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Boston School Desegregation:

The Fallowness of Common Ground

Robert A. Dentler

81

This essay scrutinizes the book by J. Anthony Lukas, Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families, to assess whether it presents a valid and reliable account of the issues, people, and events it chronicles. The substantive core of the book is shown to be the politics of Boston public school desegregation. The parts played by the three families in this event are dramatically portrayed but cannot be corroborated and are not interpreted. The parts played by five major policy leaders, when tested against other evidence, are found to be distorted, questionable legends woven in order to argue that four of the five leaders made flawed decisions that plunged Boston into violence. Lukas's docudramatic method of reporting works to cloak the ignorance, fear, and hostility of the minority of citizens in the white enclaves of Boston who initiated racial violence in the robe of civic innocence.

Common Ground, by J. Anthony Lukas, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and former reporter for the *New York Times*, was published by Alfred A. Knopf and released in September 1985 to become a best seller in the nonfiction book trade in less than a month. Excerpts from its 659 pages were printed in advance in the *Atlantic*, the *Boston Observer*, and the *Washington Monthly*. Within a week of its release, other sections were published on the Op-Ed pages of the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times*. A dozen reviews appeared almost simultaneously with its release to bookstores, and all of them contained praise. In his advance appraisal, David Halberstam wrote, "This is a bittersweet book on the end of an American dream." A month after publication, the Kennedy Foundation sponsored an eleven-member panel of discussants, most of whom spoke favorably about *Common Ground* following a speech by Lukas before a large audience assembled in the John F. Kennedy Library.

Lukas began work on what David McClintick termed his masterpiece nearly ten years ago. He counts it as seven years of work in his acknowledgments, but perhaps Lukas took three years off altogether in the course of the decade that has passed since he began the book. Besides the support he received through an advance from Knopf, Lukas was aided by a Guggenheim fellowship, a Harvard fellowship, and lectureships and adjunct professorships at Harvard and at Boston University. *Common Ground* is

intended as a major work in journalistic reporting. In his advance praise, Joe McGinniss called it "a monumental achievement; a profoundly significant book." Such a book merits close scrutiny—the aim of this essay.

My interest in *Common Ground* is professional as well as scholarly. Before coming to Boston in 1972 as dean of education at Boston University, I had worked on twelve northern school desegregation cases, and before joining Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr., in January 1975 as one of two experts he appointed to help plan and oversee his court orders, I had consulted with Mayor Kevin White, Governor Francis Sargent, and State Education Commissioner Gregory Anrig, independently of the court. Anthony Lukas sought me out as a source in 1976, and I spent many hours answering his questions. The policy issue for me, therefore, is whether *Common Ground* provides an accurate account of the turbulent decade it aspires to chronicle.

The Chairwoman

It is difficult to understand initially what *Common Ground* is about. Lukas provides no introduction or preface and no index by which to scan its concrete topics, and the flow of his prose is unimpeded by citations from sources of evidence. His two-paragraph Author's Note speaks of capturing "the realities of urban America, when seen through the lives of actual city dwellers." This and the subtitle, *A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families*, bring to mind John Gunther's books about the great cities of the world, and the Lanny Budd novels of Upton Sinclair as well as his two-volume novel, *Boston*. To the social scientist, they bring back memories of such books as *The London Poor*, *The Shame of the Cities*, *Street Corner Society*, *The Black Metropolis*, and even Oscar Lewis's *Five Families*.

The three families of the Divers, Twymons, and McGoffs are introduced so straightforwardly that by the time the reader has moved a fifth of the way into *Common Ground*, the point of the book appears to be the narrated story of three households whose youngest members inhabited Boston during the years 1968 to 1978. Chapter 9, "The Chairwoman," interrupts that impression and presents instead a profile of the life and times of Louise Day Hicks. We meet Mrs. Hicks in the midst of a June 1966 graduation ceremony at a junior high school in Roxbury where, as chairwoman of the Boston School Committee, she was invited to give the commencement address. As a result of a confrontation led by the Reverend Virgil Wood, Boston representative of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Mrs. Hicks was forced to flee the platform and the school. A short way into this chapter, the reader perceives that Lukas's primary focus on race relations has been foreshadowed throughout his opening chapters on the three families. The shadows are so embedded in the chronicle of the times of the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights revolution, however, that when first encountered they are but a small part of what each family is experiencing. It is in the chapter on Louise Day Hicks that the background of civil rights becomes the foreground of the book.

What was noteworthy about Mrs. Hicks's law school days at Boston University, Lukas assures us, was her participation in a study group composed of "a Jewish girl" and "a black" girl. This trio of close friends later came to include "an Italian girl," "a Greek girl," and two black men; the five other black students from the class of 1955 were occasional participants. When Mrs. Hicks decided in 1961 to run for a seat on the Boston School Committee, Lukas tells us, her brothers opposed her decision; he

also asserts that “for a politically ambitious woman, a seat on the School Committee was the obvious office to seek.” He does not explore the possibility that Mrs. Hicks, who held an education degree and a teaching certificate and who had served as a classroom teacher before entering law school, may have been motivated by a strong professional interest in public education.

There is little more to her biography, for half of the chapter on the chairwoman is devoted to her immersion in the issue of racial segregation in the public schools of Boston, an issue raised by the local chapter of the NAACP in 1963, her second year in office and her first year as chairwoman. For Lukas, the question is what motivated Mrs. Hicks to become the spokesperson for resistance to the demands of black parents for equal educational opportunity for their children. “Indeed, in retrospect, Louise seems to have acted less like a bigot than a politician on the make,” he writes, giving the reader only these two choices. She “discovered that, while her intransigence brought denunciations from blacks and liberals, it gained still greater support in white working-class neighborhoods.” How one answers the question of motive matters, because the answer fixes the threads of interpretation of racial policy and conflict woven throughout *Common Ground*. It is conceivable, for instance, that Louise Day Hicks was unprepared for the emergence of the segregation issue in Boston, that she knew too little at first to understand the racial injustices of school-policy operations, and that she believed her city was different from the cities of the Deep South. It is equally imaginable that she initially believed she was voicing the views of the white electorate and that their racial fears and ignorance gradually offered her margins of support she never dreamed of mobilizing when she first ran for office.

Social and political demography as well as intergroup history get short shrift from Lukas. Notes on the social facts about Boston are inserted into every chapter, but these are seldom expanded upon or integrated into interpretation; indeed, they are subordinated to the dramaturgy of personal motives. Boston’s black residents made up less than 20 percent of the city in 1960, for example. Politicians were elected at large, and black voters did not make up an organized political subcommunity of the city. Four of the five members of the Boston School Committee were elected in 1961 and 1963 by white-dominated ward organizations whose members were patronized in turn by committee members. Three members struggled to establish themselves to the right of Louise Day Hicks on the race issue, and the issue cost Arthur Gartland, the only moderate member, his seat. The choice before Louise Day Hicks from 1963 to 1966, then, was not between racial bigotry, as an act of personal conviction, and the path of political expediency: the choice for four committee members, including Hicks, was among degrees of denial concerning the facts of segregation.

At the time, there were few school committees or boards of education in the urban Northeast that were behaving differently. There were a few school superintendents, some groups of parents, and beleaguered moderates on boards who said that the *Brown* decision of 1954¹ would come to apply to all parts of the nation. Under pressure from the New York Board of Regents, for example, the city of White Plains desegregated its one identifiably black public school in 1964 by converting it into a community center. The winds of integration gusted across the cities and largest suburbs of Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut in those years. A handful of northern cities and suburbs undertook steps toward partial desegregation from 1963

to 1968, but white resistance was so deep in each year that some civil rights leaders turned away from this goal and embraced community control instead. As the 1960s drew to a close, desegregationists could point with pride to White Plains, Berkeley, Evanston, and Englewood, New Jersey, but no big-city systems had as yet reformed their racially dual schools.

