant-organizers in various activist campaigns. However, as African Americans emerged as the group's leaders, Latinos remained in supportive roles. Latino tenant-organizers served as behind-the-scenes actors or footsoldiers, while their black counterparts were charged with the group's decision-making. Ted Parrish and Leon Williams, for example, not only led the group, but also served as its spokespeople to landlords, housing officials, and the greater public of Boston. The history of the SETC movement illustrates many of the difficulties in forming black-brown movements with participants of all ethnoracial groups equally represented. It also demonstrated the gendered character of the housing movement; while black/brown women were key organizers, they did not rise into public, visible leadership roles like Parrish and Williams.

Similar to the SETC, the Community Assembly for a United South End (CAUSE) was a multiethnic/multiracial group that emerged around the same time in the movement for decent, affordable housing in Boston. In 1968, CAUSE began a series of direct action mobilizations to protest Boston's urban renewal plan. While at first the organizers staged sit-ins at the Boston Redevelopment Authority offices, they then decided to occupy lots targeted by the city for redevelopment. The Fitz-Inn parking lot

project bounded by Dartmouth, Columbus, and Yarmouth Streets had displaced one hundred South End families. In April 1968, CAUSE demonstrators blocked the site, occupied the lot, pitched tents, and camped there for three days. Community support grew for the “Tent City” protest, especially after twenty-three activists were arrested. The movement gained additional media attention when Martin Luther King, Jr.’s father arrived to give encouragement to the protestors, only two weeks after his son’s assassination.¹³⁹ After CAUSE was infiltrated by undercover police and was awarded a grant for \$10,000 from the Episcopal Diocese of Boston, Tent City dissolved. Mel King explained, “Soon after the grant was accepted the site was vacated. It was one of our biggest mistakes.”¹⁴⁰ Yet CAUSE organizers eventually triumphed twenty years later. After decades of battles with the city government, a mixed-income development was finally built on the site in 1988, with two-thirds of its units made affordable for low-income tenants. Boston named the building Tent City, to honor the 1968 movement. CAUSE continued to organize after Tent City, serving as an umbrella organization that brought various South End tenants’ groups like the SETC together into one coalition against the BRA and urban renewal. The lasting impact of CAUSE, like SETC, proved not only that multiethnic/ multiracial cooperation was possible, but that it garnered increasing support in the South End and proved effective in movements for fair housing. A *Harvard Crimson* article even described CAUSE’s main goal to “bring Negroes and Puerto Ricans together for more grass-roots power.”¹⁴¹ Yet CAUSE continued to privilege the voices and interests of the black community over that of Latino tenants.

¹³⁹ F. Taylor, Jr., “South End Decision Left to Lot’s Owner,” *Boston Globe*, April 29, 1968, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Mel King, *Chain of Change*, 113.

¹⁴¹ Killilea, “The South End: ‘Puerto Rican Power!’”

Mel King was CAUSE's main leader and public spokesman and there were relatively no Latinos who publicly appeared at his side or as equal decision-makers. King's role in the formation of CAUSE did, however, illustrate how he was one of the first proponents of black-brown coalition building in the city. King's experience organizing multiethnic/multiracial coalitions around housing proved useful later as he sought to garner the Latino vote in his 1983 mayoral run.

III. Latino-Led Coalition Building in the South End

While SETC and CAUSE promoted African American leadership in their early attempts in black-brown coalition building, another group emerged at the same time, instead privileging the voices and interests of Latinos in the South End. Ironically, one of the leading figures that helped form the Latino housing movement was, in fact, a white man named Reverend William Dwyer, a New Jersey native who had studied Spanish at Princeton and began organizing at his first parish on New York City's Lower East Side. In 1963, he moved to Boston and became pastor of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church on Shawmut Avenue in the South End. St. Stephen's congregation reflected the neighborhood's demographics, composed of "a few old Yankees, a handful of blacks, a small group of middle-class Cubans, who were political refugees, but mostly of poor and working-class Puerto Ricans, who were economic refugees."¹⁴² Dwyer helped his parishioners organize around smaller tenant concerns until the summer of 1965, when residents took on a bigger campaign.

The BRA's South End Urban Renewal Plan included the revitalization of a twenty-

¹⁴² Rev. William Dwyer, quoted in Vrabell, *A People's History of New Boston*, 113.

acre area called Parcel 19, an effort to tear down a majority of the area's buildings and redevelop it into luxury condominiums and a shopping center. The project would displace nearly 2,000 residents, of which an overwhelming majority were Puerto Rican. In a struggle to "save the parcela," Rev. Dwyer and Parcel 19's tenants organized themselves into a multiethnic/multiracial group called Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (Puerto Rican Tenants in Action or IBA). Despite the fact that there were both black and white members present since its beginning, the group primarily represented the interests of the Puerto Rican community, and this was reflected in the decision to name it IBA. The organization did receive significant support from African American residents and other tenants' rights groups such as SETC and CAUSE. "We work with everybody, not just the Spanish-speaking," explained Puerto Rican activist Israel Feliciano, one of the group's emerging leaders.¹⁴³ IBA led a door-to-door campaign to organize against the BRA's plan, sporting badges with their slogan "No nos modaremos de la Parcel 19" ("We shall not be moved from Parcel 19").

In 1968, IBA incorporated under the name Emergency Tenants Council of Parcel 19, Inc. (ETC). Seeking community control of the land, the ETC decided to develop its own redevelopment for Parcel 19. The organization's leaders prided themselves in not being militant or demonstrating, as other groups like SETC had done. Instead, the Puerto Rican-led ETC cooperated directly with the BRA to prepare a plan together.¹⁴⁴ During this time, the organization grew to more than 1,500 members, of which approximately

¹⁴³ Israel Feliciano, quoted in Judson Brown, "South End Puerto Ricans Join in Planning of B.R.A.'s 'Parcel 19,'" *Boston Globe*, June 22, 1969.

¹⁴⁴ Anthony Yudies, "Puerto Rican community reveals plans to develop So. End," *Boston Globe*, December 11, 1969, 21.

two-thirds (or 1,000 members) were Latino or “Spanish speaking.”¹⁴⁵ In 1969, the ETC earned the right to become Parcel 19’s developers. With the help of young architects, ETC tenant-organizers helped design a new 844-unit housing complex for low and middle-income residents. Naming the community “Villa Victoria” (or “Victory Village”) this project became an award-winning complex of three-story houses, and included stores, residential tower and public spaces such as the community gardens, features designed to build a tight-knit community. The houses also featured three to four bedrooms to encourage large families to live there and all had big windows for residents to keep a watchful eye on the neighborhood activities.¹⁴⁶ The ETC eventually reclaimed its original name as the Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción in 1974 and evolved into an organization focused on managing Villa Victoria and organizing events and services to foster community. Political scientist Carol Hardy-Fanta explains that with a town square called Plaza Betances and street names like Aguadilla, which bring to mind the pueblos of Puerto Rico, Villa Victoria undoubtedly “left a permanent record of Latino community participation on the map of Boston.”¹⁴⁷

The success of IBA/ETC’s movement to save the community of Parcel 19 was yet another example of how South End tenants worked across ethnic/racial lines in the movement for decent, affordable housing in Boston. The organization’s almost exclusively Puerto Rican leadership and spokespeople, however, illustrate that multiethnic/multiracial coalitions were not inherently racially balanced nor necessarily

¹⁴⁵ Lorraine Barber, “\$15 million proposal: BRA Approves Grant for Emergency Tenants Council,” *Bay State Banner*, December 18, 1969, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Mario Luis Small, *Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁷ Carol Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics, Latino Politics: Gender, Culture, and Political Participation in Boston* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 103.

representing the interests of all constituents equally. Similarly, Latina women remained as behind-the-scenes organizers with men serving as the decision-makers and public spokespeople of IBA and the movement to save the parcel.

Conclusion

The shared experiences of segregated urban life in Boston helped African Americans and Latinos to shape overlapping racial and political identities as poor and working-class people of color. As black-brown people began to recognize their similar struggles with urban renewal and slumlords in Boston's ghettos, they also began developing a shared political vision. Similar to the economic justice movement, the struggle for decent, affordable housing in Boston provided an opportunity for African Americans and Latinos to work together across ethnic/racial lines. The emergence of the three South End organizations (SETC, CAUSE, and IBA/ETC) illustrated the growth of multiethnic/multiracial coalitions in the common fight for housing equity. Yet my analysis sheds light on how these coalitions were tenuous, complex, and often unbalanced, regularly representing one group's interests more than the other's. This is evident in how the tenant organizations and movements remained ethnoracially separate in terms of leadership, as African Americans and Latinos were not evenly represented as decision-makers or public spokespeople in these diverse groups. The tenant rights movement also reflected gendered distribution of labor, as women were seen as "organizers" while men were the leaders.

In contrast to these first three chapters that illustrate how African Americans and Latinos collaborated on issues of poverty and housing, the following chapter considers

how the two groups were pulled apart to work on entirely separate, parallel paths in broader movement for educational justice, largely due to linguistic differences.

TABLE III.
TIMELINE OF HOUSING STRUGGLES AND MOVEMENTS FOR TENANTS' RIGHTS

1955	• New York Streets Area of South End Razed as Boston's First Urban Renewal Project
1964	• NAACP & CORE Help Roxbury Tenants Lead First Rent Strike
1965	• Mayor Collins Tours Through Roxbury and North Dorchester • Mothers' Sit-In & Roxbury Residents Dump Garbage at City Hall • Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA) Founded
1966	• Massachusetts State Advisory Committee Holds Public Meetings on Civil Rights Problems in Boston's Ghettos
1967	• Massachusetts State Advisory Committee's Report <i>The Voice of the Ghetto</i> is Released • Community Assembly for a United South End (CAUSE) Founded
1968	• South End Tenants Council (SETC) Founded • SETC Protest Mindicks & Rabbinical Court Brokers Agreement • CAUSE Tent City Demonstration • IBA Incorporates Under Emergency Tenants Council (ETC)
1969	• SETC Rent Strike Against Mindicks • SETC Establishes Tenants Development Corporation (TDC) to Develop Properties Formerly Owned by Mindicks • SETC Organizes Squatters Movement • ETC Earns Rights from BRA to Develop Parcel 19 into Villa Victoria
1974	• ETC incorporated as Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción

CHAPTER FOUR

“You Women Should be Home Washing Your Dishes”: Black/Brown Mother-Organizers and 1960s Movements for Educational Justice

In 1949, a fire was lit within Ruth Batson after attending an eye-opening meeting of the Boston Parents Federation. Batson’s mother had instilled in her a deep commitment to education, which drove her to attend the meeting even though she knew she would likely be the only black person in the local activist group composed of mostly white women. Batson’s parents were West Indian and politically active Garveyites, so it was no surprise she had deeply rooted activist tendencies within her.¹⁴⁸ At the meeting, she was amazed to learn “that the oldest school buildings in Boston were located in the black communities, and these buildings were unsafe. These facilities also lacked the amenities found in other school districts, such as lunch rooms, libraries, and

¹⁴⁸ Ruth Batson was born in 1921 to politically active West Indian parents and grew up in segregated housing in Roxbury, Massachusetts. She completed high school and in 1941, married John Batson and they had three daughters. She began her career in the Boston branch of the NAACP and then served as chairwoman of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD). She became assistant director and then executive director of the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program, a voluntary integration program busing students from racially imbalanced (predominantly with minority students) districts in Boston to schools in the surrounding suburbs (predominantly with white students). At Boston University, she was the director of the consultation and education program, director of the school desegregation research project, coordinator of the clinical task force, and associate professor at the School of Medicine's Division of Psychiatry. Later on in life, Batson was president and director of the Museum of Afro American History (later the Museum of African American History) and authored *The Black Educational Movement in Boston: A Sequence of Historical Events*, before passing away in 2003. “Biography,” Ruth Batson Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University [hereafter: Batson Papers].

gymnasiums.”¹⁴⁹ In a segregated and inequitable school system, black children typically went to underfunded black schools in areas of the city such as Roxbury, where Batson lived. Though she had been actively involved in her children’s schools for years, at the Parents Federation meeting she realized that her encouragement at home was simply not enough; she grew determined to challenge the gross inequalities faced by all black students in the Boston Public School system. In 1950, Batson solidified her new role as a mother-organizer by registering an official complaint with the school department that African American children, including her three daughters, were receiving an inferior education.¹⁵⁰

Batson immediately began her work with the Parents Federation and soon after ran for the Boston School Committee in 1951, becoming the first black person to run in the twentieth century. Her platform centered on replacing old, unsafe buildings, establishing a hot lunch program, improving working conditions for teachers, creating democratic home and school associations, as well as what she called an “interracial understanding and responsible citizenship.” Her campaign literature urged voters, “For Your Children’s Sake, Elect a Mother!” In another campaign flyer Batson posed in a photo with her three elementary school-aged daughters under a banner describing her as a “Life Long Resident of Boston; Mother; Teacher; Civic Worker.”¹⁵¹ The citywide election had an at-large voting system and, though she lost, she did garner 15,154 votes, placing sixteenth out of approximately twenty-six candidates. This did not hinder Batson from

¹⁴⁹ Ruth Batson, quoted in Jeanne Theoharis, “‘They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid’: Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston,” in Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 20-21.

¹⁵⁰ Brian Sheehan, *The Boston School Integration Dispute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 71-72.

¹⁵¹ “Boston School Committee campaign, 1951,” Box 2, Folder 8, Batson Papers.

continuing to fight for educational justice throughout the decade.

In 1960, Batson was disappointed to find out that her daughter did not have science as a subject while her friends at predominantly white schools did. After troubling interactions with her daughter's principal, she contacted the local Roxbury office of the NAACP to file a complaint about the school, yet was told that they did not have a committee to deal with Boston schools. The next day, the NAACP asked her to chair a new subcommittee focused on this issue and her life profoundly changed after that. Batson soon emerged as a leader in the black educational movement that gained steam in the 1960s.

Over two decades after Ruth Batson first awakened her inner activist spirit at the Parents Federation meeting, another mother realized that the Boston school system was failing students of color. In 1972, Carmen Pola was horrified when she walked into her daughters' classroom. They were a year apart in the fourth and fifth grades respectively but had been placed in the same crowded classroom with over 40 Latino children. Amidst the chaos of students throwing things and cursing in Spanish stood a young white teacher who appeared helpless and could not settle them down. In fact, the teacher could not communicate with her students at all since she spoke only English and the children were all recent Latin American migrants and mostly spoke Spanish. Pola was born in Puerto Rico in 1939 to a politically prominent family and moved to the United States in 1955 during her early teens. After a brief time in New York, she settled in an Oakland suburb in California and became a community organizer, self-identifying as a black Puerto Rican or Afro-Latina and joining the local chapter of the Black Panther

Party. She married and had five children, then relocated to Boston in 1972.¹⁵² Her daughters struggled to adjust to a new life in the poor Mission Hill neighborhood of Boston, having grown accustomed to a comfortable middle-class lifestyle and private school education just outside Oakland. They had lived in Boston for less than six months when Pola arrived at her daughters' school to check on their progress. She quickly realized that the classroom was not a space of learning and instead functioned much like a childcare center. Appalled by the lack of order and the ineffectiveness of the teacher, she slammed her hand down on a desk and shouted, "¡Cállensen!" which silenced the students. After minutes in the classroom, Pola decided to remove her children from Boston Public Schools all together. She thanked the teacher for trying her best and marched out of the school straight to a Catholic church, where she explained her story to a nun who immediately enrolled her girls in the adjoining parochial school.¹⁵³

Though Pola had defiantly chosen to withdraw her children from their school that day, she did not abandon her commitment to Boston Public Schools.¹⁵⁴ There were

¹⁵² In Boston, Pola's activism centered around education and housing. She organized tenants in Mission Hill in a class action lawsuit, *Perez v. Boston Housing Authority*, to force the city to comply with sanitary codes. She also was one of the lead plaintiffs in *Morgan v. Kerrigan* as part of *El Comité de Padres Pro Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe*. She later became part of the Citywide Parents Advisory and the Bilingual Masters Parents Advisory Council, which helped oversee the implementation of desegregation and the Voluntary Lau Compliance Plan. She directed a non-profit for children called the Project to Monitor the Code of Discipline at the Massachusetts Advocacy Center (now known as Massachusetts Advocates for Children) and later became the first Latina to run statewide office, though she lost her election for state representative. She remained in politics as part of Raymond Flynn's mayoral campaign and later as an advisor. "Biographical Note," *Carmen A. Pola Papers*, NU; *Carmen Pola, Interview with author, Boston, MA, November 11, 2014* [hereafter: *Pola Interview*].

¹⁵³ *Pola Interview*.

¹⁵⁴ Pola always identified as part of the working-class, though she was able to navigate some middle-class settings and pushed her children to attend private schools, when they were able to get financial support. She later reflected that she felt she could only commit to the educational movement and emerge as a leader once her children were "safe" in Catholic school. She did not have to worry about her children receiving any backlash from teachers, administrators or other students because of her involvement in public school reform. It is important to note that she did eventually enroll her children in Boston Public Schools again. Several of her children ended up in the bilingual education program at Brighton High. She

less than a handful of Latino and African American families at her daughters' new school, and Pola knew that private and parochial schools were not an option for most of Boston's residents of color who lived in poverty. Like Ruth Batson decades earlier, this moment awakened Pola's activist spirit, inspiring her to take an active role in the Latino movement for educational justice.

Batson and Pola's stories exemplify the struggles black/brown mothers faced in navigating Boston's segregated, inequitable school system during the 1960s and 1970s. African American and Latino children often attended the same or similar schools, given that the two communities overlapped and intersected in the ghettos of the city such as Dorchester, Roxbury, Mission Hill, and the South End. These black/brown children confronted many obstacles including, but not limited to: dilapidated buildings, overcrowded classrooms, significantly less per-pupil spending than white students received, and severe shortages of materials. "Our children were not getting the same treatment," Pola explained, "the same resources, the nice books, [or] the nice buildings as other children were."¹⁵⁵ Batson and the subcommittee of the NAACP she led witnessed how segregated schools allowed the Boston School Committee to provide black and brown children with inferior educations. "We decided," she recalled, "that where there were a large number of white students, that's where the care went. That's where the books went. That's where the money went."¹⁵⁶ The curriculum at these black-brown schools was outdated and blatantly racist, often failing to address the specific

later reflected, "I made sure my children got the best education in that building and that was bilingual education." Pola Interview.

¹⁵⁵ Carmen Pola, quoted in *Can We Talk? Learning from Boston's Busing / Desegregation Crisis*, directed by Scott Mercer (Boston: Union of Minority Neighborhoods and Mercer Media Relations, 2012).

¹⁵⁶ Ruth Batson, quoted in Henry Hampton, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s Through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam, 1990), 588-9.

needs of students such as English Language Learners (ELLs) or those with disabilities.

The segregated school system also guaranteed that the overwhelming majority of teachers and administrators in the district were white. Black and Latino students were taught by the most inexperienced white teachers, many of whom were mere substitutes and were not able to secure full-time teaching positions at any of the predominantly white schools. They also received inadequate counseling services and were tracked into segregated high schools where they would take manual and vocational classes rather than college preparatory ones. They endured hostility and violence from their peers and dropped out at alarmingly high rates. Many black/brown children were forced out of school all together, systematically excluded from the district for a host of reasons such as teenage pregnancy, inability to speak English, unsubstantiated “behavior concerns,” a misclassification of developmental disabilities, or an arbitrary branding as “unteachable.”

African Americans and Latinos mobilized around these educational inequalities for decades and though they faced similar issues in the same public schools of Boston, they rarely organized together. Instead, they worked in parallel, adjacent movements utilizing similar organizing strategies. Espousing ideas of self-determination and community control, they began by documenting the discriminatory practices and existing inequities in the school system. Then they mobilized indigenous and external resources to expand their base and develop new types of educational institutions, organizing their own school-readiness and summer educational programs, as well as establishing their own independent schools. They also petitioned the school district with proposals and recommendations for reform, staged public protests and marches, and

sought legal appeals. In 1972, the Boston chapter of the NAACP filed a class action lawsuit against the Boston School Committee on behalf of 14 African American families, charging the system with deliberate racial segregation. Latinos later joined as plaintiff-interveners in the case through a grassroots parent group called El Comité Pro La Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe (The Committee in Defense of Bilingual Education). The *Morgan v Hennigan* case resulted in Judge W. Arthur Garrity's court-ordered desegregation that began in the fall of 1974.

Despite the rich history of black-brown educational organizing in the decades leading up to and following Garrity's order, the historical narrative of school desegregation in Boston remains centered on white working-class "backlash." Over forty years later, historians and journalists continue to refer to this time as the "busing crisis," a blight on the city's legacy as the "Cradle of Liberty" when the streets felt much like a war zone. Led by City Council member Louise Day Hicks and a group called ROAR (Restore Our Alienable Rights), white ethnics protested "forced busing" in an effort to preserve "neighborhood schools." This history is centered on white resistance and is often embodied by a handful of frequently cited images such as the infamous photograph "Soiling Old Glory," which depicts a white "anti-busing" protester attacking an African American lawyer with an American flag on Boston's City Hall Plaza.¹⁵⁷ Iconography like this, coupled with the release of J. Anthony Lukas' 1985 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Common Ground*, furthers this tragic saga focused on white protest. Lukas'

¹⁵⁷ Stanley Foreman's "The Soiling of Old Glory," was taken on April 5, 1976 during an anti-desegregation rally on Boston's City Hall Plaza. The photograph depicts white "anti-busing" protestor Joseph Rakes attempting to attack African American lawyer Theodore Landsmark with an American flag. Foreman received a Pulitzer-Prize for this work. See Louis Masur, *The Soiling of Old Glory: The Story of the Photograph that Shocked America* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008).

dense and captivating monograph on the lives of three Boston families during the period of court-ordered desegregation has become the seminal text on Boston's school desegregation (and often representative of the city's racial politics more broadly). Yet Lukas' dismissal of decades of black activism and his portrayal of the book's main black family as dysfunctional ignited passionate responses from many black activists. In a scathing review, Ruth Batson declared, "JOHN ANTHONY LUKAS STOLE OUR MOVEMENT. The book completely leaves out the struggle that was carried out for so many years by Black activists in Boston."¹⁵⁸ Leading the critique of Lukas among scholars has been Jeanne Theoharis, who explains, "Lukas's portrayal of local blacks as politically passive and culturally deprived bore a dangerous resemblance to the political ideologies that had maintained segregation in the city for decades."¹⁵⁹ Lukas' work is not the only one to omit African American and Latino activism in Boston Schools. Ronald Formisano's *Boston Against Busing* and Alan Lupo's *Liberty's Chosen Home* are similarly framed.¹⁶⁰

While significant strides have been made to challenge this narrative and recover

¹⁵⁸ Emphasis in original. Ruth M. Batson, *The Black Educational Movement: A Sequence of Historical Events: A Chronology* (Boston: Northeastern University, School of Education, 2001), 11 [hereafter: *The Black Educational Movement*].

