VOICES OF FREEDOM

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT FROM THE 1950s THROUGH THE 1980s

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might be a volume with significant chapters within it. That might be more correctly what we're talking about. You know, volumes that start from the African shores. So I would say that '54 to Gary is a volume of about maybe ten chapters. Because everything that was there you can tie back to the political events of the previous eighteen years in very specific ways. And the personalities have their roots in the activities which preceded Gary over the previous eighteen years. If it had any common denominator at all, it's the people who came out of that struggle.

A summary note to the National Black Political Agenda, published on May 19, the anniversary of Malcolm X's birth, read: "To those who say that such an Agenda is 'visionary,' 'utopian,' and 'impossible,' we say that the keepers of conventional white politics have always viewed our situation and our real needs as beyond the realm of their wildest imaginations. At every critical moment of our struggle in America we have had to press relentlessly against the limits of the 'realistic' to create new realities for the life of our people. This is our challenge at Gary and beyond, for a new Black politics demands new vision, new hope and new definitions of the possible. Our time has come. These things are necessary. All things are possible."

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Busing in Boston, 1974–1976

"As if some alien was coming into the school"

Paul Parks and Ruth Batson of the NAACP address the Boston School Committee in 1963, in the early days of the campaign for desegregated schools.

At the Gary convention, the resolution against busing received a great deal of attention from the white media. This was true in part because the NAACP and other organizations had come out in favor of busing, and the dissent engendered by the National Black Political Agenda made for newsworthy controversy. It was also true because busing was very much in the public mind.

The previous year, the Supreme Court had sustained busing as a lawful remedy for unconstitutional segregation in public schools. By the 1970s, public schools in the North were more segregated than those in

the South. And although Gallup polls showed clearly that the country favored desegregating public schools, they also showed antipathy toward busing as a remedy.

During the presidential campaign in 1972, the two hottest political topics were Vietnam (for incumbent Richard Nixon and Democrat George McGovern) and busing (for George Wallace). Wallace's antibusing stance made him a strong independent candidate. He won the Florida Democratic primary, but on May 15 he was shot while campaigning in Laurel, Maryland. The assassination attempt left him paralyzed, and he dropped out of the race.

Wallace had attracted some white voters with his antibusing stand. President Nixon stated that busing was a "classic case of the remedy for one evil creating another evil."

The responses to federally mandated busing to achieve integration varied from location to location. In the majority of cities, desegregation proceeded with few incidents. But given the controversial nature of the issue, whenever busing met with violence the media covered the stories in great detail.

One city that the country watched closely through the northern move to desegregate schools was Boston, Massachusetts. Many in Boston's black community had struggled for years to improve the quality of education for their children.

Ruth Batson was born and raised in the Roxbury section of Boston and was living there in the late 1950s and early 1960s when her children were in school. In 1965, during a tour of Roxbury by Martin Luther King, Jr., she said, "I stand here today as a native Bostonian—a racial agitator—and I intend to continue this agitating as long as I have strength and as long as there is a need. . . . Since education represents our strongest hope of breaking out of the bond we have been placed in by discrimination and prejudice, we intend to fight with every means at our disposal to ensure the future of our children. And by ensuring our future, we also ensure the future of Boston." Ruth Batson's battle over education had begun two years earlier, even before she was named to head the NAACP's Public School Committee.

RUTH BATSON

When we would go to white schools, we'd see these lovely classrooms, with a small number of children in each class. The teachers were permanent. We'd see wonderful materials. When we'd go to our schools, we would see overcrowded classrooms,

children sitting out in the corridors, and so forth. And so then we decided 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.

We formed a negotiating team. I was chair of the team. Paul Parks and Mel King, both men who had been deeply involved in public school educational concerns, joined me, and we sat down and we decided that we would bring these complaints to the Boston School Committee. This was in 1963.

We said to them that this condition that we were talking about was called de facto segregation, and that by that we didn't mean at all that anybody on the school committee or any official was deliberately segregating students, but this was caused by residential settings and so forth, but that we felt that this had to be acknowledged and that something had to be done to alleviate the situation.

We were naive. And when we got to the school committee room I was surprised to see all of the press around. We thought this is just an ordinary school committee meeting, and we made our presentation and everything broke loose. We were insulted. We were told our kids were stupid and this was why they didn't learn. We were completely rejected that night. We were there until all hours of the evening. And we left battle-scarred, because we found out that this was an issue that was going to give their political careers stability for a long time to come.

It's important to note that the Boston School Committee was a unique political body. For one thing, it had always been used as a steppingstone to a higher office. Very seldom did you hear real educational issues discussed. Louise Day Hicks was chairperson of the school committee at that time. Some of the people on the NAACP general committee felt that she would meet our concerns favorably. She had been endorsed by the Citizens for Public Schools before. And so they thought that, Oh, Louise'll be fine. Well, Louise turned out to be not fine at all. She was an enemy from the minute that we stepped into that door. And this shocked a lot of people. Somehow she was smart enough to know that here was an issue that she can hang on to and move, just move ahead.

After that meeting we were asked to come to a private meeting with the members of the Boston School Committee. No press. Just us and them. And so we would sit down and we would talk.

At one point she said, "The word that I'm objecting to is *segregation*. As long as you talk about segregation I won't discuss this." Well, remember now, we didn't get past the de facto segregation issue. And so, we would drop these little sentences saying, "Where there is a majority of black students, these students are not being given the education that other people are given," and so forth and so on. And she'd say, "Does that mean segregation?" And so the whole thing would be dropped. We went through all these routines with her. Mrs. Hicks's favorite statement was, "Do you think that sitting a white child beside a black child, by osmosis the black child will get better?" That was her favorite statement.

And then there were black people and a lot of our friends who said, "Ruth, why don't we get them to fix up the schools and make them better in our district?" And, of course, that repelled us because we came through the separate but equal theory. This was not something that we believed in. Even now, when I talk to a lot of people, they say we were wrong in pushing for desegregation. But there was a very practical reason to do it in those days. We knew that there was more money being spent in certain schools, white schools—not all of them, but in certain white schools—than there was being spent in black schools. So therefore, our theory was move our kids into those schools where they're putting all of the resources so that they can get a better education. We never seemed to be able to get that point across.

These are the kinds of things that we were getting, plus with the press. The press came out: NAACP is wrong. This is wrong. We got very little public support and we got absolutely no political support.

We did all kinds of things outside that school committee. We made all kinds of appeals. And they would do nothing. In the meantime, Louise Day Hicks's name was spreading and she was a cult hero. They loved her. And the only person that we had on that Boston School Committee who supported us was a man named Arthur Gartland. So constantly we had these five-to-one votes. And, of course, he was vilified in this city.

