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“Separatist City”: The Mandela, Massachusetts (Roxbury) Movement and the Politics of Incorporation, Self-Determination, and Community Control, 1986–1988

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Cover Page Footnote

The authors wish to acknowledge the valuable research assistance of Jeremy Bingham, an undergraduate student at Northeastern University studying space and place and their role in the contestation of society and culture under Tim Cresswell, professor of history and international affairs.

“Separatist City”: The Mandela, Massachusetts (Roxbury) Movement and the Politics of Incorporation, Self-Determination, and Community Control, 1986–1988

Zebulon V. Miletsky and Tomás González¹

"We didn't create this area, we just described it. The city of Boston is so incredibly segregated, it was easy to divide. "

—Andrew Jones²

“Being part of Boston used to be OK,
When the city used to allocate money our way.
Now all that's changed and it's plain to see,
That the city only cares about property . . .
Let Boston see what it's got to see,
Mandela, Massachusetts, is the place to be.”

—“Mandela,” Massachusetts rap song; lyrics by Andrew Jones³

¹ The authors wish to acknowledge the valuable research assistance of Jeremy Bingham, an undergraduate student at Northeastern University studying space and place and their role in the contestation of society and culture under Tim Cresswell, professor of history and international affairs.

² (Kennedy, 1990: 124)

³ Provided by Curtis Davis of GRIP.



November 4, 2016, marks 30 years since the historic referendum in which close to 50,000 citizens of Boston living in or near the predominantly Black area of “Greater Roxbury” voted on whether the area should leave Boston and incorporate as a separate municipality to be named in honor of former South African president Nelson and Winnie Mandela, or remain a part of Boston. The new community, what planners called “Greater Roxbury,” would have included wards in much or all of the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, Jamaica Plain, the Fenway, the South End, and what was then known as Columbia Point. Although it was defeated by a 3-to-1 margin in 1986, the measure was raised again in 1988, with a different organizing strategy that spoke to the more turbulent climate of the late 1980s. This campaign included an expanded focus on issues of gang violence, drug abuse, and other forms of lawlessness that plagued the Black community. This attempt, too, went down in defeat. Conceived a mere 12 years after court-ordered school desegregation in Boston, Mandela symbolized in many ways attempts to address equity issues that were never completely resolved after the school desegregation crisis of the 1970s.

As Pierre Clavel writes in *Activists in City Hall: The Progressive Response to the Reagan Era in Boston and Chicago*, “They asked Flynn to hold a plebiscite in Roxbury on the question, and when he refused, gathered the five thousand signatures necessary to put the question on the ballot as a nonbinding referendum. Their success in getting the signatures in August, three months before the November election, apparently took both the city administration and the black leadership by surprise.” (Clavel, 2010, 81)

As Marie Kennedy and Chris Tilly write in a critical piece on Mandela that appeared in *Radical America*, “The separation proposal—technically a non-binding proposal to ‘de-annex and reincorporate’ Roxbury, which was until 1868 an independent town—whipped up a storm of controversy. Boston city officials

damned it as ‘economically preposterous and at worst, a program of racial separation.’ The Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project (GRIP), sponsors of the Mandela initiative, maintained, ‘We want land control because land control is the key to self-determination.’” As Kennedy and Tilly argue, “The proposal rekindled a debate that has simmered in US black communities for over a hundred years. Can the black community (or any other community of color) better achieve well being by assimilation into the white society, or by establishing community control over development?”(Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 23)

Andrew Jones stated about Mandela, “We feel that we have a ‘colonial relationship’ with the city of Boston; we feel that the city of Boston has treated us like second-class citizens and we’re fighting for basic rights of citizenship.” (WGBH, 1986) Much of the ideological impetus behind Mandela came from the dialogues of the 1960s and the Black Power era which advocated for self-determination and community control. As Kennedy, Gastón, and Tilly write, “In the late 1960s and early 1970s, militant Black leaders—including Malcolm X, Roy Innis, and Stokely Carmichael—compared the Black liberation struggle in the United States with anticolonial struggles around the world. A number of radical economists developed the analogy.” They continue: “If community control can help poor Blacks empower themselves and alter some of the ‘colonial’ economic mechanisms that marginalize them, then in the long run the community control strategy may offer a great deal of promise for economic development.” (Kennedy et al., 1990)

As they point out, “William Tabb, writing in 1970, pointed out that ‘the economic relations of the ghetto to white America closely parallel [the relations] between third world nations and the industrially advanced countries.’ Tabb explained that like the typical developing country, the Black community has low income per capita; has a small middle class, limited entrepreneurship, and an internal market too underdeveloped to support much local business; faces a low price and limited demand for its chief ‘export’—unskilled and semi-skilled labor; shows high internal demand for expensive ‘imports’—consumer goods such as cars, televisions, designer clothes; and experiences low rates of savings, investment and productivity growth. Tabb concluded that ‘internal colonialism is an apt description of the place Blacks have held and continue to hold in our country.’ All of these characteristics describe Roxbury, whose per capita income in 1979 was less than two-thirds that of Boston as a whole. (Kennedy et al., 1990)

Very much in the tradition of Black Power-era groups such as the Republic of New Africa (RNA), which was founded in 1968 as an American social movement based in the ideology of Black Nationalism, it had as one if its main goals the creation of an independent African American-majority country situated in the southeastern United States. The RNA attempted to lay claim to an

independent Black republic created out of the southern states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, which were considered “subjugated lands.” The RNA proposed that these lands separate from the larger United States to function as “a government in exile” for Black Americans and the basis for a new Black nation. Much of the idea for this was based on Tanzania president Julius Nyerere’s “*ujamaa*” concept of self-government and cooperative economics. (Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick, 1970)

As Kennedy, Tilly, and Gastón further point out, “Tanzania's Julius Nyerere has made a number of observations that seem relevant to the struggle to develop Roxbury. ‘A country, or a village, or a community cannot be developed,’ Nyerere argued. ‘It can only develop itself. For real development means the development, the growth, of people.’” (Kennedy et al., 1990).

**VOTES CAST ON QUESTION TO FORM
A NEW CITY OF THE COMMONWEALTH
TO BE CALLED MANDELA
STATE ELECTION, NOVEMBER 4, 1986**

QUESTION 9

This Question Is Nonbinding

SUMMARY

Shall the Representative from this district be instructed to vote in favor of legislation forming the following wards and precincts of the City of Boston into a new city of the Commonwealth: ward 4, precincts 8 and 9; ward 9; ward 10, precincts 5, 6, and 7; ward 11; ward 12; ward 13, precincts 1, 2, 3, and 5; ward 14; ward 15, precincts 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7; ward 17, precincts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10; ward 18, precincts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 21; ward 19, precinct 7?

In the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, and 17th
Suffolk Representative Districts

Wards	Yes	No
1		
2		
3	1,013	2,865
4	960	2,860
5	170	358
6		
7	484	1,303
8	267	759
9	632	1,393
10	643	2,001
11	628	1,622
12	781	2,148
13	705	2,243
14	804	2,317
15	426	1,507
16	1,642	4,450
17	831	3,376
18	844	2,820
19	1,210	3,029
20		
21	70	222
22		
Totals	12,110	35,273

While scholars and journalists have documented the story of Mandela fairly well, many people in Boston have either never heard of it, vaguely remember it, or never understood it in the first place. Others would just as soon forget it and are happy to never bring it up again. Since the Mandela campaign *did* happen, this article simply seeks to provide some context for the initiative, to tell the story, and

to organize the vast amount of media coverage on Mandela, despite its relative obscurity. With this upcoming inauspicious anniversary, it seems that things have come full circle in 30 years, and therefore it is an opportune time to revisit a relatively misunderstood chapter in the city's history.

This article examines the history of Mandela in Boston and the secession movement that arose in Roxbury in the mid-1980s and manifested in referenda to support the creation of a new separate Black-majority city. Also considered are the economic development implications that would have come with the separate city and how that issue figured into the political debate, resultant referenda, and their popularity, or lack thereof, even among many African Americans. Additionally, we note the concerns raised by prominent members of the African-American faith community. The main criticism of the Mandela idea was an essential question asked by many—how would they "go it alone" economically? By examining the rhetoric of that debate, we explore the politics around the movement, taking into consideration the idea of "de-annexing" or incorporation that galvanized the community at a time when gang violence and the crack epidemic threatened to dismantle many of the gains of the 1960s and 1970s. The backdrop was very much Reagan's America, where social services were being cut and hip-hop was the medium of expression in the streets.

Ultimately, we hope to force a reconsideration of the spirit of Mandela—community control, land control, and control over one's destiny. While the media and the position often tried to paint Mandela as a separatist or secession issue, its advocates insisted it was very much rooted in "land control." As former city councilor Chuck Turner notes, "The legacy of the Mandela movement was that the issue was to have the community having an authoritative voice in that, in that process..." (Turner interview with authors, 2016) Without question the idea of Mandela fanned racial, political flames and awakened the civic imagination as it drew national media attention. Whether people agreed or not, it intrigued the nation. Many observers were interested in the outcome, although almost all of the media attention was skeptical about the initiative's ability to address the problems its founders claimed it was designed to ameliorate.

Moving beyond discussions of the failures of the referenda or the lack of viability of the initial idea, it is crucial to focus on the fact that it was a radical idea that pushed the city and the administration of Mayor Ray Flynn to demonstrate its commitment to economic development in Roxbury and to the Black constituency that had overwhelmingly voted for Mel King, Flynn's opponent in the 1983 general election. By the mid-1980s, "land control" was the reigning civil rights issue for the Black community in Boston. At the height of the anti-apartheid movement among Black Americans nationally, "Mandela" symbolized the struggle for power in the 1980s, both metaphorically and actually. Additionally, we argue

that the historic step of extending eminent domain to the community-based organization Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), long hailed as a model of community organizing and empowerment, would not have been possible without the Mandela initiative, which represented a more extreme alternative in the minds of Mayor Flynn and the populace at large. Finally, we suggest beneath the Mandela initiative lay groups like the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority (GRNA) that were also engaging in campaigns to assert community-based control.

Spearheaded by two outsiders to Boston, Andrew Jones and Curtis Davis, the idea split the community, with people on both sides supporting or actively working against it. "Separatist City" was the somewhat reactionary label that the media gave to this ambitious but ultimately failed attempt at Black self-determination. Overall, that media attention was skeptical of the idea of Mandela, though there were exceptions.

It is important to mention at the outset that the Mandela referendum, had it passed, would not have created a separate city outright. It would merely have made the suggestion to the legislature that this was something a majority of the voters wanted, which the legislature could have then taken into consideration and could have acted upon.

As Marie Kennedy and Chris Tilly write in "The Mandela Campaign: A Summary," "The Boston white establishment reacted with a self-righteous anger born of wounded liberalism. Boston's leading daily newspaper, *The Boston Globe*, in a near-hysterical outpouring unprecedented since the 1970s racial violence associated with busing, published by our count at least twelve negative articles on Mandela in the three weeks preceding the election. The articles included two editorials and two signed columns, charging Mandela advocates with "deceitfulness," "negativism, untruths, and confusion," making "loud, angry charges," being "hostile and divisive," and "promot[ing] racial segregation." The *Globe*, along with other opponents of Mandela, persisted in calling the reincorporation proposal "secession," a term that GRIP rejected. The *Phoenix*, Boston's leading alternative weekly, joined the *Globe* in deploring Mandela." (Kennedy and Tilly, 23)

James Jennings, professor emeritus of urban and environmental policy and planning at Tufts University, recalls: "There was intense debate which I always felt was healthy because again intense debate, if it's within the framework of economic democracy and social justice, then, you know, the synthesis of that only moves society forward, in my opinion. So there was a lot of intense debate. But again, functional, because we have had that debate before. And now we can have a debate about what makes sense for us." (Jennings, interview with authors, 2016)

Review of the Mandela Coverage and Literature

There is more scholarship on the Mandela movement than one might think. These works seem to generally fall into two categories: work tied to the community and work done outside of the community. While the former was carried out by scholars who had ties to the community and, in some cases, were tangentially involved, the latter was produced by professional scholars of various disciplines with few connections to community institutions and without much input from the primary actors about whom they were writing.

