

Would *Brown* make it to New York City?

The First Phase of the Battle for Public School Integration, 1954-1957

When Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren handed down the *Brown* decision on May 17, 1954 declaring the doctrine of “separate but equal” unconstitutional, the ruling sent shockwaves around the world. The far-reaching implications of the decision were not lost on anyone as opinions on the *Brown* mandate included a wide spectrum of viewpoints. Across the South, whether in Jackson, Mississippi—a bastion of racial intolerance¹—or Greensboro, North Carolina—a city that had a reputation for moderation in racial matters²—, white public opinion in the immediate aftermath of the decision ran the gamut from unequivocal defiance to calls for compliance. Southern white public opinion had not hardened against the *Brown* decision in the middle of 1954 the way that it eventually would by 1957.

While white communities in various places showed a range of reactions to the mandate, black communities were no more monolithic. In Atlanta “there were no street celebrations in Negro communities.” In fact, students at Spelman College questioned what effect the decision would have on historically black colleges and universities.³ While the Mississippi branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had consistently opposed segregation, black principals and teachers were more ambivalent about the decision.⁴

Blacks and whites alike were anxious about how the future would be different now. Concern not only imbedded itself in the national consciousness below the Mason-Dixon line. Northern cities and school boards were also forced to evaluate the extent to which they would have to change their institutional policies in order to comply with *Brown*.

The changes wrought on the North by that fateful May 17, 1954 ruling—both as a region and in specific northern cities—are not often addressed in general studies of the modern civil rights movement. Traditionally, the fight for equal rights during the 1950s and 1960s has been conceptualized as a southern phenomenon that began to have relevance for the North (and West) only after 1965, with the emergence of black power ideology and the move away from the tactics of non-violent direct action. However, understanding how events in the North dovetailed with and diverged from what was happening in the South is critical to more fully understanding the impact and legacy of the national civil rights struggle. The movement was a nationwide campaign and shifting the focus of historical study to the North, particularly during the immediate post-*Brown* period, alters our understanding of the movement's trajectory.⁵ Similar struggles were taking place in both regions, but within different cultural contexts. In this early period, the movement was operating from a similar ideological viewpoint in both the North and the South; racial integration in all social arenas was a positive goal, worthy of pursuing.

After *Brown*, segregation in the nation's public schools became the number one topic for debate, public policy, and protest all over the nation, not only the South. Only weeks after the decision, noted psychologist Dr. Kenneth Clark once again accused the New York City Board of Education of "permitting 'Jim Crow' practices at some of its schools."⁶ Dr. Clark, whose findings that segregated schools caused inferiority complexes in African American children had been critical in the *Brown* case, had condemned Board of Education policies before May of 1954. He argued that the de facto segregation of New York City's system had been as effective at "damning up the source of future intellectual functioning" as legal segregation. Black and Puerto Rican children, chronically unprepared for academic secondary schooling, were left to blame themselves and their alleged inferiority for their academic underachievement.⁷ Clark's

statement was not only an indictment of the fact that significant integration was not taking place in the public schools, but also a charge of years of neglect—willful or not—on the part of the Board toward “ghetto” schools.

The Board just as adamantly denied that there was any legal segregation in the public schools.⁸ And it was correct; legal segregation did not exist in New York City’s public schools. But Clark did have evidence of Board-sanctioned racial segregation. An October 21 *New York Herald-Tribune* article uncovered a policy in northern Manhattan where white families were allowed to send their children to a predominantly white school, PS 169, outside of their district instead of their zoned school, PS 46, which had a predominantly African American student body. The Board of Education even provided bus transportation to PS 169 for the white students when PS 46 was within walking distance to their homes.⁹

School Superintendent, William Jansen, could not deny that white children were being bused a mile away from their homes to PS 169.¹⁰ So finally in May of 1955, the Board of Education began to do something about it. Assistant Superintendent, Truda Weil, devised a plan to gradually eliminate this “permissive zone” by September of 1956.¹¹ Dr. Clark used the situation in Upper Manhattan to dramatize the larger flaws of the educational system, but he also hoped that the recently authorized Public Education Association study would do more to illustrate the need for Board action in favor of integration. The revelation of Board-sanctioned busing at PS 169 was particularly damning because busing young children out of their immediate area flew directly in the face of the “neighborhood school” concept that the Board held so dear.

The Board believed it desirable for children to attend schools closest to their homes—particularly in the elementary grades. Officials contended that “neighborhood schools” promoted safety and familiarity because children would be attending school in the areas and with

the people they knew best. However, the neighborhood school concept was at odds with integration because residential patterns in the city were such that most neighborhoods were racially and ethnically homogeneous. Therefore, schools in many communities tended to be comprised of a particular racial or ethnic group.