It was a horrible time to live in Boston. All kinds of hate mail. Horrible stuff. I also got calls from black people in Boston. They would call up and they'd say, "Mrs. Batson, I know you think you're doing a good thing. And maybe where you came from there was segregation, but we don't have segregation in Boston." And

I would say to them, "Well, where do I come from?" And invariably they would say South Carolina or North Carolina. Of course, now, I was born in Boston. So there were people who could not accept the fact that this horrible thing was happening to Boston, the city of culture.

Among those involved in the effort to improve the schools was Thomas Atkins, an attorney working with the NAACP.

THOMAS ATKINS

One of the real problems that the black community faced was that relatively speaking it was small. We did not have a large enough community to control any political event, per se. And it showed itself in many ways. One of the ways it showed itself around the school issue is because of the rich diversity of views as to what ought to happen. One of the views was that we should just recognize that black children were going to be mistreated if white folks were in charge of them and get control of our schools, run them ourselves, hire the teachers and teach the kids ourselves. And it was an attractive notion, but I and many other people in the community concluded that it simply wasn't a practical approach, whatever your ideological views might be on integration. It depended on a notion that we were going to make a deal with somebody, the school committee, the state, whoever. But we didn't have the power to enforce the deal. If we made the deal and they broke it, what could we do about it? And so we said, separatism in Boston is not going to work.

We started dealing at the city level, because that was the most logical thing to do. And nothing succeeded. We got no support. We went to the state. By 1972, the efforts at the state level were so clearly thwarted that the feeling was if relief is going to come it will come only at the federal level. And if it's going to come at the federal level in 1972—you got Richard Nixon in the White House. I mean, he's not going to help us. So if it's going to come at the federal level, there's only one place it's going to come from. And that's out of the courts. That's why we got to the courts in the first place. It was by a simple—not very quick—process of elimination. We eliminated all of the other alternatives except filing the federal lawsuit.

In 1974, U.S. District Court Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr., found the city guilty of unconstitutional segregation of the city's schools. When the school committee refused to produce a desegregation plan, the judge worked with the state Department of Education. Following recent state guidelines, the plan called for integrating black and white schools that were near each other, thereby requiring little busing. Two of the communities that were paired were Roxbury and South Boston, one of the city's predominantly Irish-American enclaves.

THOMAS ATKINS

When the decision was made to file the lawsuit in the first place, there was no agreed-upon strategy as to what the solution, what the remedy, was going to be. The NAACP did not have a remedy. It didn't have a proposal in its pocket or stashed away in a drawer somewhere as to what the judge ought to do if he agreed with the lawsuit that was filed. And as a matter of law, the nature of the remedy that you get, says the Supreme Court, must be tailored by the scope of the violation you've proven in court. So you can't really start putting a remedy together, a solution together, until you have proven the dimensions of the problem you've described. The actual work in developing a remedy did not start until Garrity's decision came down in June of '74. That's the reality. People find that hard to believe. They say, "Oh, you knew what you were going to do." Well, we didn't know what we were going to do. So work began on developing a remedy.

Alan Lupo, a Boston-based journalist, was writing a book about the city when Judge Garrity's decision was handed down.

ALAN LUPO

There's a great piece of mythology in the city of Boston, and it goes like this: the schools were wonderful before desegregation.

The schools were not good before busing. The schools had been in trouble practically from the day Horace Mann pushed public schools. We're talking 1830 something. From day one, you had a class problem. You had wealthy Yankee folk saying, We don't want our kids going to school with those swamp Yankees.

You had all kinds of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants saying there were too many Irish in the schools. You had loads of Jewish and Italian people coming into the public schools in the late 1800s, scaring the heck out of teachers and administrators alike. But mainly what you had in the Boston schools was a political patronage system. Now, patronage is not a dirty word. Good patronage is fine. You also had bad patronage. It was a real tight family affair. They went to the same schools. They grew up in the same neighborhoods. They got appointed to certain jobs whether they were competent or not competent, and the people who served on the school committee, with some exceptions, were mainly a bunch of pols who were trying to either advance in their profession—that is, politics—or at least do favors for their pals.

The school committee was a bucket shop, stuff was for sale. When you ran for school committee or you ran for reelection, what you ended up doing was holding what they call a "time." A time is a political affair. And teachers would get in the mail little invitations. They were real cute. Help John Kerrigan or somebody celebrate his forty-fifth birthday. He's always been our good friend and for a fifty-dollar donation you can make him feel even better. And a lot of teachers and principals and headmasters and administrators and custodians and secretaries, et cetera, felt pressure to contribute to those things. The message being that maybe your job wouldn't be so pleasant or maybe your job wouldn't be, period, if you didn't. That's what the Boston schools were.

The hatred is almost inherited in this city. We had people, early on, who came here for religious freedom. And as soon as somebody stood up and said, Gee, I think I'll be a Quaker, they either hanged him or they banished him. That kind of set the tone, all right. And when the Irish showed up, the brutality exhibited toward them was as cruel as anything anyone has ever seen—not counting what has happened to the blacks—even more so than other immigrants. So we had a tradition of this in the city—not just in this city, in many places, but particularly poignant here because everybody was fighting for crumbs. And the economy was hardly ever good. I remember personal experiences of the early forties, into the fifties, being in a gang, happens to be a gang of Jews, self-protection. Protect your religion. Protect your class. Protect your turf, because somebody else is calling you names.

Somebody else wants to get you. So we had religious wars here. We had class wars here. Blue Hill Avenue now runs through a black neighborhood. Once upon a time it was a Jewish neighborhood and the Irish kids called it Jew Hill Avenue. And they didn't say that as a joke. Maybe to them it was a joke, but if you were Jewish, it wasn't a joke. So that's the kind of atmosphere you had here.

The real story of Boston is the story of two cities. It's a story of the traditional, alleged liberal, abolitionist Boston, the progressive Boston, the folk who sent Cesar Chavez money for his grape union. The folks who supported the Hungarian revolution in 1800 something. But the other Boston is a very hidebound, distrustful, turf-conscious, class-conscious, parochial city, full of people who did not make much progress over the years. I'm talking about white folks. They were not middle-income people. They were poor folk and they were running hardscrabble operations. And they were scared folk. And they had had plenty of things done to them. Highways had come through their living rooms. Nobody bothered to ask. Airports expanded into their neighborhoods. Nobody bothered to ask. Some of their neighborhoods had been torn down totally, two of them integrated neighborhoods. Nobody bothered to ask them. By the time busing came around, these people were ripe for revolution.

Kevin White, son of a man who had served on the school committee for twenty-three years, had first been elected mayor of Boston in 1967, defeating Louise Day Hicks. According to the black newspaper *Bay State Banner*, "The ghetto made the difference. . . . The turnout was the highest in the city . . . more than 90 percent for White."