Nothing distinguished Boston less in 1964 on this issue than the intransigence of Louise Day Hicks. There were three or more board members like her on every city school board from Santa Barbara to Providence in that year. Neither Mrs. Hicks nor Boston was even the northernmost case: that distinction went to Minneapolis, where the dispute went to federal court at the close of the 1960s. The raising of the segregation issue in 1963 and the manner of white reactions to it over the five years that followed differed from the same phenomena in dozens of other cities only in regard to timing. The debate in Boston was comparatively belated, and it was insular in scope, failing to draw heavily on the experience of other urban school systems.

In his chapter on Louise Day Hicks, Lukas also develops his assumptions about the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act. He characterizes it as the product of "moral fervor" engendered by the "outrages of Selma . . . [and] Martin Luther King's impassioned address on the Boston Common." The coalition of suburban and rural legislators who passed it, Lukas claims, were happy to point a finger at the cities. "Few paused to wonder whether the moral imperatives of the Southern civil rights struggle could be applied mechanically to a Northern city where segregation had developed differently," Lukas writes, but he does not document, let alone identify, the alleged difference.

Lukas also asserts that the authors of the Racial Imbalance Act did not pause to ask "whether quality education might not be possible in a predominantly black school." In fact, that question was debated in the course of framing the law. The question had also been the topic of continual research, conferencing, and experimentation among educators and social scientists since the *Brown* decision, and it had been treated often in the newspapers of the day. What is more, no legislation passed in Massachusetts without a coalition among suburban and rural legislators. Racial segregation was an urban issue raised by black parents who were concentrated in the cities of the state. Their leaders took it to the legislature. And there was nothing mechanical about the new law. It simply adopted the rule of thumb that identified public schools enrolling more than 50 percent nonwhite students as racially imbalanced, a rule followed in other parts of the country at that time. This definition had drawbacks, but mechanicalism and the question of quality education in predominantly black schools were not among them.

There is but one notable difference between southern and northern school segregation, and that is in the degree of explicitness. State laws prohibiting racially mixed schools in the South seemed important in 1954, but the importance diminished with every passing year as civil rights claimants tested the forms of racism common to social institutions in every region of the United States. One of those forms had been dealt with in the *Brown* decision: the argument that racially isolated, racially identifiable black schools could be as effective educationally as racially inclusive schools. This question was explored and refuted in the South long before it made its way north. And it was in the South that segregationists had perfected the critique of desegregation remedies as mechanical and therefore harmful.

Thus, the chapter entitled “The Chairwoman” formulates the central subject of *Common Ground*, and its interpretations guide Lukas into and through the terrain of that subject, which is court-ordered school desegregation in Boston. Contrary to his interpretations, Boston was never on the leading edge of that subject nationally. The choice of Louise Day Hicks between advocating reforms consistent with the *Brown* decision and resisting those reforms was not, as Lukas suggests, a fateful one for Boston or the nation. Nor did her intransigence set into motion an evolving pattern of rising white resistance to racial injustice in Boston. There were not ten elected officials in any post from mayor to city councilman who were less resistant at the time, and Boston politicians were carried into and out of office in those years on waves of white fear and ignorance. Lukas’s interpretation that the state legislature, the State Board of Education, and later the state and federal courts failed to develop rational policies fitted to northern conditions discloses the flawed quality of his social history.

Lukas truncates the political history of school desegregation, even though it is his central subject. He does not trace its evolving features as they moved northward from Baltimore to New York City in the decade after 1954. He says of this evolution, “When the legislature passed the Racial Imbalance Act on August 16, 1965, Massachusetts became the first state in the Union—and to date the only one—to outlaw *de facto* segregation in its public schools.” That act was unique only technically, however, and it was based on policy commitments made earlier in other states and localities. Progress in reform was slow, to be sure, but it came earlier and faster in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and California than it did in Massachusetts. The call for racial justice in Boston’s public schools was neither novel nor ahead of its time, and what distinguished white public reactions in Boston was the uniformity, not the substance or the intransigence, of early maneuvers of resistance and avoidance by white politicians.

The Judge

Federal District Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr., is the second of five public leaders profiled in *Common Ground*. Chapter 14, “The Judge,” follows the pattern set in the chapter on Louise Day Hicks. It narrates his family history, which is used to explain his motives and predispositions through a device Lukas calls the collective memory drawn from ancestral legends, a sort of homemade variation on the theme of the collective unconscious. It also gives a sketch of his career and his appointment to the bench. While it provides a conjectural account of how and why Judge Garrity took the actions he did in regard to Boston school segregation, the chapter is also a vehicle for discourses on federal and state law, civil procedure, and the content of the court’s remedial orders. And just as Louise Day Hicks is given a choice by Lukas between embracing or rejecting racial injustice, so Judge Garrity is pictured as choosing between moderate compromise and rigid adherence to the prescriptions of the U.S. Supreme Court.

There is another parallel: Mrs. Hicks’s moving toward public leadership is depicted as a kind of surprising emergence in her life history, whereas Judge Garrity’s moving toward a federal judgeship is described as a kind of fluke. We do not learn that W. Arthur Garrity, Sr., served as a U.S. commissioner, for example. Garrity’s clerkship under Federal Judge Francis Ford is mentioned not as an indicative career

commitment but as a time when Judge Ford "became almost a second father to the young lawyer." Garrity's appointment as U.S. attorney for Massachusetts is not connected to his achievements during earlier service as an assistant U.S. attorney but is viewed exclusively as a by-product of his campaign services for John F. Kennedy.

Nor are those campaign services presented as if they grew up out of political conviction and professional interest. Lukas tells us that they came about as a kind of side play from social involvement in a clique called the Mystery Nighters: "The Mystery Nighters were a classic John Kennedy crowd. . . . So it was hardly surprising that Arthur Garrity should join the Kennedy camp, working hard for Jack in the 1952 senatorial campaign." Lukas identifies the founder of the Mystery Nighters as Eve Carey, daughter of the chairman of American Airlines. He does not get the kinship right. It is Mrs. Carey's brother, Albert Casey, who became chairman of American Airlines. More to the point, Barbara and Arthur Garrity never attended the parties given by the Mystery Nighters; the clique did not ever specialize in St. Patrick's Day revels, as Lukas claims; and it was not the source or context for Arthur Garrity's decision to join the political campaigns for John F. Kennedy.

Each of the five public figures Lukas profiles is presented as a kind of demigod. True to the Greek tradition, each is portrayed as having been elevated from the ordinary by invisible acts of fortune, not by hard work and merit. Arthur Garrity's work in the Kennedy campaign is thus questioned for its sincerity: "To this day, Garrity insists that he had no ulterior motives in these labors." In reviewing the career of an attorney who works on public election campaigns, how shall one interpret the idea of "ulterior motives"?

Arthur Garrity's legal workmanship did not produce his appointment as U.S. attorney either, says Lukas; rather, it stemmed from the ulterior motives of others. He claims that the procedure adhered to for ordinary candidates for the post was bypassed: "Garrity's appointment was rushed through the Senate Judiciary Committee, past an unsuspecting Senate, and sped to the White House for the President's signature. The following morning, the commission was put on a plane for Boston."² Thus do senior demigods—in this tale, John and Robert together—conspire to lift mortals into their midst.

Nor, for Lukas, is Arthur Garrity's legal workmanship sufficient to account for his later elevation to the federal judgeship. Garrity was "amply qualified," but he became a judge because of a foiled effort by Edward Kennedy to appoint someone else. Arthur Garrity filled in when a seamy scheme to pay off a political hack went awry.