¹⁵⁹ Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," 17.

¹⁶⁰ For works that center on white resistance to busing and that dismiss the educational activism of African American and Latinos in Boston, see: J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Random House, 1985); Ronald Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1991); Emmett H., Jr. Buell and Richard A. Brisbin, Jr., *School Desegregation and Defended Neighborhoods: The Boston Controversy* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1982); Michel Ross and William Berg, *"I Respectfully Disagree with the Judge's Order": The Boston School Desegregation Controversy* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981); Steven Taylor, *Desegregation in Boston and Buffalo: The Influence of Local Leaders* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Jon Hillson, *The Battle of Boston* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977); Alan Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston* (Boston: Little Brown, 1977); Ione Malloy, *Southie Won't Go: A Teacher's Diary of the Desegregation of South Boston* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); George Metcalf, *From Little Rock to Boston: The History of School Desegregation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983); Pamela Bullard and Judith Stoia, *The Hardest Lesson: Personal Stories of a School Desegregation Crisis* (Boston: Little Brown, 1982).

the long history of African American educational activism in the city by scholars such as Theoharis, this critical work continues to further a black-white binary that renders Latinos invisible.¹⁶¹ School desegregation narratives more broadly across the nation have centered on either African Americans integrating white schools in the South or the lack of desegregation in the North, often overlooking how Latinos were impacted by desegregation or the role that Latino activists played in movements for change. Recent studies of educational barriers and the impact of desegregation on Chicanos in California and in the Southwest have challenged the black-white emphasis. However, hardly any have considered how other Latino groups navigated these same challenges in the urban north.¹⁶² The limited scholarship on the educational history of Latinos in northern cities centers on Puerto Ricans in New York.¹⁶³ Boston, on the other hand, remains largely obscured in the scholarship, as well as in the historical memory of the city's racial politics.

Currently, there is no comprehensive study that provides an in-depth comparative analysis of both the African American and Latino movements for

¹⁶¹ See for example: Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid."

¹⁶² For the impact of desegregation on Latinos in the Southwest, see: Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Ian Haney Lopez, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2003); Richard R. Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Educational Equality* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., *Brown, Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005); Phillipa Strum, *Mendez v. Westminster: School Desegregation and Mexican-American Rights* (Lawrence, KS: Kansas University Press, 2010); and Brian D. Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

¹⁶³ For the educational history of Latinos in the urban north, see: Anthony De Jesús and Madeline Pérez, "From Community Control to Consent Decree: Puerto Ricans Organizing for Education and Language Rights in 1960s and '70s New York City," *Centro Journal* 21:2 (Fall 2009); 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 (Constitutional Conflict)*, ed. Peter Lau (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 300-19.

educational justice in the city nor one that has considered how these groups and grassroots mobilizations impacted one another. Boston's racial history remains statically defined by this so-called "busing crisis." This framework is quite limiting as it fuels the black-white binary, ignores the impact of Garrity's decision on other racial and ethnic minorities, and erases the importance of other issues beyond busing students, such as language and bilingual education, pupil assignments, and the hiring of black and Latino teachers and administrators. I aim to disrupt this black-white "busing" story to recover the decades long black-brown mobilizations for reform in Boston Public Schools.

In this chapter, I examine the parallel educational movements waged by African Americans and Latinos in Boston during the 1960s in the years leading up to Garrity's decision, centered on ideas of community control and self-determination. I highlight the agency of ordinary parent-organizers who worked strategically in and outside the school system, employing numerous tactics in the pursuit of educational justice. I focus particularly on the leading role of working-class African American and Latina mothers. These mother-organizers documented the school inequities, staged school boycotts and public protests, mobilized indigenous and external resources to expand their base and establish their own educational programs and independent schools, petitioned the system for reform, and sought legal appeals to both integrate Boston schools and protect specific programs that served their communities.

Like in the welfare, antipoverty, and housing movements described in chapters one through three, the less-known Latino movement often drew inspiration and organizing strategies from its African American counterpart since the black community was more established in the city and led by seasoned organizers. Latinos also took notes

from the broader civil rights and Black Power movements sweeping the nation. Though Latino educational activism emerged almost a decade after African Americans', these movements underwent similar courses only diverging from parallel tracks on the issue of language, since Latino activists centered their movement sharply on the protection and expansion of bilingual education. Latina mothers, in particular, learned from their black counterparts, modeling their own parallel movement around bilingualism. Besides this, the organizing strategies of both groups drew many resemblances, though there was significantly less cross-racial organizing and multiethnic/multiracial coalition building than in the previous movements discussed. Most notably, I illustrate how both movements were led by dedicated black/brown mothers who imagined better, more comprehensive and effective alternatives for school reform than those encompassed by Judge Garrity's 1974 court-ordered desegregation plans.

I. Documenting Inequity and Waking the City

During the 1950s and 1960s, white teachers and administrators in Boston often blamed African American and Latino parents for their children's limited academic performance. Refusing to acknowledge the harsh realities black/brown children faced in the segregated, inequitable school system, Boston School Committee members often explained the achievement gap on the supposed cultural deficiencies of their families and their children's lack of motivation. Jeanne Theoharis explains that the district "isolated black students in meager schools that created conditions under which most students could not succeed," which effectively shifted the blame to black parents for

their children's limited academic performance.¹⁶⁴ Even at the onset of black educational organizing in the 1950s, Ruth Batson explained that there was a general "consensus" among Boston school principals that "black parents did not care about education" and that "black students did not do as well as white."¹⁶⁵ Focused on the quality of students, rather than the structures of schools, Batson explained,

It angers me when I hear and read that black parents do not help their children – do not participate in their educational growth... what black parents wanted was to get their children to schools where there were the best resources for educational growth – small class sizes, up-to-date books. They wanted their children in a good school building, where there was an allocation of funds which exceeded those in the black schools; where there were sufficient books and equipment for all the students. Is that too much to ask for?¹⁶⁶

For the next two decades, black and Latino parents were regularly told by school officials that the problem was with their own children, not with racial injustice in the system. Boston school committee members continued to reiterate that "there are no inferior schools, only inferior students."¹⁶⁷ Yet black and brown parents in the city like Batson became politicized over time and set out to disprove this myth.

However, this chapter does not center on Ruth Batson's story since it has already been well-documented by historian Jeanne Theoharis. I illustrate that though Batson emerged as a public leader in the NAACP in the 1950s, by the 1960s as the movement took steam, she was joined by many mother-organizers. These women voiced their concerns for their children's schools and sought immediate reform. Establishing ad-hoc organizations and task forces, they initially set out to document the existing inequities

¹⁶⁴ Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," 23.

¹⁶⁵ Batson, *The Black Educational Movement*, 48. Cited in Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," 23.

¹⁶⁶ Ruth Batson, "Black History Celebration" speech, 7-9. Cited in Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," 23.

¹⁶⁷ Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," 19.

and raise concerns within individual neighborhood schools. They also worked to raise awareness in the city about the inequities. The history of the first stages of the black and Latino educational movements disrupts widespread assumptions of black-brown familial dysfunction and lack of educational engagement best exemplified in the “culture of poverty” and “underclass” theories. The rising leadership of working-class black women in the movement, and later on by Latina women, also challenges the pathological views of black-brown motherhood.

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In 1961, Naomi Jones, Marianne Freeman, and Barbara Elam, longtime residents of a tightly-knit African American community in Roxbury, began meeting to discuss their increasing concerns about the nearby David A. Ellis School. After identifying shared experiences and patterns of inequity at the school such as overcrowding, lack of materials, and deteriorating classrooms, they decided to take the conversation beyond Elam’s kitchen table and form a mother’s group of classroom volunteers to document first-hand the conditions of the school and advocate for change. With a dozen or so other mothers from the neighborhood, they formed the Concerned Higginson Parents Association (CHPA), which sought to fight for educational reform and a stronger voice for parents at the Ellis School. The organization was named after the Higginson School District, which was located in the neighborhood of Upper Roxbury, and had over 1,000 students enrolled in three elementary schools—the David A. Ellis where their children were enrolled, as well as the Henry L. Higginson and W.L.P. Boardman. The CHPA quickly broadened its goal to dismantling racial inequality in all Boston public schools. Within eighteen months, a citywide movement had emerged. With the help of other

grassroots groups and national civil rights organizations including the NAACP, CORE, and the Urban League, the Ellis school mothers rallied hundreds of black Bostonians to their cause.¹⁶⁸

The CHPA's classroom volunteer program was an immediate success in the early 1960s. The mothers assisted teachers with lessons and provided academic support to students in need. Teachers, parents, and students all responded very enthusiastically to the program, and before long every class at the Ellis had a parent volunteer. The homeroom volunteer program afforded the CHPA mothers the opportunity to observe the conditions inside the schools. These women were also able to visit and observe other schools throughout the city of Boston. Their visits confirmed their suspicions that there were significant disparities in the quantity and quality of educational resources, instruction, and physical conditions of schools in Roxbury compared to schools in white neighborhoods. CHP mother Mary Allen commented about the school buildings, "They were falling down and dilapidated. And of course, they were old structures anyway. But... there wasn't any visible sign of renovation." She continued, "many times the children didn't have adequate supplies. The books were outdated; certainly, the books were outdated. There's no question about that."¹⁶⁹ Eva Jaynes was also concerned that materials were so limited that students had to share pencils. Her fears truly mounted when her son came home several times with his pants soiled because there was no toilet paper or other basic hygienic necessities like paper towels in the Ellis school

¹⁶⁸ Concerned Higginson Parents Association Oral History Collection [hereafter: CHPAOH], University of Massachusetts Boston Archives and Special Collections [hereafter: UMB].

¹⁶⁹ Marie Allen interview, CHPAOH, U.

bathrooms.¹⁷⁰

The CHPA mothers set up a meeting with Ellis Principal William J. McCarthy to share their concerns about the overcrowded classrooms, the lack of basic school supplies and substitute teachers, poor communication between school staff and parents, and problematic, bigoted remarks made by white teachers towards their children. Many of the mothers also worried that the school was not academically rigorous and was not adequately preparing their children to succeed in junior high school or place them on a path to college. The mothers threatened to withdraw their children from the Ellis School unless Principal McCarthy took immediate action to address their concerns. Yet he dismissed them entirely and denied their requests to hold a larger meeting to discuss the problems with the whole school community. Afterwards, the head of the Ellis School Home School Association informed the CHPA mothers that they needed to stop “agitating” or they would not be permitted to continue volunteering as homeroom mothers.¹⁷¹ Yet this threat did not scare them off.

In February 1963, the mothers met with the Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Elementary Education, Marguerite Sullivan, who supervised the Higginson District. The CHA mothers felt patronized by Sullivan who argued she knew what was best for their children. This blatant disrespect and contempt for black parents was all too common among Boston school officials. “The refusal to listen to, acknowledge, and then plan with Blacks,” Barbara Elam recounted, “had to do with power and a definite unwillingness to share it. That was central.” Elam believed race explained Sullivan’s

¹⁷⁰ Eva Jaynes interview, CHPAOH, UMB.

¹⁷¹ Barbara Elam interview, CHPAOH, UMB.

dismissive attitude. "I wanted her to understand that we really felt the Boston schools were failing our children and that we had a right to expect them to be educated. I felt clearly that she believed that Negro children were inferior."¹⁷² After this disheartening meeting with Sullivan, the CHPA mothers were frustrated and angry, yet also determined to create change. Realizing they needed to expand the scope of their movement, they enlisted the help of more established organizations in the city to plan their next move.

The increased momentum of the CHPA coincided with the growing activity of the NAACP's Public School committee. In the spring of 1961, Committee members Ruth Batson, Erna Ballentine, Mel King, Leon Lomax, Charles Pinderhughes, and Barbara Elam (who was also CHPA co-chair), began a campaign pressuring city school officials to provide detailed information on the racial makeup of the schools, assignment and transfer policies, and curriculum. When school officials refused, the Committee conducted its own racial census and survey. This survey revealed extensive racial segregation and inequality, information that ended up being critical in the protests of this period.¹⁷³

In April 1963, the Concerned Higginson Parents Association and its newly formed alliance with the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Black Ministerial Alliance, worked together to plan a community-wide meeting to discuss racial inequality in Boston's schools at St. Mark's Congregational Church Social Center in Roxbury. More than 100 parents attended the meeting where representatives from the various organizations

¹⁷² Elam interview, 4-6.

¹⁷³ Batson, *Black Educational Movement*, 63-4, 70.

facilitated discussions on the spending gap between white and black schools, among other concerns. While it was an opportunity for parents and community activists to share their experiences, they also worked to craft strategies to address these problems such as increased participation at the Boston School Committee meetings and an active role in the selection of a new superintendent. Most importantly, parents were encouraged to begin their own groups such as the CHPA and spread the word.

Building on the momentum of the meeting at St. Mark's, black parents launched a citywide media campaign to raise awareness of the problems in the schools. Parents wrote letters to leaders across the city and to the editors of the local newspapers that detailed the racial inequality in the schools. For example, in a letter to the editors of the *Boston Herald*, Barbara Elam wrote, "I do not feel that as a Negro parent I need guidance and discipline," which was in reference to the condescending attitudes of Sullivan and other school officials. She continued, "I refuse to accept second-class education for my children and other Negro children and like Martin Luther King I have a dream that someday even in Boston children will receive a decent education regardless of the color of their skin."¹⁷⁴

While the CHPA and other ad-hoc parent organizations and task forces worked to draw attention to the plight of black students in Boston Public Schools throughout the 1960s, there were several scandalous instances of abuse and neglect towards black children that garnered significant media attention on their own. One such event took place at the Quincy Dickerman elementary school in Roxbury in May 1968. One Friday afternoon around 4:00 pm, Lyda Peters and Ruth Rosner, the only black teachers at the

¹⁷⁴ Elam interview, CHPAOH, UMB.

school, entered Marie Abbott's first grade classroom to look at some student art projects. They were shocked to find a seven-year-old black girl named Jacqueline locked inside a closet with her mouth taped shut. Abbott had sent her in there as a disciplinary measure around lunchtime and, hours later, it was clear she had been forgotten. Jacqueline's mother, Lessie Brewington, feared that had she not had been found, she might have remained in the locked school building over the weekend. Later that day, Peters and Ross went to Brewington's home to check on the young girl. Her mother asked the teachers what to do about this horrific incident and Peters recommended she go straight to the NAACP and report it.¹⁷⁵ With the help of the NAACP, Brewington then filed a formal charge with the school district. Yet the school stood by Abbott. The Assistant Principal, Francis O'Meara, described the incident as merely a "terrible mistake... a human error, not a malicious thing."¹⁷⁶ Abbott defended herself publicly in the *Boston Globe* arguing that racial prejudice had nothing to do with her treatment of Jacqueline in the segregated black school. She stated that the case was exaggerated by a "colored teacher there who's trying to make a big incident of it."¹⁷⁷ Jacqueline's case was unique because there were two black teachers who were willing to testify on her behalf in front of MCAD. After significant media attention on the case and an investigation by the school department, Abbott was suspended and eventually transferred to a different school.

The increased media interest in incidents like the one coupled with extensive outreach by the Concerned Higginson Parents Association fueled the growth of the black

¹⁷⁵ Lyda Peters, Interview by Author, Cambridge, MA, October 27, 2015 [hereafter: Peters Interview].

¹⁷⁶ Francis O'Meara quoted in Nina McCain, "Roxbury Mother Says Teacher Left 1st Grade Girl in Cloakroom," *Boston Globe*, May 22, 1968.

¹⁷⁷ Marie Abbott quoted in McCain, "Roxbury Mother Says Teacher Left 1st Grade Girl in Cloakroom."

educational movement throughout the 1960s decade.¹⁷⁸ Ruth Batson had emerged as the voice of the movement, particularly after she led the NAACP in a bold protest campaign against the Boston School Committee in June 1963. In a list of fourteen demands, Batson and the NAACP called for an immediate public acknowledgement of the existence of de facto segregation in the school system, though the committee continued to deny this claim. “We were insulted,” Batson explained. “We were told our kids were stupid and this was why they didn’t learn. We were completely rejected that night.”¹⁷⁹ City officials deflected charges of racial injustice by blaming black parents and students. The school committee repeatedly pointed to black students inferiority, stupidity, and lack of motivation to explain their academic struggles. They even created a special program called Operation Counterpoise to provide services for “culturally deprived students.” As Jeanne Theoharis explains, “It was more palpable in a liberal city like Boston to use a sociological language of ‘culture’ to separate our black students. Indeed, there came to be a public elision between the phrase ‘culturally deprived students’ and black students.”¹⁸⁰

Boston school officials also questioned the cultural deficiencies of Latino families. Latino migrants, most of whom were Puerto Rican, had been arriving to the city in masses throughout the 1960s, and were said to have brought with them the “problems from the island.” This language in Boston mirrored national and academic discourses that characterized Puerto Ricans as having a “culture of poverty.” As mentioned in

¹⁷⁸ The CHP mothers had even taken their movement nationally in 1964 when Elam represented the group by testifying before the Massachusetts State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights regarding segregation in the Boston Public Schools.

¹⁷⁹ Ruth Batson, quoted in Hampton, *Voices of Freedom*, 589.

¹⁸⁰ Theoharis, “They Told Me Our Kids Were Stupid,” 25.

earlier chapters, anthropologist Oscar Lewis clearly articulated the concept in his 1965 work when he argued this “relatively thin” culture was characterized by minimal integration into larger society, little organization within the ethnic community, families that verbally emphasized unity but rarely achieved it, and individuals with a high tolerance for pathology. Migrating Puerto Ricans supposedly carried this culture of poverty with them so many of the problems they faced in urban centers like New York (or in this case Boston), had their origins in the slums of Puerto Rico.¹⁸¹ To help ease the transition of Latino migrants in Boston, teach them English, and help them assimilate, the state of Massachusetts and city established migrant and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. In 1963, for example, Massachusetts established a Migrant Education Program with some financial support from emerging Latino social service organizations (who also provided Latino teachers and volunteers to operate the center). Then, in September 1967, with Title I funds Boston began offering ESL classes with English-speaking teachers. Ten ESL teachers worked in nine schools, pulling out students from their regular classes for 45 minutes each day.¹⁸²

While issues such as overcrowding, dilapidated buildings, limited materials, and bigoted white teachers were concerns shared by both African Americans and Latinos, Latino organizers in the 1960s first sought to prove that the city’s existing migrant and ESL programs were failing to adequately address the full needs of Latino students enrolled. Much like African Americans, Latino parents began their movement for

¹⁸¹ Carmen Teresa Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia: Puerto Rican Workers and Postwar Economies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 6-7.

¹⁸² Betsy Tregar, “Bilingual Education in Boston: Litigation, Legislation, Regulation and Issues for Implementation” (Ed.D. diss, Harvard University, 1983), 22.

educational justice by documenting the inequality and harsh realities experienced by their children.

In 1969, a study conducted by ABCD (Action for Boston Community Development) and APCROSS (Association Promoting Constitutional Rights of the Spanish-Speaking) revealed that an overwhelming majority of Latino school-aged children and their parents lacked formal education and could not comfortably read or speak in English.¹⁸³ This same study found that over 75% of ESL students were below grade-level.¹⁸⁴ The Boston School Department lamented,

The Spanish-speaking child finds himself in a classroom where the total curricula, methods, and medium of language are geared toward the native English speaker... It is unrealistic for us to suppose that if we then place a number of non-English speakers in this urban classroom, the teachers can meet the special needs of these children.¹⁸⁵

Latino social service workers like Ariel Mantienzo, a Puerto Rican seminarian at the Cardinal Cushing Center for the Spanish Speaking, also pointed to the high dropout rates of Latino students to illustrate the ineffectiveness of these early programs. In a response to a series on Puerto Rican migrants in the *Boston Globe*, Mantienzo corroborated the claim that there were “long lists of 14 and 15-year-olds just sitting around in elementary

¹⁸³ ABCD was established in 1962 out of the mayor’s office to respond to the social problems created by the city’s recent urban renewal programs. Then, following the passing of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, which was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty and Great Society campaign, the city of Boston designated ABCD as its official anti-poverty agency. As explained in chapter one, APCROSS was organized in 1967 to create a more powerful political presence for Latinos (mostly Puerto Ricans) in Boston by targeting agencies that were excluding Latinos. One of the main functions of APCROSS was to register Puerto Rican voters. The agency tried to secure federal, state, and city funding to develop social service programs in the South End neighborhood. Matos Rodriguez, “Saving the *Parcela*,” 211; Coons, “Hub Programs Battle Giant Language Problem.”

¹⁸⁴ Delia Vorhauer, “A Profile of Boston’s Spanish Speaking Community: Characteristics and Attitudes,” APCROSS and Massachusetts State Department of Education, Migrant Division; compiled by Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), April 1969. Quoted in Task Force, *The Way We Go to School*, 21.