KEVIN WHITE

The issue in the campaign became not my qualifications but Mrs. Hicks's leadership, exacerbation of, or however you define it, of escalating the tensions between the blacks and whites over the issue of the school committee, of which she was chairman. And the battle basically in the election came down to Mrs. Hicks saying, "You know where I stand," which was a code word for

saying to the hearer, "I'm antiblack, and we will not let them dislodge us from our neighborhoods or our schools or our points of power in the city government." It was a code word. I used to kid and say, If Mrs. Hicks looked like Grace Kelly, she'd've beaten me. She was not an attractive candidate, yet she came within twelve thousand votes of winning. To make a long story short, I won, with ninety-five to ninety-eight percent of the black vote. Blacks did not know me. They were afraid of Mrs. Hicks. I was an unsecured refuge for them, for the moment.

When Judge Garrity handed down his decision, the first recognition is that it's a court order, it has to be enforced by the city, that it's a final decision, that it's irrevocable, and that I'm going to be responsible at a minimum for public safety, and at a maximum for the social health, in a way it's a little exaggerated, but the morals of the town. It's a moral question, as well as a political question. What I did was respond politically. And that is I brought my staff together and I decided the first thing I had to do was to reach out to the whites. They were the ones who were going to feel threatened. And secondly, because I had beaten Mrs. Hicks, the blacks had trust in me, to a degree, with the normal skepticism reserved for all public officials, and it was the whites that I had to reach out for. So I asked them to arrange a hundred coffee hours in the city, in the homes, hosted by only antibusing mothers, in the white communities. I wanted to take it head-on. I wanted to reach out to talk to them, not to threaten them, to explain.

They were usually held in a very small living room, sometimes in the basement. A group no more than twenty, sometimes as small as six. They came to listen, they came hostile, they came suspicious. But they came hopeful that if they could only capture the mayor, if only the mayor could listen, and see that they were right, then their cause would not only be heard but would be won. Boston is an international city with sort of a small-town mentality. And the mayor is the patriarch, and because it's so political, it is a town in which the mayor is seen as all-powerful. So it's a little like capture the flag for both sides. For the blacks, if we can have the mayor as our protector, then we will achieve, and for the whites, if we have the mayor, we will not lose. And my role had to be neither a partisan for either but a protector in an odd way of both. And I began to play that role in the summer.

RUTH BATSON

When Garrity's decision came down in June of 1974, we were sunk when we heard some of the remedies, the one of busing to South Boston and Charlestown particularly, because those of us who had lived in Boston all of our lives knew that this was going to be a very, very difficult thing to pull off.

As a child I had encountered the wrath of people in South Boston. And I just felt that they were bigoted. I just felt that they made it very clear that they didn't like black people. And I was prepared for them not to want black students coming to the school. Plus which, they said it. I mean, they made it very clear. The other thing was that there was absolutely no preparation made for this transition. There were a couple of athletes and other people who would go on TV and they would say, you know, "We have this thing that we have to have happen in our city. We're going to be busing kids and so forth and so on. And we have to be brave about it." And you say to yourself, Well, what are they expecting? Here were little children that were going to a school and they were talking about being brave as if some alien from some planet was coming into the school. I never heard any public official on the state level or on the city level come and say, "This is a good thing. We should all learn together. We should all live together." There was no encouragement from anybody. I call it complete official neglect.

An antibusing group called ROAR, for Restore Our Alienated Rights, operated throughout the city's white neighborhoods under the leadership of Louise Day Hicks, by now a member of the city council. Its weekly meetings were held in the city council chambers in City Hall.

Jane DuWors was a South Boston mother and ROAR leader. She helped to organize a march and rally to protest "forced busing" on September 9, 1974, just three days before school was to open and the new plan would begin. Eight thousand demonstrators from white neighborhoods all over the city assembled at City Hall Plaza, an open space in the center of downtown, bounded on one side by City Hall and on another by the John F. Kennedy Federal Building, where Senator Edward Kennedy, first elected in 1962, had his local office.

JANE DUWORS

From South Boston we marched along Broadway over Broadway Bridge. We met people from Hyde Park at the corner of Tremont Street. People from East Boston came in by carloads through the tunnel and they met with the people of Charlestown and they marched over the bridge from Charlestown down to City Hall Plaza.

We had different speakers that were going to address the crowd. And Ted Kennedy happened to be one of them. We thought this foolish social experiment had gone on long enough and that it was time for somebody to listen to the people. We always thought that the majority ruled and that the right to redress was taken seriously and listened to seriously. But we were fast becoming aware that all we were given was lip service. People would listen to us, shake their heads. "Isn't that crazy?" they'd say. Or something that we got so sick of hearing was, "Off the record, let me tell you I wouldn't do that to my child either, but for the record I have to state that I'm for this program." So we were getting tired of hearing that and we weren't in any mood to listen to more of the same. We wanted the elected officials to tell us how to go about repealing this court law. What we would have to do to get somebody in a position to remedy it, to listen to our concerns.

Ted Kennedy got up to the microphone and Ted Kennedy was the epitome of the Boston Irish. You know, everybody loved Ted Kennedy. The Kennedy family, they were all gods. So the people thought at the time that we were fast learning that Ted Kennedy was a hypocrite. He was all for other people putting their children on buses and having them driven across town. But his children didn't even partake of public education. They were all in private schools, and we thought that somebody who had children in private schools, who didn't have to walk ten feet in our moccasins, shouldn't be chastising us and telling us to put our children on the bus. We knew that we knew what was best for our children. And not people who didn't have to live it. And we were so disenchanted with them and there were thousands of us standing there. And he got up and the people started to not boo him but hiss him, politely hiss him. And somebody yelled, "Turn your back

on him when he starts to speak. Show him the same consideration that he's showing us. He's turned his back on our problems. Show him that we don't want him any longer to represent us. Turn your back on him." And we did. He started to speak, people started to turn their backs. And I was right up close to the dais so I could see. I'm a little short, and I like to see everything that's going on. And he started to speak and people started to turn around, and you could see the look of consternation appear on his face. You know, a frown, like "Why do these people do this to me? What's their problem?" Until finally the whole crowd was facing the opposite direction. We were facing the Kennedy Building instead of Ted Kennedy on the dais. And someone said, "We've heard enough. Tell him to go. He hasn't anything to say. He's not going to help us." And he started sputtering. He started losing his composure. And he kept talking, and the things he said were not making any sense whatsoever to us.

We just weren't in the mood to hear and we wanted help on how we could redress what we thought was a grievance situation. Something that was harming our children, was very detrimental to our children, which was the basic right for a parent to choose how a child should be educated and where the child should be educated. So somebody pulled the plug. And the loudspeaker went dead. And people started saying, "Go home, Ted. Go home, Ted." And he was going to speak, loudspeaker or no loudspeaker, until he finally decided that it was best for him to leave because people were really starting to get upset. And he started down off the dais and, God, he had to run across the plaza because he had a group of women, scorned women, not scorned in love, but scorned more importantly—what, how would I say it?—in the most important thing of their lives, their children. Their children were being scorned. And they chased him and they shouted at him and they——. Probably some of them were asking him for help and others were probably telling him to go home and get out. And he ran into the Kennedy Building and they locked the doors, and the women pounded on the doors to try to get in and the plate glass windows shattered, and I think we were shocked as he was when we saw the glass shatter. But the lesson that we learned that day was the lip service continues, and the bitterness and the sense of alienation continued to grow and didn't get any less, because there was no help left coming from that area.