In summing up Judge Garrity's performance on the bench, Lukas does not inform us about the quality of his justice or mercy—only that he soon revealed himself to be a puritan, obsessed by "a pathological fear of losing control." Earlier, Lukas writes that what was special about Arthur Garrity's education at Holy Cross College was his immersion in Thomistic philosophy. In an effort to account for a mind shaped by Thomistic Catholicism yet characterized by the obsessions of an English Puritan, Lukas suggests only that these incredible contradictions roiled about inside Judge Garrity's psyche.

Again, consistent with Greek drama, Lukas notes that the god of chance awarded the case of *Morgan v. Hennigan*³ to Judge Garrity. That all cases are randomly awarded is acknowledged, but Lukas tries to give this particular event the overlay of a strange fate. By attributing a quotation to the chief judge of the district court, Lukas remarks indirectly on the irony of the schools case being placed in the hands of

an Irish Catholic. We are not given the odds behind this event—we do not learn how many of the judicial peers were Irish Catholics.

The chapter on Judge Garrity includes a capsule history of Supreme Court desegregation decisions from 1954 to 1974, and on this stands the policy premise of *Common Ground*. “By then, the line between *de facto* and *de jure* segregation had become so fine as to be almost indistinguishable to the layman’s eye. . . . But others . . . thought it a distinction worth preserving: surely, a free society ought to defend the right of its citizens to make genuinely private choices, no matter how reprehensible. If government could abolish purely voluntary school segregation . . . then what was to prevent it from requiring a private citizen to accept Irish, black, or Portuguese guests at his dinner table?” Thus, the constitutional rights of private citizens are pitted against the wrongs of “voluntary” racial discrimination. The wall erected to prevent this had been eroded during twenty years of Supreme Court decisions, and Judge Garrity was chosen by fate to go into the resulting breach.

The reader gets but a single sentence of quotation from the liability opinion given by Judge Garrity in *Morgan v. Hennigan*. It is the sentence which concludes that the Boston School Committee “knowingly carried out a systematic program of segregation affecting all of the city’s students, teachers and school facilities and . . . intentionally brought about and maintained a dual school system.” Although this is the heart of the matter in *Common Ground*, the reader receives none of the facts on which this conclusion was based. Nor do we learn much about the correctness of the conclusion, only that Thomas Atkins of the NAACP thought highly of it and that the court of appeals upheld it.

The tragedy enacted by Judge Garrity, Lukas assures us, lay not in the finding of liability but in the remedies adopted to right those wrongs. Unidentified critics are alleged to have said the judge wasted his energies on the liability opinion when he should have spent them on the search for a remedy. Lukas fails to note that in school desegregation disputes, it is the defendant who must fashion the first remedial proposal and that it was in Boston that the School Committee refused to do just that.

The Phase I remedial plan for 1974–75 is depicted as a disastrous, vindictive proposal intended to harm the parents and students of South Boston—or, alternatively, as a drafting error in mechanical drawing by Charles Glenn, director of the state Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity. Two legends are narrated. One is that Glenn’s plan mistakenly linked South Boston High School with Roxbury High School. Lukas quotes Harvard Law Professor Louis Jaffe, who warned early in 1973 that South Boston’s “people are intensely hostile to blacks. . . . I conclude, therefore, that this part of the plan should be restudied.” A better plan would, for this reason, have sent South Boston’s students somewhere else, Lukas claims, but the State Board of Education rejected Jaffe’s warning.

Neither this nor any other feature of the Phase I remedial plan “caused” the violent reactions that attended its implementation. Black students and faculty at Roxbury High School, the facility nearest South Boston and one that South Boston girls had attended across the many years when it functioned as Girls’ Trade High School, accepted the incoming white students peacefully. South Boston High School became the staging area for violent resistance to the Phase I plan, a resistance which then spread to a few other schools. The entry of black students into South Boston High under any plan would have triggered a violent explosion of white racism in 1974, a point that Lukas does not make.

The second legend narrated by Lukas is that Judge Garrity ordered the Phase I plan into place because he had not studied it and because he had nothing else to adopt: "With barely three months left before the state plan was scheduled to go into effect, the judge felt he had no recourse but to adopt that plan as his first-stage remedy . . . while he began devising a permanent remedy." In fact, Judge Garrity had several alternatives. He could have delayed a remedy until January or September 1975. He could have revised parts of the Glenn plan. He could have required the School Committee to file an immediate proposal of their own, as was done within eighteen days in the case of every school district in Mississippi. The options closed to him were to do nothing; to adopt a gradual reform such as integrating one grade level a year; to revert to an open enrollment plan (already adopted by Boston and used to further segregation); and to adopt a metropolitan consolidation plan. He adopted the Glenn plan as temporary because it had been endorsed by the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts; because it affected only four in every ten schools and was thus milder than most federal court remedies; and above all because by so doing, he could give the Boston School Committee a chance to demonstrate an affirmative commitment to a permanent proposal of their own devising. The Glenn plan was implemented with negligible tension or conflict in seventy-five of the eighty schools it affected, and many of the problems associated with it stemmed from Boston School Department failures in guiding its implementation.

The tragedies narrated in *Common Ground* arose, according to Lukas, from the juxtaposition of hidden flaws in individual character and events that conspired against fulfillment of what would be best for ordinary people. The book's chronicle relies therefore on the selection of events which seem best suited to express the adverse twists of fate. For example, Lukas writes that Judge Garrity began to devise his own permanent remedy long before one was due from the School Committee. This is simply not true. He also reports that Garrity's first two choices for the role of court expert were Thomas Pettigrew and Paul Ylvisaker, but "both turned him down." In fact, Judge Garrity never conferred with Pettigrew, and in his meeting with Ylvisaker, he never broached the subject.

Edward McCormack is featured by Lukas as one of the four masters appointed by Judge Garrity to make findings of fact and to recommend courses of remedial action. McCormack, according to *Common Ground*, developed a compromise plan early in 1975 that would have brought peace as well as racial justice to Boston. The other three masters are mentioned only once, although two of them, Charles Willie and Francis Keppel, had deep expertise in desegregation, while McCormack had never dealt educationally or legally with the issue. "Although the judge had adopted . . . a 'team' approach, Eddie McCormack was clearly first among equals, the team's unofficial captain." In fact, the presiding master was Jacob J. Spiegel; and while McCormack was the most dominating as well as the most creative personality on the team, he was not the captain. He did not create the elements of the masters' proposal; did not appraise its educational consequences; did not do the legal or demographic research on which it was based; and did not investigate the prospects for federal aid. These and other vital tasks were carried out by other team members. McCormack, meanwhile, specialized in testing a wide range of interest groups and organizations in order to assess and cultivate their support for the proposal, and he set the pace of the planning effort.

According to Lukas, McCormack created the Masters' Plan in the course of

private negotiations with leaders from all parts of Boston. The result was a “skillful balancing of the constitutional requirement for racial integration with the craving of many parents for neighborhood autonomy. Moreover, Eddie McCormack had woven a powerful mystique around the plan. It seemed to promise both justice and order, an attractive combination to the afflicted city. That expectation mobilized a broad middle ground behind the plan.” It is in this statement that readers find one of the keys to the title of the book. McCormack, the brilliant master of the art of the possible, says Lukas, drew a map of the middle ground where peace would have prevailed over racial warfare, had Judge Garrity not succumbed to pressure and spoiled the map by revising it. It was this fateful error, Lukas claims, which unleashed the second wave of furies in Boston in 1975 and 1976.

But the errors in Lukas’s reconstruction of these events are so great as to obscure what actually occurred after the masters retired from the case on April 2, 1975, six weeks after they had entered it. They are such serious errors as to render *Common Ground* suspect as a chronicle of the chief subject it aspires to analyze.

