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No Prejudice Here: Racism, Resistance, and the Struggle for Equality in Denver, 1947-1994

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We recommend the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

Summer M. Cherland

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**No Prejudice Here: Racism, Resistance, and the Struggle for Equality in Denver
1947-1994**

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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NO PREJUDICE HERE: RACISM, RESISTANCE, AND THE
STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY IN DENVER,

1947-1994

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ABSTRACT

This study chronicles a story of civil rights that has been left untold until now. Recent scholarship contributing to the history of the “long civil rights movement” has reframed our understanding of civil rights beyond the years of the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹ In addition, it has also demonstrated that civil rights activity occurred in regions other than the South. However, most work on the long civil rights movement demonstrates that activism among blacks began much earlier than the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court case and instead, was a part of a longer freedom struggle that, in many ways, makes up the African American experience. By focusing on Denver, this work will demonstrate that civil rights activity, just as it began before 1954, extends past significant legislative milestones, and tragic historical moments, like the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. By turning our attention westward, this work proves that 1968 was not an end point in civil rights history. Denver’s story had regional and national impact, as two contemporary educational equality movements took shape and youth activism became more formalized and visible. Similarly, Denver’s Chicano Movement had significant influence on activism in Denver and the nation, and this history demonstrates the multicultural makeup of civil rights.

¹ Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past” *Journal of American History* 91, 4. (March, 2005): 1233-1623.

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I was fortunate to have five incredible committee members who encouraged and challenged me throughout the process. Doris Watson took a chance on an unknown history student in need of help. I’m so lucky she answered the phone that Friday evening.

With her patient and thoughtful contributions, I was always moved to see the human side of the story. Maria Casas provided brilliant, critical feedback, blended with much-needed periods of autonomy. Elizabeth White Nelson “gave” me theory by forcing me to make it my own. She also bequeathed upon me the work of Joan Dideon and a genuine fear of “Who’s the Boss” on syndication. Marcia Gallo, who never let me get away with run-on sentences or misusing jargon, dared me to be a better writer, a better scholar, and a better person. She is the lifeblood of the UNLV history department and those of us who are lucky enough to know her are improved forever. Todd Robinson, the chair of my committee constantly challenged me to see the good, the bad, and the other side. He took a chance on me when I was “wet behind the ears,” and has been the mentor I went looking for when I enrolled in a PhD program. Moreover, Dr. Robinson taught me through word and action to place family, faith, and integrity at the center. The rest will happen when it’s time.

My husband Cody is the best person I’ve ever known. I thank him for deciding when to say “make it good” and when to say “get it done.”

DEDICATION

This study has always been for my sister Stephanie, whose definitions of home and Colorado are synonymous.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
In the Image of Progress: Denver, 1947-1994

Manual High School Turns 100: 1994

On September 27th 1994, 16-year old Glenn Taylor was shot in the chest outside his home in the Five Points neighborhood of Denver, Colorado. Taylor was a junior at Manual High School. An outstanding student, member of the JROTC, and participant in the college preparatory program Upward Bound, Taylor seemed the least likely student to be involved in what locals assumed was “gang-related violence.” Taylor, a black student with dreams of becoming a civil rights lawyer and advocate for African American youths, got involved in school activities in order to avoid the trouble that he believed distracted his friends and neighbors in the tumultuous district where he lived. Glenn Taylor’s sixteen years spanned a short part of a longer era when Denver’s black and Chicano residents oscillated between periods of celebration and others of internal and external conflict and violence. Taylor’s death marked the end of nearly twenty years of extreme highs and lows for Manual High School and Five Points.²

Four months prior, Taylor and his fellow Manual Thunderbolts attended an assembly hosting Denver’s first black mayor and Manual alum, Wellington Webb. Webb kicked off a week-long celebration for the school and city as Denverites rejoiced in 100 years of Manual’s history.³ Parades, lectures, and events engaged blacks, Chicanos, Asians, Native Americans, and whites who lived in the community and reflected the multicultural makeup of the school itself. The events were meant to honor the school, which over the course of its 100 years had met its share of challenges. Originally located

² Marilyn Robinson, “Manual Student slain in Drive-by,” *Denver Post*, 28 September 1994.

³ Christopher Lopez, “Webb- Manual built a distinguished legacy,” *Denver Post*, 16 April 1994.

on East 27th and Franklin Street, Manual Training High School was part of a nation-wide experiment promoted at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia by Russian educators and scientists. This innovative approach to education taught boys and girls in manual arts, and centered on learning through hand-eye coordination and use of the body, as well as books. On April 3rd 1894, Denver's Manual Training High School opened in this tradition, but the school quickly established an identity all its own.⁴ Most manual arts schools were only open to boys, but the first class at Manual included both male and female students. Denver, a widely promoted progressive western city, was home to schools that embraced this tradition by admitting girls along with boys, and accepting African American students before many other public schools in the region did.⁵

In 1994, newspaper accounts celebrating the school's trials and triumphs included quotes from tearful alumni as they recalled the devastating fire in 1953 that claimed "Old Manual" just months after construction for a new location was completed across the street. In 1950, overcrowding and the need for improved amenities made a new location for Manual the topic of discussion for parents and teachers in Five Points. Yet the conversation about increased space and better facilities overshadowed the larger and deeper conflict facing Manual students and Denver residents in the 1950s. Once the crown jewel in Denver's public education system, the high school began to fall out of favor as the neighborhood of Five Points became increasingly black and Chicano and Manual's student population reflected these changes. Since Denver's public education system did not operate under a state *de jure* segregation law, black, white, and Chicano

⁴ George Lane, "Manual at 100: School Inspiration for Many" *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

⁵ Ibid., Patricia Ann Shikes, "Three Denver Public School Superintendents: A Historical Study of Educational Leadership" (Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 1987).

students attended schools together, though they hardly shared identical experiences.⁶ As early as 1930, black students made up a distinct but isolated portion of the student body, and this number increased significantly throughout the 1950s and 1960s.⁷

Wellington Webb and his wife Wilma graduated from Manual in 1958 and 1961, respectively. Wellington and Wilma, along with their black peers sat in desegregated classrooms, but their social experiences at lunchtime, school functions, and passing periods were marked by segregation. When “New Manual” opened in 1953, students identified spaces within the high school that were allocated to whites only, and blacks only, though no formal segregation rules existed. This was part of a history that carried over from “Old Manual.” In the 1930s, a major gathering space in the school was “the well,” a railing in the central hallway that divided the first and second floors of the school. The well was the epicenter for socializing, particularly for upper classmen. Black students, however, were treated as uninvited observers at the well. Frankie Harriette Caldwell, a long-time Denver educator and graduate from Manual in 1934 remembered that black students could “sit anywhere you wanted in class, but we stood at one end of the well. The whites stood at the other.”⁸

When the new Manual opened in 1953 at 28th and Williams, the word “training” was dropped from the name, and the school’s racial makeup had shifted from a few black students to nearly fifty percent of the student body. Hispanics and whites made up the majority of the remaining fifty percent. Examples of racial segregation now stretched

⁶ Lane, *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

⁷ Photo, “1930 Manual High School Home Economics Teacher and Student,” Denver Public Library Digital Collections.

⁸ Lane, *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

beyond black and white students at either sides of a popular hallway. Instead, the entire high school became the victim of discrimination, and it was continually held back by the Denver Public School district (DPS). “Manual was a stepchild in the Denver school system,” recalled Charles Cousins, a black businessman who became Manual’s greatest advocate and benefactor after he graduated from the school in 1936.⁹

Noticeably absent from the celebrations honoring Manual’s centennial was civil rights leader and Chicano Crusader, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales. On April 10th 1994, the same day as Webb’s address to Manual students, Corky Gonzales attended one of his final public functions. Nearly two-hundred and fifty fans from Colorado, Arizona, California, and New Mexico lined up to have brief conversations, obtain autographs, and snap photos of the impassioned hero of the national Chicano movement. Gonzales, who was born in Denver in 1928 and attended Manual High School, was a contemporary of Webb’s, and perhaps Denver’s best known political leader of the twentieth century. Having proudly graduated from “Old Manual” in 1944, Gonzales’ time in Denver’s public schools formed many of his political opinions, however controversial.

Blacks and Chicanos had been sharing Manual since the school opened. By 1994, these two groups were poised to dominate the demographics at Manual, and though they did not always collaborate, they sometimes found common ground. Only four months before the centennial, black and Chicano students organized a protest. More than seventy-five teenagers walked out of school carrying “Boycott Manual High School” signs as they marched to the nearby state capitol. The protestors stated that blacks and Chicanos were treated unfairly in Denver’s second oldest high school. At Manual, teachers and

⁹ Lane, *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

administrators assumed they were “gang members,” and enforced attendance and tardiness more harshly when it came to students of color. Black students, regardless of ability, believed they were counseled out of accelerated classes. Alfred Sayers, a black parent remembered that when his daughter attempted to sign up for college-preparatory classes, “They said, ‘Don’t do that honey, you can’t do this work.’ The teachers told her she wasn’t eligible.”¹⁰ Amin Suliaman, a seventeen-year-old Manual student who “served as sort of a master of ceremonies” shouted to the crowd that problems in their high school were representative of “institutionalized racism.”¹¹ Suliaman was on to something. Throughout the spring semester, students and parents complained individually and collectively that Manual’s graduation statistics were disappointing. Black and Chicano students disproportionately disappeared from the halls, as students dropped out or were forced out of a school that had once been a pillar of opportunity.¹²

As the 1994 school year came to a close, six black males were slated to graduate in a class of 119. When the class of 1994 enrolled as freshmen, 115 were black, 58 were black males. Yet, only six made it to graduation.¹³ One of six slated to graduate was Kinshasa Sayers, the son of Manual High alum Alfred Sayers. Inspired by the recent protests and his father’s encouragement, Kinshasa tried out in the spring to speak at the annual commencement ceremony. He thought himself the perfect candidate; he

¹⁰ Mark Stevens, “Black Struggle at Manual: Few Males Will Graduate,” *Denver Post* 1 May 1994.

¹¹ Fred Brown and Steve Lipsher, “Black, Hispanic Students Treated Unfairly, Teens Say at Capitol Rally,” *Denver Post* 25 January 1994.

¹² Michael Booth, “Protest Upends Graduation Service: Racial Tensions Fuel Manual Disruption,” *Denver Post* 30 May 1994.

¹³ Ibid. A later article claims that nine black males graduated. Bill Briggs, “Manual Student Tried to Work in the System,” *Denver Post* 9 June 1994. An earlier article about parent protests regarding this figure assumed that ten black males would graduate. Stevens, *Denver Post* 1 May 1994.

represented the few black men who made it to graduation, and the only one to try out for a speaking role; he was a member of the Manual Parent Teacher Association; he was a volunteer tutor at Columbine Elementary; he was a regular panelist at Manual's Collaborative-Making Decision meetings. He believed he had been working within the system to create positive change for black youths.¹⁴ However, when Principal Linda Transou announced the five students who would speak at graduation, Kinshasa did not make the list. Frustrated, Kinshasa began recruiting other students to protest with him. On May 30th, graduation day, only 31 of the original 115 black students collected diplomas, and many of them wore black X's on their caps to commemorate their 84 missing classmates. Parents and spectators looked quizzically at one another while family and friends of the graduating black students suddenly hoisted signs reading "Black young men denied a voice at Manual" and began circulating through the crowd. As one of the chosen speakers thanked the administrators and supportive parents, Kinshasa strode to the microphone and shouted, "I have a right to speak at my own graduation! Why are no black males speaking?" Almost instantly, a school administrator switched the microphone off, but the damage was done. Students, in red and blue caps and gowns booed Kinshasa, some of the angry seniors "stormed" the podium to shove Kinshasa, and one student was "pushed from the stage" when she tried to "oppose Sayers."¹⁵

Such controversies were not new to Manual High School. As early as 1918, youth protest became a part of the school's tradition. Barely twenty years after first opening, student "progressives" decided to voice their support for World War I. Against the

¹⁴ Briggs, *Denver Post* 9 June 1994.

¹⁵ Booth, *Denver Post* 30 May 1994.

wishes of the administration, students suspended production on Manual's school year book, in order to collect funds for an ambulance that could be used "in World War I." Likely, the ambulance was housed at Denver's Fitzsimons Army Hospital, a recent construction and point of pride for Denverites. The students raised nearly \$1,000.¹⁶ Thus, a legacy of activism began at Manual High. Decades later, Chicanos and blacks would use this proud history as a springboard for their own radical processes. Both Wellington Webb and Corky Gonzales, two figure-heads of Denver's civil rights era graduated from Manual, and many more students, parents, teachers, and politicians learned about equality, identity, and civil rights through their affiliations with Manual High and the Denver Public Schools (DPS).

By the time Manual celebrated its 100th birthday, the DPS system governed ten public high schools, all of which were involved in the educational equality movement. Manual, however, was one five specific schools that made up the epicenter of civil rights activism in Denver. Due to its longevity, as well as its central placement in a historically black neighborhood, Manual and its "feeder" Cole Junior High and the nearby Barrett Elementary were all a significant part of the civil rights tradition. Denver parents and locals were invested in Manual's reputation, at different times during this school's history. They were equally concerned about the well-being of East High School, Denver's first public high school, distinguished on the national register of historic places, came under scrutiny as well. Finally, the alternative high school, *La Escuela Tlatelolco*, represented yet another aspect of Denver's civil rights story when it opened in 1970.

¹⁶ Lane, *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

Progressivism and the Roots of Managerial Racism

Denver, Colorado sits on the front range of the Rocky Mountains with three hundred days of sunshine a year and a bustling infrastructure built on mining, tourism, finance, and enhanced by federal spending. Steadily, the city's population grew over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and as a result of the Second Great Migration, the G.I. Bill, and fair housing laws passed in the 1950s. The city's demographic makeup shifted dramatically after the World War II. City officials and boosters promoted Denver as a welcoming place for blacks and Chicanos, but politicians and residents nonetheless maintained racial segregation in the city through a variety of methods throughout the end of the twentieth century. By the time the United States Supreme Court ruled on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* in 1954, Denver had made improvements for the benefit of black and Chicano residents. Once home to a racist regime and politics dominated by the Ku Klux Klan, Denver managed to reverse their public image by 1950, but a racist undercurrent remained.

Carl Abbott writes that the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 “transformed Colorado more profoundly than any single event except the Gold Rush of 1859.”¹⁷ Western cities in general benefited from wartime production, and Denver exemplified this trend. The Mile High City was already expanding the Fitzsimons Army Hospital by the time the U.S. entered World War II, the Lowry Air Base was conducting specialized training as early as 1938, and the Remington Arms Plant began producing ammunition and prefabricated destroyer ships in the early months of 1941.¹⁸ Once a “backwater”

¹⁷ Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State* (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2005): 297.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 299.

state, Colorado was now leading the country's war economy production, with Denver at the helm. In the years following World War II, the population in Denver surged with college students, farmers, job seekers, and retired servicemen from across the country. The 1940s and 1950s saw increased federal defense spending in the state, as well as new manufacturing and information industries. Denver continued to grow in population, and the postwar suburban housing boom began to affect the Mile High City. Between the years of 1950 and 1970, the city of Denver increased by fewer than 100,000 people, but the population of the suburbs grew by more than 560,000.¹⁹ White residents in the surrounding suburbs like Wheatridge, Lakewood and Sunnyside feared annexation both by the city and its public schools district. The threat of integrated education that had, a decade earlier, motivated these parents to move to a new suburban development, once again became a possibility as the city's limits continued to stretch.

Noticeable black migration to Denver began as early as 1860, when Colorado was still a territory. At this time, the census recorded forty-six "slaves from the South." This number grew consistently for the next few decades. By 1884, the city's black population increased to 1,083, and the white population reached 35,629.²⁰ In the late 19th century, black settlement was dispersed in the older sections of Denver, as blacks made their homes nearest to their potential work sources, but also clustered based on available housing options. Most black workers found employment in domestic service, which required them to live in close proximity to the white families who employed them.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 323.

²⁰ Lionel Dean Lyles, "An Historical-Urban Geographical Analysis of Black Neighborhood Development in Denver, 1860-1970" (PhD. diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 1977): 72.

²¹ Ibid., 50, 52, 58-61.

By the 1880s, “there appeared to be a growing concentration of black households in the Five Points district...”, though this neighborhood was not yet the nucleus of black culture that it would later become.²² Black homeownership increased from 1885 to 1914, as a few Denverites worked to build a small tract of low-cost housing, among them a very small number of black homeowners were able to purchase single-family detached units. Local politicians and residents took menial attempts to provide housing opportunities for black migrants. In the 1890s, Denver officials closed old buildings in downtown that were no longer suitable for human use. Despite this, blacks were nonetheless forced to rent these unsuitable units; in many ways because this was the only choice they were given.²³ Whether they lived in Park Hill, Five Points, the barrio, or another neighborhood, Denver residents took pride in their city. Since the railroad boom of the 1800s, Denver has been the center of western transportation, mining, commerce, agriculture, finance, and retail. In the twentieth century, Denver’s information and military production joined the already prestigious list of the city’s industries. From as early as 1906, Denver became known as the “capital of the Rocky Mountain Empire.” These industries demanded workers, and increased production brought with it prosperity for these workers. As the nineteenth century came to a close, newcomers were flocking to Denver by the thousands. In 1890, the city’s population reached 106,713. By 1910, there were more than 213,000. Yet, despite this growth, Denver remained a significant city in a ruggedly western state, hesitant when it came to political change, committed to moralism and whitewashed tradition, and conflicted about its place in a changing world.

²² Ibid., 64.

²³ Ibid., 75.

However, it wasn't until the 1920s and 1930s that black settlement was concentrated into specific "enclaves."²⁴ From 1923 to 1925, Denver experienced a "building boom" as larger numbers of white residents demanded housing opportunities immediately east of the city. One of these new neighborhoods was called Park Hill. Located directly east of Five Points, Park Hill was designed to portray posh sophistication. The lots were bigger, each home was designed to look custom, and the neighborhood was within proximity to downtown, but removed from the perceived crime that came with city living. Equally attractive to aspirational whites was the placement of Park Hill. The neighborhood, however close to Five Points, was built on the other side of Colorado Boulevard, a two-lane highway that thus created a barrier between Five Points and this new Park Hill oasis. The Five Points District, a neighborhood just east of downtown and named for the intersection where five major roads meet, experienced a significantly high turn-over rate during this brief period. Because of this, larger numbers of black migrants were able to settle in Five Points and by 1930, more than three-fourths of all black Denverites were living in this neighborhood.²⁵ While white homeowners

²⁴ For more on black communities and "enclaves," see Kenneth Kusmer, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 2005).

²⁵ Scholars identify that during the "Second Great Migration," over five million black men, women, and children relocated to urban centers in the South, North, Midwest, and Denver. This movement of blacks occurred during the interwar years and continued into the late 1960s or early 1970s. See Kusmer, "African Americans in the City since World War II: From the Industrial to the Post-industrial Era," *Journal of Urban History* 21, No. 4 (May 1995): 458-504.; \ Kusmer ed., *The Ghetto Crisis of the 1960s: Causes and Consequences* (New York: Garland, 1991).; Joe W. Trotter with Earl Lewis and Tera W. Hunter, eds., *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).; Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).; Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Knopf, 1991).; James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migration of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).; James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).; Regarding Denver's migration statistics, see; Lyles: iv., Census data shows that most of these migrants were originally from Mississippi or Louisiana, and had lived briefly in Kansas before relocating to Colorado. About half of these black newcomers lived in Denver, with the rest dispersed throughout the

were purchasing new homes, black tenants were forced to rent older buildings for a lower cost. The *Denver Star*, the city's black newspaper, noted "no negro" was employed in Denver's professional or political sector.²⁶ Employment discrimination ultimately channeled blacks into unskilled and lower paying jobs, thus blocking blacks from the upward mobility that whites seemed to have when they purchased homes.

As black newcomers settled in Denver, they met many Coloradans who considered this state home long before black migration began. Mexicanos have been a part of Colorado's history from the beginning. Many of Denver's Chicanos could trace their Colorado ancestry to original migration and creation histories. The political history of Mexican-Americans in southern Colorado began with a population boom of the Spanish-speaking population from 16,000 in the 1790s to over 60,000 in 1850. Over the course of the 1830s and 1840s, the New Mexican government parceled "much of northern New Mexico, including thousands of square miles that would become part of Colorado Territory" in a series of land grants.²⁷ Included in these agreements were the Spanish-speaking farmers who had been cultivating the land for generations. Then, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States claimed more than a million square miles from Mexico's territory, including the southern half of Colorado and all who lived there.²⁸

state. Most were young to middle-aged men; however a few women made the journey and immediately began working in Denver's domestic trades.

²⁶ "Waking the Sleeping Lion," *The Denver Star*, 20 March 1915: 78.

²⁷ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 35.

²⁸ Matt S. Meier and Feliciano Rivera, *The Chicanos: A History of Mexican Americans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972): 70.

Hispanic farmers and shepherds were attracted to Colorado's grasses and plains, and by 1870, "ninety percent of the 6,400 residents of Las Animas and Huerfano counties" in the southern part of the state were either New Mexican natives or their children.²⁹ Mexican-Americans also found work with the railroad. Many made Denver their home base while traveling throughout the western region of the United States with different railroad companies.³⁰ The state's famed sugar beet farms provided Mexicanos many opportunities for employment and movement to the capital city. Colorado's agricultural economy expanded in the late nineteenth century. The Dingley Tariff in 1897, and the expansion of irrigation through the Reclamation Act in 1902, inspired Colorado farmers to rapidly increase their sugar beet production. Corporate farmers recruited Mexican Americans to serve as their labor force, and demand only increased in wartime throughout the twentieth century.³¹ Regardless of the need for workers, Mexican-Americans faced hostility when white newcomers outnumbered them. In 1914, Hispanics in the southern part of the state were told they "had no rights" when it came to public access to education. Similarly, in 1936, Governor Ed Johnson dispatched the National Guard to keep Mexican migrants from crossing the southern border of Colorado. Johnson was responding to anxiety among white Denverites who worried that an increase in migration meant Mexican nationals threatened "local jobs."³²

²⁹ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 39.

³⁰ Juan Haro, *The Ultimate Betrayal: An Autobiography by Juan Haro* (Pittsburgh, Dorrance, 1998): 4.

³¹ Meier and Rivera, *The Chicanos*, 125-126.; Rodolfo Acuna, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998): 178

³² Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 357.

Until World War II, black residents were primarily concentrated in Five Points, but some were dispersed in other downtown areas. Yet, in the postwar period, black migrants grew in population, and the neighborhoods began to change. Due to high birthrates as well as a spike in interstate migration, Denver's black population reached 15,059 by 1950.³³ Migrants were increasingly attracted to Denver's employment opportunities. During World War II, wartime economy production went into overdrive. Shipbuilder Eaton Metal Products and the Remington Arms Plant increased production and recruited women, Chicanos, and African Americans for the first time. New opportunities in the professional sector also became available and black women in particular were able to move into clerical positions that were not available to them before.³⁴ Increasing in numbers and general economic status, some blacks began to look for housing opportunities outside of Five Points. Black women initiated this shift, mostly because they had more opportunities for professional advancement than men, and thus carried the "bulk of income responsibility based on their frequency of employment when compared to black males" in Denver.³⁵ These professional black women provided the economic impetus to "move up," since their increased wages and long-term employment allowed them to consider purchasing, instead of renting.

Despite its proximity to Five Points and its appeal to the upwardly mobile, Park Hill remained racially exclusive. Even professional black families, with dual incomes and renowned reputations were shut out of Park Hill in the 1940s and 1950s. Combustion

³³ Frederick Watson, "Removing the Barricades from the Northern Schoolhouse Door: School Desegregation in Denver," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Colorado, 1993): 9.

³⁴ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 308.

³⁵ Lyles, 122.

“Cubby” Chapman was among the first blacks to break the barrier and purchase a home in Park Hill. Cubby was born in 1924 in Newton, Mississippi. He attended Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in the 1940s, where he met his wife, Margaret Alice Brown. Margaret and Cubby moved to Colorado after college, when Cubby was hired as a waiter with the Union Pacific Railroad (UP). He held the position for twenty-five years until he retired. Before he retired from UP, Cubby opened a landscaping business in 1950. Margaret and Cubby had their sights set on Park Hill. They saved every dime they could from Cubby’s tips and wages, and in the early 1950s decided it was time to buy a new home. With the help of a “straw buyer,” the Chapmans became arguably the first black family to purchase a home in Park Hill.³⁶ Cubby’s son, Gil remembered that they were not greeted with open arms. The family “received death constant death threats.”³⁷ Despite his initial frosty welcome to Park Hill, Cubby went on to great prominence in the Mile High City. His landscaping business, Chapman Landscape and Irrigation evolved to become one of Denver’s most prominent design companies, winning bids to landscape Invesco Field, the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, the Colorado Convention Center, and other landmarks. Cubby and Margaret stayed put in Park Hill, eventually earning great respect from their black and white neighbors.³⁸

Mexican-Americans were also increasingly visible in Denver. They became urban residents during the Great Depression and World War II. By 1940, Denver’s permanent

³⁶ “Straw buyer” was a nickname for a white actor who would purchase a home on behalf of unwelcome black buyers, in order to gain them access to an all-white neighborhood. Annette Espinoza, “Combas Chapman, One of the First African-Americans to Buy Home in Park Hill Dies at 88” *Denver Post* 31 January 2010.

³⁷ Espinoza, *Denver Post* 31 January 2010.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Mexicano population had grown from 2,500 twenty years prior to 12,000. These Chicanos shared the Five Points neighborhood with blacks, and many also lived in the Elyria neighborhood. Elyria, located north of downtown, was sometimes also referred to as “the Coliseum,” nicknamed for the historic building which anchors the community. Mexicanos also created enclaves in the Swansea neighborhood, on the eastern side of the Coliseum. Others still moved into the historic Auraria section, sometimes called “West Denver.” Chicanos, however, tended to generalize these many neighborhoods under the umbrella title, “the barrio.” Scholars of Mexican-American history have argued that barrios were “*de facto* segregated” neighborhoods where Chicanos lived in “dilapidated” “multi-family” homes.³⁹ Mexicanos in Denver did not share the same desire to move into Park Hill. Nonetheless angered by segregation and discrimination, Chicanos focused their energies on community service programs and self-help agencies.⁴⁰

Denver’s reputation as a racially progressive and welcoming city was a product of both chance and design. As an urban center in the American West, a progressive mystique defined Denver, as it did Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Americans across the country assumed that “things were better out west.” Furthermore, Denver like San Francisco and Seattle, lacked black ghetto, prior to the Second World War.⁴¹ More

³⁹ Mario T. Garcia, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity, 1930-1960* (Yale University Press, 1989): 93-95.

⁴⁰ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 357.

⁴¹ For more on the formation of the black ghetto outside of the West, see Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930*, Second Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).; Alan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).; Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976).; Joe William Trotter Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).; Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). For more on urban development in the North and Midwest, see Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, (New York: Random House, 2008).

economic opportunities existed for blacks and whites both, and the West seemed free of longstanding race restrictions that ran deep throughout the American South. Moreover, Denver—like its sister cities in the West—established its own progressive image by taking calculated measures to promote opportunity as a means to increase migration.

By 1960, many Denver residents enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle. The average median income for Denver County and city residents was \$6,361 per household.⁴² Colorado was a thriving state with many of its counties recording high income. At the same time, a distinction between Denver’s middle class and lower class blacks was becoming evident. Beginning in the 1920s, blacks gravitated toward the neighborhood of Five Points, on the northeast side of Denver. When Colorado’s Fair Housing Policy was passed in 1959, upwardly mobile blacks like Cubby and Margaret began looking for homes in the nearby Park Hill neighborhood, to the east of Five Points. At the time, black and white Denverites feared the potential ghettoization of their neighborhoods. Members of Five Points artistic community, who believed their neighborhood was special, urged the middle class to stay and defend their historic district. *The Denver Blade* published a call in 1959 urging blacks to retain the unique neighborhood and its identity. “The original Negro settlers of this district and their heirs created an environment and atmosphere of refinement and intelligence.” *Blade* writer John Wallace believed that the earlier period of Five Points history was special because the neighborhood was dominated by home owners instead of renters. These “pillars of the community,” as he called them, created a cosmopolitan community, and as they began moving into new

⁴² U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960 Final Report PHC (1)*-38. Denver, Colorado: Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. “Census Tracts: Table P.1.-General Characteristics of the Population, By Census Tracts: 1960: 15.

areas, “Negroes of the lower income groups flocked to Denver...” and took over the empty spaces left behind by those in search of something better. Wallace lamented that these newcomers were “parasites, pimps, con-men, gamblers, and girls... doing night work.”⁴³ Blacks continued to dominate the Five Points area, but class distinctions began to form between new residents and the Park Hill middle class. As a result, Park Hill Elementary was cautiously and deliberately integrated with the slow and steady inclusion of a few black students every year. On the other hand, Five Points elementary schools like Gilpin and Whittier lost white students every year, as more and more black and Chicano students made up the population.⁴⁴ While neighborhood, religion, and like-mindedness played a part in these distinctions, Denver’s political system also served to create boundaries encasing poor, black and Hispanic citizens, in order to prioritize the middle class, and whites in particular.

Though segregation remained a fact of life, opportunities for racial mixing existed on many fronts in Denver. The Five Points nightlife and cuisine most significantly provided occasion for races to intermix. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Five Points was home to some of the country’s outstanding jazz musicians and artists. Local Denver whites found opportunities to head to the neighborhood for a good night of food and entertainment. Black and white children in the 1930s played together during the many Five Points daytime festivals.⁴⁵ In the 1950s, this trend continued as Five Points’ reputation improved, encouraging once fearful whites to try out some of the clubs and

⁴³ John M. Wallace, “What is Wrong with Five Points?” *Denver Blade*, September 1961.

⁴⁴ Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 25, 28.

⁴⁵ Photo in Laura Mauk, *The Five Points Neighborhood of Denver*” (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Press, 2001): 87.

restaurants. “At one time or another,” wrote J. Brown for *The Denver Blade* in 1961, “many of the cities [sic] most respected families have visited this star-shaped vicinity and enjoyed every minute of the community’s finest entertainment.” Whites, blacks and Chicanos could be found wandering out on the sidewalks at all hours of the nights, and “anyone’s mother could have walked through Five Points...”⁴⁶ The Epworth United Methodist Church, which opened prior to 1920, was once an all-white congregation, but as Five Points became increasingly black, it became the only publicly interracial church in town. Before 1950, the church advertised its mission as, “A unique experiment in Christian Brotherhood, in which whites, blacks, browns, and yellows worshiped together.”⁴⁷ However, as the 1950s came to a close, white businessmen and middle class blacks began to complain that Five Points had lost its luster. The neighborhood’s safety was questioned, and racial mixing became a point of control, in part because of the growing prominence of black residents and Mexicanos.

The demographics shifted in Denver because blacks and Chicanos continued to move into the city, and they created strong ties to each other, local organizations, and national associations. These communities were built on self-help, community control, religious and spiritual organizations, neighborhood associations, and the promise of change. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had a presence in Denver, but, remembered one Denverite, “The NAACP was doing things nationally,

⁴⁶ J. Brown, “Will Five Points be Great Again? (We Say Yes)” *Denver Blade*, October 5, 1961: 2.

⁴⁷ Yvonne Wallace McNair, *Crossing Over Jordan: A History of the Black Church in Colorado*. (Denver, Colorado: 3091 California Street, Denver, Colorado: Black American West Museum and Heritage Center, 1996): 67.

but in Denver they really weren't."⁴⁸ The Urban League trained blacks for jobs, and helped seek out employment opportunities, but the most actively involved national organization was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). In the early 1960s, CORE helped to train Denver activists for protests and boycotts that would change the fabric of Denver's racial makeup. More notably, local associations were valued over national organizations among Denver's black and Mexicano. The Shorter African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in particular provided a space for blacks to create community connections, learn resistance strategies, and forge safe friendships among middle class blacks.

Whites had access to some of the city's best cultural and social amenities, while blacks were segregated outside of Five Points, despite the city's reputation of progressive race relations. Movie theaters, grocers, restaurants, and the city's taxi services all had special rules for black patrons. Blacks were either forced into "blacks only" sections, or denied service altogether. King Soopers, the city's largest grocery chain, refused to hire blacks, so in 1963 community members organized a boycott. Similarly, the Zone Cab Company hired only white drivers. Black customers faced a dilemma: "There was nowhere to picket," since the company operated by phone only. In 1963, CORE and Denver locals organized a phone picket. Agitators left their phones off the hook, which eventually tied up all the phone lines in the city. They also picketed at the airport, encouraging travelers to use another cab company, and within days the Zone Cab

⁴⁸ Billy Porter quote, Dick Alweis and Anita Saunders, *Rebels Remembered: The Civil Rights Movement in Colorado* (Denver, Colorado: Alice G. Reynolds Memorial Fund, 2007).; In 1915, Clarence Holmes established the Denver NAACP branch. Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 45.

leadership released a public statement, promising to hire black drivers.⁴⁹ Movie theaters, like those in the South, had a “crow’s nest” reserved for black patrons, and the city’s swimming pool had “blacks only” and “Hispanics only” days each week during the summer.⁵⁰

Some citizens remember these years in Denver fondly, but African Americans and Chicanos were apprehensive. Lurking under the surface of these western progressive images that presented Denver as a happy, welcoming city was a complex series of racist and oppressive practices that defined life for blacks and Mexican Americans. Promises of employment opportunities drew blacks to the Mile High City throughout the 1950s, but they made a percentage of their white neighbors’ incomes. Housing was restricted despite the passage of Colorado’s Fair Housing Act in 1959, as realtors and bankers worked together to sequester black homeowners in the Five Points and Capitol Hill neighborhood. White homeowners used their privilege of mobility to create distance from blacks. In 1959, when more black families purchased homes in the upscale neighborhood of Park Hill, white families began looking elsewhere to live.

Educational Equality in Denver

When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on *Brown v. Board*, the Denver Public School Board disregarded the decision as inconsequential to their district. On May 17, 1954, the country’s highest court determined that the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* was unconstitutional. After the *Brown* decision, state laws that segregated public schools

⁴⁹ Alweis and Saunders, *Rebels Remembered*, 2007.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

on the basis of race were found in violation and school boards were instructed to desegregate their schools with “all deliberate speed.” Since a clause defining their district as operating a “separate but equal” dual system did not exist on record, Denver whites assumed that their *de facto* segregation system was free from legal interference.

Until 1967, Denver’s public school system was under the operation of isolated, corporate-minded boards. From 1947-1967 Dr. Kenneth Oberholtzer served as Superintendent over DPS. Oberholtzer was an autocratic leader, who made decisions without consultation, and was known as “The Czar” of Denver’s schools.⁵¹ During his time as Superintendent, Oberholtzer saw a rise in parental and community involvement on the behalf of the city’s schools. Beginning in 1950, when Old Manual High was closed, parents complained school boundaries were “drawn to keep minority children in predominately minority schools.”⁵² Subsequent boundary changes in 1953 and 1957 sparked additional protest, and in 1959, Oberholtzer could no longer ignore the community’s demands.⁵³

Throughout the twentieth century, blacks and Chicanos viewed the education system as the most important vehicle to attain civil rights, liberties, and full citizenship in Denver. They saw education as one the best means to change discrimination in employment and housing, and sought to improve the public school system through a variety of methods. Denver middle class blacks in particular, championed efforts against

⁵¹ Jessica Pearson and Jeff Pearson, “Litigation and Community Change: The Desegregation of a Community,” February 1976, Rachel Noel Papers, Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2. FF15.

⁵² League of Women Voters, “Composite View of Denver’s School Desegregation” April 1974, revised September 1976 and updated September 1980. Denver, Colorado: LARASA Library., Article *The Denver Post*, April 9, 1959. Rachel Noel Papers, Box 1. Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2. FF15.

⁵³ Pearson and Pearson, “Litigation and Community Change.

inequality and for desegregation in the public schools. Throughout the 1960s, black parents and educators fought against racism in the schools, which had fostered under the guise of *de facto* desegregation. They worked with the NAACP to bring suit against the Denver Public School Board for purposefully segregating black children.

Chicano parents and working class blacks were less convinced that desegregation would provide the answer. Violent and agitated resistance from white parents and students, the cost of desegregation incurred by their children and their finances, as well as the continued demise of their local neighborhood schools dismantled the promise of desegregation. By 1970, Chicano parents, black parents, and white parents had all made local attempts for community control in Denver. With boycotts, walk-outs, and sometimes violent shows of anger, black and white parents demonstrated their concern regarding school desegregation. Chicano parents on the other hand, succeeded in creating a model for community control of education when they founded *La Escuela Tlatelolco* which served Chicano students with Chicanocentric education, an emphasis on Mexicano history and culture, and Spanish instruction. Despite these local attempts to derail desegregation, however, the wheels on the bus were already in motion. In 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Denver School Board was guilty of operating a dual system and ordered the board to create a comprehensive plan for desegregation by the start of the 1974 school year.

Denver's demographic makeup, its progressive reputation, and the various attempts for educational equality make the Mile High City a model of school and neighborhood politics and activism throughout the West. Boycotts, walk outs, legislation, and multiple competing priorities in Denver occurred contemporaneously with other such

activity across the nation, but within the western region. Denver's history, therefore, can provide insight to questions still lingering about the legacy of *Brown v. Board*. How did different ethnic, racial, gender and socio-economic paradigms shape the view educational equality? What role did desegregation play in the benefit or decline of predominately black and Chicano schools? Who controlled the plans for school desegregation and/or community control, and how did they use their power? How did black and Chicano activists communicate, clash, or collaborate on issues of community control and desegregation? How did students experience desegregation or community control, and what are their lasting impressions? Finally, how did activists' opinions on educational equality evolve over the course of the movement?

National Movement for Educational Equality

Scholars continue to probe *Brown's* legacy and how school desegregation impacted black communities. Historians began by researching black activism for desegregation and violent white resistance in southern urban and rural communities.⁵⁴ This body of scholarship also problematizes the legacy of *Brown* and the unintended, negative consequences of school desegregation on black and Chicano communities.⁵⁵ In his study of postwar civil rights activism in Phoenix, Matthew Whitaker describes a

⁵⁴ Stephen, "A Brief Historical Overview of School Desegregation," Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*.; Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*.; Chafe, *Unfinished Journey*.

⁵⁵ For more on the burden felt by black communities and the losses experienced by black teachers, parents, and students, see David Ceselski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).; For a discussion on the unintended negative consequences of *Brown v. Board* and School desegregation, consult Derrick Bell, *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive quest for Racial Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1987).; Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (Oxford University, 2005).;

predominately middle-class struggle for education equality. Using traditional organizing techniques and the court system, professional blacks in Arizona contested western *de jure* segregation in the Phoenix public school system. In the 1953 landmark ruling, the Maricopa County Superior Court declared school segregation laws unconstitutional, thanks to a case brought on by local blacks and financed by the NAACP. Whitaker provides a brief discussion of the aftermath of this decision, explaining that black students shouldered the burden. They were placed in uncertain environments at their new schools, and they lost a connection to their community felt once only through their associations to predominately black schools. The city's historically black elementary and high schools, like so many in the seemingly foreign American South, faced financial decline after the court ruling and city-wide desegregation took effect.⁵⁶ More substantially, Quintard Taylor provides an account of the impact felt among blacks in Seattle during the decades-long battle for educational equality. Taylor rightly examines education within the broader context of western black communities. Schools in Seattle were defined by residential or *de facto* segregation, and black parents contested the employment, housing, and education trifecta as they moved from "Freedom Now" campaigns to black power ideology throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In cases like Denver's and Seattle's, urban West calls for equality tended to have many voices. Some advocated for busing, transfer programs, and open enrollment. Others demanded community control, freedom schools, and decentralization. Both attempts made lasting

⁵⁶ Matthew Whitaker, *Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West*. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005): 113-119, 121-124.

contributions to the way educational equality is defined today.⁵⁷ Taylor labels Seattle's school system *de facto*, and examines civil rights activity in the Pacific Northwest accordingly. However, western school segregation, as demonstrated by the case in Denver, was ultimately created by a series of legislative mandates and policies, thus rendering the distinctions between *de facto* and *de jure* segregation a matter of semantics. This history of Denver's battle for school reform, the era of court control from 1973-1994, and the events leading up to the need for such a lawsuit will demonstrate that *de facto* segregation was merely a guise for decades of political fiats.

More recently, historians have considered the other sides of education equality. New studies, like this one, question the impacts of *Brown* and other school desegregation legislation in multiracial communities. The urban West, where blacks generally made up the smallest minority population, provides us with a useful setting to study such questions. In his study on multiracial California, Mark Brilliant explains that local and national politicians exploited the differences among blacks and Mexican Americans when it came to education equality. By the time black westerners were pursuing court-ordered desegregation in the West; many Chicanos had altered their view of assimilation and integration as an attack on their heritage. Knowing this, conservative politicians, including Ronald Reagan used an anti-busing platform to court the Chicano vote in the late 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994): 3, 213, 216, 291, 211-216, 290.

⁵⁸ Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 6, 12, 55, 58-88. See also Mario Garcia's discussion of Chicano demand for educational resources by 1960. Mario Garcia, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960* (Yale University Press, 1989): 41, 54-58, 60,

Very few historians of western urban blacks have considered multiracial communities and their experiences with desegregation. When Chicano or Asian students are discussed, they are often portrayed either as a part of the overall story, or an outlier.⁵⁹ However, scholars of the Chicano movement provide us with extensive research on the importance of education, and the complicated relationship between the demand for equal access, and the fight for cultural nationalism within the public education system. At different moments in the struggle for Mexicano equality, the public education system has been an important symbol of freedom and citizenship. Over the course of a century-long struggle, Chicanos have demanded equality in education by way of access, bilingual education, community control, and representation. In his groundbreaking publication on Chicano politics, identity, and organizing, Mario Garcia explains that Chicanos first viewed integration as a symbol of first-class citizenship, but as the movement progressed, many demanded separate control of educational resources in order to best serve their children and the future of Mexican American cultural identity.⁶⁰

Even fewer studies incorporate an analysis of student experiences and youth activism regarding school desegregation. Of course, student unrest in the 1960s has been a favored topic among historians of American Cold War culture and counter-culture, but the role of black and Chicano students within education equality movements has been largely ignored. Gael Graham provided one of the first accounts of black student

83, 89, 264-265.; Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism During the Viet Nam Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 17, 19, 37-39.

⁵⁹ Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 12, 88, 228-256, 254.

⁶⁰ Garcia, *Mexican Americans*, 41, 54-58, 60, 83, 89, 264-265.; Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!*, 17, 19, 37-39.; Acuna, *Occupied America*, 236, 295, 365, 337.; George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 85, 98.

activism, demonstrating that African American teenagers participated in a national movement for youth activism, which challenges the widespread notion that student civil rights activism generally took place on college campuses.⁶¹ Instead, in *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protests*, Graham demonstrates that high schools provided a critical stage for teens to contest their notions of freedom, interact with each other and the emerging ideas of the era, and demand their own versions of equality.⁶² Historian Todd Robinson considers the role of youth protest in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and uncovers activism “behind the veil,” as black teenagers experimented with clothing styles, facial hair, and challenges to their school dress codes in order to contest inequalities within their public high schools.⁶³ These controversies among students and administrators often made impact beyond school walls, as parents and community members debated issues of discipline, juvenile delinquency, identity, and personal freedoms. Like the teenagers in Grand Rapids, students in Denver often found that any demonstration of defiance had the potential to create community-wide impact. Scholars of Mexican American history provide similar context by explaining the unique role played by teenagers during the Chicano movement. Chicanos of what some call the “Second Generation” in the 1930s and 1940s participated in new forms of resistance and

⁶¹ Often college student activism is heralded within civil rights scholarship and popular culture. See Robert Cohen and Snyder, David J. ed., *Rebellion in Black and White: Southern Student Activism in the 1960s* (2013) ; Claybourne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Harvard University Press, 1981, 1995).; Ceselski, *Along Freedom Road*.

⁶² Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest*. (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern University Press, 2006).

⁶³ Todd Robinson, *A City Within a City: The Black Freedom Struggle in Grand Rapids, Michigan* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

rebellion that laid the groundwork for future Chicano activism in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁴

Denver was the home of Chicano civil rights organization the *Crusade for Justice* and its visionary leader, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, who embraced youth activism, recruiting young people from throughout the community and public school system to embrace Chicano activism.

These histories provide the foundation for this study, which seeks to create a narrative of black schools, Chicano and black experiences of desegregation, and court managed integration, while considering the competing notions of educational equality in an urban, multiracial western setting. Much of our current knowledge relies upon the seminal scholarship on blacks in the urban North and Midwest, and Chicanos in the Southwest. Historians must continue to expand accordingly.⁶⁵ Denver’s story forces us to

⁶⁴The Zoot Suit Riots were some of the first widely researched moments of youth activism among Mexican Americans, however recent scholarship also considers the role of anti-war demonstrations, sit-ins, and walk outs. See Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*.; Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No!*.; Munoz, *Youth, Identity, and Power*.; Mazon, *The Zoot-Suit Riots*: Patricia Rae Adler, “The 1943 Zoot-Suit Riots: Brief Episode in a Long Conflict.” in *The Mexican Americans: An Awakened Minority*, edited by Manuel P. Servin, (New York: MacMillan, 1974).; Joe Austin and Michael N. Willard, eds. *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).; Dolores Delgado Bernal, “Chicana School Resistance and Grassroots Leadership: Providing an Alternative Framework for the 1968 East Los Angeles Blowouts.” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997).; Armando Navarro, *Mexican American Youth Organization: Avant-garde of the Chicano Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

⁶⁵ Important scholarship on northern and Midwestern cities include, Kenneth L. Kusmer, “African Americans in the City since World War II: From the Industrial to the Post-industrial Era,” *Journal of Urban History* 21, No. 4 (May 1995): 458-504.; Kusmer ed., *The Ghetto Crisis of the 1960s*.; Joe W. Trotter with Earl Lewis and Tera W. Hunter, eds., *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).; Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).; Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Knopf, 1991).; James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migration of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).; James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).; For works on the West, see Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*.; Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).; Lawrence B. deGraff, “The City of Black Angels: Emergence of the Los Angeles Ghetto, 1890-1930” *Pacific Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 33 No. 3 (August 1970): 323-352.; Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).; Robert O. Self,

reconsider some of the tropes that exist and permeate our understanding of civil rights, school desegregation, and community control.