Over the summer, the black community mobilized to try to achieve an orderly transition. Freedom House, a Roxbury community center founded by Otto and Muriel Snowden, was the focal point of activity and soon became known as the Black Pentagon. Ellen Jackson was its director. School opened on September 12.

ELLEN JACKSON

The mood in the black community was one of confusion, concern, and fear because the elected officials during that summer of 1974, after the order had been given by Judge Garrity, were very often making statements that this would not happen. And statements were coming out of certain segments of Boston, specifically out of South Boston, indicating that these students were not going to be welcomed into the schools. They would do anything that they had to do to keep students from entering the schools in South Boston. We attempted at Freedom House over the summer months to try to allay some of the fears that parents had.

By and large parents didn't know what "geocodes" were. They didn't know where these streets were that the kids were supposed to go to catch the bus. They weren't sure how the kids were going to get to school. If it was a bus, if it was going to be a taxi. If it was going to be one of the longer station wagons. They didn't know, for the children that had handicaps, what was going to happen to those particular children, how they were going to get to school. If they were a special needs student, were they to go to the same school to report to the same teacher? There was a lot of confusion. Mothers worked. What time were they going to get back into the community? Where were they supposed to go? Who was going to be there to meet them? There was a lot of concern. So we attempted to work with the school department in making sure that for each school there were pickup spots and times. And people there to accompany the children, to wait with the children when the buses came. And make sure that the children were there on time, and if not, to encourage the bus driver to wait just a few minutes because the kid may be a little late. We then began to set up with the help of the New England Telephone Company what was called the hotline. In the beginning, the hotline at Freedom House was to in a sense answer any of the

questions that parents had. And it was staffed by people from various, believe it or not, agencies, various universities, various companies. We developed, my staff and I, we developed a kind of manual and we put it together for emergency numbers. We told parents about giving their children emergency numbers, pinning them on them inside their clothes or somewhere. We also made it clear that they could come and pick up this book. We tried to tell them even the bus numbers that their children would be boarding. We tried to answer and assure them that there would be plenty of people around. Many people volunteered during that time to assist parents and students during that first week of school. We kept the hotline going almost twenty-four hours a day.

Phyllis Ellison, class of '77, was one of fifty-six black students from Roxbury and Columbia Point assigned to South Boston High School.

PHYLLIS ELLISON

I didn't know much about South Boston High School at the time. I didn't know what I was getting myself into, that South Boston High School was part of busing or desegregation, I just knew that I was going to attend South Boston High School. My mother's reaction was I was *not* going to attend South Boston High School, that I would go to a Catholic school. And I let her know that my friends were going to South Boston High and I wanted to attend there. I said I would quit school if I had to go to a Catholic school, because I wanted to be with my friends and none of my friends could go to Catholic school because of affordability.

I remember my first day going on the bus to South Boston High School. I wasn't afraid because I felt important. I didn't know what to expect, what was waiting for me up the hill. We had police escorts. I think there was three motorcycle cops and then two police cruisers in front of the bus, and so I felt really important at that time, not knowing what was on the other side of the hill.

Well, when we started up the hill you could hear people saying, "Niggers go home." There were signs, they had made a sign saying, "Black people stay out. We don't want any niggers in our school." And there were people on the corners holding ba-

nanas like we were apes, monkeys. "Monkeys get out, get them out of our neighborhood. We don't want you in our schools." So at that time it did frighten me somewhat, but I was more determined then to get inside South Boston High School, because of the people that were outside.

When I got off the bus, first of all I felt important, because of the news media that was there. [Television reporter] Natalie Jacobson out in front of your school getting the story on your school. So I felt really important going through the metal detectors and making sure that no one could come into the school armed. I felt like this was a big deal to me, to attend South Boston High School.

I felt like I was making history, because that was the first year of desegregation and all the controversies and conflicts at that time. I felt that the black students there were making history.

ALAN LUPO

What sticks in my mind from the first day of busing, standing outside of Southie High School, was a sort of a rush of a crowd, verbal, not a roar really, although that's what they called themselves, ROAR. It was almost like a growl. It was scary. And I heard the word "nigger" and I saw something fly through the air, a bottle or a can, and it smacked the ground. That sticks in my mind more than anything else in terms of what I heard. But then there's what I saw. And that's more important than what I heard. What I saw was black kids looking at where they were being bused and being disappointed. Black kids smiling as if to be cocky but really nervous. Blacks walking as if to taunt the white kids but, I think, really scared. White families looking, with perhaps a combination of hatred and fear, and other whites looking with no hatred but fear and curiosity. Children looking with ignorance and awe. Their hands being held by parents who had been through a lot of hell in their white lives and were looking at a change that they couldn't understand. It was a pitiful sight for everybody.

On this first day of busing, it was quiet in Roxbury, as in most of the city. But at South Boston High School about five hundred demonstrators had stoned buses, shouted racial epithets, hurled eggs and rotten tomatoes, all in front of news cameras. Although

thirteen hundred students were scheduled to attend classes, on that first day only fifty-six black students and sixty-eight white students entered the high school.

At the end of the school day, buses carrying black elementary school students out of South Boston were stoned. Nine children were injured and eighteen buses were damaged.

ELLEN JACKSON

Well, the phones, the hotlines, started ringing. And in a few minutes the official word came in that buses coming from the elementary school had been pelted and had been stoned. And they were coming directly to Freedom House. The word was from the command post, if you will, from the police, Bring those buses, do not stop at any stops. We want to see these children. There was Red Cross there, also, at Freedom House. We want to make sure they're all right and we want to talk with the children. Well, just then also we turned on the radio and the radio said that they were not going to drop the children off at their stops near their homes, they were taking them directly to Freedom House. Well, talk about the drums beating, the word went around the community and people were incensed. They were angry. And they started coming to Freedom House and forming little groups. Walking up the pathway to Freedom House demanding to know what had happened. When the kids came, everybody just broke out in tears and started crying. The kids were crying. They had glass in their hair. They were scared. And they were shivering and crying. Talking about they wanted to go home. We tried to gently usher them into the auditorium. And wipe off the little bit of bruises that they had. Small bruises and the dirt. Picked the glass out of their hair. And then we were calling parents, based on the numbers we had, to come up to Freedom House.