¹⁸⁵ Boston School Department, “Title VII E.S.E.A. Bilingual Education Program” Proposal, Boston Public Schools, 1968. Quoted in Task Force, *The Way We Go to School*, 19.

school and waiting to drop out at 16.” He claimed in his program, “18 out of 75 boys fall in this category, not counting younger children who will soon be in a similar position within the next few years!”¹⁸⁶

The actual numbers of Latino children in and out of school remained a highly contested issue throughout the 1960s decade, a point of contention used by school officials to discredit community organizers and parents advocating for radical reform.¹⁸⁷ Many concerned residents went directly to Latino neighborhoods to gather statistics on those children who were home and not attending school. For example, Sister Frances Georgia, a Spanish nun who had taught in Puerto Rico, worked out of the Mayor’s Office of Public Service and conducted a door-to-door survey of truant children. Her research would become the foundation for a study conducted by the Task Force on Children Out of School. The Task Force was a broad-based urban coalition of activists and was composed of about 50 social workers, academics, lawyers, clergy, and support staff which investigated the performance of Boston Public Schools. Led by Chairman Hubert “Hubie” Jones, the African American Director of the Roxbury Multi-Service Center who is described in detail in chapter one, the Task Force was predominantly African American and white, though the few leading members of the Latino community included Alex

¹⁸⁶ Ariel Mantienzo, “Lack of Justice? Or Charity?” *Boston Globe*, October 16, 1966.

¹⁸⁷ Given the conflicting estimates of the Latino population and how rapidly it grew during this era, it is difficult to approximate precisely how many Latino school-age children there were in Boston and how many were enrolled or excluded from Boston schools. Yet since it was well documented that school-age children composed about one third of the Latino population (which had reached 20,000 to 40,000), one can estimate that there were roughly 6,000 to 12,000 Latino children in the city by the late 1960s and early 1970s. One third to one half of these Latino school-aged children were not enrolled in Boston Public Schools. Some pointed to the low numbers of Spanish-surname children enrolled as evidence of exclusion. For example, in 1969 there were only an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 Spanish-surname children in Boston public schools and about 300 in parochial schools, which meant that over half of Latino children (estimated between 3,000 and 10,000) were out of school. Coons, “Hub Programs Battle Giant Language Problem”; Task Force, *The Way We Go to School*, 18; “Boston Public Schools Actual Enrollment by Race, 1967-1978,” November 1978, Box 70, Folder 3, La Alianza Hispana Records, NU.

Rodriguez (also described in chapter one), Mario Clavell, and Raquel Cohen. Other Latinos served as staff members on the project and parents of children in Boston schools and community activists attended Task Force meetings and provided testimonies of their experiences in interviews.

The groundbreaking report titled *The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston* was published in 1970 and provided a “conservative estimate” that 3,000 to 8,000 Latino children were out of school. The Task Force highlighted the psychological damage Latino students experienced from exclusion by public schools.

The report explained:

The Spanish-speaking child does not have to know English to realize that other children go to school. He sees them pass his house each day. But he can't go, there is nothing at school for him. By implication, the child is told two things: first that his language is of little to no value, and second, that his parents – the way they speak and their way of life – are of little value... One need not be a psychiatrist to understand the impact this has upon the mind of a child.¹⁸⁸

The report also went on to state, “The educational programs, by the School Department’s own admission, are failing to educate the numbers of Spanish-speaking children who are in school.”¹⁸⁹ Having successfully documented that one third to one half of Latino school-aged children were not enrolled in Boston Public Schools throughout the 1960s and that the schools were failing those who did attend, this report provided much of the evidence needed to support Latino activists’ demands for educational reform.

In addition to the concerns about children excluded from school or dropping out, Latino and African American children alike faced hostility and violence in Boston schools, particularly in the wake of the urban riots that swept the nation in the late

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Task Force, “The Way We Go to School,” 19.

1960s. While the city's system was segregated by race and defined in terms of a black-white binary, Latinos did not fit neatly into this system and instead blurred the color line. Latino children enrolled in both black and white schools across the city experienced this violence. For example, in 1968, several African American and Latino students were severely beaten during a series of riots at the King Middle School, a predominantly black school in Dorchester. While this violence occurred between African American and Latino students, many community members felt the root of the problem lay in the structure of segregated schools with unmanageable class sizes and insufficient, poorly trained staff. Black/brown students faced similar violence at the hands of white students in predominantly white schools in neighborhoods such as South Boston.¹⁹⁰ Many activists argued that the more racially diverse schools in neighborhoods like the South End experienced less violence, and thus believed school integration was the best solution. Alex Rodriguez remembers his children's school in the South End as a diverse space "like the United Nations." Yet even in this more idealistic integrated space there was the constant threat of violence. Once he became involved in organizing, white Bostonians began to retaliate. One day, his daughter came home with a note in her lunchbox supposedly written by the Ku Klux Klan that threatened her father, "Look how easy we can get to you!"¹⁹¹

Following the riots at the King Middle School, a large majority of the fifty Latino students enrolled feared for their safety and stopped attending school all together. Latino and African American parents and local leaders worked together to organize a

¹⁹⁰ "Boston's Spanish-Speaking People Blame Dropouts on Beatings," *Boston Globe*, May 16, 1969.

¹⁹¹ Rodriguez Interview.

series of interracial community dialogues at the Denison House in Dorchester to discuss this issue. Sam Bell, an African American teenager and head of a militant group called the Youth Alliance, offered to negotiate with students at King and nearby schools to persuade them to halt the violence. Representatives from the Mayor's Office of Human Rights also attended the meeting and offered support, volunteering to escort Latino and African American children to their schools and assign more police patrol cars to monitor trouble areas before and after school. Yet Latino activists like Rodriguez placed a larger responsibility on the Boston Public School district itself to protect children of color. "If our children fear to go to school," he argued, "they are being denied their right to have an education."¹⁹² Armando Martinez, a Puerto Rican and Cuban teacher who worked at King and was one of the only Latino teachers in the school district, also spoke out publicly.¹⁹³ Advocating for community control of the schools, he suggested that the Boston School Department should establish a school exclusively for Latinos: "If the school system cannot guarantee the safety of our children, then let them give us a school of our own somewhere, where we can attend to their needs."¹⁹⁴

Martinez's call for community control of Boston schools ended up defining the second phase of the African American and Latino movements for educational justice in the 1960s. After documenting the existing racial inequities in the school system and raising awareness of the movement throughout the city, African American and Latino

¹⁹² Alex Rodriguez, quoted in "Boston's Spanish-Speaking People Blame Dropouts on Beatings," *Boston Globe*, May 16, 1969.

¹⁹³ Armando Martinez was a teacher at the Martin Luther King School. In 1969, he claimed he was the only "Spanish-speaking" teacher in the entire Boston Public School system. "Putting Parents in Schools: CEP Organizers Meet," *Bay State Banner*, November 27, 1969.

¹⁹⁴ Armando Martinez, quoted in "Boston's Spanish-Speaking People Blame Dropouts on Beatings," *Boston Globe*, May 16, 1969.

parent activists began espousing ideas of self-determination and crafting activist strategies centered on community control. Throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s, African Americans and Latinos turned to direct action by staging citywide boycotts and protests, as well as employing resource mobilization strategies. Mobilizing resources within their own communities and advocating for external resources, both movements expanded their bases and began organizing their own school-readiness and summer educational programs and independent schools.

II. Self-Determination

Due in large part to the self-determination and leadership of the Higginson mothers, the black educational movement began mounting its biggest protest campaign in June 1963. With Ruth Batson at its head, the NAACP Public School Committee requested a public hearing with the Boston School Committee. The NAACP organized the meeting for June 11th at 9:00 pm so that working parents could attend. They distributed flyers across Boston's black neighborhoods to recruit community participation. One flyer read, "Your children's future is at stake. Help us make it bright!" Others called for parent participation in eliminating second-class education.¹⁹⁵ While Batson delivered a statement on behalf of the NAACP and community members, hundreds of black supporters assembled outside the building and at Boston City Hall to sing protest songs.

Batson outlined a vision for a "first-class citizenship" that began with equal education for all black students in Boston schools. In the list of 14 demands delivered to the Boston School Committee, she and the activists called for the "immediate public

¹⁹⁵ Batson, *Black Educational Movement*, 87.

acknowledgment of the existence of de facto segregation in the Boston Public School System.” Batson also demanded a review of the school system’s intelligence testing, a reduction in class sizes, the addition of culturally competent instructional materials, and increased hiring of black educators as well as guidance counselors and social workers.¹⁹⁶ The NAACP also sought a formal role in the selection of Boston’s new superintendent of schools.

Much to the activists’ dismay, there was little resolution at the end of the seven-hour hearing. The Boston School Committee would not negotiate a settlement with them and refused to acknowledge the existence of school segregation and its harmful impact on black students. “No matter what we said,” Mel King later reflected, “the School Committee would not, could not, admit they had contributed to anything so wrong.”¹⁹⁷ In response, the day after the hostile hearing, the NAACP Education Committee, along with leading black activists such as Noel Day and Rev. James Breeden, called for a boycott of the Boston Public Schools on June 18th by black junior and senior high school students.¹⁹⁸ Turned off by the term “boycott” though, movement leaders instead called the demonstration a “Stay Out for Freedom.” Rev. Breeden explained to the *Boston Globe*, “this does not mean that our children are staying away from school. It does mean they

¹⁹⁶ Batson, “Statement to the Boston School Committee,” June 11, 1963, Box 4, Folder 5, Batson Papers, Schlesinger.

¹⁹⁷ Mel King, *Chain of Change*, 33.

¹⁹⁸ Though the Stay Out for Freedom was coordinated by a coalition of local agencies, civil rights groups, and black churches, Noel Day and Rev. James Breeden played leading roles. Noel Day was born in Harlem, NY and attended Dartmouth College in the 1950s, where he met James Breeden. Breeden was born in Minnesota and began organizing around racial segregation in college. While Breeden went on to the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Day became a social worker. They both moved to Boston in the late 1950s where they emerged as leaders in the black community and seasoned organizers. Rev. Breeden led several Episcopal churches and Day served as the Executive Director of St. Mark’s Social Center. Bundy, “The Schools are Killing our Kids!” 101-102.

are staying away from public school.” He continued, “It does not mean we are neglecting our children’s education. On the contrary. We are trying to give our children more of the education we think they should have.”¹⁹⁹ Movement leaders planned a full day of programming for the stay-out students, organizing freedom schools at local churches, community centers, and social service organizations. They also promised there would be no disorder or picketing. And yet the Boston School Committee remained worried about the threat of violence, urging the NAACP to reconsider its plan and call off the demonstration. School officials also intimidated black parents with the threat of truancy prosecutions.

Breeden, Day, and other movement leaders took inspiration from the national civil rights movement and had been developing the vision for the freedom schools for some time prior to the June 12th announcement of the boycott. They sought to use the stay-out to encourage young students to participate in the direct action campaign and to build a mass movement for school reform. While the NAACP continued to negotiate with the Boston School Committee in the week following the hearing, organizers held mass community meetings, distributed flyers and pamphlets, and issued public statements to rally support for the Freedom Stay Out. When the negotiations failed, the boycott was set in motion as planned. On June 18, 1963, three thousand black students stayed out of Boston schools.

Stay-out participants reported to St. Mark’s Social Center before they were bused to one of six freedom schools throughout Roxbury, Dorchester, and the South End. These

¹⁹⁹ James Breeden, quote in Seymour R. Linscott, “Negroes to Go Ahead with Stay-Out,” *Boston Globe*, June 18, 1963.

freedom schools demonstrate the efficacy of the movement's resource mobilization strategy. Turning inward, black Bostonians found space, transportation, teachers, and supplies for the schools they had always longed for their children. Children learned about African American history as well as the philosophy and strategies of civil rights protest, studied the U.S. Constitution, and sang freedom songs. The boycott was a success that garnered citywide media attention and brought the black community together in the growing movement for educational justice. Ruth Batson told the *Boston Globe*, "I feel that the Stay Out for Freedom Day was a success. Not in a sense of a victory over anybody. This was not the intent. But it demonstrated to the Boston community that the Negro community is concerned and that they want action."²⁰⁰

Following the Freedom Stay Out, black organizers launched a series of direct action protests in the summer of 1963. Led by a group called Citizens for Boston Schools, they sought to vote out the most outspoken opponents of school integration on the Boston School committee, namely Louise Day Hicks, Joseph Lee, and William O'Connor, and replace them with racially progressive candidates such as black activist Mel King (who lost the first time he ran in 1961). They staged protests on the Boston Common, organized massive sit-ins and marches at the Boston School Committee offices, and many were arrested. In August, State Commissioner of Education Owen Kiernan publicly called for the elimination of so-called "racial imbalance" in Boston schools. Kiernan introduced the term "racial imbalance" as a substitute for segregation. The *Globe* explained, "The board's policy statement steered clear of the troublesome phrase 'de facto segregation,' and made no mention of the increasingly bitter controversy involving

²⁰⁰ Ruth Batson, quoted in "It Was a Victory... ..It Was a Failure," *Boston Globe*, June 19, 1963.

Boston schools.”²⁰¹ The NAACP and other black activists rejected this language. Still, the phrase “racial imbalance” was widely adopted and later used in the court-mandated desegregation plans one decade later. The Boston School Committee did grant the NAACP a second hearing on August 15, but it ended abruptly after only fifteen minutes when Ruth Batson began a presentation on de facto segregation in the school system.

In the fall of 1963, the demonstrations continued. Two days before the primary school board election, the NAACP organized a “March on Roxbury” to dramatize the local educational issues and urge African Americans to register and vote in local elections. Drawing inspiration from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom that had taken place one month prior, NAACP’s Boston Chapter President Kenneth Guscott explained, “We want to show the city of Boston that this revolution is on. We want to show that a large segment of the Boston population has serious social problems. We want to show that there must be movement and mobility now.”²⁰² On Sunday, September 22, an estimated 10,000 people marched on Roxbury in protest of the segregated and inequitable Boston school system, ending at the deteriorated Sherwin School, which was chosen to emphasize the glaring inequities. Yet despite their efforts, none of the racially progressive candidates endorsed by the civil rights groups won seats on the Boston School Committee. In fact, Arthur Gartland, the only racial moderate on the committee lost his seat. Following the 1963 election, the make-up of the Boston School Committee was even more hostile towards the black educational movement. School Committee Chairman William O’Connor believed that the committee was able to

²⁰¹ “Racial Imbalance Hit By State School Unit,” *Boston Globe*, August 20, 1963, 2.

²⁰² Kenneth Guscott, quoted in Robert L. Levey, “NAACP Plans Roxbury March,” *Boston Globe*, September 15, 1963, 73.

withstand the challenge from black activists because of growing support across the city. He explained to the *Boston Globe*, “In the recent election the voters and taxpayers of Boston certainly showed their disapproval of boycotts by giving Mrs. Hicks (then committee chairman) 128,000 votes-principally because of her stand on this kind of action.”²⁰³ Despite O’Connor’s claims, the results of the election are less indicative of opposition to the black school boycotts, instead revealing the support of many white voters in maintaining Boston’s system of school segregation.

In January 1964, Rev. Breeden and a diverse coalition of organizations announced plans for a second school boycott on February 26, 1964.²⁰⁴ It was scheduled to coincide with a nationwide campaign organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to dramatize segregation in American schools. Boycotts were organized in cities across the nation, including Cleveland, New York, Chicago, and Atlanta. Besides SNCC, the Stay Out organizers rallied a long list of supporters at both the local and national levels. The Boston NAACP, the Massachusetts branches of CORE, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and important figures from national groups like the Northern Student Movement, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, and James Bevel, a key aid for Martin Luther King, Jr. Breeden declared, “the crisis in the schools remains unsolved. Our children are damaged daily, and their hurt and pain remain untended. We have prayed, we have talked, we have picketed, and we have patiently attended one well-meaning conference after another.” He continued, “We have been met

²⁰³ William O’Connor quoted in “School Boycott Due,” *Boston Globe*, January 15, 1964.

²⁰⁴ The boycott was originally planned for February 11, 1964 but was rescheduled because it conflicted with final exams. Black students urged the date change so they could participate without jeopardizing their academic record.

with insult, misunderstanding, and ineffective sympathy. What must we do to be heard? We have decided that, on February 26th, our children will attend freedom schools instead of public schools.”²⁰⁵ Local and national media including the *Boston Globe*, the *Boston Herald*, and the *Christian Science Monitor* also endorsed the boycotts.²⁰⁶

Over 20,000 students participated in the second Freedom Stay Out - more than six times the amount that had taken part in the first boycott the previous year. Again, the black/brown residents of Boston turned inward to mobilize resources in their own communities. In order to accommodate this growth, the number of community centers, social service organizations, and churches participating drastically increased, collectively making up 35 freedom schools. The stay-out curriculum had also expanded to include lessons beyond civil rights organizing, such as global perspectives on African diasporic history. Yet the core of the 1964 freedom school curriculum centered on the current racial discrimination and segregation in the Boston Public Schools, as students learned ways to challenge the school committee and create local change. Organizers fostered ideas of community control and self-determination among budding youth activists.

The 1964 Stay Out garnered significant support from the black community at large and from parents in particular. Supporters wrote letters to *Freedom's Journal*, a grassroots publication of the Massachusetts Freedom Movement that reported on the

²⁰⁵ “To Secure These Rights: Documentary Review of Boston School Desegregation,” February 24, 1964, WGBH-Boston, Box 39, Folder 1357, Box 39, Freedom House Records, NU.

²⁰⁶ Bundy, ““The Schools are Killing our Kids!”” 112.

local movement in Boston and its national connections.²⁰⁷ One black mother, Constance Lew, wrote in, “As a community mother, I am willing to go to jail with the leaders.” Seeing herself and other black mothers as mother-organizers and equal participants in the movement, she explained, “We’re all in this fight together.”²⁰⁸

In response to the second Freedom Stay Out, State Education Commissioner Owen Kiernan and the Massachusetts State Board of Education established a special advisory committee to investigate the presence and impact of “racial imbalance” in public schools. In April 1965, the committee released its final report titled “Because it is Right Educationally,” more commonly referred to as the Kiernan Report. In it, the committee concluded that a significant portion of the state’s schools were racially imbalanced, and a large majority of these segregated schools were located in Boston (45 of 55 total). The report documented that the schools in predominantly non-white neighborhoods generally had worse physical conditions, a lack of educational resources, and subpar teaching. Additionally, segregated schools encouraged racial prejudice among students and ultimately resulted in an inferior education for predominantly black schools. The report’s proposed solutions to eliminate “racial imbalance” included: transporting students to schools outside their neighborhoods, ceasing to construct

²⁰⁷ The Massachusetts Freedom Movement outlined its purpose as the following: “The Massachusetts Freedom Movement is a non -sectarian inter-racial organization committed to non-violent direct action to bring about social change in order to create an open society by the elimination of barriers based on economic, political, and social separation, prejudice and discrimination. Massachusetts Freedom Movement shall initiate and conduct freedom schools and other educational and cultural and research programs consistent with its aims. Its primary areas of concern shall be employment, justice and health, housing, and family life. The activities of the Massachusetts Freedom Movement shall be primarily in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. However, since political boundaries cannot limit our concern for a humane society, we may engage in sympathetic action or other appropriate measures in order to support groups with similar aims elsewhere.” Quoted in Bundy, “The Schools are Killing our Kids!” Note 207, 117.

²⁰⁸ “Local Mothers Still Support Stayout,” *Freedom’s Journal*, 1964.

schools in neighborhoods with residential segregation, holding the school committee more accountable for preventing and eliminating segregation, and withholding state funds from schools which failed to meet desegregation benchmarks.²⁰⁹

Four months later in August 1965, Governor John Volpe signed into law the nation's first voluntary state-initiated school desegregation law, the Racial Imbalance Act (RIA). The Act required school committees across the state of Massachusetts to conduct annual reviews of the racial distribution of students. The state Board of Education had the power to withhold funds from school committees that failed to conduct these racial surveys or take immediate action to eliminate segregation in their districts. Black grassroots activists were critical in amassing support for the act among state-level leaders. Yet while the RIA was a large accomplishment for the Boston educational movement, the Boston School Committee exploited the smaller stipulations and loopholes of the Act to evade its true implementation. They could appeal decisions made by the state Board of Education, as well as request unlimited number of extensions for creating and implementing desegregation plans, which ultimately slowed efforts to eliminate "racial imbalance."

The increased size, visibility, and public attention of the Freedom Stay Outs did bring about state level action, most evident in the Kiernan Report and subsequent passage of the RIA, though increasingly in the mid to late 1960s, black organizers in the movement for educational justice shifted their agendas from integration towards self-determination and community controlled schools. Parents, activists, and educators built off the Freedom Schools and community-run tutoring programs to establish four

²⁰⁹ King, *Chain of Change*, 40-1.

alternative independent schools between 1965 and 1971, which included the Roxbury Community School, New School for Children, Highland Park Free School, and St. Joseph's Community School. Dr. Phillip Hart explained that these schools sought to "show that quality education could be provided to these children in a community controlled setting."²¹⁰ Like the Freedom Schools, these schools emerged from within the black community and were directly governed by black Bostonians - they were in charge of all aspects including fundraising, budgeting, day-to-day operations, transportation, maintenance, hiring and training staff, curriculum planning, and recruiting students.

The four independent schools were small in size, ranging from 75 - 200 students in grades kindergarten through six. With majority black faculty and all black principals, the demographic composition of the staff largely resembled the schools' student bodies. There were also smaller numbers of white and Latino children who attended these schools. Puerto Rican activist Alex Rodriguez, for example, was key in the formation of the New School. Sharing a common political and educational philosophy, these schools were deeply rooted in the communities where they were founded. Noel Day became the Board Chairman of the New School and commented that the school was truly "public" in that it was responsive to the public it served. He explained, "In other words, the founding parents are not ashamed of their community - they are conquered with building and strengthening it."²¹¹ Principal Luther Seabrook at Highland Park echoed Day's words when he wrote, "The community dominates its decision-making process; the community has selected the staff; the community helps to support the cost of the

²¹⁰ Jeanne Theoharies, "We Saved the City," 71.