Racism and Activism in Denver

How did Denver come to represent a progressive, tolerant city in the American West, even though blacks and Chicanos lived, worked, and sent their children to school in an obviously segregated city? Cities like Denver thrived on these contradictions. Business leaders and politicians relied on the assumptions of *de facto* segregation, explaining that school segregation “just happened” because neighborhoods were naturally separated by race.⁶⁶ Todd Robinson explains that for every political and social success experienced by blacks, “whites seemed to engineer a more potent responsive form of racism”⁶⁷ Like Robinson’s Michigan, Colorado blacks and Chicanos faced daily what William Chafe called the “progressive mystique,” constant reminders that their social and economic reality “contradicted the state’s reputation”⁶⁸ Denver’s blacks and Chicanos were up against a systematic process that “downplayed the importance of race” and created a limit on black progress that all the while promoted certain agreeable blacks as images of success, but ghettoized the majority of the black and Chicano community in the city’s poorest neighborhoods, lowest paying jobs, and oldest, least desirable

American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).; Whitaker, *Race Work*.

⁶⁶ This quote is taken from Robinson, *A City Within a City*, 167.

⁶⁷ Robinson, *A City Within a City*, 22,

⁶⁸ William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, 1981): 5.

schools.⁶⁹ Denver was operating in a system of “managerial racism,” which promoted these contradictions and the paternalistic, progressive system of few rewards, in the image of progress without actual payoffs.⁷⁰

This is the story of a multifaceted struggle for educational equality in the urban West. It is also about the fate of historically black and Chicano schools in the West, and the efforts of individuals and groups to preserve the heritage of these schools. The result of these stories is a new paradigm about how black and Chicano westerners defined educational equality, resisted assimilation in the face of desegregation, and how community controlled education in its many forms benefited and challenged the legacy of integrated education. Therefore, this is a book ultimately about community investment in education, and how groups competed, collaborated, or appeased each other in order to define their expectations of equality in Denver, Colorado.

The fervor that accompanied integrationists as they sought to desegregate the schools was only part of a broader picture of racism, oppression, and a struggle for community control throughout the urban West. After the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision, state and local policy makers were charged with implementing a ruling by the Supreme Court to abolish separate but equal educational systems. Two national trends resulted. School boards first attempted to defy the system by clinging to *de jure* segregation as the only definition for racial imbalance. This occurred commonly in the West and the North, where Jim Crow laws were rarely state-implemented legal statutes. The second trend-- which held destructive implications for black-based education-- occurred when school

⁶⁹ Quotes from Robinson, *A City Within a City*, 176, 22.

⁷⁰ The term “managerial racism” is found in Robinson’s work, Robinson, *A City Within a City*, 22, 25, 150, 167, 176.

boards were forced to bus students in order to desegregate, and they selected black students to travel great distances to all-white schools. School desegregation became a nation-wide phenomenon throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as white and black parents attempted to define educational equality through racial balance in public schools. As a result, white policy makers often viewed the predominately and historically black and Chicano schools as the problem, disregarding the role these schools played in the black and Chicano communities. Yet, discrimination and racism in the American West took a variety of forms that serve to complicate our definitions of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation. Whereas we might have previously defined the two terms as by practice or by law respectively, the history of blacks in the urban West causes us to rethink these simple binaries.

Blacks who moved west found a delicate reality that contradicted the region's progressive image and the "surprisingly few racial barriers" with the employment restrictions that faced them when they arrived in their new hometown. This was common in the West, where white male politicians established "western outpost[s] for white supremacy and racial inequality," to use Whitaker's description.⁷¹ Western segregation was both *de facto* and *de jure*. Blacks were restricted from patronizing many local restaurants, hospitals, buses, pools, and other white establishments. Indeed blacks, Native Americans, and Mexicanos faced *de jure* segregation since Colorado boasted anti miscegenation laws, restrictive housing covenants, and laws promoting segregation in public accommodations.⁷²

⁷¹ Whitaker, *Race Work*, 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4, 13-15.

Colorado, like other western states, had longstanding legal measures for segregation, but it was also home to some of the country's first elected black officials. Progressives sought to add Human Rights clauses to the Colorado constitution, while lawyers, politicians, and individuals spent time and money to make changes to Colorado's laws to make the state appear more progressive. However welcoming Denver might have seemed, though, blacks nonetheless faced white supremacy and discrimination. Minorities were continually reminded of their inferior status in the predominately white city, by the small but significant actions of their white neighbors. While the West might have appeared practically devoid of institutionalized segregation, some white business owners in Denver, for example, were widely known for prohibiting blacks. In a similar fashion, children and parents faced racist comments and practices in the public school system, though administrators boasted that their schools were not segregated.⁷³

Project description

This study chronicles a story of civil rights that has been left untold until now. Recent scholarship contributing to the history of the "long civil rights movement" has reframed our understanding of civil rights beyond the years of the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁷⁴ In addition, it has also demonstrated that civil rights activity occurred in regions other than the South. However, most work on the long civil rights movement

⁷³ For more on these complicated notions of progressivism and racism, Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 21, 80-82.; Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, 108-110, 167, 172-173.; Douglas Flammig: *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 60-69, 153-154, 215-216, 218-220, 350, 353.; Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*, 10-11, 90-95, 29.

⁷⁴ Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1233-1623.

demonstrates that activism among blacks began much earlier than the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court case and instead, was a part of a longer freedom struggle that, in many ways, makes up the African American experience. By focusing on Denver, this work will demonstrate that civil rights activity, just as it began before 1954, extends past significant legislative milestones, and tragic historical moments, like the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. By turning our attention westward, this work proves that 1968 was not an end point in civil rights history. Denver's story had regional and national impact, as two contemporary educational equality movements took shape and youth activism became more formalized and visible. Similarly, Denver's Chicano Movement had significant influence on activism in Denver and the nation, and this history demonstrates the multicultural makeup of civil rights.

The first chapter describes the events, legislation, and people who contributed to the making of Denver's reputation as a racially tolerant and welcoming city from 1947-1960. However, in the histories of these ground-breaking individuals and paramount laws, this chapter uncovers the contradictions and racist intentions that continually held blacks and Mexicanos back from accomplishing true equality at every turn. Chapter two analyzes early activism during the same twenty-year period. As blacks and Hispanics confronted managerial racism, they sowed the seeds of an early movement that eventually came to a head over education equality, the focus of Chapter 3. The fourth chapter provides an overview of the landmark *Keyes v. Denver Public School District No.1* Supreme Court case, but also describes the tactics taken by the school board to avoid implementing court-ordered desegregation, and the parallel activism of the black

and Chicano communities. Lastly, Chapter 5 demonstrates the drawn-out attempts made by the school board to reclaim control of DPS from court control.

If the struggles for educational equality and civil rights in Denver are only briefly discussed among historians, it is not because historical materials are invisible or hard to find. It has often been noted that some of the best materials might be in an unlabeled box in some unknown garage, basement, or attic and the historian's quest for such sources can be a goose chase, at best. Currently, however, a wealth of first-hand testimonies exist and are waiting to be collected from those who lived the stories we tell. This project relies heavily on oral histories conducted by the author, interviews, and documentary sources. Oral histories in this case have proven to be essential to this study, as interviewees have included black, white, and Chicano parents, educators, and students who participated in various movements for educational equality in Denver. Textual sources include many local newspapers covering the various movements, public meeting minutes, court records, local school histories and materials, and school board election and meeting records.

In addition, this study makes use of some sources that deserve specific mention. First, the black newspaper *The Denver Blade* provided insight to how black Denverites felt about their Five Points neighborhood, segregation, and the city's progressive mystique. *The Denver Blade* was in circulation from 1961 until sometime in the early 1960s.⁷⁵ Second, the newsletter *Un Nuevo Dia*, published by the Chicano Education Project in Lakewood, Colorado provided indelible insight into how Chicano leaders, politicians, and educators viewed desegregation and Chicanocentric education at odds

⁷⁵ The last issue available with the Library of Congress' newspaper collection is dated January 10th, 1963. The Denver Public Library collection ends with this same issue.

with each other. *Un Nuevo Dia* also elucidated the crucial role that women parents and educators played in the movement for community control of Chicano education, which contests the widely-held assumption relegates Chicanas to the background of the national Chicano activist movement. Finally, personal assistance offered by members of the Colorado High School Coaches Association (CHSCA) and Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA) proved to be essential to the success of this project. Long-standing administrators and leaders of these two organizations provided institutional and organizational records, and served as crucial conduits for helping to secure individual interviews and oral histories with former students, coaches, and administrators in Denver. Without their help, finding interested parties who would agree to participate in this project might have been a more tenuous quest.

A Struggle for 100 Years: Manual Strives for Educational Equality

Over the course of its first hundred years, Manual High School meant many things to many people. Like the public school system that governed it and the Five Points neighborhood where it was anchored, Manual High School went through many transformations. When it was built in 1894, it was an experiment in “progressive” education. Following WWII, it symbolized a fresh start, hope, and a community touchstone for hometown Hispanics and recent black migrants. In the 1960s and 1970s, it became a stain on the DPS and School board reputation, as white and black parents fought over what the school really represented. In the 1990s, it came to epitomize the failures of the public school system, and ineffectual court-mandated desegregation. Throughout all of these manifestations, Manual was a training ground for youth activism

and future civil rights leadership. Manual High School and the Denver Public Schools were a burden and a blessing for the city's black, white, and Chicano communities over the course of the late twentieth century. This is their story.

CHAPTER 2

“Just for the Record”: Jim Crow at a Mile High 1947-1962

Denver Dry Goods Boycott, 1962

On July 14th, 1962 the fight for racial equality in Denver took a new turn. Denver Dry Goods, a local department store centrally located in the Sixteenth Street Shopping district and near the Five Points neighborhood, was a favorite among black patrons.⁷⁶ However, despite the high number of black shoppers who frequented Denver Dry Goods, the management refused to hire black workers for non-janitorial positions, despite the black clientele request for more black cashiers and service professionals. African Americans waged a selective patronage campaign to end employment discrimination at Denver Dry Goods when they chose that day in July to boycott the store.

The boycott in Denver was part of a nationwide “don’t buy where you can’t work” political struggle for equal rights. In New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Denver, Los Angeles, Detroit, and a number of smaller communities, African Americans initiated a coordinated effort to challenge the racialized hiring practices of dairies, bakeries, and food stores. James Farmer, founder of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), began focusing on Denver’s needs as early as 1948. He said, “Exposure is the best cure for discrimination,” noting that Denver seemed uninformed about its own racist history.⁷⁷ Farmer later compared Denver to other cities stating, “More progress, more rapid

⁷⁶ “CORE pickets Denver Dry Goods Store for drive against discriminatory employment,” *Denver Post* 14 July 2014: 3; Colleen O’Connor, “50 Years ago, Freedom Riders blazed a trail for civil rights.” *The Denver Post*

⁷⁷ “Congress of Racial Equality: Exposure best cure for discrimination,” *Denver Post* 3 January 1948: p3.

progress, is being made in the South. Of course, their problems are more obvious...⁷⁸

Farmer's observation indicates that he and national leaders were beginning to label the deep currents of racism that coursed through western and northern cities, despite assumptions and promises for better opportunity and racial equality in these more progressive places. Western cities like Denver, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas boasted progressive race relations, politeness, and tolerance when it came to the opportunities afforded to black people in the postwar period. An emphasis on consensus and paternalism shrouded the complexities of white supremacy, oppression, and discrimination that made up daily life for all blacks, whites, and Chicanos living in the Mile High City.⁷⁹ Knowing this, Farmer worked with Denver local Ruth Cousins Denny to open a Denver CORE chapter, and to organize the Denver Dry Goods Picket in 1962.

Boycotts produced mixed results. Indeed, in Los Angeles African Americans picketed an auto dealer to force him to hire a black salesman; however, the dealer refused and two months later pickets were withdrawn. Notwithstanding the outcome in Los Angeles, Farmer and Denny planned and coordinated a successful five-week picket on Sixteenth Street.⁸⁰ For more than a month, Denver blacks refused to shop at Dry Goods, cut up their credit cards in front of the store, and joined groups throughout the workday to hold signs and encourage other patrons to boycott. White Denverites joined the protest, which demonstrated the Denver CORE chapter's commitment to integration. "We were

⁷⁸ Alweis and Saunders, *Rebels Remembered*, 2007.

⁷⁹ Chafe: *Civilities and Civil Rights*.; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*.; Douglas Flammig, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: 2005).

⁸⁰ Zachary Barr, "Remembering Ruth Cousins Denny." Last accessed 18 July 2013.

integrated from the beginning,” remembered Farmer of the Denver branch.⁸¹ The organization attracted middle class whites like Denver dentist Max Hartwell Raabe, who joined the Dry Goods picket on his daily lunch breaks.⁸² In the end, the collaborative efforts of CORE, who was joined by the Denver Urban League, resulted in Denver Dry Goods hiring more African American employees. Moreover, it opened the door for blacks to negotiate more jobs with two additional supermarket chains, Furr’s and Safeway.

The push for racial equality took many forms in Denver. Though it took cues from the national movement, the Denver freedom fight took on a particularly local arrangement. The efforts of CORE and the Urban League represented a modification in the local strategy for racial justice and it underwent a number of different alterations in the post-World War II era. Groups such as CORE, the Urban League, and even the Black Panther Party (BPP) proved pivotal in the battle as issues about public education became increasingly relevant to the freedom fight. Their tactics and platforms differed and reflected the diversity within the black community as well as the changing nature of black protest nationally. CORE organizers recognized that the BPP’s formation in Denver in the mid-1960s signaled a change in attitude and tactic. Helen Wolcott, a Dry Goods organizer and CORE member said that CORE had originally been *the* radical group, until the BPP gained in prominence. She added, “Some of us were uncomfortable, but we remained friends. The torch had been passed. How could you help but be idealistic?”⁸³ Be that as it may, these tactical adjustments were a direct response to the changing nature of

⁸¹ Alweis and Saunders, *Rebels Remembered*, 2007.

⁸² Max Raabe Hartwell, “Obituary,” *The Denver Post* 3 October 2010.

⁸³ Alweis and Saunders, *Rebels Remembered*, 2007.

racism in Denver. But unlike the success of the outcome of the Dry Goods boycott, the fight for educational equality would not be resolved in six weeks; instead the struggle spanned over a quarter-century and took several iterations. Therefore, this chapter outlines the deep tradition of managerial racism and begins to uncover the seeds of black resistance in Denver and educational reform in the Mile High City.

The Myth of Western Progressivism

Optimism defined the postwar period in Denver and across the urban West. Colorado seemed the quintessential state, representing all the affluence, beauty, and patriotism of the early Cold War. The federal government spent millions in Colorado, middle-class families traveled to the Rocky Mountains to ski and enjoy the fresh air, retired servicemen bought homes in the suburbs, there was constant construction and highway development, and even atomic power found a home in Colorado. From 1948 to 1958, towns like Durango, Grand Junction, and the appropriately named Uravan boomed with individual uranium prospectors, corporate giants, engineers, and geologists in search of uranium and “the high salaries and sophisticated tastes of the postwar middle class.”⁸⁴

The city of Denver struggled to establish a central foothold, as former farmlands transformed into powerful suburbs seemingly overnight. These suburbs included spaces as close as Aurora and Littleton, as well as towns as far as Loveland and Colorado Springs. Science and education were among the two most powerful industries building and pulling Coloradans away from the capital city. However, many of the closer suburbs like Thornton and Northglenn continued to draw upon the core city’s resources, even

⁸⁴ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 321.

though the city itself was not growing at the same rate as its surrounding metropolitan area.⁸⁵ Because of this, politicians like Mayor James Quigg Newton (who called himself “Quigg”) and businessmen like Palmer Hoyt of *The Denver Post* worked to promote the Mile High City as a town that embraced change, reform, and progressive politics. During Newton’s eight years in office, beginning in 1947, he implemented new programs and studies, sales taxes, reorganized the Denver General Hospital, and expanded Stapleton Airport, which cemented Denver as the transportation hub of the western United States.⁸⁶

When Newton ran for Mayor in 1947, Denverites were ready to evolve politically. For nearly twenty years, their previous mayor, Ben Stapleton had promoted status quo over progressive improvements. As city was growing, he was not, and by the end of his mayoral service, Stapleton and his policies seemed outdated and out-of-touch. Of overcrowding and the threat of poverty in the city, he once said, “If all those people would only go back where they came from, we wouldn’t have a housing shortage.” At a time when it seemed Colorado and its capital city were poised to become a shining example of postwar America, Stapleton thumbed his nose at progress. After serving for almost two decades, Stapleton (or “The Interminable Ben,” as he was called) assumed he would win reelection in 1947. Instead, Stapleton lost to newcomer Quigg Newton by a landslide.⁸⁷ Immediately upon taking office, Newton embraced development and improvement for the Mile High City. Newton and his political and professional allies made up a “revolt of the second generation,” a young group of change makers who

⁸⁵ Ibid., 323.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

sought to liberalize Denver in the second half of the twentieth century. Historian Tom Romero writes that with the 1947 election, “ideological changes in postwar Denver” dominated the political landscape, as racial progressives in general and blacks in particular pressured the new mayor to “undermine ideas, attitudes, and ideologies of difference” throughout his career.⁸⁸ While Romero gives Newton a lot of credit, even italicizing particular fragments of the former mayor’s speeches to demonstrate an implied and early embrace of affirmative action, Newton’s postwar liberalism nonetheless kept hidden the still very pervasive lifeblood of racism that coursed through the city’s arteries.

Blacks in Denver were among the most optimistic, and actively so. They considered their city to be racially tolerant, potentially radical, and they pointed to Earl Mann and Elvin Caldwell as examples of this political progressivism. Earl Mann, born in 1886 in Iowa, was an early military migrant to Denver. When he was injured in France while fighting as a First Lieutenant in the Infantry, Mann was sent to Denver’s Fitzsimons Army Hospital to recover in 1918. He remained in Denver until his death in 1969. In his early career, Mann worked as a clerk for the Water Commission. He then became a writer for the *Colorado Statesman*, Denver’s early black newspaper, as well as the *Denver Post*, the latter he continued to write for throughout his working life. In 1942, Earl Mann became the second black man elected to Colorado state office when he won a position in the Colorado state house of representatives.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Tom I. Romero, “Of Race and Rights: Legal Culture, Social Change, and the Making of a Multiracial Metropolis, Denver 1940-1975” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2004): 97.; The designation of “the second generation” comes from a report quoted in Romero’s work, Kenneth Gray, *A Report on the Politics in Denver, Colorado* (Massachusetts: Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, 1957), II-9.

⁸⁹ The first black state legislator was Joseph H. Stuart, elected in 1895. However, Mann was largely credited with being the first. Shawn M. Snow, *Denver’s City Park and Whittier Neighborhoods* (Arcadia Publishing, 2009): 52.; Mann, Earl. “The Earl Mann Papers, 1886-1968” Blair-Caldwell African

Elvin Caldwell was born in Denver in 1919 in Denver Colorado. He graduated from East High School and went to the University of Colorado on a track scholarship. During World War II, Caldwell benefited from increased wartime production in Denver, and landed a job as chief statistician for the Remington Arms Company, a plant that moved into increased production in 1942. Caldwell then became a state representative, and in 1955, he was elected to the Denver City Council. He was the first black councilman, and the first African American elected to any city council in the west. He served in this position for twenty-eight years, overseeing as president for five of his seven terms.⁹⁰

Together, Mann and Caldwell did more than symbolize the potential for black-led change in the Mile High City. Caldwell, a Denver native and active in the community throughout his life, established a sterling reputation for himself. He is credited with many success stories in Denver's black community, having served on "...boards of numerous organizations..." Caldwell's reputation has been made immortal, since he was so revered in the Five Points neighborhood, he was later chosen as one of two honorees who would share the title of the city's black history library.⁹¹ Mann, though not the hometown hero

American Research Library, Denver Colorado. .; <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/mann-earl-1886-1969> last accessed June 23, 2014; T.R. Witcher, "Paul Stewart: Urban Cowboy," Denver Westword, Jan. 29, 1998, http://www.westword.com/issues/1998-01-29/news/feature7_1.html.; Ronald Jamal Stephens, La Vanna M. Larson, Black American West Museum, ed. *African Americans of Denver*, (Arcadia Publishing, 2008): 36.

⁹⁰ Elvin R. Caldwell Papers, ARL1, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library. T.R. Witcher, "The Young and the Restless: As the Turks of Denver's Black Politics Grow Old, What's to be Made of their Legacy?" *Westword* 1 April 1999,

⁹¹ Some of the foundational black and Mexicano entities that Caldwell helped to found or thrive included: including the Glenarm Branch of the YMCA, Boy Scouts of America and PALS of Denver. He served on the board of directors for: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Opportunities Industrialization Center, The Denver Improvement Association, Mayor's Commission on Community Relations, Colorado Municipal League, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Five Points Businessmen's Association, Urban League and the Senior Support Services, the Equity Savings and Loan Association, the International Opportunity Life Insurance Company and the Black Municipal League. He

like Caldwell, had his own level of notoriety in the city. Mann was respected widely for his leadership in World War I. Upon moving to Denver, he became a part of the community at a time when black migrants were carving out a space of their own in neighborhoods like Five Points and Capitol Hill. Mann represented upward mobility, and his publications in *The Colorado Statesman* and *The Denver Post* helped to keep the black experience in Denver from being ignored.

They were public symbols, and Caldwell and Mann were also active agents of change, particularly when they used the political process. Both championed for improved housing conditions and job opportunities for African Americans. In 1950, both agreed to sponsor what would become the state's first fair employment bill. Mann and Caldwell had previously collaborated and worked individually on contemporary measures before this bill, written and lobbied for by the Colorado Committee for Equal Employment Opportunities (CCEEO). Caldwell dropped his own employment bill, which brought with it specific "measures for enforcement," because he believed it alienated some voters. Mann, on the other hand, had refused to support an earlier and similar bill written by the CCEEO, because he claimed it was too weak. The new bill was approved in 1951, with a majority vote 47-18.⁹²

Over the course of the 1950s, Mann and Caldwell saw their share of legislative developments in Colorado, though they sometimes surprised their black supporters. In 1953, Mann refused to co-sponsor a repeal of Colorado's ban on interracial marriage. He

was also a vibrant member of the influential Shorter Community A.M.E. Church. Elvin R. Caldwell Papers, ARL1, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library.

⁹² Dani R. Newsum, "Cold War Colorado: Civil Rights and Liberals and the Movement for Legislative Equality, 1945-1959" (Master of Arts Thesis, Boulder: University of Colorado, 2012): 122-123, 139.

claimed that white constituents were not ready for such a reversal, despite how necessary it might be. Without his support, the bill moved forward, backed by Republican and Democratic co-sponsors, and the Colorado Bar Association. By 1957, the Colorado legislature had approved the repeal, which ended a nearly 100-year old law that prohibited interracial marriage.⁹³

Also in 1957, the state legislature banned discrimination in public accommodations following decade-long fight against the city's segregated swimming pools. Both Caldwell and Mann were involved throughout different stages of the attempts to desegregate the pools. Beginning in 1950, African American George Brown began reporting on Jim Crow practices for the *Denver Post*. Brown uncovered segregation in public venues like movie theaters, restaurants, Lakeside and Sportland (operated by the YMCA) swimming pools, and Washington Park's Smith Lake.⁹⁴ After Brown exposed the YMCA for denying blacks admittance to the pools, Earl Mann publicly admonished the pools for racist practices.⁹⁵ Councilman Caldwell also joined the debate, and both, alongwith the *Denver Post* exposing Jim Crow practices in Denver, it became harder to pretend that segregation was another city's problem. By 1957, the state legislature repealed a 62-year-old law governing public accommodations, and placed the jurisdiction of such practices in the hands of the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Commission (CADC).

⁹³ Newsum, "Cold War Colorado," 135-142, 144.

⁹⁴ Washington Park's Smith Lake, built in during Denver's "City Beautiful" period at the turn of the century. In August 1932, 150 blacks attempted to desegregate the lake, but were beaten back by a white crowd and white police. The lake continued to be a site of activism for the next twenty years Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 350.; Newsum, "Cold War Colorado," 150.

⁹⁵ Newsum, "Cold War Colorado," 152.

The legislative session and the decisions made seemed to come and go with little retaliation from Colorado voters.⁹⁶

The next year, Colorado Representative Bob Allen and newly elected Senator George Brown introduced the state's first fair housing bill. The bill, which proposed outlawing racial and religious discrimination in the sale or rental of a home, was immediately opposed by Republican and Democratic senators. Over the next two years, white, black, Jewish, Chicano, and Asian residents joined various campaigns regarding Colorado's housing legislation. Brown, whose articles in the *Denver Post* educated readers on the realities of racism, attempted to explain that housing was more than a "Negro problem."⁹⁷ Despite Allen and Brown's best efforts, the 1958 bid was unsuccessful. However, in 1959, the Colorado Committee to Oppose Discrimination (CCOD) rallied and altered their campaign. Using Cold War rhetoric that had been so successful for liberals in years prior, the committee, led by members of the Tri-State Anti-Defamation League (ADL) helped to convince lawmakers that a fair housing policy would protect human rights, veterans, and democracy. When the bill passed, 24-11 in 1959, Colorado became "the first state to pass comprehensive fair housing law." The state was, in effect, the first in the nation to ban discrimination in public and private housing, cementing its image as progressive place centered on racial tolerance.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid., 143-171.

⁹⁷ Newsum, "Cold War Colorado," 187, quoted from Minutes of the Committee to Oppose Discrimination, April 1, 1958: p.3., box 46, FF 2061, James Atkins collection.

⁹⁸ "Nation Hails Colorado as First State to Pass Comprehensive Fair Housing Law!," *Personal ADL Letter*, May-June 1959, p.1., Box 20, FF2.

Farces and Contradictions: Court Cases, Fair Employment, and Housing Loopholes

Denver saw its fair share of changes, human rights organizing, and liberal legislation in the postwar period. Despite enjoying a reputation for progressivism and tolerance, discriminatory practices laid the foundation for housing, employment, and education in the Mile High City. With every legislative achievement, it seemed that Coloradans also had an exit strategy. They were able to congratulate themselves on passing early comprehensive laws, while also escaping individual action through manipulated expectations and cautiously created loopholes. Furthermore, politicians and the press proudly touted Denver's implied tolerance, while all the while working behind the scenes to avoid the true consequences of a truly open haven for diversity.

Managerial racism had deep but hidden roots in Denver. The "Interminable Ben" Stapleton, during his first election in 1923 publicly campaigned for religious tolerance. At the same time, he privately welcomed the support of John Galen Locke, the grand dragon of Colorado's rapidly growing Ku Klux Klan (KKK). In the early 1920s, the Klan's power was mounting across the country. Threatened by immigration, postwar inflation, and the perceived decline of white supremacy, the Ku Klux Klan revived itself in 1915 in the image of a post- Civil War nationalist organization. Over the course of the next five years, membership ballooned, and the Klan spread its influence to western cities, like Denver. After his election, Stapleton no longer hid his relationship with the KKK. He allowed the Klan to use Denver city resources; he appointed Klansmen to important cabinet positions, and even hired one to serve as chief of police. In 1924, Stapleton announced, "I will work with the Klan and for the Klan in the coming election, heart and soul. And if I am reelected, I will give the Klan the kind of administration it

wants.”⁹⁹ While the Klan maintained a presence in Denver throughout the 1920s, Stapleton ultimately disassociated from the organization. Instead, he formed the Minutemen of America, a strikingly similar organization, to draw Klansmen away from Denver’s “invisible empire.”¹⁰⁰ The Klan remained actively involved in private affairs, as well as Denver’s political operations. With Stapleton’s support and a Klansman William Candlish serving as chief of police, the Denver KKK enjoyed undisputed power until its decline in 1926. They invaded Coloradans’ private matters, harassing blacks, Jews, and Chicanos at their homes. The Klan prioritized prohibiting racial mixing in public accommodations, as well as interpersonal and sexual relationships.¹⁰¹ The result was longstanding. Until 1942, long after the Klan’s prominence had faded, Denver’s laws regarding interracial marriage remained a fact of life. In the eyes of the law, Denver’s blacks and whites, despite their proximity to each other in some neighborhoods, were nonetheless discouraged from mixing.

Resistant Coloradans looked to the courts for results. In the 1940s and 1950s, a series of lawsuits served to cement the legality of discrimination and segregation. Prior to the 1942 marriage case, *Jackson v. City and County of Denver*, the state happily claimed that it was not segregated. *The Denver Star* stated that Colorado had only “one ‘black law’ upon its statute books,” but that “one” law was the 1864 ban on interracial

⁹⁹ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 274. Quoted from *The Denver Post*, August 3, 1993; *Denver Times*, June 17, 1921, quoted in Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan*, 216.

¹⁰⁰ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 271.; Phil Goodstein, *In the Shadow of the Klan: When the KKK Ruled Denver 1920-1926* (Denver: New Social Publication, 2006): 48-51.

¹⁰¹ They protested interracial marriages and relationships by chasing people out of town. In 1922, Klansmen succeeded in terrorizing a young black man, Ward Gash, into leaving the state because he was involved in a sexual relationship with a white woman. Leonard and Noel, *Denver Magazine*, 197-198.; Phil Goodstein, *In the Shadow of the Klan: When the KKK Ruled Denver 1920-1926*. (Denver: New Social Publications, 2006).

marriages.¹⁰² When James and Lydia Jackson were convicted of vagrancy for “attempting to marry in violation of the law,” they were up against a unique ban, as Colorado was one of only two states that prohibited, specifically, only black and white interracial marriage.¹⁰³ Yet, the statute did not define the terms of “Negro,” “mulatto,” or “white.” Instead, it left the matter of defining a suspect’s race in the hands of governing officials. When the court ruled in *Jackson v. City and County of Denver*, they determined that while the law might be “vaguely unconstitutional,” the convicted were nonetheless guilty because they had in fact identified themselves as an interracial couple – James had testified that he was black, Lydia that she was white – thus the couple could not contest the neutrality of the law.¹⁰⁴

In 1946, the Denver Police Department (DPD) faced two grand jury investigations. Both included a large and impressive body of evidence to prove that the DPD had a pattern of abuse and mistreatment among “Spanish American” Denver locals. Reverend Eutimio Duran, the pastor of el Salvador Baptist church requested the first hearing. He provided many witnesses who could attest to mistreatment at the hands of the DPD. The grand jury discounted nearly every witness, stating, “We hear complaints like this all the time.” In the second case, the local Spanish-speaking newspaper, *Pan-American News* provided countless examples brought to them by members of Denver’s Mexican American community. *Pan-American News* also criticized the grand jury,

¹⁰² The Colorado Supreme Court in the *Jackson v. City of Denver* decision lists 1864 as the year the ban was created. “The Jackson Cases,” *Denver Star* July 19, 1914: p. 4.; *Jackson et.al v. City and County of Denver*, 124 p.2d240, 241 (Colo, 1942).; Harmon Moorhead, “Negro Rights in Colorado Territory,” *Colorado Magazine*, July 1963, 214.

¹⁰³ *Jackson et.al v. City and County of Denver*, 124 p.2d240, 241 (Colo, 1942)

¹⁰⁴ *Jackson et.al v. City and County of Denver*, 124 p.2d240, 241 (Colo, 1942).; Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 172-192.

arguing that the process itself was discriminatory. Despite evidence and a multitude of complaints, the grand jury did not indict any police officer of any harassment or brutality.¹⁰⁵

The 1951 Fair Employment Practice law, helped along by Mann and Caldwell had some loopholes as well. Prior to 1951, liberals had already made three attempts to successfully promote a fair employment law, and when it did pass, it retained little of the original goal. In 1951, one senator smirked, “They’d better accept this one or they won’t get anything.” The Denver Unity Council (DUC) originated the campaign in 1945. Their bill – cast in the New Deal mold – would have established an independent state agency to govern fair employment in the state of Colorado. Senate bill 202, as it was called, had the support of many black Denverites, but state policy makers recoiled at the notion of another bureaucratic entity.¹⁰⁶ After another failed attempt at a similar bill, the DUC formed a statewide network of nearly 200 agencies, called the Colorado Committee for Civil Rights Legislation (CCCRL). However, the coalition was labeled “extremist” by the Denver press, since it once again sought to create a state entity to enforce fair education and employment.¹⁰⁷ Once the law did pass in 1951, it did so because it was a weaker version of previous bills. Accountability would be governed by an already existing state committee. Moreover, the bill, when it passed, banned discrimination in employment based on race, ethnicity, and ancestry within public agencies that had more than six employees. However, private businesses were allowed to hire based on personal

¹⁰⁵ Duncan Clark, “Burke Stalled Brutality Inquiry Months Ago, New Evidence Reveals,” *Rocky Mountain News* Denver, August 13, 1946. Romero, “Of Race and Rights,” 150-153.

¹⁰⁶ Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 69.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 70-74.

preference.¹⁰⁸ Earl Mann, who begrudgingly supported the bill, originally called it “weak.” Mann’s dispute with the bill had to do with the exemptions that were specifically included, in order to win the support of lawmakers, and to accomplish the end goal, which he thought was to get the bill passed “just for the record.”¹⁰⁹

Finally, though Colorado was the first state to pass a comprehensive fair housing law, it was not exactly an admirable example of liberal legislation. The original attempt didn’t pass in 1958 because it was too focused on confronting racism. The language in the first attempt prohibited discrimination based on ethnicity, race, and origin. In 1959, lobbyists and legislators reworked the language, and the successful bill said little about race. Then, only a few months after it passed, the staff director of the CADC made a shocking admission to the Denver press. Roy Chapman, who was involved in the process of the law from the beginning, announced that the law provided an overlooked loophole. The 1959 policy did not govern private property owners. Those selling “by owner” were exempt, as were realtors acting on behalf of their client’s wishes. His late admission of this exception demonstrated fractures in the system.¹¹⁰ Chapman and the loopholes within the real estate market in Denver reflected a national fair housing trend. Despite the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in 1948 that restrictive covenants were unconstitutional, “Informal practices by real estate agents continued to keep most blacks, Mexicans, and

¹⁰⁸ 1951 Colorado Session Laws, Thirty-eight General Assembly of the State of Colorado, pp. 523-537.

¹⁰⁹ Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 122, quoted *Taking Stock*, 4.

¹¹⁰ Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 85-96.

Asians from buying or renting property in all-white communities and neighborhoods.”¹¹¹

Across the country, white homeowners and realtors worked together to maintain segregated neighborhoods, using informal strategies, dissuasion, and prejudice as their means.

The Gentleman Dictator: Managerial Racism in Denver’s schools

Four years before the Supreme Court ruled in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case, Dr. Kenneth E. Oberholtzer was featured on the cover of *Time Magazine*. He was an unusual choice. It was 1950, and Oberholtzer was the superintendent of the Denver Public Schools (DPS), in the third year of what would become his twenty-year tenure. While he had a fairly impressive professional reputation among education leaders, Oberholtzer was hardly the intellectual giant that he would later become. At the time of publication in February 1950, *Time* called Oberholtzer the “prototypical superintendent of a school system beset with the myriad of problems of the era.”¹¹² A native of Indiana, Kenneth E. Oberholtzer moved to Denver following a prestigious record of educational leadership. He was a teacher, a principal, a coach, and later a superintendent in Texas and California. He also served as a lieutenant colonel in the Army from 1942 to 1946. Before that, Oberholtzer earned his Ph.D. at Columbia University Teacher’s College, where he studied under a former DPS superintendent, Jesse Newlon. After he was discharged from the army in 1947, Oberholtzer joined the thousands of war veterans who moved to

¹¹¹Albert M. Camarillo, “Blacks, Chicanos, and the New Racial Frontier in American Cities of Color: California’s Emerging Minority-Majority Cities. In Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter Eds., *African American Urban History Since World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 46.

¹¹² *Time Magazine*, 20 February 1950.; cited in Shikes, “Three Denver Public School Superintendents,” 222.

Denver when he was selected as the superintendent of schools. Before he earned his nickname “The Czar,” Oberholtzer was referred to as “The Professor” because he was serious, quiet, intellectual, and demanding.¹¹³

Managerial racism, the covert strategies of segregation, and the consequences of a progressive mystique were no more evident anywhere than in the administration of DPS during and immediately following Oberholtzer’s rule. On May 17, 1954, the country’s highest court determined that the 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* was in violation of the constitution. After the *Brown* decision, state laws that segregated public schools on the basis of race were found in violation and school boards were instructed to desegregate their schools with “all deliberate speed.” Since a clause defining their district as operating “separate but equal” dual systems did not exist on record, Denver whites assumed that their *de facto* segregation system was free from legal interference. Thus, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on *Brown v. Board*, the Denver School Board and Oberholtzer disregarded the decision as inconsequential to their district. The media joined school officials in boasting that their schools were free of racism. Quickly after the ruling, the *Rocky Mountain News* published an article heralding integration in DPS. The article featured a photo of an “interracial and interethnic group” of Manual High students and the headline read, “No Segregation in Denver schools.” Another article claimed “There are no Prejudices Here.”¹¹⁴ Over the course of the next two decades, however, the unique forms of discrimination which were alive and well in DPS became increasingly public

¹¹³ Shikes, “Three Denver Public School Superintendents,” 216-219.

¹¹⁴ Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 161, quoted from “There are No Prejudices Here,” *the Rocky Mountain News*, May 18, 1954: 6.

and Oberholtzer, the school board, parents, teachers, and students were forced to reconcile these contradictions in image and practice.

Since Owen J. Goldrick, Denver's first schoolmaster arrived in 1859; Denver's public school system was under the operation of isolated, corporate-minded boards.¹¹⁵ Throughout the twentieth century, politics and corruption seemed more common among school board members than a consensual commitment to education.¹¹⁶ Board members, since the 1920s, openly advocated for gentlemanly agreements in the best interest of the superintendent.¹¹⁷ This tradition continued and increased during Oberholtzer's tenure. In the first ten years of his leadership, Oberholtzer actively courted school board members' admiration and respect. He considered many of them personal friends. Board President Isador Samuels likened Oberholtzer to a successful coach, and the board to a winning team stating, "You're not going to let others break up the combination by taking the coach away."¹¹⁸ While critics groaned that the school board was an exclusive clique, apolitical, and elitist, members of the board claimed that they were civic-minded. They operated like a well-oiled machine, with Oberholtzer directing progress. He was an autocratic leader, and he considered himself the chief executive officer of the school board, earning him the prestigious nickname, "The Czar" in the Denver press and among teachers.¹¹⁹ From 1947 to 1967, The Czar reigned over public schools in Denver. For two decades he masterminded Denver's response *Brown v. Board*, negotiated with an

¹¹⁵ Shikes, "Three Denver Public School Superintendents," 47.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 141.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ *Rocky Mountain News* 22 December 1952.

¹¹⁹ Pearson and Pearson, "Litigation and Community Change."

increasingly vocal constituency of teachers, and attempted to respond to the changing nature of education as the city became increasingly diverse.

During these twenty years, Oberholtzer saw a rise in parental and community involvement on the behalf of the city's schools. Beginning in 1950, parents in Denver complained that school boundaries were "drawn to keep minority children in predominately minority schools."¹²⁰ Because they believed they could argue that prejudice was not a problem, The DPS board refused to act within the terms of *Brown*. With the lack of *de jure* segregation laws and a history of relying on *de facto* and residential segregation, they seemed protected from court interference throughout the 1950s and 1960s. While some black parents voiced demands for integration following the *Brown* case, the school board chose not to respond, preferring instead to ignore any previous racist decisions once made to isolate black and Chicano students in the past, which ultimately created a segregated system. Though their version of segregated education looked, from the outside, very different from the formal dual system operating in the South, Denver's schools were nonetheless defined by segregation.

In the years before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Denver school board's disregard of black and Chicano student needs became apparent. First, the new Manual High School opened in the heart of Five Points. The original Manual Training school was closed in 1950 due to overcrowding and poor conditions. Three years later when the school reopened, enrollment was predominately black and Chicano. That same year Robbie Bean, a black woman with a Master's Degree in Education was turned down

¹²⁰ League of Women Voters, "Composite View of Denver's School Desegregation" April 1974, revised September 1976 and updated September 1980. Denver, Colorado: LARASA Library., *The Denver Post*, April 9, 1959. Rachel Noel Papers, Box 1. Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2. FF15.

for a teaching job and told she was under-qualified. At the time, there were no openings for teachers in the disproportionately black schools, but some positions in the predominately white schools were left vacant and Mrs. Bean went home without a job. Additionally, the school board doctored neighborhood boundaries to separate whites from black and Chicano students. In 1955, just a year after *Brown*, the school board announced an expansion plan that stretched the district's boundary across Colorado Boulevard, the state highway that ran through the city and separated Five Points from Park Hill. A year later, the board shifted new boundaries in order to maintain a black majority at Cole Junior High school and approved construction for a new elementary school on the east side of Colorado Boulevard. Boundary changes and pupil reassignment were common techniques employed by western school boards hoping to avoid reprimand from the U.S. Supreme Court. In L.A., Phoenix, and Denver alike, segregation prevailed as local governments exploited the lack of *de jure* segregation, and fooled themselves into believing they did not enforce isolation and oppression. Instead, a complicated system of policies, gerrymandering and covert racism remained the unspoken reality for western urbanites, and *de facto* segregation prevailed as the coined phrase excusing away policymakers' direct involvement in a system of oppression.

School boards across the country focused on *Brown* but local efforts for educational equality provided a foundation for this landmark case. While *Brown v. Board* remains the watershed moment in the history of segregation, it was not the first or only court order that influenced movements for educational equality. Foundationally, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which in 1896 established the constitutionality of "separate but equal," set the

standard for segregated education.¹²¹ This language was misappropriated and applied to schools at all levels throughout the nation.¹²² Three of the earliest cases challenging “separate but equal” education heard by the U.S. Supreme Court had to do with graduate education, but set a precedent that would reverberate for decades.¹²³ In the years following, *Brown I* and *Brown II* established segregation was unconstitutional and demanded desegregation be carried out as soon as possible. Americans used this watershed as cases regarding just how to create educational equality based on local circumstances made their way to the country’s highest court. From 1955 until *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1* was heard in 1974, the Supreme Court ended freedom of choice plans, established busing as a useful technique for desegregation, and placed the burden of integration on the shoulders of black students.¹²⁴ All of these verdicts had two important things in common. First, each of the lawsuits challenged *de jure* segregation. Secondly, all of these cases focused on issues in southern states. Colorado’s school system simply did not fit this bill.

Western school boards took full advantage of the nation’s preoccupation with school desegregation in the southern states. From 1954 to 1966, the Denver school board and others in the West drew boundaries around black neighborhoods to prevent racial mixing. They shut down schools to continue the permanence of segregation when they

¹²¹ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

¹²² In 1899, the Supreme Court upheld the “separate but equal” doctrine within public education in *Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education* 175 U.S. 528 (1899).

¹²³ *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*, 305 U.S. 337 (1938).; *Sipuel v. University of Oklahoma*, 332 U.S. 631 (1948).; *Swealt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629 (1950).

¹²⁴ *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* 391 U.S. 430 (1968).; *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenberg Board of Education* 402 U.S. 1 (1971).; *Miliken v. Bradley* 48 U.S. 717 (1974).

could no longer influence housing policies. They implemented hiring practices that isolated black and Chicano teachers in the lowest income neighborhoods, while compensating them at fractions of white teachers' salaries. A small select few middle class black students were strategically placed in white schools in an attempt to fool the public into thinking that desegregation happened naturally in the Mile High City. For all of these reasons, segregation perpetuated as an educational reality in Denver until nearly two decades after *Brown*.¹²⁵

Neighborhood Schools: Manual High, Cole Junior, and Elementary Schools

For blacks and Chicanos in Denver, Manual High was the center of their historical connection to Denver. For more than half a century, the Five Points neighborhood and Manual High school represented community, tradition, and racial-uplift. From its inception in 1894, Manual sought to prepare all students for “the active duties of life, those who could not go to college, as well as prepare the more fortunate for a college course.”¹²⁶ Because Manual was originally a DPS experiment, it was an open campus for any Denver residents wanting to attend; no racial restrictions prohibiting blacks or other minorities existed. This legacy continued throughout district consolidation and boundary assignments in 1906, and black students began to view Manual as their own.¹²⁷ The earliest documented black social club organized in 1942, minority students established

¹²⁵ *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1*, 413 U.S. 189, 5-7.; Wilfred KEYES et al., Petitioners, v. SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1, DENVER, COLORADO, et al., 413 U.S. 189

¹²⁶ Denver Public Schools, *Brief Histories of the Denver Public Schools: Compiled for the Administrative Offices of the Denver Public Schools*. (Denver, Colorado: 1952).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

the “Hi Lite Club,” a social organization that sponsored dances and assumed responsibility for the “interests of the colored population of Manual.”¹²⁸

Community, home, and school life, “naturally intertwined” in Denver’s minority schools, as relationships among parents and teachers influenced curriculum and behavioral standards. Manual, Cole Junior High, and their feeder elementary schools, Traylor, Whittier, Gilpin, and later Park Hill, were a significant part of Denver’s black community, particularly in the Five Points neighborhood. The *Denver Blade* explained the connection to school and community was eminent in Five Points. In an editorial, writer John Wallace remembered about leaving his community school, “When my contact with the school was broken, so was my contact with the community I had known.”¹²⁹ Though Wallace described his experiences as a university student, his observations nonetheless applied to high school students, schools, and communities in Denver. He argued that the community relied upon students to thrive, and that when students “graduated, quit school,” or moved on to other endeavors, they created a neighborhood made up of strangers instead of a community of neighbors. Wallace applauded those who stayed in Denver generally, and Five Points specifically to “give rebirth to the area.”¹³⁰

Scholars of African American history often argue that churches and schools are the two most central pillars of the black community, and the two are intertwined. David Cecelski, in his history of Hyde County, North Carolina, explains the process. Black

¹²⁸ Ibid, 22.