When the parents got there, they were as angry with me as I would have been if it had been my own child. And it sort of took me back to the days when we had problems in the sixties, when my kids were in school. And they said, "You listened to the mayor and look what happened. My kid's not going back tomorrow. I'm not letting him be, or her be, subjected to this anymore." I mean, basically parents said, "The hell with it, we're not going to do this anymore. We trusted you." And that hurt because I knew where they were coming from. I could feel their pain myself. And that

feeling of trust, because I had trusted some other people who had promised me that this was not going to happen. So we talked with the parents. We asked them to give us another chance, to get to the officials and to talk with them, and they say, "You can't just talk anymore. You've got to demand for us. You've got to have them demonstrate how they're going to make sure that this day never happens again."

I went upstairs to Otto Snowden's office with two other people and I dialed. Kevin White immediately was on the phone. And he said, "Ellen, I know, I know it happened."

And I said, "You have got to come out here and talk."

And he said, "Well, I can't come right now."

I said, "Well, you've got to come, because we're not going to have any parents tomorrow. I made a promise and you made a promise. We've got to do this. We've got to have a dialogue. We've got to talk. We've got to have some assurances."

And he said, "Okay. I'll be out there around six o'clock."

Just a short half an hour after we called him, the hall began to fill up with all types of people, from all over. Parents, agency people, students, just concerned residents. And they were in a dither. It seemed an eternity before the mayor came. And I remember standing in Otto's office watching him get out of the car with his jacket thrown over his shoulder. He couldn't see the parking lot and see that many cars were there. I said, "Oh, my Lord, this man has no idea what's going to happen or what this was going to turn out to be." Nor did I at that point. So he came in the door, and I said, "We've got an auditorium full of people. Angry parents. And I don't know what we're going to do. We can't promise them anything anymore. My own credibility is on the line. I'm born and raised in this community. I'm going to be here, Kevin, when you go back to Beacon Hill. And I'm going to die here possibly. And these are my people. These are my neighbors. So I don't know if I can assure them. I'm going to need you to tell them something. So let's step into the lounge area and talk. And we want to talk to you only."

We went in the room and I said, "You put us in a hell of a position. These kids were hurt. You should have been here and seen it. You said you couldn't make it. But you had to see with your eyes and you'll understand the anger and the frustration that the parents and we all are feeling right now. So be prepared. Don't come out with one of those pat speeches. You've got to hear these

parents." Kevin and I, I think, were very close. But I don't think he really even believed me then until he stepped out of that lounge and went downstairs into that auditorium and proceeded to walk up to the front and to go up onto that stage. And before he could even speak, parents were standing up and saying, "We've been betrayed again. We've been betrayed again. We put our kids out here and we take chances with our kids. We didn't want to do it, but you promised us. What are you going to do for us now, Kevin?" It was a difficult time to calm the audience down.

When he heard many of the comments, and many of the accusations, and many of the allegations, and much of the anger and the rage and the frustration from the parents, they said, "We're not going." He turned around and he said, "Wait a minute. Give me," he pleaded, he pleaded and said, "give me one more chance. Let your kids get on those buses tomorrow." He said, "I promise you this will never happen again." There was a pause in the room, and you could feel the silence. People were fighting with themselves, their consciences. Whether or not they should allow their kids to go. Should they take this chance? How could they be assured? Should they trust his word again? When that silence came, someone from the Bay State side of Columbia Point Project yelled, "No, we're not going to have it. We're going to have our own people there. If it's going to be like this, we're going to send our own people on these buses." Kevin White, frankly, was lucky to get out of there with his jacket and his skin that night.

We didn't know how many kids were going to turn out that next day, but we met all night long. And we decided then that we'd have to really form groups to follow the buses over the next morning to South Boston. And that we possibly would have to start on a regular basis from that day on to have people in a sense just watching and monitoring what was happening as the buses went up the hill. I remember we stated that to the police commissioner and he said, "Well, we don't want it. We're not going to be responsible." We said, "You haven't been responsible for us up to now, so we'll take the responsibility on our own. We'll be responsible for ourselves. At the same time, we've got to be responsible for our kids. And these are all of our kids. We may not be their biological parents, but they're our children. We've encouraged these people to participate in this process. And therefore we have a responsibility." But that was a night that changed the whole

idea that this was going to be an easy, easy process. It was clear it was not.

Many black children did go to school the next day. But the city's racial climate remained confused and uncertain. In South Boston, many white parents kept their children out of the public schools.

JANE DUWORS

We asked the parents if they would go along with the boycott. The majority of people did. And in the meantime we set up schools in yacht clubs. We set up schools in veterans' posts. All over South Boston there were schools. We had them during the day at first, and then somebody complained. To this day I don't know who complained and said that you couldn't set up a school and have tutoring going on during normal school hours. So we said the hell with it. If that's the way you want to be. We'll let the kids out in the daytime to play and they'll go to school at night. And they did. We switched the tutoring hours over from daytime hours to nighttime hours. And the yacht clubs and the veterans' posts and wherever we had them agreed that we could use them at night instead of the daytime. We had teachers in the Boston public school system who were tutoring our kids at night for free. We had prospective teachers, kids going to college, tutoring our children at night. And it worked out pretty well.

South Boston mother Tracy Amalfitano, refusing to participate in the boycott, sent her two boys to their assigned schools from the first day.

TRACY AMALFITANO

My whole schedule revolved around walking both my children to school, but especially the older one, to catch the bus every morning for Columbia Point. And I also met him every afternoon. It was very difficult for us. Our whole lives, basically, became topsy-turvy, and everything revolved around making sure that the children were in school because we believed that they should be

in school. But also making sure that their safety was assured. I was concerned, in my own community, if my kids would be safe. The community basically was talking about kids not being safe going into the minority communities, but because I went in and out every day myself, I knew that they were safe there. And my concern was that they were safe when they got off, when my older son got off the bus in his own community. It was very difficult for us. It was difficult for other members in the family who didn't understand what I was doing. It was almost like getting up every morning and going to war.

There were, at that point in time, many police in the community. There were police lines. There were a lot of groups congregating on street corners. And every day we walked through all of that to the bus stop. It was not easy for us but, on the other hand, I felt that as people had a right to boycott—that's a person's right—it was also my right to send my children to school. And I think I got mad as much as anything, as much as maybe being afraid. I said, Why would anyone interfere with my right to send my kids to school? And, I guess, basically, that anger also sustained me.

It was a lot of isolation for a while, though, for us. Many days I would come home and I would think about all the liberals that got on the buses and went south for sit-ins and boycotts, and I really would come home and wonder, Where were they now?

There were people out there, but for a long, long time I felt very isolated and alone in the decision, but I felt that my decision was right. My kids also became more isolated because people that were boycotting would not allow their children to play with my children anymore. And that was real. But somehow we instilled some strength in our kids so that they were sustained.

We did not get support from political leaders, although I know political leaders were meeting quite routinely with those that boycotted. But for those of us around the city that decided to support the desegregation order, it was very much a lonely place for a long time.

By 1974, Thomas Atkins was Massachusetts secretary for communities and development, a cabinet-level post under Governor Francis Sargent. He had also assumed a leadership role within the Boston NAACP.