Besides these two broad and rather simplistic categories of scholarship on Mandela, it's also important to consider the work on urban studies and community development in Boston more broadly and identify useful models in organizing the literature to better situate the story of Mandela. King, in his seminal book *Chain of Change*, cites three stages of political development in the Black community's quest for liberation. Although his formulation related to politics, it is possible to extend it to the larger scholarship on African Americans in Boston. As such, it may be useful as a way to roughly organize the work on African Americans in Boston beyond the simplistic binary notion of work that emanates from outside Boston's Black community versus that which is more organic or "home grown." This theoretical framework can be helpful here in not only better understanding the Mandela movement, but in attempting to categorize the various "stages" or broad "categories" of scholarly work on African Americans in Boston along these same lines.

For scholarship produced by those without ties to the community, one could best describe it in a way as being akin to what King characterized as the "service stage" of the Black liberation struggle in Boston. He writes, "The Service Stage was a time during which the community of color was dependent on the 'good will' of the white society for access to its goods, its services, its jobs, housing and schools. Black people were expected to trust that the system would work for them—eventually." (King, 1981, 6)

Following this line of thought logically, other work on Mandela could also be said to fall into the "service stage"—as well as the following two stages—the "organization stage" and, finally, the "institution building" stage. King writes, "The Organizing Stage encompasses most of the 1960's. The moment Black People began to awaken to their own potential to state, 'We are deserving,' the process of organizing ourselves began. No longer were we content to wait. We demanded our rights." (King, 1981, 27) Under this rubric might fall much of the critical knowledge building that was acquired by the Black press, which kicked open doors in the 1960s to access the print and broadcast newsrooms of Boston

and create an army of Black reporters intent on being able to “shape the story” of the Black experience in the city.

One thinks of a Sarah-Ann Shaw, first female African American television reporter in Boston, who grew up in an “organizing family.” Her mother worked alongside the selfless Melnea Cass, and Shaw's father, who was active in the Roxbury Democratic Club, took her to lectures as a child. In high school, she became involved with the NAACP Youth Movement. Increasingly involved in community activities, Shaw worked with St. Mark's Social Center and as a member of the Boston Action Group (BAG), one of Boston's most important and effective civil rights groups. In 1968, she became involved with Ray Richardson's “Say Brother” public affairs show on WGBH-TV and, in 1969, was hired by WBZ-TV as a reporter.

An initial article from the now defunct *Roxbury Community News*, edited by Mary Ann Crayton, is what actually motivated the *Globe* to write about the Mandela referenda in a more nuanced way. Jennings recalls that “the *Roxbury Community News* had two or three important pieces on what was happening on the ground, and I think that's what motivated the *Globe* to say, ‘Hey, wait a second. We have to write about this as well, other than calling people separatist.’” (Jennings, interview with authors, 2016)

The long-standing Black newspaper, the *Bay State Banner*, deserves special mention for its extensive coverage of Mandela. Melvin B. Miller, editor of the *Banner*, historically known to fall more on the conservative side of such issues, arranged for a balanced interpretation—one that could even be characterized as positive. Much of the coverage's quality stems from the devoted reporting of *Banner* scribe Brian Wright O'Connor, who kept the record on Mandela.

There were many others who provided solid and consistent coverage of the Mandela story, including Callie Crossley, Carmen Fields, and Marcus Jones, all formerly of the 10 O'Clock News, WGBH; Beth Deare and Robin Washington of “Say Brother,” WGBH; and Luix Overbea of *The Christian Science Monitor* all provided coverage.

King describes the last stage in Boston's political development as the “Institution Building” stage. He explains, “The confidence and experience gained through the organizing process prompted us to begin thinking differently about what we wanted to gain. Just as a person grows up and realizes that no one else can provide what you want as well as you can, because you really are the only person who can *know* what you want, Black people began to realize that just getting access to the existing institutions was not the best way to meet our needs.” (King, 1981, 151) In this “institution building” stage, Boston has developed what could be called an “indigenous” scholarship infrastructure, growing its own scholars in the tradition of Black and Ethnic Studies, where many scholars

(including scholars of color and/or allies) have either come out of the civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s or are members of the post-civil rights generation. Their work could most adequately be called the fruit of the “institution building” stage.

Much of the scholarship on Mandela falls into the “institution building” stage—work that was nurtured from within a community framework, utilized community sources, and reflected a concern about community roots. Studies falling under this heading were produced by entities like the Trotter Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston—by authors with ties to its College of Public and Community Service. The strongest work by far written on Mandela came out of that intellectual community through the scholarship of Jennings, Marie Kennedy, the late Mauricio Gastón, and Chris Tilly. In contrast, like much of the mainstream coverage, which was acerbically negative, the secondary literature on Mandela from outside the community largely mirrored the skepticism expressed in the mainstream media.

Authors whose larger work had a wider focus and who may have devoted a page or two to Mandela often characterize it as an idea that was more symbolic in nature and essentially as a failure. A notable exception is the doctoral dissertation “The Sociology of a City in Transition: Boston 1980–2000” by Donald A. Gillis, a sociologist who spent most of his career working for the city of Boston in the mayoral administrations of Ray Flynn. While Mandela was not his main focus, the study does offer an analysis of how race influenced Boston.

“Indigenous” scholarship that falls under both the “insider” column and aspires to that higher, nobler status of “institution building” would certainly include the work of King and Jennings. Their work, in both *The Politics of Black Empowerment: The Transformation of Black Activism in Urban America* (1992) and *From Access to Power: Black Politics in Boston* (1986), devotes a great deal of attention to Mandela, and more important to the urban conditions that gave rise to a call for incorporation. In fact, this partnership and ongoing collaboration has produced the highest order of scholarly studies on Boston’s Black community. Scholarship on Roxbury and the Black community in Boston during the critical movement years of the 1960s to the present owe a great deal to these foundational texts. The work of King and Jennings provides the penultimate examples of the “insider” work that also falls in the category of “institution building” as it applies to the scholarship on Boston’s Black liberation movement. The many works of Robert C. Hayden, longtime historian of Black Boston, must also be noted. Hayden “is a historian, author, and educator, who has contributed to African American historiography for thirty-five years. He is the author, co-author, and editor of nineteen books and special publications in the field... From 1974 to 1983, he wrote a weekly column, “Boston’s Black History,” for the Bay State Banner newspaper

in Boston.” (Historymakers.com) His steadfast column resulted in a book that is still the standard for Black history in Boston, *African Americans in Boston: More Than 350 Years*. Other texts by “allies” include James Green’s *Taking History to Heart: The Power of the Past in Building Social Movements* and the critical volume edited by Mike Davis, Steven Hiatt, Marie Kennedy, Susan Ruddick, and Michael Sprinker, *Fire in the Hearth: The Radical Politics of Place in America*.⁴

Radical America, a left-wing political magazine established in 1967 and published out of Somerville, Massachusetts, brought together the leading voices on the questions raised here regarding Boston and Roxbury for a special issue on “Race & Community Control, Media, Politics” in the fall of 1986. All combined, these essays played an important role in deconstructing how race was understood in Boston in the mid-1980s. Paul Buhle and Mari Jo Buhle, who were activists in Students for a Democratic Society, founded the magazine. An article, “The Mandela Campaign: An Overview,” by Marie Kennedy and Chris Tilly, was an abridged version of a longer article that appeared as “A City Called Mandela: Secession and the Struggle for Community Control in Boston,” published in the spring 1987 issue of *The North Star*. Another article, coming from a more independent point of view, “Africa in Boston: A Critical Analysis of Mandela, Massachusetts,” written by Monty Neill, appeared in *The New Enclosures* in 1990. A book chapter by Nancy Haggard-Gilson, published in 1995 and titled “Boston’s Mandela Referendum: Urban Nationalism and Economic Dependence,” was included in *The Changing Racial Regime*, edited by J. Matthew Holden, a publication of the National Conference of Black Political Scientists.

Much like the authors in the special volume in *Radical America*, who called for a “rethinking” of the Mandela project, we are not seeking to rehash every aspect of the story, but rather to revisit this pivotal moment in the Black community’s relationship with the city of Boston, recounting what took place, and evaluating where things stand 30 years later. Unlike much of that work, our project employs a slightly different disciplinary lens—considering these events from a historical perspective rather than an urban studies or social science one that have characterized virtually all of the work on Mandela until now. As such, this project uses oral histories as a key part of our analysis.

⁴ In terms of painting the foreground, other helpful works include: Lawrence Kennedy’s *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston since 1930* (1992); Alan Lupo’s *Liberty’s Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston* (1977); as well as Jim Vrabel’s *A People’s History of the New Boston*; and Thomas H. O’Conner’s *Building a New Boston*; Robert C. Hayden’s *African Americans in Boston: More Than 350 Years*. Boston: Boston Public Library Board of Trustees, 1992

The Context of the Mandela Idea

To fully examine the contemporary implications for Boston's community of color and what the idea of a new, separate majority-Black city would have meant to Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, the Fenway, the South End, and parts of Dorchester and Mattapan, it is important to note that Mandela was conceived by two relative beginners to organizing whose idea created a lasting rift in the Black community, with some Black elected officials supporting the referendum, while an active, organized, and well-funded campaign worked to defeat it.

Although it may be easy to dismiss Andrew Jones and Curtis Davis as outsiders, Jennings makes an important point, "I had major concerns with people who would say, 'Well, this is being pushed by outsiders.' At the same time, the same individuals did not see a contradiction between that and fighting this apartheid in South Africa because the apartheid regime was saying the same thing. Ronald Reagan, our president at the time, was saying the same thing." (Jennings, interview with authors, 2016)

One aspect that distinguishes our research from previous undertakings is that we attempted to bring in "both sides" to this debate—not only the community, but also elected officials and mayoral appointees. As such, we interviewed former mayor Ray Flynn, his former chief of staff Neil Sullivan, and George Russell, who served as the city's treasurer at the time and utilized some of the materials produced by the city—in an effort to give a more balanced interpretation of what took place 30 years ago, hopefully allowing "cooler heads to prevail" after such a divisive and turbulent moment in Boston's history.

As mentioned previously, the idea of Mandela appeared only some 12 years after the court desegregation decision that prompted Boston's busing crisis, and despite Mayor Flynn's best intentions and campaign promises, race relations were at an all-time low. Sadly, they would only sink lower after Mandela when the Charles Stuart murder case rocked Boston's neighborhoods of color and was handled poorly by the administration. At the same time, as historian Jeanne Theoharis points out, "Flynn wanted to keep race out of the election, insisting that racism was not an issue, but distributed different flyers in black and white areas." (Theoharis, 1996) The mayoral candidate famously styled himself a populist on the campaign trail. Yet as Jennings reminds us, "The problem with a populist is that they overlook race in U.S. society. And so remember, George Wallace was a populist." (Jennings, interview with authors, 2016)

In our research about Mandela, however, we discovered that Flynn and his position during this time perhaps deserve a second glance. Certainly naïve in his

optimism that race relations could be improved so quickly after a bitter and racially charged mayoral primary, Flynn himself seemed to have the best of intentions. He integrated public housing in South Boston, an action that led to a direct confrontation with his own constituency. In our interview with Flynn he reminisced about having played basketball throughout the city of Boston, and through that process having built a sense of camaraderie with some of his teammates, many of who happened to be Black. He even boasted of having once played on a semiprofessional basketball team, where his teammate was none other than a young Mel King. (Raymond Flynn interview with Tomás González, 2016) As Clavel writes, “Flynn was from an Irish family in South Boston. He was a basketball star at Providence College, and later, when he returned to Boston, he was elected to the state legislature and city council... He would reminisce about coming back from college and a tryout with the Boston Celtics, and playing ball in neighborhoods like the West End that were being decimated by urban renewal. He got to know Mel King that way. In 1971 he found himself elected to the legislature from South Boston and served there with King. Then, in 1978, he was on city council through the mayoral race in 1983.” (Clavel, 2010: 55)

Rather than the aforementioned memories, what most will remember are images of the first mayor elected from the neighborhood of South Boston riding the fire engines to emergencies around the city—many of those fires occurring in Roxbury—that were part of the larger legacy of arson that created so many of the vacant buildings that eventually became empty lots.

