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# **“VERY QUIET DAY, VAGUE TENSION”: DIGITIZING AND SHARING THE STORIES OF SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND BUSING IN BOSTON<sup>1</sup>**

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## **THE BOSTON SCHOOLS CASE**

*Morgan v. Hennigan*,<sup>2</sup> commonly known as the Boston Schools case, was a class action suit against the state of Massachusetts and the Boston School Committee that evolved from a 1965 report about racial segregation in Massachusetts’ public schools. In March of 1972, the plaintiffs filed a complaint with the First District Court of Massachusetts, charging the state and Boston officials with maintaining a segregated school system. The case went to trial before Federal Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr., and lasted fifteen days. On June 21, 1974, Judge Garrity filed a lengthy opinion ruling that the School Committee had, as the plaintiffs alleged, “intentionally brought about and maintained racial segregation”<sup>3</sup> and that “the defendants’ actions had a segregative impact.”<sup>4</sup> The opinion required the School Committee to use a temporary desegregation plan (court-ordered busing) for the 1974 to 1975 school year and ordered them to formulate a permanent plan. The School Committee failed to present a long-range plan for desegregation by the end of 1974 and the court began to oversee implementation of desegregation until 1985, when Judge Garrity issued his final order in the case. Management of the Boston Public Schools would return to Boston city officials and the Boston School Committee in 1988.

Of course, the story of school desegregation and busing in Boston is so much more complicated than this description of those activities that preceded and followed Judge Garrity’s 1974 order. And more, the stories of busing and school desegregation in Boston must be seen and studied within the context of a much larger, more complex history of Boston and Massachusetts.

## **CHANGING NARRATIVES, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND ARCHIVES**

In the traditional narratives of the Boston Schools case, there are villains, there are troublemakers, there are surprisingly few heroes, and, perhaps most importantly, there are a lot of people about whom we know very little. I’m thinking here of the personal stories

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<sup>1</sup> From a presentation at the 2016 Spring Meeting of New England Archivists in a session titled “Boston Public Schools Desegregation: From Digital Library to Classroom.” Co-presenters included Julia Collins Howington, Giordana Mecagni, Marilyn Morgan, Patricia Reeve, and Josue Sakata.

<sup>2</sup> *Morgan v. Hennigan*, 379 F. Supp. 410 (D.C. Mass., June 21, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> *Morgan v. Hennigan* 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Morgan v. Hennigan* 147.

behind the desegregation case. What was actually happening in the schools and in homes across the city, from Brighton, to Roxbury, to South Boston?

Most archival repositories in Boston hold the unique and under-told stories of school desegregation. Because the impacts of the Boston Schools case were so pervasive, it sometimes requires us to simply look a little bit deeper into our existing collections and to look beyond the usual cast of characters. In many ways, this collaboration<sup>5</sup> is about the relationship between archives and social justice. What roles do or should we play when it comes to activism and social justice movements? What's our responsibility and to whom are we responsible?

Randall Jimerson writes that archivists "have a moral professional responsibility to balance that support given to the status quo by giving equal voice to those groups that too often have been marginalized and silenced."<sup>6</sup> David Wallace goes even further and asks that archivists and archives "privilege social justice strivings"<sup>7</sup> and emphasizes the notion of "embracing ambiguity over clarity; accepting that social memory is always contestable and reconfigurable; ... [and] understanding that politics ... is always present in shaping social memory ..."<sup>8</sup> And although analyses of the relationship between archives and social justice often focus on issues more expansive than one city's efforts to desegregate the public schools, such as the role of archives in post-apartheid South Africa, I believe it's important that we think of our efforts to make accessible materials related to school desegregation within the context of this social justice and activist narrative, because in each case the role of archives is really the same: Archives exist to hold people, governments, and our memories accountable.

## **DESEGREGATION COLLECTIONS AT UMASS BOSTON**

There are a number of archives involved in this project and I can only relay the experiences of University Archives and Special Collections at UMass Boston, but I feel that our experiences are shared by many of our archival partners.