In the wake of the *Brown* ruling and the repeated critiques of Dr. Clark and others, even before the busing of white students to PS 169 was exposed, the Board of Education requested that the Public Education Association (PEA), a private educational research group, conduct a study of public school education among Negro and Puerto Rican children.¹² Rose Shapiro headed up the study.¹³ In addition, the Board of Education also established the Commission on Integration (CI) on December 23, 1954. The Board released a powerful statement of its intent to comply with *Brown* when it announced the formation of the special commission.¹⁴

Creating the Commission on Integration was an important step towards school integration. The Board's policy statement served several purposes. By calling *Brown v. Board of Education* a "moral reaffirmation of our fundamental educational principles," the Board implied that a tradition of racial and ethnic integration had existed in New York City schools before 1954.¹⁵ The statement also framed the quest for integration as a national rather than regional problem. And by acknowledging the cruelty of de facto segregation and accepting the challenge to eliminate it, the Board pledged that it would make every attempt to comply with the Supreme Court decision. Proponents of integration had to be optimistic about the prospects of school integration. However, the next few years would show all too clearly that genuine racial integration required much more than zeal and commission studies. Battles over integrating schools and providing minority schools with better personnel would end in frustration for civil rights organizations and black and Puerto Rican parents.

The Commission on Integration consisted of the nine members of the Board of Education, five school administrators, and twenty-three civic and educational leaders, including Ella Baker of the NAACP and Kenneth Clark. After their initial meeting in April 1955, the CI divided itself into seven sub-commissions in order to study specific aspects of the school system and report back to the Board with recommendations on how to improve the schools and foster integration.¹⁶

The Public Education Association submitted its independent report on educational conditions in the public schools in November of 1955. The study found that 71 percent of city schools were comprised of student populations that were either ninety or more percent white or ninety or more percent black and Puerto Rican. The PEA study revealed five major findings. When compared to predominantly white schools, the schools that were overwhelmingly black and Puerto Rican tended to: 1) be located in older buildings with less than satisfactory floor and playground spaces; 2) have less tenured faculty members, a higher proportion of probationary teachers, and higher teacher turnover rates; 3) offer more “classes for retarded children” and “fewer classes for bright children;” 4) have lower standardized test scores; and 5) have larger average class sizes for their mainstreamed students.¹⁷ All signs indicated that, whether or not the reasons were calculated in origin, African American and Puerto Rican youth were being deprived of adequate educations by the New York City school system.

However, the PEA also emphasized, in agreement with Board leaders, that there were many factors inhibiting integration outside of the Board’s control.¹⁸ On November 7, 1955, the day after the report was approved, the *New York Times*’ headline read, “City Schools Cleared in Segregation Study”¹⁹ and the *New York World Telegram*’s headline read, “School Board Cleared in Segregation Issue: Survey Finds Racial Concentration of Pupils Due to Residence Patterns.”²⁰

Kenneth Clark, among others, was infuriated by the media's interpretation that the Board had been exonerated from responsibility for current conditions in the schools. On November 12 he responded in the press, calling the PEA press release "an attempted whitewash." "That the Board of Education has been cleared is a misinterpretation of the report," and he further charged that "verbal tricks [had been] used to mislead the public."²¹

Although the "whitewash" metaphor was, perhaps, unfortunate, the point was that Board of Education had indeed been indicted for not providing equal education for all of New York's children. Clark refused to let it be lost on anyone that in New York, as cosmopolitan a city as any in the world, segregation existed in the public schools. Therefore, officials at the Board of Education and city residents had no more superior claim on enlightenment than their southern counterparts that openly endorsed segregation. Conditions in the schools, and for blacks and Puerto Ricans generally in New York, were still not equal with whites.²²

For Kenneth Clark, the CI, and other groups such as the Brooklyn NAACP, the struggle for school integration was not just about black and white children attending classes in the same building. The more imperative issue was guaranteeing high quality educational programs for all children, which they all believed could only happen in an integrated setting.²³ In the report it submitted to the Board of Education in the summer of 1956²⁴ the CI sub-commission on "Educational Standards and Curriculum," which Clark chaired, argued that in order to foster integration and improve the quality of education for all of New York City's children, the educational standards, physical plant, and quality of personnel hired in minority schools would need to be raised dramatically.²⁵ Disparities in standards and achievement levels between predominantly minority and predominantly white schools spoke to another fundamental problem

in the school system: inequalities in educational standards and philosophies toward teaching students of color that were, at their core, racist.