Just a few of the mistakes can be noted here. One of the gravest is the statement that Judge Garrity revised the Masters’ Plan by increasing the number of students to be bused from 14,900 to 25,000. The actual estimate by the masters was 18,900, but they tucked some 4,000 of these into an appendix as magnet school riders and, hence, “voluntary” transportees. Judge Garrity put the two types of riders together and added those to be transported for reasons of traffic safety. He also gave parents an opportunity to advise on busing plans, with the result that many lobbied successfully to add bus transportation for their children. The number bused in September 1975 thus was about 24,000.

Lukas also neglects the record of events in court. Several weeks after the masters retired, the Boston School Department, black plaintiffs, and the State Board of Education all *repudiated* the enrollment data on which the Masters’ Plan was based, including that plan’s estimates of numbers of students to be bused. More accurate data were supplied in response to a later court order, but the impact of invalid information on the dispute over a remedy was enormous at this time.

Contrary to the chronicle in *Common Ground*, all of the substantive features of the Masters’ Plan were retained by the court. These included citywide cross-busing, with the exception of East Boston; magnet schools in abundance; guidelines for community school districts, which consisted of clusters of facilities falling within firmly bounded but enlarged subcommunities; the pairing of schools with businesses, colleges and universities, and cultural agencies; uniform grade structures; and the closing of fire-unsafe, severely dilapidated buildings. What the court changed in the light of new evidence was 10 percent of the boundary lines around community districts. The masters could not have comprehended the necessity for these changes. They served the court for six weeks and then retired, while the judge, his two experts, and one special law clerk, as well as the nine parties to the litigation, continued on long after.

Lukas reports that when the permanent court order came out,

Ed McCormack was so angry he couldn’t bring himself to read the newspapers the next morning. He felt betrayed. After encouraging them to build consensus for a plan, the judge had kicked the props from underneath it. If the plan had needed refinement, why couldn’t Garrity have handed it back to them for “fine tuning” instead of simply overriding them? Now people could say, “I supported the

Masters' Plan, but I can't support the judge's." Garrity claimed to have retained 90 percent of the original plan, but McCormack was sure that the revisions, modest though they might be, had destroyed the plan's mystique and therefore its efficacy. He could not guarantee that his plan would have brought peace to the city, but he was certain that the judge's remedy would ensure more violence.

These may well have been McCormack's views. No one worked harder over the period of a few weeks, moreover, than did McCormack in his efforts to persuade key groups to back the Masters' Plan. He had been tireless, influential, and credible in his attempts to engineer a consensus around that plan. In the process, he brought back only one compromise he persuaded the other masters to make in order to render their plan acceptable, and that concerned a real-estate aim of Mayor Kevin White. McCormack's accomplishments lifted morale among the team of planners and gave them hope that consensus might extend beyond the federal courthouse to the divided and hostile segments of public leadership.

The quality of his contribution cannot be overstated, but anyone who was present at the court hearings in April and May of 1975 (as McCormack was not) would have realized that the Masters' Plan was incapable, as any plan would have been at that time, of establishing a common ground. Fine-tuning was quite beside the point. Planners and attorneys for the School Committee attacked the Masters' Plan in nearly every particular, condemning it as infeasible, educationally undesirable, and based on errors of fact. Attorneys for black plaintiffs critiqued the plan within an inch of its life. The State Board reached back to Charles Glenn and their former consultant, John Finger, to file an eighty-page critique. Mayor White's corporation counsel, Herbert Gleason and Kevin Maloney, gave no advocacy, and opposition came as well from the Boston Teachers Union, the Boston Association of School Administrators, El Comité for the Hispanic parents, and the Home and School Association, all parties to the litigation at the time. That Judge Garrity navigated these seas of division and reached the port called for in the Masters' Plan was the most extraordinary achievement in the remedial phases of the case.

Lukas suggests that Judge Garrity failed to approve the McCormack compromise out of some flaw in character, some Thomistic or puritanical penchant for caution—some inherent inability to embrace the practicalities of compromise. This, he writes, converged with the evolving rigidities of the Supreme Court and with the raging cross-pressures blowing across Boston. In this plot, both flaw and context destroy the last remaining chance for racial peace.

This is storybook stuff, however. It was fashioned locally as part of the means for exculpating Bostonians from the implications of their own uncompromising commitments to the status quo. Lukas serves as the chronicling outsider who collects, sifts, and weaves a more complete fabric of exculpation out of the stuff of these local legends.

The Cardinal, the Editor, and the Mayor

Three other public figures are profiled in *Common Ground*. We meet Humberto Cardinal Medeiros at the center of the book, *Globe* editor Thomas Winship at the two-thirds point, and Mayor Kevin White near the climax of the long story.

Each is provided with a biographical profile and these profiles vary in length, depending on how many details were available on the record and how much friends

and kin were disposed to tell Lukas. Where the biographical detail is thinnest, as with Cardinal Medeiros, Lukas fills in with the history of the church in Boston. The coverage of Cardinal Cushing and his era is so extensive that reviewers from other regions or countries might think he is still leading the archdiocese.

This is not the result of sloppiness on Lukas's part. His aim in selecting his public figures was to bracket the political action around the school desegregation story. But Cardinal Medeiros figured faintly in that action. Not only did he concentrate on the performance of his religious office, but the white ethnic hostility shown toward him immediately on his arrival in Boston was so grievous and so obviously a by-product of the racism mobilized by the antibusing movement that there was little he could do.

Unlike an investigative reporter, however, Lukas does not pin down or explicate the sources of the hatred and threats displayed toward the cardinal. Consistent with his dramatic format, he stresses the view that Cardinal Medeiros was unable to rise to the occasion. His chapter becomes one of recording what Medeiros did not do; the meetings he did not attend; the visits he did not make to Charlestown and South Boston. Most important for the book's account of race relations, Lukas finds that the cardinal's formal prohibition against giving white students refuge in parish schools was flawed with loopholes and weakly enforced by the archdiocese. Thus, like Winship and White, Medeiros failed to act effectively when the moment of decision arrived, according to Lukas, who further claims that when the court ordered its Phase I remedy in 1974, the cardinal's endorsement of it was halfhearted.

The reasoning about the performance of Cardinal Medeiros is subjective conjecture on the part of a journalist who was unable to penetrate the walls of privacy surrounding archdiocesan leadership in secular matters. The cardinal's actions are interpreted from a place remote from the locus of action, and they are contrasted invidiously with what the deceased Cardinal Cushing might have done—a form of what-if historiography. This conjectural exercise diverts the reader's attention from the political action among Catholics when desegregation took place—the homes and neighborhoods of the white ethnic enclaves where parish priests faced into the winds of racist violence, a story Lukas documents well in his chronicle of the lives of the McGoff family in Charlestown but does not link to the chapter on Medeiros.

Mayor Kevin White, according to Lukas, was a professional politician who proved himself "light as a feather." *Common Ground* gives the reader a picture of a man who, as a youth, barely graduated from high school and college; who struggled through law school; and who eked out a meager living as an assistant district attorney in his earliest adulthood. As with Louise Day Hicks, W. Arthur Garrity, Jr., and Humberto Medeiros before him, Kevin White is profiled as one who came unqualified into public life by reaching high state office at a tender age with little support from his politically influential family; in short, yet another twist of fate.