According to Medoff and Sklar, authors of *Streets of Hope*, “In 1981, Roxbury's Highland Park neighborhood was dubbed ‘The Arson Capital of the Nation.’” Most of the fires, the Arson Commission noted, “were directly related to increased speculation due to the Southwest Corridor Project,” the massive redevelopment project centered around the relocated mass transit Orange Line (which used to run through Dudley Station) and extending from the South End through Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. The Arson Commission stated: “Many of the buildings that were burned were among the approximately 75 abandoned buildings that local residents attempted to save for low-income housing and community-based activities. When frightened residents, ignored then by Mayor [Kevin] White, appealed” to the state for assistance, they “learned that Highland Park's fire statistics were the highest in the Commonwealth.” (Medoff and Sklar, 1994, 31)

In a documentary made about the founding of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, “Holding Ground,” Byron Rushing recalled, “More and more houses were being abandoned. And then a number of the owners of those buildings decided that one of the ways that they could get their money back, and maybe even make a quick profit, was to burn their houses down.” (Lipman and Mahan, 1996) Che Madyun, a neighborhood resident who became a primary

organizer in the Dudley Street effort, recalled: “You go to sleep at night and you hear the sirens and you go, oh gosh here we go again, another building is gonna burn down. You get up, you run to the window, you look. Sometimes you see it, sometimes you smell it.” (Lipman and Mahan, 1996) The Rev. Paul Bothwell, a resident and would-be organizer, also recollected, “I can remember kids being dragged out already dead, kids being dragged out in flames, the father in flames, running out of the house screaming and the neighborhood just stunned. And it happened again and again and again.” (Lipman and Mahan, 1996) Again Madyun offered, “Every night there was a fire. It was like this block and the next block and the block after that. And each time they'd burn a house, they'd tear it down and you had another vacant lot. So I saw the vacant lots increase. The amount of crap on the vacant lots increased and it just kept getting worse and worse and worse.” (Lipman and Mahan, 1996)

Gentrification and the Reemergence of Black Political Agency

In January 1986, Bruce Bolling Sr. was elected as the first Black president of the Boston City Council in its 170-year history. Only three years before, King had achieved the feat of being the first African-American candidate to make it into the mayoral general election, putting up very respectable numbers in the quest for power. In many ways, these two men embodied the two poles in the vast ideological political spectrum of Boston's Black community in the 1980s. King was an organizer, while Bolling represented the existing political establishment; one was from Roxbury and reflected a grassroots perspective, while the other was from the South End. While these two men representing different constituencies seemed dissimilar, in fact there was much that they shared: both were self-made men who ran for the office of mayor, and both were leaders of the Black community. There was, however, one key area in which they differed: King supported Mandela; Bolling did not.

As Kennedy and Tilly write, “State Senator Royal Bolling, Sr., patriarch of Boston's mainstream black political dynasty, supported the effort to put the question on the ballot, but opposed the content of the proposal, saying, ‘We have the swing vote to determine any election. So why give up the whole pie for just a slice?’” Although Bolling's son Bruce Sr., then City Council President, initially backed the referendum, he was slowly dragged into the opposition. (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 24)

In the wake of the election of Bolling Sr. and King's strong showing in the 1983 mayoral race, grassroots activists and community organizers in Roxbury were fighting for economic redress. Black activists were tired of living in decaying and crime-ridden neighborhoods while downtown Boston prospered. Black residents

feared the rumored gentrification, which had already claimed the South End and parts of Roxbury, both close to downtown. Beneath the commercial heart of Roxbury, there were concerns that it was going to become the next South End, which had in the earlier part of the twentieth century been the home to the majority of Black, Puerto Rican, and West Indian residents. By the early 1980s, the South End had become largely White and well off. The population shift was notable given that members of this community provided King his base of support in 1968, when he, along with a multitude of other demonstrators under the banner of the Community Assembly for a United South End (CAUSE), occupied a parking lot at 130 Dartmouth Street to protest the displacement of residents by urban renewal. This group of concerned citizens pitched tents and occupied the site for a number of days. This protest led to the Tent City housing development, a mixed-income high-rise that opened its doors on April 30 1988. (Vrabel, 2014, 123)

Tent City still stands defiantly amid multimillion-dollar buildings and the luxuriousness of Copley Square. Although King held a strong front that would alter the development to include affordable units, he could not save the entire the South End. Amid the area's increased investment and profitability, some Black families managed to hold on to their properties, but sadly many others made the decision to capitalize on rising home values and sold theirs. On the one hand, this led to increased Black wealth through the ownership of market-priced homes, but the results were nothing short of transformative. Latinos also struggled to hold on to *their* portion of the South End, which resulted in the development of the Villa Victoria apartment complex on Parcel 19—known more popularly as “La Parcela”—the continued existence of which is a testament to their ongoing struggle for community control. (Matos-Rodriguez, 2006)

In these early stages of gentrification, small, unified efforts could not prevent the inevitable. Investment in Black communities became infectious, shortly taking hold of the historic Roxbury Highlands—known locally as Fort Hill. Cruz Construction would introduce the condominium real estate model to Eliot Square, a picturesque section of the historic Highland Park section of Roxbury. It was known that the city government planned to create additional municipal space to Dudley Square, having already built a library branch and police station. Thirty years later, the city purchased the long-vacant Ferdinand furniture building, restoring it to its prior greatness, with mixed commercial and municipal office space, including a café and bistro. In various ways, the renewal of the Ferdinand building represents the culmination of Mandela. For many, this signaled the potential resurgence of Dudley Square, the economic and transportation hub of Roxbury, as well as serving as a symbol. Recent public investment included the construction of a new police substation and the revitalization of the most glaring eyesore right in the heart of Dudley Square, the Ferdinand Building, which has

been renamed the Bruce Bolling Building. Boston's newspapers routinely reported on the racial shift and disinvestment in the city's urban core, with the residential transformation of these areas marking the slow but steady demographic transformation as a new group of more affluent and younger Whites replaced longtime Black residents. At the same time, longtime White residents fled the city in droves to make the suburbs home. The South End, with its charming brownstone-style row houses and carefully landscaped tree-lined streets, offered a unique kind of urban living that was very appealing to the newly arrived young urbanites and former suburban empty-nesters.

While most of the South End's housing was constructed during the Victorian era, its history was not one of luxury. Whites began moving out of the area in the late 1800s. In the early 1900s, the neighborhood became home to the city's Black community, and in later years, Latinos and Chinese moved to the area. Just a stone's throw away from the railroad yards, which would later become Back Bay Station and Copley Square, the South End side of the tracks was constantly filled with ash and soot from the steam-powered trains, which brought passengers and cargo to and from New York and all points in between. Many of the men who worked in the railroad yards, Pullman porters, lived in the South End community, which was not only conveniently located to the yards, but also more affordable. There were always rooms for rent in the South End's brownstones. Often owned by Blacks, these homes were sometimes rented out as rooming houses. As Andrew Buni and Alan Rogers point out, "Job discrimination, for example, systematically deprived black artisans of their trades. This meant that many men were forced to seek low-paying, unskilled jobs in the rail yards and station of the South End. (Buni, Rogers, and Whelan, 1984)

While some of the longtime homeowners may have stood to gain financially from community-wide reinvestment and the development in the South End, many residents of Roxbury were more skeptical about the prospects of development. Buni writes, "In the South End, for example, long-time residents were amazed when brownstone homes that their immigrant owners could not sell for \$5,000 in 1950 were being sold for more than 10 times that amount a decade later." (Buni et al., 1984)

The mood in Roxbury in the 1980s was one of defiance, especially after having witnessed the decimation of the Black community in the South End, where Black residents were displaced by Whites, and parts of Lower Roxbury, which fell victim to the rapidly expanding campus of Northeastern University. Instead of relying on the promises of White elected officials, they turned their energy to the political process and supported Black candidates for local elections. In fits and starts, the proud Black political tradition in Boston was revived when John D. O'Bryant in 1978 became the first African American elected to the Boston School

Committee. Bruce Bolling Sr. and his family had brought a grace and dignity to Black politics that gave many a sense of pride. Byron Rushing replaced King as the state representative from the South End.

A City Called Mandela: The Actors

In the early 1980s, largely through the acumen of two men, Andrew Jones and Curtis Davis, residents of Roxbury decided they needed to do something big, if Boston's communities of color were to ever prosper. Jones and Davis decided that Boston's communities of color had to secede from the city of Boston in order to become self-reliant and maintain community control. Jones, a 34-year-old classical violinist, independent TV producer, and sometime actor, and Davis, a Harvard-trained architect, started an organization called GRIP (the Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project) and so began the tumultuous fight for Black self-sufficiency. Their proposal would have taken Roxbury and other neighborhoods and renamed the area Mandela. The proposed city would have carved out 25 percent of Boston's geographical terrain. Although the measure went down to a resounding defeat, the referendum amounted to a vote on the quality of City Hall's governance of Boston's Black community.

So who were Jones and Davis, the two major drivers behind this idea that sparked political imaginations aflame in the 1980s and then seemingly disappeared? Jones was a multitalented individual who first came to New England as a child from Richmond to attend Phillips Exeter Academy, the college prep school in New Hampshire. After graduating from Exeter in 1970, the accomplished violinist studied at the New England Conservatory of Music and later earned a master's degree in journalism from Boston University in 1982. After working as an ABC television network producer, foreign correspondent, and field producer of sorts, he became a successful documentary filmmaker. In 1995, he left Boston and settled in Johannesburg, South Africa. After a faltering marriage and troubled family life, Jones became better known in more recent times as a father's rights advocate after being labeled a "deadbeat dad." "In 2003, after voluntarily returning from South Africa to argue his case, Jones had his passport seized and was led out of the Edward Brooke Courthouse in handcuffs and taken to the South Bay House of Correction. The 52-year-old filmmaker spent 60 days in lockup while his wife and family sold assets and emptied bank accounts to come up with over \$30,000 to begin satisfying the \$100,000 child support judgment against him." (*Bay State Banner*, 2005)

Davis was trained as an architect and community development activist. He worked for a neighborhood nonprofit at the time. Davis and Jones were once neighbors, and Davis's wife attended the New England Conservatory of Music. He

worked for the Greater Roxbury Development Corporation, which was one of three community development corporations in Boston that dated back to the War on Poverty, called Title VII CDCs.