THOMAS ATKINS

From approximately August of '74 until the end of the '74–'75 school year, because of the central role I was playing as essentially the spokesperson for the community on the school case, I was targeted for intimidation. So I started getting death threats. I was averaging about forty death threats per week. I had had that before, so it didn't particularly bother me. However, it took some rather bizarre aspects. Initially these calls were coming in to my office at the state house, to the NAACP office, and to my home. I was getting letters at all three places. And I found out, much after the fact, that some of the calls that came into my house were being answered by my children, who, like kids all over the country, I guess, tried to protect their daddy. And people would call to speak to me and to tell me that they were going to blow my head off only to find themselves being asked by one of my kids, "Why are you going to kill my daddy?" And it was an embarrassing kind of thing for them to have to try and explain this. Some of the people who started off calling for that purpose wound up calling back to talk to my kids. I got wind of this in a rather peculiar way.

One night I was home watching television. I got a call from a guy who identified himself as having called before. And he wouldn't give me his name. He said, "You know me. You'll recognize me if I give you my name." He said, "But I've talked to your kids."

I said, "What do you mean you've talked to my kids?"

He said, "Yeah, I've talked to your kids." He said, "What I want to tell you is this." He said, "There was a meeting tonight in South Boston and if those kids go over to South Boston High School tomorrow, all hell's going to break loose. They're going to stone the buses. They're going to attack the buses. They're going to turn them over. They're going to burn them."

And I said, "What are you talking about?"

And he said, "That's the message." He says, "I know what I'm talking about."

Well, I never talked to this guy before. I had no way of crediting this. And so I wasn't inclined to initially. I went back and started watching television. But the more I thought about it, the less I believed I could take the chance that he was not right.

So I called the superintendent of schools and relayed the information. The superintendent suggested that I call, and I did call, the police commissioner in Boston. I talked with him, and his information was that yes, there had been a meeting that night in South Boston and yes, something was planned for the next day. He didn't know what. He hadn't gotten the information yet. I called the person at the state level who was in charge of the state police, 'cause that's who was at that time in charge of protecting the kids in South Boston, and I passed this information on to him. And finally we concluded that we simply couldn't take the chance, that those kids had to be moved out of that school the next day.

There was no time to notify individual parents or children. So the plan was to meet the kids as they came into the Bayside Mall in South Boston, the Columbia Point–Bayside area, where typically they would be taken from the buses that brought them from home and put on buses that would take them up to the high school, in effect, in a convoy. Police cars and motorcycles on each side. That day we intercepted them and took them instead to UMass/Boston [the University of Massachusetts at Boston]. We had made arrangements to have people from the community come in and serve as freedom school teachers. So none of the kids who were supposed to go to South Boston showed up that day.

As my informant had told me, however, there was a crowd of well over fifteen hundred people, between fifteen hundred and two thousand people waiting for the buses, and when it became clear that the buses were not going to arrive, those people were very upset. Finally they broke up, and one contingent of the crowd that had broken up was going down the hill from the high school, which sits up on a hill, to Columbia Road, and as they got to Columbia Road the light changed for people to cross the street, and it happened, as fate would have it, that the second car in line, waiting for the light to change, was a car in which this black man, Haitian, was riding by himself. It was early in the morning, and one of the people in the crowd saw him and said, "There's a nigger. Let's get him." And so they attacked his car. He couldn't move his car forward. He couldn't move it backward. So he got out of the car and ran. They chased this man through the streets of South Boston, and they finally caught him on a porch trying to get into a house. Nobody would open a door for him. And he was beaten with sticks and bottles.

At South Boston High School, it was a quiet day. At UMass we had each of the kids fill out a questionnaire describing to us any problems they had had, whether anybody had mistreated them and if so, who it was. We asked them for their name and their address and the phone number and the school they had attended the year before and the names of any witnesses and so forth, and a simple description of the problem they had. It was just a one-page form. It was an eight-and-a-half-by-fourteen-inch form, legal size. And every one of the kids did fill these out, and there was so much going on I didn't have time to read them that day.

About a week later, I was sitting in my office one night and I reached into my briefcase and here were these forms. So, I took them out and I began, sort of absently, to read through them, and it was like being hit with a sledgehammer. It was an experience I'll never forget as long as I live. As I read through one after another of these forms, what I saw was that these kids couldn't spell. They could not write a simple, declaratory sentence. They couldn't spell the name of their street. They couldn't spell the name of their community. They couldn't spell *Roxbury*. They couldn't spell *Boston* as in South Boston. They couldn't spell *high* as in high school. They couldn't spell *Negro*. They couldn't spell *black*, they couldn't spell *nigger*. And as I read these forms, none of which were grammatically correct or the spelling proper, I just started to cry. It was impossible to explain the feeling of pain, on the one hand, but on the other hand, I knew we were right. We had to get those kids out of those schools and this proved it.

The beating of the Haitian man, André Yvon Jean-Louis, occurred on October 7, 1974, and served to heighten racial tensions even further. Soon after, the violence in South Boston was echoed in Roxbury, when black high school students took to the streets and hurled rocks at white passersby.

On October 9, President Gerald Ford—who had been sworn in two months earlier, when Richard Nixon resigned over the Watergate scandal—stated at a press conference that he deplored the violence in Boston. Then he added, "I have consistently opposed forced busing to achieve racial balance as a solution to quality education. And therefore, I respectfully disagree with the judge's order." The next day Mayor White told the press that he, too, opposed "forced busing." The mayor then stated, "But I believe it is the basic responsibility of any elected

public official to support fully with all his resources any law as long as it is our law."

Meanwhile, the violence continued for the students who attended South Boston High School.

PHYLLIS ELLISON

On a normal day there would be anywhere between ten and fifteen fights. You could walk down the corridor and a black person would bump into a white person or vice versa. That would be one fight. And they'd try to separate us, because at that time there was so much tension in the school that one fight could just have the school dismissed for the entire day because it would just lead to another and another and another.

You can't imagine how tense it was inside the classroom. A teacher was almost afraid to say the wrong thing, because they knew that that would excite the whole class, a disturbance in the classroom. The black students sat on one side of the classes. The white students sat on the other side of the classes. The teachers didn't want to assign seating because there may be some problems in the classrooms. So the teachers basically let the students sit where they wanted to sit. In the lunchrooms, the black students sat on one side. The white students sat on the other side. And the ladies' room. It was the same thing. The black students went to the right of the ladies' room; the white students went to the left of the ladies' room. So really, it was separate. I mean, we attended the same school, but we really never did anything together. Gym classes. If the blacks wanted to play basketball, the whites wanted to play volleyball. So we never played together. They would play volleyball. We would play basketball.

Kathy Downs Stapleton was a white senior who chose to finish high school at South Boston.

KATHY DOWNS STAPLETON

I did not boycott. I stayed out of school when a majority of children stayed out of school—mostly for safety reasons on days that I didn't think that it was safe to be in the building, or it was not a good idea. But, basically, I did try to go.