¹²⁹ Wallace, “Greater Five Points: The Things I Remember” *Denver Blade*, September 1961.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

students attended Sunday school classes that regularly complimented the course work assigned at school. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students often attended the same churches, thus lessons taught in church and in the classroom were frequently reinforced. Educators were “conscious of their roles as mentors,” in and out of the classroom, and they provided assistance to parents who required additional childcare outside of regular school hours. The church and schoolhouse were the two aspects of community dominated by black leadership and community involvement, which created a sense of pride for these two institutions within black communities across the country.¹³¹

Both black and Chicano communities in Denver placed Manual High at the center of their communal experience, though each group laid claim to it for different reasons. For the most part, the school remained segregated, since its location in Five Points effectively guaranteed that it would be a “black high school with some Hispanic enrollment” by 1960.¹³² Because of this, the school board considered Manual a black school, and attempted to manipulate neighborhood boundaries to maintain this distribution. Manual was a beacon in the community for achievement and cultural pride. Alumni from the Five Points school reinforced a “special mystique” that both parents and students celebrated as something unique about Manual.¹³³ Mayor Wellington Webb, a

¹³¹ David Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, University of Carolina Press, 9, 64-65. For more on the vital role of the church in black communities, see also Web duBois, “The Church and Religion” *The Crisis* Vol. 40 No. 10. (October 1933): 236-237; Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Sarah L. Barnes, “Black Culture and Community Action” *Social Forces* Vol. 84 No. 2 (December 2005): 967-994; Eric C. Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990).

¹³² Maurice Mitchell, “The Desegregation of Denver’s Public schools.” *Center Magazine* Vol. 11, No. 6 (1978): 69.

¹³³ Cindy Brovosky, “Reaching Out: Manual inviting neighbors in high school holds fair to connect with area.” *Denver Post* 31 May 1998: B-01.

renowned Manual 1958 alumnus, remarked that Manual built a “distinguished legacy of scholars, sports teams, and community leaders” throughout its tumultuous history.¹³⁴

Webb was referring to Denver locals who graduated from Manual and went on to make notable historic contributions in Denver and throughout the West. Over the course of its history, Five Points community members and Denver politicians alike attempted to rebrand Manual as, “Something of a school of government.” Along with Wellington Webb, Norman Rice, who graduated from Manual in 1961, went on to lead a major city’s government. He became Seattle’s first and only black mayor in 1989.¹³⁵ Manual graduates who made local impact included former athletes who went on to be state and local police officers, locals who graduated and returned to their alma maters to teach at Manual, politicians, activists, and organizers. In fact, part of Manual’s connection to the black community and its development of future leaders involved a commitment to athletic achievement. Through organized sports and various after-school athletic opportunities, Manual earned a reputation of success that “outlasted disaster and segregation” in the black community.¹³⁶

Manual’s centrality in Five Points created a culture of respect for education that spanned to include other black schools like Cole Junior High, Whittier, Newton, Wyatt, Harrington, and Mitchell Elementary. These schools provided unique opportunities for blacks to become local leaders, respected by the general Denver community, and examples of achievement for black children. Though parents found problems with the

¹³⁴ Lopez, *Denver Post* 16 April 1994.

¹³⁵ Lane, *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

disproportionate distribution of black teachers to minority schools, these teachers tended to improve the quality of education for their students, and they exemplified leadership in action. Many Five Points parents found that as the number and percentage of black teachers in predominately black schools was a benefit to their children, despite the realities of segregation.¹³⁷ Marie Greenwood, who became Denver's first black teacher in 1935, spent sixty years as a DPS instructor, teaching at segregated and integrated schools until she retired in 1974.¹³⁸ Greenwood never called herself an activist, but she spent her adult life breaking barriers and encouraging black children to invest in their community. She recalled of her first assignment at Whittier Elementary, "It's like building a house. You lay a good foundation and you can build anything."¹³⁹ Greenwood took time off to raise children, and returned to DPS in 1953, seeking a job at Newton school on West 4th Avenue and Vrain. At the time, Newton was widely recognized as Denver's "black school," and Greenwood helped to organize the pre-school and PTA, in order to encourage black familial and community involvement. During her brief time as a substitute before being permanently hired at Newton, Greenwood was only assigned to northeast schools, which were predominately black and Hispanic. This pleased Greenwood, who believed, "Good teachers come in all colors and are dedicated to teaching children."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ "Negro Teacher Jobs Explained," *Denver Post*, 22 July 1969: 3.

¹³⁸ Marie Anderson, Notice of Probational Appointment, *Denver Public schools: Office of the Board of Education*, June 12, 1935: Marie Anderson papers, BCAARL.

¹³⁹ Alan Dumas, "Public School Pioneer," *Rocky Mountain News*, 21 February 1999: 13D.

¹⁴⁰ Marie Louise Greenwood, handwritten biography, 1993. Located at the DPL, BCAARL, Marie Greenwood Papers.

Long before the *Keyes v. Denver Schools* trial, which reached the U.S. Supreme Court by 1974, desegregation overpowered the conversation about educational equality. Parents made a great show of promising that busing would desegregate the schools and create equal access for black, Chicano, and white students. However, community control remained a viable option among blacks and Chicanos alike. Manual High, with its prominence in Five Points remained a center of pride and community engagement throughout the school desegregation controversy. While some white parents feared that their children might be ultimately sent to attend Manual if desegregation ultimately meant a a busing program, black and Chicano parents remained proud of their neighborhood school.

Cole Junior High and Manual High were parts of a larger history connecting historically black schools and their surrounding community exists throughout the United States. In the rural south, historically black schools, segregated throughout their entire existence, were closed en masse as desegregation swept the region after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The Supreme Court made a widespread federal decision that impacted the entire country, but left the implementation of educational equality to the local school boards and administrations. David Cecelski wrote, “Instead of reconciling black and white schools on equal terms, white leaders made school desegregation a one-way street.”¹⁴¹ Thus the legacy of school desegregation became one of new failure, as black communities lost opportunities for leadership, middle class advancement, and symbols of heritage and leadership. Denver blacks were reluctant to allow Manual to

¹⁴¹ Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road*, 7-8.; See also Bell, *And We Are Not Saved.*; Bell, *Faces in the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, (1992).; Bell, *Shades of Brown: New Perspectives on School Desegregation* (1980). , and *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Forgotten Hopes of Education Reform* (2005).

meet this same fate. Drawing instead on Manual's distinction in the city, black parents advocated for preserving the high school's legacy as a pillar in the black community.¹⁴²

Despite the historical relevance these schools represented to the citizens of Denver, Manual, Cole and their feeder elementary schools were often disregarded in the eyes of the school board and middle-class white parents. In some opinions, these schools were the least desirable to all members of the city. Many board members failed to recognize that black and Chicano Denverites were proud of their schools in Five Points. Because of this, teachers assigned to Manual High, Cole Junior High, and area elementary schools usually lacked experience, and were therefore hired at the lowest salaries. These teachers were disadvantaged and within a few years, qualified teachers sought transfers to better paying schools in the district.¹⁴³ According to a team of researchers appointed by the school board in 1964, there was a lack of teachers with proficiency in Spanish assigned to schools with a predominate Spanish-speaking majority, and the few black administrators and teachers with significant training and experiences were not hired to neighborhood schools like Cole and Manual. Therefore, the majority of teachers assigned to black and Spanish-speaking schools were not prepared to teach "children of varied backgrounds."¹⁴⁴ Even teachers who had the exact same titles, salaries, and training lacked commonality in their daily lives at school. Denis R. Martin and Marsha J. Hummel, who taught at Cole Junior and Hill Junior High, respectively,

¹⁴² For more on black schools as prominent features of black community and leadership, see; [Barbara Shircliffe](#), "We Got the Best of That World" and [Dominique Downs](#), "Their Highest Potential."

¹⁴³ Martin Moran, 1969. "East Denver Unit Has School Plan." *Rocky Mountain News* 20 August, 1969., 36.

¹⁴⁴ "Inadequate Boundary Policy Criticized" *Denver Post*. 1 March 1964., 7D.; "Special Study Committee on the Equality of Educational Opportunity in the Denver Public Schools (Denver: Denver Public Schools, 1964).

faced very different challenges when they arrived to work each day. At Cole, teacher turnover was unprecedented throughout the 1960s. Martin arrived in August among thirty-six new teachers; most were assigned to teach subjects that were very different from their college majors. Nearly forty percent of Cole's teachers were new hires in 1969, a trend that started in the early 1950s.¹⁴⁵

The few black teachers assigned to predominately white schools found themselves isolated, and far away from their own neighborhoods. Some were expected to speak on behalf of all black students, and respond to discipline conflicts. Effie Northgraw, a black woman, was a teacher at Hill Junior High school. Hill, located on Colorado Boulevard and Leetsdale was in an affluent neighborhood, and was home mostly to wealthy, Jewish children. Effie had a family of her own, but rarely talked about her children to other teachers. In 1968, Effie mentored Judy Barnett, a young student-teacher about to graduate. Barnett remembered, "Effie was the only black teacher at Hill." Other teachers "came to her" with discipline problems, "because she was black, she would know how to handle the situation." Effie's colleagues often requested suggestions from her, regarding all discipline problems, regardless of the student's race, though the few black students were sent to Effie often. "And that broke her heart."¹⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Effie's white colleagues experienced low turn-over, as most teachers assigned to predominately white schools tended to stay put.¹⁴⁷ Cole and Manual were physical embodiments of these disadvantages, as parents often pointed out. By 1970, both

¹⁴⁵ Charles Carter, "2 Teachers Tasks Take Unlike Turns at Cole and Hill." *Denver Post* 27 April 1969., 23.

¹⁴⁶ Judy Barnett, interview by author, 13 July 2012, transcript and recording in possession of author.

¹⁴⁷ Carter, *Denver Post*, 23.

schools were in desperate need of renovation; the buildings were overcrowded and could not accommodate the yearly increase in pupils, books and equipment were outdated, and the schools lacked modern upgrades to keep them in competition with others in the district. Concerns mounted throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with blacks in particular criticizing the school board for ignoring the needs of these schools and ignoring the need to compensate for the “massive growth of school age children.” In 1962, for example, parents petitioned the school board to build a new school and shut down the seventy-nine year old Whittier school, as well as build more classrooms for Wyatt, Harrington, and Mitchell schools in Five Points.¹⁴⁸

Turning the Tide: Black Boycotts and Protests, Denver in 1960s

In 1961, *The Denver Blade* pronounced segregation “dead” in Denver but worried “what will it cost to bury it?” Denver blacks faced realities in “housing, employment,” and education that defied Colorado’s liberal reputation.¹⁴⁹ Just one month later, *The Blade* published a letter to the editor that demonstrated perhaps segregation wasn’t dead after all, despite the recently passed Colorado fair housing act. “Mr. O.C.,” a retired Army Master Sergeant and his wife moved to Denver in November, 1961. The first day they arrived, the couple was “refused the right to rent space.” Every “trailer court we went to” told them they did not “take Negroes.” Finally, Mr. and Mrs. O.C. were invited to stay with “kind people” who lived on a rural lot until they could make “permanent

¹⁴⁸ Percy Dante, “Citizens Blitzkrieg School Board” *The Denver Blade*. 29 March 1962., 1.

¹⁴⁹ Percy Dante, “Segregation is Dead, What will it Cost to Bury It?” *The Denver Blade* 9 November 1961: 2.

arrangements.”¹⁵⁰ Thankful for the isolated hospitality but angered by the “direct violation of the Colorado fair housing act” they experienced at the trailer courts, the couple “filed a complaint” with the state against each offending trailer park. Mr. O.C. explained that while the court owners knew they were in violation of state law, they believed they could discriminate openly, because many blacks in town did not retaliate. Mr. O.C. and his wife sought the additional help of CORE. Two white CORE representatives posed as a “test” couple and applied to rent spaces at each of the trailer courts where Mr. and Mrs. O.C. had been denied. “In every case where the test couple was welcome to move in, we were refused,” Mr. O.C. summarized. The next day, Mr. and Mrs. O.C., and the CORE test couple were joined by additional CORE representatives. The group approached managers at each of the tested trailer courts. The activists “politely reminded the managers of the fair housing law and told them something of CORE direct action methods.” Mr. O.C. noticed that when faced with complaints filed to the state, the managers did not seem concerned with the potential consequences. On the other hand, when faced with a CORE-initiated protest, they “of course choose to comply with the law.”¹⁵¹ In the early 1960s, CORE and direct action protests like those they coordinated at Denver Dry Goods and the trailer parks helped to turn the tide of activism in Denver. *Denver Post* reporter Charles Roos explained this shift in 1963 when he wrote, “The Negro is no longer satisfied merely to extend what he

¹⁵⁰ “Letter to the Editor,” *The Denver Blade* 7 December 1961: 6.

¹⁵¹ “Letter to the Editor,” *The Denver Blade* 7 December 1961: 6.

calls his ‘ghetto’... he wants something more than civil rights filed away in a dusty volume of Colorado statutes.”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 198, quoted from Charles Roos, “Racial Bias Subtle but Real,” *Denver Post* October 17, 1963.

CHAPTER 3

“Something Big is Happening in Denver”: The Seeds of an Early Movement, 1947-1967

New Manual, Old Problems

On an early summer morning in 1953, twelve-year-old George Lane abandoned his paper route. He and his friends had heard news of a big fire in Five Points. They pedaled furiously to Franklin Street to see what the commotion was. George and his buddies ditched their bikes a block away from the three-alarm fire, and stood in awe as Manual High School was engulfed in flames.¹⁵³ The fire started early on July 23rd and destroyed “Old Manual,” a symbolic and beautiful structure in the middle of Five Points.¹⁵⁴ George Lane, who later graduated from “New Manual” and went on to work as a *Denver Post* reporter never forgot that day. “The tear-stained faces” of the crowd watching, “not the physical destruction,” remained cemented in Lane’s memory. “The burned-out hulk of the old red-brick building” represented “so much in their lives. No emotion could have been more genuine.”¹⁵⁵ Through the smoke and their tears, bystanders caught glimpses of “New Manual,” which was slated to open just blocks from the burning building in September 1953. In 1950, the school board announced that Manual High was overcrowded. They dropped the word “training” from the school’s name and began planning to build a new location across the street. Once Old Manual went up in flames, remembered George Lane more than four decades later, “many of the

¹⁵³ Lane, *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

¹⁵⁴ Some consider Manual to be in the Whittier neighborhood of Denver, which is adjacent to Five Points. However, for the purposes of this study, Manual’s location within the Five Points community takes precedent.

¹⁵⁵ Lane, *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

people who offered tearful goodbyes” eventually came to appreciate the new location, but not without hesitation.¹⁵⁶

Prior to the 1953 fire, organizations and individuals alike pressured the school board to improve conditions in Five Points schools, which were predominately black and Chicano. In 1950, the school board announced plans to close down Manual High School, citing parental demands and concerns regarding over-crowding and aging buildings. However, parents also complained that the school’s racial makeup was becoming alarmingly homogenous, with new black students arriving every year and more white students leaving for East High, West High, or suburban schools. The school board disregarded this concern and chose to build “New Manual” directly in the shadow of its namesake. Promising “vocational education” which, they argued, would attract intellectual students from all over the city, the school board sought to convince Denver parents that the New Manual would be the best school in the district. However new the building might be, Manual nonetheless was left wanting when it opened in 1953. Denver Public Schools (DPS), instead of spending money on new furniture and materials, simply collected used desks and books from other high schools and had them delivered to Manual.¹⁵⁷

The school district remained an active promoter of segregation, within specific schools and the DPS system altogether. Students at New Manual were discouraged from socializing in integrated groups, black students were prohibited from the prom, and administrators were cruel to students of color. Manual in its new manifestation, failed to

¹⁵⁶ Lane, *Denver Post*, 10 April 1994.

¹⁵⁷ Romero, “Of Race and Rights,” 385-387.

attract white students from across the city. The school board manipulated attendance boundaries within New Manual's first three years, by fixing the eastern border at York Street, the line between Five Points and the more integrated community of Clayton Park. In 1956, the superintendent's office released a plan to increase "optional" attendance zones, but these new boundaries did very little to integrate the nearly all-white East High, and the nearly all-minority Manual.¹⁵⁸ By drawing the boundaries this way, the Superintendent and the school board acknowledged publicly their intentions to segregate known black students to Manual and its feeder schools. These new boundaries were drawn suspiciously to include the state's only two elected officials, allowing them the limited opportunity to choose the Five Points attendance district. Senator George Brown assumed the school board was sending a message, "We're going to fix it so that your elected officials can escape from what we consider obviously a bad situation."¹⁵⁹

When black students complained to the school board, Superintendent Kenneth Oberholtzer scoffed that the conditions were the burden of the students. He claimed that black students were not as interested in taking accelerated courses, nor were they likely to attend college, thus, college preparatory courses would be a waste of money at Manual. With this argument, Oberholtzer stated that Manual then had little need for improved teacher training, resources, and attractive courses for college-bound students.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Romero, "Of Race and Rights,"387-388.; The two elected officials were Senator George Brown and City Councilman Elvin Caldwell, who lived in Five Points. "Court Transcripts," February 1970 *Keyes Collection* Box 8 849-850.

¹⁵⁹ Romero, "Of Race and Rights,"387-388.; The two elected officials were Senator George Brown and City Councilman Elvin Caldwell, who lived in Five Points. "Court Transcripts," February 1970 *Keyes Collection* Box 8 849-850.

¹⁶⁰ Romero, "Of Race and Rights,"389-390.; Watson, "Removing the Barricades."

Reform and Resistance

Denver, with its tolerant reputation and record of passing liberal legislation, was nonetheless in need of civil rights activity. In 1947, blacks and Chicanos in Denver organized to challenge managerial racism, segregation, and the progressive mystique. They began by confronting employment discrimination and the loopholes that allowed private and some public employers to refuse hiring minorities. Next, activists organized to challenge housing inequality, and the contradictions that existed in Colorado's milestone fair housing policy. Whites and middle-class blacks also opposed the threat of white flight in some of Denver's most desirable neighborhoods, as blacks began taking advantage of the few opportunities they had for fair housing, many white residents threatened to leave the city and head for the suburbs. Finally, resisting neighborhood segregation led many blacks and Chicanos to fight the school board to make adequate changes to their public school system. As the school board continued to avoid meeting their demands, different groups of activists and parents chose varying methods of response. Some black middle-class parents and their white neighbors, experimenting with the methods that were previously successful in integrating neighborhoods and warding off white flight, devised a plan to effectively desegregate Denver's schools.

Activists in Denver had a long history of civil rights organizing. Typically, these groups researched and investigated problems in the city, with the intention of making suggestions in order to create change. In 1943, whites and blacks from varying professions and groups in the city formed the Denver Unity Council (DUC). Using Cold War rhetoric to warn Denverites about the evils of "Hitlerism," "discrimination," and "bigotry," the DUC co-founders sought to create and "interracial, interethnic, and

interfaith” organization.¹⁶¹ For example, in its first pamphlet the DUC criticized racism in Denver, stating that the evils of oppression “were not trademarks of Hitler’s world alone.”¹⁶² Leading the charge was co-founder Dean Paul Roberts, reverend at Denver’s St. John’s Episcopal Cathedral.¹⁶³ DUC membership spiked almost immediately, as over eight-hundred individuals joined within the DUC’s first three years and ninety-five offices were created within the organization. Arguably its most influential professional member was the local Anti-Defamation League (ADL), “originally a Jewish self-defense organization” that later blossomed under its national leadership into a “full-throttle... American intergroup relations movement.” The Tri-State ADL was based in Denver, but considered Wyoming, New Mexico, and Colorado within its sphere of influence. The ADL worked with DUC to create meaningful relationships with local political and business leaders, as well as Denver clergy. The ADL helped to establish the DUC as a self-sustaining agency with its eye on civil rights research and activism.¹⁶⁴

However committed the DUC may have seemed to its interethnic ideal, its leadership was nonetheless dominated by “educated, middle-class white professional business men and women.”¹⁶⁵ This was common among other agencies in Denver. Founded in 1946, Denver’s Urban League (UL) was controlled by a board of mostly

¹⁶¹ Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 9.

¹⁶² *Denver Unity Council*, Pamphlet 1947: 2; Nina Mjagkjj *Organizing Black America* (Routledge, 2013): 185-186.

¹⁶³ Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 15.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23-26.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

white professional men.¹⁶⁶ Both the DUC and the ADL had significant influence over the UL, its formation, and its daily activities. While the national organization, established in 1910, was dedicated to acclimating blacks to their new urban lifestyles following migration from the rural South, Denver's UL embraced the "intergroup" attitude in the city, a tone set by the DUC.¹⁶⁷

The DUC helped campaign for Quigg Newton, and when he was sworn in in 1947, Newton made good on his promises to the council. The new mayor appointed an inaugural committee to analyze discrimination in Denver's governmental agencies and businesses.¹⁶⁸ Made up of eight interim members, this council conducted studies of neighborhoods, schools, and services in order to research discrimination in Denver and educate their local community. The DUC, like many organizations in Denver focused on local change, but found ways to reach out to national agencies for assistance. In a 1947 letter to the President's Committee on Civil Rights, DUC Executive Secretary Louise Evans cited seven areas of concern faced by Denver minorities, and made suggestions for federal involvement. Educational inequality, housing and employment discrimination, and the need for a civil rights act were among the important suggestions made by the DUC in 1947. Evans wrote, "Employment discrimination is unquestionably the first on the list of critical problems."¹⁶⁹ Fair employment, as evidenced by the DUC report, was a

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶⁹ Louise Evans, letter to Harry Truman's President's Committee on Civil Rights. Denver Unity Council, June 25, 1947. Harry S. Truman Library, Committee on Civil Rights.; Similar reports include an Urban League study on Denver black employment in the 1920s. This study concluded that blacks typically found blue-collar work including positions as Pullman porters, waiters, janitors, and cooks.

myth in Denver, as blacks in particular were victims of discrimination. Denver blacks later pointed this out during the Denver Dry Goods boycott, arguing that employment discrimination took many forms. Blacks had to fight to be considered for jobs outside of domestic and janitorial work, despite the fact that they were admitted as patrons at the same stores that refused to hire them. Secondly, blacks were denied housing opportunities outside of Five Points and Capitol Hill. Evans and the DUC urged the President to consider federal investment in nation-wide legislation to end housing discrimination. Finally, the DUC cited education among their top concerns. As evidenced in the letter, the DUC recognized that housing, employment, and education were interrelated in Denver, as they were in many urban communities. Segregated employment and housing led to segregated education, which perpetuated the longevity of discrimination and racism for generations. Evans wrote, “Federal action against segregated schools should be taken.”¹⁷⁰ In 1951, the interim committee to study discrimination for Mayor Newton was made permanent when the Denver City Council established the Denver Commission on Human Relations. This was one of the only committees like it in the West, but across the nation, city councils were busy appointing citizens to study “intergroup” relations.¹⁷¹ For

¹⁷⁰ Louise Evans, letter to Harry Truman’s President’s Committee on Civil Rights. Denver Unity Council, June 25, 1947. Harry S. Truman Library, Committee on Civil Rights.; Similar reports include an Urban League study on Denver black employment in the 1920s. This study concluded that blacks typically found blue-collar work including positions as Pullman porters, waiters, janitors, and cooks. Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 7.

¹⁷¹ Newsum, “Cold War Colorado,” 15.; As of 1951, only Colorado and South Dakota had committees like this one. Dan Dodson, “Public Intergroup Relations Agencies,” *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 20. No. 3. (Summer 1951): 398.

the most part, the black community seemed pleased with the DUC, the Mayor's Commission, and Newton himself.¹⁷²

As Denver expanded during the 1950s, housing developments began to reflect trends across the West. Historians generally agree that “one of the greatest migrations of the twentieth century was the movement of whites from central cities to the suburbs.”¹⁷³ Denver whites joined this migration en masse, despite the reputation the state had for racially tolerant housing policies. Instead, when new laws passed, like Colorado's oft-bragged about fair housing legislation, the subsequent reactions among white homeowners were often more telling than the regulations themselves. Historian Albert M. Camarillo writes that as people of color moved into western cities, “. . .the combination of federal laws, blockbusting real estate practices, and fear led to the wholesale departure of whites from many formerly segregated communities. . .”¹⁷⁴ By the late 1950s, “white flight” seemed very real to Denverites, who considered the outcomes of this threat in Detroit, Boston, and Chicago to be warning signs of what not to do. While few white residents sought integration in their segregated communities, many paid lip service to housing equality, while privately working to manage the actual threat of change. Whites in the Park Hill neighborhood in particular, worried that if too many blacks purchased homes in their neighborhood, white homeowners would then fall victim to “panic

¹⁷² “Race Discrimination Uncovered, Unanswered, and Growing Rampant in Denver,” *Denver Star*, December 6, 1947: p.1.

¹⁷³ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 2nd Edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995, 2005): xxi.; Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).; Andrew Weise, *Places of their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).; Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).; Kenneth M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁷⁴ Camarillo, “Blacks, Chicanos, and the New Racial Frontier,” 47.

selling.”¹⁷⁵ This fear of black neighbors was common in white America, as soon as black migrants arrived. At first, urban whites identified blacks “as a threat and began to defend themselves using force and threats of violence”¹⁷⁶ However, when cities like Denver banned restrictive covenants and passed fair housing legislation, locals turned to neighborhood associations combat integration, educate locals, and prioritize white homeownership over black “invasion.”¹⁷⁷ Perhaps most telling in Denver was the rise of two neighborhood associations, the first that organized *outside* of city limits to educate Denver on civil rights issues, and the second, the Park Hill Action Committee, which in its origins was devised by white homeowners to limit desegregation, but ultimately and unexpectedly became a vocal civil rights force.

In 1958, on the eve of Colorado’s passage of the country’s first Fair Housing Act, a group of white homeowners gathered to create the Littleton Council for Human Relations. Founding members included Dr. Charles Fraser and his wife, author Virginia, as well as Ellie Miller Greenberg, a speech pathologist and educator, and social worker Libby Bortz. All of the founding members were recent residents of Colorado, born on the east coast, and college-educated in the Midwest. “People in Denver didn’t think we necessarily had a problem,” recalled Fred Brown, a retired *Denver Post* journalist who

¹⁷⁵ Park Hill residents claimed “panic selling” threatened their neighborhood in particular. Charles Freeman Longino Jr., *The Park Hill Action Committee: A Study of the Legitimation Process of Community Involvement*. (Master’s Thesis: University of Colorado, 1962): 11.

¹⁷⁶ Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 2nd Edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995, 2005): 24.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

covered the Council's work in the 1960s.¹⁷⁸ Virginia Fraser and her husband moved to Denver in 1957, where she began studying for her Master's Degree. Having worked with the American Friends Service Committee, Fraser helped to integrate neighborhood playgrounds in Washington D.C., and upon arriving in Denver, she began looking for similar opportunities. She joined the League of Women Voters to advocate for fair housing issues and civil rights, and in doing so was motivated to start the Littleton Council on Human Relations.¹⁷⁹ The organization emphasized fairness in housing practices, creating and lobbying for fair housing legislation throughout the 1960s. The council organized interracial social events and gatherings at a time when suburbanization and white flight to Littleton might have seemed the norm.¹⁸⁰ Founder Libby Bortz said of the council, "We wanted to make this a community that was more representative of the country."¹⁸¹ Bortz and the committee, made up primarily of white middle-class suburbanites, nonetheless attempted to research and create programs to improve race relations, and halt white flight.

The Evolution of the Park Hill Action Committee

Perhaps more noticeably, a small group of self-proclaimed white "progressives" began organizing to promote liberal race relations, and to steer racial integration in their

¹⁷⁸ Adam M. Dempsey, "A Civic Visit to Denver by Doctor King" *Littleton Independent* and *Colorado Symphony Events* blog *When a King Came To Town*, KRMA Rocky Mountain PBS 13 January 2014.

¹⁷⁹ Sonya Ellingboe, "Activist, Author Left her Mark," *Littleton Independent* 26 Nov 2011: 1.

¹⁸⁰ Sonya Ellingboe, "Civil Rights struggles Discussed in Littleton," *Lone Tree Voice*, 26 March 2014: 1.

¹⁸¹ Jennifer Smith, "Libby Bortz's Life's Work Honored: Clinical Social Worker Values Justice, Equality." *Littleton Independent* 3 March 2014.

neighborhood. Beginning in 1958, the community of Park Hill had experienced slow and steady desegregation, as middle-class blacks purchased homes in the slightly more upscale neighborhood. At the time, Denver whites feared “ghettoization,” and thought that white flight created the decline of historic central urban neighborhoods. In 1960, eight Denver churches, seven of them white, sponsored the founding of an interdenominational collaborative of Park Hill residents.¹⁸² The group was made up by all white founders, led by chairman Ed Lupberger, a white professional and member of Montview Presbyterian Church, who recruited Art Branscombe of the *Denver Post* to serve as publicity chairman.¹⁸³ Additional founders included Art’s wife Bea, Gladys and John Bates, and Fred and Myrtle Thomas, all white neighbors and members of different neighborhood churches. Hoping to influence the future of the community, these white liberal homeowners organized the Park Hill Action Committee (PHAC) “to keep Park Hill a top notch neighborhood in every way.”¹⁸⁴ Their founding documents indicated that this was, “A church-sponsored group organized last spring to reverse any down-hill trends in Park Hill, and to make it instead an even better place in which to live.”¹⁸⁵ Their

¹⁸² The predominately white churches included Blessed Sacrament Catholic, City Park Baptist, Messiah Lutheran, Park Hill Congregational, and Park Hill Christian. St. Thomas Episcopal initiated a call for an integration congregation in the late 1950s, as the neighborhood began to change, and the only historically black church that joined the PHAC was Montview Presbyterian. *Park Hill Action Committee (Interdenominational)* “Park Hill Action Committee, (Interdenominational)” 1960: 2. Rachel Noel manuscripts, FF1, Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2. BCAARL, ARL.; <http://creatingcommunities.denverlibrary.org/story/churches-park-hill> Last accessed 10 April 2014.

¹⁸³ <http://greaterparkhill.org/2012/03/01/art-branscombe-helped-turn-the-tide-of-segregation/> last accessed 10 April 2014. <http://creatingcommunities.denverlibrary.org/story/park-hill-action-committee> last accessed 10 April 2014. <http://digitaldu.coalliance.org/fedora/repository/codu:30427> Last accessed 10 April 2014.

¹⁸⁴ Rachel Noel manuscripts, *Park Hill Scroll* clipping. FF1, Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2. BCAARL, ARL.

¹⁸⁵ *Park Hill Action Committee (Interdenominational)* “Park Hill Action Committee, (Interdenominational)” 1960: 2. Rachel Noel manuscripts, FF1, Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2. BCAARL, ARL.

original focus was to maintain the elitist environment in Park Hill. Likening their “Quality Hill” to Washington D.C.’s Georgetown, the PHAC sought to make and keep Park Hill “one of the most desirable residential areas... due to its distinctive character and great convenience to downtown.”¹⁸⁶ Attempting to halt the potential threat of white flight, this group of whites sought to combat ghettoization.¹⁸⁷ In 1960, Park Hill was 97% white and 3% black, with only one black family owning a home in the community. By the end of the 1960s, the figure shifted to nearly 50% white and 50% black, but the income level was maintained at “affluent and middle-class.”¹⁸⁸

From their early beginnings, PHAC identified a set of guidelines to selectively recruit desirable middle-class black neighbors, while encouraging affluent whites to stay in the community and embrace managerial racism. Their founding documents acknowledged, “We know that the glamour of the suburbs is near...,” but these same documents encouraged whites to stay near downtown as Park Hill will “come into its own.”¹⁸⁹ They developed a survey for potential black homeowners that requested biographical information, racial statistics on the buyers’ agent, the buyers’ plans to stay in the community. Additionally, PHAC created a questionnaire for white residents. The questions included “Would you contemplate moving out... if this neighborhood... was entered by another Negro family?”¹⁹⁰ PHAC identified many goals within their first few

¹⁸⁶ “PHAC’s Basic Purpose,” *Park Hill Actionnews* 1.1, October 1960: 2.

¹⁸⁷ Rebecca C. Dorward, *Denver’s Park Hill Neighborhood (Images of America Series)* (Denver, Colorado: Arcadia Publishing, 2010): 105.

¹⁸⁸ “PHAC’s Basic Purpose,” *Park Hill Actionnews* 1.1, October 1960: 2.

¹⁸⁹ Charles Freeman Longino Jr., “The Park Hill Action Committee: A Study of the Legitimation Process of Community Involvement,” (Master’s Thesis: University of Colorado, 1962): 40-41.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

years. They hoped that by integrating the neighborhood slowly and intentionally, they would create cohesion in the community, develop a sense of concern for the neighborhood and its schools, identify local leaders, and resolve problems with effective communication.¹⁹¹ In part due to these varied strategies, many Denver locals found PHAC and its mission to be confusing. Park Hill residents seemed divided on the purpose of the organization. Nearly half of all Park Hill neighbors thought PHAC was organized to integrate the community. The other half believed the organization existed to halt the invasion of black homebuyers.¹⁹²

This identity crisis continued as families remained segregated, within Park Hill. The few blacks that did move in occupied houses closest to the western boundary of the neighborhood. Residents living closest to this area were the most informed when it came to PHAC and integrated housing. One study completed in 1962 demonstrated that less than half of the Park Hill community was “aware of” PHAC. The study, which compiled data from nearly every resident in Park Hill, demonstrated that the only people who knew of PHAC and approved of their work were either; 1.) members of PHAC or.; 2.) black or white residents who lived in proximity to members of another race.¹⁹³ PHAC awareness and membership was equally driven by the congregations of the eight sponsoring churches. At first, PHAC seemed bound to its church sponsorship, as most members and organizers, as well as neighbors recognized the association based on the churches that supported it. This trend continued for PHAC’s first five years, but by the mid-1960s,

¹⁹¹ Rachel Noel manuscripts, *Park Hill Scroll* clipping. FF1, Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2. BCAARL, ARL.

¹⁹² Longino, “The Park Hill Action Committee,” 43-44.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 120-124.

however, the organization had moved away from its affiliation with the churches and took a decidedly political turn.

This shift occurred over the fate of Denver schools. When PHAC formed in 1960, founders Ed Lupberger and Art Branscombe wrote that one of their goals included protecting Park Hill and other elementary schools such as Smith, Stedman, Hallett, and Phillips. Nearly all of these schools enjoyed significant white majorities in 1960.¹⁹⁴ Following elementary, students went to Hill or Smiley Middle Schools in Park Hill and then East or Manual High. Worried that black homeownership might cause white neighbors to assume the community would go downhill, Lupberger and Branscombe planned to convince PHAC members that the Park Hill's assigned public schools were top of the line. They urged the school board to "keep their standards high" throughout the system. Cole and Manual, though they were in Five Points, were among PHAC's biggest concerns. The two schools lost white students consistently, and black and Chicano students made up the majority of the student body, with this figure growing every year. However, it was the new construction of Barrett Elementary in 1960 and proposed construction of another new school in 1962 that inspired PHAC to take more action in Denver's education equality movement.

Rachel and Edmund Noel were among the country's black "pioneers" who moved into predominately white neighborhoods from black enclaves in the 1940s and 1950s

¹⁹⁴ In 1960, Park Hill Elementary was comprised of nearly 100% white students. Smith Elementary recorded a black population of less than 3%. Stedman and Hallett were 99% and 99% white, respectively. Figures are taken from George Bardwell, *Park Hill Areas of Denver 1950-1966: An updating of the 1960 census, A study of population movement and property value* (Denver: Commission on Community Relations, 1966): 4-15. For a general overview of these numbers and the role they played in the *Keyes* case, see Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 52-53.

when they purchased a home in Park Hill.¹⁹⁵ Rachel Louise Bassette was born to civil rights lawyers in Hampton, Virginia in 1918. She spent her life watching her parents advocate for African Americans' rights to education, voting, and equal access, and she acquired a blend of legal knowledge and grassroots experiences that anchored her education and passions. Bassette graduated with a bachelor's degree from Hampton Institute and earned a Master's from Fisk University before marrying Edmond Noel, a surgeon, and relocating to Denver in 1949. Though the two came from privileged educational backgrounds, Rachel and Edmond shared a passion for public education. Rachel began her career as a school teacher, but because she was an inspired leader, politics seemed to call her.¹⁹⁶ Within her first few years in Denver, Rachel became an active community member. She joined church groups and ladies social clubs, establishing herself as an organizer and leader, but it was her daughter Angie who motivated Rachel to take her first political action. Rachel and Edmond enjoyed a quiet notoriety in Denver, and as members of the black professional class, they paired their upbringing and training with their leadership skills and civil rights knowledge to combat Denver's managerial racism and historic roadblocks facing middle class and poor blacks.¹⁹⁷ The Noels seemed an ideal couple when it came to PHAC, who hoped to maintain an elite, professional atmosphere in their community. In PHAC monthly newsletters, the organization often listed prominent black and white community members, which they hoped would demonstrate the panache and prestige of Park Hill. Yet Edmond and Rachel did not make

¹⁹⁵ Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, 180-181.

¹⁹⁶ The Hampton Institute has since been renamed Hampton University. Rachel Noel Papers, ARL117, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library.

¹⁹⁷ For more on the black professional class in the West, see Matthew C. Whitaker, *Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

the list. At first, Rachel Noel was not active in PHAC, though she was among the first few black residents in Park Hill. However, the Park Hill Action Committee and Rachel Noel would eventually work together to put Denver front-and-center in the nation's battle over education equality.

On an early fall day in September 1960, Angie Noel crossed the street, leaving Park Hill to attend Barrett Elementary School in Five Points. This seemingly commonplace act set in motion a series of events that led to Rachel Noel's political career and a major fight over education in the Mile High City. The community of Park Hill lies directly east of Five Points, but the two neighborhoods are separated by Colorado Boulevard, a four-lane major highway. When black families first began moving into Park Hill, many of them were consolidated on the west-most street backing up to Colorado Boulevard. Noticing this trend, DPS drew school variance boundaries to include the western corridor of Park Hill in the Five Points schools attendance zones, and in 1959, approved construction of a new public elementary school on the west side of Colorado Boulevard. When Barrett Elementary opened in 1960, 98% of the students attending were black. Most lived in Five Points, but some, like Angie Noel, were among the black children living in the western section of Park Hill, who had to cross Colorado Boulevard to go to school.¹⁹⁸

When the school board announced intentions to build Barrett in 1959, black parents like the Noels were concerned. Prior to this announcement, Angie was among the black and white children who were bussed to Park Hill Elementary, which was predominately white. When white parents complained about an increasing black

¹⁹⁸ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 30-32.

presence, the school board began to draft plans for a new school. Barrett was “built small,” and it became clear that the board intended to accommodate only the black community that straddled Colorado Boulevard.¹⁹⁹ When parents raised concerns about the location, school board members blamed overcrowding at Park Hill Elementary and many of the Five Points schools. Parents pointed out attendance lines were drawn to encircle black families and leave out white families, and Park Hill Elementary would remain overcrowded, even once Barrett opened. The school board ignored these concerns. Though she was displeased with the new construction, Rachel Noel sent Angie to attend fifth grade at Barrett Elementary. When Angie bemoaned that she was bored in classes, Noel researched the conditions at Barrett. She was incensed to find out that Angie was nearly a year behind her peers at Park Hill Elementary. She discovered that the teachers at Barrett were within the first few years of their teaching careers, and lacked experience working with minority children. Unhappy with the conditions at Barrett, Noel began to recruit others in the community to find a solution.

As the 1961-1962 school year was winding down, the board approved plans for a new junior high school in northeast Denver. They identified an ideal building location on the “border of the black and white community,” near Park Hill, but within the boundaries of the black neighborhood of Five Points.²⁰⁰ The recent construction of Barrett Elementary was still fresh in many parents’ memories. Barrett, as black community members predicted, was nearly all-black from the day it opened. This new junior high, like Barrett, would back up to Colorado Boulevard, which meant it would receive most of

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 129-131.; U.S. District Court Transcript, 16 July 1969, 24; *Keyes Papers*, Box 7.

²⁰⁰ Shikes, “Three Denver Public School Superintendents,” 283.

Barrett's students, and would feed into Manual High School.²⁰¹ PHAC's worst fears were coming true; as black families moved into Park Hill, the schools were becoming increasingly black, and with the school board doing little to improve conditions at predominately black schools, it seemed that white homeowners would look elsewhere in order to find better education options for their children. The Park Hill Action Committee was at a crossroads. Though they originally took on a decidedly neutral tone, neither publicly for nor against integration, by 1962, they were forced to take a side.

The board cited overcrowding at Cole Junior as a reason for a new school on Colorado Boulevard, but PHAC was not convinced. The Park Hill Action Committee's first feat was to start from where they were comfortable. They recruited the support the black congregations that were members of PHAC, as well as some that did not affiliate with PHAC. The church leaders then sought help from the local NAACP, CORE, Urban League, and ADL activists to organize a protest. With Zion Baptist, Shorter AME, Park Hill Methodist and PHAC at the helm, black parents joined in to protest the plan and hold the board back from building yet another segregated school.²⁰² On April 4, 1962, activists and parents who opposed the plan for new construction flooded into the school board meeting. The school board balked. Rather than incite a round of protests and bad press, the board decided to simply postpone the plans for the proposed junior high until frustrations died down. They promised to conduct considerable research on schools in the Park Hill and Five Points area, rethink the proposed construction site, and assess

²⁰¹ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 48-49.

²⁰² Rachel Noel, "Denver Public Schools" box "The Equality of Educational Opportunity in Denver, Colorado" prepared for the Denver Public school board, 1964. FF15, BCAARL ARL 117 Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2.

community concerns before breaking ground. Among those at that April 4th school board meeting was Rachel Noel. Noel, an educator and a researcher, wanted the school board to take action beyond postponing proposed construction. When the school board voted to appoint community members to a Special Study Committee (SSC) in order to research race, segregation, and educational equality in DPS, Rachel Noel raised her hand.

National Investment in Denver's Movement

Along with PHAC, national groups were invested in Denver's educational equality movement. The NAACP, CORE, the Urban League (UL), and the Black Panther Party (BPP) all had local influence in the struggle for education equality in the Mile High City. The Denver NAACP chapter began in 1915, when Dr. Clarence Holmes established a Colorado-Wyoming branch. Holmes was a Denver native. He was born in the Mile High City in 1892 and graduated from Manual High School in 1913. He began organizing a local NAACP branch just two years after leaving high school, while he was a full-time college student. At first, the Denver NAACP remained focused on local political and business endeavors. Led by Holmes, the NAACP was instrumental in opening the Glenarm YMCA, the only location that was open to black Denverites.²⁰³ Throughout the 1940s, the NAACP focused on politics and educating voters, and it continued a long partnership with the Glenarm YMCA.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ "Creating Your Community: Dr. Clarence Holmes," *Denver Public Library* September 11, 2011

²⁰⁴ "Harvey Williams leads young Democrats of East Denver," *The Colorado Statesman* 1 November 1940: 5; "Heads of Negro-Coordinating Council" *The Colorado Statesman* 21 March 1941: 1; "Young Men's Christian Association: Heading Membership Drive" *The Colorado Statesman* 28 March 1941: 1.

Nearly thirty years after he helped to establish the Denver NAACP, Dr. Clarence Holmes started another civil rights organization. The Denver Urban League (UL) was founded in 1946, making it one of the first in the American West. The Denver branch's mission was to assist blacks in finding and securing productive employment in Denver, but the UL eventually also shifted its focus to education.²⁰⁵ In 1949, Denver University hosted the first Urban League conference in a western city. Lester Blackwell Granger, executive director of the national organization complimented Mayor Quigg Newton, the Commission on Human Relations, and Denver, arguing that the city was a model example for other cities. This "new America," he believed was exemplified in Denver, with its forward thinking and racial progress.²⁰⁶ Yet, despite these examples of progress, the UL and Denver citizens recognized that all was not well. During the 1949 convention, UL speakers pointed out racism, discrimination, and obstacles that African Americans faced in the Mile High City. The message at the UL convention was clear: prejudice and segregation existed in Denver. Almost as evil as Communism itself, these social ills were the exact opposite of America's promise.²⁰⁷ Colorado, with its potential for progress, was in a visible and ideal position.

²⁰⁵ Beginning in the early-1960s, the Urban League forged a partnership with the Denver Public Schools to create programs for teenagers in the city. Alarmed at the high levels of black dropouts, the Denver Urban League created its "Leap" program as early as 1964, but did not launch it until later in the decade "Project Leapfrog Gets Underway" *Rocky Mountain News* 10 September, 1966: 8; "Urban League President Urges Moderate Approach to Integration" *The Denver Post* 6 September, 1955: 21; The organization changed its name from Urban League of Colorado to the Urban League of Denver or Denver Urban League in 1961. "Urban League Changes its Name" *Denver Post* 9 May 1961: 13.

²⁰⁶ Newsum, "Cold War Colorado," 94-95.; "Miller Barbour—New Faces in the Post Gallery of Fame," *Denver Post*, September 10, 1949: p. 16.; "What about the Negro?" *Rocky Mountain News*, 7 September 1949: p. 14.; "Urban League Pleads for Unity," *Denver Post* 7 September 1949: p.15.; "League Raps Reds' Use of Negro Propaganda," *Denver Post* 10 September 1949: p.1.

²⁰⁷ Newsum, "Cold War Colorado," 95.

In 1961, the NAACP met in Denver for its sixty-third annual conference. At this conference, the Denver branch was charged with continuing the NAACP's push for northern and western school desegregation.²⁰⁸ In 1962 Denver's NAACP educational chairman, James Atkins, presented findings from an organizational study of managerial racism within DPS and Atkins made clear his intention of eventually taking the school district to court.²⁰⁹ His report, titled "Integration: A Necessary Component of Equality in Educational Opportunity," began in 1961, indicated that black students in Denver received substandard education. One of the most important measures Atkins suggested the school board take was desegregating teachers. The study found that of the fifteen black teachers employed by DPS, ten of them were assigned to Manual High School.²¹⁰ Atkins, like many of the desegregationist parents in Denver and the NAACP who supported them, felt that researching DPS practices and statistics would poise them for success in the courtroom. With these facts and figures, they believed they could implore the school board to be "color conscious," instead of "color blind."²¹¹ This belief created a culture of investigation which would perpetuate itself throughout the desegregationist movement in Denver.

Atkins and the NAACP empowered members of the Denver branch, as well as the Western regional branch to educate themselves about *de facto* segregation in schools, along with the impact the housing discrimination ultimately had on educational equality.

²⁰⁸ John H. Bracey, Jr. and Sharon Harley, Ed., "Papers of the NAACP: Part 27: Selected Branch Files, 1956-1965, Series D, the West." Reel 6, Group III, Box C-16, 0001-0087.

²⁰⁹ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 41.

²¹⁰ James Atkins, "Integration a Necessary Component of Equality in Educational Opportunity," Atkins Papers, Box 37.

²¹¹ Quote from NAACP representative Irving Andrews in Dante, *Denver Blade*, 1.