So how did its two prime movers go about the undertaking of creating Mandela? Davis explained: “We sponsored monthly breakfast meetings at the Harvard Faculty Club. As a Harvard alumn[us], I had access to the faculty club. And this is with people in the community. Why do we do that? Well, we knew that if we said, hey, come, and let’s meet at the local, you know, breakfast joint on the street, people wouldn’t take it as serious. But when we kind of hosted these little breakfast meetings at the Harvard Faculty Club, people came. And they came with a fairly serious intent; they took us more seriously. So Gloria Fox, Mel King, and many, many others, we met with, for a year one-on-one at breakfast meetings. So well before the campaign, we seeded the idea throughout the political leadership and community leadership, partly to give people the ability to either claim or disclaim us based on their own personal agendas.” (Davis, 2015)

As a *Boston Globe* article pointed out, much of Mandela would have contained institutions such as Harvard Medical School, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Northeastern University, and the John F. Kennedy Library. Add to that the number of Whites who still lived in the area that would become Mandela. The article reported, “Coincidentally or not, the targeted area encompasses the predominantly minority neighborhoods. This has led many to assume it is strictly a minority affair, but white residents also lived throughout the targeted areas of Dorchester, Mattapan, Jamaica Plain, the South End, the Fenway and Roxbury. The presence of white residents who elected to live in an integrated neighborhood is a sign that the racial climate in Boston has improved. That makes secession a Boston issue.” (Patterson, *Boston Globe*, October 12, 1986, p. 72).

The Town of Roxbury

It is said that the name "Roxbury" or "Rocksborough" was taken from the puddingstone, a type of rock common to the area. Historically, the Roxbury area extended to Dorchester on the south, Brookline to the north, Dedham to the west, and Boston on the east. In 1630, it became the sixth town to become incorporated in Massachusetts. The earliest settlement of the area, known as Eliot Square, centered around the First Church in Roxbury. The entire village of Roxbury was housed on “Roxbury Street” with scattered farms.

In 1652, Roxbury was a quiet suburban village with an estimated population of about 700 people. The number of residents increased very slowly to 1,467 in the colonial census of 1765. The Town of West Roxbury, which also included a part of Jamaica Plain, separated from Roxbury in 1861 and was annexed to Boston

in 1874. By 1868, the growth of Roxbury was noticeable in terms of structures and population, and residents voted in favor of annexation to take advantage of Boston's city services. In many ways, Roxbury was the first suburb of Boston, controlled largely by wealthy families who worked in Boston proper but wanted a country home.

For much of its early history, Roxbury was politically and geographically isolated from Boston. The first settlers were English emigrants, the Puritans who sailed with John Winthrop, first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As Bailey, Turner, and Hayden write in *Lower Roxbury A Community of Treasures in the City of Boston*, "Old Roxbury extended for eight miles from east to west and two miles north to south and included present-day West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, and part of Brookline. The 'Neck,' the long narrow strip of land connecting Roxbury to Boston, was more than a mile long and had a dam on either side to prevent overflow from the tides. In the early years of settlement the area was fortified to protect whites from attacks by Native Americans." (Bailey et al., 2) In 1846, Roxbury became a city, and remained so until Boston annexed it in 1868. The fact that Roxbury was once a separate city and encompassed many of the areas sought in the 1986 Mandela proposal makes the idea of secession less far-fetched than one might have first considered.

A salvo titled "A Roxbury Government Open Letter" appeared in the *Bay State Banner* in 1965, written by a young Byron Rushing. A newcomer to Cambridge and Boston, the New York native entered Harvard University in the fall of 1960. He wrote, "If the Negro community of Boston can be characterized by one word, that word is "powerless." We have no power. And we will never be free unless we are strong, unless we can acquire power. The weak can't help but be slaves. The primary political issue for the Negro in Roxbury (as it is for Negroes in most northern cities) is the acquisition of power. The question is "How?" (Rushing, 1965)

He continued, "Certain community leaders have recently been talking about setting up a Roxbury government. This is an excellent idea—only if they really mean it. I'm tired of symbolic actions and educational campaigns. I am ready to fight to win—for real power." (Rushing, 1965) His letter continues:

Almost a hundred years ago, the City of Roxbury decided to become a part of Boston. They did this for several reasons: to get the benefits of the water and sewage systems, to have the trolley tracks extended to Roxbury, to have gas lines put in for street lights and cooking stoves, to get their streets paved, etc. Now a hundred years later most of the functions that the city of Boston gave to Roxbury no

longer come from Boston. Our transportation is controlled by the MBTA a state chartered agency to which Boston, along with suburban cities and towns, is a member. Our water is supplied by a similar organization, the MDC. What do we receive from the City of Boston? The Police, the schools, the Welfare Department, the Sanitation Department, and DPW, the Park Dept. Who in Roxbury is satisfied with the services supplied by any of these branches of our city government? (Rushing, 1965)

What Rushing could not have realized was that 20 years later, his article would be read by two people who also yearned for true freedom and the purest exercise of democracy—Jones and Davis, the founders of GRIP. Davis invited Rushing to come speak to a discussion group of “young professional/intellectual black men.” (Bingham, 2014) Of Jones, Rushing recalled: “So, he had done some research, and one of the things he came across was an article that I had written in the *Bay State Banner* in the 1960s about whether Roxbury should be independent or not.” (Bingham, 2014)

According to Rushing:

So, we had talked about that in the 60s and it never picked up, but it never got any legs. There were a group of people thinking about it and then we couldn't get much support for it, and so this little article had just been there, but Andrew had found it. And he suggested at this meeting that we should do that except those boundaries weren't going to work and he wanted to know what I thought about coming up with boundaries, what could we look at and so that's how I got into this. And then he kept working on it, we kept looking at what political thing could we do, and he began organizing around this, he organized a group because what he was still talking about for a name was Roxbury, so he called it GRIP, Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project, because that was what we'd be doing, we'd be incorporating a political area into a city. (Rushing, 2014)

A City Called Nairobi: East Palo Alto

To those who asked how Mandela could survive on its own, proponents of Mandela pointed to the incorporation of East Palo Alto, a small community north of Palo Alto, California in the San Mateo Valley. The original organizers behind the incorporation of East Palo Alto initially wanted to rename the area Nairobi. An

interesting side note was that a young Ronald Bailey, who would later come to Boston to chair the Department of African-American Studies at Northeastern University in 1989, worked on the project. He authored, along with Diane Turner and Robert Hayden, an indispensable, independently published history, *Lower Roxbury: A Community of Treasures in the City of Boston*, with a preface by Danette Jones of the Lower Roxbury Community Corporation.

Bailey wrote, “As a graduate student at Stanford, I worked on the history and incorporation efforts of East Palo Alto, California, often called Nairobi.” (Bailey et al., 1989) While East Palo Alto was successful in creating its own city, there were several differences between that situation and the Mandela struggle. By the 1980s, when East Palo Alto achieved this feat, the area was largely African American after many families moved into the area in the 1950s.

While advocates contended that a precedent had already been set, there are several distinguishing factors that make this comparison flawed. East Palo Alto was already set apart by a river and, unlike Roxbury, had never been incorporated. Unlike Roxbury, East Palo Alto has always been a separate entity since its founding as an unincorporated community. It is also in San Mateo County, while Palo Alto is in Santa Clara County. The two cities are separated by San Francisquito Creek.

As Nancy Haggard-Gilson has argued, “The experience of East Palo Alto, however, should prove that those skeptical of Mandela's viability were correct. East Palo Alto is bankrupt. Its inability to provide services to its citizens forced the surrounding county, with aid from the state of California, to offer short-term contracts for police and emergency crews. More critically, the city continues to be economically isolated from the surrounding area. It has not been able to translate a resolve to defend minority rights into economic development in the absence of an indigenous, independent business base. As conditions have worsened, East Palo Alto has become politically divided.” (Haggard-Gilson, 1995)

The founders of Mandela could have looked closer to home for two examples of annexation towns frustrated with the poor city services they were receiving. Charlestown and Hyde Park both experienced political moments in which secession was proposed as a viable option, as documented in Jim Vrabel's *A People's History of Boston*.

According to Vrabel, “On September 24, 1962... more than 2,000 [Hyde Park residents] filled the auditorium of Hyde Park High to show how upset they were that their location would provide no protection from the threat of the proposed highway. They were treated that evening to a particularly inept presentation by a state DPW official, whose best argument for the Southwest Expressway seemed to be that it would displace fewer people than the Inner Belt. Five residents were not persuaded, and, soon after, many signed a petition to

secede from Boston. They sent it to the Massachusetts legislature fifty years to the day after Hyde Park had allowed itself to be annexed.” (Vrabel, 2014, 23)

Vrabel continues: “On April 27, 1965 more than 400 [Charlestown residents] descended on City Hall for a four-and-a-half-hour hearing described in a front-page *Boston Globe* headline as ‘the wildest session ever staged in City Hall’s council chambers.’ Not long after that, 350 residents signed a petition asking the state legislature ‘to authorize the citizens of Charlestown to form a government completely independent of the city. Charlestown didn’t secede from Boston, and urban renewal did proceed. But it did so in a way that was more carefully thought out.’” (Vrabel, 2014, 23)

Urban Renewal or Urban “Removal”

Boston’s Black population has never been particularly large. Although Boston’s total population was close to 800,000 in 1930 and the city ranked as one of the nation’s most heavily populated municipalities during this decade, Boston had fewer Black residents percentage-wise than any other urban center whose population was greater than 500,000.

Although Boston did have a relatively sizable Black population at the turn of the century, the city did not witness the rather dramatic surge in Black population, brought about by the Great Migration in other cities, during the years 1910 to 1925. Rather, Boston’s Black population increased more gradually, by 20.5 percent, during the decade of 1910 to 1920, and from 1920 to 1930, 25.8 percent. That percentage growth did not dramatically alter the absolute percentage of Black presence in the city on the eve of American involvement in World War II. In 1910, Blacks comprised 2 percent of Boston’s population. In 1920, they were 2.2 percent of the population; in 1930, 2.6 percent; and 1940, 3 percent. Thus, race relations in Boston during the first half of the twentieth century would be shaped to some degree by the relatively small size of the Black population. It was small but quite complex in its ethnic character and place of origin.

More than one-third of its Black residents were born in Massachusetts, allowing Boston to enjoy the distinction among large non-southern cities of having the highest percentage of native-born Black residents. Moreover, one-sixth of Boston’s Black population was foreign-born, emigrating principally from Jamaica, Barbados, other small British colonial possessions, and the Cape Verdean islands off the West Coast of Africa.⁵

⁵ See Johnson, Violet Showers. *The Other Black Bostonians: West Indians in Boston, 1900–1950*, Blacks in the Diaspora. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006 and Halter, Marilyn. *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape*

As a result of Boston's increasing population, the Black community slowly began to move from Beacon Hill into the expanded South End area. With the development of an affordable public transportation system, there was a migration into Roxbury and Dorchester, which had previously functioned as suburban bedroom communities.

The 1950s and 1960s brought many economic changes and spurred the rapid growth and development in terms of Black migration to Boston, although during World War I Boston's share of the Great Migration was smaller than it was in other northern cities. The historically small Black population of Boston grew in the post-World War II era, when more African Americans migrated to the city in search of jobs and better political and economic opportunities. Unlike immigrants from abroad, notably Irish Americans, racial bias prevented Blacks from securing the government jobs that employed a large percentage of the city's workforce. Of these "newcomers," many came directly from the South, while many others came to Boston after a relatively short stay in one of the other ports of entry to the north (Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, etc.).

As more African Americans and West Indians arrived in the city in search of jobs and improved political and economic opportunities, they were met with an influx of immigrants from Europe that created unique pressures and conflicts for the relatively small Black population. Racist hiring practices, however, often prevented Blacks from reaping the benefits of the financial growth of the city. In the 1970s, Black workers earned only about two-thirds of what their White counterparts did. A legacy of redlining and discriminatory lending practices prevented Blacks from moving into such outlying areas as Hyde Park and West Roxbury, where many working-class people owned their own homes. Blacks were also kept out of poorer White working-class neighborhoods, such as South Boston, Charlestown, and East Boston.⁶ As African Americans were pushed out of the historically Black neighborhoods of the South End and Lower Roxbury, ghettos began to emerge in the areas surrounding Roxbury, Mattapan, and Dorchester. The schools and housing in these neighborhoods were inadequate and lacked basic resources.