For the Board to endorse the recommendations from the Commission subcommittees was one thing, but the Brooklyn NAACP's Schools Workshop would provide the Board with its first true test when they challenged the Board to actively work to integrate Junior High School 258 (JHS 258) in the borough's Bedford-Stuyvesant section. Annie Stein was one of the group's principal leaders. She had been a labor organizer and had also served on the Office of Price Administration price panel during the Second World War. Before her passion for eliminating racial discrimination and her interest in educational issues led her to join the Brooklyn branch of the NAACP, she had also been president of the Parent Teacher Association of Junior High School 246 in Brooklyn.²⁶

Reverend Milton A. Galamison was the other major leader of the Schools Workshop. He had been the pastor of the Siloam Presbyterian Church since 1948. Galamison was elected chair of the Brooklyn NAACP's education committee in December of 1955 and it was in this capacity during the battle to integrate JHS 258 that he appeared on the local civil rights scene. Over the next decade Galamison would become one of the most important civil rights activists working for school integration in New York City.²⁷

The Schools Workshop²⁸ was a mass group that worked through existing parent and teacher groups to educate parents about issues concerning Brooklyn's public schools. The Schools Workshop mobilized support for action through education. Stein believed that the more parents knew about Board of Education policies, the more involved they would become. In that way, the Workshop gave Brooklyn parents a vehicle through which to contest Board policies.²⁹

Galamison, Stein, and the parents of the NAACP Schools Workshop saw the integration of JHS 258 as essential to demonstrating the Board of Education's commitment to racial integration. But as of November 1956, the Board was not keeping its promise to integrate JHS 258. Of nearly 1,100 students, only between 12-15 (or 1 percent) were white.³⁰ The Board had made different promises to various constituencies. While Superintendent Jansen told civil rights organizations that the Board would work to integrate JHS 258,³¹ he also worked to assuage white parents' fears by assuring them no "radical" changes would take place within the system.

Galamison claimed that the Board purposefully segregated black and Puerto Rican students from white students in the same neighborhood by zoning them to different schools. He advocated that white and black students be redistributed among Bedford-Stuyvesant's schools not simply for the purposes of integration, but because he believed this was the only way to guarantee that the educational standards and facilities would be upgraded to provide minority children with better educational opportunities.³²

Jansen maintained that some progress toward integration had been made, but that massive racial integration would be virtually impossible because JHS 258 was located in the heart of Bedford-Stuyvesant, an overwhelmingly black neighborhood.³³ It was only in the "fringe"³⁴ areas, not in the black neighborhoods, that Board leaders believed the most substantial integration could take place. Rather than actively work to integrate JHS 258, Jansen pledged to provide the school with additional services.³⁵ The Brooklyn NAACP was not satisfied with Jansen's response. The branch sent an open letter to Superintendent Jansen saying that any statements from the Board of Education on progress in integrating JHS 258 were an "attempt to evade" its responsibility to integrate the school.³⁶

Jansen, however, stood behind the Board's concept of the "neighborhood school." Since residential patterns were segregated, the neighborhood school concept hindered integration. But by affirming neighborhood schools, school officials were ideologically at odds with the civil rights movement. As historian Clarence Taylor writes, "Jansen's and Silver's offer [of additional services] indicated their belief that they could provide black and Puerto Rican children with a decent education in a segregated setting, thus ignoring Galamison's assertion of the urgency to end segregation because children could not properly learn under such conditions."³⁷

Galamison tried to keep the pressure on the Board to integrate JHS 258 in November of 1956 by going to Mayor Robert Wagner and requesting that he ask for Jansen's resignation; informing him that unless something was done to "clean up" the situation at JHS 258, he had 25,000 African Americans ready to vote Republican in the next election. Eight days later the Board announced that it would study the student population at JHS 258 and attached a resolution "reaffirm[ing] the Board's intention to achieve racial integration in the schools."³⁸ Bedford-Stuyvesant Assistant Superintendent, Joseph Noethen, reported that hundreds of children in schools in and around Bedford-Stuyvesant had been shifted in the interest of integration.³⁹

Galamison continued his efforts to make Jansen and the Board of Education accountable for not acting in the spirit or the letter of *Brown v. Board*. In February 1957, at a symposium sponsored by the Americans for Democratic Action, Galamison again questioned the "board's willingness to take positive steps to integration."⁴⁰ Still in September of 1957 Galamison was challenging the Board to act affirmatively to integrate JHS 258. Black and Puerto Rican parents organized a protest asserting that no significant progress had been made in the case of JHS 258 and New York City more generally, but ultimately, this first major test to get the Board to move to actively integrate a school was unsuccessful.⁴¹