In spite of inauspicious beginnings, then, the Kevin White of *Common Ground* becomes a professional politician who builds a powerful, resiliently adaptive political machine which appears for many years to be highly appropriate to the volatile conditions of Boston. In addition, we are asked to believe, perhaps beyond credulity, that as mayor, Kevin White had little to do with members of the Vault, the private-sector committee that shapes big-corporate policy toward the city and that bankrolls projects and public leaders on critical occasions. This sounds credible until we learn that White carried out vast downtown redevelopment projects and always found political support and big money when it was needed most and seemed hardest to

come by. We also wonder how this flawed and barely qualified mayor succeeded in recruiting a cadre of exceptionally gifted young aides into service at City Hall and how, with them, he put into place more than a dozen innovative policies and programs of city revitalization in the years from 1968 to 1974.

Kevin White emerges gradually in the chapter devoted to him as the most nimble, inventive, and ethnically inclusive mayor Boston had elected and reelected in perhaps the last century. Lukas concludes, however, that when the challenge of school desegregation befell White in 1974, he botched the midnight test of leadership. The explanation Lukas offers is to be found in the chapters on Colin Divers, a White aide, as well as in the chapter on the mayor. It is, in sum, that Kevin White reached out for higher office and came within an inch of nomination as the Democratic candidate for vice president of the United States. Earlier, dreams of the governorship danced in his head, and later, the presidency itself seemed possible. His gifted aides, we are told, watched with despair as White's attention was diverted from the conduct of Boston's affairs. For this dream of self-aggrandizement, White suffered the fate of Narcissus.

In place of a researched account of the conditions under which Mayor White changed between 1974 and 1976 from an advocate for racial justice and adherence to constitutional law into a vigorously defiant opponent of court actions, Lukas focuses on trivia. He records stories about White telephoning the Garrity home during a crisis of racial violence and getting turned away—as if a White would really believe he could hold backstage conversations with a federal judge in the midst of complex civil litigation. Lukas even suggests, without having examined court documents, that Judge Garrity attached the mayor as a defendant in the case as a vindictive reaction to the telephone calls. The course of White's movement from the liberal center of the controversy toward the outer edges of the antibusing ideology is not chronicled; instead, the Kevin White in *Common Ground* fades away before our eyes. We get snippets about his success in being reelected in 1976, but the chapter ends with the legend of his political self-destruction. Once again, the opportunity to explore the forces at work within a part of the electorate, a part committed to defiant and even violent resistance to desegregation of the public schools, is sacrificed in favor of the interpretation of flaws in the character of an individual leader.

The chapter on Thomas Winship, "The Editor," departs from the essentially docudramatic treatment of the other four leaders. Here, Lukas deals with the career of a newspaperman and with the impact of school desegregation on the *Boston Globe*, a newspaper whose traditions and content he understands from earned professional familiarity with urban journalism. *Common Ground* is at its best in this chapter. It is one that will be reprinted for years to come for use in college courses on journalism.

The story of the editor coheres with other parts of *Common Ground* in one important respect, however: it is devoid of an account of why and how the attacks against the *Globe* became so violent and were so long-sustained. The response of Winship and others on the *Globe* is covered superbly. How the paper's leadership fumbled along the path toward their calvary, contributing to their own pain, links this chapter to others as well. Just what it was that spawned the South Boston lion of violence and what made it roar with such telling effects is left unexplained, however, and it becomes hard to link the fortunes of the *Globe* to the diverse and volatile subcultures of Boston.

Ordinary People

Stories of demigods are empty unless they include stories of the mortals in whose midst they dwell. As Sam Walter Foss wrote in his poem "In Memoriam," "The plain man is the basic clod/ From which we grow the demigod;/ And in the average man is curled/ The hero stuff that rules the world."

In his Author's Note, Lukas writes, "The three families at the center of my story were not selected as statistical averages or norms. On the contrary, I was drawn to them by a special intensity, an engagement with life, which made them stand out from their social context." No reader would expect three families to provide an adequate sample of Boston's ordinary people, but no reader can believe either that they were chosen simply for their "special intensity."

The Divers give the reader a picture of the young urban professionals of early Baby Boom vintage. They are upwardly mobile members of the white upper middle class who were touched somewhat by the civil rights and other countercultural movements of the sixties. They want social change and are willing to work for it, and they believe in racial equality. The McGoffs offer the sharply contrasting values of the downwardly mobile Boston Irish working class; they are not only rooted in Charlestown, they are stuck there by economic forces, and they want it to be culturally changeless. The Twymons give the reader a picture of the life and times of the bitterly hard-pressed, black single-parent household. With a touch of middle-classness in her past and with church connections into the civil rights revolution, Mrs. Twymon not only extends her imagination in many directions but also articulates her experiences with vigor and precision. Happily for Lukas, the Divers and the Twymons share the South End, and the Twymon daughters share Charlestown High School with two of the McGoff children.

Just as happily for the sake of plot structure, the Divers are connected with City Hall and later the State House, giving readers a small but select window into politics and social policy. The McGoffs have political-protest ties to the movement inspired by Louise Day Hicks, and their church life takes us through part of the portrayal of the archdiocese as well as into two local parishes. While the Twymons lack these direct connections with Boston leaders, Mrs. Twymon has associations with Martin Luther King, Jr., and with several local clergymen caught up in the northern struggle for minority rights in housing and education, thus giving balance to the plot and the way it seeks to connect heroes, however badly flawed, with ordinary people. A reader from a distant place might infer that Boston life is infused with extraordinary political activism among its residents, an inference contradicted by the evidence on voter registration and turnouts, but Lukas does not intend or assert this. Every plot has its inherently circumstantial contrivances.

Charlestown and the South End and a public school within each of these neighborhoods become settings for examining the interactions between ordinary people, public leaders, and the politics of social and economic change. They are good choices. Both neighborhoods are old and have well-documented histories that can be recounted engagingly by Lukas. In this way, prospective millions of Americans and foreign visitors who have heard of Bunker Hill or who have seen the Boston Pops Orchestra perform on television can identify with something about these settings.

Although *Common Ground* is the story of school desegregation in Boston framed among many subplots, only two public schools are treated in any detail in the book.

The chronicle of Charlestown High School during the 1974-76 years is strong and fully researched, and provides a glimpse of Lukas's journalistic abilities at their best. Had he done nothing else during his years on this project, this chronicle would vindicate his effort. Across the growing shelf of books and articles about the Boston Public Schools, nothing equals this reconstruction of daily life in and around the old high school for precision, relevance, and selection of detail. Indeed, no other source save the liability opinion of the federal court offers a fuller account of the nature and implications of racial segregation and discrimination and how these ideologies and practices undermined the learning opportunities for all students, before and during the earliest period of desegregation.

94

Among the few details overlooked by Lukas are some which would have linked the narrative of Charlestown High to the school desegregation remedy itself, however. The rationale behind the assignment of students is not described, for example; that is, that Charlestown and the South End and Back Bay are within a few short miles of one another; that the overcrowding decried by Lukas made it possible for all Charlestown youth to attend Charlestown High; and that the old high school facility was being replaced, thanks to desegregation, by a fine new building nearby. Indeed, nowhere in *Common Ground* is there reference to the fact that the maximum busing distances for students assigned to community district schools were shorter, by court order, than the distances traveled by students in the suburban and rural districts of Massachusetts.

Lukas also leaves out of *Common Ground* any record of the numbers of students who were withdrawn from elementary and middle schools by their Charlestown parents rather than being allowed to travel the short distances to schools across the Charles River, in contrast to the black students who risked their lives daily for two years in commuting to schools in Charlestown. Nor does he note that, with the advent of desegregation, Charlestown parents and students had new, greatly enlarged opportunities to enroll in magnet schools and diverse vocational programs dotted throughout the city.

Common Ground shows with sharp clarity how a small fraction of the parents of Charlestown organized to protest and resist school desegregation. It describes vividly how these parents, including Alice McGoff, mobilized and then carried out the protest demonstrations not only of adults but of the youth inside Charlestown High School. While the demonstrations in the streets were tightly controlled by the police, white students inside the high school engaged in mob terrorization of black students as well as in daily, minor harassments consisting of ostracism and individual confrontation.