At the same time, Boston underwent many structural changes in the name of urban renewal as entire neighborhoods were demolished to make way for the city's expansion. As Lew Finfer, a longtime Boston-community organizer, states, "In

Verdean American Immigrants, 1860-1965, Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

⁶ For a more detailed analysis of the effects of these changes, consult Yona Ginsberg's *Jews in a Changing Neighborhood: The Study of Mattapan* (1975). This created an environment of hostile racial encampment and segregated ethnic neighborhoods.

1958 the West End Urban Renewal program began, in which the West End neighborhood was torn down to build Charles River Park luxury apartments. West Enders were promised the right of return, but few could afford the market-rate apartments they were offered. Jerome Rappaport, a former aide to Mayor Hynes, was picked as developer of the Charles River Park Apartments. Rappaport served as a major power broker for his interests and real estate interests in Boston over the next 50 years.” (Finfer, 2016)

According to Finfer, there were several key events that defined the struggle and in many ways paved the way for the Mandela initiative to come, including a citywide and metropolitan campaign to stop the proposed 10-lane Inner Belt/ I-95 extension that was to go from Route 128/Dedham, through Boston and Cambridge, and connect to I-93 in Somerville (also included was extending I-95 through Lynn). He stated, “A famous sign was painted on the railroad crossing in Jamaica Plain: ‘Stop I-95—People Before Highways’ to symbolize the organizing campaign.” As Finfer recalls, “In 1970, Governor Sargent announced a moratorium on construction of this highway. Funds were later shifted to instead build the new MBTA Orange Line and the Southwest Corridor parks. It is for that reason that a memorial with the history of this organizing, recognizing the many neighborhood leaders who worked on this, is located right outside of the Roxbury Crossing MBTA station.” (Finfer, 2016)

Nationally, 1968 proved to be a most tumultuous year, and Boston would see its fair share of violence. In a response to the riots that followed Martin Luther King’s death, Mayor White and the Boston business community initiated three programs that, while perhaps well intended, exacerbated the major problems confronting rioting communities like Grove Hall. (Finfer, 2016)

The riots of 1968, which seemed to be sparked by the King assassination, were in fact a reaction to decades of injustice and inequality. Despite Boston’s exclusion from those cities most well known for urban rebellions, only a year earlier, the city was the site of the so-called welfare riot of 1967, during which local businesses were destroyed and scores of people were injured. What began as a peaceful demonstration turned tragic when Boston police officers broke up the assembled crowd. Their action led to an angry mob gathering in support of the protesters.

On April 6, 1968, nearly 5,000 people attended a rally organized by the Black United Front, which was created out of the riots and headed by King, Turner, and Byron Rushing, at White Stadium in Franklin Park, at which a list of demands was presented that included: “(the transfer of the ownership of ... [White-owned] businesses to the black community, ... every school in the black community shall have all-black staff, ... [and] control of all public, private, and

municipal agencies that affect the lives of the people in this community." (Vrabel, 2004, 335)

In the wake of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Fair Housing Act of 1968 outlawed discrimination in the housing market and suddenly made it possible for many Black families to purchase homes in any neighborhood. Finfer stated, "This led to the formation of the Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group (BBURG), which existed between 1968 and 1972. In this well-intended but ultimately failed initiative, banks promised to make home ownership loans to African American families. However, in this program Black families could buy homes only in existing Black neighborhoods and the then predominantly White and predominantly Jewish sections of Mattapan and western Dorchester. This 'reverse redlining' led to blockbusting by realtors and racial conflict as neighborhoods turned from 90% White to 90% Black in only four years." Authors Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, in their 1992 book *The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions*, wrote: "The Boston Banks Urban Renewal Group program was to housing what court-ordered desegregation was to education: while creating the impression of fairness, in reality it created more problems than it solved." (Levine and Harmon, 1992)

The White working-class victims of the city's transformation responded by electing leaders who would defend the neighborhoods at all costs, including the right to retain their own neighborhood schools. In the face of municipal power and the federal court, anti-busing extremists resorted to violence to protest against school desegregation that led to violence in the streets and nearly daily fights in the hallways and classrooms of Boston's public schools. Competition around jobs was a main source of tension in the city, where the contestation over de facto residential segregation and urban renewal had more far-reaching consequences. Although increased opportunity led to some occupational and economic gains for Blacks, compared to Whites', those figures remained low. Unlike other cities that had sustained periods of Black migration, Boston's Black community continued to have difficulty in achieving political parity with the long-established White ethnic population because of its relatively small numbers. In spite of the victory of Thomas Atkins for city councilor in 1967, African Americans were unable to win many seats in local and state government. Without a political voice, municipal jobs, which were often reserved for the relatives of White elected officials, continued to remain elusive to African Americans. This situation would improve somewhat in the 1970s and 1980s, when King ran his mayoral races of 1979 and 1983.

A Rainbow Coalition

The major issue coming out of the 1960s for Black Bostonians was “community control” and self-determination. By the 1980s, that translated into land control and a say in the development of their own neighborhoods. One could argue that land control was perhaps just as pertinent for the 1980s as school desegregation was for the 1970s. The quest for control would manifest itself in many ways in Boston’s political scene. Yet the failure to establish Mandela showed a reluctance of a cross section of Boston residents to accept this unorthodox approach to Black empowerment. Corporate leaders clearly did not see Mandela to be in their best interests, and a number of White residents and some Black leaders opposed the proposition.” (*Boston Globe Magazine*, April 12, 1987, 19)

By 1985, the number of Blacks and Latinos elected mayor in American cities had grown dramatically, from zero in 1960 to twenty-seven Black and three Latinos. They were mayors of cities with populations of over 50,000. (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, 2003, 5) The lack of Black elected officials in Boston was a major problem with no easy answers. In 1953, 1961, 1963, and 1965, King, a social worker and community activist, ran unsuccessfully for a seat on the Boston School Committee. As with many other candidates, there was just not a strong enough base to mount a successful campaign.

For Blacks to win elections in Boston, as in most major American cities, it was essential to form political coalitions that often included large groups of minorities and progressive Whites. By the 1960s, Blacks and Latinos had gained access to city jobs, expanding their influence and improving city programs. The civil rights movement and local mobilization efforts became critical tests not only of minorities’ ability to sustain a high level of political activity but also of the promise of the democratic participation of all citizens.

A multiracial coalition and trailblazing experiment in minority politics was realized in 1983 when King, who had been elected to the state’s legislature in 1973, mounted a serious bid in the Boston mayoral campaign against City Councilor Raymond Flynn and five other White candidates. King was first elected as a state representative from the South End and served in the Legislature until 1982. King mobilized a “rainbow coalition” through a voter registration campaign aimed at Blacks and Latinos. With endorsements from national Black leadership at the time, such as Chicago mayor Harold Washington and Democratic presidential contender Jesse Jackson, King’s registration drive swelled the rolls by 25 percent in the months before the election. (Erie, 1988, 187) Although he ultimately lost to Flynn in the final election, King amassed a coalition that was an exercise in the effectiveness of minorities banding together—and attracting White allies—to further their political agenda.

This feat becomes more impressive as one imagines the historic record of racial divisiveness in Boston, including the violent episodes during the school desegregation crisis that fractured the city. Mandela was in some ways an outgrowth of the 1983 campaign. Jennings makes an interesting point in terms of the presumed connection between King's political campaign and the Mandela campaign. "The way I would explain that piece of politics, it was part of a changing mindset in Boston. It was part of a mindset that said, 'You know, we have a right—people who have not been at the table downtown—we have a right to think about what this city should be like and how it should be organized' and so...in one sense, Mel King and the Rainbow Coalition and that whole mindset is a frontal assault on continuing racial and economic injustice in the city of Boston. It's a frontal political assault. Mandela is sort of a different front. It's not a frontal assault in a sense. But it says, 'Look, I—we think we can do better than you.' And so we're going to push an idea that also reflects, just like Mel King and the Rainbow Coalition reflect, an idea that, you know, a city can be a just city. A city is not beautiful if it's not a just city." (Jennings, interview with authors, 2016)

King was a dedicated enemy of racial segregation in schools and housing. As a result of redistricting in 1971, Blacks improved their chances of gaining more than just one seat for Roxbury in the Legislature. Redistricting brought four Blacks into the State House the next election year: Doris Bunte (the first African American woman to serve in the Legislature), Bill Owens, Royal Bolling Jr., and King. This cluster formed the Massachusetts Black Caucus, a new institution that played a key role in municipal and state politics. (Browning et al., 2003, 115)

As a long outspoken and visible leader of the Black community, King set the framework for a Rainbow Coalition long before he ran for mayor. By being outspoken on a number of issues concerning Blacks and other groups, he was able to draw widespread support from the women's, anti-racist, and gay rights movements of Boston. According to William Nelson, author of *Black Atlantic Politics: Dilemmas of Political Empowerment in Boston and Liverpool*, "Mel King was able to mobilize an unprecedented number of progressives to volunteer and work for his campaign. These individuals were attracted to King's persona, his integrity, his track record as a committed, community activist, and his vision of a new Boston sensitive to the needs of the poor. The message he delivered was so captivating that much of his platform was adopted by his opponents." (Nelson, 2000, 123)

It actually seemed like King was at the forefront of a multi-issue, multi-group movement, as his Rainbow Coalition was a true multiracial alliance of Latinos, Asians, Blacks, feminists, and gay rights activists. He was the first African American to qualify for a final mayoral election in Boston. (Browning et al., 2003, 118)

Despite its success in propelling King to second in the primary and into the final, the Rainbow Coalition did not succeed in electing him as mayor. A reason for this, as one observer notes, is that after the primary election, a change in strategy to make more of an attempt to reach out to White voters may have alienated many Black and other minority voters. This decision corresponded to an effort to blur the lines of the rainbow—to make it seem less like a Black empowerment and anti-racist movement and more like a broad humanistic appeal that included White neighborhoods. In the final tally, 128,578 voters supported Flynn; King received 69,015 votes. At 69.5 percent, turnout for the election was the highest for a mayoral election in Boston since 1949. (Vrabel, 2014, 358) Despite his loss, King took 35 percent of votes in the final election. His campaign formed a veritable multiracial grassroots movement that would have implications for Boston's future.

More significantly, King's campaign forced the mayor-elect to take positions on a number of issues of concern to Blacks and other minorities. Flynn had won less than 5 percent of the vote in Roxbury and had very little support among people in communities of color. As mayor, Flynn spoke about being deeply committed to improving the city and becoming more effective in the development of Boston's neighborhoods. He had been one of the most vocal politicians in opposition to school desegregation during Boston's busing crisis, but not one who incited violence. This has been well documented. Again, Jeanne Theoharis is helpful here: "While the newspapers tended to portray their politics as interchangeable, Flynn and King stood for two different sides of Boston. Flynn, a white state representative and city councilman, had originally been opposed to court-order busing and school desegregation but now embraced a vision of a united city. King, a black community activist and former state representative, had been active in the school desegregation campaign as well as other community initiatives against the BRA and other development." (Theoharis, 1996)

Perhaps it came as a surprise to some observers when King, after building such a multiracial coalition, endorsed "Mandela," which most people considered to be a nationalist-separatist project. Was there a contradiction between the Rainbow Coalition and Mandela? As Kennedy and Tilly write, "King was singled out for particularly vicious criticism in articles that predicted support for Mandela would end his political career. Even after the defeat of the referendum, Flynn and the *Globe* blasted politicians who supported Mandela as well as, in the *Globe's* words, 'politicians who counseled "maybe" on this important issue.' (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 24) At the time of Mandela, Jennings was quoted as saying, "The white powerholders of Boston are doing their best to control black leadership in the city—to suppress insurgent black leaders, and to facilitate the emergence of 'cooperative' black leaders." (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 24)

In his campaign for mayor, Flynn made a populist appeal to many lower-income White voters in which he promised a move away from downtown development and toward community and neighborhood development. His coalition consisted principally of White working-class people hurt by the policies of the administration of former mayor Kevin White. Flynn was also able to add an economist's approach that emphasized growth and an economic share of the pie for lower-class Whites as well as minorities.