At a 1962 meeting involving all Denverites “that had anything to do with civil rights in Denver, Colorado,” local NAACP officer Irving Andrews and Denver branch president William Pinkett joined local religious leaders to discuss issues facing Denver’s black community. Andrews, whose daughter attended Barrett, gave blacks the impression that “something big” was going to happen soon in Denver.²¹² Andrews and Pinkett were likely referring to a growing sense of consciousness and impatience that was influencing blacks in Denver, and across the country. Five months prior, Pinkett hosted a special meeting of the Denver NAACP branch. At the meeting, national Membership Secretary Mildred Bond spoke to Denver blacks, attempting to inspire increased participation, voting, and activism. Pinkett also introduced regional Field Secretary Leonard H. Carter, who pointed out specific problems in Denver and the West. “I think,” Carter said, “we are at many times just a little too complacent.” He added, “We hide behind the miniature liberal policies that we have in Denver, or we are just too afraid...” By 1962, Andrews and Pinkett agreed that housing, employment, and education segregation were areas that needed “immediate attention” from local and national leaders.²¹³

The Denver Black Panther Party (BPP) was less formally organized than CORE, the NAACP, or the Denver Urban League, but they had local influence on the educational equality movement. Much like early accounts of many local chapters, the details of Denver’s BPP origins remain mythologized and complicated. A historian attempting to uncover the Denver BPP foundations is forced to use the limited information available in

²¹² J. Brown, “Fast Denver Pact NAACP and Pastors: Something Big is Happening to Denver” *Denver Blade* 22 February 1962: 1.

²¹³ Percy Dante, “Segregation is Dead, What Will it Cost to Bury It?” *Denver Blade* 9 September 1961: 3.

the pages of the *Black Panther*, and local news reports. Historian David Garrow noted in 2007, "...Court cases involving BPP members... supplement the archival material," and these records tend to be light and problematic.²¹⁴ Denver's BPP story is no exception. The Denver chapter's history is hazy at best, since most foundational materials were destroyed in a 1968 police raid of the Denver BPP headquarters.²¹⁵ Likewise, the branch's origins are ultimately tied to the fate of the local radical who opened the chapter, Lauren Watson. Watson was the star of four widely-publicized court cases between 1968 and 1995. His time in court included his 1970 criminal trial which was documented and aired on national television.²¹⁶ While he established prominence as a local leader in Denver, Watson's relationship with the national BPP organization was complicated and at times, frosty. In the late 1960s, Watson met with Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, who "urged him to found a Denver chapter of the Black Panther Party."²¹⁷ Right away, Watson and the Denver BPP became inextricably linked. "He was the leadership [in Denver]" remembered Black Panther defense lawyer, Leonard Davies of Watson. He was "the Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and Eldridge Cleaver all in one. He was big, articulate, fearless."²¹⁸ The majority of Watson's communication with the national BPP consisted of

²¹⁴ David Garrow, "Picking up the Books: The New Historiography of the Black Panther Party," *Reviews in American History*, 35 (2007): 650-70.

²¹⁵ "Complain of Unnecessary Damage in Police Search of Head-Quarters" *Denver Post* 9 December, 1968: 2.

²¹⁶ *Philadelphia Tribune*, "Taped Telecast of Criminal Trial Shows Clash Between Police, Blacks." 21 March 1970: 23.; Peter G. Chronis, "Ex-Panther arrested on drug charges," *Denver Post* 8 December 1994; *The Denver Post*, "Ex-Panther faces more drug counts," 4 November 1995: B6; *Time Magazine*, "Television: Courtroom Drama" 30 March 1970.

²¹⁷ Don Morreale, "Lauren Watson: The Rise of a Radical" *Denver Everyday People Examiner: Denver Examiner* 29 January 2011.

²¹⁸ Eric Dexheimer, "Fade to Black" *Denver Westword News* 20 September 1995.

reports describing problematic interactions with the Denver police, which continued to plague Watson and his associates for the remainder of his life.²¹⁹ By 1970, the national BPP leaders had tired of Watson's constant arrests. That year, they removed him from their ranks. In an interview about his time with the BPP, Watson said, "In 1970 the guys from Oakland came and said I was not giving them appropriate political leadership." His wife Mary Lou added, "They took him off somewhere in the mountains. When he came back, he said he had been removed."²²⁰

Though Watson started the Denver branch with the national BPP leadership's support, like other community leaders across the country, he operated with some degree of independence until his removal.²²¹ Recognizing that their community, though part of a national movement, had its own set of local issues and potential solutions, the Denver BPP established itself as an autonomous change maker. They focused particularly on neighborhood safety and interactions with the police. In 2007, Denver journalist Billy Baker recalled of the BPP, "I was afraid of them, but more afraid of the Denver police."²²² Lauren Watson originally applauded CORE's efforts with the Denver Dry Goods boycott. He remembered, "People in L.A. were standing up to the cops and I

²¹⁹ "Black Panther Party Pieces of History: 1966-1969," *The Black Panther Party*, http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/chapter_history/bpp_pieces_of_history.html. Last accessed 29 September 2013.

²²⁰ Dexheimer, *Denver Westword News* 20 September 1995.

²²¹ For more scholarship on BPP local chapters organizing, as Joe Street puts it, "independently of the BPP's central leadership," see Yohuru Williams, *Black Politics/White Power: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Black Panthers in New Haven* (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 2000); Jon Rice, "The World of the Illinois Panthers," in Jeanne Theoharris and Komozi Woodward, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2003): 41-63.; Joe Street, "The Historiography of the Black Panther Party" *Journal of American Studies* 44 (2010): 2, 351-372.

²²² Alweis and Saunders, *Rebels Remembered*, 2007.

thought we should be doing this back home. I came back to Denver with a serious attitude. I joined CORE and started hanging out with SDS and the Young Socialist Alliance.”²²³ Watson’s association with CORE did not last long. He became frustrated with the group’s nonviolent strategies. Instead, he began organizing younger radicals who would soon come to make up the Denver BPP. Watson educated them and trained these youths to resist employment discrimination and threatening police behaviors with more aggressive techniques. He stated, “There’s gotta [sic] be a better way than sitting out front of Dry Goods and getting spit on.”²²⁴ Upon disassociating with CORE and moving to start the Denver BPP, Watson, like other young blacks in western cities demonstrated disillusionment with nonviolent protests, and embraced the central tenants of black power. Watson was a part of a national trend responding to calls for self-determination. For example, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), had previously been an interracial community for “idealistic activists, whites as well as blacks,” but over time the leaders of this organization began to turn inward and separatist and by 1966 was setting the example for black power among teens and young people.²²⁵ Likewise, across the country, youths began embracing black power strategies by experimenting with their clothing and hairstyles, protests, and defensive reactions to local police.²²⁶

Though Denver’s BPP embodied the spirit and employed techniques that had been useful in other urban settings, it was the national organization’s reputation that

²²³ Morreale, *Denver Everyday People: Examiner*. 29 January 2011. SDS is an acronym for Students for Democratic Society, which was active in civil rights and antiwar activism throughout the 1960s.

²²⁴ Alweis and Saunders, *Rebels Remembered*, 2007.

²²⁵ Carson, *In Struggle*.

²²⁶ Robinson, *A City Within a City*.; Graham, *Young Activists*.

helped Watson and his comrades to create change in the Mile High City. In the 1960s, the Denver BPP was instrumental in desegregating the city's central swimming pool. For decades, the pool had practiced segregation by denying access to Mexican Americans and blacks except on specific days of the week, despite anti-discrimination laws. City Councilman Elvin Caldwell, the first black man elected to public office in Colorado, struggled for years to integrate the Curtis Park swimming pool. He recalled, "It was difficult. You talk and talk and talk and never seem like you're makin [sic] any, getting any success." The Denver BPP, he believed, helped to make swift change. "You got success when the Panthers are organizing!" He laughed, "Come on! Boy, they couldn't get that door open fast enough! Come in, now! Come in! Come in!" Caldwell continued, "They didn't open those swimming pools up because they particularly liked me; they opened 'em up because people raising a lot of h—cane."²²⁷ The BPP, however, rarely advocated for desegregation. Much like their national organization, Denver Panthers preferred community control of schools and resources. As their efforts for educational equality became more radically isolated in the late 1960s, other black activists began distancing themselves from the Panthers' approach. However, Mexican Americans in Denver used similar techniques and in fact, saw the benefits of community control in the same areas of the city.²²⁸

²²⁷ Alweis and Saunders, *Rebels Remembered*, 2007.

²²⁸ Don Lyle, "Councilman Takes Stand Against Panther Demands," *Rocky Mountain News* 21 August 1969: 5.; For more on interracial impacts of the BPP, see Jama Lazcrow, "'A Rebel All His Life': The Unexpected Story of Frank 'Parky' Grace": in Lazcrow and Williams, *In Search of the Black Panther Party*, 306-323.

Reactions and Resistance: A School District Running on Racism

By 1962, things had changed radically for the Denver school board. Prior to the end of the 1950s, the board operated as an elite fraternity. Many of the members belonged to the same social communities, and pleasing Superintendent Oberholtzer was their primary responsibility. The first sign that winds were shifting was the election of Palmer Burch in 1959 to the board. Burch, a State Representative, had previously criticized the board for operating as a rubber-stamping good-old-boys' network. With his arrival, the nature of the board shifted, as did its administrative character. Burch attended standing legislature meetings that conflicted with school board meetings, which were held in the afternoon. Upon his election in 1959 to the board, members agreed to change meetings from afternoon to evening, and an unintended consequence was that now more community members could frequent board meetings.²²⁹

Burch regularly disagreed with Oberholtzer, specifically regarding budgetary issues, but avoided public confrontations with The Czar of DPS. Yet his readiness to argue with Oberholtzer, however privately, signaled a change in the status-quo. Burch was the first of a new class of board members who were controversial and at times resistant. When Burch and fellow newcomer Jackson Fuller joined the seven-person board in 1959, the meeting time was changed, as was the election process. Prior to 1959, Denver school board elections had always taken place separately from other municipal elections, and were governed by the board. The year that Burch and Fuller joined however, the school board became increasingly politicized, as elections were merged with city municipal elections. Until 1959, Denver locals had to take a particular interest

²²⁹ Shikes, "Three Denver Public School Superintendents," 264-266.

in school board elections and therefore vote on separate dates, but upon Burch's arrival to the school board, members and hopefuls focused on campaigning, party recognition, local politics, and moving into more public roles after their time on the board.²³⁰

New members continued to join the board until 1964, and their arrivals challenged business as usual in ways that were maddening and exhausting for Oberholtzer. In 1961, white liberal A. Edgar Benton was appointed to the board. The next year, moderate Allegra Saunders joined, and in 1964, the first black board member, Rachel Noel was elected to an open position. By 1964, the board no longer resembled a gentlemen's club of agreeable, like-minded elitists. Instead, a new decidedly diverse, vocal, and challenging group oversaw the public schools.²³¹ They also struggled to agree with each other, with blocs forming among Noel, Saunders, and Benton, who generally opposed the viewpoints of President Palmer Burch, and James Voorhees, Jackson Fuller, and Frank Amasse all of whom had served for multiple terms prior to 1964.²³²

When the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, Denver citizens saw what Heather Ann Thompson called "not the conclusion but the beginning of their struggle for true

²³⁰ Previous scholars of Denver's schools agree that 1959, and the arrival of Burch was the turning point in school board history. Shikes and Watson each argue that this year was the first shift, as board members began to use their experience on the school board as a stepping stone into future political roles. Shikes, "Three Denver Public School Superintendents," 266.; Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 83.

²³¹ Shikes, "Three Denver Public School Superintendents," 267. Shikes, dismisses the level of annoyance Oberholtzer felt with these changes. She writes, "The new members still had tremendous respect for Oberholtzer's competence, integrity and dedication but more questions were asked. The changes in the character of the board did not appear to ruffle Oberholtzer, however..." Shikes cites this argument by footnoting a personal interview she completed with a previous board President, Lois Rinker Heath, who led the board during the very time Shikes argues was motivated by agreement with Oberholtzer. Yet, Shikes concludes in her chapter on Oberholtzer's time with DPS that by the time he retired, he had grown frustrated and impatient, worried that there were more problems to come, and tired of being called a dictator and even a bigot.

²³² Shikes, "Three Denver Public School Superintendents," 268.

equality.”²³³ Denver’s story demonstrates that important legislative changes like *Brown v. Board* and the Civil Rights Act were merely twists in a long stream of civil rights activism. Denver parents recognized that the national act, however symbolic though it was, did not establish change in the city. Merely, it provided them with another tool for creating social change in their city. As Jacqueline Dowd Hall explained in her seminal essay on civil rights scholarship, “...The story of a ‘long civil rights movement’ that took root in the liberal and radical milieu of the late 1930s, was intimately tied to the ‘rise and fall of the New Deal Order,’ accelerated during World War II, stretched far beyond the South, was continuously and ferociously contested, and in the late 1960s and 1970s inspired a ‘movement of movements’...” is evident in the voices and events that make up Denver’s educational, political, urban, and cultural history.²³⁴ Discrimination in Denver had always been hard to pinpoint, difficult to identify, and stubbornly pervasive. In 1964, civil rights organizing was just gaining attention in the city, but blacks were already engrossed in their strategies and networks of resistance that ebbed and flowed with the contemporary issues they faced. African Americans who preferred desegregation saw an opportunity to use legal recourse to demand the school board take radical action to integrate the schools. These parents and agitators believed that the federal government’s ability to withdraw funds from segregated school districts would be enough of a threat and a catalyst for change. Denver leaders and organizations acted quickly to take advantage of new resources available to them because of the passage of the Civil Rights

²³³ Heather Ann Thompson, “All Across the Nation: Urban Black Activism, North and South, 1965-1975.” Kenneth Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter, *African American Urban History Since World War II* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 2009): 201.

²³⁴ Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement, 1233-1623.

Act. At the same time, the Colorado State Advisory Committee to the Civil Rights Commission began investigating the problems faced by Spanish-speaking residents in Colorado.²³⁵

The school board first complied minimally in 1962 with *Brown v. Board*. Responding to community concerns, they appointed a Special Study Committee (SSC). President Palmer Burch charged the SSC with researching demographics and the educational wellbeing of DPS students and the school board hoped that the results from the SSC study would ensure that Denver schools could remain operating at the status quo. The SSC was made up of board members and community parents. Burch appointed six school employees, and twenty-six parents, and he felt the SSC then represented “every geographic area of the city”.²³⁶ Board member James Voorhees, a white parent, and supporter of desegregation chaired the committee.²³⁷ Rachel Noel, the black mother from Park Hill—and unbeknownst to the board, future school board member—was appointed to this committee along with Bernard “Bernie” Valdez of the Congress of Hispanic Educators (CHE) and James Atkins, the chairman the Denver NAACP Education Committee, who had vocally protested the proposed junior high.²³⁸ Both Noel and Valdez benefited greatly from their work with the SSC, and from her position as a committee member, Noel became a groundbreaking leader on the school board and in the

²³⁵ Sam Simmons letter to Howard Rogerson. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 7 June 1964. Colorado State Advisory Committee.

²³⁶ Rachel Noel, “Noel Resolution and The Keyes Case, Copy 2” Rachel Noel Papers, ARL117, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library.1985: 3.

²³⁷ “Thirty-two Citizens Had Role in Report” *Denver Post* 1 March 1964: 7D.

²³⁸ Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 45-47.

city of Denver. The SSC spent sixteen months conducting research on the school board's behalf and presented their findings in the spring of 1964.

To Burch's dismay, the SSC presented damning evidence that proved decades of racist management. First, the board was responsible for gerrymandering schools within the district to maintain racial segregation, despite with they called "color-blinded" strategies. The SSC argued that the school board took advantage of the fact that "no written or... established policy governing school boundary lines" existed.²³⁹ For example, in the late 1950s, the board manipulated boundaries in an east neighborhood near integrated Smiley Junior High School. White students at the farthest north sections of town were to be bused past Smiley to the all-white Gove Junior High. Similarly, the board made a racist decision regarding the central Clayton Park neighborhood, once considered an "optional area" where students could choose from any nearby elementary, junior, or high schools. In early 1960, the board proposed that this optional area was likely to be "filled with Negroes," so they considered splitting up the Clayton area to direct black students to Cole Junior and Manual High, instead of Smiley Junior and East High. In general, the SSC found that Denver parents voiced concerns about their neighborhood schools if they were in black or Chicano neighborhoods. Largely, the interviewed parents complained that the conditions of Five Points school buildings including Barrett, Whittier, Cole and Manual were not up to par, and that black and Hispanic students were herded into these schools.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ "Inadequate Boundary Policy Criticized." *Denver Post* 1 March 1964: 7D. Rachel Noel, "Denver Public Schools" box "The Equality of Educational Opportunity in Denver, Colorado" prepared for the Denver Public School Board, 1964. FF3, BCAARL ARL 117 Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2.

²⁴⁰ Rachel Noel, "Denver Public Schools" box "The Equality of Educational Opportunity in Denver, Colorado" prepared for the Denver Public school board, 1964. FF3, BCAARL ARL 117 Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2.

Second, the SSC found that the DPS was racist in hiring and transferring teachers. The SSC provided seven points of concern regarding discriminatory hiring practices. School personnel fell short by being poorly trained and not prepared. The few black and Mexicano teachers employed by DPS were assigned to schools in areas with high poverty rates, overcrowding, and significant minority populations. “With few exceptions,” the statement read, “teachers employed by the Denver school system have had no pre-employment training in human relations and teaching children of varied backgrounds.” Furthermore, the SSC pointed out that the schools with the highest numbers of black or Chicano students had “no Principals with minority backgrounds.” Finally, the SSC lambasted the school board DPS for employing “No Negroes and few members of other minority groups among the personnel of the administrative staff in school headquarters.” The committee argued that after a year of interviewing teachers and administrators, it seemed that black and Chicano teachers faced a difficult conundrum. They were often hired only for schools with large Mexican-American or black populations, and though their leadership was necessary and valued at these schools, they were nonetheless exploited and segregated. The committee suggested that the board “insure further integration of the races,” by creating a specific policy to hire “qualified teachers of minority backgrounds” and distribute their talents “throughout the system.”²⁴¹ The SSC agreed that the Denver school board was practicing *de facto* segregation, but that the practice was nonetheless in violation of the Civil Rights Act and *Brown v. Board*. The SSC and its recommendations were in full support of desegregating the schools, because

²⁴¹ “School Equality: Personnel Policies Criticized in Study,” *Denver Post* 1 March 1964.

in inactively allowing schools to remain segregated, the school board nonetheless was guilty of racial discrimination.²⁴²

In a map provided to the *Rocky Mountain News*, (below) the SSC indicated the racial distribution of students in Denver’s Public Schools. The SSC labeled each school within its assigned neighborhood, and included the percentage of each race, by labeling the figure with an “N stands for Negro and S for Spanish-Surnamed.” As demonstrated on the map, the schools with the highest concentration of black or Mexicano students tended to be in the northeast corner of the city, near Five Points, or close to Park Hill.

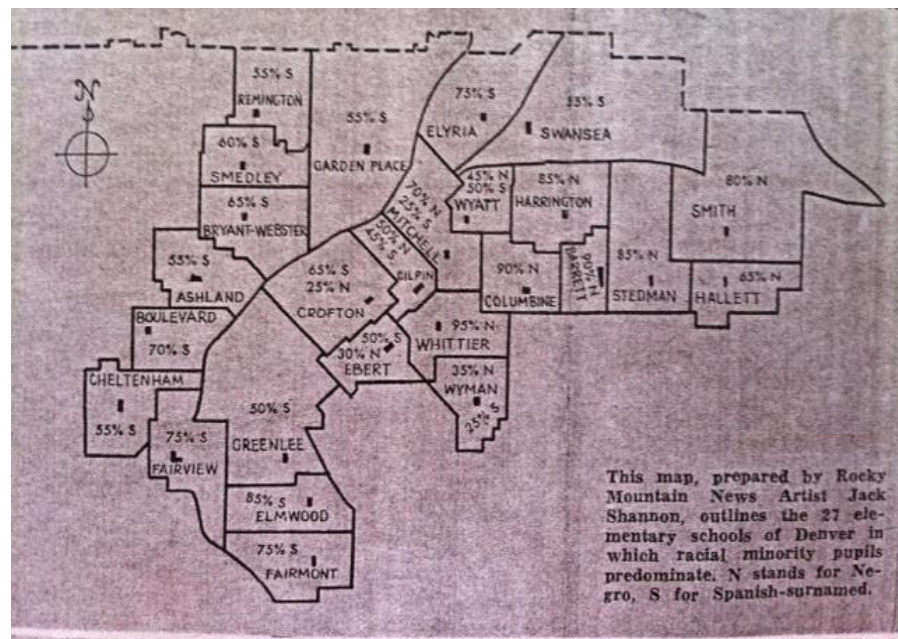


Figure 1. Racial distribution at DPS schools. Map 1965

Denver’s First “Choice School” Attempt: Limited Open Enrollment, 1964

Despite the SSC’s report, the school board implemented few measures to remedy the damning findings. Instead, the board chose to focus on small-scale attempts that they

²⁴² “Special Study Committee on the Equality of Educational Opportunity in the Denver Public Schools (Denver: Denver Public Schools, 1964): 5.

hoped would appease the SSC without disrupting the racial balance in their schools. In response to the SSC report in 1964, the school board announced plans to permit limited open enrollment (LOE) at George Washington High School, south of Park Hill, and twenty-nine elementary schools within the district's one hundred and thirteen schools. 1,809 spaces were created for LOE, but this number only accounted for 2% of Denver's enrollment.²⁴³ LOE allowed for high school students to choose to attend either George Washington or their already assigned schools. The elementary schools chosen were done so strategically because they were already almost to capacity. Once a school was filled, no more students could request to attend through LOE. The schools selected were either far out of the way from students in Park Hill or Five Points, or they were the same schools that parents hoped their students could leave. For example, the school board considering making Manual High School an LOE school, which would have accomplished very little, since many parents felt that Manual was in itself the problem.²⁴⁴ LOE was only open for enrollment until the beginning of the 1964 school year. Because of this, the SSC's underwhelmed response to LOE, and the fact that many of the schools that were declared open faced similar problems, parents were disillusioned by this option. Only 365 students participated, despite the nearly two-thousand open seats available.

Denver parents were unsatisfied but not surprised. A year earlier, the Oakland Public Schools had attempted to institute a similar resolution in the Bay Area. At the start of the 1963 school year, 1,100 black public school pupils participated in a parallel version of LOE. Though the school board created over two thousand open spaces in less-crowded

²⁴³ Rachel Noel, 1964 report from the Special Committee, Box 1 Range 7b, Section 3. Shelf 2. Rachel Noel Collection, BCAARL ARL 117.

²⁴⁴ "Less than One-Third Are Open," *Denver Post* 1 March 1964: 7D.

high schools, only half of those seats were filled. Black students in the California community deemed LOE unnecessary, and not enough to create educational equality. Parents in Oakland boycotted LOE, believing it was "... really not open enrollment at all." Too few students were benefiting from this menial change, and believed that this was a small measure to avoid solving segregation in Oakland.²⁴⁵ Denver parents took note of Oakland's experiment, as well as a likeminded program in Seattle. In 1963, the Seattle school board announced a Voluntary Racial Transfer Program (VRT) that redistributed black pupils out of the core urban neighborhood into outlying schools with larger percentages of white students. The school board planned on 1,400 students participating in the project, but could only convince 238 students to agree to the cross-district transfers.²⁴⁶

From 1964 to 1968, LOE remained unsuccessful in Denver, as well. Very few students participated, and those who did felt alienated at their new schools. Rachel Noel explained, "In too many schools, the only Negro you find is the janitor."²⁴⁷ Black students who left their neighborhood schools were few in numbers, and therefore isolated. Most of them were shuttled into remedial programs, removed from the general white populous in the schools, and it was assumed they would eventually drop out. "The problem," stated Manual's James Ward, one of only two black principals in Denver,

²⁴⁵ Daryl Lembke, "Oakland Schools Start 'Open Enrollment' Plan: Program Designed to Solve Segregation Problem Greeted by Two Pickett Marches." *Los Angeles Times* 11 September 1963: 18.

²⁴⁶ Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 211-213.

²⁴⁷ Walt Lindenmann, "School boards Urged to Hire More Negroes as Teachers," *Denver Post* 23 February 1964: 14A.

“starts in elementary schools with psychological drop-outs.”²⁴⁸ Furthermore, LOE did little to resolve the inadequacies discovered by the SSC. Within three years, students participating in LOE were disproportionately white, and the schools that suffered were inner city black schools, like Manual High in Five Points. In the 1967 school year, John F. Kennedy High School in the southern corner of the city and ninety-nine percent white, was included in the LOE program. Within months, Kennedy was filled to capacity with twenty-nine white students taking every open seat available. Similarly, Manual High School reached seventy percent black and twenty percent Hispanic at the end of the 1966-1967 school year. When Manual was announced an LOE school, thirty-nine black students and eight Chicanos enrolled. Cole Junior High, neighbor and feeder to Manual was fifty-nine percent black, and received twenty-seven new black students in 1967. Elementary schools recorded similar numbers, with the almost all-white schools enrolling white students from out of variance.²⁴⁹ Parents in Denver, particularly white and black parents who advocated for desegregation found these numbers alarming. With each year, it seemed the racial makeup of each school became more and more saturated with one type of race. Even with LOE, desegregation was not happening normally and students were not seeing any benefits to their education.²⁵⁰ Lauren Watson observed, “White kids, who were even poorer... were getting on Student Council, being placed in advanced classes.” White teachers he stated, “had very low expectations” of black students.²⁵¹ In a

²⁴⁸ “The Negro in Denver: Boundary Lines, Rising Drop-out Rate Pose.” *Denver Post*, 31 October 1963.

²⁴⁹ Carter, “School Transfers Analyzed” *Denver Post* 19 March 1967: D6-3.

²⁵⁰ Jack Gaskie, “Ethnic Growth Apace in Schools,” *Denver Post* 25 October 1967: 8.

²⁵¹ Morreale, *Denver Everyday People Examiner: Denver Examiner* 29 January 2011.

pamphlet meant to educate Denver parents on the perils of segregation, PHAC blamed LOE for being a disguise for white flight. LOE, they stated was a way for “white parents to move their children freely to the nearest all-white school” as soon as black children enrolled.²⁵²

By the late 1960s, schools across the nation were experiencing disruptions. The reasons for this were complex and interwoven. In some cases, black and white students struggled to get along in new environments, as school desegregation became a trend across the country. In others, black and Chicano students began to explore resistance strategies as they were unconvinced of the benefits of desegregation. At a high school in New Jersey, white students boycotted for days claiming that they were victims of hostility, harassment, abuse, from the more than one thousand black students who attended their Trenton school. At the same time, black students at another school in New Jersey boycotted to protest the replacement of a faculty advisor for their black student union. Meanwhile, Boston’s busing crisis was a central topic in Denver newspapers throughout the 1960s, and during the LOE era, as white policymakers attempted to warn the community about the potential conflicts that might result from cross-district busing.²⁵³

Denver students participating in LOE felt this disillusionment. Those requesting transfers through the LOE system were required to fill out an application, and though their requests were usually met, pupils experienced anxiety over where they might be placed. Those students who were granted admittance to schools outside of their

²⁵² “A Summary History of Denver School Desegregation: A Park Hill Perspective,” *Park Hill Actionnews* Undated. Rachel Noel Papers, ARL117, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library.

²⁵³ Associated Press, “Racial Incidents Disrupt Schools” *Rocky Mountain News* 27 September 1968.

neighborhood faced the burden of transportation. Relying on parents and public transportation, LOE students found that their commute to and from school each day could be disruptive.²⁵⁴ Woodie Smith was a black high school student in Denver in the mid-1960s. He attended Mullen High School, a selective private white school that opened its doors only to talented athletes, but considered itself a participant in LOE. Woodie was a four-letter athlete who grew up in Denver's all-black Lincoln Park housing project. He remembered, "We were sort of that first group of kids that were being brought in from all parts of the city. But, yeah. The kids that were, the majority of the kids were white and upper-class." Woodie's mother had arranged for him to attend Mullen after he completed ninth grade at a Catholic school. "All of my friends from Saint Elizabeth's were heading to West High School. I thought for sure that's where I am going to be, and my mother said "absolutely not. You're not going to West High School." He continued, "We had not really talked about this, but somehow, she finagled a way for me to go to Mullen High School." When the school year began in 1964, Woodie found himself in a unique conflict. His mother worked two jobs, leaving him to get to school, but he lacked a driver's license and car, and as the oldest child he did not have a sibling to rely on for transportation. Under LOE, Woodie could attend any school with open availability, but he was responsible for his own transportation. Woodie found ways to get to Mullen, which was too far away to walk. Many days he took the public bus, leaving hours before the school day began and returning after dinner. Once he established himself at Mullen and made friends, Woodie realized that people were willing to help him get to school. "I was fortunate because there were some other kids at Mullen, Hispanic kids that took me

²⁵⁴ Carter, "School Transfers Analyzed" *Denver Post* 19 March 1967: D6-3.

under their wings. Sometimes they'd drive me to and from school.”²⁵⁵ The Chicano students who befriended Woodie lived near him in the West Denver neighborhood, and were equally out of place at the elite, predominately white Mullen. By making connections with each other based on neighborhood association, these students of color and early participants in desegregation found ways to resist prejudice and hostility at their new school.

Students who did not have neighbors or coaches to take them underwing faced public scrutiny, especially when it came to their commutes. In the years of LOE, newspaper coverage about student activity on public transportation became increasingly negative. Incidents that did not even involve students, but that occurred in proximity to some of Denver's schools were covered as though student transfers were the culprit. In 1968, a series of conflicts involving black and white students occurred at George Washington High School (GWHS). Following an incident involving a white George Washington student and a black former student that occurred off campus, the high school and a public bus became scenes of two more related altercations. Police were unable to explain the reason for what they termed a “critical situation,” but George Washington nonetheless became a site of activism for black youths in Denver during this time, and its position as a LOE school helped to establish this.²⁵⁶ Black students attending George Washington came from one of two perspectives. Either they already attended prior to the

²⁵⁵ Woodie Smith, interview by author, 13 July 2012, transcript and recording in possession of the author.

²⁵⁶ Michael Rounds, “3 Teen Dropouts Arrested Trying to Enter School.” *Rocky Mountain News* 1968.

LOE program and felt a sense of ownership of GWHS, or they chose to attend and felt out of place upon arrival at their new school.

At the time, the school board used national census language. They lumped all students of Asian or Mexican descent into the “nonwhite” or “other” category and, when convenient, categorizing them as “white”. Preoccupied for the time being with black students, the board primarily ignored Denver’s Hispanic population. For the most part, however, few Chicano students participated in LOE at this time. In 1963, Alex Martinez attended Cole Junior High. He took the bus from the Elyria barrio, a predominately Hispanic neighborhood north of the Denver Coliseum. Alex, who had grown up walking just a few blocks to school until seventh grade, found the bus commonplace, but nonetheless intimidating. “They provided the bus,” he remembered, but “a few years later, Denver went into mandatory busing.”²⁵⁷ Mexicano students like Alex, who did elect to attend schools across district shared similar experiences to those of the black students who were bused to GWHS. In the first three years of LOE, the Hispanic population within DPS grew 21.1 percent. Though Chicanos originally made up a smaller fraction of the school district’s demographic than blacks, their numbers grew at a faster rate. Just as specific elementary and secondary schools had large proportions of black students, certain schools in Denver were dominated by Hispanic students. Baker Junior High School, for example, had the largest population of “Spanish-surnamed” students in 1967, with eighty-three percent of the students Chicano. Likewise, West High School and

²⁵⁷ Alex Martinez, interview by author, 5 March 2012, transcript and recording in author’s possession.

Manual High School had substantial Mexican-American numbers, with thirty-six percent and twenty percent Hispanic, respectively.²⁵⁸

The few Chicano students who took part in LOE did so in ways similar to black students. They typically requested transfers to schools with already significant proportions of Chicano students. In 1967, eight Hispanic students were granted enrollment at Manual, and twenty-one were moved to George Washington. Fourteen Chicanos moved to West High under LOE. At the elementary level, many statistics demonstrated that it was even more common for Hispanic students to transfer to schools with large Hispanic populations. Crofton Elementary with over half its population Hispanic approved nineteen Chicano transfers. These numbers, alongside the similar facts about black transfers led the school board and SSC to consider LOE a failure. school board vice president A. Edgar Benton stated that the practice “had limited success in alleviating segregation,” as it seemed that students mostly requested transfers to schools that already had racial imbalances.²⁵⁹ Alex, for example, chose to attend Cole Junior High School, even though the school was proven to be overcrowded and underfunded. Most Mexicano students from his neighborhood chose Cole, despite their opportunities to go to other schools participating in LOE. By 1969, it seemed that LOE had only helped to facilitate segregation, instead of distributing pupils throughout DPS, particularly regarding Chicano students. “At all levels,” the DPS ethnic census indicated, “the district’s 19,821 Hispano pupils are in majority-Hispano schools.” The report summarized that when black and Hispanic students were combined in significant

²⁵⁸ Gaskie, *Rocky Mountain News* 25 October 1967: 8.

²⁵⁹ Carter, *Denver Post* 19 February 1967: D6-3.

numbers at schools like Barrett Elementary, Park Hill Elementary, Smiley Junior High, Cole Junior High, and Manual High, those schools were then “less than half Anglo.”²⁶⁰

LOE was a common attempt throughout the Southwest, as school boards responded to parent concern and mounting pressure from the community to equalize education. It was, however, not successful for any of the parties involved. Mexican Americans in particular found many problems with LOE, and school transfers in general.²⁶¹ Mexicano students often cited a “cultural distance” at school, sensing that they were removed from their support systems when attending public schools, since there was little interaction between teachers and family members. Sometimes well-meaning teachers and administrators attempted to respond to this concern, but the impact was often “condescending” and hurtful to Chicano students and parents.²⁶² Furthermore, LOE did not eradicate the language and cultural barriers that Mexicano students faced. Throughout school districts, teachers were untrained and ill-prepared to teach and evaluate Spanish-speaking students. In fact, these are two reasons why so many Hispanic students participating in LOE chose to attend schools with significant preexisting Mexicano populations. A closer proximity to other Hispanic students helped some to feel a connection to school, and the few Spanish-speaking teachers who were employed by DPS tended to be assigned to schools like Cole and Manual High.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Carter, “Integration Order Shifts School Race Balance,” *Denver Post* 31 October 1969: 15.

²⁶¹ For more anecdotes on voluntary enrollment programs in the West, see Whitaker, *Race Work*; Mario T. Garcia and Sal Castro, *Blowout: Sal Castro and the Chicano Struggle for Educational Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed*.

²⁶² “1964-1945: Mexican Americans in the Southwest: Spanish Speaking People Prior to 1966” Report for U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, March 15, 1965: 66.

²⁶³ “1964-1945: Mexican Americans in the Southwest: Spanish Speaking People Prior to 1966” Report for U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, March 15, 1965: 67-88.

Regardless, the discussion about educational equality, LOE, and the future of Denver schools created tensions among Chicano students and parents over the course of the early 1960s. Since the conversation tended to be about black students, white students, and the racial makeup of black and white schools, Denver's population of Hispanic students were often ignored. However, Chicano parents and students identified their own set of issues regarding education and the future of DPS. Though Mexicanos did not necessarily face the same kind of housing and employment discrimination that blacks did in the 1960s, they nonetheless were less educated and employed at lower rates than Denver's blacks.²⁶⁴ Like blacks, Mexicanos faced segregation in all aspects of their lives. They recognized nationally that they were denied access to housing, education, and employment opportunities, and that all three were interrelated. In Denver, as in other northern and western cities, Mexicanos and blacks both faced this "multiplicity of structural forces" that denied them access and perpetuated a cycle of inequality.²⁶⁵ As blacks and Chicanos continued to develop strategies within the freedom struggle, education maintained a central project for both groups.

Yet Mexicanos felt differently about how to achieve educational equality. They referred to their neighborhoods in central and north Denver as "the barrio," though they shared much of the space with blacks, who most often referred to the specific neighborhood, Five Points. Even though they shared space and lived within a few blocks of each other, communities of kids remained isolated for the most part, until junior high. When Alex Martinez got on the bus to Cole in 1963, he knew the kids from his street, but

²⁶⁴ Daniel T. Valdes, "Denver Schools and the Hispanos" *Denver Post* 3 April 1965: 35.

²⁶⁵ Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, 1996): 5.

at the next stop, a group of strangers boarded. “It was a very small neighborhood. He added, “At our [elementary] school, 5th and 6th grade were combined. There were probably 30 or 40 kids, maybe, in that combined. So there was [sic] just a handful of us, really.” The bus stop was a few streets down, in the Swansea neighborhood, where black children, new to Alex and his friends, waited for the bus as well. “I think we knew some of those kids, but not really,” he remembered.²⁶⁶ Mexicanos recognized that their barrio schools were among the oldest, many had been built before 1900 and lacked cafeterias, gymnasiums, and other amenities. They experienced what the SSC report had pointed out; their neighborhood schools like Elyria Elementary where Alex had attended, had the highest teacher turnover rates and therefore the most inexperienced faculty and staff.²⁶⁷ Finally, Mexicanos in Denver moved around the city, though not as dramatically as Mexican Americans moved in other western cities. Denver Chicanos moved “not to the suburbs or to the middle class areas.” They moved to what professor Daniel T. Valdes called the “grey areas of the city” in far west and north Denver. These “pockets” of communities formed in isolation from other groups, causing Hispanic children to be segregated *within* the schools they attended, to an extreme effect.²⁶⁸ Therefore, Mexicano students only participated in LOE if it meant attending schools with a higher concentration of like-minded Hispanic students.

²⁶⁶ Alex Martinez, interview by author, 5 March 2012, transcript and recording in author’s possession.

²⁶⁷ Rachel Noel, “Denver Public Schools” box “The Equality of Educational Opportunity in Denver, Colorado” prepared for the Denver Public School Board, 1964. FF3, BCAARL ARL 117 Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2

²⁶⁸ Valdes, *Denver Post* 3 April 1965: 35.

Chicanos in Denver ultimately did not believe that desegregation would be enough. They recognized that desegregation brought about some benefits, as DPS began to provide better resources for Chicano students in the mid-1960s, including reference materials on Mexican American peoples. Yet LOE only represented one potential option without many benefits to the Chicano population in Denver. Ultimately, desegregation in general did not win them over. Valdes argued that the assumption that integration was the answer simply went “against the overwhelming evidence that shows that no one racial or ethnic group is innately superior to another.” Many Mexicanos believed that large-scale, structural change was necessary and would not be accomplished through pupil distribution. Valdes wrote, “There must be a conscious policy, backed by the citizens of Denver, backed by brains and money to bring the ghetto and barrio school to a level above that of the best schools.” Valdes believed that the barrio schools must become the most competitive among DPS schools in order to give poor, Chicano, and black children a chance to make significant change beyond school age.²⁶⁹ LOE was simply not the answer.

To add further complication, LOE students were not always greeted warmly at their new schools. White parents in particular feared that LOE was a symbolic root for the future of “forced busing.” Busing to them represented a loss of local neighborhood control, and the threat of intruding black and Mexicano students. These parents tended to assume that barrio and ghetto schools failed *because* of the large populations of minority students. They did not acknowledge the disproportionate resources allocated to majority white schools, and refused to consider that racism played a part. The great speed at which

²⁶⁹ Valdes, *Denver Post* 3 April 1965: 35.

Denver schools' demographics shifted added a sense of urgency for these parents. LOE then signaled another encroachment of black and Chicano students, which caused white parents to react in dramatic ways.²⁷⁰ White parents and researchers alike blamed blacks for creating a climate of *de facto* segregation that ultimately impacted all racial minorities. In a report to the U.S. Civil Service Commission, a Denver committee submitted a claim that "even though schools and colleges are integrated, there is *de facto* segregation because of a high concentration of Negroes in certain neighborhoods."²⁷¹ Spanish-surnamed students, the report indicated, were merely caught up in this trend.

Mainstream news outlets, like *The Rocky Mountain News* and *The Denver Post* took pains to categorize conservative white parents into a neutral, homogenous mass. Parents who resisted LOE and the threat of busing tended to do so anonymously or with the support of a large group simply identified as "white parents" in the press. Whites were uncomfortable with openly aligning themselves with overt racist strategies and organizations. More common, instead, was an underlying and covert approach to white supremacy in the Mile High City. Conservative white parents and activists for neighborhood schools resisted LOE and the threat of school desegregation. These parents denounced the SSC's findings, claiming that all of their suggestions created a system of "special treatment" for minority students. "Ironically," scoffed one critic, these were the same people who once wanted the school board to stop tracking race demographics.²⁷²

Fearing busing, white parents began to mobilize in the mid-1960s in order to create an

²⁷⁰ Jack Gaskie, "Minority Pupils Number High in Denver System," *Rocky Mountain News* 13 March 1966: 28.

²⁷¹ "Report on Community Reviews," U.S. UNITED STATES CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION BUREAU OF RECRUITING AND EXAMINING (Washington D.C., 1963): 14.

²⁷² Jack Gaskie, "91 Years of Ailed Integration," *Rocky Mountain News*, 2 January 1964: 38.

organized response to desegregation. These parents, many of whom moved away from the east Denver neighborhoods only a few years prior, felt it was their right to maintain racial imbalances in the schools their children attended.

Meanwhile, white progressives publicly boasted friendly race relations, but powerful politicians and personalities worked together to create a management system that benefited whites and limited opportunities for blacks and Chicanos. Members of the school board made administrative decisions influencing the public schools using this very strategy throughout the 1960s. Therefore, blacks and Chicanos faced racist strategies from multiple angles. As racism and intimidation persisted, and Denver's demographics shifted by 1965, black and Chicano families began to voice concerns about the benefits of desegregation. LOE was never, in the opinions of many, a solution to the systematic and structural racism that permeated the Denver Public School system.

Manual, Old, New, and Under Attack

The fire that destroyed Old Manual in 1953 symbolized the end of an era for Denver blacks and Chicanos, but it was just the beginning of Manual's significance. The first students to attend New Manual were among some of the most politically active and vocal blacks and Mexicanos. In 1958, Wilma Gerdine became her sophomore class's student council president. She worked closely with "head boy" Norman Rice. Manual's "head boy" and "head girl" were considered co-presidents of the school and thus were visible leaders during their year-long appointment. Norman and Wilma recognized that New Manual lacked the resources that other schools had, but they felt a "sense of pride" that only came from attending Manual High. After they graduated, both Norman and

Wilma attributed their leadership training to the early foundations set at Manual High. Norman went on to break racial barriers, becoming the Seattle's first black mayor in 1989. Wilma was among the few blacks elected to the Colorado House of Representatives, and in 1991 she was renamed the Mile High City's first lady when her husband became Denver's first black mayor.²⁷³

Norman and Wilma attended New Manual just a few years after it opened, and they helped to reestablish a sense of pride and leadership among the school's black and Chicano students. However, Manual remained a problematic school for DPS. Students and parents both noticed that their school lacked highly trained teachers in many subjects, and though it was a fairly new building, Manual's resources left much to be desired. Much like Cole Junior High, Manual received hand-me-down books and desks from other schools, and it was obvious that students of color were channeled into the school, while white students attended East High more readily. The community was ready for a change.

²⁷³ George Lane, "3 Manual Alums Score the Big Time Webbs, Seattle Mayor Proud Graduate" *Denver Post* 21 June 1991: 1A.

CHAPTER 4

“Born of a Revolution”: Community Control Efforts, 1966-1974

Blacks for Community Control, 1966

Some of the most vocal black leaders in Denver believed that problems in the school system could be resolved with community control. Hiawatha Davis Jr. was among those not convinced that desegregation was the answer. He was born April 30th, 1944 and attended Denver Public Schools in the Five Points neighborhood. He graduated from Manual High School in 1962, and was a proud alumnus of the city’s second oldest high school. Davis saw from a young age the benefits of black-led education within the black community. Because of this, Davis chose to remain in Denver, where he served his city for his entire adult life.²⁷⁴

While attending college at the University of Colorado (CU) in nearby Boulder, Hiawatha began to consider and embrace the central concepts of black power and the New Left. Davis studied economics at CU from 1962-1966, and this was era of campus unrest in Boulder. Many college students at the university participated in New Left demonstrations, antiwar protests, and consciousness-raising events. It was at CU where Davis first learned of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and its belief in racial separatism.²⁷⁵ Like SNCC and Stokely Carmichael, whom he admired, Hiawatha also aligned with the New Left, and took a decidedly antiwar stance, as the

²⁷⁴ Robert, Chaer “Hiawatha Davis: Human Rights, Community Relations” biographical description written for the *Denver Human Rights Coalition*.
<http://www.denvergov.org/AboutUs/tabid/388387/Default.aspx> Last accessed 13 July 2013.

²⁷⁵ Carson, *In Struggle*, 174-175.

Vietnam War continued to preoccupy conversations on campus.²⁷⁶ Before he graduated from CU, Davis dropped out and moved to San Francisco to work with the Afro-American Unity organization. Within the year, Davis was drafted to the Vietnam War. His friends remembered this was a turning point for Hiawatha. This, they believed, was the moment he became an activist. Instead of reporting for duty, Hiawatha refused. Many expected him to flee to Canada, but he chose to remain in San Francisco and fight the draft.²⁷⁷ He was convicted in 1967 and sentenced to two years in prison. After he was released from prison, Hiawatha moved back to Denver in 1971. He had become critical of the Denver black community's lack of progress and the failed attempts to resolve poverty and crime among blacks in his hometown. Denver welcomed him back, and he remained a political figure until his death in 2000.²⁷⁸

Though his draft resistance was a public indication of his new radicalism, Hiawatha had experimented with activism long before he moved to San Francisco. When he was still a college sophomore, formed the Committee for an Educational Plan for East Denver (CEPED). He created the group, inspired by the national progress of black power, racial separation, and community control strategies.²⁷⁹ Over the course of the early 1960s, black and white parents in Denver discussed how to create an equitable education system in the city, but Davis took issue with the concepts of desegregation. Davis recruited Jerry

²⁷⁶ Cindy Brovsky and Peter G. Chronis, "Hiawatha Davis 1944-2000: City Mourns activist Longtime Councilman Succumbs to Cancer." *The Denver Post* 26 May 2000: A1.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Peter G. Chronis, "Man of Principle championed underdogs" *Denver Post* 26 May 2000: A8.