In the final chapter of his book, Lukas also shows how desegregation and such efforts as an integrated Upward Bound summer program induced the beginnings of racial tolerance in Lisa McGoff, one of the student leaders during the two years of violent protest. The reader can imagine, with the help of Lukas, a future in which the next generation of Charlestown families will refuse to serve as pawns in violent attacks against black children, youth, and parents. Lukas departs Charlestown on a note of hope. His story closes before subsequent episodes, extending well into 1985, suggest that violent white racism lives on in those young adult "Townies" who withdrew from school in the 1970s.

There are white demigods as well as antiheroes in *Common Ground*, but no Bostonian black demigods are presented. Not only do the Twymons lack heroes, but

every hope, every effort expended by all but three members of their family is crushed under the careening wheels of Boston's white policy and economy. According to Lukas, the federal court remedy made a mockery of Rachel Twymon's quest for a decent education for her children. She does not call it a mockery and she gives her daughter sound reasons for attending Charlestown High, but Lukas makes it seem hopeless for them. The dreams inspired by the *Brown* decision and by Martin Luther King, Jr., are pressed into ashes of despair by every event he records in employment, housing, welfare assistance, small-business development, criminal justice, and public education. Even within this larger context of oppression, Cassandra Twymon's days at Charlestown High, which receive the most sustained illumination by Lukas, read like the history of a civil rights movement whose outcomes are an exercise in collective madness brought on by court orders.

The alleged betrayal of white parishioners by Cardinal Medeiros is harder for Lukas to particularize because he lacks an insider's account of life within the church. Still, his emphasis on this allegation casts a pall second only to the alleged failure of Judge Garrity to embrace the McCormack compromise. The McGoffs believe their cardinal and his priests have abandoned them at every turn in the course of the desegregation crisis. Alice McGoff finds parochial school havens for two of her children, and two local priests remain sympathetic. Yet one of the cardinal's specialists in urban affairs, Father Michael Groden, not only accepts Judge Garrity's invitation to head a panel of citizens to monitor desegregation but does so while he continues to live in a parish rectory hard by the McGoffs' neighborhood.

One of the sympathetic priests urges the cardinal to visit Charlestown early in the fall of 1975. The cardinal refuses, and many weeks later a reporter quotes him as saying, "They wanted me to go to Charlestown. . . . To get stoned. They're looking for blood and they'd love to see me dead in the streets." The offense this statement gives Alice McGoff nearly exceeds Lukas's ability to record it, while the truth value in the cardinal's outburst goes unappraised. In preference to documenting the full scope of hatred and threats directed at the cardinal by some white parishioners, Lukas speculates on how Portuguese Catholics share very grim visions of the Christian peril. He notes cross burnings, death threats, hate mail, the demise of money offerings, and the relentless defiance shown toward church doctrine, but he is drawn dramatically toward a notion of a Portuguese persecution complex.

The Fallowness

In a television program of the 1960s entitled "The Naked City," the announcer began each week's telecast with "There are eight million stories in the Naked City. This is one of them." Unlike New York, Boston does not have 8 million stories to chronicle, but it does have at least six hundred thousand. J. Anthony Lukas has written up a dozen of those and has organized them around three families, five public leaders, and one class-action litigation that affected nearly everyone. His stories do not illuminate any one moral generalization. They are not explained in whole or in their parts.

There are fragments of social theory scattered throughout the book, but these are not reconciled with one another, nor are they used to develop an explanatory overview. One theory, borrowed from an urban economist, says that public-policy changes often trigger perverse secondary effects which are worse than the problem the policies addressed originally. Another, taken from psychiatrist Robert Coles, says

that by limiting racial justice reforms to the central city, reformers neglected white suburbia and thus pitted poor white against poor black children—a kind of variation on the idea of perverse effects. A third theory advanced by Lukas as his own proposes that the American ideals of community and equality are radically incompatible with one another in an advanced industrial society.

These theories would merit appraisal if *Common Ground* were a scholarly treatise or a contribution to social science, but it is not. Lukas holds to the ideals of the journeyman reporter. He is in search of the facts about what happened in Boston between 1968 and 1978, to the extent that what happened is contained in the stories he has selected for coverage.

Dramatically engaging as the story of each family may be, no evidence from them explains at all adequately the story of school desegregation. The Divers have some firsthand knowledge about a single elementary school in the South End, but that is the extent of their involvement. The Twymon children attend several different schools before and during desegregation, but Lukas captures the story of but one of these, Charlestown High. The McGoffs, two of them at least, carry us into parts of the citywide protest movement, but most of their experience is confined to a few years at Charlestown High.

The thousands of filings in *Morgan v. Hennigan* go unexamined in *Common Ground*. There is no review, and there are no quotations, from the public record of the litigation except for a sentence or two from the federal court's liability opinion. The contents of the *Globe's* coverage of race relations and the court case are alluded to but neither digested nor reviewed. Sourcebooks such as *Schools on Trial: An Inside Account of the Boston School Desegregation Case*⁴ and "*I Respectfully Disagree with the Judge's Order*"⁵ are not quoted or cited. The first of these summarizes the record of the court case and its implementation; the second reprints and excerpts the full range of media accounts of the dispute.

Much is gained by intensifying the focus on what journalists call the human interest elements in *Common Ground*, but much is also sacrificed. A reader cannot learn what transpired in the course of state and federal court proceedings over the years 1969 to 1978, and what a reader can learn is factually unreliable. And a reader cannot learn what in particular it was that the *Boston Globe* did in reporting on the dispute that may have contributed to attacks on the paper, its staff, and its facilities.

In addition to generating a kind of vacuum around the particulars of policy actions and media actions, Lukas avoids the question of how unique or representative Boston is among cities. Shall we read about Boston because its happenings are unlike those that took place in other American cities in the same years? This cannot be the intent, surely, because the militancy of opposition to school desegregation in Pontiac, Louisville, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Indianapolis, and San Francisco, to mention places from diverse regions, was just as fierce and just as dependent on the arguments summarized in the book *Disaster by Decree*.⁶ So, too, when Lukas reports on how white youths attacked Rachel Twymon's sister and family when they moved into a white neighborhood, we recall similar attacks in Detroit, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

Can it be that we are to take a case study of Boston as representative of urban America? There is a solid grain of truth in this idea, but Lukas does not consider it seriously, and his emphasis upon the historicity of Boston and its Bunker Hill distracts the reader from considering it. Journalists, unlike social scientists, are not burdened by disciplinary responsibility for gauging whether their reports are more or

less generalizable, and one cannot fault Lukas for working within his professional tradition. Journalists also do not have to assess whether the stories of one or two neighborhoods within a city are indicative of the stories of other parts of the same city, and indeed we learn little from *Common Ground* about South Boston, the core of resistance and defiance toward racial justice, let alone a dozen other neighboring subcommunities.

Unlike a sociological monograph or a novel by E. L. Doctorow, *Common Ground* should be appraised on two counts: Is its chronicle of what happened accurate, and is the point of view through which the chronicle is interpreted adequate to the scale of the events themselves?

On the first count, *Common Ground* records many facts and many statements offered as facts which are in error. A surfeit of details and conjecture is sometimes used in preference to a selective decision about which facts matter. No one needs, for example, to pile a persecution complex on top of the facts that Cardinal Medeiros suffered from diabetes and high blood pressure and was received by some parishioners with manifest hostility in order to provide an account of his despair. Nor does one need an account of the Mystery Nighters in order to learn how Arthur Garrity came to work on campaigns for John Kennedy. Many details are included because they add to the human interest factor, no doubt, but the standard of selection and verification is made of rubber.