A simultaneous, and equally intense fight was spurred by the efforts to equalize the ratio of certified to substitute teachers in minority schools. Not only the PEA study, but also the CI reports cited the disproportionate number of uncertified and substitute teachers in minority schools as a critical problem that needed to be rectified. At the start of the 1957 school year only 18 teachers out of 70 at JHS 258 had regular licenses. Twenty-two teachers were substitutes and the remaining thirty came in on waivers from elementary schools.⁴² Unfortunately, the staff makeup of JHS 258 was typical of public schools in African American and Puerto Rican communities. The PEA, CI, and parents organizations such as the United Parents Association all had suggestions for how to remedy this problem, which usually revolved around teacher rotation.

A report on teacher assignments, prepared by the Commission on Integration in the fall of 1956, was a lightning rod for criticism by teacher groups, including the New York Teachers Guild (NYTG), the Joint Committee of Teachers Organizations (JCTO), and the High School Teachers Association (HSTA). All of these organizations had predominantly white membership rosters, particularly at the highest levels of leadership. And well before programs of voluntary and compulsory teacher rotation were considered by the Board of Education, these groups had already created a flurry of opposition.⁴³

The report on Teacher Assignments, presented and approved by the executive committee of the Commission on December 6, 1956, faced criticism from teachers for several reasons.⁴⁴ One recommendation requiring three years of service in a “difficult school”⁴⁵ to be eligible for promotions prompted the High School Teachers Association to answer back that “promotion should depend on ‘probable ability to do a job established by meritorious service and open competition’ and not on ‘willingness to act as a guard for several years.’”⁴⁶ Apparently, teaching

in a “difficult”—read “black and Puerto Rican”—school would not only be degrading, but akin to being a warden in a prison.

Teacher organizations did offer many of the same suggestions as the sub-commission report on how to staff “difficult schools,” but other recommendations, although perhaps appearing innocuous, upon closer inspection, smacked of the racism evident in the linkage between minority schools and penitentiaries. The teachers’ associations asked for a \$400 per year bonus for taking these assignments.⁴⁷ Another suggestion was to increase the bonus to \$480 per year on par with teachers in “600” schools (The “600” schools were for children who were one step removed from juvenile detention centers and prison).⁴⁸ Asking for more pay to teach in these mainstreamed public schools demonstrated that these teachers looked at black and Puerto Rican children as inherently more difficult to teach than white students. The Board rejected this request, saying that “a subject school is not a school for delinquents.”⁴⁹

Teacher groups also recommended that special classes be set up for emotionally disturbed students. But Kenneth Clark and the staff at the Northside Center proved that schools were, already, often too quick to place young people of color in classes for children with retarded mental development (CRMD). Dr. Clark pointed out in 1954 that in Harlem public schools there were 103 CRMD classes but only six classes for intellectually gifted students.⁵⁰ According to Clark, “most stay in their regular classes that ‘meet their ability.’ Little is expected of them, they are rewarded for mediocre performance, and consequently accomplish increasingly less than students at their grade level should accomplish.”⁵¹ In fact, classes that were supposed to “meet the ability” of students were often inhibiting in the long run because they were not challenging enough. The PEA study found that some schools “watered down” their curriculums because teachers did not believe students could meet the higher standards.⁵²

The Board of Education did finally approve the report on teacher assignments in late February of 1957, but with a curious disclaimer reserving the “privilege of interpreting the meaning attached to certain terms and phrases, of further studying and exploring the merits of specific recommendations and of resolving the administrative problems which necessarily arise in carrying out any policy for a school system as complex as that of New York City.”⁵³

Therefore, it was difficult to know exactly what the Board was and was not endorsing and what it was and was not going to try and implement.⁵⁴ Their equivocal language typified the Board’s continual effort to appease all sides without taking firm action.

Eventually the Board of Education yielded to the resistance of teacher groups and refused to implement a plan of voluntary or mandatory rotation. Come September 1957, only a few teachers volunteered for posts in “subject schools.” In the battle between teacher groups and civil rights groups, the Board capitulated to teacher groups, even though, as city employees, “the Board of Education should have had the right to assign them where they were needed.”⁵⁵ Therefore, predominantly African American and Puerto Rican schools in 1957—as they had before 1954—still lacked an equitable ratio of tenured teachers to substitutes and the quality of instruction in many schools continued to suffer. And unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the Board never addressed the racist attitudes of the Teachers Guild, the JCTO, or the HSTA.