²⁷⁹ Jeanne Theoharis, "I'd Rather Go to School in the South," in Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodward, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave MacMillon, 2003): 125-151.; Bill Wood, "Community School Control May Be Reality," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 7 August 1969.;

Campbell, fellow Manual High School alum to serve as the committee's spokesperson while Hiawatha was in Boulder. Jerry and Hiawatha chose first to use the Denver media to their advantage. They crafted a statement to the Denver press, indicating that black parents planned to seek community control of the Five Points schools. Knowing that this radical language would generate heat, the two devised a vague plan and refused to offer too much information at first. However cloudy and distorted their solution might have been, the CEPED's list of problems within the Denver Public Schools (DPS) were made clear in the statement. Campbell, who spoke to the *Denver Post* cited "teacher turnover," school board "indifference" to black children, "old and inadequate" resources, and a system that has "left the crumbs to the kids" in the Five Points neighborhood, including Manual High School, Cole Junior High School, and many of the feeder elementary schools like Barrett and Traylor.²⁸⁰

Hiawatha Davis, Jerry Campbell, and the CEPED struck a chord with Denver's blacks, but also white liberals who viewed desegregation as the only manageable solution to a city with shifting demographics. The CEPED's controversial albeit shrouded plan garnered press attention from 1967-1969. Moreover, these strategies became a significant part of the educational equality model for both blacks and Chicanos in Denver, despite the attention afforded to desegregation efforts.

Youth Activism, and Alternatives to Desegregation

In 1968, some of the loudest voices in Denver's educational equality movements were arguing the merits of desegregation, or "mandated busing." However, black students

²⁸⁰ "Blacks Seek Control of Cole Area Schools" *Denver Post* 20 August 1967: 8.

and parents alike considered the benefits of community control in education. By this point, the school board already faced criticism from the NAACP, the Urban League, and local committees for creating and managing a segregated school system. Some of the parents and students involved believed that integration was “fine,” but not enough to create longstanding change. At a school board meeting on September 19th, 1968, two-hundred parents and students demanded a variety of solutions, some of which included community control. Joel Polk, the president of Cole Junior High’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA) presented a list of demands to the school board regarding the wellbeing of Cole students. Polk, on behalf of the PTA admonished the board for taking too long to make decisions. “If these demands are to be studied for another twenty years... we, the parents and teachers are asking that Cole Junior High be closed.” Polk and the Cole PTA preferred, however, that the school board invest a significant amount of money into Cole to develop teaching training, to eliminate fees, and to improve the physical conditions of the junior high. Cole, according to Polk, was twenty years behind in curriculum, but improved education could be achieved at the historically black school, without needing to turn to busing as the solution. Cole teachers believed that the school would “grow and improve,” with school board support. The PTA thought solutions could be made with community investment in Cole, without the involvement of outside students and teachers. A group of Manual High School students agreed. These students advocated for Cole and Manual both, arguing that “they prefer segregation under present conditions” to desegregation of schools.²⁸¹ These students saw busing as a “band aid where radical surgery is necessary” and believed they would benefit most from a

²⁸¹ Moran, “Parents Challenge Board: Improve or Close Cole,” *Rocky Mountain News* 20 September 1968: 9.

community controlled system where black leaders, teachers, and parents could oversee their own schools.²⁸²

Black parents also considered the responses from white parents throughout the desegregation discussion from 1968-1970. In addition, the school board had a record of ignoring black demands to be involved, and this legacy of exclusion served only to make parents more skeptical. They had only past experience from which to draw. As evidenced by the failure of LOE, the NAACP 1962 report, and the SSC's report in 1964, DPS could not be trusted to create equality in the city's schools. When parents pointed out systematic failures and examples of racism, DPS made false promises. Even when national and local groups researched the history of these failures, DPS hid behind new construction, adjusted boundaries, and finally LOE. In the failure of LOE, black parents in particular recognized concerning features of desegregation. To them, it seemed too good to be true. "I didn't see teachers reaching out to them," remembered Judy Barnett, who was a student teacher at Hill Middle School in Park Hill. Black students who participated in LOE, recalled Barnett, were expected to catch up, since it was a voluntary opportunity. "It was like, 'OK! You wanted to be here.' That was their thinking," though the teachers knew the students were "forced to come" by their parents. Barnett added, "They were like, 'Get on board, even though you're four years behind in your reading scores.'" Barnett remembered that the climate at Hill was either "sink or swim." She ended, that black students participating in LOE were not given the attention or tools to succeed. "Because it became a self-fulfilling prophecy, you know? 'If they can't keep up,

²⁸² Ibid., 9.

they don't belong here.”²⁸³ The students who had participated in early LOE efforts learned from experience that desegregation was more work than it was worth, and that black students shouldered the burden more than anyone else in the city.

Organizations of black parents publicized the sacrifices they would make in the name of desegregation. Jerry Campbell and the CEPED voiced these concerns in a school board meeting on October 16, 1969. Campbell stated that “white America is a racist society,” and he argued that white teachers within the public education system were direct examples of this institutionalized racism. Busing, Campbell argued, would only allocate more funds to a system that has already failed. In addition, the parents who belonged to the CEPED refused to encourage desegregation, which would only remove black students from their community and “local interests.”²⁸⁴

Not all black parents in Denver believed that the school system was tragically flawed with racism. Those who remained skeptical of integration, however, explained their rationale using descriptions of individual, vague examples of discrimination. These parents referred to a “lack of understanding” among whites about black children, and a “feeling” of not being wanted. Mrs. George Williams, a black mother whose son was bused to Hill Junior High in 1969 described this sense. “It wasn't something that was expressed,” she stated, explaining that Denver's openly hostile whites were not the only problem. Instead, Williams and others believed that “patronizers and hypocrites” were equally threatening to their black students. Williams continued, “You don't have to be hit

²⁸³ Judy Barnett, interview by author, 13 July 2012, transcript and recording in possession of author.

²⁸⁴ Martin Moran, “Community School Control Urged.” *Rocky Mountain News*, 17 October 1969: 4.

over the head to know you're not wanted.”²⁸⁵ Parents worried less about the quality of education and more about how white parents in particular would respond to the presence of black students. Social implications of integrated schools seemed the most controversial, in the eyes of these black parents. Though white parents who favored neighborhood schools often used logistics, finances, and location as their talking points, they nonetheless remained cautious regarding interracial friendships and dating. A black parent who supported integration stated that white parents “see themselves threatened by integration in more ways than one. They're afraid it just might work. Now that's ugly.”²⁸⁶

“The white community always had neighborhood schools; now the black community wants its own schools,” Campbell stated. Campbell and CEPED, which was made up mostly of black parents from the Five Points area were “tired of waiting” for the school board to begrudgingly come to a decision about Cole, as well as Barrett and Whittier Elementary Schools in East Denver. CEPED demanded a law that distributed tax dollars equally across the city, so that blacks could create their own school board and hire a local black superintendent. “We want to control the entire system in our area,” Campbell stated. The CEPED plan promised not to interfere with voluntary busing, but indicated that black students would ultimately choose to attend their own neighborhood schools; much like white students preferred their home schools.²⁸⁷

A few months later, CEPED invited members of the school board to attend a special session meeting to hear a plan for community control. The board refused for a few

²⁸⁵ Charles Carter and John Dunning, “Social Implications of Busing Assessed.” *Denver Post* 11 Dec 1969.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ “Blacks Seek Control of Cole Area Schools,” *Denver Post* 20 August 1969: 40.

days, but eventually responded to “heavy pressure from the black community” to hear the CEPED’s message. Jerry Campbell again assumed spokesman responsibility at the meeting, held at Manual High School on October 16, 1969. Campbell outlined the CEPED’s demands after first rehashing his widely heard disdain for mandatory busing. Campbell had been a vocal critic of desegregation for months, arguing that school integration would only further disenfranchise black children. In contrast, the CEPED plan included the fates of Manual High, Cole Junior, Barrett, and Whittier Elementary Schools, and began with an election of a nine-member all black community school board, elected by Five Points residents. This board, Campbell explained, would be held to contractual guidelines established by the black community of parents and students, and their primary responsibility would be hiring, transferring, reviewing, and approving the selection of teachers. Since this board was run by residents, black parents and children affiliated with the schools would also have influence in the selection of teachers. The CEPED’s plan included an outline for how the community board would solicit funds, oversee development of school facilities, and interactions with the Denver Public School Board. If the CEPED plan were implemented, DPS would collect taxes from all Denver residents, and equally distribute them “to all schools in the city on a per pupil basis.” Thus, CEPED would manage a substantial amount of money, since Manual, Cole, Whittier, and Barrett had large populations of students.²⁸⁸ Ultimately, the school board ignored CEPED’s call for a response and by November 1969 it seemed the call was forgotten.

²⁸⁸ Moran, *Rocky Mountain News*, 4.

From its early history, Five Points gave rise to voices of nonconformity, as black leaders, parents and children preferred instead to develop plans for community control in Denver. Community entities like churches and social organizations embraced self-help as central to their missions. The Shorter AME church was home to many of Denver's black leaders. "Shorter," as they called it, was organized in 1868 and maintained omnipresence in the black community over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The church changed locations five times from its first site in a log cabin on 19th and what is now Market Street. Having survived white opposition, vandalism, a fire set by the Ku Klux Klan in 1925, and interference from the Denver Urban Renewal Authority, Shorter's congregation remained dedicated to self-help and community involvement.²⁸⁹ The Shorter congregation and leadership, from as early as 1868, was an authority for black community in Denver, and its efforts increased throughout the postwar period. In 1962, the church successfully financed and oversaw the construction of forty-two affordable housing apartments for Denver's blacks.²⁹⁰

This desire for community influence stretched from Shorter to local groups of parents who wanted to establish control in their neighborhood schools. Cole Junior High remained an ideological battleground as desegregationists and community control advocates used the school as its site for potential solutions. Cole's disproportionate black population, its centrality in the Five Points neighborhood, as well as the overcrowded conditions and outdated resources provided parents with a unique pet project. While many advocated for desegregation, others argued that community control would be the

²⁸⁹ McNair, Yvonne Wallace. *Crossing Over Jordan: A History of the Black Church in Colorado*. Denver, Colorado: Black American West Museum and Heritage Center, 1996: 24-26.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

best way to go. M.C. Davis, who taught at Cole believed that the school would “grow and improve” with improved programs directed toward black and Hispanic students.²⁹¹

Community control, however, went beyond strategies and plans presented in official school board meetings. Both black and Hispanic groups managed to create effective educational community control. Blacks, in particular, had the successes of the Black Panther Party (BPP) as inspiration. Lauren Watson was born in 1940 and grew up in San Francisco, California. When he was ten years old, Watson and his family moved to Denver. Watson’s family background and his emotional connection to the burgeoning black power organization forming in Oakland combined to make him a radical at an early age. Watson first spoke out against racial discrimination when he was still in school, earning him the reputation of “troublemaker” before he graduated from Manual in 1957. After high school, Watson became a full-time activist, organizing anti-war protests and coordinating for the “Poor People’s Campaign” in 1967. Though he was a polarizing force in Denver, Watson was respected for his sometimes effective efforts to collaborate with the NAACP, CORE, the Urban League, and other national offices in the city.²⁹² During the late 1960s, however, Watson struggled to set roots. He traveled back and forth to California, often claiming he was visiting BPP headquarters. Furthermore, Watson was in and out of jail throughout the 1960s and 1970s, so most of his local and national legacy is tied to arrests and trials. His relationship to the national organization remains ambiguous, yet Watson contributed a commentary about community control of schools in Denver to the *Black Panther*, the BPP’s newspaper in 1969. In his brief article Watson

²⁹¹ Ibid., 9.

²⁹² Denver Public Library, “Lauren R. Watson,” *Lauren Watson Papers* (1960s). Blair Caldwell African American Research Library, Manuscripts. FF1.

described the “racist school board elections” that occurred in May 1969, and eluded to the Denver BPP plan to “decentralize the school system and to institute community control in our area.” Watson echoed Panther vernacular writing that community control would create a sense of freedom by returning school control to “the hands of the people,” since “black people can never realize this freedom and power by attempting to integrate themselves into a decadent capitalistic and racist society.”²⁹³ Using the examples of community control successes in Oakland, Watson developed a list of requirements for Denver’s black-dominated schools. This list included community-led black history courses and free and reduced lunches.

Implementing this plan, however, proved to be difficult for Watson. Instead of waiting for the school board to respond to CEPED proposals, Watson and members of the Denver BPP attempted to create community control through force at Cole and Manual for the 1968-1969 school year. Their first action was to picket the entrance to Cole Junior High during the first few weeks of classes in 1968. As they were approaching Cole on the first day, black students were met by black men in their late teens and early twenties who urged them to turn around and head home. Though historian Frederick Watson writes in his dissertation on Denver’s school desegregation movement, “There was never a large organized opposition to school desegregation within the black community,” nearly two hundred students joined the Panther’s boycott which lasted for more than two weeks of the school year.²⁹⁴ When the boycott ended, the Panthers had established influence over Cole’s administration and student body.

²⁹³ Lauren Watson, “Denver Panthers Determined: Community Control of Schools.” *The Black Panther* 7 June 1969: 6.

²⁹⁴ Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 100-101.

Youth protesting reached an apex a year later, when on January 9th 1969, four black Cole students and one from Manual attacked a teacher's car in the parking lot. The students, who were loosely affiliated with the Denver BPP were arrested, and as a result, the administration hired an undercover police officer to patrol the halls of Cole Junior High.²⁹⁵ Parents and students were outraged by the principal's reaction, and the BPP organized another boycott in response. From January 16th to January 26th, seven hundred students refused to enter the school and some picketed the Cole entrance alongside the Black Panthers and Lauren Watson. Two events on January 26th signaled the end of the boycott. First, the school board succumbed to BPP pressure and fired Philip Sarafini, the white principal of Cole Junior High. In his place, the board appointed George Morrison Jr., a local black teacher who was well respected and connected in the Five Points community. Morrison hired Maceo Broadnax, who was also a longtime Five Points resident, as his assistant principal. Together, the two men had nearly thirty-five years of experience teaching in the black community and both felt connected to Cole's students and parents.²⁹⁶ Almost immediately, Morrison and Broadnax embraced some of the BPP's original plans, though they were reluctant to publicly state support for anything other than desegregation. The two black principals encouraged community involvement, inviting parents to personal conferences and requiring students who had discipline problems to meet with their families and the involved teachers or students at the school.

²⁹⁵ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 100-103., *Rocky Mountain News* 10 January 1969., *Denver Post* 10 January 1969.

²⁹⁶ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 103., *Denver Post* 26 January 1969.

The most widely acknowledged change occurred under the Morrison and Broadnax leadership, when Cole began to offer black history courses.²⁹⁷

These black students, who came of age in the late 1960s were members of a “new generation of black activists” who attacked white supremacy from new perspectives. Historian William H. Chafe writes that “young blacks seemed intent on overturning” language and dialogue that had once been dictated by white leaders who “exerted ultimate control” of racial relations.²⁹⁸ Nationwide, Black Panthers and student-led organizations mobilized to embrace youth activism. This radicalization of students helped to shape school reforms from the grassroots level in a multitude of cities. In Greensboro in 1969, student protestors helped to shape a new dialogue with the Chamber of Commerce and created a “new interracial alliance” for the first time in North Carolina.²⁹⁹ Likewise, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, black students organized to defy the school board and their school’s dress and grooming code. In what Todd Robinson called the “mustache saga,” black students walked out, and gained national attention when their efforts “articulated black student concerns about school policy, [and] explained the cultural meaning of facial hair in the black community...” Most significantly, Robinson points out, student activism in Grand Rapids resulted in student voices finally being considered in town and educational policy discussions.³⁰⁰

Though Cole, Manual, and other predominately black schools remained under the jurisdiction of the Denver Public Schools, the legacy of community control endured as

²⁹⁷ Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 100-107.

²⁹⁸ Chafe: *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 173.

²⁹⁹ Chafe: *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 205.

³⁰⁰ Robinson, *A City Within a City*, 109.

one triumph of educational equality in the Mile High City. Because of CEPED and Black Panther attempts, the influence of black churches and leaders on the Five Points neighborhood in particular, and the incorporation of community control techniques by mainstream leaders, specific aspects became pieces of the fabric that makeup the Denver saga. These efforts, though primarily grassroots inspired and locally influential, mirror the national story of community control and its overarching benefits.

In many ways, community control efforts in Denver and across the country drew on the contentious history of segregated education. In a time when desegregation was the most widely accepted answer to education inequality, many black parents considered the benefits of black-only education for their children. Well documented by Vanessa Siddle Walker, the legacy of segregated schools in the rural South can be applied to Denver's very different system. As Walker demonstrates, black rural schools like the Caswell County Training School (CCTS) in North Carolina successfully operated within a network of parents, students, community leaders, and educators. The teachers and administrators at CCTS were neighbors to their students, friends with the school's parents, and valuable role models for black children. These teachers were powerful members of their Piedmont, N.C. community and helped to create a sense of respect and prestige regarding CCTS and the power of education.³⁰¹

While Denver's school environment in 1968 differed greatly from that of Walker's subject in rural North Carolina prior to 1954, many of the points made in *Their Highest Potential* can provide a framework with which to view the impact of community control, even in the urban West. The elementary schools in East Denver, including

³⁰¹ Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Mitchell, Whittier, and Barrett were intentionally segregated, just as Cole and Manual were throughout the postwar period. By 1968, when activism for community control reached its peak in the black community, many of the benefits outlined by Walker could be interpreted through the most publicized efforts in Denver. First, community control advocates like Jerry Campbell and Lauren Watson valued the influence of community collaboration in creating behavioral and academic standards for school children. Parents and teachers sought opportunities to work together for the benefit of their children, despite growing inertia for the promise that desegregation would resolve everything. Secondly, the disproportionate presence of black teachers and administrators in black-dominated schools was considered a benefit to community control advocates, not a downfall. These black community members were influential leaders, mentors to young children and representative of the importance of education. These teachers also helped to develop a sense of racial identity and pride among their students, which many believed could not be accomplished in a desegregated school. This power assigned to them was revered in Five Points and Park Hill alike, and their prominence in the community was always valued.³⁰²

In 1971, twenty-one black teachers and administrators formed the Black Education Advisory Committee (BEAC). The BEAC was made up of men and women, educators and parents who planned to make recommendations to the already existing Black Educators United (BEU) and the school board. Their mission incorporated many of the calls made by community control advocates in the years prior. The BEAC sought to improve education to “make it relevant” to black children, increase collaboration among

³⁰² “Black Advisory Panel Gets OK,” *Denver Post* 16 April 1971: 80.

schools and black community members, create activities that would enhance “school-community relations” and “interpret and expose the needs of the black community.” The BEAC also planned to improve attendance and disciplinary policies, particularly regarding black children attending desegregated schools.³⁰³

After 1968, the BEAC, teachers and administrators from Cole and Manual, as well as the neighborhood schools, attempted to employ parent and teacher collaboration, as emphasized in the community control efforts of both the BPP and CEDEP. Four years prior, in 1964, Reverend L. Sylvester Odom, of Shorter AME pointed out that Denver blacks were isolated and segregated in the schools; despite a Colorado law governing separation. Odom stated, “There may not be laws promoting segregation in Denver, but by dozens of other devious ways, the Negro in Denver is set apart from the rest of the community—through inferior schools...”³⁰⁴ Odom joined a group of disgruntled parents, teachers, and children to call for more black teachers to be hired in his community’s schools. Rachel Noel, the pioneer of desegregation in Denver claimed in the same tone that the only professional working in the schools was the janitor. Noel, Odom and others argued that Denver black students would benefit most by learning from black teachers and role models.³⁰⁵ This call for black leadership in the schools continued through the 1960s. Between the years of 1965 and 1968, the ratio of black teachers at Cole and other predominately black schools increased. The school board claimed this decision was due to public requests, and it was in direct opposition to the Special Study Committee’s

³⁰³ “Black Advisory Panel Gets OK,” *Denver Post* 16 April 1971: 80.

³⁰⁴ Lindenmann, *Denver Post* 23 February 1964: 14A.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

(SSC) 1964 recommendation to assign “minority teachers throughout the system.”³⁰⁶ The Deputy Superintendent justified this decision by stating many black parents felt “black teachers are indispensable in black schools.”³⁰⁷ The school board’s stance on this, however embraced as it may have been by the more overshadowed community control movement, would eventually lead to legal retaliation by desegregationists.

Teachers at Cole and Manual felt a connection to parents and their students. Parents, in turn, relied on close relationships with their neighborhood schools in order to maintain influence over their children and their communities. Through their relationships with teachers and school leaders, parents influenced the curriculum and behavioral standards. In addition, teachers and administrators developed learning criteria based on community issues and needs recognized by their specific pupils. Under the CEDEP strategy, teachers would be directly accountable to the community, and the curriculum would be made to reflect local interests. Though the CEDEP was not successful in their 1969 bid, Cole and Manual teachers nonetheless developed activities and lessons that encouraged citizenship and local community involvement.

The 1969 meeting at Manual was one of the first public opportunities that black and Hispanic activists had to identify their similar attempts at community control. After Campbell finished outlining the CEPED plan, former state representative and Denver local Frank Anaya stood to address the crowd and the school board. Anaya, a member of the Platte Valley Action Center was involved in local efforts to hold the board

³⁰⁶ Rachel Noel, “Denver Public Schools” box “The Equality of Educational Opportunity in Denver, Colorado” prepared for the Denver Public School Board, 1964. FF3, BCAARL ARL 117 Box 1, Range 7b, Section 3, Shelf 2

³⁰⁷ “Teacher Jobs Explained,” *Rocky Mountain News* 20 July 1969: 3.

accountable for their mistreatment of Mexicano students. Anaya warned the school board that the “Hispano community is moving in the same direction and is now in the process of developing opinions that will have impact on the schools.”³⁰⁸ Anaya and Campbell’s separate statements demonstrate a larger theme that defined black and Mexicano education equality activism in the late 1960s. While blacks and Chicanos used similar platforms and created analogous plans for educational equality in terms of community control, they rarely collaborated in public settings. Their strategies no doubt influenced each other, but the information remained isolated in presentation, despite the fact that they had comparable ideas and they were discussing the same areas and schools.³⁰⁹

Denver’s community control and the BPP captured national attention in 1970, when National Educational Television broadcasted a four-part special with the intent to inform Americans about the judicial process. The court case featured was *The City and County of Denver v. Lauren R. Watson*. Watson, who faced charges of “resisting arrest” and “interfering with a police officer,” consented to the documentation and broadcast of his case. Watson and his defense lawyer remained confident throughout the case, and *Time* magazine criticized them both for being “too cocky and slick.” Despite this, and the obvious disdain police officers had for Watson, the case ended with all charges dropped. Watson, in an interview following the acquittal stated, “There is no justice for blacks in America.”³¹⁰ Watson’s arrest and the subsequent publicized trial inspired a trend among black and Chicano youths in the Denver area. These students, many of whom attended

³⁰⁸ “Teacher Jobs Explained,” *Rocky Mountain News* 20 July 1969: 3

³⁰⁹ Moran, *Rocky Mountain News*, 4.

³¹⁰ “Television: Courtroom Drama.” *Time Magazine in Partnership with CNN*. 30 March 1970. <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,942249,00.html>. Last accessed 27 April 2010.

Manual or Denver's Metropolitan State College rallied around Watson and his message, embracing his radical stance, and demanding improvements in the community and the education system. In addition, these students made public their new perspectives on racial identity, and the disenfranchisement of blacks and Mexicanos through systematic organizations like politics and education. Though their frustration called for separation and community control, which did not fully come to fruition for Denver blacks at this time, they nonetheless helped to create a standard of community collaboration in the neighborhood schools.³¹¹

In 1971, a survey of seventy-eight teachers and nearly eight hundred Manual students uncovered that while “ghetto schools” are disadvantaged, the overwhelming majority of pupils “were proud of school.”³¹² Perhaps most significantly, Manual, Cole, and the black and Chicano network to which they belonged, influenced generations of students to absorb pride, strength, and community outreach as aspects of their racial identities. Blacks and Chicanos in Denver were proud that their heritage was represented in these public schools. Those advocating for school desegregation did so without intending to forsake the legacy of accomplishments embodied at Manual, Cole, and Elementary. They instead anticipated that desegregation would occur both in white schools as well as black and Chicano schools. Throughout the 1960s, their focus was on how black, white, and Chicano students would benefit from desegregation. However, by

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Robert Dunwell, “The Assessment of Informal Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning in a Ghetto High School: Denver, Colorado, Manual High School.” *Paper presented to the American Association of School Administrators*, Atlantic City, N.J., 24 February 1971.

1971, efforts for community control served to remind blacks and Chicanos of what was to be lost through school desegregation.

Romanticism and Wrath: Corky Gonzales, the “West High Blowouts,” and Chicanos for Community Control

Chicanos were equally unconvinced of the intended benefits busing promised to provide. The assumption remained that they were ambivalent or apathetic, but instead they purposefully withdrew from the pro-busing conversation.³¹³ Hispanic parents assumed busing would benefit the black community, and perhaps only nominally improve their children’s experiences.³¹⁴ Corky Gonzales, in particular defied the assumed profits of desegregation. “The American educational system,” he stated in a speech at Claremont College in 1969, “is a cookie-cutting machine.” He added that nationalism was the only way for Chicanos to succeed in all aspects of life; collective economic, political, educational, and social power, and the need was urgent.³¹⁵ Corky’s message rejected assimilation, claiming Mexicanos “don’t want to be ‘accepted’ or ‘integrated.’” Instead, he believed, “They want to be recognized as an important, indigenous part of the Southwest.”³¹⁶ Corky’s separatist message convinced even moderate Chicano leaders who previously had not aligned themselves with the Crusade for Justice. Bernard Valdez, who ran for the Denver School Board in in the late 1960s on a neighborhood schools

³¹³ Rachel F. Moran, “Getting a Foot in the Door: The Hispanic Push for Equal Educational Opportunity in Denver,” *The Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy* No. 35 (Summer 1992): 35-42.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

³¹⁵ Ruben Salazar, “Chicano Must Be Nationalist to Last in U.S., Leader Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 1969: C1.

³¹⁶ Ruben Salazar, “Anglo ‘Integration’ Rejected by Chicanos,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1969: C4.

platform, challenged assumptions that all minorities wanted integration and those against busing were racist white parents. Valdez's successful bid for school board echoed Corky's "misgivings" about integration, agreeing that desegregation would be an "instrument of equality for the black community." According to Valdez, school integration was a human relations campaign that would do little to "improve education," or help Hispanic students.³¹⁷

The movement for community control among Denver Chicanos gained national attention in 1968. Inspired by Sal Castro and the East L.A. blowouts, Gonzales and his compatriots began brainstorming a district-wide walkout of Denver's Public Schools. Corky was a Colorado native, and a 1944 graduate of Manual High.³¹⁸ From his own memories of the Denver barrio, Corky drew inspiration for a more militant, separatist approach to civil rights in his hometown and the American Southwest. Moreover, his experiences at a Denver Public School provided Corky with a first-hand account of racism that Chicano students faced daily. His time as a student taught him, "To forget Spanish, to forget my heritage, to forget who I was."³¹⁹ In 1968, Corky believed that little had changed in Denver's Public Schools. Chicano students came to Corky with issues similar to his time in the Denver schools. In 1969, Corky helped to orchestrate another walkout of one of Denver's High Schools when he led nearly a hundred students in a three-day boycott of West High School, after students complained that teachers were

³¹⁷ Moran, "Getting A Foot in the Door," 88.

³¹⁸ Antonio Esquibel ed., *Message to Atzlan: Selected Writings* (Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press, University of Houston: 2001): xxii.

³¹⁹ Christine Marin, *A Spokesman of the Mexican American Movement: Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales and the Fight for Chicano Liberation, 1966-1972* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1977): 1-2.

racist and the administration refused to acknowledge Mexican-American history.³²⁰

Chicano students were appeased for a short time, but DPS nonetheless continued to fail Chicanos. In 1969, the dropout rate for Chicanos was above seventy percent. The 1968 and 1969 blowouts were a response to the Chicano struggle with the Denver public education system, and a refusal to accept high dropout rates and disappointing statistics. Corky Gonzales and members of his Chicano rights organization, the Crusade for Justice created a program to train and indoctrinate young Chicano students in nationalism and self-reliance during the height of educational equality movements in Denver.

“Corky” was born Rodolfo Gonzales, the youngest of eight children who were raised by their single father.³²¹ Corky split his time growing up in the Denver barrio and the Colorado sugar beet fields, giving him a unique combination of rural and urban experiences that helped him to relate to a variety of Chicano youths. After graduating high school and leaving college, Corky began competing as a boxer, choosing to remain in the amateur ranks and acting as his own manager. Corky’s commitment to the more “honorable reward of local, state, and national pride” in place of money and glory that was affiliated with professional boxing won him the trust of Chicano men across the country during and following his boxing career.³²² His young age, and his background as a former boxer endeared him to younger, more radical audiences while still preserving his machismo. Corky’s unique roots “distinguished him” as an urban Chicano who related to youths from Denver, L.A., and other cities. Additionally, Corky’s speeches and

³²⁰ Ruben Salazar, “Chicanos Hold 5-State Event in Colorado,” *Los Angeles Times* 30 March 1969: 8.

³²¹ Harrison Fletcher, “Nita Gonzales, All in the Family” *Westword News* 29 January 1998.

³²² Tom I. Romero II, “Wearing the Red, White, and Blue Trunks of : Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales and the Convergence of American Chicano Nationalism” No. 29 Vol 1. (Spring 2004): 89.

publications blended romanticism and wrath, which matched the moods of thousands still searching for their voices, and made him the “leading apostle of the Chicano movement” by 1969.³²³ He was fond of saying, “Five loose fingers by themselves are nothing...But bring them together and you have a fist.”³²⁴

In 1969 Corky Gonzales became the “unofficial ideologist of the movement,” when he and the Crusade for Justice hosted the First National Youth Liberation Conference. Over three thousand young Chicanos traveled by “car, bus, or jalopy” to learn about their heritage, voice their frustrations, and find their front man.³²⁵ At the time, the youth movement was “full of energy but seemingly without direction.” Youths across the Southwest with varying demands and personalities were in search of a leader. Corky’s regional speaking engagements and boxing career had already earned him the adoration of Chicanos youths, mostly due to his controversial and persuasive persona. By demanding involvement from teens and college students, and urging Chicanos to resist integration, Corky continued to personify *el movimiento* during the Conference. “The young people were turned on by Corky,” stated nineteen-year-old Jorge Licon of Pomona College in 1969. “Not only because he talks of revolution, but because he is beholden to no one. Mexican American leaders talk ... Corky acts.”³²⁶ Denverites likened Corky to Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King Jr., despite the very different approaches of these

³²³ Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, “No Revolutions Without Poets:’ The Rhetoric of Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales,” *The Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 46 (Winter 1982), 91; Tony Castro, *Chicano Power: The Emergence of Mexican America* (New York: Saturday Review Books, 1974): 222.

³²⁴ Harrison Fletcher, “Nita Gonzales, All in the Family” *Westword News* 29 January 1998.

³²⁵ Ruben Salazar, “Mexican-Americans to Hold Youth Conference,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 1969: B3.

³²⁶ Ruben Salazar, “Chicanos Conferees Plan 5-State School Walkout,” *Los Angeles Times* 1 April 1969: F8.

three men. In 1993, Sharon Vigil of Denver's Hispanic Chamber of Commerce remembered her relationships with the two Chicano leaders as though they were inseparable. "Cesar Chavez and Corky Gonzales both built up my awareness of my community as well as my understanding of how important it is to become involved."³²⁷ However, members of the Crusade for Justice scoffed at the comparisons. "Gonzales," wrote Crusade member Ernesto B. Vigil, "was not guided by spiritual pacifism. He entertained no notions of redeeming the souls of those he viewed as oppressors." Vigil continued that Gonzales saw Chavez as a labor organizer and King as a "martyr, but his own nationalist politics and sentiments were closer to those of the assassinated Malcolm X."³²⁸

If he was once the unofficial spokesman, Corky's publication of *Yo Soy Joaquin* established him as one of the most significant leaders of *el movimiento* for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, he created a name for what we now know as the Chicano movement. Written in 1967 it was in wide circulation by 1969, and the epic poem was a unique "blend of compassion and anger, idealism and realism," which combined Corky's magnetic speaking presence with the longevity of the written word.³²⁹ *Joaquin* identified the most significant issues facing Chicanos across the country, and reached an audience of over 100,000 within four years of its publication.³³⁰ Education, language, identity, racism, and self-hatred were among the many themes Gonzales lamented and spoke to

³²⁷ "Community Profile," *La Voz de Colorado* 12 May 1993: 5.

³²⁸ Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government's War on Dissent* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999): 9.

³²⁹ Jensen and Hammerback, 73.; this quote is borrowed from a 1969 article about Gonzales, "Corky Speaks con su Corazon," *La Verdad*, June 1969: 14.

³³⁰ Jensen and Hammerback, 76; Acuna, *Occupied America*, 364.

Chicanos across the country from college students and professors to field workers and teen moms.³³¹ *Joaquin* asserted a name and a voice for both Corky and the movement he helped to lead. When combined with his personal and professional background, Corky's public anger in the words of *Joaquin* about American integration related to a generation of Chicano activists. Through the eyes of *Joaquin*, Corky sought to educate Chicanos about the mistreatment and oppression that defined their existence in America. Corky believed that no revolution could happen without Chicanos first becoming aware and incensed about their need for change. By first identifying the common issues among all Chicanos, Corky's manifesto then called for a national movement that "...comes first out of the family, then into tribalism, and then into alliances that are necessary to lift the burden of all suppressed humanity."³³²

Corky helped to convince Denver Chicanos that equality could only be achieved if nationalism was placed at the center of Hispanic Education. The then unnamed *La Escuela Tlatelolco* quickly became his pet project as it symbolized this very approach. It would be more than just a place for Chicano students and Chicano dropouts to go to school. Corky wrote it would be an, "applied philosophy, a Chicano creation in the struggle to preserve and augment La Raza de Bronce and our home, Aztlán."³³³ The American education system, he argued, provided some "individual economic power for some Chicanos," but *La Escuela Tlatelolco* would create "collective or group Chicano

³³¹ Acuna, *Occupied America*, 364.

³³² Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, *Yo Soy Joaquin*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1972): 9.

³³³ "La Escuela Tlatelolco brochure" originally published in 1973 by La Escuela y Colegio Tlatelolco Board." Taken from Antonio Equibel ed. Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, *Message to Aztlan: Selected Writings*, (Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press, University of Houston, 2001): 173.

power” based on familial connections to the school.³³⁴ *La Escuela* represented a new venture founded on the central tenets of the Crusade for Justice and Chicano activism. “Back then,” Corky remembered, “I couldn’t think past the next day.” As they were developing plans and collecting money for the school, Corky remained idealistic. He said, “Nobody can know what’s going to happen. But we’re determined to make something happen; we can. And when we get the people involved, we can build a family and succeed.”³³⁵

Despite his magnetic personality and compelling determination, Corky was nonetheless a singular actor in a shared process for educational equality. *La Escuela* was a both a brainchild of Corky’s and a product of collective youth activism in Denver, following the Youth Liberation Conference in 1969.³³⁶ During the 1969 Conference, Chicano teens and college students joined forces with the Crusade for Justice to create three mission statements of the Chicano movement. El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, The Statement of the Revolutionary Caucus, and The Brotherhood of Chicano Students each emphasized revolution, independence, and racial and ethnic solidarity among Chicanos of varying locations and classes. El Plan Espiritual most significantly acknowledged a rejection of Anglo ideals and a turn toward self-reliance and isolation. The Chicano organizations of Brown Berets, Third World Liberation Front, and United Mexican American Students (UMAS) joined with more tenuous groups like the self-named “batos locos,” young barrio “toughs” to create this plan for ideological independence. El Plan

³³⁴ Ruben Salazar, “Chicanos Must Be Nationalist to Last in U.S., Leader Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 April 1969: C1.

³³⁵ J. Sebastian Sinisi, “Owens touts Vouchers in Unlikely Spot,” *Denver Post*, 17 September 1999: B-01.

³³⁶ Equibel ed., *Message to Aztlán*, 173.

Espiritual called for a five-state walkout of all public schools on September 16th, Mexican Independence Day as a symbol of “ethnic nationalism” and the development of a self-sustaining educational system for Chicanos.³³⁷

Immediately following the Youth Liberation Conference in 1969, Chicanos organized the Summer Freedom School. A hundred and fifty Mexicanos, ranging in age from four to eighteen attended courses held at the Crusade for Justice headquarters. The effort involved the entire Denver Chicano community, as Crusade activists recruited certified teachers and educated parents to teach courses on history, folklore, music, and political affairs.³³⁸ In an open forum and throughout the weeks of instruction, Mexicano students voiced frustrations about their public school system that echoed similar complaints at the Liberation Conference. Chicano youths felt displaced in Denver’s schools, citing that teachers seemed unprepared and disinterested in working with Mexicanos, who had a specific set of unique needs.³³⁹ In contrast, the Freedom School experimented with “team teaching” and “built-in progression.” In this format, students learned from more than one instructor in each subject, and then conducted extensive background research to investigate controversies and nuances in the material.³⁴⁰ The Freedom School was so successful that Chicano children clamored for more opportunities to learn in this fashion. When registration opened for the second summer Freedom School in 1970, enrollment nearly doubled to three hundred students, and the faculty expanded to

³³⁷ Ruben Salazar, “Anglo ‘Integration’ Rejected by Chicanos,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 1969: C4.

³³⁸ “La Escuela Tlatelolco brochure” originally published in 1973 by La Escuela y Colegio Tlatelolco Board.” Taken from Equibel ed., *Message to Aztlan*, 172.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

include university professors from California and Mexico.³⁴¹ It was clear from the success of the Freedom Schools, and the issues posed by students regarding public education in Denver, that *La Escuela Tlatelolco* was the solution to a list of problems facing the Chicano in the Mile High City. The Freedom School provided a successful model for education centered on nationalism and collective identity. Moreover, two successful summer schools created a strong community of instructors, donors, and attentive students who would ensure success at *La Escuela* in the fall of 1970.

La Escuela, Corky argued, should stand in stark contrast to DPS which seemed unconcerned that Chicano students were “lagging behind other students.”³⁴² When Crusade activists were successful with the Freedom School and boycotts protesting public education in Denver, they set out to further defend their spiritual and physical independence by opening the *La Escuela*. The school opened in 1970 to nearly three-hundred students in the Crusade for Justice Headquarters in Denver.³⁴³ The building, formerly the Calvary Baptist Church was purchased by Corky for \$86,000 in the summer of 1968 and used for various projects until *La Escuela* became the focus.³⁴⁴ The widely publicized mission of *La Escuela* was to “liberate the mind, heart and spirit of students

³⁴¹ Ibid., 173.

³⁴² “Interview; Nita Gonzales, president and chief executive of nonprofit Escuela Tlatelolco in Denver, A family tradition empowers kids to learn cultural pride.” *Denver Post*, 20 July 2008: K2.

³⁴³ Conflicting reports indicate an unclear number of students who enrolled. I chose to use the more conservative number. In the days following Corky’s death, obituaries claimed up to three hundred students enrolled in the first year at *La Escuela Tlatelolco*. Elizabeth Aguilera and Bianca Prieto, “For 35 Years, the school founded by the late Corky Gonzales has been a beacon for Chicanos: Activist’s passion lives on.” *Denver Post*, 23 June 2005: B01.; “Interview: Nita Gonzales, President and Chief Executive Officer of Nonprofit Escuela Tlatelolco in Denver: A Family Tradition Empowers Kids to Learn Cultural Pride,” *Denver Post*, 20 July 2008: K2.

³⁴⁴ Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice*, 68.; Richard Vasquez, “Sandals in the Snow: Chicanos Gather for Liberation Meeting,” *Los Angeles Times* 28 March 1970.

through cultural expression, moral courage, and honorable behavior.” Named for the ancient Aztec center of education and fine arts, *La Escuela Tlatelolco* represented more than academic proficiency. Students attending *La Escuela* would develop cultural pride, confidence, leadership, and activism.³⁴⁵ Students were encouraged to take ownership of their own education by being self-directed and autonomous in their learning process. The school’s mission emphasized social justice and activism, and promoted the role education played in liberating an oppressed people.³⁴⁶ By leaving public schools, Chicano students in Denver, like those in Los Angeles., demonstrated racial solidarity and a refusal to conform. The Denver West High blowouts in 1968 and 1969 were the first step for Chicano youths to demand improved education. When they helped to develop the Summer Freedom Schools, they established an ideal model, and when Chicanos opened *La Escuela* in October of 1970, they set the tone for how educational equality could be achieved on their own terms.

La Escuela was one of the first Chicanocentric schools of its kind to be founded by leaders of the Chicano movement. Community member Pierre Jimenez remarked that the focus was always on “...giving our kids a quality education in a setting that celebrates who they are.” He continued, “The school was born of a revolution, and it’s going a long way in revolutionizing the way Chicano children receive an education.”³⁴⁷ Much like similar approaches, schools such as this were characterized by the common vision held among Chicano activists to create programs alternative to historically disappointing

³⁴⁵ Briones, Marci A. “Tlatelolco celebrates a different kind of graduation,” *La Voz: Colorado’s Hispanic Voice*, 11 June 1997: 10.

³⁴⁶ “Interview; Nita Gonzales, president and chief executive of nonprofit Escuela Tlatelolco in Denver, A family tradition empowers kids to learn cultural pride.” *Denver Post*, 20 July 2008: K2.

³⁴⁷ Jeff Martinez, “Champions of Change saluted at DPAC,” *La Voz* 8 May 2002: 3.

public schools.³⁴⁸ One thing that distinguished *La Escuela* from the public schools was its emphasis on community and parental involvement. Parental involvement is one of the reasons the school was so successful and continues to perform in the 21st century. As stated in a 1999 news report about *La Escuela*, “They welcome, encourage, or require parental involvement and parents with children in successful schools respond by being active in their children’s education.”³⁴⁹ From its emerging stages, parents and teachers worked together to establish a curriculum standards for *La Escuela*. These architects valued concepts of homeland, heritage, and community control as well as an emphasis on the Spanish language as central to the curriculum. Corky’s daughter, Nita, who went on to become the principal and CEO of *La Escuela* remembered in 1999, “...Everyone was staff whether you were a cook or a janitor. There was a concilio that you all participated in every week... and you made decisions about plans and how the school would evolve.”³⁵⁰ Parents and students worked with Corky to develop a bilingual curriculum, intending to create cohesion between school and home. In addition, these parents developed heritage courses to counteract what Crusade activists called “a lack of ethnic identity” among Chicanos attending public schools. Parents exchanged Chicano Studies in the place of American History and traditional English courses, and students

³⁴⁸ Elena Aragon de McKissack, *Chicano Educational Achievement: Comparing Escuela Tlatelolco, a Chicano-centric School, and a Public High School* (New York, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999): 46.

³⁴⁹ Michael Holzmeister, “Parents make successful schools, not Montessori.” *La Voz: Hispanic Voice of Denver* 6 October 1999: 5.

³⁵⁰ Nita Gonzales took over leadership of *La Escuela* in 1984, after she finished her Master’s in Education at Antioch College. “Interview: Nita Gonzales, President and Chief Executive of Nonprofit Escuela Tlatelolco in Denver: A Family Tradition Empowers Kids to Learn Cultural Pride.” *Denver Post*, 20 July 2008: K2.; McKissack, *Chicano Educational Achievement*, 72.

experienced an “enlightening” change from Anglocentric instruction.³⁵¹ This commitment continued throughout the school’s history, despite physical and financial challenges faced by the personnel. In the winter of 1972, the school’s heating system failed, and teachers encouraged students to stay home. Instead, parents and children returned to the school, braving the snow and cold in order to not allow their education to be interrupted.³⁵²

Significant numbers of blacks and Chicanos in Denver predicted that desegregation was not going to solve educational inequality. Many of them—though silenced by outspoken integrationists—were already voicing concerns about what Derrick Bell later called a “dangerous” and “traumatic” potential fate for minorities bused into white schools.³⁵³ They had seen or participated in Limited Open Enrollment with lackluster results. Many black students experienced or feared alienation and harassment in the white schools, and desegregation promised to send black and Chicano students out of their comfort zones and far away from home.

Community Control Perseveres: blacks and Chicanos, 1970

In the fall of 1969, Chicano and black students were constantly inundated with images of activism. Their local leaders and a national climate of student engagement inspired many to take action. On October 7th, 1969 North High School, the relatively inactive campus in Denver dominated by white and Mexicano students became a new

³⁵¹ McKissack, *Chicano Educational Achievement*, 24.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁵³ Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (Oxford, 2004): 121.

source of campus unrest. Nine students; Manual Rocky Hernandez, Daniel Manuel Martinez, Pat Ulibarri, Frank Luevana, Ronnie Freyta, Dan Pedraza, Louis A. Martinez, Juan “Jerry” Trujillo, and Bill Cordova were suspended from school for protesting the dress code. The nine boys “intentionally” disrupted North High School when they arrived at school wearing black berets.³⁵⁴ They chose the berets as a “symbol of power,” but the North High administration considered it an “invasion on the rights of others.”³⁵⁵ Teachers notified Principal Pete Shannon that the Hispanic teens were “talking in loud voices and from time to time shouting ‘Chicano Power’ during passing periods.” Shannon heard that the boys were blocking students in the hallways, intimidating teachers, and attempting to create a climate of fear in his school.³⁵⁶ Without consulting their parents, Shannon suspended all nine boys for a total of twenty days.³⁵⁷ The boys sought legal assistance from attorney Ed Kahn, who filed suit against the school board and Pete Shannon. Kahn claimed that twenty days was an unreasonably long period to suspend the students, and that it was an infringement on the students’ constitutional rights for free speech. Kahn also argued that in 1969 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that students had the protected right to demonstrate a “political belief.”³⁵⁸ In a short hearing in which the judge only heard testimony from Principal Shannon, the U.S. District court upheld the suspension, stating that twenty days was “not unreasonable,” and that the students did not have

³⁵⁴ Robert Threlkeld, “Suspension of 9 Students is Upheld,” *Rocky Mountain News* 20 August 1970: 22.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., Kahn was referencing the 1969 case *Tinker v. Des Moines* which ruled students had the right to wear armbands to demonstrate their protest against the Vietnam War. *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District No. 21* 393. US 503 (1969).

constitutional rights if their behaviors challenged the “welfare, safety, or morals of other pupils.”³⁵⁹

Though the boys lost their appeal, they made an impact at North High. A year after the controversy of their suspension died down, a group of Hispanic athletes at North High boycotted the school’s football team. The students formed their own Chicano-only football team, called “The Challengers.” While North High’s administration quickly squashed the team, they nonetheless embraced a spirit of isolation and competition within their public schools. These Chicano youths, like those who attended *La Escuela* or the black student at Manual who boycotted school, advocated for community control despite the fervor surrounding their district regarding desegregation.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ *Rocky Mountain News*, “North High Challengers,” August 1971.