On the second count, *Common Ground* is much weaker. If we are to read a hundred pages about violent reactions to changing racial policies, for example, the factual details presented should point toward something that is causally commensurate with the scale of the reactions. No evidence is mustered in the chapters on the five leaders to suggest that one or all of them caused the bloodshed, terror tactics, sniper attacks, or mob violence documented in the book. In his book, *The Boston School Integration Dispute*,⁷ anthropologist J. Brian Sheehan narrates the same bloody record and finds it necessary to invent a conspiracy between Yankee Brahmin business leaders and “black politicians” in order to account for it. His conspiracy theory is another myth, to be sure, but at least it has scope.

The family chapters cannot account for the violence, because none of the families is situated to offer an interpretation. The McGoffs, or Alice and her daughter Lisa at least, are deeply implicated in desegregation protest activities, and their story is made exceptionally vivid for this reason. They were eager to tell Lukas their recollections years afterward in order to justify their conduct—indeed, perhaps, to memorialize it with pride.

Mrs. Alice McGoff paid little attention to the school dispute until the spring of 1973, when she attended a meeting and heard a Dorchester mother warn that “indiscriminate mixing of blacks and whites would be a disaster. ‘The three R’s will be turned to Riot, Rape, and Robbery, she said.’ . . . To Alice, the idea of sending her children to a school halfway across the city when they had a perfectly good school right across the street was utterly ridiculous. Moreover, what she knew of conditions in Roxbury strengthened her resolve . . . she knew it wasn’t safe over there.” That is the full reconstruction of her knowledge and attitudes. It certainly does not suffice as motivation for what followed.

Kevin White toured a half-dozen cities in the North in 1976 and spoke eloquently on what he called “the disaster of busing in Boston.” At that time he was still mayor. It was not until 1982 that he made public his conviction that Boston was a

particularly racist city, but when he was running for office he could not have been expected to account for "the disaster" in these terms or even in terms of voter attitudes. His own public reputation as a political liberal, while rusting away, made this impossible. And Edward McCormack, with his close ties to the politics of South Boston, his lifelong loyalty to his uncle, John McCormack, and his real-estate as well as political interdependence with Kevin White, did not tell Lukas about the intensity of rejection accorded the "McCormack compromise plan" by South Boston's political leaders, William Bulger and Raymond Flynn.

In a speech at the Kennedy Library, J. Anthony Lukas said no one should make Judge Garrity a scapegoat for the wreckage wrought by Bostonians, yet his own sources and his record of their accounts in *Common Ground* do precisely that. They assert that the liability opinion took too long in coming; that it failed to distinguish between northern and southern forms of racial segregation; that the judge adopted the Phase I remedy hastily and without prudent forethought; that his Phase II remedy was both rigid and draconian; and that his intrusion into School Department operations stimulated racial strife. Judge Garrity is not the only source of the problem: Louise Day Hicks is deemed a political anomaly rather than the symbol of protest. Cardinal Medeiros, we are told, was a poor choice on the part of a key person in the Vatican. Kevin White fails to keep his eye on Boston when his leadership is needed most. Tom Winship makes the *Globe* cosmopolitan and objective just when some readers yearn most for parochialism and for coverage that is sympathetic to protesters.

It is not Lukas who invents the exculpation of those who acted out the violence in the citywide movement that came to be named ROAR. His role is that of the visiting stranger who gathers the wool of exculpation heaped up by others. If Boston is the unique, historical Cradle of Liberty its citizens believe it to be, can the relentless hostility toward black parents and students and a small band of white moderates be reconciled with the image? Will stories about flawed leaders help restore the loaded surfaces of conventional ideology which cover over the realities of life near Bunker Hill? If the staff and offices of the *Boston Globe* are subjected to gunfire, can it be for reasons grounded in the ignorance and fears of subscribers who cannot bear to read what the *Globe* reports? Or shall the same surfaces of convention be smoothed over by the excuse that the *Globe* lost touch with its subscribers?

Common Ground leaves such questions unanswered. We are left to answer for ourselves why some white students at Charlestown High, goaded by their parents, snubbed, terrorized, and attacked black students inside and outside the school. We cannot learn from reading this book how opposition to racial desegregation came to be carried to such extremes.

Nothorners were shocked when similar extremes flared in Little Rock in 1957; but there, remember, a white school board and many administrators and teachers had tried to initiate desegregation, only to be blocked and attacked by Governor Faubus and others in the State House. Is it possible that the hands that rocked the Cradle of Liberty were culturally identical to the hands that blocked the schoolhouse door at Central High School in Little Rock nearly thirty years ago? None of Lukas's sources explore this question.

Something which has large potential value or utility but which is being unused is often called fallow. The criminal-court record in the rape of a white woman by Freddie Twymon is chronicled in minute detail in Lukas's last chapter on the

Twymon family. Its inclusion in *Common Ground* is presumably justified at one level of meaning by the author's effort to track the lives of every family member. At another level of meaning, however, this story discloses the fallowness of the book. We learn what heinous assaults took place but not why, whether on the level of individual psychology or on the plane of Boston and American society.

Were the sacrifices and gains accomplished by those who built the civil rights revolution wasted on Freddie Twymon? Is this story, by any assessment the grimmest individual behavior recounted in *Common Ground*, indicative of something, or is it finally meaningless in its blanketing import of despair? To what extent does the story sound an echo for the ROAR speaker who equated the black community with rape and robbery?

It was Martin Luther King, Jr., who revived Gandhi's dictum that poverty itself is the greatest violence that human beings wreak upon one another, but Lukas does not tell his readers what was done to Freddie Twymon that he would act so rapaciously. Nor does he probe what was done to Lisa McGoff that she would lead others to terrorize black students. She remembers feeling sickened by being a part of the protest march in which her schoolmate bludgeoned black attorney Theodore Landmark with the staff of an American flag while he was crossing City Hall Plaza on an innocent mission. By her own account, she was sickened not so much by the violent hatred expressed as by the realization that its criminality would be used to discredit her protest.

Lukas's theory of community versus equality defines community in narrow terms characteristic of closed, ultratraditional neighborhoods organized around ethnic and class homogeneity. Surely the ideal of community refers to something grander than tribal attachments to a place. In any event, it was not the quest for equal educational opportunity that led to the disintegration of closed neighborhoods in Boston and other big cities. That breakdown of barriers began during the dislocations of the Great Depression and the explosion of social and economic change during World War II. Lukas gives us many details about Charlestown and the South End in support of this history of deep and irreversible change, and he shows us how the McGoffs were stranded in a backwater housing project left over from the 1930s; but he does not make the mental connections essential to comprehending how racism, white and black together, is forged in the crucible of a profit-centered, privatistic urban culture.

The word *fallow* also refers to ground which has been plowed and harrowed, but not cropped. Thus, Lukas plows the ground of Boston, but the meanings of the lives and times that he treats go unharvested. Nor is the ground he works on common in the sense in which we think of locating the common ground in a dispute. On this issue, he is quoted in an interview in the *Boston Globe*: "The book is about human beings, all who are right by their own certain lights. . . . I try to leave it to the reader. I would like the reader to be as confounded . . . as I was. I was constantly shuttling back and forth, never knowing where my sympathies were."

The question is not one of rightness or wrongness, however, nor of sympathies, but of why events went the way they did in Boston. One cannot answer this by recording what a few respondents say they did and how they felt about it. Not even the events themselves can be described validly by this method.