As Peter Dreier notes, "The Flynn administration had been given a mandate by the voter to 'share the prosperity' of Boston's downtown economic boom." He goes on to say, "What the Flynn administration inherited was a city of contrasts. By 1984, Boston's economy was well along to shifting from a manufacturing base to a service-based economy, spurring the development of downtown buildings, university and medical research centers, and high-technology industries. This economic boom created new problems and compounded some old ones. Neighborhoods near downtown or close to universities and hospitals were becoming gentrified, pricing working-class and moderate-income residents out of the market... lower-income neighborhoods faced redlining and disinvestment; the minority unemployment rate was twice that of the city at large; and many of the jobs held by Boston residents were in the low-paying portion of the new service-oriented economy." (Krumholz and Clavel, 1994)

Dreier notes, "The inconsistency between Boston's thriving economy and the socioeconomic conditions of the city's working class provided the Flynn administration with a mandate for a redistributionist policy agenda. The pattern of development described previously had created economic prosperity for some and had made life difficult for many others, especially in the areas of jobs and housing." (Krumholz and Clavel, 1994) To his credit, Flynn appeared to want to truly live up to his populist rhetoric of the campaign. Flynn became known as "mayor of the neighborhoods." King's loss, however, brought to the fore the issues of community control and self-determination in Roxbury. At the end of the day, the idea of Mandela became a threat. As Gloria Fox, a state representative from Roxbury since 1986, recalls, "We set up hearings, not only in the community, but here at the State House as well. It got very, very, very, very controversial. A number of times it got very, very heated, with people wanting to come to blows—you know, around us wanting our independence, wanting to secede from the city of Boston. Thinking and talking about having our own police force, having our own fire department, having our own money, having our own tax rates, having our own businesses, and reaping the profits of those businesses only for Roxbury became very, very dangerous to the other community. And when I say the other community I do mean the White community and those people—those Black people that supported that—that group of people. It became very, very dangerous, and so

people got even more serious in trying to block how we were getting attention.” (Interview with Jeremy Bingham, 2014)

King, interviewed about Mandela in 1990, remarked, “I think again that this is a struggle for the land and a struggle for the money. And I think that the issue around Mandela is principally a struggle for the money. And if people believe in themselves and in the fact that they have the capacity to fashion out a community that will provide for its residents and its people in ways that are vastly superior to what is being offered to them now, then they should go for it.” (Turner, 1990)

“Yes We Stay, No We Go”

According to a *Boston Globe* article, “The failure to establish Mandela showed a reluctance of a cross section of Boston residents to accept this unorthodox approach to Black empowerment. Corporate leaders clearly did not see Mandela to be in their best interests, and a number of White residents and some Black leaders opposed the proposition.” (*Boston Globe Magazine*, April 12, 1987, 19) State representatives Byron Rushing and Royal Bolling Jr. were Mandela supporters, as was Chuck Turner, a community activist, later a Boston city councilor representing Roxbury, and cofounder of the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority. State Senator Royal Bolling Sr. came out in opposition to Mandela. Joyce Ferriabough-Bolling, longtime political consultant and wife of the late Bruce Bolling Sr., ran the opposition campaign. According to a *Bay State Banner* article, after hearing Jones grumbling about Flynn's "plantation politics," Ferriabough-Bolling confronted him. "How do you want your ass kicking?" she asked. "Over easy or well done?" (*Bay State Banner*, November 11, 2010)

That same article notes that Jones acknowledged that the Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project should have been hatched at kitchen tables in Roxbury rather than over linen tablecloths at the Harvard Faculty Club. Ferriabough-Bolling respected Jones's passion but questioned his judgment. Davis asserts that Mandela was never about “secession,” but rather “incorporation.” Mandela “wasn’t a secessionist movement, it was an incorporation. And we never—that was what we could never kind of overcome, because we also at the same time leaned on the Black Nationalist rhetoric. It was very easy for the media to take that rhetoric and [call us] secessionists. So we just lived with that. But that was not what was the intellectual or the tactical framework that we were working from. So tactically, incorporation, we felt, was a move that had a very, very powerful impact because it affected so much of the legal and economic structure of the city that we knew if we made a credible move to that, we were going to get reaction, all kinds of reactions. And we did. Some good, some bad, some predictable, some unpredictable.” (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky, 2015)

Kennedy and Tilly agree on the strategy of Black Nationalist rhetoric, writing: “GRIP appealed for votes based on several rationales: reversing the decades of racist neglect experienced by Roxbury, controlling the impending flood of investment, and simply gaining accountable government. Although the reincorporation strategy clearly draws on black nationalism, GRIP often adopted moderate and even ‘all-American’ rhetoric: GRIP's main position paper begins, ‘Independence. It is as much a part of the Massachusetts spirit as it is the American one, if not more so.’ GRIP's literature emphasized, “Our community is integrated and our city will be, too.” (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 23)

Some even went as far as to accuse Jones and Davis of making money off the Mandela initiative, but Davis said that was not the case:

We weren't accepting money from outside sources. We [could have] had lots of money from wealthy people all around the country. LA, Chicago, Houston. We could've gotten millions of dollars to support the campaign, but we chose not to do that because it would undermine the overall thesis. That is, the community ought to be able to support itself. And so it wasn't about winning, per se. The win was a much more strategic vision of community-felt empowerment. So the fatalistic argument, which said, “hey, is this making a move to shake up the city?” was a very thin analysis. It was a lot deeper than that. We weren't interested in making Flynn's days difficult. That was not what that was about. (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky, 2015)

While Davis brought a theoretical approach, Jones should be credited with the imaginative way of getting Mandela on the ballot. Of Jones and Davis, Rushing said:

And they decide that one of the organizing tools to use is to get a vote on this issue, but the only way they can do that is to have a vote in state representative districts. So, in Massachusetts we allow nonbinding questions to be put on the ballot in state representative districts because the questions are to get the state representative to know what its constituents are thinking. So, you can put a question, you have to do this by petition, it's not many names, and then on the ballot in the next state election you could have a question like, we believe our state representatives should vote for incorporation. So, you could put that question on and that's the tool that they use. And so we have in a state election during that time in

about six or seven state representative districts, there are several that they put this question. And that state representative district might be, the geography of that state representative district might wholly be included in the area they planned to have become the city or it might just be partially included. Because they did their whole organizing around geography around precincts and so they looked for all the precincts that had majority Black people in them and put them together. And, of course, get[ting] back to what I said about how segregated the city was, it was no big problem. So you put them all together and you have, except for one exception, it was a continuous area... That was this public housing project that had been built on a peninsula that stuck out into the ocean called Columbia Point, and that precinct of course was predominantly Black, and now it's separated from the mass of Black people in this city. (Interview with Jeremy Bingham, 2014)

Jones was also particularly effective in keeping Mandela in the media thanks to his experience as a journalist. Once a writer for the *Boston Globe* and a public relations maven, Jones knew how to fan the flames. From the State House steps, joined by King, he held one of many news conferences on October 13, 1986, leading up to the vote in November, in which he read aloud a letter written to Michael Dukakis, urging the Massachusetts governor to appoint a special panel "to carefully and objectively examine the structural feasibility of municipal incorporation for our community." The letter stated, "The legacy of discrimination has left deep scars among the youth of our community. Their rage is causing them to self-destruct before our eyes and something must be done . . . This process must be halted and the seeds of a new legacy must be sown." (*Boston Globe*, October 14, 1986) The governor was unavailable for comment, but issued a statement that read in part: "While there are obviously legitimate concerns within the community, the only way to address those concerns and to solve the problems that come about is to continue to work together. Secession does not accomplish that." (*Boston Globe*, Oct. 14, 1986)

In what would become a predictable volley between Flynn and Mandela advocates, Flynn released a similar statement: "We welcome the comments by the governor's office which stress that secession is not an answer but is in fact a step backwards. The answer that is clearly in the best interest of the state and the city is one in which every community works with all the people." (Vennoch, 1986)

“One Boston”

The opposition to Mandela was strong and varied, with activists, business owners, and community representatives standing in opposition to the creation of a separate city. The One Boston Campaign was formed specifically to lobby against the secession question. Led primarily by Black clergy loyal to Flynn, One Boston members included Rev. Charles Stith and Rev. Bruce Wall, among others. As Kennedy and Tilly write, “The One Boston Campaign, the organized group opposing Mandela, surfaced just about three weeks before the election, and was described by the *Globe* as ‘made up largely of minority clergymen and business and political leaders.’ Its two most visible spokespeople were Bruce Wall and Charles Stith, two relatively young black ministers. Both had challenged Flynn on racial issues in the past, and ironically Wall had even joined the call for a Roxbury plebiscite on separation in 1985. Wall pronounced that ‘A number of us have planted the seeds of opportunity over the last seven years or so, and we intend to stay here,’ but also acknowledged that he had in the past used the separation proposal as a source of leverage over Flynn. GRIP had botched the opportunities for such leverage, he argued, by taking itself too seriously.” (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 23) In the pages of *The Boston Globe*, however, Wall opined, “This fans racism on all sides and is very self-defeating... We've been trying to work for racial harmony and sow the seeds of opportunity for people of color in Boston, not go back to ground zero.” (Butterfield, *New York Times*, 1986)

Stith helped prepare an internal memo to Flynn that outlined the mayor’s strategy against Mandela. That opposition raised multiple issues, and information was disseminated mainly through the media outlets, raising the fears of residents—especially the fear that taxes would go up and the new city would not be solvent. As Kennedy and Tilly write, “City officials were not to be outdone in the rush to denounce reincorporation for Roxbury. Rev. Bruce Wall, a critic of Mandela, told a Phoenix reporter that he had never seen Mayor Flynn so angry over an issue. A typical comment from Flynn was, ‘We should not slam the door on the future to make up for the problems of the past.’ Flynn’s administration released a report that projected Mandela would run an annual deficit of over \$135 million. In the month before the election, city workers were instructed to assume any inquiries about Roxbury (e.g., about assessments and land disposition) were coming from Mandela supporters and they were to withhold information until after the election. Flynn’s political organization was mobilized to stop Mandela at the polls; city workers were seen at many polling places during working hours.” (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 23)

As State Representative Gloria Fox recalls:

The people that worked for the mayor, there was a lot of people from our community that worked for the mayor... anyone in the community that [was] even thinking of Roxbury incorporation or Mandela. And that was—it got very nasty and it—it polarized our community and it's not been repaired since then. It still has an impact. We still remember who those people are, because they later went on to work for another man, so on so forth. So it has had a negative impact historically that still remains 30 years later. One Boston didn't mean one Boston at all; we refused to use the term. It was so negative to those of us that were political in the African American community that we shot it down; we shot the term down as ONE Boston. (Fox, 2014)

A joint statement issued by Flynn, Stith, and Boston City Council President Bruce Bolling Sr. titled, “Boston Reaffirms Unity Through Rejection Of Question 9,” was issued on election night in 1986. It read:

The people of Boston have voted a resounding "no!" to secession; They have rejected the divisiveness of the past and have embraced Unity. The secession proposal was counterproductive and polarizing in its attempt to divide Boston. The people said no! As of tonight, secession and division are issues of the past. As of tomorrow, we continue our joint efforts to build strong families and strong neighborhoods in Boston. We will continue to work to extend hope and opportunity to every resident in every neighborhood. This has been our agenda historically, as it is tonight and for the future. (Flynn, 1986)

The argument was made that Roxbury developers and construction projects would also lose out on the linkage plans being offered at that time by Flynn. A typically one-sided article in the *Boston Globe* warned, “Those with the most to lose, the developers and construction people, stridently oppose secession. For them, secession would destroy the linkage plans proposed by Mayor Flynn's administration. Without being part of Boston, Roxbury developers would lose their 30 percent stake in a \$400-million project that links the construction of a downtown office building with a Roxbury commercial development.” (*Boston Globe*, 1986) This was precisely the kind of gentrification that worried the planners of Mandela. Linkage was seen by some to not necessarily be the best thing for Roxbury. It demonstrates precisely how differently Blacks and Whites in Boston, on more than one occasion, had a way of seeing any one issue much

differently. The article continues, "Roxbury only recently has begun to attract outside capital, where before the only outside capital it attracted was in the form of government subsidies. Secession would put it even farther behind," said John Cruz, head of Cruz Construction, one of the city's most successful minority construction companies.