By September of 1957 JHS 258 still had not been integrated and the effort to remedy the paucity of qualified teachers in majority non-white schools was all but lost. Integration of the school system was proceeding at a snail’s pace, at best, and many argued that the Board of Education was failing to integrate the schools at all.⁵⁶ The patience of black and Puerto Rican parents, as well as civil rights leaders was all but gone, as the atmosphere of cautious optimism that existed less than a year earlier⁵⁷ had evaporated.

In much of the South, white opposition to *Brown* had hardened to the point of crystallization by the end of 1956. In Greensboro, the token integration that had taken place came to represent more a defeat than a victory, as the support for compliance that existed three years earlier was unable to triumph.⁵⁸ The Mississippi state legislature passed a resolution declaring the *Brown* decision “invalid, unconstitutional, and of not lawful effect” by a vote of 136 to 0 while singing Dixie . . . literally.⁵⁹ And then, of course, there was Little Rock.⁶⁰

Although the New York City Board of Education never pledged outright defiance of the Supreme Court decision as in Mississippi or Arkansas, the fact is that by the end of 1957 New York had not complied. Even with the reports of the Commission on Integration and a relatively liberal board of education, implementing most of their recommendations was proving impossible. Staunch commitment to the neighborhood school concept was a major hindrance. Residential segregation was an even more acute problem.⁶¹ Board representatives cited racial concentration in residential patterns time and again as the biggest obstacle to integrating the schools.

However, just as big a problem was the Board's propensity to try and appease all the parties involved in the integration battle. The Board spent considerable time and energy portraying itself as an ardent proponent of integration while simultaneously trying to convince oppositional parent and teacher groups that whatever changes took place would not be too radical. While establishing the CI and endorsing most of its recommendations, it made vague just how those recommendations would be used. Those tactics inevitably limited the potential actions of the Board until it became paralyzed and unable to effect significant change at all. In trying to satisfy all sides, the Board ultimately satisfied no one. When Superintendent Jansen retired in 1958, that may have made some happy, but the movement to integrate the schools did

not necessarily improve, it merely entered a new phase, as would the civil rights movement nationwide.

¹ John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 37. In Mississippi, rabid segregationist Senator James Eastland retorted that “the South will not abide by nor obey this legislative decision of a political court. . . . We will take whatever steps are necessary to retain segregation in education.”

² William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 13. In Greensboro, the school board voted six to one to endorse a proposal by Chairman D. Edward Hudgins “committing Greensboro to implement the Supreme Court desegregation edict.” Greensboro school superintendent Benjamin Smith agreed with Hudgins. “‘It is unthinkable,’ he said, ‘that we will try to abrogate the laws of the United States of America.’ Any effort to evade the decision, Smith declared, would be a disaster to the country and signify the end of democracy.” On May 19 the city’s largest paper applauded the decision of the school board to come to terms with the Supreme Court mandate. The response to *Brown* in Greensboro seemed to bode well for the prospect of integration there.

³ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1988), 112-3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-7. These employees had no job protection, and under the control of white school boards, they could easily be fired for taking a pro-integration position. Besides that, the segregated educational system had benefited a select few blacks by providing them with a livelihood and elevated social prestige within the black community.

⁵ I am paraphrasing Dr. Wendell Pritchett from a paper he gave at a conference on civil rights in New York City at Baruch College. His presentation completely altered my conceptualization of the civil rights movement.

⁶ “Racial Unity Set for City Schools,” *New York Times*, 24 December 1954; Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), 251.

⁷ Speech delivered by Kenneth Clark at “Children Apart” conference, New York, 24 April 1954, 12. From Board of Education Papers, Series 456, “Superintendent of Schools, William Jansen, Subject Files: Racial Discrimination,” box 1, folder 2a, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. From here on this collection will be referred to as “Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination.” Clark argued, “it is no longer necessary to have specific techniques for gerrymandering schools and excluding Negro children from academic and other specialized schools. These children are not prepared to pass the tests for these . . . schools. This is a most effective form of racial exclusion. It is exclusion by damming up the source of future intellectual functioning. These children, by virtue of inadequate elementary education, can not compete academically with other children on the high school level. Under these conditions the child can blame no one but himself and his alleged and created inferiority.”

⁸ Jansen to Clark, 14 June 1954. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, box 1, folder 2a, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York; “Javits and Levitt Speak in Harlem,” *New York Times*, 26 October 1954.

⁹ “Clark Cites Several Examples of School Segregation Here,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, 21 October 1954. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, box 1, folder 2a, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. In the same article Clark also brought up the case of Forest Hills High School in Queens, in which he argued black students were being deliberately rejected on the basis of race. In his response to Clark, Jansen refuted Clark’s claim that only African American children were being rejected at Forest Hills High School. Jansen maintained that both white and black youngsters were being turned away from the school, not due to any racial factors, but because the school was overcrowded.