There was pressure from all sorts of people, from the media as well as the civic groups. Nobody said, "Don't do this. Don't act up. This isn't nice." People wanted to see a story. People encouraged it. Nobody said, "Don't do this." Political people said, "You children should boycott. You children should not do this. This is not right." "This is the mayor or this is the police. Don't do this." And so it put pressure on everybody. No one knew the right thing to do. I mean, I wanted to go to school. I was trying to go to school, but I resented people telling me I shouldn't be in the school. I resented people telling us where we should go to school. And I hated picking up the paper every day and seeing it in the paper. It was really kind of a disgrace. I'm very proud of my community, but I did not like what I saw on the media. I think it hurt us all. The attention was negative. The kids were the ones being hurt and being told what to do. I mean, kids will do what they're told, usually. These adults say we shouldn't go to school, let's not go to school today. Or we should do this, or we should fight, or we should stand up for ourselves. But it was not coming from the kids within. I think we were all being pulled in many different directions between what was right and what was wrong.

ALAN LUPO

It was an ironic thing to watch and listen to the people actively opposing busing. A number of them said, essentially, "If Martin Luther King was a hero for sitting on the street, or blocking traffic, or picketing or demonstrating, how come we're not heroes? How come the media are treating us differently than it did the white college students who opposed Vietnam, or the blacks who had sit-ins?" Some people were very sincere when they raised that question. They felt there was no difference. They felt they were demonstrating for their homes, their neighborhoods, their children, their view of education. Their civil rights. Some people, I fear, were not so sincere—perhaps some of the leaders who thought they were being cute, and may or may not have seen any parallels, but decided to run that guilt trip on the media, and say, "Oh, so now you're discriminating against us." So you had both. You had those who honestly saw no difference and believed that their civil rights were in danger and they had a right to

demonstrate. And you had those who were maybe playing it for all it was worth.

We were going up a hill one day in South Boston. I think it was probably the second or third or fourth week of busing. And I was with Bob Kiley, who was essentially the deputy mayor, sitting in one of the mayor's cars, heading up the hill. There had just been yet another incident. Cops, white cops, dealing with their white neighbors, and police screaming, "Get out of the way!" and mothers and fathers screaming, "Police brutality!" Sort of a replay of the white college kids fighting with cops earlier, or blacks dealing with cops in the street. History was repeating itself in interesting ways, and a crowd of kids were moving up the hill, and our window was open. And we clearly heard one kid say to another, "No, that'll be too late to make the six o'clock, but it'll be on the eleven o'clock news." And Kiley turned to me and shook his head and said, "Don't tell me these people aren't aware." In other words, they're out there for a principle, bad or good, but folks also get out because they want to be on TV. There's no question about it. Now, I would argue that were there no television, there would still have been fighting in the street. There still would have been hatred; there still would have been moments of accommodation. But the presence of the camera is startling, and for a lot of people who will have their names in the newspaper only when they die, and there will be a little paid death notice, almost anything, any kind of access to becoming a star, even for thirty seconds, is quite important to them, white or black.

On December 11, a white student was stabbed by a black student during a melee at South Boston High School.

PHYLLIS ELLISON

I remember the day Michael Faith got stabbed vividly, because I was in the principal's office and all of a sudden you heard a lot of commotion and you heard kids screaming and yelling and saying, "He's dead, he's dead. That black nigger killed him. He's dead, he's dead." And then the principal running out of the office. There was a lot of commotion and screaming, yelling, hollering, "Get the niggers at Southie." I was really afraid. And the principal came back into the office and said, Call the ambulance and tell all the black students that were in the office to stay there. A police officer was in there and they were trying to get the white students out of the building, because they had just gone on a rampage and they were just going to hurt the first black student that they saw. Anyone that was caught in the corridor that day would be hurt. Once that happened, it probably took about fifteen, twenty minutes for the police officers to get all the white students out. The black students were locked in their rooms and all the white students were let go out of their classrooms. I remember us going into a room, and outside you just saw a crowd of people, I mean, just so many people, I can't even count. They just looked like little bumblebees or something, there was that many. And that Louise Day Hicks was on top of the stairs saying, Let the niggers go back to Roxbury. Send them back to Roxbury. And the crowd booing her. I remember the police cars coming up the street, attempting to, and people turning over the police cars, and I was just amazed that they could do something like that. The police tried to get horses up. They wouldn't let the horses get up. They stoned the horses. They stoned the cars. And I thought that day that we would never get out of South Boston High School.

Police officials and leaders from the black community developed a plan to get the children out of the school.

ELLEN JACKSON

The plan was that some of us would go up on the bus. There would be at least four to five buses that would be going up the hill. And three of those buses were going to be decoy buses. We volunteered to go out, and we weren't asked to do it but we said here was a chance to prove to the parents and demonstrate as they had said to us sometime early back, "You need to be put in a position. You're sending our kids out there. You need to find out what those kids are going through." So some of us said yes. I was the only woman. At first they said I couldn't go. And I said, You all are going, I'm going. That's all there is to it. I don't think anybody's going to be able to stop me.

So we got on the bus and we tried to joke. We were lying on the floor. Percy Wilson, who was the head of [the Roxbury] Multi-Services [Center], said, "Oh, God, I thought I left these days

in Mississippi. I didn't think I would be into this kind of situation again." But we were nervous. Frankly, we were scared. But we went up, and when we got closer to the school, we could hear the noise. And it's a hollow feeling when you go up that hill. Anytime there's a noise, it seems like it goes back to the water and it's just very echoey. And we could hear the yelling. Could hear the sirens and things.

We came around the front part of the building where the people, the mob—in a sense, crazy mob—was and they could see us. We were slouching so we would look like students. We weren't sitting straight up so they could see that we were so-called adults. And while we were trying to distract them, hopefully distracting them, the two buses with the students would take another route and get down the hill.

When we started down that hill, I tell you, they rushed past the police and started rocking those buses. I know they rocked the one I was on. And as we were going down, they started throwing everything they could get in their hands. Not rocks, they looked like boulders. Seemed like someone would have to take two hands and throw these things into the bus. And we finally got down the hill, and when we got down the hill, it was complete silence on the bus. And I think a lot of us just started crying. Fear and anger and hurt. It was a real traumatic time, when I think about it. And then we started laughing because we started picking glass out of each other. Somebody leaned down and said, "There was glass in your hair. Are you okay?" "Yeah, we're okay." And people were cheering and shouting and hugging us. And you know, one of my kids was there and said, "Mommy, you shouldn't have gone up the hill, you know that was dangerous." And somebody said, "You know you're not going to stop E.J. from doing what she wants to do." And we kind of laughed and joked about it at that point. But it was a frightening thing. And it was even more frightening when we reflected on it, because we thought of what could have happened to those kids. Because here we were adults and we were scared to death. And I know those kids would have been petrified.