²¹¹ Noel Day, Box 38, Folder 1309, Freedom House Records, NU. Cited in Bundy, "The Schools are Killing our Kids!" 148.

school; the community provides much of the staff and the focus for much of the curriculum; the community's *total educational needs* are served by the school; the school is concerned with, and involved in, all the social, physical, political, and economic factors which contribute to the community's educational health."²¹² Seabrook also highlighted the school's experimental and innovative approach to urban education. While an overwhelming majority of the students came from families with incomes of less than \$1000 per year, the parents were incredibly active in shaping the direction of the school. They collectively decided to make the school non-graded and tuition-free and helped educators develop a unique curriculum that sought to create new solutions to urban problems, particularly around issues of race. Similarly, the Board of Directors of the Roxbury Community School and St. Joseph's both consisted primarily of black parents, which directed all aspects of school governance such as setting tuition rates, establishing school policies, developing curriculum, and fundraising.²¹³

The independent schools were driven by self-determination and were a true reflection of effective grassroots community organizing and ability to mobilize indigenous and external resources. They served multiple purposes in Boston's black neighborhoods, providing space for community events, hosting health and wellness clinics such as dental screenings, and offering a range of adult education courses. In line with the black organizing tradition, school organizers worked with local parents to create a sustainable model for their community school. One example of this was the "community teachers program" established out of the Highland Park Free School and the

²¹² King, *Chain of Change*, 93.

²¹³ Ibid.

Roxbury Community School, which recruited and trained neighborhood residents to work in classrooms as teaching assistants. “The community teacher was to bring the vast resource of urban sociology to the classroom,” Mel King explained. “Every classroom had one community teacher who worked not only in the classroom but also with parents and other community groups to foster the maximum feasible community participation in the school’s life, and in turn, to maximize the school’s participation in the community’s life.”²¹⁴

With parental involvement at the center of this community school model, the black independent school curriculum and pedagogy reflected the commitment to self-determination as well as racial pride. Community members donated materials to create hands-on learning activities centered on “real world” problems, while other lessons focused on questions of identity and instilled pride in students’ African and African American heritage. Schools adorned African flags and posters of black freedom fighters, and some schools like St. Joseph’s even centered student evaluations on their proficiency in the seven principles of Kwanzaa.²¹⁵

Similar to their black counterparts, Latino parent-organizers and activists in the late 1960s forged their educational movement based on ideas self-determination, community control, and racial pride, while simultaneously making some significant political gains on the state-level. Working-class Latina mothers in particular turned inward to utilize their own community resources and develop new educational programs to help prepare their children for the challenges they would face in Boston

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Bundy, “The Schools are Killing our Kids!” 150.

schools. At first Latina mothers offered English lessons on their doorsteps to children in their neighborhoods, but by 1969 they had established two formal educational programs in Boston.²¹⁶ The first was Latin American Summer, a summer program held at the Hurley and Mackey Schools. Of the 400 Latino children who attended, one in eight had never been to school before and many others had once attended but had since dropped out.²¹⁷ The second was Acción School, a school-readiness program led by two Puerto Rican mothers, Blanca Nuñez and Gloria Melicio, and several community volunteers that served a smaller group of 30 Latino children in St. Stephen's Episcopal Church.²¹⁸ These Latina women resources and ran the entire program - transporting children, preparing meals, supplying books and other materials with their own money, and teaching classes.²¹⁹ The *Globe* reported that the program "proved so useful that community response was immediate and enthusiastic."²²⁰ Both of these summer programs achieved enormous successes, providing a combination of bilingual education, enrichment classes, field trips, and free lunch. The Task Force on Children Out of School's report profiled Latino children who flourished in the summer programs and longed for the availability of similar programming during the school year.²²¹ These early programs for Latino children were dress rehearsals for Boston's pilot bilingual education program, which was set to start in the fall of 1969.

²¹⁶ Danice Bordett, "Spanish Community Builds Resources," *Bay State Banner*, September 5, 1968.

²¹⁷ Task Force, *The Way We Go to School*, 17.

²¹⁸ Though coordinated mostly by Latino parents, both Latin American Summer and Acción School also received support from various Latino organizations in Boston like APCROSS, the Spanish Federation, and the Cardinal Cushing Center for the Spanish Speaking, among others. Coons, "Hub Programs Battle Giant Language Problem."

²¹⁹ Anne Kirchheimer, "Accion School...A Success," *Boston Globe*, June 11, 1971.

²²⁰ Kirchheimer, "Accion School...A Success."

²²¹ Task Force, *The Way We Go to School*, 8.

After the passage of the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or ESEA) in 1968, Latino activists began lobbying for external resources outside of their community. They secured large federal and state grants, which forced the Boston School Committee to establish six bilingual education classes in September 1969. They continued to pressure the committee until it voted to approve a budget of \$200,000 for transitional bilingual “clusters.” By January 1970, the program increased to 14 classes in three bilingual “clusters” (one elementary, one middle, and one high school) in the South End and North Dorchester-Roxbury neighborhoods. Latinos pressed the committee to hire a Puerto Rican to direct the clusters; Carmen Nacheles, one of the only permanent Puerto Rican teachers in the city, was appointed Teacher-in-Charge. They also pressed to create a Bilingual Department in the district.²²² Like the summer programs, Latino parents and members of the Spanish Federation (a mostly Puerto Rican group that organized around education) took community control of the implementation of these bilingual programs. They found unused locations for the clusters, furnished classrooms, advertised the programs in the community, recruited students, and screened and hired teachers. “It was the first program ever started in the Boston schools where school people were not involved in the planning,” Latino activist Alex Rodriguez explained. “The community planned it, we hired the staff. They gave us an empty building, we even had to get the pencils and the chalk.”²²³ Former ESL teacher Betsy Tregar explained that the clusters were the ultimate “Hispanic project,” an

²²² Tregar, “Bilingual Education in Boston,” 28.

²²³ Alex Rodriguez, quoted in Miren Uriarte, “Contra Viento Y Marea (Against All Odds): Latinos Build Community in Boston,” in *Latinos in Boston: Confronting Poverty and Building Community*, ed. Miren Uriarte et al (Boston: Boston Community Foundation, Boston Persistent Poverty Project, 1992), 20.

extension of the Latino community rather than the Boston Public Schools.²²⁴

Yet the relative autonomy of the bilingual clusters resulted in minimal support services from the school system. While one group of Latino students benefitted from a spacious, well-equipped facility at the former Boston College High School building in the South End, others placed at the Denison House in Dorchester were less fortunate. The *Globe* explained, “The building has no cafeteria, library or play area, little office space and few storage facilities.” Among the issues cited were overcrowding, a lack of heat and custodial services, insufficient desks, and a shortage of supplies. Teachers provided most materials without being reimbursed, wore coats inside their classrooms to combat the cold, hoped for absent students so there would be enough desks, and cleaned the classrooms themselves. Due to the poor working conditions, there were problems of low teacher morale and high turnover. The teachers who remained grew deeply concerned about the fate of their students once they left the bilingual clusters, arguing that they had little support once they returned to mainstream English-only classes.²²⁵

Similarly, the black community controlled schools were plagued with financial struggles. Some schools like the New School did not secure either federal or foundational funding, thus were forced to charge an annual tuition, which placed it out of reach of many of the black community’s poorest families. By 1969, schools like the New School were in fiscal crisis, facing school closure unless community members could donate funds to save the school. One exception to this was the Roxbury Community School, which survived for nearly twenty years. It was the most stable school largely

²²⁴ Tregar, “Bilingual Education in Boston,” 30.

²²⁵ Judith Brody, “Spanish-to-English Transition Schools Need Helping Hand,” *Boston Globe*, December 20, 1970.

because it did not rely solely on the community resources and, instead, secured external funding through the U.S. Office of Education and Titles I and IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It also received private funding through various banks, charitable funds, and churches. The institutional and financial difficulties prompted leaders to form an alliance in 1970 between the Roxbury Community School, the New School for Children, and the Highland Park Free School that they called the Federation of Boston Community Schools. Historian Tess Bundy explains that though the schools sought autonomy and local control, joining together to create this new governing body was necessary for the independent schools' survival.²²⁶ By the early 1970s, most of the community schools were in similar positions, with many closing their doors by the middle of the decade.

While the black independent schools could not meet the needs of the entire black community, the initial bilingual programs only served a few hundred Latino students, leaving thousands of others left to receive an inferior education that did not meet their linguistic or cultural needs or were excluded from school all together. One bilingual education teacher lamented in 1970, "We are reaching only a small majority of the children because we can enter the school only at the request of the principals." The teacher continued, "Large numbers of Spanish-speaking families are new in Boston, especially in Roxbury, but the schools are going to have to accept the fact that the problem is going to get worse if they don't do something about it."²²⁷ Consequently, Latino parents and community organizers did not bask in the successes of these early

²²⁶ Bundy, "The Schools are Killing our Kids!" 153-4.

²²⁷ Quoted in Jane Manning, "Spanish-Speaking Children Get Little Schooling," *Bay State Banner*, October 29, 1970.

experiments in bilingual education. The demands for increased access to bilingual education across the city represented a significant increase in expectations for the education of immigrants, who previously were seen as individual failures if they left school and were expected to find work. A high school degree was increasingly necessary for upward mobility in the postwar era, and thus Latino organizers remained focused and determined to improve and expand bilingual education programs in the city. Alex Rodriguez explained:

For years the School Department has failed to provide an education for their children. In a sense, the Department was telling the parents: 'Your children aren't important enough to educate.' Now when some classes are available, you can't expect the parents to believe all of a sudden that school officials really do care. It will take a little time and an all-out effort by the School Department. It must provide classes for every one of these children, and in every part of the city.²²⁸

Like most Latino community organizers and parents in Boston, Rodriguez did not trust the School Department to address the specific needs of Latino children so they lobbied for state legislation to protect the rights of limited-English-proficient students.

Though Latino activists received some unexpected state and federal assistance in these lobbying efforts following the release of the Task Force on Children Out of School's report, they faced significant opposition on the local level.²²⁹ The Boston School

²²⁸ Alex Rodriguez, quoted in Task Force, "The Way We Go to School," 24-25.

²²⁹ In May 1970, J. Stanley Pottinger, the Director of the United States Office of Civil Rights issued a memo that maintained that a failure to provide equal opportunities to limited-English-proficient students – or the failure to offer effective programs to compensate for language deficiencies – would be considered a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Furthermore, he added that any school found to be discriminating against LEP (or, specifically, "Spanish-surnamed") students on the basis of their language ability would risk losing federal aid under ESEA and other programs. Two weeks after Pottinger sent this memo, the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), a state agency, sued the Boston Public Schools for denying equal opportunities to thousands of LEP students. Pottinger's compelling case for isolated bilingual-transitional programs was endorsed by MCAD in its ongoing litigation as well as the Task Force. Historian Adam Nelson explains, "For MCAD, the crucial issue was not that schools were actively *excluding* non-English-speaking students or somehow blocking their access to class but, rather, that schools were *including* these students in classes they could not understand. This sort of inclusion, or

Committee, in particular, resisted plans to increase bilingual education classes. In a committee meeting in November 1970 where the Task Force and Latino community leaders pressed for reform, two committee members, Joseph Lee and Paul Tierney, insisted that the existing programs met the needs of LEP students. The *Globe* explained, “The hearing was marked by heated argument at times, with Tierney and Lee insisting that the problem was not as bad as the Task Force had said.” In response to claims that the Task Force had exaggerated the number of Latino children out of school, Larry Brown, a Task Force staff researcher, provided detailed statistics and evidence. Chairman Lee followed by asking for a list of truants yet Brown refused, citing that there were no programs to accommodate them anyway. Pointing out that there were currently over 100 children already on waiting lists for existing bilingual education classes, Brown asked, “What would you do with 1,000?”²³⁰ The committee continued to attack the credibility of the report though the Task Force offered to share all their sources. At one point when the audience laughed at accusations that parts of the report were embellished, the *Bay State Banner* reported that Lee threatened, “I want to understand what the laughter is about. Now, if you want us to cut the programs, I will be tickled to death to do it.”²³¹

Dominated by “the Irish” (or working-class whites), the city of Boston and the school department in particular (alongside with other public institutions like the Welfare Department) were sites of white ethnic power. Thus, it was no surprise that the

linguistic immersion, MCAD argued, was discriminatory, because it failed to make the curriculum comprehensible to non-English-speaking students.” Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal*, 105.

²³⁰ “School’s ‘Can’t Afford’ Spanish Aid,” *Boston Globe*, November 18, 1970.

²³¹ Jane Manning, “Excluded Student Panel Clashed with School Board,” *Bay State Banner*, November 26, 1970.

School Committee evoked immigrant bootstrap ideology to dismiss Latino demands. Premised on the notion that white ethnics gained success in the United States through their own sheer will and hard work, Chairman Lee stressed that Latino students had received more aid than any other immigrant group. Arguing that the Latino community should be satisfied with the amount of help they were given, Lee commented, "Let the record be clear that we are doing more for you than we've ever done for these others, and actually we have no right to go ahead with these special programs." According to the *Globe*, Mario Clavell (a Latino activist, Chairman of the Spanish Federation, and member of the Task Force) drew applause when he responded by declaring he was an "American citizen who wants only equal protection under the law and equal opportunity for my people." Though the School Committee could not dispute with Clavell on his rights as a citizen, they maintained that there were not enough resources in the district to expand bilingual education. They noted that the city planned on spending about \$1 million of its own money in addition to \$300,000 from federal sources on classes for Latino students that year. Minutes later though the committee approved spending nearly \$100,000 on salary increases for dual department heads at the prestigious Boston Latin School, which would have been enough to provide bilingual classes for an estimated 100 children. The *Globe* remarked this was "one of the clearest displays to date of the committee's priorities for city schools."²³² Historian Adam Nelson summarized, "Although federal officials had defined bilingual education as a civil right, the school committee nonetheless refused to add bilingual clusters in Boston until the city received more state

²³² "School's 'Can't Afford' Spanish Aid," *Boston Globe*, November 18, 1970.

or federal aid to pay for them.”²³³ Thankfully, bilingual education proponents did not have to wait long for this.

In January 1970, Task Force member and Massachusetts state representative Michael Daly submitted a bill that would provide from \$250,000 up to \$4 million in state aid over the next five years for bilingual education programs. Led by Alex Rodriguez, Latino parents lobbied the legislature and collected signatures for months. James “Jim” Caradonio, a white former seminarian and educator was actively involved in the Latino movement. Born in 1946 in New Jersey, he grew up in Houston, Texas and moved to the Northeast in the 1960s when he joined the Catholic seminary. He moved to Massachusetts to attend Merrimack College in 1968 and, as a student, became involved in Boston’s Latino community in the South End. Caradonio moved into a Latino housing project in the neighborhood and worked as a youth tutor and mentor out of the Cardinal Cushing Center for the Spanish Speaking. Though he was a white man from an Italian immigrant family, he at times passed as Latino and became fluent in Spanish, especially after teaching in Puerto Rico. Caradonio eventually left the Catholic Church and forged a career in education. He worked first as a bilingual education teacher and guidance counselor in Boston. Caradonio later reflected, “While the community wasn’t terribly organized, they could get you five or eight busloads [of people] in a minute.” These quick mobilizations within the community proved effective as busloads of supporters attended the hearing at the State House.²³⁴ As Cardonio explained, they shocked the “blanquitos

²³³ Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal*, 110.

²³⁴ Uriarte, “Contra Viento Y Marea,” 20.

[little white people].”²³⁵ Though the bill passed, it initially received no funding, and only when Daly resubmitted it in 1971 did it achieve more success. The Transitional Bilingual Education Act (also known as Chapter 71A) passed in May 1971, becoming the first state law in the nation to mandate isolated transitional bilingual education for students of limited English proficiency (LEP). School districts with at least twenty LEP students of a single minority language group would be required to provide transitional bilingual education clusters. The Massachusetts Department of Education established a Bureau of Transitional Bilingual Education to oversee implementation, appointed a Director, and created a forty-five-member Bilingual Advisory Council. Puerto Rican activist Alex Rodriguez became the Council’s first Chairman.²³⁶

As Boston’s bilingual education program expanded in 1971, Latino parents seized this opportunity to create their “own school” in Roxbury. This elementary school had a clear Latino majority and had experienced unparalleled success in the early phase as a bilingual cluster. Education scholar Barry McDonald explains it was “a de facto segregated school for Puerto Rican children,” for most of whom it was their first time in school at all. He continued, “Spanish was the medium for content subjects, with English taught as a foreign language. Those were heady days, full of hope and potency.”²³⁷ In an

²³⁵ Jim Caradonio was also the only white man who was a founding member of the Latino organization El Comité Pro La Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe, which became a plaintiff-intervener in the *Morgan v. Hennigan* case, which is detailed in chapter four. After completing a doctorate at Harvard University, he moved out of the city in the 1990s and into educational administration as an Assistant Superintendent in East Greenwich, RI and Superintendent in Worcester, MA. Most recently, he worked in Vocational Education in Holyoke, MA and as a consultant for Blueprint Network Schools. Jim Caradonio, Skype Interview by Author, October 25, 2015 [hereafter: Caradonio Interview].

²³⁶ Tregar, “Bilingual Education in Boston,” 31.

²³⁷ Barry McDonald, *Bread and Dreams: A Case Study of Bilingual Schooling in the U.S.A.*, ed. Barry Macdonald and Saville Kushner (Norwich, U.K.: Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE), 1982), 24.

act of community control, Latino parents voted to name “their” school the Rafael Hernández School after the Puerto Rican poet, composer, and musician whose songs reflected the loneliness and isolation of migration. This was particularly symbolic in light of the African American struggles to claim naming rights to a new Roxbury school a few years earlier.

In 1967, the Boston School Committee proposed the opening of a new school on Humboldt Avenue, the first new one in the Roxbury neighborhood in more than fifty years. Though community members were initially thrilled, protests broke out when it was announced the school would be named after School Committee member Joseph Lee, given that he had been a longtime opponent of the black educational movement. Local residents petitioned for the school to be named instead after 19th century freedom fighter and native Bostonian William Monroe Trotter. After years of local organizing led by a coalition of black educational leaders and groups, the School Committee finally agreed to name the school in honor of Trotter, making it the first school in Boston’s history to be named for an African American when it opened its in 1969. The Hernández School was the Latino counterpart to the Trotter School, both reflecting years of struggle, grassroots community organizing, and an unwavering commitment to racial and cultural pride. The Hernández school was even dedicated on November 19th, a holiday commemorating the discovery of Puerto Rico.

While Latino parents and activists had finally realized some of their educational reform goals in the formation of Boston’s first fully bilingual school, the entire bilingual education program experienced significant implementation problems in its early years. The Bilingual Department encountered resistance from school principals throughout

Boston who did not want to add bilingual classes and had the authority to forbid staff or programs in the school and withhold desired room assignments and course schedules. School leaders were also frustrated with the hiring of Latino teachers who could not speak English, seeing their presence as evidence that the program was not designed to teach English. There were also content issues, limited materials in Spanish for all subjects, and almost a complete absence of curriculum guidelines. With little defining criteria to follow, responsibility fell entirely on principals to use their own judgment to determine which students needed a bilingual class.

The variation in principals' opinions regarding the need for bilingual education on the required annual census was a major point of contention. The out-of-school portion of the census proved even more difficult since the school department did not have the resources to conduct a citywide door-to-door census. All efforts to document excluded children showed there were absolutely no children out of school, which Betsy Tregar explained reflected the attendance officers' manipulation of the entire process. She wrote that the existence of the mandatory census was "an accusation that they had not previously been doing their job. Not surprisingly, they found a way to ensure that no unenrolled children were officially identified." Tregar continued, "When they encountered such children during the census, they apparently completed registration forms for each child, submitted them through regular channels, and maintained no other record of the transaction."²³⁸

School principals also struggled to deal with the bilingual education program's intricate financial logistics. State funds were not provided in advance but rather on a

²³⁸ Tregar, "Bilingual Education in Boston," 43.

reimbursement basis after expenditures were recorded. This resulted in an overly complex bureaucratic process involving individual schools, the school department, the Mayor's Office, and the state. As the bilingual program grew in 1972 to 132 classes in 61 schools, issues worsened. A state review in 1973 documented schools with no bilingual programs or ones too small to serve all students in need, while others had pull-out rather than full-time bilingual classes. Other problems cited were insufficient native language instruction, inadequate integration, a lack of kindergarten programs or special education services, a need for more native speakers as teachers and training, and a lack of authority in the Bilingual Department to effect necessary changes.²³⁹ While the Boston School Department tried to resolve many of these problems, Latino parents, as their African American counterparts had done for decades, continued to develop their own solutions by forming ad-hoc task forces and neighborhood coalitions, and petitioning the district for reform. They demanded an increased hiring of Puerto Rican teachers and administrators, the inclusion of Puerto Rican history and culture in the curriculum, better facilities, expanded hot lunch programs, and increased safety measures.²⁴⁰

III. Opting Out

While black and Latino activists built parallel mass movements for educational justice in Boston, working tirelessly to mobilize indigenous and external resources, expand their bases, establish their own schools and programs, and simultaneously

²³⁹ "A Response to the Boston Bilingual Program Review Report, Boston Public Schools (November 1973). Cited in Tregar, "Bilingual Education in Boston," 48-49.

²⁴⁰ Letter, United Parents of Boston to William Ohrenberger, August 26, 1971, Box 78, Folder 24, La Alianza Hispana Records, NU.

sought state-level action, many parents ultimately resolved that the best solution for their own families was to opt out of the segregated, inequitable schools that their children were assigned to. Black/brown parent-activists developed several strategies to place their children in higher quality schools, yet this was no easy task. Despite the district's open enrollment policy, parents faced significant bureaucratic red tape in the district as well as intimidation from school administrators.

The Boston Public School system was originally designed as a district-based system where students progressed from elementary to high school within a single geographic district or they could attend one of two types of citywide schools – examination or vocational schools. The Boston School Committee and other school officials maintained a segregated system, which resulted in an incredibly complicated administrative structure without a clear pattern. This complex maze-like organization was even more difficult to navigate because of BPS's irregular system of grade progression. This included K-8 elementary schools, 7-9 and 6-8 middle schools, and 9-12 and 10-12 high schools. A transfer option was unequally afforded to black and Latino parents, yet this was an option that even the most educated, informed, and vocal parents either knew little about and, those who did, found it incredibly challenging to navigate.