¹⁰ Jansen to Clark, 25 October 1954. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, box 1, folder 2a, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

¹¹ Truda Weil to Rose Shapiro, 11 May 1955. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, box 1, folder 3, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. Weil assured Shapiro that this practice had begun before she had been assigned to the district. Weil’s plan called for the elimination of the “permissive zone” for kindergarteners, first graders, and all incoming students, no matter the grade level beginning in September of 1955. These students would go to PS 46 and the number of students being bussed would fall dramatically from 174 to 43. Beginning in September of 1956, only pupils already enrolled in grades 3 through 6 at

PS 169 would be allowed to remain in the school. Weil also informed Shapiro that all the elementary schools between West 150th and West 213th streets would be re-zoned in September of 1956.

¹² "Racial Unity," *New York Times*, 24 December 1954; Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 252.

¹³ Rose Shapiro to Charles Silver, "Report of Progress: PEA Study of Equality in Education." Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, box 1, folder 3, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. The PEA gathered information by extensively interviewing top school officials, distributing questionnaires, studying select elementary and junior high schools in depth, and collecting information from administrators, including 25 superintendents—including Truda Weil—and 50 principals.

¹⁴ "Preliminary Statement of Board of Education Resolution for Action," 23 December 1954. "We interpret the May 17th decision of the United States Supreme Court as a legal and moral reaffirmation of our fundamental educational principles. We recognize it . . . as a challenge to Boards throughout the nation, in Northern as well as Southern communities, to re-examine the racial composition of the schools within their respective systems in order to determine whether they conform to the standards stated clearly by that Court.

"The Supreme Court . . . reminds us that modern psychological knowledge indicates clearly that segregated, racially homogeneous schools damage the personality of minority group children. These schools decrease their motivation and thus impair their ability to learn. White children are damaged too.

"Public education in a racially homogeneous setting is socially unrealistic and blocks the attainment of the goals of democratic education, whether this segregation occurs by law or by fact. In seeking to provide effective democratic education for all the children of this city, the members of the Board of Education . . . are faced with many real obstacles in the form of complex social and community problems. . . . [T]he board is determined to accept the challenge implicit in the language and spirit of the decision. We will seek a solution to these problems and take action with dispatch, implementing the recommendations resulting from a systematic and objective study of the problem here presented." "Preliminary Statement of Board of Education Resolution for Action," 23 December 1954.

¹⁵ Board of Education of the City of New York, *Toward Greater Opportunity: A Progress Report from the Superintendent of Schools to the Board of Education dealing with Implementation of Recommendations of the Commission on Integration* (June 1960), 3. From the Board of Education Papers, Series 261, "Commission on Integration Papers," box 5, folder 41, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. From here on this collection will be referred to as "Commission on Integration Papers." The Board of Education maintained that it had been working toward the integration of its high schools since 1940.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Included on the panel were representatives of national organizations such as Ella Baker of the NAACP; heads of regional and local groups such as Rose Shapiro; representatives of parents associations; and other educational and civic leaders including Dr. Kenneth Clark. Other prominent members of the Commission on Integration included: Wolfgang Schwabacher of the Urban League of Greater New York, Reverend Edicer N. Rodriguez of the Council of Spanish-American Organizations of Greater New York, Lillian Ashe of the United Parents Association (UPA), Augusta E. Flagg of the Brooklyn Federation of Parent Teacher Associations, Joan Hood of the Staten Island Federation of Parent Teacher Associations, and attorney, Thomas Dyett.

¹⁷ Board of Education of the City of New York, *Toward Greater Opportunity*, 3. Commission on Integration Papers, Series 261, box 5, folder 41, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Leonard Buder, "City Schools Cleared in Segregation Study," *New York Times*, 7 November 1955.

²⁰ Helen T. Emery, "School Board Cleared in Segregation Issue: Survey Finds Racial Concentration of Pupils Due to Residence Patterns," *New York Times*, 7 November 1955.

²¹ "Dr. Clark Blasts Zoning of Negro as School's 'Out,'" *New York Age*, 12 November 1955.

²² Tillman Durdin, "Barriers for Negro Here Still High Despite Gains," *New York Times*, 23 April 1956.

²³ Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 111.

²⁴ Lynn Farnol to Commission on Integration, n.d. Commission on Integration Papers, Series 261, box 5, folder 49, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. By the fall of 1956 two other CI sub-commissions had also submitted reports on "Physical Plant and Maintenance" and "Guidance, Educational Stimulation, and Placement" which were approved by the Board.