CHAPTER 5

By Means “No Less Effective”: Fighting Segregation in Denver’s Schools, 1966-1974

Manual’s Contested Legacy

In the words of the *Denver Post*, the Manual High school of the late 1960s was a haven for criminals and deadbeats. “More students could be found wandering the halls than in the classrooms,” an article recalled in 1975.³⁶¹ “The smell of marijuana grew stronger and stronger as the day wore on,” the school struggled with attendance and discipline problems, and despite the “ambitious” teachers and students, the high school was in trouble. The general consensus seemed that Manual was a wasteland, but to hear students and teachers tell it, the papers got it wrong. In 1970, researchers from the American Association of School Administrators conducted a survey of Manual’s parents, teachers, and educators that only added to the school’s declining reputation. Researchers found that students at Manual felt they were pigeon-holed into the “ghetto school” and that the rest of the district hoped they would eventually become depressed and commit “psychological suicide.” Despite this assumption, the nearly 800 students surveyed indicated they were “proud of their school” and they were determined to succeed and prove DPS wrong.³⁶²

Manual’s teachers and students revered the community and heritage that was the lifeblood of their school, but that didn’t stop the rest of the city from turning their noses

³⁶¹ The writers, Sandra Dillard and Sharon Sherman, a black and white educator respectively, sought to generalize the process of desegregation through the eyes of Manual and John F. Kennedy high school students in 1975. Sandra Dillard and Sharon Sherman, “Things Much the Same at Manual” *Denver Post* 2 February 1975: 37-38.

³⁶² Robert R. Dunwell, “The Assessment of Informal Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning in a Ghetto High School: Denver, Colorado, Manual High school” *The American Association of School Administrators*, Paper presented at Atlantic City, NJ: 24 Feb 1971: 102.

down at what they called a “ghetto school.” In the middle of a cold February night in 1969, vandals broke into the DPS bus barn” and detonated two bombs. The explosions damaged twenty-three school buses, sending a message that some Denverites would vandalize school property, create thousands of dollars of damage to buses bought with tax-payer money, and risk injury rather than support district busing of white children to black schools, like Manual.³⁶³ Less than a year later, another fifteen buses were demolished in a likeminded incident at the bus barn. Years of parent complaints, protests and boycotts, community control efforts, and research on race in DPS culminated at the turn of the decade as parents, teachers, administrators, politicians, activists, and students struggled to define and create education equality in Denver. The 1960s started with the opening of Barrett Elementary, and ended with the anonymous destruction of school property. In the years leading up to the *Keyes v. Denver Public School District No. 1*, the school board and the district, as well as the community, went under substantial changes that would alter the city of Denver forever.

Controversies and Compromises: The Denver School Board, 1960s

In 1963, a seat on the school board became available when board member Frank Taylor died unexpectedly. Faced with the unanticipated opening, the board considered potential Denver locals to appoint in Taylor’s stead. Rachel Noel was one of the first suggestions they considered. Noel was heavily involved in board activity, having taken the lead on many of the Special Study Committee’s responsibilities. She was invested in the wellbeing of the district’s schools, and she enjoyed considerable support from her

³⁶³ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 352.

neighbors. However in 1963, Superintendent Oberholtzer and the more conservative board members were not in favor of making history by selecting the city's first black person to serve on the school board. The seat remained vacant for nearly six months while the board debated. Without a seventh member, they continually deadlocked in a 3-3 vote over the future of the open seat. Eventually, the board chose tradition over innovation when they appointed Robert McCollum, a businessman, former city councilman, and the vice-chancellor of the University of Denver to the seventh seat.³⁶⁴

Rachel Noel did not have to wait long to make history. In 1965, Noel's community elected her to the school board. She was the first black person on the school board, and the first black woman elected to public office in Colorado. Noel, an advocate of desegregation, was elected alongside James Voorhees and Dr. John Amasse, both labeled as "sympathetic" to minority students. Along with A. Edgar Benton who previously called himself the "lone civil rights liberal," this new class of school board members revolutionized the board in ways that reverberated throughout the twentieth century in Denver.³⁶⁵

Within her first months in office, Noel began making plans to hasten the school board's slow response to desegregation. DPS had just initiated limited open enrollment (LOE), and Noel criticized the still unbalanced demographics in the city's schools. Park Hill Elementary was 63% white and 37% black, while nearby Stedman was nearly 90%

³⁶⁴ Mary Jean Taylor, "Leadership Responses to Desegregation in Denver Public Schools, A Historical Study" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Denver, 1990).; Sharon Ruth Brown-Bailey, "Journey Full Circle: A Historical Analysis of *Keyes v. School District No. 1*" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Colorado at Denver, 1998): 78.

³⁶⁵ Brown-Bailey, "Journey Full Circle," 78.

black and Barrett was still 98% black.³⁶⁶ Noel spent her first two years on the school board visiting every DPS site and diligently tracking pupil demographics. She collaborated with teachers, parents, and administrators to survey the status of educational equality in the Mile High City. With this research, she then initiated a series of reforms for the public schools, particularly elementary schools in and near Park Hill. Her experience with the school board and the Special Study Committee (SSC) as well as the months she spent studying school demographics provided Noel with the research necessary to substantiate her proposals.

Noel's first order of business was to propose that Policy 5100, which passed in 1964 on the advice of her SSC, not only established limited open enrollment (LOE), but also included a board-approved desire to decrease segregation. Policy 5100 recognized the "concentration of some minority racial and ethnic groups in some schools" due to the "continuation of neighborhood schools" as a district-wide practice.³⁶⁷ Noel indicated that by passing Policy 5100, the school board admitted the need for a plan to eliminate racial segregation. In response, the board reinstated the SSC, and appointed new researchers to what they titled "The Berge Study Committee." Attorney William Berge served as the chairman, and previous SSC member Bernie Valdez was the vice-chairman. After conducting a year of research practically identical to the original SSC's work, the Berge Study presented a final report in 1967 that mimicked the 1964 report.³⁶⁸ However, William Berge did not support busing. Instead, he declared in his 1967 report that DPS

³⁶⁶ Rachel Noel, "Denver Public Schools Resolution 1490," 25 April 1968, Rachel Noel, "Resolution Number 1490" Rachel Noel Files, BCAARL Noel Manuscript: 1-4.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Brown-Bailey, "Journey Full Circle," 78-79.

should simply stop construction on new developments until a consensus could be met, but avoid “mandatory desegregation” and honor the traditions of neighborhood schools. Yet Noel and her liberal allies now had two school board sponsored reports that called for a “plan... to reduce the concentrations of minority pupils.”³⁶⁹ She got to work writing such a plan.

On an anti-busing platform and backed by “Republican money,” William Berge was elected to the school board in 1967. He and fellow newcomer Stephen Knight claimed they were dissatisfied with the liberal directions the board was taking and hoped to put an end to efforts to fully desegregate DPS.³⁷⁰ That same year, the school board made an unconvincing show of requesting tax payer support for a bond issue that would implement chosen aspects of the 1964 and 1967 study committee reports. When citizens voted against the measure in a three two one margin, it was the first time a public schools bond issue had failed since 1938. Voters indicated that lack of board investment, and also the fear “over integration aspects” within the school board’s recommendations had dissuaded them from supporting the measure.³⁷¹

Amid the heated elections and the failed bond measure, Superintendent Oberholtzer announced he would not renew his contract in July 1967. Publicly he simply stated he was ready for retirement, but critics and some of his confidantes indicated that he was pessimistic about the future of Denver’s schools. In twenty years, he had watched the school board transform from a comfortable cocoon of trusted colleagues and friends

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 79.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 80.

³⁷¹ Art Branscombe, *The Denver Post* 8 November 1967.; Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 82.

to a politicized, volatile collection of frustrated strangers.³⁷² In a discussion of Oberholtzer's leadership style, historian Patricia Ann Shikes writes of his decision to retire, "Finally, several of his colleagues recall feeling, at the time, that Oberholtzer was astute enough to realize there were going to be rough times ahead."³⁷³ When he retired, Oberholtzer left the decision regarding his replacement to a board now dominated by anti-desegregationist conservatives. They selected Dr. Robert Gilberts, a "young superintendent of the Madison, Wisconsin Public Schools." Gilberts was optimistic, relatively inexperienced, and unlike Oberholtzer, willing to step aside and let the board make major decisions without interfering.³⁷⁴

Rachel Noel recognized an opportunity when it presented itself. Gilberts was fairly green; he had little experience with desegregation and multiethnic school districts, and he was willing to take direction from the school board. In 1968, Noel introduced what is now called the "Noel Resolutions," a series of demands instructing Gilberts to develop a plan for integration by the fall semester in 1968. Resolution 1490, or the "Noel Resolutions" called for a decrease in minority pupils at inner-city schools, an "equality of educational program" in all city schools, system-wide acceptance of diversity and integration, "human relations and sensitivity training" for all school personnel, and active community involvement.³⁷⁵

³⁷² Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 83.; Shikes, "Three Denver Public School Superintendents," 290.

³⁷³ Shikes, "Three Denver Public School Superintendents," 291.

³⁷⁴ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 85.

³⁷⁵ Rachel Noel, "Resolution Number 1490" Rachel Noel Files, BCAARL Noel Manuscript: 1-4.

Conservative white parents were quick to protest “busing” or “reversed busing,” and Noel believed that the school board had been too attentive to these “undefined fears.” She blamed the school board for creating a culture of distrust by first enacting racist measures (she cited “the approval of a major high school construction...” in an all-black neighborhood) along with the board’s “voluntary support” of racist parents and their complaints.³⁷⁶ Thus 1490 included eleven potential strategies that the Superintendent should use when considering his plan. The first was the highly controversial method of busing, which Noel wrote should be “voluntary or mandatory,” depending on the neighborhood in question. However, the following ten points included propositions that had little to do with busing. Noel suggested the “development of ‘magnet’ or ‘laboratory’ schools,” as well as a “form of extended school year,” improved facilities and materials, and courses in minority “...cultural, historical, social and economic contributions to our society...”³⁷⁷

The biggest deterrents to the Noel Resolutions proved to be her fellow school board members. Her colleagues on the board remained dedicated to stalling on any calls for desegregation. They ignored the SSC’s findings and attempted to postpone voting on the Noel Resolutions. Other issues provided timely distractions. The board instead became entrapped in another local bond issue that determined the fate of fifteen schools that would be incorporated into the city. Meanwhile, white parents grew increasingly frustrated with the potential consequences of the Noel Resolutions. Immediately after

³⁷⁶ Rachel Noel, “Resolution Number 1490” Rachel Noel Files, BCAARL Noel Manuscript: 3.

³⁷⁷ Rachel Noel, “Resolution Number 1490” Rachel Noel Files, BCAARL Noel Manuscript: 4.

Noel proposed 1490, various organizations of parents began planning protests.³⁷⁸ These protests came from multiple perspectives. The first to resist were white school board members who avoided making a decision upon Noel's submission. Initially, the school board postponed voting on the Noel Resolutions, and parents mobilized to agitate. The school board rescheduled immediately following Noel's April, 1968 presentation. If passed, the Noel Resolutions would require that Superintendent Gilberts create a comprehensive integration plan that would take effect by the start of the 1968 school year. In the face of this potential quick action, the school board voted on April 25, 1968 to table the Noel's Resolutions. They needed more time, the motion indicated, to review, as well as the definitions and benefits of integration.³⁷⁹ White conservative parents took advantage of this delay.

Conservative white parents were not the only voices of dissent, but they made the loudest impact with their protests. Immediately following the April 25th board vote, white parents in Denver mobilized to show their disdain for a district desegregation program. At first, most of these protestors focused on issues like costs and logistics associated with busing. "We felt our students were being used," stated one mother who worried that desegregation was more of a problem than a solution.³⁸⁰ These parents preferred neighborhood schools because, according to them, their children were easily accessible and within walking distance of home. "Forced busing," they argued, would create unnecessary costs for Denver tax payers, and would ultimately not benefit any

³⁷⁸Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 95.

³⁷⁹ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 95.

³⁸⁰ *Denver Post*, 19 December 1968.

students.³⁸¹ These arguments laid the foundation for what would later infiltrate the educational equality movement in Denver. Though resistant white parents argued using the language of cost and location in order to protest against desegregation, their thinly veiled racist claims were revealed later as the discussion became more intense.

Despite the distractions, the school board voted on the Noel Resolutions on May 16, 1968. The Resolutions passed with five in favor and two against. Noel and fellow liberal A. Edgar Benton were joined by three moderate board members, while two vocal opponents William Berge and Stephen Knight voted “nay.”³⁸² In passing the Resolutions, however, the school board did not necessarily support “forced busing.” Instead, their vote indicated that Superintendent Gilberts was now responsible for creating a plan that would integrate Denver’s students without creating too much controversy or cost for Denver’s parents.

Berge and Knight were more committed to preserving segregation and advancing opportunities for white students than they were complying with the Noel Resolutions. Hoping for a scapegoat, they assumed Gilberts would draft a plan that would address all measures in the Noel Resolutions without including busing in the plan. Gilberts spent the summer creating his strategy, which he presented to the Denver school board and tax payers in September, 1968. He titled the giant document *Planning Quality Education: A Proposal for Integrating the Denver schools*, but it was quickly nicknamed “Gilbert’s Plan” or “the cluster plan.”³⁸³ To the disgust of white conservative parents including

³⁸¹ *Denver Post*, 16 May 1968.

³⁸² Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 99.

³⁸³ Robert Gilberts, *Planning Quality Education: A Proposal for Integrating the Denver Public Schools* (Denver, Colorado: 1968).

William Berge and Stephen Knight, Gilberts proposed busing nearly 3,000 black and Hispanic pupils from “inner city elementary, junior high, and high schools” to predominately white neighborhood schools under proposals 1520, 1521, and 1534.³⁸⁴ Gilbert’s proposals took into consideration similar attempts in America’s cities, and followed a 1967 suggestion made by the school board’s hired consultant on education. Dr. Thomas F. Pettigrew’s report to the board indicated DPS should implement “educational parks,” drawing students from all urban areas and ethnic backgrounds.³⁸⁵ Gilberts, using this design, sought to appease both desegregationists and proponents for neighborhood schools by extending voluntary open enrollment and developing programs that would attract white and black students to the same schools. Under the Gilberts Plan, predominately black elementary and junior high schools would host special reading, counseling, and academic programs, as well as adult-education classes after hours. The cluster plan also sought to adjust junior high sub-district boundaries, to redistribute black students from Hill Junior High to Smiley Junior High. Manual High school would become Denver’s first public college preparatory academy, working in connection with Denver University to benefit students bound for higher education, and increase opportunities for Five Points youths. LOE would continue to serve as the main integrating agent for black and white children, but Gilberts believed that the advanced programs in Five Points and Park Hill schools would interest whites enough to send their students to Cole, Manual, and other predominately black schools. Denver parents on all

³⁸⁴ Ibid., Shikes, “Three Denver Public School Superintendents,” 84.; *Rocky Mountain News* 11 October 1968.

³⁸⁵ Carter, “Model Educational Park Urged.” *Denver Post* 11 May 1967: 16.

sides of the debate were displeased. By attempting to strike a balance and avoid alienating any group, Gilberts had made everyone unhappy with his neutral approach.³⁸⁶

White conservative parents for neighborhood schools were vocal in their complaints. Remaining proponents of neighborhood schools, these Denverites attempted to squelch any suggestions for integration by first arguing about the costs of busing, suggesting improvements at all neighborhood schools, and finally threatening to impeach members of the school board. A loosely organized group who called themselves members of the “silent majority” founded the Coalition Steering Committee (CSC). They organized petitions that demanded the school board stop any busing plans. These parents blamed the school board for “selling out” and refusing to represent the true desires of Denver’s citizens. The CSC argued that the board was interfering with personal rights and privileges afforded to all Americans, and made racist claims that desegregated schools would lead to violence. In a meeting with the school board, white parents demanded to hear plans to protect white students from bodily harm, should open enrollment lead to a more final “forced busing” plan.³⁸⁷ Leading the CSC was James Perrill, a white proponent of neighborhood schools. Perrill spoke up at this January 16th meeting, demanding that the board focus their resources on improving neighborhood schools “where students live,” and avoid “intolerable” busing.³⁸⁸ Perrill later announced his candidacy for the 1969 school board election. The Montclair PTA joined in the critique. Their biggest complaint regarded plans to adjust boundaries at Hill Junior High,

³⁸⁶ Gilberts, “Planning Quality Education.”

³⁸⁷ “Busing Hit: Add Schools, Group Says.” *Denver Post* 17 January 1969: 43.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

which would ultimately result in their white children attending the majority black Smiley Junior. Members of the PTA announced they would move to impeach all school board members who voted to support the Gilberts Plan.³⁸⁹

The first of three cluster resolutions was passed in November, 1968. This first part increased the number of spaces available to senior and junior high students requesting a voluntary transfer under LOE.³⁹⁰ Berge, Knight, and the CSC complained that increased busing would create a burden of cost, so the resolution was amended to include the requirement that students requesting a transfer would need to arrange for his own transportation. Moreover, when passed, the Gilberts Plan would take nearly two years to be complete, since students would be bused in waves over the course of the following two school years.³⁹¹ Disdain from parents contributed greatly to the delay. The Gilberts Plan did little to appease any of the parents and activists involved. In January, the Representative Council of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) publicly challenged the cluster program. These teachers, including president Robert Gould of Denver, voted in favor of a “stronger integration plan.” They were supportive, “commending Gilberts for his courage in proposing racial balance at Smiley... and East High School...” but they were nonetheless unsatisfied.³⁹² By March of 1969, the board voted to partially implement the Gilberts Plan for school integration. Since the cluster

³⁸⁹ Moran, “Montclair Unit Opposes Busing Plan,” *Rocky Mountain News* 4 February 1969: 5.

³⁹⁰ “Meet Requirement of school Busing Program,” *Denver Post* 23 January 1969.

³⁹¹ “Here’s how Busing would alter Schools,” *Denver Post* 17 January 1969: 4.; “The School Plan for Racial Balancing” *Denver Post* 10 December 1968.

³⁹² “DCTA Asks for Stronger Plan for Integration,” *Denver Post* 23 January 1969.

program did little to please parents on either side of the debate, the school board's vote angered nearly everyone involved.

Not all critics excused Gilberts from blame. Noel acknowledged that 1520, 1521, and 1524 attempted to create "concrete measures to alleviate school segregation in Park Hill..." but partial integration was not enough.³⁹³ Black and white desegregationists joined Noel in their frustration. The plan was too slow and not radical enough. The biggest problem they identified, along with the rate of pace the plan demanded, was the lack of attention given to integrating children in the lower elementary grades. Though cluster schools would create centralized spaces for white and black students to interact, the majority of the integrating efforts under the Gilberts plan were focused on junior and high school students. Jules Mondschein, a white parent in Park Hill offered, "The Gilberts plan appears to be a step toward integration, but it's ten times more important to desegregate the grade schools."³⁹⁴ Jerry Campbell, the black radical parent who advocated for community control added to the critiques. He stated, "We don't want any more words. Time has run out."³⁹⁵

Amid the controversy, two school board seats were up for election. Noel later recalled that the voting lines were "obviously racial" in the 1969 election. Nine candidates ran for two positions and in April 1969, the entire city was enraptured by the school board election. Two of the four most significant candidates were incumbent A. Edgar Benton and newcomer Monte Pascoe, who ran together on a pro-busing ticket, and

³⁹³ Rachel Noel, "Mayor's Commission on Human Relations," (Denver: Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library) Rachel Noel Papers. FF15, 1969.

³⁹⁴ "Busing Hit: Add Schools, Group Says." *Denver Post* 17 January 1969: 43.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

publicly supported Superintendent Gilberts. Benton and Pascoe were supported by the Democratic Party, despite the fact that Allegra Saunders ran for reelection as a Democrat. Republicans James Perrill and Frank Southworth, who also shared a ticket were opposed to any and all desegregationist plans, and boasted neighborhood schools programs through their candidacy. Perrill was an active anti-busing activist, and Southworth had previously served as a state senator. The four candidates together received over 94% of the public vote, with the five other candidates practically ignored.³⁹⁶

Perrill and Southworth were elected in May, 1969. The majority of those who voted for them were white, anti-busing parents from the same neighborhoods as the two winners.³⁹⁷ Most white parents, even those in neighborhoods not affected by the desegregation plans, tended to vote for Perrill and Southworth, so the neighborhood schools ticket won by a landslide. Perrill and Southworth began their first meeting on June 9th, 1969 by proposing Resolution 1533, which rescinded the entire Gilberts plan.³⁹⁸ The board, now heavily influenced by conservative voices, voted five to two in agreement with 1533.³⁹⁹

Middle class black parents and the liberal whites who wanted desegregation were not surprised. They were, however, impatient. Having prepared for conflict with the school board over the course of nearly ten years, the most active blacks in Park Hill had been working with the NAACP to put together a lawsuit against the school board. Noel

³⁹⁶ Harold E. Jackson, "Discrimination and Busing: The Denver School board Election of May 1969" *The Rocky Mountain Social Science Journal* Vol. 8. No. 2. (1971): 101.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁹⁸ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 112.

³⁹⁹ Brown-Bailey, "Journey Full Circle," 85-86.

had spent nearly ten years researching segregation in all of the schools governed by DPS, but the best examples of racial discrimination still included Barrett Elementary, Cole Junior High, and Manual High school, all of which were located in Five Points, but had attendance zones that included Park Hill. Because of this, Noel knew parents and students from both neighborhoods would have a vested interest in the outcomes of the potential lawsuit. Looking for support, she turned to the only neighborhood association that existed between the two communities: The Park Hill Action Committee.

When it was founded in 1960, the Park Hill Action Committee was a white-run, interdenominational but faith-based organization committed to maintaining a certain superior élan despite a ban on discriminatory housing policies. In its formation, PHAC was somewhat unsophisticated and unclear in its mission, attempting to please everyone in Park Hill. They were neither pro-integrationist, nor in support of black homeownership. They simply wanted to keep Park Hill elite. Yet over the course of the decade, PHAC took on a new identity and became one of the leading political organizations in the fight for school desegregation. Black membership in PHAC went from non-existent in 1960 to nearly half by 1969. In 1967, PHAC elected its first black president, Fred Thomas. Suddenly, but not by accident, the Park Hill Action Committee was front-and-center in the struggle for educational equality in Denver.

School Board Under Fire: The *Keyes* Trials Begin

On June 19, 1969, eight parents of DPS students filed a joint class action suit under the name of Wilfred Keyes, a black father living in Park Hill. Wilfred Keyes was a black father of two girls in the Park Hill neighborhood. Keyes' daughter Christi attended

Barrett Elementary in 1969. In late 1968, Keyes was recruited to join the Park Hill Action Committee (PHAC), which was mobilizing on behalf of the Noel Resolutions and plans for desegregation. When the school board elections ended with two anti-busing members elected and the Gilberts plan rescinded, the PHAC was poised for action. Within a month, they filed suit against the Denver Public Schools, and the Denver school board, including every individual on the board.⁴⁰⁰ Wilfred Keyes served as the lead plaintiff for the case. Keyes was joined by seven additional black and white families.⁴⁰¹ The complaint included a motion for a preliminary injunction with the U.S. District Court and requested that the rescission of Resolutions 1520, 1521, and 1534 (The Gilberts Plan) be declared a violation of the Equal Protection Clause, and therefore reversed permanently. Secondly, the suit requested judgment that declared the schools in Park Hill were in fact segregated in the DPS system.⁴⁰²

The school board was completely unprepared. There had been threats of a lawsuit for years, but the legal team rarely took these seriously. The plaintiffs on the other hand – who claimed to represent black, white, and Hispanic families from Park Hill – had been working to get the case perfect for years. They selected Gordon Greiner, a relatively young attorney to represent them.⁴⁰³ Greiner originally shied away from the case, having

⁴⁰⁰ Wilfred Keyes et.al, v. School District No. 1, Denver Colorado et.al. 413 U.S. 189. Keyes v. School Dist. No. 1, 303 F. Supp. 279 (D.Colo.1969).

⁴⁰¹ Barbara Browne, “Mandatory Busing Suit Opens in Court” *Rocky Mountain News* 17 July 1969: 5.; Keyes v. School Dist. No. 1, 303 F.Supp. 279 (D.Colo.1969).

⁴⁰² *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 303 F. Supp. 279, 284 (D. Colo. 1969).

⁴⁰³ The original eight plaintiffs in fact only included black and white families. Later during proceedings, Greiner sought a Mexicano family to join the class action suit. In 1974, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund intervened on behalf of the ignored Hispanic voice. Rachel F. Moran, “Getting a Foot in the Door: The Hispanic Push for Equal Educational Opportunity in Denver,” *Kansas Law and Public Policy* 2 No. 35 (1992-1993): 35. The plaintiffs also considered Craig Barnes as a

had little experience with civil rights law and a lack of interest in supporting a pro-busing movement. However, when he considered Rachel Noel's research and the arguments made by Park Hill parents and the NAACP, and Greiner decided to join the fight after all. He did the same in his personal life. Within a few years, Greiner relocated from the suburbs to Park Hill and sent his son to predominately black Smiley Middle School.⁴⁰⁴ Greiner set out to prove that the school board intentionally created a dual system, and he saw Park Hill as the perfect microcosm to demonstrate this fact.⁴⁰⁵ Greiner's suit had eight plaintiffs and almost as many defendants. The primary defendant was Denver Public School District No.1, often called "DPS" or the "school district" in court proceedings. Additional defendants included Superintendent Gilberts and all school board members except Amasse, Voorhees, and Noel.⁴⁰⁶ The case was assigned to Justice William Doyle, an Irish-American Denver native whose reputation included descriptions like "moderate," "tough," and "liberal." One critic considered him "one of the most liberal of the District Court judges in the nation."⁴⁰⁷

Proceedings:

Greiner, Noel, Keyes, and Doyle were just four of the numerous individuals who, in June of 1969 became entrenched in a vivid and lengthy legal drama that would stretch

potential attorney. Citizens Association for Neighborhood schools, "Education by Judicial Fiat" (Denver, Colorado: 1974): 4.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview conducted by Frederick Watson on 17 December 1985, cited in Watson's dissertation, Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 128, 180n13. Watson includes profiles written on Greiner in various journals; James Meadow, "Who's Really Who: Gordon Greiner," *Cervi's Rocky Mountain Journal*, 8 May 1974: 11-12.; James Meadow, "It Has Been Five Long Hard Years," *Cervi's Rocky Mountain Journal*, 8 May 1974: 23.

⁴⁰⁵ Carter, "Negro School Setup Told by Researcher" *The Denver Post* 17 July 1969: 3.

⁴⁰⁶ *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 303 F. Supp. 279, 284 (D. Colo. 1969).

⁴⁰⁷ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 128-129.; Brown-Bailey, "Journey Full Circle," 89.;

into the 1990s and outlive some of them.⁴⁰⁸ In the first hearing, Gordon Greiner stated that segregation and racism in Denver were difficult to define, but impossible to ignore. Greiner opened with, “No one hangs a ‘for whites-only’ sign on the school house door—the means are no less effective.”⁴⁰⁹ Dr. George E. Bardwell testified as the plaintiff’s expert on city design and census interpretation. Bardwell demonstrated to the judge that Barrett Elementary had been positioned in order to segregate black children. Colorado Boulevard, separating Barrett from nearby schools was inconsistent with the other boundaries in the district. He added that the school board was “deliberately fostering segregation in schools.”⁴¹⁰

Doyle found that the school board was guilty of *de jure* segregation, based on a pattern of policies that discriminated against students of color, and a body of evidence that they were made aware of these practices over the course of the years following *Brown*.⁴¹¹ Doyle also made an observation about the differences between *de facto* and *de jure* segregation when he said, “Consequently, I don’t see how you make the difference, if you came out with the same segregated pattern in the one as related to the other.” He added he could “see no difference” between “*de facto* and the *de jure* segregation.”⁴¹² In

⁴⁰⁸ For general overviews and histories of the *Keyes* case, see James Fishman and Lawrence Strauss, “Endless Journey: Integration and the Provision of Equal Educational Opportunity in Denver’s Public Schools: A Study of *Keyes v. School District No. 1*.” *Howard Law Journal*, 1989.; Jessica and Jeffrey Pearson in Howard Kalodner ed., *Limits of Justice: The Courts Role in school Desegregation* (1978).; Brown-Bailey, “Journey Full Circle.”; Taylor, “Leadership Responses to Desegregation.”

⁴⁰⁹ Carter, “Negro School Setup Told By Researcher” *Denver Post* 17 July 1969: 3.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.; Browne, “Mandatory Busing Suit Opens in Court,” *Rocky Mountain News* 17 July 1969: 5.

⁴¹¹ *Keyes v. school District No, 1*, 303F Supp. 279. 284 (D. Colo. 1969).

⁴¹² The original ruling indicated that Doyle found proof of *de facto* segregation, meaning segregation by act, not law in the distribution of pupils. This ruling ultimately led to additional consequences for Doyle and Denver. <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-10th-circuit/1297305.html>.; Last

general, Judge Doyle ordered the school board to implement a pupil-transfer plan that would effectively desegregate all Park Hill schools by the end of the 1969-1970 school year. Furthermore, Doyle demanded that the school board return to the previous arrangements made under the Gilberts Plan within ten days.⁴¹³ White conservative parents were enraged by the judge's decision and the potential consequences they faced as a result of the court case. Anger and frustration seemed to permeate throughout the city as a result. Very soon after Judge Doyle's initial ruling, Wilfred Keyes woke up to an exploding pipe bomb on his front door step. A few days later, a still unidentified arsonist set fire to the Denver Public schools bus barn. Nearly half of the district's buses were destroyed in the fire and a message was sent: Denver anti-busing activists were willing to go to great extremes.⁴¹⁴ Responding to these angry parents, the school board voted to appeal the judgment. Three members, Rachel Noel, James Voorhees and John Amasse opposed, but the motion passed.⁴¹⁵ The appeal, filed in July also requested a stay, so that the board could be released from immediate action upon Doyle's ruling.

Full Trial on the merits ordered, 1969

When the school board filed their appeal to the Tenth District Court, they likely believed that the return would be worth the cost. Having agreed to spend nearly twenty

accessed 19 August 2013.; Moran, "School Unit to Appeal Bus Ruling." *Rocky Mountain News* 29 July 1969: 5.

⁴¹³ Carter, "Next Legal Round Friday in school Busing Case." *Denver Post* 16 June 1969.

⁴¹⁴ James Brooke, "Court Says Denver Can End Forced Busing." *New York Times: Education* 17 September 1995. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/09/17/us/court-says-denver-can-end-forced-busing.html>. Last accessed 23 August 2013.

⁴¹⁵ Moran, "School Unit to Appeal Bus Ruling" *Rocky Mountain News* 29 July 1969: 5.

thousand dollars more than budgeted, the appeal was a risk. Instead, they entered into a legal battle that lasted until 1974 and ended up influencing the entire Denver Public school system, beyond Park Hill and Five Points. The Appeals Court granted the stay of Doyle's ruling on August 27th, 1969 and immediately, Greiner appealed to the Supreme Court. Three days later, and less than a week before the start of the 1969 school year, Justice William Brennan from the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the stay and ordered a full trial on the merits.⁴¹⁶ Historian Frederick Watson noted, "fifteen years after the *Brown* decision... the Court was impatient with the delaying tactics of communities that opposed desegregation."⁴¹⁷ However, the Denver Public School Board would continue to employ such tactics for another four years, and long after the U.S. Supreme Court made its final ruling regarding DPS. School districts across the nation used the courts and the appeals process to delay integration at every turn, and Denver schools fell victim to this exact approach.

Protests, 1969

The school board had three days to redraw their attendance lines, in order to comply with Doyle's ruling after the stay was reversed. At the time, the only neighborhood boundaries in question were that of Park Hill, which impacted Five Points, so the school board arranged transfers within those neighborhoods. Even though some of the transfers made only a difference of a few blocks, parents were angered at the lack of notice regarding school assignments. Newspapers published the new boundaries, and

⁴¹⁶ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 138.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 139.

opening day information on Monday, and the school year began the next day.⁴¹⁸ Most of the transfers affected the area's junior high schools. George Mathes was the Principal at the predominately white Hill Junior High in Park Hill in 1969. He was informed just two days before school started that 550 students from Hill were being transferred to Smiley Junior further west while 250 black students would leave Smiley and attend Hill. Mathes knew there would be trouble. The parents hadn't been given any notice, and he was unprepared for such a dramatic change at his school. On the first day of classes, about 100 white parents of the students who were transferred to Smiley showed up at Hill, anyway. They "forced their way" into Mathes' office and demanded the right to register their children at Hill. Mathes did his best to calm down the parents, despite angry accusations that he was a "communist" and part of a "conspiracy." He told the parents to take their children to Smiley. Black parents were unhappy, too. Just like the students of Hill, their children had been given no notice until the final hour. Those who were transferred lost a connection to their neighborhood schools, just as white students did. They found themselves in foreign surroundings, seemingly far away from home, and unwelcome.⁴¹⁹ Parents, both black and white picketed the district office, and the specific schools in question. Though the pickets lasted only a few weeks into the school year, the community was still rocked by the controversy. For months, Mathes claimed there were fights, robberies, and "incidents," at Hill, though he never filed a police report. In December, the *Denver Post* catalogued parental concerns about busing and found, that in

⁴¹⁸ "Denver School Opening, Bus Schedule," *Rocky Mountain News* 1 September 1969.

⁴¹⁹ *Denver Post* 9 September 1969.

general, parents who listened to “portable police radios” or “inflated” “minor incidents into atrocities” were motivated by rumors, not fact.⁴²⁰

Full Trial on the Merits ruling, March 1970

The full trial on the merits was scheduled to take place in February 1970. Judge William Doyle heard the case again. This time, Gordon Greiner and the plaintiffs decided to expand their claim to include the entire DPS system, beyond Park Hill and Five Points. Greiner believed this would force Doyle to rule that *de jure* segregation was system-wide, beyond selective neighborhoods that had a high concentration of black students.⁴²¹ Two witnesses for the defense were called that likely had quite an impact on Judge Doyle’s ruling. First, James Perrill, the school board member elected in 1968 and one of the two most vocal opponents of the Noel Resolutions took the stand. Perrill was asked if he thought the *Brown* case and rulings applied to Denver. Unsurprisingly, he said no. He didn’t believe that *Brown* “related to our situation in Denver” because Colorado did not have a legal dual system. DPS, he stated was segregated because of racial housing patterns, not laws and legislation requiring separate but equal. This was a common argument employed by white parents and policy makers in the North and West.⁴²² The second witness called was retired Superintendent Kenneth Oberholtzer. Oberholtzer had stayed out of the busing controversy since he left his post in 1967. However, when he testified, he provided the court with a lot to consider. Greiner pointed out to the judge and

⁴²⁰ Carter and Dunning, *Denver Post*, 33.

⁴²¹ Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 142-143.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 144.

Oberholtzer that “mandatory busing” had always existed. Anytime new territories were annexed or population shifted, the school district had to account for new pupils. Thus, white students were already bused constantly. Oberholtzer replied that undesirable conditions in predominately black and Hispanic schools were the fault of the parents, the students, and the community, not DPS.⁴²³ The trial lasted for several weeks, and expert witnesses, school board members, and DPS teachers were consulted.

Hearings on relief and potential plans, March 21, 1970

Upon judgment on March 21st, 1970, Judge Doyle expanded his ruling to include two additional schools to the Park Hill and Five Points schools listed in the original petition. Doyle ruled that “minority schools were inferior and this inferiority was largely a result of racial isolation.”⁴²⁴ Doyle also found the school board guilty of *de jure* segregation. He explained that adopting the Noel Resolutions was a step forward, but following the 1969 school board election the rescissions of 1520, 1524, and 1531 were “legislative acts” that perpetuated racial segregation.⁴²⁵ Doyle demanded that the school board and plaintiffs submit proposals by May 1970 to remedy the inequalities in all fourteen of the schools listed in his judgment.⁴²⁶ Contrary to reputation, Doyle was not a complete believer of busing. He stated that “busing isn’t the most desirable means of

⁴²³ U.S. District Court Transcript, 16 July 1969, 24: Keyes Papers, Box 7.

⁴²⁴ “Federal Court Orders Denver to Integrate Minority Schools,” *Special to the New York Times* 24 May 1970: 40.

⁴²⁵ Judge Doyle, Opinion and Order, 21 March 1970.

⁴²⁶ Cindy Paramenter, “Integration Key in school Plans,” *Denver Post* 10 May 1969: 29.

bettering education in the district,” and he remained skeptical of the potential outcomes.⁴²⁷

Hearings on Relief

While the plaintiffs called expert witnesses from around the country to discuss the importance of desegregated education, the defense relied on Superintendent Robert Gilberts as their main witness.⁴²⁸ Both sides argued the merits of integration. On May 21st, 1970 Judge Doyle made another ruling. He concluded that *de facto* segregation and *de jure* segregation, though DPS was guilty of both in many cases, could not be resolved through the same means. Likewise, he stated that compensatory education programs, and “choice enrollment” like LOE had already been ruled unconstitutional solutions and therefore could not be the used to desegregate Denver’s schools.⁴²⁹ He added three more schools to his initial “core-city” schools under review. These seventeen schools were selected if they were attended by 70-75 percent either black or Chicano students. Regarding these seventeen schools and the overall ruling, Doyle stated that the only way to remedy segregation in DPS was through permanent desegregation and improvements made to minority schools.⁴³⁰ Teachers and administrators, he ruled, must attend human

⁴²⁷ “Desegregation Stalled” *Denver Post* 18 July 1969: 8.

⁴²⁸ Witnesses included Dr. James Coleman who authored “The Coleman Report,” Neil Sullivan, the Commissioner of the Massachusetts State board of Education and former Superintendent of Berkeley Public schools, and Robert O’Reilly from the New York State Department of Education. All three had conducted research on integration and had experience with desegregating schools and the benefits behind successful busing programs. U.S. District Court Transcript, 16 July 1969, 24; Keyes Papers, Box 7.

⁴²⁹ *Green v. School Board of New Kent County*, 391 U.S. 439 (1968).

⁴³⁰ Judge Doyle, Opinion and Order, 21 May 1970.

resources training to learn how to “deal” with black and Hispanic students.⁴³¹ Then, Doyle made the final blow. He ruled that half of the designated schools be desegregated by September 1971 and the other half a year later.

On June 16th, 1970, the school board appealed the decision to the Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. Two weeks later, Gordon Greiner did the same, for very different reasons. First, the plaintiffs decided to seek an increased integration program that would involve all of DPS. Second, their appeal included an issue with the use of *de facto* segregation instead of *de jure*. The plaintiffs believed that the school district’s formal boundary drawing was evidence of a formal segregated system. The Appeals Court, made up of three judges, upheld Doyle’s ruling to integrate the Park Hill schools. However, they were not as liberal with the rest of the “core city” schools. Both the school board and the plaintiffs had appealed those issues, so the court had a lot to consider. First, they found that black and Hispanic teachers had *not* been segregated within the district, as the plaintiffs originally cited. Second, they found that the burden of proof was the plaintiff’s responsibility, and third, they stated that *de facto* segregation in DPS did *not* create an unequal system, and was therefore constitutional.⁴³² When the Court of Appeals handed down this judgment, the plaintiffs petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court.

⁴³¹ Ibid., Appeals Court, Tenth Circuit Court, 2 March 1971.; Barbara Browne, “School Board Asks Stay of Doyle’s Balance Decree.” *Rocky Mountain News* 18 July 1969; Cindy Parmenter, “Board Votes to Ask New Integration Stay,” *Denver Post* 28 April 1971: 1. Cindy Parmenter, “Integration Key in School Plans” *Denver Post* 10 May 1969:29.; “School board to Fight Busing Ruling.” *Rocky Mountain News*;

⁴³² Appeals Court, Tenth Circuit Court, 2 March 1971.

Court Control of DPS 1972-1974

It took more than two years for the Supreme Court to rule on the *Keyes* case. The hearings began on October 12th, 1972. Gordon Greiner and James M. Natrit, III from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund argued for the plaintiffs. Attorney William K. Ris of Denver argued for the defendants. Nearly a year later, the Supreme Court delivered a twenty-six page ruling, divided into four parts. The first section found errors in Judge Doyle's designation of minority schools. They wrote that blacks and Hispanics faced "identical" discrimination, and Doyle's distinction between the two was unnecessary. Secondly, the Supreme Court found that the burden of proof was unjustly assigned to the plaintiffs. They had proven that segregation existed, primarily in Park Hill, and thus it was the District Court's responsibility, not the plaintiffs, to determine if segregation that existed in Park Hill applied to the entire system. They then took this part further in their third section, when the Supreme Court demanded that the school board was responsible for proving that segregation was *not* district-wide. Finally, the Supreme Court ruled that Judge Doyle must declare the entire Denver Public Schools system a "dual system" and, that Doyle must oversee the overall desegregation of the entire system.⁴³³ In doing so, they returned jurisdiction to Doyle and put the burdens of proof resolution in the hands of an angry school board.

Keyes was a landmark case for civil rights and school desegregation. It was the first case heard by the Supreme Court regarding "northern" school desegregation. It was also the first to take into account the nuances of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation. A history textbook might generalize the two terms with regard to legality or intent. *De jure*

⁴³³ *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1*, 413 U.S. 189, 5-7.; Wilfred KEYES et al., Petitioners, v. SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1, DENVER, COLORADO, et al., 413 U.S. 189

segregation refers to state, federal, or local province that allows for or enforces segregation. Usually, these laws employ language from the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case that determined “separate but equal” accommodations constitutional. Students of history might also conflate the *de jure* distinction with Jim Crow laws, which existed throughout the United States, but are particularly vivid in pre-Civil Rights southern social customs. *De facto* segregation, on the other hand, tends to be lumped in with accidental or ordinary separation of races. School boards like Denver’s following World War II believed that blacks, whites, and Hispanics were naturally segregated into neighborhoods by choice. It was generally argued that *de jure* segregation was bad; *de facto*, tolerable. By 1973, the United States Supreme Court had heard quite a few school desegregation cases regarding education in the Jim Crow South. When Denver’s case was heard, the nuances between *de facto* and *de jure* segregation were no longer crystal clear. More importantly, plaintiffs like those Gordon Greiner represented, were able to prove that *de facto* segregation was a myth. By imposing resolutions and attendance policies that recorded the intended segregation of black students – based on neighborhood location or not – Greiner demonstrated that Denver’s *de facto* system was, in fact, a product of *de jure* segregation.⁴³⁴

Another groundbreaking aspect of the *Keyes* trial was that it considered the impacts of segregation beyond white and black race relations. For the first time, the Supreme Court heard a case regarding a “tri-ethnic” community, since the *Keyes* plaintiffs included blacks, whites, and Chicanos. By 1973, Hispanic interests in western communities were visible. *Keyes* attempted to take this into account, but the conflict was

⁴³⁴ Kern Alexander and M. David Alexander, *American Public School Law* (Saint Paul: West Publishing, 1985): 425-426.

far from over in Denver and elsewhere. In their ruling, the Supreme Court stated that segregation was evident in schools with large majorities of black and/or Hispanic, therefore, all of the schools in Denver needed to be remedied. This would become an issue with the Chicano community, who were relatively disinterested in the *Keyes* case and proceedings and instead, had their own axe to grind.

1973 Remand Trial

When Christi Keyes' father volunteered as lead plaintiff for the suit against DPS, she was in kindergarten. It was 1969. By the time Judge Doyle scheduled the remand trials in December 1973, Christi was nine-years-old and little had changed for her and her black classmates. While the case was under Supreme Court review, the school board was able to stall in making permanent changes to their policies. By 1973, however, Doyle was ready to see improvements. In the remand trial, the school board attempted to persuade Doyle that Park Hill was unique, despite what the Supreme Court had ruled. Notwithstanding these attempts, Doyle ordered the school board and the plaintiffs to present plans for system-wide desegregation. The Congress of Hispanic Educators (CHE) recruited Dr. John Cardenas to write an additional plan that would represent the interests of Chicano students.⁴³⁵ Thus began a long, drawn-out period of planning, as the plaintiffs submitted proposals for desegregating, and the school board dragged their feet with more of the same.

In May, 1974, Doyle's patience ran out. The plaintiffs and the board had both presented plans, but it seemed Greiner and the *Keyes* parties were the only ones who took

⁴³⁵ Brown-Bailey, "Journey Full Circle," 105.

it seriously. School board conservatives with an eye on future political appointments did not want to appear cooperative with Judge Doyle, and because of this did the best they could to defy his requests. Their plan included the closing of Doyle's original seventeen "core-city" schools, all of which were predominately black and/or Hispanic. The up-ended students would then be bused to white schools.⁴³⁶ Doyle was much happier with the plaintiffs' plan, which was complex. The plaintiffs proposed making every school in the city "50% Anglo" or more, by distributing minority and white children in a complicated pairing system. The pairing system combined busing with the neighborhood schools concept, so that students could spend three years at their home school, and three years elsewhere. Student transfers would account for nearly 14,000 students in the system. The plaintiffs also suggested that minority teachers be redistributed throughout the system and all teachers attend human relations training. In addition, the plaintiffs called for a rewriting of the history and social studies curriculum to include perspectives from black and Chicano voices.⁴³⁷ The school board's plan was out of the question, and Doyle found the plaintiffs' proposal to be expensive and unreasonable. He went looking for another expert.