Some parents like Mary Allen, a black mother and member of the Concerned Higginson Parents Association, were knowledgeable about their options through the school transfer system, but faced harsh resistance from individual school administrators. Allen had always monitored her son David's educational progress and became concerned when he came home with straight "A" report cards, which she did not believe his schoolwork merited. She suspected the David Ellis School had lower

academic expectations for African Americans. This was affirmed by a black teacher at the school who confided in her that it was common practice to hear white teachers using racial slurs at black students and had lowered standards for them. Allen took action, filing a transfer request for David to move to the predominantly white Roger Wolcott school in the Mattapan neighborhood. Though Allen's request was approved by the district and she was excited to send her son to a more rigorous and higher performing school, she faced hostility and resistance from the school's white principal, Walter McSwiney. "We were treated very discourteously, with extreme discourteousness," she remembered. "We were humiliated; we were embarrassed; and we were insulted by the demeanor of the principal, the tone of his voice, and the manner in which he spoke to us. And he really tried, in every way, to discourage us from enrolling our son into 'his' school." According to Allen, he rudely insisted, "Why don't you stay down there where you belong?" Yet she would not be easily swayed. She reminded Principal McSwiney that "his school" was indeed a public one supported by her taxes, and she asserted she had a right to enroll her son in any Boston school that had space available. McSwiney pointed his finger in her face and warned her, "All right, but I don't want you to tell anyone that he's coming up here. And when the floodgates open, I'm closing my doors."²⁴¹ This principal's threat was all too common for African American and Latino families who tried to take advantage of Boston Public School's open enrollment policy. Not only were parents warned that school administrators would not allow the "floodgates" of black/brown transfer students in their schools, they also threatened that their children could easily be transferred out of their new schools for any minor infraction such as a

²⁴¹ Allen interview, CHPAOH, UMB.

single absence or tardy.²⁴²

While parents and families like Mary Allen's attempted to work within the system to access the best schools for their own children, some parents and educators sought to provide similar opportunities for greater numbers of black children throughout Boston. African American parents in Roxbury began organizing programs to benefit from Boston's open enrollment policy. They sought to transfer black students from chronically overcrowded, under-resourced, and low performing black schools to better-resourced, higher performing, majority white schools in other parts of Boston. The movement to transport black students to schools with vacant seats began in Roxbury in the summer of 1964.

In June, the Boston School Committee sent out notices to approximately 200 black families at the William Lloyd Garrison Elementary in Roxbury informing them that many would be transferred to the W.L.P. Boardman Elementary School. The schools were less than a mile apart and the School Committee had initiated the transfer to help alleviate overcrowding at the Garrison School and explained that the move would be temporary until the completion of a new school on nearby Humboldt Avenue in 1967. Garrison parents initially opposed the transfer because it would require their children to walk through the active school construction zone, which brought up many safety concerns. Social worker and activist Noel Day explained it bordered "almost on criminal

²⁴² It is interesting to note that after struggling to get her son, David, into a white school in Mattapan, Mary Allen decided her daughter, Stacey, should enroll in the METCO program. Her daughter ended up in the suburban district of Framingham Public Schools, which Allen knew was not an excellent school system, but she considered it a better option than her neighborhood schools in Roxbury. Appreciatively, she later reflected, "The whole METCO program was a Godsend, absolutely a Godsend." Allen interview, CHPAOH, UMB, 5.

negligence to send children there.”²⁴³ Additionally, Garrison School was considered one of the best black schools in the district so naturally parents were hesitant to move their children out of it.

In response, parents established the Boardman Parents Group (BPG) with the support of longtime activists like Ruth Batson, Paul Parks, Thomas Atkins, Rev. James Breeden, and others. They initially sought to pressure school officials to reverse their assignment decision, so they met with Deputy School Superintendent Marguerite Sullivan. To their disappointment, Sullivan responded with the same dismissive tone as she had when the Higginson mothers’ had met with her years prior. Obstructed by Sullivan, the BPG appealed directly to the Boston School Committee, which immediately rejected their appeal.

With encouragement from African American State Representatives Royal Bolling Sr. and Alfred Brothers, the Boardman Parents Group filed suit against the Boston School Committee. The court, however, refused to take action against the school committee in the first hearing in August and set a date for a follow-up hearing in September. Now faced with the court’s delay, the BPG turned to direct action. On September 9, the day before the start of school, they hosted a press conference where they publicly announced they would not send their children to the Boardman School and that they would picket it until their children were reinstated into the Garrison. On the first day of school, only seven children arrived at the Boardman. Instead, approximately sixty students held unofficial classes at the Garrison School for a week, while their parents held marches and a mother’s sit-in at the Boardman. On September 17, Superintendent

²⁴³ Noel Day, quoted in Robert Levey, “Not THAT School, Negro Parents Say,” *Boston Globe*, July 8, 1964, 11.

Ohrenberger demanded an end to the protests. Then, on September 28, the court ruled in favor of the Boston School Committee's decision to transfer the Garrison students to Boardman.

In response, the Boardman Parents Group shifted their strategy to transfer the students. With over 11,500 open seats in the Boston public school system (close to 9,000 in the elementary schools alone), the school district itself determined there were open seats in virtually every grade in every school in the city.²⁴⁴ Armed with this knowledge, the parents decided to take a self-determined approach and transfer the children themselves to the Peter Faneuil and Edmund P. Tileston Elementary Schools in predominantly white upper-class neighborhood of Beacon Hill and racially and socioeconomically mixed neighborhood of Mattapan respectively. Parents pooled together to rent a bus and within three weeks over 100 students participated in the program. Rev. James Breeden called the Boardman protest the "first direct action organized by parents themselves,"²⁴⁵ though in the true organizing tradition, the busing program relied heavily on mobilizing the resources in the community. This included a network of local and national civil rights activists and organizations like the Boston branch of the NAACP, which provided initial funding for the bus rental. Yet maintaining the bus program was no easy task. Boston Public Schools would not provide any transportation or alternative resources to support students who transferred into different schools, but the Boardman parents kept trying to raise funds. "Parents are also busy raising money," The *Banner* reported, "This is not easy and involves fundraising

²⁴⁴ "Count 11,524 Open Seats in Hub Schools," *Boston Globe*, September 15, 1964, 7.

²⁴⁵ James Breeden, quote in Robert Levey, "Boardman School OK, Court Told," *Boston Globe*, September 18, 1964, 15.

events, such as concerts and soliciting individual donations.”²⁴⁶ Paul Parks explained, “We’re looking for all the public support we can get.”²⁴⁷ In an effort to make the program accessible to a range of families of varying socioeconomic statuses, the Boardman parents did not charge participants a fee (only a suggested one dollar weekly donation), which also contributed to the lack of funding. Ultimately, the Boardman parents ran out of money and had to close the program in the spring of 1966, after nearly two years.

In the summer of 1965, another group of African American parents from Roxbury and North Dorchester similarly organized a program to take advantage of Boston’s open enrollment policy, which they named Operation Exodus. Like the Boardman Parents Group, parents of students at the Christopher Gibson, William E. Endicott, Atherton, and Greenwood Elementary Schools began meeting to discuss the overcrowding and lack of resources. These parents, along with others from fourteen other nearby schools formed the Roxbury-North Dorchester Parents Association (RNDPA) in August 1965. Similar to the Concerned Higginson Parents Association and the Boardman Parents Group, the RNDPA sought to document and reform the segregated, overcrowded, inequitable schools of the area. They organized in their respective schools and then came together to petition the Boston School Committee to transfer students to less crowded schools in the district and to build new schools in their neighborhood, yet their demands were ignored.²⁴⁸ Even when Superintendent Ohrenberger recommended a plan to bus these students to different schools, it was voted down by the Boston School Committee.

²⁴⁶ “Boardman Parents Keep on Rolling,” *Bay State Banner*, February 26, 1966.

²⁴⁷ Paul Parks, quoted in William Fripp, “Protesting Parents to Raise Funds: Buses to Transport Pupils to Other Schools,” *Boston Globe*, October 2, 1964, 13.

²⁴⁸ This prompted the parents to file a complaint with MCAD in August 1965 demanding the School Committee halt its segregative practices. Bundy, “The Schools are Killing our Kids!” 134.

Instead, school officials proposed implementing double-sessions and mobile classrooms to ease crowding. They also announced plans to purchase a building in Dorchester, which they would assign excess students to from the three crowded schools. Black parents were infuriated when they found out the cost of purchasing, renovating, and staffing a new school would greatly exceed that of transferring students. On the evening of the committee's announcement, the parents began to shift their energies away from petitioning the Boston School Committee for change to a more self-determined, grassroots movement strategy.

Ellen Jackson, who was not only a parent but a seasoned local activist, emerged as a leader in the RNDPA. She was born in Boston in 1939 and grew up in a predominantly Jewish part of Roxbury called "Sugar Hill," prior to the large influx of African Americans. In 1958, she graduated from Boston State College for Teachers. Throughout this time, she married Hugh Jackson and had five children. In 1962, she joined the Northern Student Movement (NSM) as the parent coordinator, and began organizing parents around educational inequalities in the city, as well as voter registration, and helping establish and direct the first Head Start program.²⁴⁹ Jackson recruited parents whose children participated in Head Start, which quickly grew the group's membership base. She explained, "These were parents with little kids who were concerned about what they were going to do for the fall for their kids. They decided they wanted to stay together and talk about the educational concerns so we started meeting at the Shaw House. Parents started telling other parents. Parents from all difference communities in terms of the black community at that time started coming to our meetings, our rallies.

²⁴⁹ Ellen Jackson Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University.

And it grew and grew and grew.”²⁵⁰ Nearly 800 parents and community activists gathered in the auditorium of the Jeremiah Burke High School to strategize a response to the Boston School Committee.

Jackson and the growing membership of the RNDPA became aware of the number of students and available seats in each classroom across Boston schools and this prompted a radical new idea. Jackson and other parents were determined to take advantage of the city’s open enrollment policy, strategizing ways to transport their children from the overcrowded black schools of Roxbury to less burdened and higher performing schools in other Boston neighborhoods. After Jackson’s rousing speech, over 250 parents signed up for the new program on the spot.

While many seasoned civil rights organizers were present at the meeting, Jackson insisted that the movement be led by everyday working-class black parents and not be masterminded by middle-class “professionals.” “Everyone talked that evening and we listened, but we told them *we* were going to carry the ball and do it our way,” she explained. “We said we were going to take our kids out of Roxbury schools if we had to take them on roller skates, and if they wanted their kids to come along, fine.”²⁵¹ For the next several nights, Jackson and community organizers and parents held marathon strategy meetings, scrambling to get the program on the ground. She later reflected, “You had to be some kind of damn fool to even try to do what we did. We had no money,

²⁵⁰ Ellen Jackson Interview, Black Women Oral History Project, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University [hereafter: Jackson Interview].

²⁵¹ Ellen Jackson, quoted in Peggy Lamson, “Operation Exodus - and the Driving Force Behind It,” *Boston Magazine*, August 1968, 34. Ellen Jackson Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University (emphasis in original).

no connections, and no sense. All we had was just plain old nerve.”²⁵² Yet in reality, the group had much more the “plain old nerve.” The existing relationships and community network they had were the basis for their grassroots program.

In the organizing tradition, Jackson and the RNDPA mobilized the resources of the Roxbury community. Jackson explained, “I can’t recall which one of us said it. Let’s take the damn kids to their school. Get a motorcade going. We’ve got friends who’ve got a beach wagon. I know so-and-son, and he’s got two cars in his family, and my car sets six people.”²⁵³ While they publicized the program through flyers and the newspaper, it was word of mouth that spread the call for action quickly from family to family, resulting in many volunteering their cars and trucks to add to the buses they had secured.

As parent-organizers continued to hash out the details in the days leading up to the first day of school, Louise Day Hicks unexpectedly showed up to the Operation Exodus offices to threaten them. She informed Jackson that if they did not present the formal paperwork or “transfer cards” for the students, school officials would prohibit the students and Exodus workers from entering the schools. Jackson explained, “I remember I was getting ready to say something to her, and one of the parents, she pushed up, and came between the two of us. She said, ‘We tried it your way. Now we’re trying it our way,’ and turned around and said, ‘Come on Ellen. We gotta go.’ .. That particular statement got heard all over the city, that ‘we’re doing it our way.’”²⁵⁴

Operation Exodus grew quickly and by the end of its first month in September 1965, there were over 350 students participating. By the end of the school year, the

²⁵² Jackson, quoted in Lamson, “Operation Exodus,” 33, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University.

²⁵³ Jackson Interview.

²⁵⁴ Jackson Interview.

number had grown to close to 500. The following 1966-1967 school-year, the Exodus program transferred close to 900 students to over thirty-five schools across Boston's neighborhoods.²⁵⁵ Ellen Jackson attributed its immediate success to its grassroots organizing strategy. She explained, "By putting authentic, highly-skilled, 'grass roots' community people in key staff positions, EXODUS creates a far more relevant environment for meeting the educational needs of the people it serves. EXODUS provides the outlet for these energies and the channel through which these concerned community people can plan and operate the programs they want."²⁵⁶

In late 1966, Exodus announced the creation of a new "educational complex" on Blue Hill Avenue at the intersection of Upper Roxbury and Dorchester that offered tutoring, recreational programs, support services, cultural enrichment, among other community programs. Jackson modeled the tutoring program after her work with the Northern Student Movement. Despite the growth of these services that aligned with the black educational movement's greater mission, Exodus experienced some challenges and increasing tensions throughout the late 1960s. In particular, Jackson grew concerned with parents diminishing leadership and decreased interest in the program. Additionally, the program faced significant financial challenges.

After raising \$150,000 from external private sources to fund its first year, Exodus struggled to keep up its fundraising. The program relied heavily on donations from the local black community and on smaller fundraisers like bake sales, concerts, and rallies. Though the program sought funds from the city of Boston or state of

²⁵⁵ "Parents Group Expands 'Exodus,'" *Bay State Banner*, September 25, 1969.

²⁵⁶ Ellen Jackson, "A Proposal for Operational Support for a Community-Based Educational Center," June 1970, Box 41, Folder 1468, Freedom House Records, NU. Emphasis in Original.

Massachusetts, neither would support the program, so Exodus turned to the federal government for aid. In October 1965, Jackson led busloads of parents to Washington, D.C. to meet with Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy, Office of Economic Opportunity Head Sargent Shriver, and Francis Keppel, the Commissioner of Health, Education, and Welfare. These organizing efforts resulted in \$70,000 in federal funding in 1966 from Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Yet this was not enough to keep Exodus from going under. In debt thousands of dollars with the bus company, the program was in constant risk of close and relied on emergency fundraising efforts. Despite its financial difficulties, the program somehow managed to survive until the early 1970s. At its peak, Exodus served approximately 3,000 students.

In many ways, Operation Exodus was the precursor to the more well-known Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program, which was founded one year later in 1966. Ellen Jackson later explained, “We’re really Metco’s mother, but they’ve got it made financially so they tend to act as if Exodus is just a little off-shoot of them.”²⁵⁷ METCO was the result of a collaboration of Boston parents and activists and liberal white allies in surrounding suburban towns.²⁵⁸ The program was

²⁵⁷ Jackson, quoted in Lamson, “Operation Exodus - and the Driving Force Behind It,” Ellen Jackson Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University.

²⁵⁸ The idea for a voluntary busing program emerged in the mid 1960s. As early as November 1964, a Civil Rights Committee in Boston’s neighboring town of Brookline asked its local School Committee to enroll black students from Boston. The idea was discussed between Brookline school officials and the Boston NAACP. The following year, the idea had spread to other towns. The Massachusetts Federation for Fair Housing and Equal Rights took an interest in urban-suburban educational cooperation and sponsored a meeting of more than 12 suburban school districts to explore the further development of such a program. This meeting led to several others, and in December 1965, representatives of suburban school districts outlined the basic program that became METCO in 1966. The voluntary program also functioned as a service-delivery agency that provided support services to METCO students and their families. The METCO board secured funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It also received some funding support from the participating suburban towns. The board consciously picked Boston students from a range of family income and academic

designed as a short-term solution to solve Boston's racial imbalance. Until the city's school system was "straightened out," METCO would transport black students from the city to open spaces in white suburban schools. METCO's purpose was not integration, but rather quality education for Boston's black students. Ruth Batson became the director of METCO while continuing the fight for desegregation in the city. "We've taken parents out to see other schools in the suburban areas because we've been put in a very bad position here in Boston," Batson explained. "Parents have been put in the position of only being against something. They have not been put in a position where they can say what they're for."²⁵⁹ In its first year, METCO bused 220 children to seven suburbs. By the mid 1970s, the program was busing nearly 2,500 students to 38 suburbs. Though originally designed as a temporary program, METCO's immediate success and rapidly growing interest among black families in Boston, enabled it to be seen as a long-term solution to educational inequity and thus it became a permanent organization.

While large numbers of Boston's black and Latino students and their families sought out alternative strategies to navigate the segregated and inequitable school system, a large majority were unable to access the opportunities afforded by the Exodus and METCO programs. The voluntary transfer and tutoring programs aided only a small percentage of Boston's black/brown children. As activist Mel King explained in 1966 to

success, though many continued to believe the program funneled primarily middle-class and academically advanced black students or "cream of the crop" out of the Boston's school system. Ruth Batson and Robert C. Hayden, "A History of METCO: A Suburban Education for Boston's Urban Students," 1987, Northeastern Digital Repository Service; "Historical Note," Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. Records, NU.

²⁵⁹ Ruth Batson, Interview of Ruth Batson in the Civil Rights Documentation Project, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, 13-4. Cited in Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," 31.

the *Bay State Banner*, “Obviously all of these programs are necessary, but they are side issues. The real problem remains: Quality integrated schools for all children.”²⁶⁰

Conclusion

Despite Boston’s dominant historical narrative centered on the 1974 “busing crisis,” this chapter illustrated how the struggle for black/brown educational justice began decades prior to Garrity’s decision. The African American and Latino movements both took steam in the 1960s, undergoing similar courses despite operating on largely separate, parallel tracks. Disrupting widespread assumptions of black-brown familial dysfunction and lack of educational engagement, working-class and middle-class parents alike set out to disprove that their children were inferior students and to prove that segregation existed in Boston and resulted in inequitable schools. They carefully documented that black-brown schools were underfunded, overcrowded, and deteriorating, among other things.

As evident through the Concerned Higginson mothers in Roxbury, the movements were largely led by working-class women of color, who dedicated much of their lives to the struggle for quality schools and emerged as “mother-organizers.” The leadership of these women also challenges the pathological views of black-brown motherhood. While many believed that women of color were apolitical during this time and were not active in their child’s education, others were surprised any women at all (regardless of their race) were demanding school reform. As mother-organizer Joyce King remembered, one South End principal commented to her and other mothers at a

²⁶⁰ Melvin H. King, “School Battle Running Out of Gas?” *Bay State Banner*, March 26, 1966, 6.

meeting, “You women should be home washing your dishes.”²⁶¹ Instead, these black-brown women, concerned for their children’s educations, forged grassroots movements around their kitchen tables. As Ruth Batson declared in 1965, “We intend to fight with every means at our disposal to ensure the future of our children.”²⁶² That is exactly what Boston’s black/brown mother-organizers did.

Yet when the Boston School Committee refused to acknowledge the existence of racial segregation or create any real reform, these mothers turned to seasoned civil rights activists and organizations to aid their protests. The Stay-Outs for Freedom, Freedom Schools, and rise of independent schools marked the black movement’s ability to garner mass support and maximum participation in Boston, as well as mobilize indigenous resources. While this movement for self-determination grew among African Americans and began drawing national media attention, simultaneously the movement for bilingual education emerged among Latinos. While at first Latina mothers began small-scale programs to assist the transition of their Spanish-speaking children into Boston schools, the Latino movement successfully lobbied for major pieces legislation such as the Bilingual Education Act in 1968 and the Transitional Bilingual Education Act in 1971, which paved the way for a much larger-scale bilingual education program in the city, organized and run entirely by Latino residents. In 1971, the establishment of the Hernandez, the district’s first fully bilingual school, was a major victory in the movement for community control of schools.

²⁶¹ Joyce King interview, CHPAOH, UMB.

²⁶² Ruth Batson, quoted in “They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid,” 20.

Despite the many successes throughout the decade, both the African American and Latino movements were plagued with financial struggles and were unable to create radical reform that would impact all black/brown students. Because of this, many families tried to take advantage of the city's open enrollment policy, transferring their own individual children to other schools on their own. When this proved difficult, some formed ad-hoc groups like the Boardman Parents Group or turned to the more established organizations like Operation Exodus, for support in transferring and transporting their children to better schools. Fewer numbers of mostly middle-class black and Latino families opted out of the district all together to private/parochial schools or to the suburbs via the METCO program. By the end of the decade, it was clear that Boston school officials would never respond to their calls for reform. African American and Latino parents and organizers began looking for opportunities for legal reform to force the district to take action. The following chapter examines the *Morgan v Hennigan* case that led to court-ordered desegregation in 1974. In rethinking the "busing crisis," I explore how the black/brown movements for education justice took form in the 1970s around Garrity's order and in the years following.