²⁵ Without these essential upgrades white parents would continue to be justified in opposing the transfer of their children to schools in black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods because they would be sacrificing the quality of their children's educations. Rather than support integration, white families would continue to react to efforts to integrate previously all-white or all-black elementary and junior high schools by either moving to suburban communities or

withdrawing from public education and placing their children in private or parochial schools. Clark realized that attempts had to be made to stem white flight from the public school system as the schools could only be integrated if white students remained (Kenneth Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 111).

White students were not remaining in the public schools. The demographic makeup of the public schools and of the city was changing rapidly. Between 1950 and 1958 there were 835,000 in-migrants to New York City; mostly immigrants, Puerto Ricans, or southern blacks moving north. However, during that same span 1,285,000 people left New York City. Most of those who left were white and this does not even take into account those families that simply enrolled their children in private or religiously affiliated institutions (Board of Education of the City of New York, *Towards Greater Opportunity*, 153. Commission on Integration Papers, Series 261, box 5 folder 41, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York). So while the overall population of New York City may have decreased only slightly, the proportion of white children in public schools was decreasing more rapidly. The reasons for white flight out of the school system were manifold, but were inextricably tied to race. According to Dr. Clark, “the reasons given for middle-class flight into the suburbs or into the private and parochial schools become self-fulfilling prophecies, for as whites leave the schools, the quality of the schools does indeed decline—not because Negroes are inferior, but because the school system behaves as though they are (Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 150).”

The PEA report had already found that minority schools and majority white schools were not equal in terms of space allocation and personnel distribution but the Board was not spending money equitably either. The New York City Board of Education three times as much to educate each white child as on its black and Puerto Rican pupils (Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 97). With all these disparities, it is not surprising that there were also gaps in achievement levels in black and white schools.

There were wide divergences in the levels of academic achievement between minority and majority white schools in the mid-1950s; gaps that Kenneth Clark found actually widened as students remained in the system. Dr. Clark concluded that the school system, rather than enrich, actually appeared to impair the intellectual development of black and Puerto Rican children in Harlem and, by implication, the entire city (Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 120; Markowitz and Rosner, 98).

Whether or not aware of these particular figures, teachers and administrators in minority schools were in many cases undisturbed by lower academic achievement among their students. “The New York United Federation of Teachers and board of education representatives increasingly argued that the children could not learn because they came from homes where education was not prized. Harlem’s parents—if not the children—were said to be at fault, not the school system itself (Markowitz and Rosner, 110).”

²⁶ Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 55-7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3, 60.

²⁸ Stein, Galamison, Winston Craig, and Clair Cumberbatch, allies within the Brooklyn branch, had formed the NAACP Schools Workshop.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 60-3. A strong tradition of parent activism existed in Bedford-Stuyvesant before Stein and Galamison arrived in Brooklyn, but they “gave the movement a new thrust by presenting and articulating the objectives of the movement, the benefits of an integrated harmonious community and the detriments of a segregated school system, by organizing activists and concerned parents, and presenting aggressive strategies to accomplish the goal of integration.”

³⁰ “Board of Ed. Integration Report is Challenged,” *New York Age Defender*, 10 November 1956. Commission on Integration Papers, Series 261, box 5, folder 53, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Taylor, 66. Dr. Clark shared this belief with Galamison.

³³ A “fringe” area was considered one where the neighborhood was racially mixed or one where neighborhoods comprised of different racial and ethnic groups were in very close proximity.

³⁴ “NAACP Rebukes City Board for All-Negro Brooklyn School,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1956. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, Series 456, box 1, folder 7, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

³⁵ Taylor, 66.

³⁶ “NAACP Rebukes City Board for All-Negro Brooklyn School,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1956. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, Series 456, box 1, folder 7, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library,

Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. The Brooklyn branch did not believe that the school was too difficult for white students to get to or that the school was the heart of a “Negro” area.

³⁷ Taylor, 66.

³⁸ Ibid., 67.

³⁹ Robert A. Poteet, “Brooklyn Pupils Shifted in Integration Program,” *New York Herald-Tribune*, 30 October 1956. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, Series 456, box 1, folder 5, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

⁴⁰ Taylor, 72.

⁴¹ Ibid., 75. On September 8 about 500 parents belonging to Parents in Action Against Educational Discrimination took their complaints to City Hall. Among the demands of the group were smaller class sizes, a standard curriculum in every grade, a full day of school for all students, and an equal share of certified, experienced teachers in black and Puerto Rican schools. The full school day was a problem of particular concern in poor black and Puerto Rican schools which were disproportionately overcrowded and understaffed.

⁴² Ibid., 72.