1974 Finger Plan

Three years earlier, Dr. John Finger was recruited to help in a likeminded situation when a public school board in North Carolina had been similarly uncooperative. In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled in *Swan v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* that a district court

⁴³⁶ School board Minutes, 17 January 1974.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

had the right to intervene when school boards dragged their feet to dismantle a dual system.⁴³⁸ Dr. Finger presented a likeminded proposal for Denver that Doyle believed could appease both sides.⁴³⁹ “The Finger Plan” accounted for the busing of nearly 14,000 black, white, and Hispanic elementary students, but it also allowed more than 10,000 younger students to remain in their neighborhood schools. The junior highs and high schools would all be rezoned, thus redistributing all students throughout the system to achieve racial balance.⁴⁴⁰ The plan was ambitious, and nearly impossible to accomplish. Finger’s pairing program was organized on a part-time basis, and included provisions to bus children to-and-from schools during the lunchtime. It also would have required nearly 1,000 students to be bused in zig-zags across the city, with black students still bearing the brunt of the longest travel time.⁴⁴¹ Conservative white parents were obsessed with protesting the busing provisions in the Finger Plan, but the proposal also included many other optimistic, expensive suggestions ranging from bilingual education programs, additional reporting, and new school construction. When Doyle ruled, accepting the Finger Plan, he gave the school board more ammunition to appeal than he probably realized. He also ordered the district to pay for the plaintiffs’ attorney fees for the duration of the case since 1969, and to settle the bill for John Finger’s consulting work.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁸ *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* 402. U.S. 1 (1973).; Gary Orfield, Susan E. Eaton, and Elaine R. Jones, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (New York: New Press, 1997).

⁴³⁹ Tom Rees, “Doyle Picks Expert to Help Study Desegregation Plans,” *Rocky Mountain News* 1974.

⁴⁴⁰ Report from the Superintendent of schools. *John Finger Plan; Special Report* (Denver, Colorado: Denver Public schools, April 1974).

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*; Brown-Bailey, “Journey Full Circle,” 108-111.

⁴⁴² *Keyes v. School District No. 1*. 380 F. Supp. 673, 684, 685, 692, 705. (D. Colo., 1974)(Memorandum Opinion and Order mandating the Finger Plan).

1974 Appeal

Disgusted, the board appealed and requested a stay of Doyle's order, which was denied by the District Court and the Appeals Court. The school board was not ready to give up. Doyle was equally repulsed, blaming the board for using busing as a "political football" and dragging their feet.⁴⁴³ The board filed an appeal with the U.S. States Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in August 1974. Parents in Denver were confused, angry, and impatient. Since the stay had not been granted, the Finger Plan had to be implemented while the appeal waited judgment. Some school board members capitalized on this frustration. James Perrill, the conservative white school board President explained that it was in the board's best interest to delay and procrastinate in order to overturn Judge Doyle's ruling.⁴⁴⁴ In 1975 the Appeals Court confirmed much of the Finger Plan, but rejected the pairing program and ruled that five additional schools must be included to consider the needs of Hispanic students.⁴⁴⁵ In response, Doyle sought to include the five "Hispanic" schools in the plans for district busing.

"Dragging their feet": Managerial Racism and the Denver School Board, 1970-1974

Throughout the court proceedings, both the school board and DPS both underwent changes. Robert Gilberts resigned from his position as Superintendent in 1970, and Rachel Noel chose to leave the school board without running for reelection. Gilberts and

⁴⁴³ U.S. District Court Hearings, 24 April 1974.

⁴⁴⁴ Maurice Mitchell to Honorable William E. Doyle, 10 February 1975.; Community Education Council, "A Guide for Denver Public school Monitors," 1. August 1974.

⁴⁴⁵ *Keyes v. School District No. 1* 521 F. 2d. 465. 470(FN.15), 475, 479 (10th Circuit Court, 1975).

Noel were likely exhausted of their work on Denver's troubled school system, and both moved on to other leadership roles. Gilberts moved to Eugene to serve as Dean of the school of Education at the University of Oregon. Noel was asked to help develop the Black Studies Department at Metropolitan State College in Denver. She continued to champion black education and break barriers; in 1976 she became the first black person elected to the Board of Regents for Colorado's university system.⁴⁴⁶ In her exit, Noel left a seat open alongside two more vacant positions on the school board. In 1971, conservatives Bob Crider, Bert Gallegos, and Ted Hackworth were elected to the school board. Gallegos was a lawyer and State Representative. Though when he ran, he may have seemed like a "liberal" when it came to minority students, Gallegos was actually against busing. He supported community control, particularly in the Hispanic community. The school board was now effectively controlled by white, anti-busing conservatives. The board began to vote against federal support and any involvement from outside help if it had anything to do with desegregation.⁴⁴⁷

In 1972, Bert Gallegos accepted a position with Richard Nixon's Administration and the Health, Education, and Welfare Department (HEW). The board replaced Gallegos with the ever-present Bernie Valdez, who had been affiliated with the SSC eight years earlier, and remained an active participant in school issues. Valdez was starkly different from Gallegos. He supported busing and voted liberally on all issues pertaining to desegregation. Valdez, however, recognized that Chicanos and blacks had different opinions regarding educational equality. He stated that "Hispanics as a group" were never

⁴⁴⁶ Rachel Noel, "Denver Public Schools Resolution 1490," 25 April 1968, Rachel Noel, "Resolution Number 1490" Rachel Noel Files, BCAARL Noel Manuscript: 1-4.

⁴⁴⁷ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 197.

in support of “forced integration.” In part, Valdez believed this was because they did not experience discrimination the same way that blacks did. More importantly, Valdez agreed with Chicano leader Corky Gonzales that Chicanos had a “different psyche,” but that because they were in the minority, Hispanics had been used as pawns by both blacks and whites when it came to the busing debate. Chicanos, he said, “got caught in the middle.”⁴⁴⁸ Regardless of his nuanced perspective, Valdez was outnumbered either way. The school board was forced to devise a means to desegregate the schools, which left no room for Chicano community control. Conservatives dominated the conversations as newcomers Hackworth and Crider, who were both opposed to busing, and were out to prove their political potential. Both men eventually ran for state office, using their time on the board as campaign material.

Dr. Howard Johnson served as Superintendent in the three years following Gilberts’ resignation. During that time, Johnson mostly attempted to keep the peace. A relic of Oberholtzer’s “good old boy” era, Johnson had worked his way up through DPS, starting as a teacher and coach and eventually serving as Oberholtzer’s Assistant Superintendent.⁴⁴⁹ Johnson retired in the middle the 1973 school board elections. Dr. Louis Kishkunas, the former Superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools was hired to replace Johnson in May.⁴⁵⁰ That same month, Omar Blair and Kay Schomp were elected to the seats left vacant by William Berge and Stephen Knight. Previously dominated by conservative white male voices, the board was now altered in a liberal direction.⁴⁵¹ Blair,

⁴⁴⁸ Valdez interview, in Fishman and Strauss, “Endless Journey,” No. 661, 634, FN. 25.

⁴⁴⁹ Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 192.

⁴⁵⁰ Taylor, “Leadership Responses to Desegregation,” 175.

⁴⁵¹ Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 199-201.

the first African American man elected to the board remembered years later that Rachel Noel had encouraged him to run, urging him that it was his turn to step up and ensure progress was made.

Omar Blair was born July 16, 1918 in Houston, Texas and lived in western cities throughout his formative years. When he graduated from high school, Blair joined the Air Force. He was assigned to the famed 99th Pursuit Squadron, also known as the “Tuskegee Airmen” during World War II and retired from military service in 1964.⁴⁵² Though he kept a fairly low profile in Denver until his run for the school board, Blair was an avid supporter of desegregation. He often explained that when he graduated from high school in Albuquerque, he and his black classmates were required to sit in the back during the commencement ceremony. The event inspired Blair to fight for integrated education throughout his time in Denver.⁴⁵³

Along with Blair, Katherine “Kay” Schomp was elected to the board in 1973. Kay was born Katherine Weaver, in Pueblo, Colorado in 1917. After she attended the University of Colorado and earned a graduate degree from George Washington University, Schomp and her husband Ralph moved to Denver and bought a home in the upscale Country Club neighborhood. Schomp volunteered for many organizations, and upon her election to the school board in 1973 had served as President of the League of Women Voters, where she helped pen a report on the progress of school desegregation in Denver.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Omar Blair Papers, ARL3, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library, Box 1.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Brady McCombs, “Longtime Arts Activist ‘Kay’ Schomp Dies at 83” *Denver Post* 23 November 2003.; Rep. Diana DeGette, “A Tribute to Katherine Weaver Schomp,”

Blair and Schomp revitalized the liberal perspective on the school board, and also created a space for student voice. Until their elections in 1973, the board was dominated by parent and politician voices, but Schomp helped to initiate a “Student Board of Education” upon her arrival.⁴⁵⁵ Because they were committed to representing student experiences, both Blair and Schomp were often at odds with Superintendent Kishkunas, who used any stalling tactic he could to avoid desegregating the schools. Kishkunas was also openly bigoted when it came to the fate of black students in Denver. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Kishkunas stated that his biggest fear regarding court-ordered desegregation was that the school board was going to have to send “whites to black dominated schools.”⁴⁵⁶ Schomp and Blair were incensed, and demanded that Kishkunas write a retraction. At the following school board meeting, Kishkunas came to as close to an apology as he could muster, blaming the incident on high-running emotions and an angry body of parents. But to Omar Blair, the damage was done. He vowed to spend the rest of his term fighting for the wellbeing of black students, and ensuring that desegregation was not their burden to bear alone.⁴⁵⁷

The evolving school board was nonetheless responsible for dismantling a history of segregation in the Denver Public Schools. While Doyle and Dr. John Finger worked to finalize the Finger Plan, the school board sought to prepare parents, students, teachers,

http://capitolwords.org/date/2000/12/15/E2220_tribute-to-katherine-weaver-schomp/ Last Accessed 7.1.2013. (Student board of Education)

⁴⁵⁵ Rep. Diana DeGette, “A Tribute to Katherine Weaver Schomp,” http://capitolwords.org/date/2000/12/15/E2220_tribute-to-katherine-weaver-schomp/ Last Accessed 7.1.2013.

⁴⁵⁶ Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 201, quoted from an interview with Gordon Greiner, conducted by F. Watson, 17 December 1985.

⁴⁵⁷ School Board Minutes, 17 January 1974.

and community for what might lie ahead. When the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals adjusted Doyle's approval of the Finger Plan to include predominately Hispanic schools, the school board was faced with an unsettling reality: ultimately, they were responsible for implementing what might be a million-dollar plan to bus a majority of the city's students.

Indian Affidavits, Boycotts, and Misinformation: "The Silent Majority" in Denver, 1974.

Beyond court proceedings and school board elections, parents and students in Denver resisted and acted in their own interests regarding educational equality. Black radical groups, like the Committee for an Education Plan of East Denver (CEPED) and the Black Panther Party (BPP) organized for community control of their neighborhood schools. The Crusade for Justice built a private alternative school in the hope of isolating what Valdez called the certain "psyche" of the Hispanic student in a Chicanocentric school. All the while, white conservative parents varied in their responses. Some resorted to violence and trickery, others relocated to the suburbs. Throughout the first half of the 1970s, Denverites reacted across the board when it came to the courts' word on school desegregation. After Omar Blair and Kay Schomp were elected to the school board, and before Judge Doyle ruled in favor of the Finger Plan, white conservative parents mobilized to demonstrate their disdain for busing. William Berge and Stephen Knight cited in 1969 that their election to the board of Education was example enough that the "entire" community was against busing. Since this argument was eventually overruled, white conservatives felt forced to prove their point more clearly.

Nolan Winsett was a Denver local who graduated from South High School in Denver in 1957. He attended the University of Denver in 1963 and married his high school sweetheart Linda. They had three children and lived briefly in Washington D.C. before moving back home to Denver. When the Winsett family moved back in 1969, they had the choice to purchase a home in the newly developed suburbs, but having lived most of their lives in the city of Denver, they chose to buy a house within the city limits. They sent their children to Ellis Elementary, a predominately white school in south Denver, relatively removed from the drama unfolding in Park Hill. The Winsett couple was involved in community events and the Ellis PTA, but it was not until the Finger Plan was approved that Nolan and Linda got involved in the fight for education equality. Nolan believed Judge Doyle was a “dictator” who threatened the democratic process by overstepping his authority, as well as the constitution.⁴⁵⁸

Nolan and Linda used their affiliation with Ellis Elementary to recruit other PTA members from white schools to organize a meeting on February 4, 1974. According to Winsett, thousands of people and representatives from “89 homeowner association” attended the meeting. At it, Winsett and his alleged army of supporters founded the Citizens Association for Neighborhood Schools (CANS).⁴⁵⁹ According to their founding documents and a pamphlet circulated among Denver parents in their first month of operation, the more than “10,000” CANS members opposed busing, desegregation, and “court-ordered pupil distribution” based on race.⁴⁶⁰ The seventeen-page pamphlet, titled

⁴⁵⁸ South High School alumni board, <http://www.classreport.org/usa/co/denver/shs/1957/> Last accessed November 17, 2013.; Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 205-206.;

⁴⁵⁹ Bev Bennett, “CANS backs school boycott to protest busing,” *University Park and Cherry Creek News Sentinel*, Vol. 27. No. 45. (Denver, Colorado) 13 February, 1974.

⁴⁶⁰ “Education by Judicial Fiat.”

“Education by Judicial Fiat” provided a perplexing view of CANS’ purpose and organization. First, the pamphlet explained in great detail the milestones in Denver’s school board elections and the *Keyes* case. Coupled with brief descriptions of precedent-setting cases in other cities, the general discussion of *Keyes* and Denver schools practically explained instead of discounted the need for school desegregation. Yet throughout the pamphlet, editorial cartoons demonstrate that CANS believed busing was an example of authoritarian rule. The most cohesive argument made in their pamphlet against busing was the projected cost for Denver taxpayers. Mounting court fees, as well as the actual cost of busing loomed large a threat on the horizon. “Education by Judicial Fiat” also served to boast the egos of CANS organizers. In it, they claimed to have initiated “massive” boycotts and rallies, attended by “thousands” of people. CANS was also convinced of their political prowess, stating that they influenced dozens of state and local officials, including school board members who were elected long before they were founded in 1974. Finally, as it was treated throughout the 1970s, the issue of Hispanic needs showed up in the pamphlet, a smug afterthought. The very last line read, “About all one can say – to be bilingual—is ‘Quien sabe?’ – who knows?” It is the only discussion of Mexicanos in the Denver school system throughout CANS’ twelve-page pamphlet.⁴⁶¹

For all their posturing, CANS did not have the widespread support they claimed to enjoy. School board members Frank Southworth and James Perrill were the only elected officials who publicly affiliated with CANS, and only participated as guests to CANS meetings and events. Major media outlets like *The Denver Post* and *The Rocky Mountain News* all but disregarded CANS, lumping Winsett and others into the

⁴⁶¹ “Education by Judicial Fiat,” 15, 17.; A more realistic estimate claims CANS had about 1,500 members.; Brown-Bailey, “Journey Full Circle,” 117.

“conservative white parents” category. Winsett used this to his advantage, citing the “silent majority” when referencing the thousands he claimed supported him.⁴⁶² At one point, the *Denver Post* editor urged Denver readers to “boycott” Winsett and CANS, calling the organization’s efforts “shocking and irresponsible.”⁴⁶³ The only publication that gave Winsett substantial coverage was his local neighborhood weekly, *The University Park and Cherry Creek Sentinel*. On June 5th, 1974, the *Sentinel* devoted a two-page spread to Winsett and CANS. In it Winsett claimed that Judge Doyle, choice members of the school board, the League of Women Voters, and anyone affiliated with “the Democrats” were part of a “dark conspiracy.” Winsett came to this conclusion after taking nearly five months off from his “regular job” to conduct research on anyone allied with this perceived conspiracy.⁴⁶⁴ Even members of CANS were not so sure. One member who chose not to identify herself for the article provided a rebuttal. “You can’t take all of this too seriously,” she stated. She offered that Winsett had perhaps recruited people to CANS “who don’t have much education or who are kind of naïve about political action.”⁴⁶⁵ Winsett himself admitted that he lacked the support he claimed to have. “I was wrong,” he said regarding a CANS petition that took five months longer than expected. “Maybe the people don’t want a vote.”⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² Bev Bennett, “CANS backs school boycott to protest busing,” *University Park and Cherry Creek News Sentinel*, Vol. 27. No. 45. (Denver, Colorado) 13 February, 1974.

⁴⁶³ “Boycott the October School Boycott” *Denver Post, the Post’s Opinion* October 1974.

⁴⁶⁴ Bev Bennett, “CANS Crusade Concentrating on Petition Drive,” *University Park and Cherry Creek News Sentinel* 5 June 1974: 4.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

In the 1970s, white conservatives across the country embraced President Richard Nixon's "silent majority." Nixon publicly denounced busing, stating it was an infringement on American choice. Using the President's distaste for busing as a vehicle, white conservative parents like Nolan Winsett embraced efforts like limited open enrollment, voluntary enrollment, and "choice schools," as a means to avoid desegregation. Though these measures had already been proclaimed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, elitist and upwardly aspiring white parents hoped that a new era of conservatism had begun in America.⁴⁶⁷ Parents affiliated with CANS exploited white fears regarding violence in the schools, as well as conservative concerns over rising costs in the public school system to build a broader base. By doing this, they maintained a politically-charged message, while dispelling accusations that they were racist.

Though CANS was not always taken seriously, the organization had considerable momentum in their first months. In "Education by Judicial Fiat," Winsett stated that CANS initiated a boycott just weeks after they were founded. Indeed, on February 22nd 1974, nearly 48,000 Denver students stayed home from school to demonstrate their anger for DPS and desegregation.⁴⁶⁸ CANS exploited white fear, exploiting any issue that occurred at an integrated school to demonstrate the problems with desegregation. CANS also succeeded in getting an Anti-Busing Amendment election ballot initiative added to

⁴⁶⁷ Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006)., Kenneth M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007)., Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁴⁶⁸ This number is unsettling. The pamphlet stated that "More than half (60%) of Denver's 87,147" students participated in the protest, while Watson's dissertation quotes a *Rocky Mountain News* article and counts "47,788" students who stayed home on February 22, 1974. In many sources CANS is largely credited with initiating the protest, but the number of students who actually participated is unclear. Citizens Association for Neighborhood schools, "Education by Judicial Fiat" (Denver, Colorado: February 1974): 17., Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 207.

the November 1974 election. The initiative passed, but had no bearing on the Denver desegregation process, since DPS was under court control.⁴⁶⁹ When the Appeals Court upheld Doyle's approval of the Finger Plan in September 1974, CANS was prepared. Winsett issued a statement inviting all white parents in the "silent majority" to boycott DPS on a weekly basis.⁴⁷⁰ Winsett instructed parents to demonstrate consolidation with white parents in Boston, who were also boycotting their public schools once a week. *The Denver Post* encouraged parents to take the high road and ignore Winsett. "The problem in Boston" was different, the *Post* editorial reminded parents because "citizens of Denver have been responsible," unlike Boston who couldn't "handle" their own problem.⁴⁷¹ Ultimately, more people heeded the *Post's* suggestions than Winsett's. In October, less than 5% of all DPS students participated in the protest. *The Rocky Mountain News* reported that the school boycott "fizzle[d]." The report cited only seventy-five protestors, but pointed out that "seven students were injured," many of them white. As a response, principals, parents, and members of the school board urged others to "ignore the proposed boycott" planned for the next Friday.⁴⁷²

Five days later, Judge Doyle, CANS' primary nemesis, put a stop to the boycotts altogether. On October 10th, 1974 Judge Doyle extended a temporary restraining order,

⁴⁶⁹ Brown-Bailey, "Journey Full Circle," 118-119.; Jessica Pearson and Jeffrey Pearson, "Keyes v. School District No. 1." In Howard Kaloder ed., *Limits of Justice: The Role of the Court in school Desegregation* (Cambridge, Mass: Ballinger Publishing) 205, 207.

⁴⁷⁰ "White Flight Proves Threat to Denver School Integration" *Santa Cruz Sentinel: Santa Cruz, California* 10 December 1974: 11.; "Calls for school Boycotts for Each Friday in October" *Denver Post* 20 September 1974: 21.; "Calls for Boycotts for Each Friday in October," *Rocky Mountain News* 20 September 1974: 5.;

⁴⁷¹ *Denver Post* "Boycott the October Boycott," *The Denver Post: Post's Opinion* October 1974.

⁴⁷² Tom Rees, "School Boycott Fizzles, but Seven Are Injured," *Rocky Mountain News* 5 October 1974: 5, 25.

prohibiting all members of CANS from “promoting boycotts to protest court-ordered desegregation.” Citing the student-sustained injuries on October 4th, Doyle stated that the boycotts created an unsafe environment for children. Winsett, who testified in Doyle’s court on the 10th claimed he had “no intention of going out and asking people to boycott,” despite his previous statements.⁴⁷³ By this point, Winsett had fallen out of any favor that somehow remained. In September, the *Denver Post* exposed Winsett as a fraud, stating the CANS leader provided false figures to the paper.⁴⁷⁴ A few weeks later, paranoid and clinging to extremism, Nolan Winsett set fire to the only CANS membership list he claimed existed.⁴⁷⁵ Though Winsett ran for school board in 1975, the restraining order and disappointing boycotts served to end Winsett’s short albeit dim run in the Denver spotlight.

One of the names listed on Winsett’s mysterious membership roster was that of Naomi Bradford, a white mother whose children attended predominately white Johnson Elementary school, which was paired with Park Hill’s predominately black Gilpin Elementary for the 1974 school year.⁴⁷⁶ Bradford, unlike Winsett, was able to use her leadership with CANS to catapult into local politics, where she remained a fixture for two

⁴⁷³ Tom Rees, “Doyle Directs CANS to Drop Other Boycotts,” *Rocky Mountain News*, 10 October 1974: 5.

⁴⁷⁴ “Nolan Winsett, Leader of Cans, Give Misinformation to Embarrass *Post*.” *Denver Post* 24 September 1974: 2.

⁴⁷⁵ “CANS President Burns Membership Lists Following the Issuing of an Injunction Against School Boycotts” *Rocky Mountain News* 28 September 1974: 1, 5, 10.; “Nolan Winsett, Leader of Cans, Give Misinformation to Embarrass *Post*.” *Denver Post* 24 September 1974: 2.

⁴⁷⁶ “Busing foe—Candidate for School Board” *Rocky Mountain News* 24 January 1975: 43.; “Former CANS Member Has Announced Denver board of Education Candidacy for May 20th Election” *Denver Post* 24 January 1974: 4.; “Two Members of Denver board of Education Endorse Naomi Bradford and Nolan Winsett in May 20th Board Elections” *Rocky Mountain News* 17 May 1974: 34.; “Mrs. Virginia Rockwell and Mrs. Naomi Bradford win Seats in Denver Board of Education May 20,” *Rocky Mountain News* 21 May 1974: 5.

decades. A month after Judge Doyle terminated CANS' protest plans, Art Branscombe and *The Denver Post* exposed Bradford and other CANS parents for defrauding DPS. Branscombe quoted a report presented to the school board that stated Bradford "has openly refused to participate in pairing and has urged others to evade the law."⁴⁷⁷ Branscombe continued that the school board was requesting additional information.⁴⁷⁷ What they found was a scheme involving Bradford and a large group of Johnson Elementary parents.

The 1974 Finger Plan, recently endorsed by Judge Doyle, accounted for tribal sovereignty among Denver's Native American pupils. Those registered as American Indian could choose to be exempt from participating in any desegregation programs. In 1974, Bradford and other white parents filed false Indian Affidavits identifying their children as Native American, and therefore exempt as well. Bradford claimed that she was an unaffiliated member of the Navajo tribe, but nonetheless joined the dozens of other parents at Johnson who resubmitted correct paperwork upon Doyle's demand.⁴⁷⁸ This was one of the first times, but not the last that Bradford attempted to dishonestly identify within a minority group, while also actively working against the interests of black and Chicano students. It was also the beginning of a long and controversial career for Naomi Bradford and the Denver schools.

Bradford was born Naomi Llewella Taylor in 1940 to suburban parents in Los Angeles, California. She attended private schools and earned a Master's Degree from Colorado Christian University. When she joined CANS, she was an active member of

⁴⁷⁷ Art Branscombe, "Integration Blamed for 'White Noose'" *The Denver Post* 25 May 1975: 1, 4.

⁴⁷⁸ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 215-216.; *Denver Post* 21 September 1974.;

Johnson's PTA, married to Regional Transportation District (RTD) driver, Ron Bradford.⁴⁷⁹ In 1974, conservatives James Perrill and Frank Southworth both decided not to run again for the school board and Naomi Bradford jumped at the opportunity. Her Indian Affidavit controversy served as a springboard, as Bradford campaigned as an anti-busing radical who believed that breaking the law was sometimes necessary if it was for the right reasons. In 1975, Bradford and pro-busing integrationist Virginia Rockwell were elected to the board, continuing the proverbial tennis match that had been plaguing the school board since 1965. Ten years later, the board was still oscillating between liberal and conservative dominance. In 1975, Bernie Valdez, Omar Blair, Kay Schomp and newcomer Rockwell had majority, but Bradford did her best to interfere with any decisions that would help "see that busing works."⁴⁸⁰ In 1980, Bradford ran for state office against incumbent and longtime Colorado Congresswoman Pat Schroeder. Bradford, who vowed to "pin Schroeder to the wall" lost miserably but maintained her prominence in Denver by staying on the school board and eventually serving as its President.⁴⁸¹

When attorney Gordon Greiner moved from the suburbs to Park Hill, he bucked convention and did the opposite of what many white parents were doing in Denver and across the country. Since the late 1950s, cities in the West preoccupied with the threat of "white flight," and the school integration battle seemed the prime offender in the

⁴⁷⁹ Virginia Culver, "Ex-school board Member Fought Busing: A Colorado Life," *Denver Post* 20 March 2007.

⁴⁸⁰ Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 216, 223-225.; School board Minutes, 9 December 1976.; James F. Fishman, "Endless Journey: Integration and the Provision of Equal Educational Opportunity in Denver's Public schools: A Study of *Keyes v. School District No. 1.*" *Howard Law Journal* Vol. 32. No. 627. (1989): 661.

⁴⁸¹ Culver, *Denver Post* 20 March 2007.

movement to halt white flight. In 1973, the year the Supreme Court ruled that Denver had a dual system, DPS lost white students, as well as a few black and Hispanic children as well.⁴⁸² A movement of middle-class families, most of them white started from the core city of Denver and reached to suburbs like Wheatridge, Lakewood, Westminster, Littleton, and further. Most blamed busing, calling it a “self-defeating” initiative.⁴⁸³ By 1975, national researchers were blaming the courts and public schools for being too quick to bus. Perhaps, considered writer and Park Hill Action Committee founder Art Branscombe, proper equality had more to do with socioeconomic factors than racial desegregation.⁴⁸⁴ Branscombe’s observation notwithstanding, middle-class white parents feared that desegregation would follow them to the suburbs. To stop Denver from aggressively taking over nearby suburbs, they passed the Poundstone Amendment, named for lobbyist Freda Poundstone. The Amendment provided that neither the city nor county of Denver could annex adjacent land without a majority vote from all people living in the county of the area in question. The Amendment was a “suburban assault” on Denver and an attempt to keep “integrated busing” isolated downtown.⁴⁸⁵ Because the court’s jurisdiction over DPS applied only to schools within the *Keyes* case, the Poundstone Amendment “effectively sealed off Denver” from the nearby suburbs and “severely

⁴⁸² Art Branscombe, “Anglo Students Off in Suburbs,” *Denver Post* 1973.

⁴⁸³ Art Branscombe, “Mass Busing Termed ‘Self-Defeating,’” *Denver Post* 1 June 1975: 1.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.; Art Branscombe, “Integration Blamed for ‘White Noose’” *The Denver Post* 25 May 1975: 1, 4.

⁴⁸⁵ Abbott, Leonard, and Noel, 352.; Fred Brown, “Poundstone v. Aurora’s Ambitions.” *Denver Post* 21 February 1996: B9.

curtailed” the city’s reach, thereby nearly guaranteeing that desegregation would not have a “lasting” and “stable” future.⁴⁸⁶

The Legacy Continues: Manual in 1974

Of all the schools affected by Judge Doyle’s Finger Plan, Manual High School would undergo the most dramatic change in 1974. Manual, the most significantly overcrowded in the district and overwhelmingly attended by black and Chicano students, lost more than half of its students when 1,065 were assigned to other high schools. 838 white students from West, South, East, Washington, Jefferson, and Kennedy High were paired with Manual. Likewise, The Finger Plan ignored a near 70-year-old rivalry and attempted to form the “East-Manual Complex,” by merging the two oldest high schools. The plan added to the frustration and confusion among black, white, and Chicano parents.⁴⁸⁷ Students on the other hand, seemed more prepared. Tim Slaughter, an “A student” was one of the black teenagers reassigned to South High School under the Finger Plan. Slaughter believed he would be “better qualified” at South to maintain an above-average GPA because of what he learned at Manual. “Here, when they educate you, you have to do a little more,” he said of Denver’s second-oldest high school.⁴⁸⁸ Chicanos were not so optimistic. Irene Munoz, one of Manual’s Chicano educators said of the Mexicano students, “We have no control over what’s going on.” Another Chicano

⁴⁸⁶ Catherine L. Horn and Michal Kurlaender, “The End of *Keyes* – Resegregation Trends and Achievement in Denver Public Schools,” *The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University* (Cambridge, MA: 2006): 7.

⁴⁸⁷ Tom Rees, “Denver Manual Gearing Up for Desegregation” *Rocky Mountain News* 9 June 1974: 8.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

teacher added, “The system controls us. We’re being controlled now.”⁴⁸⁹ Like their diverse students, Mexicano and black educators were reassigned throughout the district as well. Manual, which was once described as the city’s “symbolic dual school,” was once again the emblem of Denver’s educational equality movement.

White parents expressed fear that Manual High School was no place for their more delicate children. One parent stated, “I wouldn’t go there without a guard.”⁴⁹⁰ Through violent, vocal, and political means, white conservatives attempted to “hold crosstown busing at bay.”⁴⁹¹ Four years after vandals destroyed the DPS bus barn, another series of bombs exploded on Denver Public School property. The district office and Cole Junior High were two of the school facilities targeted. Specific school board members, including Rachel Noel and A. Edgar Benton received “letter bombs” in the mail. Noel and her family received common death threats into the 1970s. Noel remembered friends meeting her after school board meetings got out so she would have someone to walk with her to her car, lest she be threatened or attacked by an angry member of the community. In 1970, Wilfred Keyes’ daughter Christi came running from her place at the dining room table to table to tell him she had heard a loud, threatening noise. When Keyes went to investigate, he discovered a pipe smoldering on his front porch. Though he attempted to suffocate the bomb with water, the device exploded near his front door and broke several windows. Keyes and his family were unharmed, having fled to the backyard when Wilfred realized he hadn’t put the bomb out. The police report

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ “I wouldn’t go there without a guard.” *Denver Post* Letter to the Editor by Jill M. Leingang, 27 March 1974.

⁴⁹¹ Fred Brown, “Poundstone v. Aurora’s Ambitions.” *Denver Post* 21 February 1996: B9.

indicated that the bomb, an amateur creation made with metal pellets, could have killed Keyes and any of his family members if they had not made it to the backyard.⁴⁹² In a 1974 symbolic demonstration of symmetry, protestors created makeshift explosives by binding flares together and planted them under bus hoods at the same parking lot that was the site of the first school-related bombings five years earlier.⁴⁹³

The *Keyes* trial began in the 1970s, but the aftermath stretched into the 1990s. Over the course of these twenty-five years, parents and students attempted to implement and avoid the realities of court ordered busing. White conservative parents lashed out, and also got involved in the political process. Some moved to the suburbs where they could leave the conflicts of city life behind. Black parents who wanted desegregation sought to implement the court's plans effectively. School board members battled to find common ground.

⁴⁹² *Rocky Mountain News* 22 February 1970.

⁴⁹³ Brown-Bailey, "Journey Full Circle," 94-95.

CHAPTER 6
“A Distinguished Legacy”: Aftermath, 1974-1994

The Busing Debate Wanes

Manual High School turned 100 in 1994, two decades after court-controlled school desegregation began. It was not until a year later that the courts released authority back to the Denver Public School Board.⁴⁹⁴ For more than two decades, students crisscrossed all over the city, but during these years, the city and its residents changed. Throughout this contested era, DPS enrollment plummeted from 96,634 in 1968 to 79,197 students in 1974.⁴⁹⁵ Of these students, 42,838 (54%) were white, 20,541 (26%) were Hispanic, and 14,608 (18%) were black. The rest were distinguished as “Asian or other.” By 1980, the total fell to 63,414. 26,012 (41%) white, 20,373 (32%) Hispanic, and 14,328 (23%) black.⁴⁹⁶

Despite the many years that passed, the community struggled for new conversations, and even the complaint of the “same old same old” was tired. Reporters in the early 1970s had already noted that the “forced busing” debate was getting old. Craig Matsuda, a graduate of East High and reporter for the *University Park and Cherry Creek Sentinel* lamented in his Denver School Board coverage, “I pinched myself to make sure that I hadn’t fallen asleep in ’69 and had just awakened.” In Matsuda’s words, nothing had changed for DPS since 1969 when desegregation became a point of conversation.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Horn and Kurlaender, “The End of *Keyes*.”

⁴⁹⁵ Office of Public Information, Denver Public Schools 1977. Watson, “Removing the Barricades,” 222.

⁴⁹⁶ Gary Delsohn, “Denver: A Minority District?” *Rocky Mountain News* 12 May 1981: 6. Numbers cited as “Based on DPS Figures”

⁴⁹⁷ Craig Matsuda, “Where are they when real school issues come up?” *University Park and Cherry Creek Sentinel*, 27 August 1974.

Matsuda's thoughts were echoed throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and into the 1990s as the school board, parents, and the general community grew tired of the busing debate.

In his 1974 plan for desegregation, John D. Finger recognized that Manual High School was a unique case. He wrote that "considerable attention" needed to be paid to Manual High School in order to ensure that the city's second oldest high school be integrated. Success at Manual would ensure "that there would no longer be any black high school" in Denver. Finger urged the school board to take special care of Manual, to make the high school "equal in quality and program to all the other high schools in the city," including East High.⁴⁹⁸ Manual and East High were rivals from the beginning. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the two schools were often compared, and over the years Manual became the underdog. In 1975 when the schools were paired under the Finger Plan, parents worried that black and white students would not get along. However, through academics, extracurricular activities and most significantly, athletics, students found common ground. A year into the desegregation program, Manual's principal Jim Ward and East's, Robert Colwell, found success in bridging the communities and schools together. They established The East and Manuals Supporters (TEAMS), a coalition of white and black parents to "pressure" the community into embracing desegregation. Along with students of all races from both schools, TEAMS and the principals created new student orientation programs, wrote newsletters, and contacted future students by phone. Ward believed the students needed opportunities to "rap" together, and wanted to show parents that black, white, and Chicano students could build meaningful

⁴⁹⁸ "The Superintendent's Reports: John D. Finger Report," 5 April 1974: 4.

relationships.⁴⁹⁹ One parent claimed that Manual High surprised her with its “loving, caring atmosphere,” and attributed the success to Ward. She remained “not a fan of busing,” but a new fan of Manual’s.⁵⁰⁰

“Resegregation,” 1990s

The 1981 school board election in Denver was “truly pivotal.” The courts were expecting proposals for a new desegregation plans in 1981, and busing was still dominating most meetings. In 1979, Omar Blair was elected to presidency, and his publicly acknowledged feud with anti-busing member Naomi Bradford was a topic almost as politically charged as desegregation itself. In her first year on the board, Bradford made enemies of both Blair and Bernie Valdez by being difficult and incendiary. In a 1976 interview with *Denver Magazine*, Bradford referred to Valdez as a “wetback,” and Blair as a “black S.O.B.”⁵⁰¹ Despite her controversial personality, Bradford was up for reelection in 1981, as was Virginia Rockwell, who was pro-busing. Bernie Valdez decided against running for another term. The *Rocky Mountain News* acknowledged of Rockwell’s position, “If Rockwell loses the school board will for the first time since 1975 be controlled by those who feel the desegregation order has hurt the district more than it has helped.” Seven of the eight candidates were in favor of neighborhood schools. Rockwell, the lone pro-busing candidate lost to Franklin Mullen,

⁴⁹⁹ “Whites Proud of Desegregation,” *Rocky Mountain News* 17 October 1976.

⁵⁰⁰ Ann Eisendrath, “We Didn’t Reckon with Ellen: Mother Says of Desegregation Role,” *Rocky Mountain News* 17 October 1976: 1.

⁵⁰¹ Ingrid Rizo, “Debate at H.O.C. Luncheon Drives Naomi Bradford to Tears,” *La Voz Nueva*, 31 March 1993: 14.

an anti-busing conservative and member of Denver's business elite.⁵⁰² The *Rocky Mountain News*' prediction came true: Blair, Kay Schomp and Robert Crider were outnumbered by anti-busing majority Bradford, Mullen, Marion Hammond, and William Schroeder.

It was no secret that Blair and Bradford did not see eye-to-eye. Bradford had a reputation of being difficult, hard-nosed, and staunchly conservative. Yet, briefly under Blair's leadership, the school board reached consensus more often and effectively than they had in the ten years prior. In an all-day retreat, the board met to discuss their upcoming deadline to present a new proposal for desegregation to Judge Matsch. Blair was surprised to make an unexpected ally in Frank Mullen, who helped break the board "out of its old 4-3 split on busing issues." When Mullen consistently voted in favor of new desegregation plans, he helped the board find consensus, but he became Naomi Bradford's "new antagonist."⁵⁰³

In 1974, Judge Doyle ruled that the school board had three years to implement busing according to the Finger Plan. He stated he was "not unwilling" to consider boundary and attendance changes, if the board had good reason and explanation. Two years later, Doyle decided it was "time some of the blessings were passed around," and handed the case down to his successor, Judge Richard Matsch.⁵⁰⁴ Conservatives were thankful to have a fresh perspective on the bench, and Matsch promised to take a

⁵⁰² Gary Delsohn, "Denver School Board Election is Truly Pivotal: School Board Vote to Influence Busing Future" *Rocky Mountain News* 17 May 1981: 48-49.; Watson, "Removing the Barricades," 236.

⁵⁰³ Art Branscombe, "Major Gain Cited in School Integration," *Denver Post* 27 September 1981.

⁵⁰⁴ Doyle was appointed to the 10th Circuit of Appeals Court in 1976. "Doyle Hands School Job to Matsch," *Rocky Mountain News* 23 April 1976: 15.

measured approach regarding busing. He stated that while he was committed to “upholding the law,” he was willing to consider desegregation methods that did not include busing.⁵⁰⁵ Matsch entered the case during the three-year moratorium, but the school board was preparing to submit a new proposal in 1981. Matsch asked the board to submit “a ‘unitary, non-racial’ desegregation plan” to him by December, so that he could close the *Keyes* lawsuit and return control of DPS to the board.⁵⁰⁶

No matter its arrangement, the school board was never really a fan of *busing*. Over the course of the late twentieth century, to liberal board members, busing represented a necessary evil to desegregate schools. In conservative members’ perspectives, busing was an authoritarian waste of money imposed upon DPS by out-of-touch courts, and a threat to white supremacy. Thus, it comes as no surprise that as soon as Judge Matsch took up the *Keyes* case and its legacies, the school board and others voiced their desires to end busing. Only four years after Doyle instituted the Finger Plan, the school board submitted new proposals for desegregation that greatly minimized busing.⁵⁰⁷ The board first argued that demographics had shifted in Denver so dramatically that many schools were predominately black or Chicano, despite the intentions of busing.⁵⁰⁸ At their September retreat, the board created “three dozen” specific decisions to include in their 1981 proposal. The plan included new pupil assignments to elementary, junior, and high schools throughout the district, and plans to build two new

⁵⁰⁵ “Doyle Hands School Job to Matsch,” *Rocky Mountain News* 23 April 1976: 15.

⁵⁰⁶ Art Branscombe, “Voluntary Desegregation is called Ineffective,” *Denver Post* 9 March 1982: 6B.

⁵⁰⁷ Sandra Dillard, “9 Schools Lack Ethnic Balance,” *Denver Post* 29 June 1978: 47.; Art Branscombe, “Can Denver Find an End to Busing: ‘Natural’ Integration,” *Denver Post* 22 May 1979.

⁵⁰⁸ Dillard, *Denver Post* 29 June 1978: 47.

schools in the Montbello neighborhood. For the most part, the board was relatively unanimous with Naomi Bradford offering the only dissenting perspective on many of the items.⁵⁰⁹ However, only three weeks later, the school board submitted two very different plans to Judge Matsch for consideration. The first reflected the decisions made at the board retreat in September. The second proposal, unbeknownst to President Blair, called for “magnet schools” that would attract integrated populations of students.⁵¹⁰

In the last week of November, Matsch returned the plans to the board, demanding they compromise and submit a single proposal. President Omar Blair remained “silent” at the meeting when Naomi Bradford made a motion to approve and submit the “magnet school” plan to Judge Matsch. Bradford justified the proposal saying, “enriched programs or specific educational philosophies would attract students from throughout the city” to various schools, creating natural integration. Apparently, Mullen and Bradford had reconciled since the September retreat. Mullen, who seconded Bradford’s motion called it “a chance to be honest,” and demanded Blair do the same. Mullen claimed that Blair was secretly against busing, having “assured me in a private conversation that if he had his way, he would eliminate busing.”⁵¹¹ Blair refused to comment during the meeting, but later told *The Rocky Mountain News* he never said anything of the sort. The board voted in favor of Bradford’s proposal 4-2.⁵¹² Later, Blair stated that he knew Matsch would

⁵⁰⁹ Cindy Parmenter, “Hispano View of Busing Eyed” *Denver Post* 11 May 1978: 12.; Art Branscombe, “School Board Agrees to 4 Changes on Desegregation Plan,” *Denver Post* 27 September 1981.

⁵¹⁰ Berny Morson, “Board Orders Open-Enrollment Plan Drafted,” *Rocky Mountain News* 1 December 1981: 1.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ibid.

“throw it out.” He followed, “Can you imagine the mass confusion that will reign in this town when everyone picks a school and we have to put them on a bus?”⁵¹³

New member William Schroeder fine-tuned the proposal, terming it the “Total Access Plan” (TAP). TAP created ten “magnet” schools designed to attract children from all over the city to varied programs on elementary, junior, and high school campuses. Blair knew the plan had many flaws. He stated that similar programs in other states failed to integrate children. In Houston he scoffed, “a magnet school for porters and maids is all black.” The Denver NAACP was equally disillusioned by Schroeder’s proposal. They called it “a cover-up” intending to resegregate DPS. The NAACP “reject[ed] the plan in its entirety” and urged Matsch to do the same.⁵¹⁴ TAP, they pointed out, failed to comply with Matsch’s order to create a “unitary school district that won’t resegregate” and in fact sought to return to a separate and unequal dual system.⁵¹⁵ Art Branscombe, still an active member of the Park Hill Action Committee, was concerned that TAP would “renew school racial lines” and threaten Park Hill’s stability. He worried that giving “students a choice of attending almost any school in the district” was a “major departure from the current court-ordered system of busing,” without a guarantee to maintain integrated education.⁵¹⁶

TAP continued in the board’s trend of ignoring Chicano needs. TAP’s designations included schools for gifted and talented children, a “university laboratory

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Sandra Dillard, “NAACP Council Lambastes School Plan: Resegregation Bid Claimed” *Denver Post* 16 February 1982: 1B.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Art Branscombe, “Plan Could Renew School Racial Lines,” *Denver Post* 12 February 1982: 1A.

school,” a daycare center at historically Chicano Gilpin elementary, an “individually guided education” school, and a “problem solving” academy. There are only two indicators that Schroeder briefly considered Chicano needs. First was his proposal for a “foreign language” program at Cory Elementary, at the far southern tip of the district and across town from the predominately Hispanic neighborhoods. Secondly, TAP provided a “multicultural heritage center” at Del Pueblo School, which was near the Chicano community. However, TAP also proposed closing ten schools, four of which were in Chicano neighborhoods.⁵¹⁷

TAP was most unpopular among the Manual High School community. Under Schroeder’s plan, the careful work conducted by Jim Ward and Manual’s students to integrate thoughtfully was discounted. The high school would be converted into the “Classical Academy for Advanced Studies.”⁵¹⁸ Among his many errors, Schroeder had not consulted any of the faculty or staff at Manual when crafting his proposal. Therefore, when TAP was publicized, teachers across the district, but most specifically at Manual were outraged by the unexpected potential change. Jerry McCracken, a Social Studies teacher at Manual organized an “informal meeting” after school in the Manual High cafeteria. McCracken was a veteran teacher. In his near twenty years working for DPS he had won awards and recognition as an outstanding teacher. He was also a member of Ward’s team, working to effectively integrate Manual without conflict. McCracken admitted to the gathered teachers that TAP, “as an education plan may be good, but as an

⁵¹⁷ “Magnet School Desegregation” *Denver Post* 10 December 1980: 6B.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

integration plan it ain't.”⁵¹⁹ When the school board approached Manual's teachers to “write curriculum” that would match the school's potential new designation, many of the teachers refused. McCracken circulated a survey to every teacher, and more than half the faculty returned them. The surveys indicated that respondents worried that “in a few years” Manual would become nearly 100% black and once again ignored by the school board.⁵²⁰ They weren't wrong. Researchers calculated that under TAP, Manual's Anglo population would drop from 50.1% to 5.6% by the start of the 1982 school year.⁵²¹ To voice their concerns, McCracken and his colleagues wrote letters to the school board and Judge Matsch. They also continued to refuse writing potential curriculum until Matsch ruled on the proposal. The school board dismissed Manual's faculty and asked teachers elsewhere to draft curriculum.⁵²²

The parents of fourteen Chicano students, all who attended Swansea Elementary, filed suit in federal court to be exempt from DPS' pairing program under the Finger Plan. The Finger Plan, they claimed, left out the Hispanic demand for bilingual-bicultural education, which had been in their 1973 proposal, submitted by the Congress of Hispanic Educators.⁵²³ Judge Doyle heard their case in 1978, while Matsch was preparing to make a TAP ruling. The plaintiffs presented a plan for educational opportunity that excluded sixteen schools in the district with “a combined Negro and Hispano enrollment of 70 to

⁵¹⁹ Art Branscombe, “Manual Teachers to Note School Plan Opposition” *Denver Post* 9 February 1982: 8C.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ “DPS Racial Cast Could Be Revived” *Denver Post* 12 February 1982: 1A, 14A.

⁵²² Branscombe, *Denver Post* 9 February 1982: 8C.

⁵²³ Max Woodfin, “U.S. Judge Asked to Approve School Reorganization Plan,” *Rocky Mountain News* 18 March 1976: 5.