**TABLE IV.
TIMELINE OF MOVEMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE IN THE 1960S**

1951	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruth Batson Runs for Boston School Committee (BSC)
1960	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Batson & Boston Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Establish Education Subcommittee
1961	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerned Higginson Parents Association (CHPA) Founded • Mel King Runs for BSC
1963	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Massachusetts Migrant Education Program Established • BSC Debates Segregation in Boston Public Schools (BPS) • First School “Stay-Out For Freedom” & Freedom Schools • NAACP Present 14 Demands to BSC & Stage “March on Roxbury” • Mel King’s Second Run for School Committee
1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boardman Parents Group (BPG) Founded & Establish Transfer Program • Second School “Stay-Out” & Freedom Schools
1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Passed • Kiernan Report Published • Racial Imbalance Act (RIA) Enacted • Roxbury-North Dorchester Parents Association (RNDPA) & Operation Exodus Founded • Roxbury Community School Founded - First of Four Alternative Black Independent Schools • Mel King’s Third Run for School Committee
1966	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Withholds Funds from BSC for Violation of RIA • Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) Founded
1967	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boston Public Schools (BPS) Begins Offering English as a Second Language (ESL) Classes
1968	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage of Bilingual Education Act • Riots at King Middle School (Dorchester)
1969	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABCD & APCROSS Study Published on Latino children in BPS • BSC Established First Bilingual Education Classes in BPS • Latin American Summer & Acción School Established • William Monroe Trotter School Opens in Roxbury After Naming Debates

- 1970**
- Task Force on Children Out of School Publish Report *The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston*
 - BPS's Bilingual Education Program Expands
 - Federation of Boston Community Schools Formed (Alliance Between Black Independent Schools)

- 1971**
- Passage of Transitional Bilingual Education Act
 - Founding of Rafael Hernández, BPS's First Bilingual School
 - State Withholds Funds from BSC for Second Time

CHAPTER FIVE

“Vamos a Ver” / “Let’s Wait and See”: Black/Brown Educational Organizing in the Wake of the 1974 “Busing Crisis”

By the early 1970s, many of Boston’s African American and Latino parent-activists had succumb to the fact that the Boston School Committee would never actually address the district’s segregation and racial inequities without a court-mandated order. Though they continued their community organizing by exposing failing schools and discriminatory practices, establishing new community-controlled black/brown schools and educational programs, transferring between Boston’s schools or into the surrounding suburbs, staging public protests, and petitioning the district for reform, they also sought the support of established civil rights and advocacy organizations for their legal appeals. In October 1970, the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) filed suit against the Boston School Committee on behalf of the father of Christine Underwood, a black student denied entry into Roslindale High School. In June 1971, MCAD found the School Committee guilty of discrimination in the open enrollment policy and ordered the committee to eliminate racial imbalance. MCAD then filed suit, seeking enforcement of the order when it went ignored. The case was delayed for the next two years. In December 1971, the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) of the Office of Civil Rights charged the City of Boston for violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act by tracking students of color through middle schools and

white students through junior high schools. Also, as it did five years prior in 1966, in 1971 (and then again in 1973 and 1974), the Massachusetts Board of Education withheld funds for Boston for alleged violating the Racial Imbalance Act.

At the core of this entire issue was the School Committee's practice of restricting the open enrollment policy for black/brown students, while routinely granting transfer requests to white students. After months of negotiations, the School Committee agreed to conduct open enrollment to eliminate racial imbalance. This plan included redistricting four elementary schools in Dorchester, including the newly constructed Joseph Lee School. When a vast majority of the white parents at the Fifield and O'Hearn schools opted to keep their children in their current schools instead of transferring them to their new assignment at the Lee, it was clear that the new school would be a segregated and racially imbalanced one. Despite briefly changing course, the School Committee continued to appease white parents, allowing their children to remain in their former schools, while also allowing illegally registered black students (who has used false addresses) to attend the Lee. As a result, the Lee school was racially segregated and predominantly African American. This ruling was a clear violation of the Racial Imbalance Act and had major political implications, paving the way for the infamous *Morgan* case.

In this chapter, I build off the previous one to examine how black/brown movements for educational justice faired into the 1970s. I begin by exploring the *Morgan* case and Garrity's 1974 court-ordered desegregation, paying particular attention to how Latino parent-organizers fought for representation in the lawsuit. My analysis seeks to complicate the dominant narrative centered on the "busing crisis"

frame and its inherent black-white binary. In disrupting this story, I illustrate the limitations of the “busing” framework since “busing” did little to actually address the needs and demands of the diverse black-brown communities of Boston. In fact, I maintain busing was never central to black/brown parent-organizers visions of educational justice or desegregation. I thus examine the failed logic of Garrity’s desegregation plan and the chaotic storm new school assignments centered around “busing” caused poor black/brown families. I draw attention to the experiences of Latino children, whose stories have never been told as part of the city’s “busing “ narrative at all.

Although Massachusetts had been an innovator in the education of children with limited English proficiency (LEP) throughout the 1960s, Judge Garrity’s decision made no mention of their needs or the fate of bilingual education in Boston Public Schools. It seemed that few outside of the Latino community had even considered how the landmark ruling would affect Latino students. How were they to be racially classified and assigned to schools? Were they considered white, black, or racial others? Would their specific linguistic and cultural needs be factored into school assignments? It was unclear to parent-organizers at this point whether bilingual education and desegregation were even compatible goals within the framework of Garrity’s order or if they would compete over the limited resources in Boston’s school system. Dispersing students based on race to satisfy the plan of desegregation potentially threatened the viability of bilingual education programs, which required a clustering of at least twenty LEP students of a single minority language. This chapter considers how and why Latino children and their families were not interested in integrating into predominantly white

schools, and instead, were more concerned about their own safety and protecting the bilingual education programs. Though the Latino campaign for bilingual education was disrupted by Garrity's order, ultimately, I illustrate how Latino parent-organizers successfully pressured the court to adjust it to maintain its viability. Beyond that, I challenge the focus on desegregation in 1974 as the culminating endpoint of black/brown movements for educational justice in the city. The struggle for bilingual education in Boston continued long after this and achieved some of its greatest successes when Latino parents expanded the movement to include other immigrant ELL groups and form new multiethnic/multiracial (and multilingual) coalitions.

As in the previous chapter, I highlight the agency of ordinary African American and Latino parent-activists in the pursuit of educational justice, particularly the leading role of working-class black/brown mothers. I also consider how interethnic conflicts and divisions emerged within the Latino community at times, though they did not alter the movement's primary aims, which remained sharply focused on linguistic concerns and the protection and expansion of bilingual education. I should note that though the black/brown educational justice movements did intersect in the 1970s as desegregation rolled out, African American and Latino activists for the most part continued to organize on separate, parallel paths throughout most of the decade. It was not until the late 1970s and into the early 1980s that more multiethnic/multiracial coalitions emerged on the issue of bilingualism, though this largely reflected newer black immigrant populations in the city such as Haitians.

I. Morgan v. Hennigan

On March 15, 1972, the NAACP and the Harvard Center for Law and Education filed a suit against both city and state officials in the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts in the case of *Tallulah Morgan v. James W. Hennigan*. The suit was filed on behalf of fifteen African American parents and their forty-three children. The named plaintiff was Tallulah Morgan, an African American mother of four, and the named defendant was James Hennigan, the Chair of the Boston School Committee at the time of the filing. In the suit, plaintiffs argued that the defendants were guilty of “racially discriminatory policies, practices, acts, and customs resulting in the segregation of the Boston Public Schools.” The suit outlined numerous intentionally segregative practices employed by city and state officials and cited extensive evidence of segregation in areas such as student assignments, school building and districting, residential segregation, transportation, instructional resources, and discrimination in staff recruitment, hiring, and promotion.²⁶³ They highlighted the School Committee’s recent actions to create a segregated student body at the Lee School. Despite the Racial Imbalance Act, 59 of 201 schools in Boston had a majority of black students and there were only 356 black teachers in a school system of 4,500 teachers.²⁶⁴ Latino students were also segregated (some by choice in bilingual programs) and there were only a handful of Latino teachers in the district.

While Judge W. Arthur Garrity Jr. heard the *Morgan* case in 1972 and 1973, African American and Latino activists continued their community organizing. In late

²⁶³ *Morgan v Hennigan*.

²⁶⁴ Theoharis, “They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid,” 33.

1972, a diverse group of activists including Ruth Batson, Ellen Jackson, and Muriel and Otto Snowden, came together to establish an informal educational advocacy group called Black Advocates for Quality Education (BAQE). Building off their work in BAQE, in 1973 the Snowdens formed the Freedom House Institute for Schools and Education, naming Jackson as its head. Muriel Snowden explained the Institute represented a shift in strategy in Boston's black educational movement: "In recent years the movement to obtain quality education for minority children has been to go around Boston school officials through alternative schools and suburban busing programs. The creation of the institute is recognition of the reality that (our) focus must be redirected back on the public school system, upon which the great majority of these children must depend."²⁶⁵ Illustrating that community control and integration were not mutually exclusive goals of the movement, the Institute organizers helped prepare for the court's anticipated ruling in the *Morgan* case.

On June 21, 1974, Judge Garrity found the Boston School Committee guilty of intentionally creating and maintaining a racially segregated school system. In his infamous decision, Garrity ordered the immediate and complete desegregation of Boston schools beginning the following September. The decision was a huge victory for the long black and Latino educational justice movements, though its implementation would prove enormously difficult and brought a host of new problems.

As Boston prepared for Phase I of desegregation in the summer of 1974, there was growing concern among Boston's Latino residents about how the plan would impact

²⁶⁵ Muriel Snowden, quoted in Stephen Curwood, "Mrs. Jackson Calls for Black Role in Schools," *Boston Globe*, May 16, 1974, 3.

their children. In fact, though Massachusetts had been an innovator in the education of children with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) throughout the 1960s, Judge Garrity's decision in *Morgan* made no mention of the fate of bilingual education in Boston schools or the specific needs of Latino and other LEP children.²⁶⁶ Garrity's opinion did include one related footnote though. He wrote:

The court certified the named plaintiffs as proper representatives of a class of 'all black children enrolled in the Boston Public School System and their parents.' Thereafter *Keyes v School Dist. No. 1*...held that 'petitioners are entitled to have schools with a combined predominance of Negroes and Hispanos included in the category of 'segregated' school.'²⁶⁷

Though Judge Garrity recognized the presence of Latinos (or "Hispanos") and other minorities in Boston's school district, he argued that there was no clear evidence about how the dual (segregated) system impacted these other groups. "The parties did not frame any issues as to discrimination against non-black minority students, who comprise approximately 7 percent of Boston's public school population," he explained. "In this opinion the term 'racial segregation' when unqualified will refer to blacks only." He went on to conclude that following the precedent set in the *Keyes* case of Denver, CO, the court and school system would eventually need to consider the impact of

²⁶⁶ Massachusetts offered programs that provided English instruction to Latino migrants prior to the passage of the Bilingual Education Act in 1968. In September 1969, the federal Office of Civil Rights held congressional hearings to discuss the growing problem of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students. There, Massachusetts's senator Edward Kennedy called for increased federal aid to bilingual programs. In 1971, the Massachusetts legislature passed the Transitional Bilingual Education Act – making it the first state to enact legislation mandating bilingual education for students of limited English proficiency. Adam Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal: Equal Educational Opportunity and the Federal Role in Boston's Public Schools, 1950-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 103.

²⁶⁷ *Morgan v. Hennigan*, C.A. 72-911-G (1974). Quoted in Sarah Melendez, "Hispanos, Desegregation and Bilingual Education: A Case Analysis of the Role of 'El Comité de Padres' in the Court-Ordered Desegregation of the Boston Public Schools (1974-1975)," Ed.D. diss., Harvard University, 1981.

desegregation on other racial or ethnic minorities.²⁶⁸ “However, at future hearings concerning equitable remedies required to convert the Boston schools from a dual to a unitary system,” Garrity continued, “the *Keyes* holding will of course be observed and consideration given to the treatment of non whites other than blacks.”²⁶⁹ It was not the court or school system, however, that drew attention to the needs of Latino children, but the efforts of Latino parents that forced the city to consider the impact of desegregation on these children.

II. Rethinking the 1974 “Busing Crisis”

Over the summer of 1974, as parents began to receive their children’s school assignments for the following year, they grew concerned that many would be placed in schools far from home or to schools without bilingual education programs. The failed logic of Garrity’s desegregation plan created a chaotic storm for poor black/brown families. For example, Latino siblings could be assigned to different schools on the rather arbitrary basis of perceived skin color. One Puerto Rican family brought this issue to the attention of the entire Latino community. As a result of the desegregation order, a set of twin brothers, one with lighter skin and the other with darker skin, were divided. The

²⁶⁸ In 1969, parents of Latino and African American students in Denver, CO sued the school board, alleging that officials acted intentionally to create a racially segregated system. There were several inconclusive rounds of litigation in lower federal courts, before it was decided in the Supreme Court in 1973, ruling partially in favor of the parents. *Keyes* was the first desegregation case that included Latinos, affording them the same rights to desegregation remedies as African American students. The ruling stated that these two groups may be placed in the same category for the purposes of defining segregated schools, since they both experienced gross educational inequalities compared to their white counterparts. The case was also key in defining de facto segregation; although there were no official laws supporting segregation in Denver, it was determined that the school board intentionally created and maintained a segregated school system. This set a precedent for Boston’s *Morgan v Kerrigan*.

²⁶⁹ *Morgan v. Hennigan*, quoted in Melendez, “Hispanos, Desegregation and Bilingual Education.”

lighter son was classified by school officials as white and assigned to a black school to help achieve racial balance, while the other was classified as black and assigned to a white school for the same reason.²⁷⁰ Activist Carmen Pola's two daughters were also assigned different races until she went to the school department to file a complaint. Pola explained that teachers would walk around classrooms and determine racial designations using their own judgment based on skin color and other features like hair texture, which infuriated Latino parents and teachers.²⁷¹ Betsy Tregar, a white teacher in Boston's bilingual program at the time, agreed that the racial designations were arbitrary and based on the racial understandings of individual teachers and school-level leaders.²⁷² Latino parents did not want the school system using their children (and their ambiguous racial identities) to balance heavily black or white schools without any easily discerned pattern. Mobilizing indigenous resources, as their black counterparts had successfully done for decades, Latinos began organizing at Latino social service organizations such as La Alianza Hispana. Much like Freedom House and the Roxbury Multi-Service Center in the black community, these became unofficial information centers within the Latino community. These organizations distributed information about Garrity's order in Spanish and advocated on the behalf of parents seeking school transfers for their children. The Superintendent's Office was also flooded with calls from Latino parents during the first couple weeks of school, and the Bilingual Department provided volunteers to help translate or answer questions.

²⁷⁰ Melendez, "Hispanos, Desegregation and Bilingual Education," 46; Carol Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics, Latino Politics: Gender, Culture, and Political Participation in Boston* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 116.

²⁷¹ Pola Interview.

²⁷² Tregar Interview.

Neither African American nor Latino parent-activists were consulted in the Phase I desegregation plans, which were designed by Charles Glenn, Director of the State Bureau of Equal Education Opportunity. In order to reduce the travel times for students, the plans paired nearby racially segregated schools in a dual-busing program, whereas black students from predominantly black schools would be reassigned to majority white schools and vice versa. Most notably, South Boston and Roxbury High Schools were paired, inciting resistance and fear, particularly in the growing anti-desegregation movement led by a group called Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR) and its leader School Committee member Louise Day Hicks, known as the “Joan of Arc” of anti-busing. The group, composed mostly of white Bostonians and Boston School Committee and Boston City Council members, formed in 1974 and staged a series of large anti-desegregation protests in Boston throughout the summer, encouraging white parents to boycott integrated schools. African American and Latino parents were also reluctant and fearful of sending their children into South Boston, given that it had historically been an unsafe, hostile place for Boston’s residents of color. Most avoided the neighborhood all together and recognized the real threat of violence that their children would face if they did follow through with Garrity’s plan. Throughout Boston, media sources like the *Boston Globe* obsessed about safety concerns. Shifting the narrative away from desegregation, they focused almost entirely on what “busing” would mean for the city, what existing racial tensions would be exposed, and what unrest might ensue.

On September 12, 1974, riots erupted in Boston as desegregation began on the first day of school. At the direction of ROAR, massive amounts of white students boycotted school and stayed home or took to the streets in protest. Black and Latino

parents turned to their community organizations like Freedom House and La Alianza Hispana, among others, to seek support and information regarding safety concerns for their children. The violence in South Boston garnered the most media attention. As the first bus arrived, the twenty black children riding it were met by a crowd of white people throwing rocks, bottles, eggs, and rotten tomatoes, and yelling “Niggers Go Home!” Some held out bananas to black students telling them that “monkeys” were not wanted in “their” schools. At the end of the day, the buses again faced rocks. At Roxbury High, ROAR’s boycott was a success as only 10 percent of the 525 white students assigned showed up for the first day.²⁷³ Mel King argued this was no surprise to black/brown Bostonians. “South Boston High had for generations been a closed school,” he explained. “I remember being told by a City Counselor that there was an unwritten code that no Black would ever graduate from ‘Southie.’”²⁷⁴ Despite the widespread media attention in South Boston, harassment and violence were not confined to this working-class neighborhood, as there were similar occurrences in middle-class neighborhoods like Hyde Park.

Though the violence was largely framed as a black-white issue, Latino children also experienced increased hostility during this time, particularly in the Roxbury and Mission Hill neighborhoods. In October, for example, after several weeks of school boycotts, a riot erupted outside of English High in Roxbury and spread throughout a Mission Hill housing project. Close to 40 people were injured and several others were

²⁷³ Theoharis, “They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid,” 34.

²⁷⁴ King, *Chain of Change*, 161.

arrested.²⁷⁵ The press focused largely on black youth who were allegedly assaulting and stoning white people, as well as vandalizing and overturning cars, yet Carmen Pola remembers it quite differently. She argued it was white police officers outfitted in riot gear that were the most violent. Though these officers were stationed to monitor the desegregation process and peacefully control the crowds, Pola claimed they were instigating the riots and brutally beating African American and Latino adults and teenagers. Pola recalled the officers marching down Tremont Street in formation loudly singing “God Bless America” as they struck people of color that walked by with their clubs. She was terrified when she caught one of her daughters planning to throw glass bottles at the police officers as a form of self-defense.²⁷⁶ Just like African American parents, it was a frightening time for Pola and other Latino parents who were scared to let their children walk the streets of Boston, let alone send them to unsafe schools.

Mayor Kevin White appealed to the federal government to send U.S. Marshals to help restore order in the city, and a coalition of black agencies including Freedom House, the Black Ministerial Alliance, and the NAACP echoed this, requesting federal troops to secure the safety of black students. In October, the coalition sent a letter to the Congressional Black Caucus and the Attorney General stating: “We urgently need your support in resolving Boston’s most pressing urban issue, the inability and unwillingness of the city’s elected officials to fulfill their obligation to protect and support our Black community’s pursuit of public education for our youth.”²⁷⁷ Yet despite their pleas and other prominent political figures referring to Boston as the “Little Rock of the North,”

²⁷⁵ James Ayres and Manli Ho, “38 Injured, One Serious; 7 Arrested,” *Boston Globe*, October 9, 1974.

²⁷⁶ Pola Interview.

²⁷⁷ Quoted in King, *Chain of Change*, 164.

President Gerald Ford did not weigh in on desegregation in Boston until October 9, 1974, when he stated that he not only opposed “forced busing,” but that he “respectfully disagree[d] with the judge’s order.” As leading activist Mel King explained, in effect, Ford “announced that he supported people opposed to providing and protecting constitutional rights.”²⁷⁸ Though the media focused solely on white resistance particularly among elected officials, black activists in the national black freedom movement such as Angela Davis, Coretta Scott King, Ralph Abernathy, Dick Gregory, and Amiri Baraka came to Boston to speak and lead marches deploring the violence.

III. El Comité: Latinos Struggle for a Voice

In December 1974, the parties in the *Morgan* case submitted their proposed desegregation plans to the court, both of which conflicted with the interests of Latinos and disrupted their campaign for bilingual education. The defendants’ plan proposed that Latino children would be racially classified into two groups: “Hispanic-white” and “Hispanic-black.” Latino activists did not believe they fit neatly into these simplistic categories and were frustrated that most Bostonians did not understand the complex history of racial mixing in Latin America that attributed to the Latino community’s diversity of skin colors and physical traits. “As Puerto Ricans,” organizer Edwin Colina explained, “we saw that as totally contrary to what we are and what our characterization of race is.”²⁷⁹ Infuriated Latino parents and activists insisted they constituted one racial category of “Hispanic.” The plaintiff’s proposed plan, on the other hand, would classify

²⁷⁸ King, *Chain of Change*, 161.

²⁷⁹ Edwin Colina, quoted in Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics, Latino Politics*, 116.

Latinos in a broader umbrella category of “Other Minorities,” and would fail to consider their linguistic needs in school assignments. As a result, many Latino children would be assigned to schools without bilingual education programs and in insufficient numbers to warrant their creation. In fact, the plaintiff’s plan would assign Latino students in such a way that only 16 of 121 elementary and middle schools would have sufficient numbers for a viable bilingual education program. Additionally, the Rafael Hernández School would be dismantled, turned into a part-time bilingual resource center for children bused in from all parts of Boston. This would destroy an important symbol in the Latino community, which was a testament to their years of organizing and considered an enormous success, as well as subject Latino children to double busing each day.²⁸⁰ Latino parents were outraged with both plans and began advocating for a voice in the court and developing their own solutions to manage the desegregation process.

Two Latina mothers, Daisy Díaz and Natividad (Nati) Pagán, emerged as leaders in this new movement to protect bilingual education and to address the linguistic and cultural needs of Latino children in Boston. Both women were Puerto Rican and from working-class backgrounds. They were students in the bilingual education teacher-training program at Boston University (BU), members of the Boston chapter of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), and residents of the South End. Most importantly, both were parents of children in Boston’s bilingual program.²⁸¹ Díaz and Pagán began

²⁸⁰ Melendez, “Hispanos, Desegregation and Bilingual Education,” 46-47.

²⁸¹ Díaz was born and raised in Puerto Rico. Part of the working-class, she originally worked as migrant worker and then as an operative at the National Brush Company. She developed an interest in community organizing as part of Boston’s chapter of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party and then became interested in education. She also had two children at the Hernández School. Pagán was also Puerto Rican and working-class but was raised in Cleveland, Ohio before moving to Boston as an adult. Melendez, “Hispanos, Desegregation and Bilingual Education,” 55-56.

organizing other BU education students and Latino parents of children in Boston schools to discuss their concerns about the desegregation order. At their first meeting in December 1974 in Jamaica Plain, where approximately 200 members of the community attended, they began to strategize a plan of action.²⁸²

The group of Latino parents, teachers, and community organizers held meetings in people's homes and in various Latino organizations such as La Alianza Hispana. Founding member Jim Caradonio explained, "The organizing strategy was right out of Saul Alinsky." He continued, "We used to meet at Daisy's and Natividad's house/apartment in Mission Hill and we'd sit around the kitchen table. Basically it was, as I saw it, taking the structure of the court... How do we provide the information? How do we provide the political pressure? How do we do the advocacy needed? Because this is the only game in town. If you are not in this federal court order, you're dead."²⁸³ The group decided to seek legal assistance from the Lawyer's Guild in Cambridge, which had consulted the PSP on several occasions. Cathy Segal and Alan Rom of the Guild became the group's attorney. She advised them to join the *Morgan* case, explaining they had two options to do so: as plaintiff-intervenors or through the filing of amicus curiae briefs. In the first scenario, they could claim to be a legal class affected by the outcome of the case and that it had, thus far, not represented their rights. The alternative amicus curiae option would only allow them as a group to express their opinion and make a recommendation. They collectively decided to appear at the next hearing and petition

²⁸² Melendez, "Hispanos, Desegregation and Bilingual Education," 48.