The decoy was successful. The black students were evacuated from South Boston High School. As it turned out, Michael Faith's wound was not fatal, but the incident intensified resistance. Less than a week later, Judge Garrity found three members of the school committee in contempt of court when they refused to come up with a permanent desegregation plan.

With no political leaders supporting busing, desegregation limped along under court order through the remaining academic year. White parents in South Boston continued to keep the majority of their children out of the schools. Two days before the new school year, Mayor Kevin White promised that the city would pay the costs for appealing Judge Garrity's desegregation order to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Attendance during the autumn of 1975 at South Boston High School was low, but 216 white students showed up for classes the first day (three times more than the previous year). Tension remained high and the school continued to operate under tight security. White flight from the schools had intensified. Fifty-three percent of the students in the system were now nonwhite, though they represented 25 percent of the overall population.

On December 9, 1975, Judge Garrity placed South Boston High School in receivership. It would no longer be run by the school committee. Instead, it would be run by the court. The entire administrative staff at the school was to be transferred.

RUTH BATSON

I believe that putting South Boston High School into receivership was the turning point in this whole case. I had long felt that this was an important step to take. And after my first trip to South Boston High School in October 1974, I came back to our group at Freedom House and I said, "I want to write a letter to the judge saying to the judge that we have to put South Boston High School into receivership." And they said, "Oh, Ruth, he'll never do that. It's just a waste of time. He'll never do it." And I really pushed my argument. And they said, "No, we'll just aggravate the situation. They'll never do that." Well, always being the kind of person that would follow through on what I felt, I said, "Well, I'm going to write the judge on my own." So I wrote the judge a letter in October saying to him that I had been out to South Boston High School and one of the things that I believed was that this thing would never be solved at the rate it was going because the people in South Boston felt that this was their school, that they owned this building. Somehow they had paid money for it. It was their school. And as long as this was the situation, this was never going to be solved. And I pointed out to him the kinds of things that I

had seen happen in the school. And so I said to him, "Judge Garrity, I really believe that this school will have to be put into receivership. Take it out of the hands of the people of South Boston, have an outside group look at it and handle it until we get over this crunch." Well, lo and behold, it was really a big day for me when the judge came out with the ruling that South Boston was going into receivership. Now, I'm not by any stretch of the imagination saying that he was influenced at all by a letter that I would have sent, but it thrilled me to have this happen, because for once, I said, somebody is looking at this situation realistically.

In the spring of 1976, President Ford and his solicitor general, Robert Bork, were considering lending the federal government's support to Boston's antibusing forces in their attempt to appeal Judge Garrity's order.

THOMAS ATKINS

In 1976 you had Gerald Ford in the White House. He wound up there by accident, and increasingly people thought he *was* an accident. But he was the president. And he was trying to bring the country together but he also wanted to stay there. He wanted to run for reelection. And it was at about the time that he was getting his campaign put together and Democrats were running around the country calling each other names, as they always do, that one of the many appeals in the Boston school desegregation case wound its way up to the Supreme Court. And the issue presented to a Supreme Court that had not yet ever accepted an appeal dealing with the Boston school desegregation issue was whether it should accept this appeal. We did not want the Supreme Court to accept the appeal. We thought that it would be the wrong message to send. So we organized, primarily under the leadership of Clarence Mitchell, who was then the NAACP's longtime lobbyist, head of its Washington bureau, and affectionately known to many as the hundred and first senator. Clarence Mitchell knew Gerald Ford from years and years of working with him. And he put together a meeting with the president, including Attorney General Edward Levi.

The meeting was a very, very tense one. I wasn't at the meeting because at that time I was trying the Columbus school desegregation case that I would ultimately argue three years later at the Supreme Court. But I got a rather copious report on the meeting. The NAACP's position was that whatever Gerald Ford's position was on busing, which he continued to say he was opposed to, that he could only have one position on the question of enforcing constitutional rights and that position had to be the same as Eisenhower had had when he sent troops into Little Rock. And Clarence Mitchell lectured Gerald Ford on the importance then of Eisenhower having done that and of how history had put him in a position to do the same thing. He said, "Mr. President, you can't support this challenge, because if you do, you send a message that the Constitution can be annulled by violent opposition." And it was an argument that both the president and the attorney general agreed overrode everything else. As a result of which the position that was taken by the United States on that issue was that the Supreme Court should not grant certiorari and it, certiorari, was not granted. The appeal was rejected.

I think it's important to note that there probably has not been another school desegregation case, either before or after Boston, in which as many individual orders have been issued. The count now is well in excess of four hundred. And the Supreme Court of the United States has never accepted an appeal from any one of those orders. Never. And it never will, for the reason that it too believes that lawlessness cannot be rewarded by making it respectable.

Phyllis Ellison graduated from South Boston High School in June 1977.

PHYLLIS ELLISON

I didn't go to my prom because I felt that it was an all-white prom. The black students had no input in the planning of the prom whatsoever. So it was as if we didn't exist. And there wasn't enough black students to vote against the white students because there was more white students attending than black. So we had no voice. We had no say-so. And we didn't want to attend. So we

boycotted, and there wasn't one black student that attended the prom in '77.

If I had it to do all over again, for the civil rights part of it, I would do it over, because I felt like my rights were being violated by the white people of South Boston telling me that I could not go to South Boston High School. As far as my education, I think I could have gotten a better education if I didn't spend so much time out of school with the fighting and the violence and being dismissed from school at least once or twice a week. We were allowed to go home early because there was just so much tension inside of the school that if we didn't, someone may be killed or really seriously injured. I think that I could have gotten a better education if I'd spent more time in school than out of school at that time.

RUTH BATSON

One of the things that I was concerned about was the fact that just because you were black, you were told that you couldn't go there. "This was *my* school. This was our place. You can't come here." I thought that a great educational achievement had been made to show both white and black kids that they could go anywhere they wanted to. That there should be no school in the city of Boston that would not admit a child because of their color. So I considered it an educational achievement that that had taken place. I really did. It always used to kill me to think that I couldn't go into a place in Boston just because I was black, and that if I went there, something would happen to me.

Had I had any say in the selections of communities beforehand—at least some of us thought afterwards that it had been a mistake that we hadn't been more active—I would have said not to send them to South Boston. But after it was done and people wanted to go protest, then we thought about it and we said, "Well, they should be able to go anyplace they want, anywhere."

When you saw what the kids had to go through—I was just as proud of some of the white kids that stuck through it, because there were white families who made their kids go and stay in that school.

Kids had to go through metal detectors, and police were all over the place, and there was such ridicule in the halls. I thought that the kids who went through this were just wonderful kids. And most of them weren't kids with great marks or anything. They were just kids who were determined. There was a movement. And they felt part of a movement. We haven't seen anything like that since, I don't think.

In November 1977, Louise Day Hicks lost her seat on the city council. In that same election, John O'Bryant became the first black member of the Boston School Committee in seventy-six years.