75 percent” from the pairing program. Doyle admitted that since 1969, he had not seen “a single Hispano” appear in the *Keyes* proceeding. Gordon Greiner, the lawyer who represented the *Keyes* case, pointed out that Doyle had not heard a “dissenting” Chicano voice until 1978, either.⁵²⁴

Three more organizations joined to voice their discontent with TAP. Sandy Berkowitz, on behalf of the League of Women Voters attended the school board meeting in February. Berkowitz, using examples from Dallas, Milwaukee, and San Diego, argued that “freedom of choice” plans don’t work and were in fact, unconstitutional.⁵²⁵ Michale Simmons, of the Denver Community Desegregation Project told the school board the TAP plan was based on nostalgic notions of days gone by. TAP, he argued “will turn back the clock to the days when everybody assumed that minority schools would be inferior.”⁵²⁶ Once again, the PHAC, which had changed its name to the Greater Park Hill Community (GPHC) made a case for desegregation. Louis Matthias, chair of GPHC’s school’s committee blamed the School Board for attempting to “re-segregate the schools.”⁵²⁷

The GPHC infiltrated public perception of the school board, as writer Art Branscombe continued to advocate for desegregation through his position with *The Denver Post*. Branscombe covered every moment of the hearings, and applauded attorney Gordon Greiner, who returned to the court room thirteen years after filing his first injunction. Greiner was once again prepared and eloquent, with a team of experts to

⁵²⁴ Parmenter, *Denver Post* 11 May 1978: 12.

⁵²⁵ Art Branscombe, “3 Groups Criticize School Plan” *Denver Post* 12 February 1982: 1B.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid.

convince Matsch that TAP was inadequate. Branscombe wrote, “Voluntary desegregation plans, like the magnet school open enrollment one proposed by the Denver School Board, don’t work in school systems.” Branscombe referenced a study conducted by Vanderbilt University researchers, who testified before Judge Matsch in March. The study was conducted by Dr. Willis D. Hawley, Vanderbilt’s Dean of Education, and Mark A. Smylie, a doctoral candidate under Hawley. The study argued that Denver’s minority population, which was over “60% minority” in 1982 was too large for a magnet program to be effective. Hawley and Smylie, upon conducting general research on Denver and education equality stated that “mandatory desegregation plans are ‘at least three times more effective’ in producing racial balance.” Furthermore, the researchers testified that school desegregation would lead to housing desegregation. Branscombe and his GPHC finally had legal, documented proof.⁵²⁸ In a follow-up article, Branscombe pointed to successful housing integration in Riverside, California and Louisville, Kentucky. Branscombe cited ground-breaking historian Gary Orfield, “Orfield reports that court orders in cities such as Louisville and St. Louis have put the force of law behind school desegregation plans which encourage housing integration.”⁵²⁹

Matsch – annoyed by the school board’s “cover up” and convinced by Greiner’s presentation of experts on the merits of “mandatory desegregation” – snubbed TAP in early March, 1982. Matsch gave the board thirty days to submit a new proposal. Robert Crider, the newly minted board president was aware that “each member has a

⁵²⁸ Art Branscombe, “Voluntary Desegregation is Called Ineffective,” *Denver Post* 9 March 1982: 6B.

⁵²⁹ Art Branscombe, “Experts Advise Residentially Integrated Plan for Denver: Programs in Riverside, Calif., Louisville, KY., Called Success” *Denver Post* 14 March 1982: 1C.

constituency with strong feelings for or against mandatory busing,” but he was also hopeful the board could reach a consensus. He pleaded with the board to form a united front, and “bring this district back together.”⁵³⁰ The school board grumbled, and voted to “resurrect” their September plan from the year before.⁵³¹ They called it the “consensus plan.” The proposal eliminated “forced busing” to twelve schools in “already integrated” neighborhoods. The consensus plan also closed eight schools and returned 2,600 students to neighborhood schools. When the board voted, six were in favor. Naomi Bradford was the only dissenting vote.⁵³²

A Rewritten Memory of Busing, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s:

Nearly ten years earlier in 1975, the *Rocky Mountain Research Institute* published a report that claimed most Denverites were still not convinced that busing would do any good. Parents complained that busing was “a hardship” on families and children, and that “children should go to school in their neighborhood.” According to the study, parents also worried that busing cost too much taxpayer money, and was not a productive way to create “racial balance.” However, of the parents surveyed, only 2% indicated that “there is no need for racial balance.”⁵³³ Ten years later, Denver residents were more frustrated than ever. In their “12-year battle against school desegregation,” the school board was

⁵³⁰ Art Branscombe, “Busing Plan Revived: 2,600 Fewer Pupils Will Be Transported” *Denver Post* 19 March 1982: 1A.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Ibid.; For more on TAP and the consensus plan, see Brown-Bailey, “Journey Full Circle,” 127-133.

⁵³³ “Survey Uncover Denver Attitudes: ‘A Hardship on Families’” *Rocky Mountain News* 8 June 1975: 110

blamed for “costing city taxpayers almost \$1.3 million so far” with projected expenditures rising.⁵³⁴ In 1982, the board already faced paying all attorney fees, including those of the plaintiffs, as well as financing the city-wide busing. Moreover, in a 1977 lawsuit, the board was found guilty for “foot-dragging” over busing logistics and a federal judge ordered the school board to pay an additional \$230,000 in restitution to the *Keyes* plaintiff’s attorney, as well as two local organization complainants.⁵³⁵ In the 1979 school year, DPS spent \$3.1 million on “busing for integration,” with about 24,000 kids “riding the bus.”⁵³⁶ With Matsch still overseeing the *Keyes* outcomes and outliers on the school board like controversial Naomi Bradford, Denver residents were wary. It seemed like this battle would never end. *Brown v. Board of Education* was ancient history to the generation now attending schools across town, and there was little proof that DPS had improved since 1954. They had grown equally tired of Naomi Bradford, though they continued to reelect her to the board. In 1983 Bradford took on the role of President, following Crider’s short stint. Bradford remained on the board long after the other veterans from the 1970s left for new pursuits.⁵³⁷

Of the students enrolled in DPS for the 1981 school year, 40 percent were Anglo, 32 percent Hispanic, 23 percent black, and 5 percent “other.” Likewise, the city of Denver had a similar analysis. 66 percent were white, 19 percent Hispanic, and 12

⁵³⁴ Daniel Taylor, “Denver School Bus Battle Costly,” *Rocky Mountain News* 23 May 1982: 4.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, Those awarded included NAACP, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and Gordon Greiner’s firm, Holland and Hart. Most of the winners of the case refused to comment regarding the payout.

⁵³⁶ Gary Delsohn, “Denver: A Minority District?” *Rocky Mountain News* 12 May 1981: 6.

⁵³⁷ Berny Morson, “Naomi Bradford, Former School Board Member” *Rocky Mountain News* 16 March 2007.

percent black.⁵³⁸ Nearly all DPS, despite race, were bused in 1981. Teachers, parents, and students had differing views on the benefits of desegregation. Teachers assigned to schools previously dominated by blacks or Hispanics saw improvements after 1974. David Finley, who taught at Cole Junior High in the first few years of busing believed the best improvements happened in the first few years. “I saw some miracles when we got word some white kids were going to be bused to us,” he remembered. Before 1974, Cole received hand-me-down desks and books, but when white children were assigned to the Five Points school, “overnight we saw supplies, equipment,” and better teachers, Finley recalled.⁵³⁹ Black students bused to white schools did not see the benefits so readily. In 1980, 600 minority students were bused to previously all-white John F. Kennedy High (JFK). That same year, only one black student was accepted to JFK’s chapter of the National Honor Society.⁵⁴⁰

Some students remained segregated at their schools. One report cited black students congregating “near the front entrance, bantering among themselves while a throng of whites occupies the school’s southwest corner” at Hill Elementary. The report went on to explain that middle-school aged children “develop a racial consciousness” which “inhibits meaningful mixing,” despite their environments.⁵⁴¹ White students expressed dissatisfaction with busing more often than black students. “It’s only at school we’re integrated and there’s still a lot of fighting between blacks and whites,” a white 15-

⁵³⁸ Census, 1980. “Desegregation Guidelines Proposed,” *Denver Post* 12 March 1983: 1B, 6B.

⁵³⁹ “Some Believe Busing Has Been No Help to Minority Students” *Rocky Mountain News* 10 May 1981: 25.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

year old student who was bused commented. Another white teenager said, “It’s created a lot of problems. I never used to be prejudiced until they started busing. It’s just that they don’t seem to have respect for us.” Her friend added, “We feel outnumbered.”⁵⁴²

The students who seemed disproportionately outnumbered, however, were Mexicanos, despite their growing numbers. Francisco Rios, a community “monitor” who helped to oversee integration on behalf of Judge Matsch explained, “Because of the emphasis on blacks and whites, Hispanos... have slipped through the cracks.”⁵⁴³ John Archuleta, a 17-year old senior who was bused from his neighborhood near West High School to Manual struggled to find other Chicanos, despite Manual’s historic connection to the Hispanic community. “I had no choice,” he said of busing, since his home was one block outside of the boundary that would have allowed him to attend his neighborhood high school. “I just didn’t feel confident when I came here.” Archuleta added, “I live in a mostly Chicano neighborhood, and I was used to being around Chicanos.”⁵⁴⁴

Rios, once a fan of integration, felt that busing had only served to demonstrate why schools like the Crusade for Justice’s *La Escuela Tlatelolco* were perhaps better suited for Chicanos than desegregated schools. “An all-black or all-Hispanic school would be great if it has the resources and the parents involved,” he mused. He added that one-race schools seemed to have better results, because busing did not help minority students enough. Black and Hispanic parents, he said didn’t believe “that their kids will get smarter from mingling with white kids.”⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

Judge Matsch knew students were unhappy with the TAP proposal, and he felt the school board was still incapable of managing a desegregated district. Referring back to language used in the 1968 *Green v. School Board of New Kent County* court case, Matsch reminded the board that they were responsible for creating a “unitary” system. The 1968 case set the precedent of defining an equal school public school system based on racial demographics, busing and transportation, sports and activities, and physical resources. TAP did not take into account these items.⁵⁴⁶ In 1982, DPS still had not created a truly integrated system where “all of the students have access to the opportunity for education,” with “resources distributed equitably.” Most significantly, TAP defied court demands to create opportunities for students “to develop fully” despite “restrictions” based on their “racial or ethnic groups.”⁵⁴⁷

In response to Matsch’s ruling, the school board decided to take a different route. In 1983, they voted unanimously to stop submitting new plans to create an integrated system and instead seek court acceptance that DPS was already unitary. In late 1983, Omar Blair, the only black school board member and a previous vocal advocate for busing, surprised the black community when he voted in favor of the plan. “I wouldn’t support that vote,” said Lawrence Lewis of the Denver NAACP. The Urban League spokesperson was equally shocked. “Maybe he knows something I don’t know” offered Lawrence Borom.⁵⁴⁸ Blair explained his vote, “I’m not naïve enough to believe there are not hidden agendas by a lot of folks,” he said. Blair knew that the courts would not

⁵⁴⁶ *Green v. School Board of New Kent County*, 391 U.S. 439 (1968).

⁵⁴⁷ *Keyes v. School District No. 1* 540 F Supp. 339, 401 (1982).

⁵⁴⁸ Berny Morson, “Black Leaders Wary to End of Busing” *Rocky Mountain News* 17 December 1983: 10.

release control of the desegregation process “without safeguards,” but “it’s time we have some kind of resolution.”⁵⁴⁹ The school board explained that they could work with Matsch’s specifications for a unitary school system. “The Denver Public Schools,” argued the board, “are as integrated as they can be, especially since white enrollment declined from 57% in 1973... to 39%.” They followed they shouldn’t “be forced to alter busing patterns every time the population changes in city neighborhoods.”⁵⁵⁰ The school board spent the next year drafting a new proposal. They hoped to establish that DPS was desegregated, operating in a unitary system, within the conditions provided in *Green* and quoted by Matsch. In December, 1983, the school board submitted documents claiming to prove that the system was integrated. In it, President Bradford likened busing to “giving a patient the medicine for too long a time.”⁵⁵¹

In the first weeks of 1984, the Denver Public School Board filed a formal motion and request for an evidentiary hearing. They hoped to prove that Denver was integrated within the guidelines provided by *Green* and Matsch.⁵⁵² In April, Matsch began hearings. The school board had their work cut out for them. Not only were they charged with proving DPS was a unitary system, they were also up against the vague demands for “bilingual/bicultural” education in the 1974 judgment and decree. Demonstrating the city’s demographics had changed proved to be much easier than proving DPS was

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Janet Bingham, “Segregation Persisting at School Where Fight for Integration Began” *Denver Post* 14 April 1985: 1E, 6E.

⁵⁵¹ Iver Peterson, “Denver Says It’s Integrated; Now What?” *New York Times* 8 January 1984: E5.

⁵⁵² Brown-Bailey, “Journey Full Circle,” 138-142.

operating in a bicultural system.⁵⁵³ Ultimately, Matsch's decision reflected what the NAACP and UL noticed. Declaring DPS unitary did little to ensure that the school board would continue to advocate for the best interests of minority children. Matsch encouraged the school board to begin working with the *Keyes* attorneys to negotiate a settlement and compromise. He followed that he wanted to release control, but the school board still needed to prevent resegregation.⁵⁵⁴

It took two more years for the school board to appease Matsch's requests. In an interim decree in 1987, Judge Matsch announced he would allow the school board to follow "general integration guidelines" instead of the "specific desegregation orders" contained in the Finger Plan.⁵⁵⁵ Though the decision did not immediately put a stop to busing, it did allow the district to make changes to the now thirteen-year-old plan. Board member Judy Morton explained, "Until housing patterns change, we'll still have busing to integrate schools."⁵⁵⁶ In his ruling, Matsch expected the school board "to act on their own initiative, without prior court approval," but he maintained that the "bilingual program," as well as faculty distribution requirements remained as they did under the Finger Plan.⁵⁵⁷

Naomi Bradford was the sole member who endured on the school board from the 1970s to hear Matsch's interim decree. By 1987, the board's makeup had shifted once

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 138, 140.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 144.

⁵⁵⁵ Janet Bingham, "Court Relaxes Control on Schools," *Denver Post* 7 October 1987., *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1* 670 F Supp. 1536 (D. Colo. 1987).

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

again. In 1985, William Schroeder's failed TAP left a mark on his candidacy, and he was defeated. In an undramatic election, liberals Edward Garner and Carol McCotter won. Both were committed to putting a stop to school board spending when it came to desegregation and court fees.⁵⁵⁸ DPS administration was changing, as well. In 1988, Dr. Evie Dennis was hired as Deputy Superintendent. Dennis was the first black person and the first woman appointed to the position.⁵⁵⁹

She was born Evie Garrett on September 8, 1924 in Farmhaven, Mississippi. When she was in high school, her mother died and Evie's father became her biggest coach. He encouraged her saying, "You've got to have an education," hoping Dennis would defy stereotypes and rise from the poverty that plagued her large family.⁵⁶⁰ Dennis earned a Bachelor's Degree from St. Louis University in 1953. In 1958, she and her daughter Pia moved to Denver when Davis took a job with the Children's Asthmatic Research Institute. In 1966, Dennis became a math teacher for Denver Public Schools.⁵⁶¹ She continued to pursue educational and leadership opportunities. Dennis earned a Master's Degree in 1971 from the University of Colorado and a doctorate degree in 1976 from Nova University. After earning her Master's, Dennis moved into administration and throughout the 1970s worked with the DPS district office to oversee court-ordered

⁵⁵⁸ Janet Bingham, "Garner, McCotter Win Denver School Election," *Denver Post* 22 May 1985: 1A.

⁵⁵⁹ Janet Bingham, "New Denver Schools Boss Needs Time to 'Walk on Water'" *Denver Post* 5 August 1990: 1A.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ <http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/evie-garrett-dennis-41> Last accessed 5 May 2012., "Evie Dennis," *Colorado Women's Hall of Fame*, <http://www.cogreatwomen.org/index.php/item/60-evie-dennis>. Last accessed 5 May 2012., Rep. Diana DeGette, "Tribute to Dr. Evie Garrett Dennis," *Capitol Words* 20 July 2010. <http://capitolwords.org/date/2010/07/30/E1507-tribute-to-dr-evie-garrett-dennis/> Last accessed 5 May 2012.

desegregation.⁵⁶² The Denver community was anxious to see the changes Dennis promised to bring. They hoped Dennis would establish a sense of calm to a district that was in turmoil. She was sixth superintendent in six years to take the position. While she promised there would be change, Dennis hoped “people will give me time to make a difference.”⁵⁶³

A new era had begun in DPS history. Superintendent Dennis and the school board were publicly committed to working together, within the guidelines provided by the courts. Judge Matsch acknowledged that the racial balance in Denver schools was “eroding” due to shifting demographics in the core city. The language had shifted from “neighborhood schools” and “busing” to “quality schools” and “resegregation.” Black and Hispanic leaders bemoaned desegregation and its lack of rewards. “Some students were better off in black schools where they were motivated to achieve when they competed with other black students,” observed Gwen Thomas of the newly formed Colorado Black Roundtable. Test scores demonstrated that Denver’s black and Hispanic students scored in the bottom third of the nation, while whites were in the top third.⁵⁶⁴

In 1989, the school board asked the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to overturn Matsch’s 1987 judgment and release DPS from court control permanently. They argued that the district was in “full compliance,” and that the 1970s lawsuit was outdated and irrelevant. Gordon Greiner, once again representing the plaintiffs disagreed. He asked,

⁵⁶² Diana DeGette, “Tribute to Dr. Evie Garrett Dennis,” *Capitol Words* 20 July 2010. http://capitolwords.org/date/2010/07/30/E1507_tribute-to-dr-evie-garrett-dennis/ Last accessed 5 May 2012.

⁵⁶³ Bingham, *Denver Post* 5 August 1990: 1A.

⁵⁶⁴ Ann Carnhahan and Robert Jackson, “Fewer City Schools Meeting Guidelines for Integration,” *Rocky Mountain News* 15 January 1989: 7.

“What have we been doing here for the last 20 years?” Greiner stated that the district was never in full compliance with the 1974 Finger Plan, and had no proof that they desegregated the dual system, instead their efforts were “just a bunch of platitudes.”⁵⁶⁵ The court upheld Matsch’s definition of unitary systems, and denied the appeal in 1990.⁵⁶⁶

Dr. Evie Dennis retired in 1994, but not before she drafted the proposal that would eventually end twenty years of court-supervised desegregation in DPS. “My last full week,” she recalled, “I asked for release. The city had changed, the population had changed, and the judge lifted the order.”⁵⁶⁷ In Evie Dennis’ eyes, the era of busing had ended long ago. Over the course of Dennis’ four years as superintendent, DPS filed four appeals to Judge Matsch, requesting to be released. On August 22, 1994, Judge Richard Matsch held his last hearings on Denver’s school desegregation fate. DPS argued that “all remnants of discrimination” were erased from Denver’s racist school system. They argued that busing had “fueled” white flight to the suburbs and left DPS with a white population of less than 30%, causing them to redraw busing lines every year. They were joined by Hispanic and black leaders, like Evie Dennis, who claimed busing never worked. Manual High alum, Mayor Wellington Webb publicized his readiness to end busing in DPS. Three years earlier in his 1991 mayoral campaign, Webb promised to “seek to integrate schools by integrating neighborhoods,” in an effort to release DPS from

⁵⁶⁵ Sue Lindsay, “Schools Want End to Court Ties: DPS Asks to Sever Federal Control in Desegregation Case,” *Rocky Mountain News* 18 January 1989: 8.

⁵⁶⁶ *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1* 498 U.S. 1082 (1991) (*Certiorari denied*).

⁵⁶⁷ Dr. Evie Dennis, interviewed by author, 6 March 2010, transcript in possession of author.

court control. Webb recognized a “great opportunity to end busing.”⁵⁶⁸ In 1992, the newly elected Mayor joined DPS in requesting release from Judge Matsch. He offered that the city could provide “valuable resources—political, monetary and personal—to the case,” and asked that Matsch turn intervention over to his office.⁵⁶⁹ One study conducted in 1983 found that, “Contrary to popular belief, things are not getting better for most Chicanos in public education.”⁵⁷⁰ Nine years later, Denver Chicanos repeated the statement. Ken Salazar, Colorado’s Director of Natural Resources, in the governor’s cabinet told *The Rocky Mountain News* that while he believed that twenty years of desegregation never worked, but he was unsure the school district ready to operate autonomously.⁵⁷¹

The district also tabulated its costs, hoping to demonstrate that court interference was a burden to taxpayers. In 1992, it took DPS over a month to calculate the amount they had paid to lawyers and for transportation. In twenty years, the school board spent more than four million dollars. Attorney fees averaged two hundred dollars an hour. “Four million is a lot of money,” groaned Richard Koeppe, the former Superintendent who once hired Evie Dennis to teach. Koeppe pointed out that if the case continued, “that could easily be another eight million.”⁵⁷² Katherine Archuletta, a Hispanic activist and former mayoral aide agreed. “Four million is more than enough to be spent on litigation.

⁵⁶⁸ Janet Bingham and Bill McBean, “Busing Solution Offered,” *Denver Post* 18 April 1992: 1A.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Lupe Michael Martinez, “Success” and “Failure” of Mexican Americans in Public Education (Ph.D. Diss., University of Colorado): iii.

⁵⁷¹ Berny Morson, “Denver Schools Seek to End Busing: District to Ask Federal Judge to Halt Transit Plan, Arguing that Last Pockets of Segregation are Gone.” *Rocky Mountain News* 4 January 1992.

⁵⁷² Katie Kerwin, “Busing Fight Costs \$4 Million” *Rocky Mountain News* 6 February 1992: 8.

We should work together to settle this case as soon as possible.”⁵⁷³ Another Chicano activist echoed Archuleta’s words. State representative Tony Hernandez said the community was ready to end desegregation, if it meant spending less money on lawyers. “It’s [the] moms and dads and kids who want out from under the court order,” he said.⁵⁷⁴

In September 1995, Manual High School turned 101. For more than one fourth of its history, Manual was at the center of court-controlled school desegregation in Denver. That same month, Judge Richard Matsch declared the experiment was over. “Denver now,” wrote Matsch, “is very different from what it was when this lawsuit began.”⁵⁷⁵ Matsch cited white flight, the 1974 Poundstone Amendment, and the rise of enrollments in private schools as the reasons for declining numbers in Denver’s schools. One unexpected benefit of lower enrollment meant that students in DPS enjoyed a financial reality unlike they had in 1968. Denver’s school budget amounted to “nearly half-a-billion-dollars,” meaning DPS was spending an average of “\$7,300 per student a year, about the amount of tuition charged by the better private schools.”⁵⁷⁶ Reverend Aaron Gray, the black minister from Shorter AME explained, “The difference today is that you can step into an African-American school and you can see the same amount of resources that are provided to a majority Anglo school.”⁵⁷⁷ Despite the dollars spent, DPS was nonetheless dominated by minority students who hailed from poor socio-economic

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ James Brooke, “Court Says Denver Can End Forced Busing,” *The New York Times* 17 September 1995.; *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1*, (Memorandum and Order: Judgment, September 12, 1995).

⁵⁷⁶ Brooke, *The New York Times*, 17 September 1995.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

backgrounds. Furthermore, “one-fourth” of the student population lacked “proficiency in English,” the number of diplomas awarded slipped, and dropouts increased. Wellington Webb’s office stated that black neighborhoods were “shattered by busing,” and the end of court-control would hopefully improve community connections to the schools, therein improving student performance.⁵⁷⁸

The End of Busing: Community Investment in Historically Black and Chicano Schools

In 1995, DPS and the school board celebrated. Twenty years of operating under the thumb of state and federal courts finally came to an end. But, as the *Denver Post* stated in a summation of the *Keyes* case, it was time to face the “600-pound gorilla sitting in the middle of the living room of American society; while everyone tiptoed around it.”⁵⁷⁹ Art Branscombe, the *Denver Post* reporter who founded the Park Hill Action Committee and chronicled DPS progress from the beginning of the *Keyes* era commented that “Denver Public Schools has the potential of being the best district in the nation,” but worried that housing segregation, overlooked for “70 years” would ultimately bring DPS to its knees.⁵⁸⁰ Mayor Webb, ever the advocate for housing desegregation applauded the end of court control, “The educational fate of thousands,” he said, “will no longer be determined by an unresponsive and intransigent federal judge.” However, he added the caveat, “The bad news is that the educational fate of thousands of Denver youngsters will

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ “Beyond Busing: Summing up Citizen Commentary on the Future of Denver Schools: So, Where Should DPS Go From Here?” *Denver Post* 8 October 1995: D4.

⁵⁸⁰ Brooke, *The New York Times*, 17 September 1995.

now be determined by an unresponsive and intransigent school bureaucracy.”⁵⁸¹ Webb worried that the school board’s use of this new authority would mean “dumbing down the curriculum even more, creating fifth graders who cannot multiply 12 times 8, but who have high self-esteem and who repeat the official pieties of multicultural correctness.”⁵⁸² Most Denver parents, though, hoped that the end of court control meant a return to neighborhood schools which “encourages people to participate in their community.”⁵⁸³ Reverend Gray, an active leader in the black community throughout the 1990s asked the Shorter congregation, “Judge Matsch’s decision is a gift and a challenge to the whole of the Denver community. The question before us now is: What do we really value?”⁵⁸⁴

It was clear that both the black and Hispanic communities valued community-led education. Parents of black students at Manual were cautious when it came to the district’s plan for their community high school. In 1996, the school board announced new attendance lines for Manual that would change the school’s demographic makeup in shocking ways. From 44% white, 41% black, and 13% Hispanic, Manual would shift to 6% white, 38% black and 55% Hispanic, almost overnight.⁵⁸⁵ Under court-ordered integration, Manual’s population was drawn mostly from the predominately upper-class white neighborhoods of east-central and southeast Denver. Under a neighborhood schools plan, “Manual would become an overwhelmingly poor, predominately minority

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Alan Gottlieb, “Boundary Battle? East, Manual Targeted,” *Denver Post* 23 January 1996: A1.

school” if allowed to return to its neighborhood dynamics.⁵⁸⁶ Yet Manual’s “devotees,” parents, community members, students, and politicians, were committed to “visioning” a more certain future for the high school.⁵⁸⁷ Nancy Sutton, the new Manual principal welcomed “nearly 200 people” who “showed up on a rainy night” to organize the Collaborative Decision Making team (CDM) to propose a new comprehensive attendance plan for the Five Points school. Sutton was pleased with some of the ideas generated during the first meeting. The team brainstormed “multicultural studies, fine arts, leadership studies, business, finance, and specialized interests programs” to combat Manual’s bad publicity. One parent explained how such a beloved school could have a bad reputation. “The school has often received negative press,” explained father Neil Wiegert, “not because of problems in the building, but because it’s located in a high-crime area.”⁵⁸⁸

Students enrolled at Manual in 1996 did not always reach a consensus about the school’s reputation. Caitlin Pierce, a black student “desperately” wanted to remain at Manual High, though she lived in Park Hill. Meanwhile, her classmate Stephanie Darris from Five Points thought Manual was “full of gang members.” Darris hoped she could attend a private school if she was assigned to Manual in 1997.⁵⁸⁹ Sophomore Devon James, who was bused across town to Manual from the Hilltop neighborhood said she “hope[d] to graduate from Manual,” even if she was assigned to a different high

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ Alan Gottlieb, “What Next for Manual? End of Integration Effort will Change Student Mix” *Denver Post* 20 October 1996: A1.

school.⁵⁹⁰ As the 1996 school year ended, students voiced their frustrations in a widely contested special edition of *The Bolt*, Manual's student newspaper. *The Bolt* maintained a "tradition" by publishing uncensored "last wills" and "testaments" from graduating seniors. The community and school board were preoccupied and angered by the "unacceptably foul" descriptions of drug use, sexual deviance, and the use of racial slurs. However, some of the student confessions betray frustrations over the confusing future of Manual High.⁵⁹¹ One student wrote, "The faster I get outta this bullsh*t society, the happier I'll be."⁵⁹² Jill Lohmiller *The Bolt's* editor-in-chief believed she was carrying on a time-honored ritual. The graduating senior said, "In the past, no one's made a big deal about it." She added, "It's been the same way at Manual, and at many of the Denver schools for a good 20 years." Lohmiller claimed "we have files of newspapers" dating back to "1976 and they have things in them that are ten times worse."

Yet despite mixed student perspectives, community members voiced their support for Manual High. When the school board published plans to return to the neighborhood schools concept, Manual's black community "viewed this as a blessing." Principal Nancy Sutton and her CDM completed their proposal in November, 1996. Their plan capped Manual to "1,000 students, 250 below capacity." All 1,000 students had to request permission to attend Manual in writing, and explain their commitment to being "competitive workers... immersed in core curriculum." Each student enrolled would select to participate in "one of six programs of excellence," each directed toward student

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Jim Hughes, "Racy School Papers Stir Ire of DPS," *Denver Post Special* 13 June 1997: B1, B2., Karen Bowers, "What's Black and White and Rude All Over?" *Westword*, 12 June 1997: 1-2.

⁵⁹² Karen Bowers, "What's Black and White and Rude All Over?" *Westword*, 12 June 1997: 1-2.

success in a future college environment. Sutton explained, “We can be a high-performing school that is a school of color.”⁵⁹³ Sutton and the CDM attempted to cling to one of the benefits they enjoyed during court-mandated desegregation. In the 1970s and 1980s, Manual provided an unexpected “cocoon of accelerated classes” for the few white middle-class students who took advanced placement coursework. With busing scheduled to end in 1997, the students who once “nestled” for two years in Manual’s advanced placement halls worried they would become “unwelcome outsiders” overnight.⁵⁹⁴ “Manual sophomores bused into the school to help integrate it feel like leftovers these days,” explained Alan Gottlieb of *The Denver Post*. Sutton faced a unique dilemma. “Sutton must transform Manual from an integrated school” that had a record of graduating white, affluent students and sending them to top performing universities “to an inner-city, heavily minority school where more than half the incoming student read far below grade level.”⁵⁹⁵

When the 1997 school year began, Principal Sutton “vowed” that Manual High would still “knock your socks off,” and produce “extremely educated students.” With her guarantee, all “eyes were fixed” on Manual High. It was the dawn of a new era. Manual High School was 103 years old. From its beginnings it was an experimental school. It produced some of Denver’s most significant activists, and it was the battle ground upon which the educational equality movement was fought. On August 30th, 1997, a new class

⁵⁹³ Alan Gottlieb, “Manual Reaches for a New Level of Excellence: School Officials Form Plan for Post-Busing Era,” *Denver Post* 5 November 1996.

⁵⁹⁴ Alan Gottlieb, “DPS Switch has Kids in Bind Manual, Kennedy Anxiety Growing,” *Denver Post* 27 February 1997: D1, D2.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

of students, most of them black or Hispanic, walked through the doors of Manual High School under a sign that read, “Our Future’s So Bright, We Gotta Wear Shades.”⁵⁹⁶

La Escuela Tlatelolco became a part of a cyclical process in Denver, as Chicano students attending the school inherited and owned The Crusade for Justice’s commitment to youth activism. Just as boycotts and Youth Conferences in Denver from 1968-1969 laid the groundwork for the formation of the alternative school for Chicanos, *La Escuela* students ultimately earned an education in activism that continued into the twenty-first century. This very legacy is exemplified in the 2007 graduation project for *La Escuela* that culminated in a protest at the State Capitol. Not just a philosophy in practice, *La Escuela* was also a physical space intended for young people to immerse themselves in their own history and emerge as actors and activists on their own terms. Housed originally in the Crusade for Justice headquarters, the school was, from the start, a site of activism. It was decorated with political artwork, “raised-fist ‘Chicano Power’ posters and Che Guevarra portraits” lined the walls.⁵⁹⁷ Prior to opening as a school in 1970, the space allocated for *La Escuela* was used to house six hundred out-of-town students attending the Second Chicano Youth Liberation Conference. Nearly four thousand students came from the surrounding Southwest states, and estimates indicated that an additional two thousand commuted to the event from the Denver area. The space was opened up to include various activities and lessons in the building, which housed twenty-six classrooms, a kitchen, an auditorium, and gymnasium. With such a large influx of

⁵⁹⁶ Carols Illescas “All Eyes on Manual as DPS Year Begins,” *Denver Post* 31 August 1997: A1, A4.

⁵⁹⁷ Eric Hubler, “The Language of Conflict Immersion Fight Reopens Wounds on Role of Spanish,” *Denver Post*, 23 September 2002: B-01.

students and press, the Crusade recruited members of the Brown Berets to act as security guards. These young Chicano men were entrusted with the Crusade's space, and encouraged to frisk any media personnel who looked out of place. While the majority of participants were Chicanos, the registration list included names that indicated "Spanish and Indian ancestry, Spanish-speaking blacks, Anglos, and personas without obvious Chicano decent."⁵⁹⁸ Immediately following the Second Liberation Conference, The Crusade help the Summer Freedom School of 1970 at the old Calvary Church, and subsequently opened *La Escuela*.

Even after permanently relocating to a building on Federal Boulevard in in 1994, *La Escuela* continued as a site for Chicano activism, beyond its role as a school.⁵⁹⁹ In their first year of operating the school at the Calvary Church site, the community organized the first annual Spirit of Tlatelolco luncheon and fundraiser at the Crusade Headquarters. This luncheon, meant to honor Chicano leaders across the region and raise money operating costs, became the most significant and long-standing tradition in *La Escuela's* history. The Spirit Luncheon hosted prominent speakers like Rodolfo Acuña in 1997 and Roberto Rodriguez in 1998.⁶⁰⁰ In 2002, Nita Gonzales created another event, modeled after the Spirit Luncheon. *La Escuela* hosted the "Champions of Change" gala, dedicated Chicano community members who had participated in *La Escuela's* success. Denver honorees included playwright Rudolfo Añaya, state legislator Polly Baca,

⁵⁹⁸ Richard Vasquez, "Sandals in the Snow: Chicanos Gather for Liberation Meeting," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 1970.

⁵⁹⁹ Kris Hudson, "City auditor questions forgiving of school's debt," *Denver Post* 15 December 2004: B-04.

⁶⁰⁰ Rachel Carrasco Mendoza, "Escuela Tlatelolco embodies spirit of moral courage," *La Voz: Colorado's Hispanic Voice*, 5 November 1997: 1.; Angela Cortez, "Writer recalls Chicanos' history," *Denver Post* 19 September 1998: B-03.

musician Ramon “Chunky” Castillo, and Bob Jackson, a *Rocky Mountain News* columnist. Sal Castro, the Los Angeles educator and someone who had inspired Corky greatly in the 1960s, was also honored. Each of the dedicatees was asked to speak, and most took the opportunity to congratulate Corky and Nita on the success of *La Escuela* and “its culturally-based curricula.”⁶⁰¹

Awards ceremonies and fundraisers were just one example of how Crusade leaders continued to use *La Escuela* as a physical and ideological space for activism. The school became a common gathering place for meetings pertaining to Denver Chicanos. Beginning with the Youth Liberation Conferences and continuing into the 1970s, *La Escuela* and the Crusade Headquarters remained the site for important conversations about educational equality in Denver. In the early 1990s, when national Chicano drop-out rates were holding steady at fifty percent, Nita Gonzales held press conferences and meetings at *La Escuela* to discuss potential strategies. In the 1990s, she helped to form Denver’s Chicano Education Coalition. The organization used *La Escuela*’s approach to education as an example when they collaborated with DPS to suggest improvements for Chicanos in the public schools.⁶⁰² In 1998, representatives of local and national Hispanic groups held a conference at *La Escuela Tlatelolco* “to discuss their concerns about bilingual education in Denver Public Schools.” Pam Martinez, of Padres Unidos joined dozens of organizers who agreed that DPS was guilty of racism on the basis of language. This meeting welcomed representatives from the National Association of Bilingual Educators and the National Council of Latin American Research and Service Agency, all

⁶⁰¹ Jeff Martinez, “Champions of Change saluted at DPAC,” *La Voz* 8 May 2002: 3.

⁶⁰² Tomas Romero, “Reform Formula: First define the relationship we have with ourselves,” *Denver Post*, 14 September 1994.

who felt that the bilingual program in DPS, in place since 1984, needed to be revamped in the image of *La Escuela*.⁶⁰³

While the physical space of *La Escuela* embodied a spirit of activism, it was no more prevalent than the experiences of the students who attended and graduated from the school. *La Escuela* was a school that allowed for, if not demanded that, Chicano students establish themselves as activists on their own terms. In 1970, the very act of leaving DPS and attending *La Escuela* was considered revolutionary, and by 2007, this energy remained. By taking control of their own education, Chicano students defied what Corky called “the negative image of defeat” created by a “country that has wiped out all [our] history.”⁶⁰⁴ Students attending *La Escuela* remained active in their community throughout the twentieth century. They attended marches, rallies and meetings about issues ranging from education and language, to sex drugs and safety. In 1997, *La Escuela* students were invited to participate in a panel at a Youth Issues Conference. “Forget the problems,” stated student speaker Hugo Baltierra, “We already know what they are. We need some solutions.” Baltierra was one of many *Escuela* students attending the meeting, and they helped to set the mood for the five hundred teens joining them from the Denver Public Schools.⁶⁰⁵ *La Escuela* prepared Baltierra and other students to engage as active participants in their community, and speak up when the opportunity presented itself. Likewise, at the Youth Crime Prevention Conference in Denver in 1999, *Escuela* youths

⁶⁰³ Carlos Illescas, “Hispanics will discuss DPS bilingual education,” *Denver Post* 10 January 1998: C-03.

⁶⁰⁴ Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, “‘No Revolutions without Poets’: The Rhetoric of Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales,” *The Western Journal of Speech Communication* No. 46 (Winter 1982): 80. Second quote taken from Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, “Yo Soy Joaquin,” reprinted in Antonio Esquibel, Ed., *Message to Aztlan: Selected Writings* (Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press, University of Houston).

⁶⁰⁵ Chance Conner “Denver teens share concerns,” *Denver Post* 17 January 1997: B1-2.

made another lasting impression. Ten students were selected to attend the national conference as representatives as Denver Chicano students. Estrella Lujan, a senior at *La Escuela* shared her perceived responsibility in attending the conference, which hosted nearly five thousand students and professionals. She stated, “I came because I wanted to learn about crime prevention and I want to share the information with others at my school.” Lujan, along with students and administrators from *La Escuela* already had first-hand experience with crime prevention, as they worked with community members to prevent violence during the 16 de Septiembre celebrations the year before.⁶⁰⁶

In fact, students at *La Escuela*, educated in the tradition of protest, placed themselves at the center of youth activism into the twenty-first century. In March, 2003, hundreds of high schoolers in Denver and nearby Boulder faced consequences from detention to expulsion when they participated in a state-wide anti-war protest, but students at *La Escuela* were applauded for their involvement. Educator Rudy Gonzales led the kids himself to the rally. He said, “You guys got signs? Move ‘em out, get ‘em on the street!”⁶⁰⁷ In 2007, when *La Escuela* students led their Denver peers in another anti-war protest at the State Capitol, instructor Joy Stewart agreed, “They’re not missing school; this is it.”⁶⁰⁸

Ultimately, the most significant legacy of *La Escuela* that remains is this: Chicano students were more successful in the community controlled environment at *La Escuela*

⁶⁰⁶ Miraval, Francisco, “Youth Crime Prevention Conference Meets in Denver.” *La Voz: Colorado’s Hispanic Voice*, 10 March 1999: 1.

⁶⁰⁷ Elana Ashanti Jefferson, “Bombing Not the Way to Peace: Hundreds of Teens Skip Classes to Protest.” *Denver Post*, 6 March 2003: A-01.

⁶⁰⁸ Gabriela Resto-Montero, “Students’ Walkout Forms Army Against War.” *Denver Post* 23 March 2007: B-3.

Tlatelolco than they were in public schools. Since graduating their first senior class in 1971, *La Escuela* has maintained a 90% graduation rate, in stark contrast to its neighboring public schools.⁶⁰⁹ In her study on the factors that make a school successful for Hispanic students, Elena McKissack explained that most Chicanos indicate that connections are needed among parents, friends, the school, cultural history, self-identity, and community leaders. *La Escuela* started with all of these factors at the center, and the legacy continues.⁶¹⁰ At *La Escuela*, negative opinions about Chicanos are not tolerated. Racism, internal or external is explored and challenged. A connection to the community is required. Activism is celebrated, learned, and honored. The waiting list for enrollment is steadily at forty or more students each year. “*La Escuela*,” wrote McKissack, “has never sacrificed its ideals and continues to center its curriculum on Chicano themes.”⁶¹¹ It was a long time coming. Beginning with the blowouts in 1968, the Chicano Youth Liberation Conferences in 1969 and 1970, and the publication of *Yo Soy Joaquin* in 1967, *La Escuela Tlatelolco* is a product of interpretations of nationalism, language, and identity in physical form. Chicano-centric education defined one of Denver’s only effective attempts at community control, and pioneered a successful model for similar attempts in the Southwest.

⁶⁰⁹ Elizabeth Aguilera and Bianca Prieto, “For 35 Years, the school founded by the late Corky Gonzales has been a beacon for Chicanos: Activist’s Passion Lives On.” *Denver Post*, 23 June 2005.

⁶¹⁰ de McKissack, *Chicano Educational Achievement*, 74.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

An Established Legacy: Manual 100 Years in the Making

In 1991, Denver voters elected Wellington Webb, the hometown basketball star from Manual High School to serve as their mayor. Webb, who ran on a platform that was decidedly “anti-big money,” made national news when he conducted his campaign almost exclusively on foot. Webb, his wife Wilma, and his supporters traipsed the city of Denver, approaching private citizens in their homes to discuss politics and the future of Denver.⁶¹² The campaign and its historic impact were equally notorious in Denver. Webb announced his run when incumbent Federico Peña, the city’s first Hispanic mayor announced that he wouldn’t seek reelection after his third term ended in 1991. Peña halfheartedly endorsed Donald Bain, a wealthy Republican, until Bain pulled out of the race and threw his support behind Wellington Webb. Webb beat Norm Early, another black man from the Denver area. Mused one political commentary, “When was the last time any of you ever heard of a mayoral race in a major American city where a rich white man was running third behind two black candidates? In a predominantly white city where the black population is around 12 percent?”⁶¹³ Webb followed Peña, who ran in 1983 on a campaign meant to challenge the white elite establishment in local politics. Peña spent his three terms advocating for more jobs and better housing opportunities for women and minorities. Webb promised to continue the tradition, while also bringing an end to the great busing controversy that plagued Denver since the late 1960s.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² “Wellington Webb: Best for Denver Mayor,” *Denver Post* 12 May 1991: 3H.

⁶¹³ Keith A. Owens, “Sooner or Later, They’ll Discover Mayor’s Color: But Maybe They Don’t Care” *Sun Sentinel* 29 June 1991:

⁶¹⁴ “Elect Wellington Webb as Denver’s Next Mayor,” *Denver Post* 12 June 1991: 10B.; Alan Snel, “Webb Shares Vision for Denver Neighborhoods: Schools Top List,” *Denver Post* 2 July 1997: B1, B2.

Wellington Webb was born in Chicago in 1941.⁶¹⁵ His family moved to Denver when he was in high school, and Webb joined the Manual Thunderbolt basketball team. When he graduated in 1958, he won a collegiate athletics scholarship and attended Northeastern Junior College in Sterling Colorado. He then graduated with his Bachelor's Degree in 1964 from Colorado State College in Greeley, Colorado. Webb, a Denver devotee, hoped to return to the city and teach for DPS. When he was consistently turned down for teaching positions, Webb went looking for other opportunities. On the advice of his grandmother, Webb sought a job at city hall, where he developed a love for politics.⁶¹⁶ Webb married Wilma in 1969, and the two became active members of the Denver community and Colorado politics.⁶¹⁷ In part because of their political careers, and in part because they were proud alumni of Manual High, Wilma and Wellington became fixtures in Manual's community. Norman Rice, Seattle's first black mayor, and classmate of both Webbs explained in 1991, "People who went to Manual still have the pride today."⁶¹⁸

"The pride" continued to define Manual High School, even when the end of busing threatened to resegregate the district and return Manual to an impoverished state. In part because of their stellar athletic programs, Manual's success stories bombarded the local newspapers almost as often as pieces about gangs and violence. The community

⁶¹⁵ For a series of videos on Webb's life, organizing, and career see: <http://www.idvl.org/thehistorymakers/Bio144.html> Last accessed 5 May 2013.

⁶¹⁶ Wellington Webb, *Wellington Webb: The Man, The Mayor, and the Making of Denver* (Fulcrum Publishing: 2007).

⁶¹⁷ "Webb, Wilma (1943-). *The Black Past* <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/webb-wilma-j-1943> Last Accessed 5 May 2013.

⁶¹⁸ Lane, "3 Manual Alums Score the Big Time," 1A.

rallied around the Thunderbolts. In 1993, Reverend Wade C. Davis of Good Shepherd Baptist Church near Park Hill was announced the new basketball coach at Manual. Davis won the position in a heated job search that included twenty highly qualified candidates, and cemented another era of community investment in Manual's future initiated by church leadership. In 1994, Webb and the Denver community believed Manual "has produced a very distinguished legacy of scholars, sports teams, and community leaders." They hoped Manual was poised for another 100 years of prominence in the Mile High City.

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“Basement Bowlers: The National Negro Bowling Association and its Legacy of Black Leadership” For future publication in, David K. Wiggins and Ryan Swanson, eds., *Separate Games: Sport in the African American Community During the Age of Racial Segregation and Beyond*. University of Illinois Press, December 2014

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Presentations

“Will this be on the Test?: Teaching Research Strategies to Undergraduate Students”
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“Using Learning Style Assessment to Teach Research Strategies”
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“It's More than Black and White: Remembering School Desegregation in Denver, 1978-1991”
Southwestern Oral History Conference, April 2012

“School Desegregation in Denver: The Intersections Race Gender, and Class, 1962-1974”
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Gateway Community College, Phoenix, AZ: HIS 104: United States 1865 to Present
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Estrella Mountain Community College, Avondale, AZ: HIS 204: African American History, *October 2014-Present*

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, COLA 100E: First Year Seminar: Exploring Majors, *August-December 2012*

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, PUA 230: Introduction to Leadership, *January-May 2012*

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, HIST 495: The History of Women's Leadership, *January-December 2011*

Northern Arizona University, EPS 499: RA Pre-service Course, *2005-2009*

Northern Arizona University, WGS/ES 191: Women, Gender and Ethnicity, *2008-2009*

Northern Arizona University, WST 215: Making of the Real Man: Masculinities and Manhood, *2006*

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