⁴³ Assistant superintendent, Edmund Gannon, wrote a letter to Superintendent Jansen back in March of 1955 suggesting that a “rotational system” assigning teachers to “schools of high I. Q.” then to “schools of low I. Q.” without regard to race, class, or other considerations would be the best way to avoid “over concentration of any particular type of teacher in a particular school.” Edmund Gannon to William Jansen, 9 March 1955. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, Series 456, box 1, folder 5, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

⁴⁴ Benjamin Fine, “New Policy Asked on Teacher Posts,” *New York Times*, 6 December 1956. Commission on Integration Papers, Series 261, box 5, folder 53, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. The report made sixteen recommendations to improve the ratio of certified to substitute teachers and the quality of instruction in minority schools. Some of the most significant included hiring more administrative personnel so that teachers could spend more time in the classroom, making class sizes smaller, requiring three years of service in a “difficult school” before becoming eligible for promotions to supervisory posts, assigning teachers based on the needs of the school system rather than on teacher preferences, hiring only certified teachers, and providing better parking facilities in underprivileged areas.

⁴⁵ Schools that had a predominantly black and Puerto Rican student body were referred to as “difficult schools” or “subject schools” as common practice. This language served to cement in the white public image an inherent connection between a school being majority African American and Puerto Rican and the school being besieged by problems of juvenile delinquency. This language also uniformly characterized minority schools as undesirable places to work and the students in those schools as uneducable.

⁴⁶ “HSTA Against Restriction of Promotions,” n.p., n.d. Board of Education Papers, Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, Series 456, box 1, folder 5, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

⁴⁷ Receipt of these bonuses would be conditional upon completing special training courses.

⁴⁸ John McCuen, “Teachers Tell How Difficult Schools can be Staffed,” *New York World-Telegraph-Sun*, 7 November 1957. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, Series 456, box 1, folder 5, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

⁴⁹ “Text of the Board of Education Statement on Integration Here,” *New York Times*, 26 February 1957. The Board was correct in rejecting the teachers’ requests on these grounds, but the Board’s response was still problematic. The next few lines of the Board’s justification for not increasing teacher salaries to work in “subject schools” reflect a perspective that would hinder the Board’s ability to deal effectively with integration. The Board continued, “it is a school in an *underprivileged culturally deprived* area. The additional funds required would be better spent in improving teaching conditions in these schools.”

⁵⁰ Markowitz and Rosner, 95.

⁵¹ Clark, *Dark Ghetto*, 121, 124.

⁵² Leonard Buder, “City’s Schools Open a Major Campaign to Spur Integration,” *New York Times*, 24 July 1956.

⁵³ Speech by William Jansen, “Talk to Principals of Queens Schools and Representatives of Parents Associations on Some Aspects of Integration,” Jamaica, Queens, 10 April 1957. Commission on Integration Papers, Series 261, box 5, folder 51, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

⁵⁴ Ravitch, *Great School Wars*, 254-5.

⁵⁵ Taylor, 77.

⁵⁶ David Lawrence, "An Integration Problem—It's in N.Y. City Schools," *New York Herald-Tribune*, 29 January 1957. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, Series 456, box 1, folder 5, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

⁵⁷ Speech by Kenneth Clark, "Educational Factors in the Prospects for School Integration in New York City," 4 December 1956. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, Series 456, box 1, folder 5, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. In this speech Clark expresses some optimism about the efforts of the Board since 1954 although he also makes clear the need for "continued vigilance on the part of community groups (4)."

⁵⁸ Chafe, 43.

⁵⁹ Dittmer, 59.

⁶⁰ On September 4, 1957, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to make sure that nine black students did not enroll at all-white Central High School. For days mobs of white adults and students appeared each morning to make sure that the guardsmen did their duty. Television and print media flocked to report on the "Little Rock crisis." Tensions reached a frenzied pitch over the next few weeks as Faubus appeared repentant to President Eisenhower one minute and brazenly defiant the next. After allowing whites to destroy school property and assault reporters by simply removing the Guard on September 23 and 24, Eisenhower finally reached his breaking point. He treated the city of Little Rock and the state of Arkansas as if it were in a state of insurrection and deployed one thousand riot-trained soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division into Little Rock by nightfall. Finally, school integration resumed the following morning without incident. Branch, 222-4.

⁶¹ Tillman Durdin, "Barriers for Negro Here Still High Despite Gains," *New York Times*, 23 April 1956; "Segregation Pattern—Northern Style," *Bronx Independent*, 2 March 1956. Jansen Files on Racial Discrimination, box 1, folder 5, Special Collections, Milbank Memorial Library, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.