University Archives and Special Collections at UMass Boston was established in 1981 as a repository "to collect archival material in subject areas of interest to the university, as well

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<sup>5</sup> University Archives and Special Collections at UMass Boston is part of a multi-archive digitization initiative, coordinated by the Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections. The goal of this project is "to create a digital library of material that can be widely disseminated for both curricular and scholarly use" related to the history of school desegregation and busing in Boston. This project was made possible by a gift from the Boston Library Consortium (BLC) and BLC members involved include University Archives and Special Collections at UMass Boston, the Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections, The State Library of Massachusetts' Special Collections, and Boston College's John J. Burns Library of Rare Books and Special Collections. Additional partners include The Moakley Archive and Institute at Suffolk University and the Boston City Archives. For more information, visit <http://www.lib.neu.edu/snippets/?p=8736>.

<sup>6</sup> Jimerson 254.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace 185.

<sup>8</sup> Wallace 184.

as the records of the university itself,”<sup>9</sup> and we hold more than 200 linear feet of material related to Boston school desegregation.

Our collections include the personal papers of a number of individuals, including Linda Lawrence,<sup>10</sup> a senior at Hyde Park High School in Boston during the first year of court-ordered busing, and Ione Malloy,<sup>11</sup> the author of *Southie Won't Go*, a memoir about her time as a teacher at South Boston High during the first few years of desegregation. We also hold the records of organizations connected to the Boston Schools case, including the Center for Law and Education,<sup>12</sup> which served as co-counsel in the case.

After reviewing the range of materials in our care and rights issues involved, we decided to focus on two collections: the records of *Mosaic*, a program at South Boston High School from 1980 to 1989, and the chambers papers of Judge Arthur Garrity, Jr., the federal district court judge who oversaw the Boston Schools case.

### **MOSAIC, A PUBLICATION OUT OF SOUTH BOSTON HIGH SCHOOL**

*Mosaic*<sup>13</sup> was launched at South Boston High School in response to the effects of school desegregation. Led by professional writers and photographers, students produced stories and photographs about themselves and their communities. Eleven issues of *Mosaic* were produced, which include contributions from approximately 269 students at South Boston High and that address a range of topics, including immigration, homelessness, teen pregnancy, racism, work, and family.

Digitizing and describing these issues of *Mosaic* was fairly straightforward. We didn't redact any information, as *Mosaic* was published, sold, distributed, and used in classrooms across the country.

### **THE CHAMBERS PAPERS OF JUDGE W. ARTHUR GARRITY**

Working with the chambers papers of Judge Garrity<sup>14</sup> proved to be a bit more complicated. First, though, a little about chambers papers.

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<sup>9</sup> OPEN ARCHIVES NEWS, see <http://blogs.umb.edu/archives/about/>.

<sup>10</sup> See finding aid for the Linda Lawrence papers:  
<http://openarchives.umb.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15774coll8/id/360>.

<sup>11</sup> See the finding aid for the Ione Malloy papers:  
<http://openarchives.umb.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15774coll8/id/359>.

<sup>12</sup> See the finding aid for the Center for Law and Education: Morgan v. Hennigan case records:  
<http://openarchives.umb.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15774coll8/id/189>.

<sup>13</sup> See the finding aid for the *Mosaic* records  
(<http://openarchives.umb.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15774coll8/id/249>) and the digitized issues of *Mosaic*  
(<http://openarchives.umb.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15774coll34>).

<sup>14</sup> See the finding aid for the Judge W. Arthur Garrity chambers papers  
(<http://openarchives.umb.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15774coll8/id/213>) and the digitized materials from  
the collection (<http://openarchives.umb.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15774coll33>).

Chambers papers are the personal property of the Judge, who retains the right to make the final decision about their disposition. The papers in this collection constitute a day-to-day file of the Boston Schools case and offer a perspective and level of detail not available in the court record of the case.

What's particularly interesting about Garrity's papers is the extent to which they tell the varied stories of those whose voices, in many ways, were marginalized and silenced throughout the desegregation process. By looking beyond one of the well-known characters in the Boston Schools case – the creator and a subject of this collection, Judge Garrity – we are able to begin to tell the more complex, personal histories of school desegregation and busing in Boston.

Two of the three series from the Garrity papers that we worked with comprise the Judge's correspondence with public officials and with the general public, including young children, teenagers, and parents. Only 27 letters from the general public were digitized, and for the most part to support a UMass Boston faculty member's graduate archives course. There are thousands of letters from the general public included in the Garrity papers, however, and though Judge Garrity felt it was important to save these, he also placed very clear restrictions on this particular series as a condition of his donation. We've thought a lot in the Archives at UMass Boston about these restrictions and have determined that only a small selection of letters should be digitized at this time, and that those digital files must be heavily redacted.