²⁸³ James "Jim" Caradonio, a white man of Italian descent, was one of the most active founding members of El Comité. He lived in the South End and been a part of the Latino community through his work at the Cardinal Cushing Center for the Spanish Speaking. Caradonio remembers his role as a "foot soldier," a behind-the-scenes type of man who remained neutral in personal politics and spent most of his time helping the group's lawyers prepare for court. Caradonio Interview.

the court to intervene.

Yet the Latino organization HOPE (Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation) independently decided to go to court as *amicus curiae* at the same time.²⁸⁴ HOPE leader Alex Rodriguez argued that his group had tried to get Latino parents to organize for years prior to Garrity's decision. "That group [El Comité] emerged because they were contrary and when you asked them to form a group, they sat on their ass...They wouldn't do anything but complain," Rodriguez explained. He argued that only when HOPE began to mobilize around the *Morgan* case, El Comité formed. "Finally when they had someone to fight against, they organized," he maintained.²⁸⁵ Other Latino residents felt HOPE had not informed the rest of the community about the case or its implications, nor consulted with the parents who had been leaders of the education movement, yet still called a press conference at the State Department of Education's Office of Transitional Bilingual Education to announce its plan. It was at this press conference that the divisions within the Latino community became increasingly visible to the rest of Boston.²⁸⁶

Díaz and Pagán and the working group of parents confronted HOPE at the press conference about their claims to represent the Latino community. While the parents group was led by working-class Latina mothers, HOPE, they argued, was led by middle-class Latino men, most of whom supposedly lived in the suburbs and did not have children in Boston's bilingual education program. Díaz, in particular, had a distrust of

²⁸⁴ HOPE was a statewide, community based, nonprofit organization established in 1971 to advocate, develop, facilitate, coordinate, and evaluate educational, health and human services, and community development programs for the Latino community of Massachusetts. Their programs centered on college readiness, health promotion, prevention education, technology training, and workforce and leadership development. "Historical Note," Hispanic Office of Planning and Evaluation (HOPE) records, NU.

²⁸⁵ Rodriguez Interview.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

middle-class professionals who attempted to make decisions on behalf of the Latino community. She often expressed that those who did not live in one of Boston's "barrios" (i.e. Roxbury, Dorchester, the South End, or Jamaica Plain) could not represent the community. Carmen Pola, who had emerged as a leader in the parents group, expressed a similar doubt. Referring to HOPE leader Alex Rodriguez, Pola argued, "A leader is not a leader when he gets a 20,000 dollar a year job, comes to an office at 9 o'clock in the morning, go home at 4, have a nice steak dinner, put on the TV, and go to sleep at 10."²⁸⁷ While Pola and others questioned Rodriguez's middle-class position and leadership style, as mentioned in chapter one, he was also a controversial figure in the Latino community because he did not speak Spanish fluently. Pola argued there were underlying gendered concerns as well. She explained that while women did all the work in the movement, the men "showed up when the cameras were on," and often commandeered public meetings.²⁸⁸ This press conference highlighted this claim. Betsy Tregar, bilingual teacher and one of the founders of La Alianza Hispana, explained the parents group "was much more grassroots. HOPE was the intelligentsia."²⁸⁹ Lastly, the parents firmly believed that Puerto Ricans should assume the leadership in the case since they constituted the majority of Latinos in the city. Since the chairperson of HOPE's board of directors, Frieda Garcia, was Dominican, the parents group insisted that she could not possibly represent them. These concerns over leadership and representation in the desegregation case highlighted existing tensions and divisions in Boston's Latino community based on class, gender, and nationality, which were evident in all the racial

²⁸⁷ Carmen Pola, quoted in McDonald, *Bread and Dreams*, 40.

²⁸⁸ Pola Interview.

²⁸⁹ Tregar Interview.

justice movements of the city.

Despite the concerns of the parents, there were some practical advantages to selecting HOPE to represent the Latino community. HOPE was an established, well-respected agency in Boston with an office, staff, and extensive research experience. While Rodriguez believed he was the driving force in getting Latino parents to organize, other HOPE leaders were unsure how an ad-hoc parents group without a staff, office, or resources could manage the case. These leaders wanted to ensure that the case did not only center on bilingual education but on the right to a quality education for all Latino children. They were also concerned that an intervention might be misinterpreted by the African American plaintiffs and community as opposition to desegregation.

Though by the end of the press conference HOPE reluctantly agreed not to lead the case intervention, the organization and the parents group both appeared at the next court hearing in January 1975, each claiming to represent the Latino community. Judge Garrity told them to decide which group would represent them by the next session, but it was a difficult task for the diverse Latino community to elect one voice.²⁹⁰ Eventually, they cooperated and decided that the parents group would seek to intervene and HOPE would assist in any way it could.²⁹¹ “There was no way that the intelligentsia was going to win,” Betsy Tregar later reflected. “They eventually had to back off... In that kind of a setting in terms of community politics and all that, the veterans and the intelligentsia were not going to win against the grassroots.”²⁹² Naming themselves El Comité de

²⁹⁰ Melendez, “Hispanos, Desegregation and Bilingual Education,” 49-51.

²⁹¹ Rodriguez laments the parents’ group’s decision to hire white lawyers, arguing that Latino lawyers would have made it truly a community-organized movement. Rodriguez Interview.

²⁹² Tregar Interview.

Padres Pro Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe (the Parent's Committee for Defense of Bilingual Education), the parents group began canvassing Boston's neighborhoods, seeking as many Latinos as possible to sign petitions and affidavits as plaintiffs-interveners. One such petition read:

We, the undersigned, agree that the Parent's Committee for Defense of Bilingual Education, comprised of parents and teachers from the Hispanic community, are our representatives before the Federal Court with regards to the integration plan in Boston schools. We [are] the parents and teachers of Hispanic children that are directly affected by the integration plans implemented in this city. We understand that the Committee is the most qualified to represent our best interests.²⁹³

On January 23, 1975, El Comité presented 1,600 parents' signatures and over 50 affidavits from groups or agencies authorizing them as representatives of the Latino community, and Judge Garrity granted the motion to intervene in the desegregation case.

El Comité was a loosely structured organization that welcomed anyone interested in the fate of Latino children and bilingual education in Boston schools, though the majority were working-class parents and the leadership comprised mostly of Latina mothers-organizers with school-age children. Edwin Colina, a member of El Comité, emphasized the grassroots strategy of the group, explaining, "We never accepted state, federal, city funds. We did everything that we did strictly on volunteer contributions and just a lot of energy, sweat, and blood."²⁹⁴ The central committee had a representative from each neighborhood of Boston and a steering committee served as the link between these members and the schools, lawyers, and the court. Díaz was the

²⁹³ Translation by author. "Petición de los Comites de Barrio de Boston," Box 3, Folder 33, Carmen A. Pola Papers, NU.

²⁹⁴ Colina, quoted in Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics, Latino Politics*, 117.

first chairperson of the group and Pagán remained a leader. Jim Caradonio remembers the women as “tough” leaders. “It wasn’t fancy stuff,” he explained, “it was arroz and habichuela [rice and beans]. Let’s get this stuff done.”²⁹⁵ Other key members included Carmen Pola, Rosa Zayas (who became president of the group in the summer of 1975), Carmen Barreto, Rudolfo Rodriguez, Sonia Marrero, William Zayas-Sanjurjo, Edna Melendez, and Sarinda Maribal. The large majority of the membership of El Comité was Puerto Rican, poor, and had little to no formal education. Education scholar Sarah Melendez explains:

Many of the members of the steering committee had poor, working-class backgrounds but, due to education and/or the positions they held could be considered middle class. Nevertheless, they identified with the working class, lived in the Puerto Rican neighborhoods and had their children in the bilingual education program. El Comité had no wealthy members, elected or appointed officials, nor administrators from any level of government.²⁹⁶

The organization did include some non-Puerto Rican Latino leaders as well such as Mora and Caribe Bernadino and Frieda Garcia from the Dominican Republic, Maria Morrison who was Brazilian, and Maria Brisk who was Argentinean. Brisk, a professor and director of the bilingual education program at Boston University, was recruited to testify as an expert witness on the merits of bilingual education.²⁹⁷ Additionally, El Comité worked to mobilize hundreds of Latino parents and tried to garner support from the African American community through organizations like Freedom House and the NAACP, as well as women’s and civil rights groups.

With some support from existing Latino social service organizations, El Comité

²⁹⁵ Caradonio Interview.

²⁹⁶ Melendez, “Hispanos, Desegregation and Bilingual Education,” 59.

²⁹⁷ As noted in footnote 21, Jim Caradonio was the only white founding member of El Comité.

organized community meetings, fundraised, conducted research on bilingual education and desegregation, distributed newsletters and press releases, wrote affidavits, and developed the plaintiffs-intervener's plan. They also staged protests and demonstrations across the city of Boston. "We took 'em on. We took on the school department, the city, the state, the federal court – a lot of different places," Edwin Colina reflected. "We had demonstrations in our own community down Dudley Street, or along Tremont Street in the South End, or in front of the school committee, or in front of the Federal Court House. We had Judge Garrity's courtroom packed many a time. We demonstrated in front of the State House in the snow." He continued, "We had, on a constant basis, in the early years of the organization, over two hundred fifty people, easy, that would come to a demonstration on a day's – two days' – notice."²⁹⁸ El Comité established parent advisory councils to assure parent participation in the decision-making process, though at times there were heated disagreements with the case lawyers. For example, El Comité wanted to keep the Hernández and Fenwick schools as entirely bilingual, but the lawyers advised against it, arguing that the court would not permit a clearly segregated school. El Comité established a list of other recommendations that included a census of Latino children in Boston schools who needed bilingual education and that classified them as "Hispanics" and not as black or white, the assignment of schools based on linguistic need, the increased hiring of Latino and bilingual education teachers, and other specifications for bilingual clusters.

Despite the disruption caused by Garrity's initial desegregation plan, Latino parent-organizers successfully pressured him to adjust the court order to maintain the

²⁹⁸ Colina, quoted in Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics, Latino Politics*, 117.

viability of bilingual education. In a historic win for the Latino community, the court, in fact, adopted all of El Comité recommendations, except preserving the Fenwick program. El Comité had achieved its primary goal of sustaining (and eventually expanding) bilingual education in Boston. In June 1975, Judge Garrity wrote in his remedy-phase decision:

El Comité de Padres Pro Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe, representing the class of Spanish-speaking students and their parents, have stressed their right to adequate bilingual education. The remedy accordingly concentrates on providing bilingual schooling for Hispanic students and for others in need of this service. Assignment of bilingual clusters before others will prevent excessive dispersal. Thus the “clustering” of bilingual classes will be possible and Boston’s schools will be enabled to fulfill the promise of this state’s exemplary bilingual education law...[and] meet the requirements of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964.²⁹⁹

The revised desegregation plan not only reiterated the promise of an “equally desegregated education” for other minority groups besides African Americans, but also recognized the different educational needs of LEP students, requiring that they be considered separately in making student assignments. Garrity’s exception for LEP students in his broader busing plan allowed the Latino community to keep the Hernández School despite its racial imbalance; he exempted it from busing as long as it maintained an enrollment of no more than 65% Latino students. Yet given the resistance they confronted from the school committee throughout the movement, Latino activists knew better than to stage an extended celebration of this victory. Instead, they adopted what one *Globe* journalist called a “vamos a ver (let’s wait and see) attitude” about Phase II of Garrity’s plan, closely monitoring the schools to ensure that they were effectively implementing both desegregation and bilingual education mandates

²⁹⁹ *Morgan v Kerrigan* 401 F. Supp. 216 (1975). Quoted in Nelson, *The Elusive Ideal*, 147.

simultaneously.³⁰⁰

IV. Black/ Brown Educational Organizing Beyond 1974

African American and Latino parent-activists continued to organize around educational justice after Garrity's 1974 decision. Leaders in the educational movement pushed to shift power away from the Boston Public Schools and School Committee to the courts and an outside administration. On December 9, 1975, Judge Garrity ousted the principal of South Boston High School along with seven other white administrators, took the school system entirely out of the control of the School Committee, and put the system into receivership. That same day, the Boston NAACP office was firebombed. This was a clear indicator of the constant threat of racial violence that accompanied the fight for integration and black-brown political power in Boston. As Jeanne Theoharis explains, many black leaders thought receivership was the turning point when white segregationists realized the "judge meant business." A few months later on May 17, 1975, approximately 40,000 people marched to show their public support for school integration. "We wanted to show Boston that there are a number of people who have fought for busing, some for over 20 years," Ellen Jackson explained. "We hoped to express the concerns of many people who have not seen themselves, only seeing the anti-busing demonstrations in the media."³⁰¹ The movement saw great momentum when Louise Day Hicks lost her City Council seat in 1977, and John O'Bryant, was elected to

³⁰⁰ Anne Kirchheimer, "Confusion, Fear Reported Hurting Hispanic Schooling, Bilingual Programs," *Boston Globe*, September 11, 1975.

³⁰¹ Ellen Jackson, quoted in Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," 35.

the School Committee, the first African American in 76 years.³⁰²

Despite integration and many of the successes of the long black-brown educational justice movements from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, Boston Public Schools continued to struggle to provide a quality education for African American and Latino children throughout the second half of the 1970s. In the 1975-1976 school year, Latino student enrollment in the district had increased to between 6,000 and 7,000 and the bilingual education programs serviced over half of them. Thousands were still receiving an inferior education, out of school or on the waiting lists for the bilingual program, and new migrants were arriving to Boston each day.³⁰³ When school began in September 1975, Latino parents were most concerned with the new school assignments, which illustrate the failed logic of Garrity's desegregation plan and the chaotic storm new school assignments caused poor black/brown families.

The confusion increased for Latino parents with more than one child in the school district, since most siblings were divided and arbitrarily placed in different schools without any clear pattern. Daisy Diaz of El Comité explained to the *Globe*, "The main problem is confusion. Many don't know where their children are supposed to be taking the buses, and others have children who are supposed to be in bilingual programs but haven't been assigned."³⁰⁴ Rosa Maria Zayas, El Comité leader and mother of nine children (with eight in school), explained, "I have too many worries. I'm going crazy." Three of her children relied on public transportation to get to English High in Jamaica

³⁰² Theoharis, "They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid," 36.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Daisy Diaz, quoted in Anne Kirchheimer, "Confusion, Fear Reported Hurting Hispanic Schooling, Bilingual Programs," *Boston Globe*, September 11, 1975.

Plain, one child walked to a distant bus stop to ride the school bus to the Mackey School in the South End and another one to the McCormack School in Dorchester, and two children walked far to the Mason School in Roxbury. Another child was assigned to the Tuckerman School in South Boston yet was not attending since there was not a bilingual class for her. With children assigned to five different schools across the city, Zayas lamented, “If it’s not one problem here then it’s one over there. I can’t cope with it – one school here and the other school there.” She continued, “This is too confusing. This kind of thing, different assignments for each child, should have been avoided from the beginning.”³⁰⁵

As concerns over school assignments continued to grow in the Latino community into 1977, parents and teachers began meeting with El Comité’s lawyers to establish a convincing case to bring to the court. In a strongly worded letter to Judge Garrity, El Comité condemned the school department’s assignment procedure that would relocate more than 2,000 students in the 1977-1978 school year. The organization released the letter at a press conference held at the Citywide Coordinating Council (CCC), a court established monitor of the school desegregation process, which argued that the assignments would compromise the court’s concern for “continuity and stability” within the school system and jeopardize the gains made in bilingual education. El Comité cited several educational inequities faced by LEP students in the new assignment process such as that over 40% of bilingual students would be reassigned and dispersed to 55 different schools, breaking up 21 larger bilingual “clusters” (which was the preferred

³⁰⁵ Rosa Maria Zayas, quoted in Kirchheimer, “Confusion, Fear Reported Hurting Hispanic Schooling, Bilingual Programs.”

organizing method) and eliminating 18 existing bilingual programs.³⁰⁶ Yet Judge Garrity denied El Comité's motion to rescind the school assignments of bilingual students, explaining to the largely Latino crowd in the court, "These are matters of fine tuning. These are not matters of basic substance."³⁰⁷

In addition to the challenges Latino parents faced in navigating the complex school assignment system, they were also concerned about the isolation, violence and hostility their children might face as new students to schools in predominantly white neighborhoods. Many Latino parents were less interested in integration or "busing" and only cared about their children's safety. El Comité chairperson Daisy Diaz explained, "Some are afraid to send their younger children especially to places like South Boston and Charlestown."³⁰⁸ South Boston High, in particular, became a site of protest. In January 1976, Pedro Berrios, a 14-year-old student there who had recently arrived from Puerto Rico, led a group of 22 Latino students in the bilingual program in a boycott, stating that they were not learning anything and were isolated from other students. Along with the support of their parents, El Comité, and other community groups, the protest lasted close to two months, as they tried to convince the court to transfer the bilingual program to another school. While they were boycotting, the students attended tutorial classes at La Alianza Hispana, where they received instruction in math and science, which were not offered at South Boston High.

On February 19, Judge Garrity ruled in favor of the students, ordering that the

³⁰⁶ Fletcher Roberts, "Coalition Condemns Pupil Relocation," *Boston Globe*, July 22, 1977.

³⁰⁷ Judge W. Arthur Garrity, quoted in Fletcher Roberts, "Bilingual Plan Will Remain – Garrity" *Boston Globe*, July 28, 1977.

³⁰⁸ Diaz, quoted in Kirchheimer, "Confusion, Fear Reported Hurting Hispanic Schooling, Bilingual Programs."

bilingual program be transferred to Roxbury High, which was formerly an all black school in the heart of the African American community. Though dominant “busing” narratives represent Roxbury as a major site of black-white hostility during the first phase of desegregation, Latinos longed for a place at Roxbury High, and saw it as significantly more welcoming and safer than South Boston, which was a testament to the growing affinities and alliances between black and Latino residents in the city. El Comité leader, Nati Pagán, stated to the *Globe*, “This is a significant victory for the Hispanic community.” Berrios also celebrated the triumph, “If this didn’t happen we would have continued to struggle, but I’m very happy that the judge decided it today.” Elva Valasquez, a 16 year-old student who would also be transferring chimed in, “We’ll work hard at Roxbury High. I’m so happy. It will be much better at Roxbury. There are more bilingual students, so we can get together and work it out.”³⁰⁹ Yet despite these small victories, the bilingual program in Boston continued to prove ineffective.

Due to statewide educational cutbacks and the program’s high costs, the bilingual education program was underfunded, understaffed and severely mismanaged. Reviews from several agencies throughout the late 1970s cited many issues such as: significant overcrowding, a lack of curricula and procedures for assessing and placing students, questionable teacher competencies, futile kindergarten classes, and little support for special education students, among others.³¹⁰ Migdalia Marquez, a member of the Citywide Parents Advisory Council (CPAC) commented to the *Globe*, “There is a crisis

³⁰⁹ Anne Kirchheimer, “Hispanic Students Win a Change in Schools,” *Boston Globe*, February 20, 1976.

³¹⁰ Tregar, “Bilingual Education in Boston,” 64.

and the kids are in the middle.”³¹¹ Even Judge Garrity condemned the system’s bilingual education department. In 1977, he denied El Comité’s motion to rescind the school assignments of bilingual students. “The performance of the School Department in this area,” he argued, “is probably the worst performed in the entire panoply.”³¹² It was clear by the end of the decade that the bilingual program they had imagined, created, and fought so hard to maintain and expand would continue to underperform and fall short of their expectations if the Boston School Committee did not make radical changes.

By 1977, the black educational movement, on the other hand, had brought some stability and peace to Boston’s schools and parent-activists were cautiously optimistic. Muriel Snowden explained that in the third year of desegregation, “Boston may be rounding the corner and heading for the goal, which has always, from the very beginning of desegregation and years before, been that of a fair chance at a decent education for everybody.”³¹³ Though the violence had declined, the ultimate goal of equal education for Boston’s black youth was not immediately met by desegregation. New plans in the late 1970s called for the closure of Roxbury High School and several other predominantly black schools throughout the city. Though Judge Garrity eventually rejected this plan, parents continued to challenge facilities plans that had excluded them from the planning process.

The Latino movement for bilingual education in Boston continued long after

³¹¹ Migdalia Marquez, quoted in Joseph Rosenbloom, “Bilingual Education Group Claims ‘Crisis’ in Classes,” *Boston Globe*, December 19, 1977.

³¹² Judge W. Arthur Garrity, quoted in Fletcher Roberts, “Bilingual Plan Will Remain – Garrity,” *Boston Globe*, July 28, 1977.

³¹³ Muriel Snowden, “Freedom House Statement to Community at Large and Black Community Specifically,” September 9, 1976, Box 38, Folder 1300, Freedom House Records, NU. Cited in Bundy, “‘The Schools Are Killing Our Kids!’” 238.

Judge Garrity's 1974 desegregation order. By the end of the 1970s, Latino parent-organizers realized their movement would garner more political power by including other immigrant groups. In the spring of 1979, they led the formation of a diverse multiethnic/multiracial coalition of 300 people representing about a half dozen linguistic groups but was mostly comprised of Latino, Chinese, Haitian, and Cape Verdean immigrants, all of which were rapidly growing populations in the city. Together, they protested the school department, arguing it had neglected the needs of bilingual students. Carmen Pola, El Comité leader who had been designated the coalition's spokesperson, explained in a public statement: "Parents in this system can not, do not, and will not accept [Superintendent] Robert Wood's plan for the so-called reorganization of bilingual education. His plan simply does not make sense." She continued, "We don't want our children to be separate, to be shuffled into some basement classroom and given the leftover crumbs of this department – we want them to get basic services, using their own language and learning English, so that they can receive an education which will prepare them to deal effectively in this country."³¹⁴ After two weeks of negotiations, Latino parents, alongside those from various other ethnoracial groups, celebrated a major victory when the school committee finally ceded to their demands. The committee adopted a resolution that preserved five staff members in the department, established specialists for bilingual hiring and curriculum design, and began to develop a coherent philosophy on bilingual education which had previously not existed. Pola declared, "I feel we have moved ahead." The Boston School Committee

³¹⁴ Carmen Pola, "Statement," March 28, 1979, Box 1, Series III, Citywide Parents Council Records (Desegregation Era Records Collection: Boston Public Schools), City of Boston Archives.