A part of the answer to the question comes from the effects of racism. Central to racist thought has been the view that the stereotyped qualities attributed to black

Americans by some white Americans are biologically innate. These stereotypes have functioned to rationalize discrimination and segregation, the methods by which blacks are oppressed, confined, and isolated. Decades of racist rhetoric prefigure and drench the issue of school desegregation in Boston. Pieces of that rhetoric are picked up by Lukas in his chronicle of Charlestown and in his report on Codman Square in Dorchester. Generally, however, the substance, pervasiveness, and uses of racist ideas and actions go unexamined in *Common Ground*. Those who can afford to buy the book may include some readers who keep their stereotypes under firm control as part of a custom of civility, but *Common Ground* is not likely to increase their awareness of the damage this ideological virus can do, whether leashed or unleashed. Colin Diver experiences such an awareness when he feels the agonizing pressures of defending his property and family from intruders. The pain of recognizing his own racism is part of what motivates him to relocate to Newton from the South End. This is one of the few contexts in which a major aspect of the thoughtways of many Bostonians is presented, however.

Another explanation of events in Boston surely lies in the political culture of the city. It was organized for nearly a century around wards that preserved and patronized the closed, vertically structured, white ethnic enclaves so brilliantly described in *Street Corner Society* more than forty years ago. Six of these wards were Irish and two were Italian. Ordinary citizens at the base of each enclave had ward bosses and other minor politicians who mediated their claims with the big bosses downtown. Public offices, including school principalships and custodial jobs, were bought and sold in a white marketplace where money, votes, and loyalties were the currency of exchange. Black, Hispanic, and Asian households had no place in the political culture, which lay like a seamless blanket across all services that involved public finance, real estate and facilities, and taxation.

From 1950 to 1970, hundreds of thousands of households relocated from Boston to the suburbs and out of the region as well. The aging white population that was left in the central city grew puzzled, angry toward the relocators and about themselves, and increasingly antagonistic toward politicians who concentrated less on the neighborhood wards and ever more intensely on the profits to be taken from downtown renewal, gentrification projects, and, in the 1960s, federal investments in urban assistance.

Politicians who, like Louise Day Hicks, Albert O'Neil, Fred Langone, and John Kerrigan, continued to bank on the white ethnic enclaves found themselves cut off from the newer, more profitable politics of renewal and finance under Mayors Collins and White. New school construction was a part of the new politics, beginning in 1954. Crumbling and fire-unsafe facilities were left in operation as part of avoidance of conflict with the enclave dwellers, while new buildings were placed in ways that reinforced redevelopment. Some enclaves, such as East Boston and South Boston, were left out of the redevelopment process, except where Massport cut into real estate in order to expand the airport and harbor areas.

Black Bostonians were immaterial, at least until 1965, to the grinding impasse facing white families who could not make it out of the crumbling public housing projects left over from 1937 and the endless miles of wooden, arson-prone walkups nearby. Until their numbers grew, blacks were a small, divided minority stuffed away toward near invisibility when viewed from South Boston. The march on Selma could be watched on television, but it was far away. When black parents organized and

dared to press claims for the education of their children, however, the challenge to white ethnic families became apparent. What was happening nationwide in the Kennedy and Johnson years came to Boston. For some white families, affirmative action and the other trappings of equal treatment seemed to be part of the same plot that caused suburbanization, urban demolition, job insecurity, and the shredding of such old enclaves as the West End and Charlestown. That the demolition cut an even broader swath through black Roxbury provided no comfort.

Unlike Buffalo, a sister city whose economy had been more severely decimated by the Great Depression, Boston hosted no sizeable, radically deprived white ethnic subcommunity like the Polish Americans. The Boston Irish, poor and struggling as they were in the aftermath of World War II, could take pride in the success of their rise to political hegemony. When a federal court ordered school desegregation in Buffalo, the occasion offered renewed and enlarged opportunities for Polish-American children as readily as it did for black Americans, and after some years of tension, both groups worked collaboratively toward that end. Boston, meanwhile, had already undergone commercial transformation. It was not a rusting manufacturing and steelworking city like Buffalo, and by 1970 it had become a contender for at least a basement slot in the world-class city competition as a financial, medical, scientific, and higher educational center. Its political structure had turned toward federal concerns with the Kennedys, and its mayors and their aides had gone to Harvard or M.I.T. What some of the Boston Irish saw in the racial issue of public schooling was but one more occasion for a downward slide in their hegemony.

If we can begin to answer why events happened the way they did, we may also speculate on whether the violence of 1974 and 1975 could have been prevented. This essay has argued that the claim that better litigation, better remedial plans, and better efforts by city and state authorities could have stemmed the tide of strife is specious. Nor would a different cardinal and a different editor of the *Boston Globe* have made a difference, either.

Kevin White in 1974 was probably as competent a mayor as a mayor of Boston could possibly be. He could have committed to the cause of racial peace the full weight of his machine, but only in the certain knowledge that all would be lost for him and for the middle managers of his organization. Some American cities have had political leaders who have made such a commitment, but they can be counted on the fingers of two hands. His successor's investment in the politics of antidesegregation would have been greater than his ever became, substantial as that was by 1976. The alienation between the white enclaves and City Hall was in itself too extreme by 1970 to have made such a choice an effective one, however courageous.

The violence might have been prevented had the federal government developed and carried out a national urban policy. Such a policy was beginning to be framed as early as 1960, parts of it by leaders from Boston, but it was drained away by the Vietnam War and the privatistic politics of the Nixon years. Given the initial impetus of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, we can speculate that distributive justice, coupled with effective housing, transportation, and education programs, would have made school desegregation in Boston a concomitant of urban reconstruction rather than the result of a court dispute. Many big cities of the North, including Boston, were within reach of redressing racial wrongs in public education as part of new school construction and other programs of the times. By the time of the inner-city riots and

burnings that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., that opportunity had decayed.

When we reflect upon opportunities missed, it becomes obvious that no contemporary central city in the United States can be interpreted through the ancient visions of the Greek city-state, the self-sufficient fortress cities of medieval Europe, or the shining city on a hill of the Puritans. Boston today is a small dot in the great nexus of an international commercial and environmental ecosystem, as it has been since at least 1945. As the world and the nation go now, so goes Boston, a dwindling dot in an expanding metro area. The ignorance, fear, and anger of those who tried to lock the gates of Charlestown, Dorchester, or West Roxbury are the mental and emotional debris from which an urban legend of innocence is spawned. J. Anthony Lukas fails to find the facts which exist in the midst of that debris and which put the rule of equal treatment above the custom of special advantage within the closed neighborhood, no matter how hardened the crust of local custom has become. Alice McGoff, Lisa McGoff, and Freddie Twymon, together or apart, cannot be exculpated. They are what the later decades of the American twentieth century made them become. With the Boston Public Schools, as with Watergate, justice finally prevailed, but not before the worst in many people crawled out from under the rock of convention.

Notes

1. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.*, 349 U.S. 294, 1954.
2. Garrity's appointment was indeed rushed. Newly elected, President Kennedy was replacing Republican holdovers like Elliot Richardson, then U.S. attorney for Massachusetts, from coast to coast within the first one hundred days after his inauguration. The need for a replacement in Massachusetts was acutely sensitive for several reasons. Fast or slow as the appointment process may have been, Arthur Garrity was a prime, highly qualified candidate in any circumstance.
3. *Morgan v. Hennigan*, 379 F.Supp. 410, 1974.
4. Robert A. Dentler and Marvin B. Scott, *Schools on Trial: An Inside Account of the Boston School Desegregation Case* (Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1981).
5. J. Michael Ross and William M. Berg, "*I Respectfully Disagree with the Judge's Order*": *The Boston School Desegregation Controversy* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981).
6. Lino A. Graglia, *Disaster by Decree: The Supreme Court Decisions on Race and the Schools* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976).
7. J. Brian Sheehan, *The Boston School Integration Dispute: Social Change and Legal Maneuvers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).