As for Judge Garrity's correspondence with public officials, which in many cases include Judge Garrity's responses, each set of correspondence was reviewed to determine the need for redaction, if any. In many cases, officials included copies of correspondence with their constituents that contain personal information about parents and families. While that information was redacted, we didn't redact any of the information related to the officials themselves. The 95 sets of correspondence in this series offers an interesting window into the perspectives and politicking of people like Boston mayors Ray Flynn and Kevin White, as well as figures like Louise Day Hicks, the Boston City Councilor, School Committee member, and anti-busing activist. No characters in the story of school desegregation in Boston are truly one-dimensional.

The final series from the Garrity papers with which we worked comprises a full year of observer reports prepared by the Citywide Coordinating Council. In March of 1975, Judge Garrity established this Council to monitor implementation of the desegregation plan. Council observers were placed in schools throughout the city to report on activities within the schools. The reports required observers to complete a form noting different information about each school day, but what's perhaps most intriguing about the reports are the descriptive assessments of the individual schools that observers provide. Observers were given the option, and many took advantage of this opportunity, to describe in their own words what was really happening in the schools.

We digitized 445 observer reports and each was reviewed to determine the need for redaction, as reports occasionally include the full names of students.

## **ONGOING: DIGITIZATION, COLLABORATION, ENGAGEMENT, EDUCATION**

I now want to identify what I see as some important next steps and future plans, in terms of the Garrity papers and in terms of this collaboration more broadly.

First, we plan to continue to work with the Citywide Coordinating Council observer reports. Because the original observer reports are handwritten, we only provide brief descriptive records for each report available in the digital collection. We won't know the full research value of these reports, however, until they are fully transcribed and the fielded data in the forms is collected. Also, only one year of original observer reports were included as part of the Garrity papers, and of that year, only reports from high schools. We're working with other archival institutions now to identify and, we hope, digitize and make available additional observer reports.

Second, finding new ways to incorporate the use of these digitized materials into the day-to-day departmental activities of University Archives and Special Collections at UMass Boston is important and necessary. For example, I'm currently exploring how to use these digitized materials as part of our archival and research instruction program to help students learn about the full research experience.

Finally, I want us all to explore how we can encourage students and researchers to engage with, interpret, and build upon our existing knowledge of records related to Boston school desegregation, while maintaining the necessary contextual information for those materials. In the digital realm, I regularly see copies of copies of copies of digital files – sometimes with different associated metadata – and it becomes more and more difficult to trace back to where the original items reside, to maintain provenance, and to ensure reliability.

### **“VERY QUIET DAY, VAGUE TENSION.”**

I want to end with some selections from two of the observer reports. The first, from May 28, 1976, is by Kathleen Field and is the last report she submitted that school year at Charlestown High School.

Bear in mind, this report is from the end of the second year of court-ordered busing in Boston.

It reads, in part:

Very quiet day, vague tension.

A black aide said he escorted 3 black basketball players (2 F[emale], 1 M[ale]) to the sports banquet ... He said absolutely no mention was made [at the event] of minority participation in any sport ... These students felt totally unwelcome ... 2 white girls approached the 2 black girls in the lavatory + thanked them for coming. They were afraid to speak to them in the larger group.

[...]

... whites apparently tried to discourage all minority participation in graduation.

No minority students attended prom.

[...]

... insults + threats to minority students + aides are on the rise again, often outside school when the buses are loading + unloading.<sup>15</sup>

A second report by Marc Miller, from a few weeks prior at Hyde Park High School, is a bit more hopeful. Miller's report reads, in part:

I just saw something here, I never conceived happening in South Boston. In the lunchroom study hall, blacks + whites, male + female, sitting at the same table, talking normally. When the bell rang, they left together, still talking just like friends. An isolated example, but very encouraging.<sup>16</sup>

By making these first-hand accounts of what was happening in the schools more widely available, by sharing letters from public figures and from the general public to Judge Garrity, and by sharing the stories of students from South Boston High, University Archives and Special Collections at UMass Boston and our archival partners are contributing to a better understanding of the complex history of school desegregation and busing in Boston. But more than that, I believe we're helping people better understand the complex history of the City of Boston more broadly.

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<sup>15</sup> Field 7.

<sup>16</sup> Miller 7.

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