President David Finnegan went even further, hailing the occasion a “brand new beginning for bilingual education in Boston.”³¹⁵ For once, Latino parents, like their African American counterparts, were cautiously optimistic about the fate of bilingual education and its fresh start in the 1980s, though experience had taught them to maintain a watchful eye (or a “vamos a ver” attitude”) and be prepared to intervene at any sign that their children’s needs were not being met.

Conclusion

Despite the decades-long history of African American and Latino organizing for educational justice in the city, Boston’s dominant historical narrative remains centered on Judge Garrity’s desegregation order in 1974 and white working-class resistance. My analysis of the parallel black-brown educational movements in this chapter challenges the very assumptions of this existing “busing” frame, which continues to remain at the center of Boston’s racial narrative. This framework centers on the *Morgan* case as a singular moment of black educational activism or endpoint to the movement in Boston, painting the city as torn exclusively between black and white, ignoring both the long black educational movement as well as all other ethnoracial minorities such as Latinos. This frame, centered on the idea of “busing” – which was not the only remedy for school inequality represented in Garrity’s decision – limits the very terms in which scholars think and write about education in Boston.

Over forty years later in 2014 on the anniversary of Garrity’s decision, the *Boston*

³¹⁵ Carmen Pola and David Finnegan, quoted in Fletcher Roberts, “Bilingual Dispute Appears Over,” *Boston Globe*, April 12, 1979, 30.

Globe continued to frame the story around “busing” and not around segregation. As Matthew Delmont and Jeanne Theoharis explain, this frame reduces Boston’s racism to working-class ethnic parochialism, centers entirely on white resistance, maintains a “dangerous fiction” that what happened in Boston was different than what happened in Little Rock or Birmingham, and obfuscates the long history of systemic racial inequality in the “Cradle of Liberty” that led to these decades-long protests.³¹⁶ In fact, centering “busing” is entirely misleading, as it was not the aim of either black-brown movements nor did Garrity’s order solve all the educational inequities faced by African American and Latino children. It’s failed logic and chaotic organization, in fact, created new problems for poor and working-class black/brown families. Fixating on this notion ignores a multitude of other key issues in the desegregation case such as pupil assignments and bilingual education.

Through the parallel movements for educational equality both African Americans and Latinos imagined better, more effective alternatives for school reform than “busing” provided them. Led by working-class parent-activists (particularly mothers), who worked strategically in and outside the school system and employed numerous tactics in the pursuit of educational justice, these grassroots movements advocated a broader vision centered on self-determination and community control. In the case of Latinos, Garrity’s desegregation did disrupt the movement for bilingual education, however Latino parent-organizers successfully rallied to convince the courts to adjust the order so that the programs would remain viable. I also illustrate how the movement extended

³¹⁶ Matthew Delmont and Jeanne Theoharis, “Introduction: Rethinking the Boston ‘Busing Crisis,’” *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2 (March 2017), 193.

beyond 1974 and experienced some of its greatest success when Latinos began organizing across racial lines, forming multiethnic/multiracial coalitions with other immigrant groups through shared linguistic concerns.

The black-brown movements for educational justice solidified African American and Latino parents as political decision-makers in the city of Boston, arguably even more so than the movements centered on poverty and housing. In the epilogue that follows, I examine how the leading black-brown activists in the city such as Mel King built off the success of these overlapping movements of the 1960s and 1970s, continued to build multiracial/multiethnic coalitions, and entered local politics in the 1980s.

TABLE V.
TIMELINE OF MOVEMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE IN THE 1970S

1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passage of Transitional Bilingual Education Act • Founding of Rafael Hernández, BPS's First Bilingual School • State Withholds Funds from BSC for Second Time • Office of Civil Rights at Federal Department of Health, Education, & Welfare (HEW) Charges Boston for Violating Title VI of Civil Rights Act
1972	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boston NAACP files class-action suit <i>Morgan v. Hennigan</i> in Federal Court • Black Advocates for Quality Education (BAQE) is Founded
1973	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom House Institute for Schools and Education is Founded • State Withholds Funds from BSC for Third Time
1974	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judge W. Arthur Garrity Rules Boston schools are Unconstitutionally Segregated in <i>Morgan v. Hennigan</i> Decision • Court-Ordered Desegregation Plan Begins • State Withholds Funds from BSC for Fourth Time • El Comité de Padres Pro Defensa de la Educación Bilingüe (the Parent's Committee for Defense of Bilingual Education) is Founded
1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Judge Garrity Adopts El Comité's Recommendations in Remedy-Phase Decision • South Boston High Principal Fired & School Put Into Receivership • Boston NAACP Office Firebombed • 40,000 March in Support of School Integration • John O'Bryant's First Run for BSC
1976	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latino Protest at South Boston High – Judge Garrity Transfers Bilingual Program to Roxbury High
1977	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Louise Day Hicks lost City Council Seat • John O'Bryant Elected to BSC
1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BSC Agrees to Demands of Multiethnic/Multiracial Coalition for Bilingual Education

EPILOGUE

On October 11, 1983, prominent educator-social worker-organizer Mel King made history by becoming the first black American to ever advance to a run-off in a Boston mayoral election. He had run four years prior in a challenge to Mayor Kevin White, but came up short, suffering a disappointing loss. Nevertheless, he persisted and his success in the 1983 mayoral primary was a testament to his growing coalition of supporters in the city. That redeeming night in October, King passionately addressed his voters, “somebody said last night that a number of myths were going to die and one myth that said that people of color wouldn’t vote and stay together. That myth has died.” He continued, “We started off by saying that we may have come on different ships but we are all in the same boat now. We’re here to say that the boat is changing its course. Welcome to the rainbow coalition!”³¹⁷

A brief look at the development of Mel King’s political career and culminating mayoral run sheds light on a pattern among black/brown activist leaders in Boston, who increasingly transitioned out of grassroots community organizing to enter local electoral politics in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. This challenges dominant declension narratives that maintain that movements for civil rights deteriorated by the end of the 1960s. King’s multiethnic/multiracial Rainbow Coalition, in fact, represented the intersection of the welfare rights, antipoverty, housing, and educational justice

³¹⁷ Mel King, quoted in “KING: ‘...the boat is changing its course,” *Boston Globe*, October 12, 1983, 59.

movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

* * *

Mel King was born in October 1928 to West Indian parents who had immigrated from Barbados and Guyana after World War I. One of eleven children, he grew up in the diverse “New York Streets” neighborhood of the South End until the area was destroyed in Boston’s first urban renewal project in the 1950s. His parents were active in the community as his father served as secretary of his local boating union and his mother was involved in local church and women’s groups.³¹⁸ He graduated from Boston Technical High School in 1946 and moved to South Carolina to attend the historically black Claflin College. It was an eye-opening experience not only because of King’s first exposure to the realities of segregated, Jim Crow life in the South, but also because he was tremendously excited to be part of a black institution. “For the first time I was attending schools run by Black people and was made aware of Black people doing things for themselves,” he later explained.³¹⁹ After graduating in 1950, he returned to Boston and in 1951, he married Joyce King, a black woman who he grew up with in his neighborhood. They had six children together. He went on to become a mathematics teacher at his alma mater, earning a Master’s degree from Boston Teachers College (later called Boston State College and merging with the University of Massachusetts Boston).

In 1953, King left the classroom and began his dual education - social work career as Director of Boy’s Work at Lincoln House and, later as Youth Director at the United South End Settlements. At these two social service organizations, he established

³¹⁸ King, *Chain of Change*, 9-10.

³¹⁹ King, *Chain of Change*, 11.

educational enrichment and tutoring programs for black-brown children and worked with street corner gangs in the city.³²⁰ As discussed in chapters two and three, he also began working as a community organizer in the early antipoverty and housing movements. In 1967, King became director of the New Urban League of Greater Boston and then in 1970, he created the Community Fellows Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He directed the program and taught as adjunct professor of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT for the next twenty-five years.

King's entrance into local politics was a long process. He ran three times for the Boston School Committee in 1961, 1963, and 1965, though failed to win a seat each time. He did emerge as a leader in the black movement for educational justice, helping organize the "Stay Out" movement and Freedom Schools, as well as leading the struggle against urban renewal in the South End through his founding of CAUSE and mobilizations such as the Tent City protest. King finally won his first seat in public office in 1973 as State Representative for the 9th Suffolk District and served in the Massachusetts Legislature until 1982.

King was not, however, the first or only black/brown Bostonian to run for local electoral politics during this era. In 1951, black education activist Ruth Batson ran unsuccessfully for Boston School Committee. Decades later, after one unsuccessful run in 1975, in 1977, educator John O'Bryant became the first African American to get elected to and serve on the BSC. In 1981 and 1983, Puerto Rican activist Felix Arroyo ran unsuccessfully for Boston School Committee, becoming the first Latino to ever run

³²⁰ "Biographical Note," Melvin King Papers, 1983 Mayoral Campaign, Roxbury Community College Special Collections, Roxbury MA.

citywide and the first Latino to move on from the primary election to the run-off stage. At the same time, large numbers of African Americans and Latinos began moving into positions as city officials, working within the Mayor's Office in the late 1960s and early 1970s and leading boards and advisory committees.

In addition to King, there were also several black/brown Bostonians who also ran for State Representative. In 1968, Puerto Rican activist Alex Rodriguez was defeated in the primary. He commented on the difficulties in registering black/brown voters and getting them to the polls. "All they had to do was come out and vote, man. That's all they had to do," he explained to the *Globe*.³²¹ In 1972, one year prior to King's election, longtime housing rights organizer Doris Bunte made history as the first black woman in the Massachusetts Legislature when she was elected as State Representative for the 7th Suffolk District. In 1980, Puerto Rican activist Carmen Pola became the first Latina to run for statewide office. However, she was unsuccessful in her bid for State Representative of Suffolk County's 17th District. In 1982, black CORE organizer Byron Rushing (who was also Frieda Garcia's partner) was elected as a State Representative serving the 9th Suffolk District. All of these examples illustrate how black/brown grassroots organizers active in the poverty, housing, and educational justice movements of Boston sought new roles in public positions of power. Despite the struggles in getting elected, particularly for Latinos as compared to their African American counterparts, these campaigns demonstrate how upbuilding and community organizing led to the growing political power of black/brown Bostonians.

In 1979, Mel King ran unsuccessfully for Boston mayor against five other

³²¹ Alex Rodriguez, quoted in Cobb, "How Boston's Spanish speaking hope to emerge," A3.

candidates, finishing third with 15% of the primary vote. Mayor Kevin White won his fourth term in office. Then, on March 5, 1983, King announced his intentions to enter into the mayoral race for the second time. When White withdrew from contention after sixteen years in office, King and his campaign believed he had a chance at winning the election, despite having to run against six white candidates in the primary. As the lone black candidate, King was confident he could win the African American vote in the city. However, he truly needed to build a rainbow coalition around issues of ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual equality in order to advance to the run-off against the Irish Catholic populist Raymond Flynn.

While labor issues and job creation, specifically, were at the center of King's platform, I argue it was his push for multiethnic/multiracial coalition building that drew masses in support, reflecting the shifting political landscape of the city. This increasing interest in cooperation was in large part due to the shared lived experiences of African Americans and Latinos as poor and working-class ethnoracial minorities in the city during the 1960s and 1970s, which I have demonstrated formed the basis of new overlapping racial and political identities. King explained the Rainbow Coalition consisted of "people who are practical, so practical that they look beyond race to the real issues that are affecting our families." Highlighting issues such as housing that drew diverse groups of Boston residents to work together, he argued the coalition sought "a city that [was] open and accessible for all."³²² In his speech following the preliminary election, King declared, "We have a phenomenal opportunity here in Boston to bring people together... I've walked through all parts of the city, and I want everybody to be

³²² King, quoted in "KING: '...the boat is changing its course.'"

able to be able to walk through all parts of the city. We can make it happen. We must make it happen. We will make it happen.”³²³

In October 1983, Mel King finished second in the mayoral primary, a tight race against Raymond Flynn. In fact, King and Flynn had both garnered 28.7% of the vote, with King losing by just one vote - 47,432 to 47,431. The *New York Times* wrote that the “virtual tie” in the primary between King and Flynn reflected “the emergence of a more liberal electorate in Boston after a century of domination by conservative and Irish politicians.”³²⁴ King’s success in the mayoral primary was largely due to his ability to register new black/brown voters. Together, African Americans and Latinos constituted a quarter of the electorate. King’s campaign team successfully registered 51,000 new voters, of which more than 40,000 were black, Latino, or “other minorities.”³²⁵

King had a growing appeal in the Latino community of Boston. On October 29, 1983, hundreds of Latinos rallied in his support, marching the streets of Boston chanting “Mel King, sí; Ray Flynn, no!” He had won the endorsement of a new Puerto Rican leader, Felix Arroyo, who was running for the Boston School Committee that year, who addressed the crowds. “There is no doubt that Mel King is the best candidate to serve the Latino community in Boston,” Arroyo argued. Mel and I have been working together for a long time on issues such as housing, accessibility, education and Latino community

³²³ Mel King, quoted in Kenney Charles, “‘Incredibly warm, positive responses’ buoyed King,” *Boston Globe*, October 12, 1983, 1.

³²⁴ Butterfield, Fox, “Signs of Change Appearing in Boston’s Electorate,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1983, A1.

³²⁵ Dudley Clendinen, “Black’s Mayoral Bid Brings Change to Boston,” *New York Times*, October 7, 1983, A14.

improvement.”³²⁶

Despite amassing a coalition of supporters across the city of Boston, Mel King lost the mayoral election on November 15, 1983 to Raymond Flynn. In a “landslide victory,” according to the *Globe*, Flynn led King 66% to 34%. Flynn’s win was largely due to his success in the white neighborhoods of Boston, since King only received about 20% of the white vote.³²⁷ Yet King’s campaign and supporters continued to hail the mayoral bid as a victory for the city. “It will be said that the ‘rainbow coalition’ did not win, but it never can be said that the ‘rainbow coalition’ was defeated,” King declared in his concession speech.³²⁸ He continued, “You have given me the privilege to be able to guide us through what historians will recognize as the turning point in the social, cultural, and political history of Boston.”³²⁹

Despite Mel King’s loss in Boston’s 1983 mayoral race, his rainbow coalition politics left a lasting mark on the city, representing the culmination of the black-brown movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Despite their brief and, at times, unstable nature, early attempts at multiethnic/ multiracial coalition building in the welfare rights, antipoverty, and housing movements paved the way for the emerging rainbow politics of the 1980s. Historian Shana Bernstein writes, “Whether coalitions were rare or common is not the important question here, but rather their significance and long-term import.”³³⁰ Similarly, I argue that the long-term significance of Boston’s earliest

³²⁶ Felix Arroyo, quoted in Viola Osgood, “Hispanics, youth rally for King,” *Boston Globe*, October 30, 1983, 40.

³²⁷ Robert Jordan, “Flynn wins in a big way, 66% - 34%” *Boston Globe*, November 16, 1983, 1.

³²⁸ Mel King, quoted in “After Boston’s decision,” *Boston Globe*, November 17, 1983, 28.

³²⁹ Mel King, quoted in Jordan, “Flynn wins in a big way,” 1.

³³⁰ Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8.

multiethnic/ multiracial coalitions outweigh their narratives as mere “missed opportunities” or, worse, “failures.” Though these alliances were complex, tenuous, and often unbalanced, they helped develop the increasingly shared racial and political identities among African Americans and Latinos in the city and produced radical new, inclusive political visions and civil rights agendas. The Rainbow Coalition forged by King demonstrates how African American and Latino activists built off the advancements of these movements, cultivated increasing political power as a collective of people of color, and emerged as decision-makers in the city of Boston.

* * *

Thirty years after King’s loss, in 2013, the *Globe* published an article arguing that despite the city’s progressive politics, Boston remains “behind the political curve” in race relations, which is reflected in local elections. Among the nation’s twenty-five largest cities, Boston is one of two in the north who have never elected a mayor of color.³³¹ That same year, several candidates of color ran for mayor but not a single one was able to garner the support of masses of black/brown supporters, resulting in losses in the primary. However all of this might change soon with the current 2017 mayoral election has proven very hopeful between challenger, Roxbury native, and City Councilor Tito Jackson and Mayor Marty Walsh. In September, Jackson moved past the primary election to become the first black mayoral finalist since King.

On June 23, 2017, the *Boston Globe* released an article titled “Is Boston Racist?” designed to outline the results of a poll the newspaper conducted with Suffolk University

³³¹ Kenneth Cooper, “A mayor of color: Why race matters in this fall’s election,” *Boston Globe*, August 18, 2013, BGM.6.

on contemporary race relations in the city. Though the poll's sample size was not clearly indicated, the article revealed that Bostonians are fairly evenly divided about whether the town is racist and that their answers largely depended on their individual ethnoracial identification. One of the poll's most compelling findings was that over 60% of white residents felt relations between whites and blacks were "very" or "somewhat" good, whereas close to half of African Americans (47%) thought the complete opposite, that relations were "somewhat" or "very" bad."³³² These results surprised few black/brown Bostonians. As African American *Globe* journalist, Reneé Graham, aptly put it, "The question isn't whether this city is racist, but what its citizens, business leaders, and elected officials plan to do beyond occasionally talking about it." She proposed the first solid step would be for people to be "outraged by the racism that clings to Boston like a second skin."³³³ What is most interesting about the *Globe* article, however, as it relates to this dissertation, is the newspaper's decision to phrase the question as examining the "relations between whites and blacks." This article is but one of many that continues to perpetuate a black-white binary and racial conflict in the city, obscuring Latinos and other ethnoracial groups and their long history of cross – ethnoracial collaborations. Similarly, in 2014, a series of articles were published in Boston's various newspapers to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Judge Garrity's desegregation order. These perpetuated the "busing crisis" framework and told a story of white South Boston residents against black Roxbury residents, once again oversimplifying race relations.

³³² Jim O'Sullivan, "Is Boston racist? Poll shows city is split- along racial lines," *Boston Globe*, June 23, 2017.

³³³ Reneé Graham, "Yes, Boston, you are racist," *Boston Globe*, March 29, 2017, A.12.

Conclusion

“Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown” intervenes in the city’s dominant racial discourses by providing a multilayered analysis of postwar racial politics. It illustrates not only how African Americans and Latinos faced parallel and intersecting struggles in the same segregated neighborhoods of Boston, but also how these shared lived experiences facilitated their emerging racial and political identities as poor, nonwhite, ethnoracial minorities in the city during the 1960s and 1970s. Black/brown Bostonians began to see their futures as linked, developing increasingly similar political visions and civil rights agendas centered on ideologies of self-determination, community control, and racial uplift.

As demonstrated throughout my analysis, the shared racial and political identities of African Americans and Latinos did not, however, automatically materialize into collaboration or formal coalition building. Chapters one, two, and three illustrate how issues such as welfare, poverty, and housing, drew these two groups to work together. These common causes facilitated cooperation, as black/brown Bostonians pooled together their political power to form inclusive multiethnic/ multiracial organizations like Mothers for Adequate Welfare or the South End Tenants Council, or alliances such as the one between the Roxbury Multi-Service Center and La Alianza Hispana. Yet these coalitions were not without conflict, as there were numerous differences such as class, gender, and nation that threatened cross-ethnoracial collaboration. Additionally, the most effective groups tended to have ethnoracially homogenous leadership, prioritizing the interests of one group over the other. Chapters

four and five's analyses illustrate that not all movements were plagued with conflict, but merely had differing goals. The educational justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s illustrate how African Americans and Latinos diverged on the issue of language and thus chose to advance the struggle for equitable schools on separate, parallel paths.

Beyond recovered black-brown upbuilding and community organizing in Boston, this study exposes the limits of the black-white binary racial frame for understanding racial politics in the postwar urban north. It urges us to consider how Latinos forged racial identities and fit into spaces typically divided by black and white. It also questions the limitations of vocabularies of "conflict" and "coalition" and similar simplistic binaries such as "unity" versus "disunity" that have dominated the scholarship on black-brown relations. Instead, this study provides a multilayered analysis that examines both the power of multiethnic/multiracial organizing, as well as the difficulties inherent in creating and sustaining coalitions.

This study illuminates the power of local, community studies, which have expanded, deepened, and fundamentally transformed the study of race in modern American history. They provide a focused lens and a level of nuance to national and regional patterns and transformations often overlooked in expansive studies, while also highlighting complexities and specific local circumstances. This study's "bottom up" approach asserts the agency of ordinary African American and Latino people, particularly women, in shaping their communities and Boston politics more broadly. Used in conjunction with other methodologies such as oral history, this community study of Boston gives voice to otherwise obscured people, those marginalized in or absent from the historical record, providing them an opportunity to actively participate

in the rewriting of their city's racial history.

“Boston’s Struggle in Black and Brown” also sheds light on contemporary race relations, helping to explain the complex relationships between African Americans and Latinos in urban spaces. In 2015, the Latino population became the largest ethnoracial minority in the nation, constituting close to 18% of its total population. The Latino population is also projected to grow faster than any other group in the coming decades, which is shifting the landscape of American politics. This study poses important questions on the growing political power of Latinos in the United States. How have Latinos been shaped by African Americans and blackness and how will they continue to be influenced in the future? How will this relationship impact Latino voting patterns or the future sociopolitical climate of the nation? Finally, when will the nation address the continued segregation and inequality faced by African Americans and Latinos in cities like Boston today? Will black/brown Americans continue to uplift their communities from within and forge their own parallel and intersecting grassroots movements for racial justice?

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