As Kennedy and Tilly write, "Black business owners interviewed by the *Globe* complained that reincorporation had little to offer them. Richard Taylor, president of the Minority Developers' Association, stated, 'I don't really believe much of the basis of the Mandela proposal is grounded in trying to solve business problems. I think its root is based in trying to gain political self-determination.... There has been no discussion on how it will affect the overall business climate.' Some businessmen stood to lose directly—for example, the minority developers who have a piece of Flynn's \$400 million deal. John Cruz, a minority contractor who is part of that deal, observed, "Roxbury only recently has begun to attract outside capital Secession would put it even farther behind." (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 24)

Royal Bolling Sr., another opponent of the movement, cited as real examples of progress his own election to the state Senate earlier in the year and the appointment of a Black superintendent to oversee the Boston Public Schools the year before, Laval S. Wilson. Bolling Sr. stated: "The irony of Mandela is that we are finally beginning to make progress towards empowerment within the mainstream." (Butterfield, *New York Times*, 1986)

According to Kennedy and Tilly, then Black state senate candidate Bill Owens told a *Globe* columnist that while he "philosophically" supported the reincorporation and would vote for it, "I'm not encouraging people to vote for it because I don't have all the information." (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 24)

Thomas Finneran, a state representative from Mattapan at that time and future speaker of the Massachusetts House, whose constituents were 75 percent Black due to re-districting, pointed out that there was certainly a backlash to the idea in his neighborhood, stating: "There is no question the backlash is there, there are extremists in the white community just as there are in the black community." He continued, "there are white people saying, 'You've been a drain on us for years—we'd be glad to get rid of the obligation.' " Mr. Finneran added, "They say, 'You're the only ones using the schools anyway, so you can have them,' " referring to the fact that 73 percent of Boston's public school students were members of minority groups. (*New York Times*, 1986)

Nelson, author of *Black Atlantic Politics*, concluded, "With opposition across the city building like a brush fire, the Mandela proposal had little chance of victory at the ballot box..." In explaining the problems underlying the secession movement, he noted, "The campaign for Mandela never really got off the ground

in the Black community because Jones and Davis were political neophytes with no experience in community organizing. This problem was compounded by the fact that they had no constituency and were not connected to any existing community-based organization capable of creating a constituency for them.” (Nelson, 2000, 19) While Davis and Jones may not have had the acumen, residents had a need to feel like they had a stake in community control—to rid their community of drugs, to save their young people from the crack cocaine epidemic taking hold. An interview conducted with a Mandela supporter was telling in this regard:

If we had our own community, we wouldn't have drugs coming in here. We could stop that cold. I wouldn't have kids telling me what caliber rifle bullet they want. What the hell do they know about rifles? The mayor conned them; they get these house Negroes right out front. The area [Mandela] wasn't all Black. They said we were too poor to control our community. You had Harvard Medical School. You had the University of Massachusetts. You had Northeastern University and the New England School of Fine Arts. All kind of things. Anytime you don't have to put in sidewalks, storm drains, electrical wiring, build schools, you are pretty rich aren't you. This is the "Common Wealth" and it is one of the oldest and richest parts of the country. It's a constant re-education of who and what we are. There is a lot of leadership here to do what needs to be done to give us community control. (Nelson, 2000, 130)

There were many nuances to the Mandela debate that often get lost. The interviewee mentions four tax-exempt institutions—he may have meant the New England Conservatory of Music or Massachusetts College of Art and Design, instead of the “New England School of Fine Arts”—that bring up several important questions. What would have been the value of the residential and commercial tax bases of Mandela? What would have been the number and size of businesses there or the number of jobs?

A *Los Angeles Times* article, "Separatist City of Mandela: Boston Voting on Proposal to Let Black Areas Secede," stated:

A study commissioned by Mayor Flynn and released in early October showed that Mandela would face a \$135-million deficit in its first year. The study said also that Mandela would have to raise residential property taxes

by 61% and commercial and industrial property taxes by 44% to compensate for its reduced tax base. But Mandela supporters dismiss the study's figures as deliberately misleading. (*Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1986)

Another *Los Angeles Times* article, from September 7, 1986, "Irate Blacks Pushing for Secession in Boston," reported: "The secessionists argue that Mandela, despite having the city's highest crime rates and lowest incomes, would nonetheless have good prospects because of a solid tax base and its potential for business expansion. The *Boston Globe* quoted city fiscal officers as saying that a breakaway Roxbury, even with state aid, would face a \$100-million budget deficit." (*Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1986)

The city's estimate of Mandela's fiscal prospects is contained in the following memo to Raymond Dooley, the administrative services director in charge of the budget and Flynn's former campaign manager:

MEMO

TO: Ray Dooley
FROM: John Riordan
DATE: August 8, 1986
RE: Greater Roxbury info

MANDELA POPULATION: 137,978

MANDELA AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL CITY: 22%

MANDELA ASSESSMENT (Wards 8,9,11,12,13,14,17): \$25,092,424

MANDELA AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL CITY ASSESSMENT: 6.9% (5.6% if Ward 13 is excluded)

TOTAL CITY BUDGET: \$1.1 Billion

MANDELA'S CONTRIBUTION TO CITY BUDGET: \$25 million or 2.3%

NUMBER OF STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: 57,634

NUMBER AND PERCENT MINORITY STUDENTS: 41,737 or 72%

PERCENT OF BOSTON CITY HOSPITAL USERS WHO ARE MINORITY: 75%

PERCENT OF TOTAL CITY BUDGET DEVOTED TO SCHOOLS AND BCH: 51.3% (FY 86)
40% (FY 87)

PROJECTED BUDGET OF MANDELA CITY \$288 million

PROJECTED MANDELA REVENUE
\$25.1 million (Property Tax)
\$ 1.9 million (Auto Excise)
\$18.0 million (Dept Revenue)
\$ 3.7 million (Fed Aid)
\$88.8 million (State Aid)

\$137.5 million

PROJECTED MENDALA BUDGET SHORTFALL \$150.5 million or 52%

Davis responded to this criticism by pointing out:

There are two issues that we had that were extremely powerful elements for the economic side of incorporation. One was city-owned property. If one were to go through an incorporation process, all of the municipal assets, not just assets in Roxbury, but all of the municipal assets for this to be in Boston would have to be reviewed because of the nature of the bond rating.

That was an issue that was not discussed. It didn't—the city was terrified that that would be put forward because of the potential impact on the city bond rating. So from a municipal finance point of view, it was way in position to just look at tax revenues in and out of our expenses. But if there was an effort—we forced the city to be explicit about how much money they were spending in Roxbury districts on municipal services. But then people were always pissing and moaning about, oh, the city doesn't spend enough money in our community. Well, we said, well, I think they might spend a lot. But let's press them to do that. And so by putting out our report on the fiscal health of the community, it forced the city to be explicit about that. And that raised some questions. (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky, 2015)

Some of the briefing notes prepared for Flynn by his handlers also allow us to better understand the level of opposition to Mandela. These were the major talking points of the “One Boston” campaign. It could just as easily be called Flynn's “I am a Bostonian” speech:

I am unalterably opposed to popularizing the Roxbury secession concept in any way, as I would oppose considering the separation of any neighborhood from the City. This means that I am against considering neighborhood secession as a ballot question in any form or as legislation of any sort. The proposition is the exact opposite of the program I am pursuing as mayor. It is divisive. It pits neighborhood against neighborhood, race against race, and city resident against city resident. As a political leader I offer one theme more often than any other. As Boston residents, there is more power to be realized by confronting the economic challenges we share than by dwelling on the fears and misunderstandings which divide us. The secession question is divisive and wrong headed. As mayor, I am striving to unite Boston residents in a common struggle against poverty, in a common crusade for better neighborhood services and development. I am striving to ensure that the benefits of downtown economic growth are shared equitably with all the neighborhoods of Boston. It is absurd to even suggest that any Boston neighborhood would fare better economically as a separate city. Tax classification has created a real return for Boston neighborhoods in terms of lower property

taxes and improving services. Linkage and Boston Jobs agreements offer new hope for those who have been traditionally left behind during periods of economic growth. It is folly to even consider surrendering these gains after years of shared struggle. I am a Bostonian. That word—Bostonian—feels a bit new to me. It is not a word many of us are accustomed to saying. Perhaps that should change. I am proud of my neighborhood, but I also am very proud of my city. I am proud of both our diversity and our unity. I will surrender neither. I am a Bostonian. (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky and Tomás González, 1986)

Internal memos commissioned by the Flynn administration revealed : “Over 35% of the \$799 *million* capital plan is earmarked for Mandela: This includes \$6.9 million in new police stations, \$191 million to improve health care facilities (including a new BCH in-patient facility), \$17 million to upgrade school facilities, and \$15 million to improve parks.” (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky and Tomás González, 1986) To combat the supporters of Mandela, Flynn commissioned a study of why secession would not work. The following figures illustrate his position:

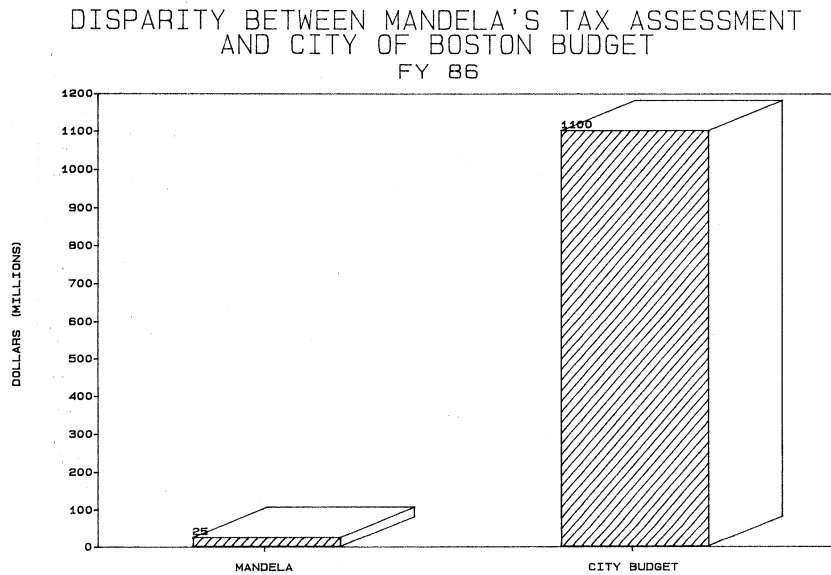


Figure 1

Source: City of Boston Archives

COMPARISON OF WHOLE CITY VS. MANDELA
AMOUNT OF TAX BILL
FISCAL YEAR 1986

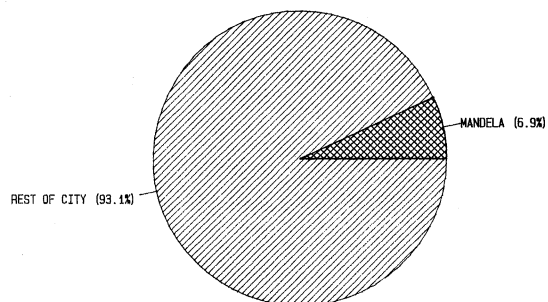


Figure 2

Source: City of Boston Archives

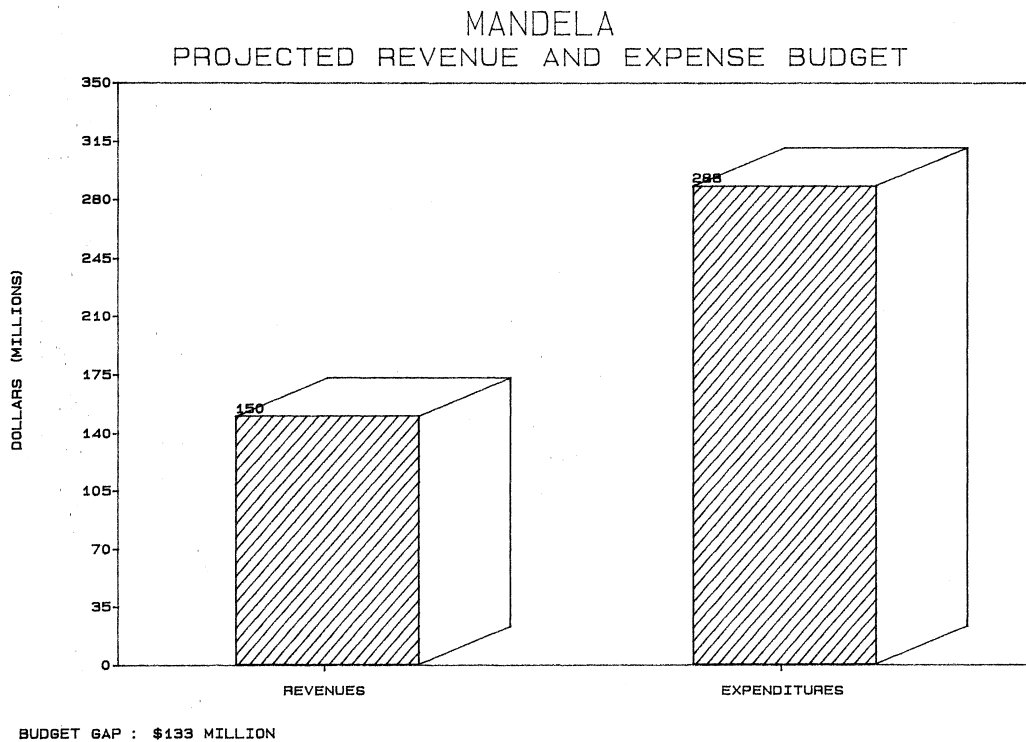


Figure 3

Source: City of Boston Archives

Along with Jones and Davis, Turner was a primary driver during the second attempt to pass Mandela. Turner declared in a televised interview: “If we vote yes, this will be a mandate for the mayor to open the books of the city. The BRA [Boston Redevelopment Authority] says that there are 2,500 parcels of cleared land in District Seven alone, in Bruce Bolling’s [city council] district alone. That’s 15 million square feet of land; you know what 15 million square feet of cleared land is? That’s 300 football fields.” (WGBH, 1988)

In an interview, Turner recalled the following: “Economic implications were, you know, were also a strong driving force in terms of creating a new city, with job opportunities to the taking over of services that have been provided by the City of Boston. At that time, one of the things that [was] a major driving force throughout the city was the gentrification of that particular period and the fact that the Roxbury-Dorchester area had the most, you know, land in the city. I think the figure we used was ten football fields of available land for development.” (Turner, 2016)

When discussing this second campaign, many observers mention that the second effort came closer than the first, but that point is misleading if you are not looking at the overall ballots for each contest. There are several reasons for the

large drop-off in interest, not the least of which was the formation of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative.

Figure 4
Overall Vote for the Mandela Referendum in 1986 and 1988

	1986	(141 precincts)	1988	(97 precincts)
Yes	12,110	(20%)	11,643	(22%)
No	35,273	(57%)	21,262	(40%)
Blank	14,205	(23%)	19,659	(37%)
Total	61,588		52,559	

Figure 5
Comparison of Vote for Mandela Referendum in 1986 and 1988
in Precincts Unchanged by 1987 Redistricting

	1986	(95 precincts)	1988	(95 precincts)
Yes	7,000	(20%)	11,216	(22%)
No	20,939	(59%)	20,298	(40%)
Blank	7,778	(22%)	18,941	(38%)
Total	35,717		50,455*	

Source: *Boston Election Commission*, 1986 and 1988.

*1988 was a presidential election.

As State Representative Byron Rushing, a key voice in the Mandela struggle and a legislator who helped advise the process, recalls about the second referendum: “So the next thing that we wanted to do after we lost having the vote, then the last thing that we asked for was essentially a committee to be set up to determine the practicality of doing all of this. And the court said that the legislature could not do that because of our home-rule articles in our Constitution. And that could only happen if Boston asks for that...I still come back to the fact that I think that the—in terms of a critique, the biggest failure of this was not being able to have this—have a strong clearly organizing piece to this. And so, all the eggs had to go into this one basket and which was letting—having the legislature make this decision.” (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky and Tomás González, 2016)

As the *Boston Globe* reported, “In a complaint filed with the court, the committee's lawyers contend that Robert MacQueen, clerk of the House of Representatives, wrongly interpreted an amendment to the state Constitution that

the incorporation committee said should allow the Mandela question to be put before the Legislature and included as a nonbinding referendum question in November during Boston's municipal election. According to the complaint, Rep. Byron Rushing (D-South End) sought to file a bill in the Legislature to put the Mandela question on the ballot but was told by MacQueen that as a home-rule petition the bill needed the support of the Boston City Council and Boston's mayor.” (Winston, *Boston Globe*, June 17, 1987)

As Rushing recalls it, “We actually, went to the SJC about this because—and the SJC said, “No, you can’t vote to have a discussion about this. This is yes or no. You need to have to set up the town or city or not...” (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky and Tomás González, 2016)

The *Globe* article continued, “According to Alan J. Rom, an attorney for GRIP, the state Constitution provides that home-rule petitions can come before the Legislature without City Council approval in cases of incorporation, annexation or de-annexation... No further administrative remedies exist which the plaintiffs might exhaust in order to obtain a determination of their present rights, status and legal relationship, Rom said in the complaint. So GRIP has now asked the court to decide the question and have MacQueen turn the bill over to a legislative committee so that it may go through the process for inclusion on November's ballot.” (Winston, *Boston Globe*, June 17, 1987)

Ultimately they were successful in getting the referendum back on the ballot in 1988. As Rushing points out, however, the ultimate failure of the Mandela initiative had to do with a lack of solid organizing. He explains, “If you have a group of 500 people who are a part of this, you know, organizing, you would then go and put the pressure on the City Council to do this because the City Council could’ve done this. The City Council could do it right now.” (Rushing, 2016) In the final analysis, the state Legislature was severely limited in what it could do, but it could put up these nonbinding referendums to make a statement, and perhaps pursue the matter from there. The problem is that neither referendum passed. Without the organizing structure to carry on the issue, the dream of Mandela died.

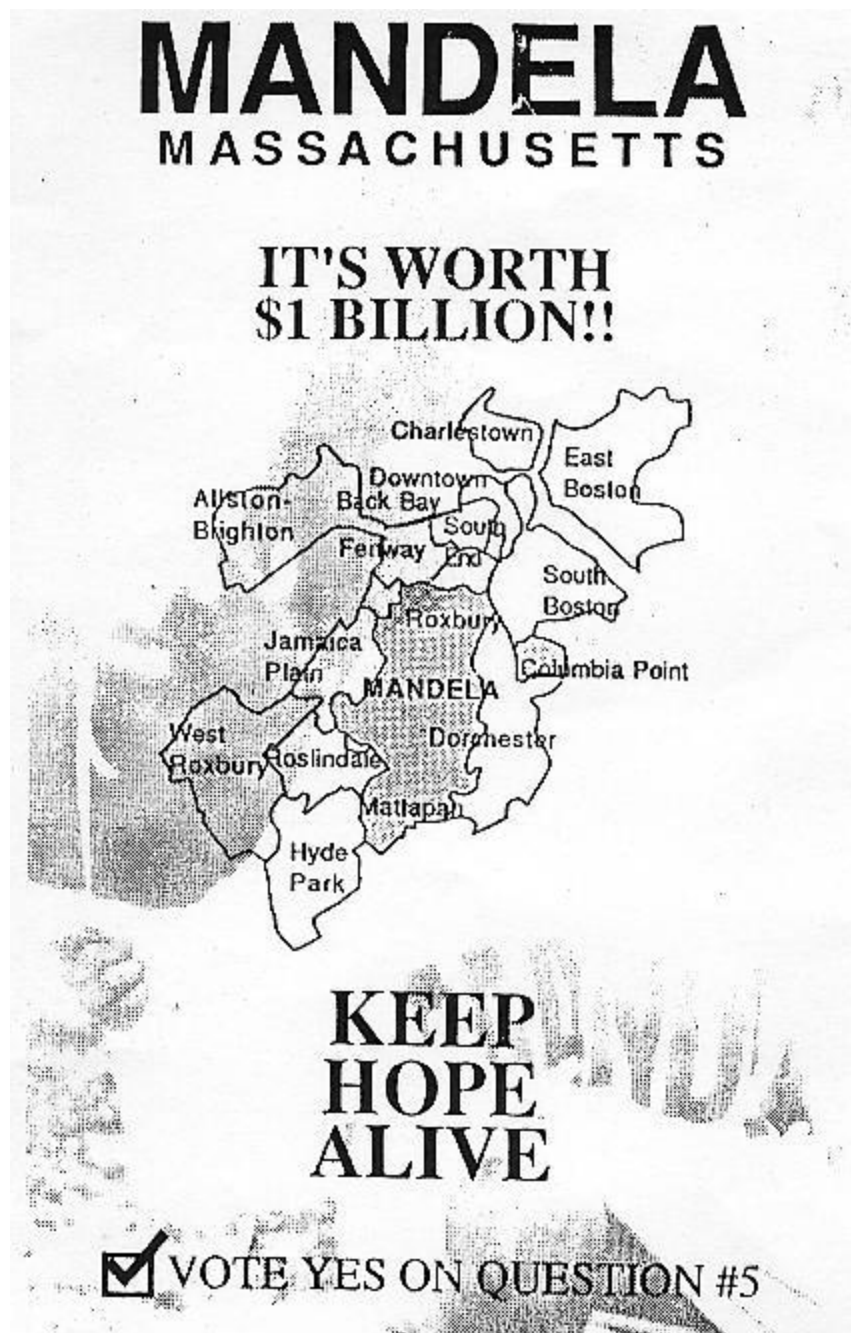


Figure 6

“Take a Stand, Own the Land”: The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

In response to the Mandela movement, a local group, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), proposed an alternate and more moderate plan that did receive support from the community and Mayor Flynn. It is our contention

that the City of Boston gave the nonprofit organization control of the Dudley Square Triangle and created its land trust in response to the Mandela movement. The transfer was mainly made, however, because DSNI had a grassroots groundswell of organizing and investments from private foundations. Also, at least two years of solid organizing and community revitalization through cleanups led by DSNI convinced the city that this was an exceptionally viable program and initiative. And that's exactly what DSNI got—control over the land, over the planning, over the development process. The most significant difference in these two undertakings was that Mandela did not have a groundswell of Roxbury residents participating in the planning and in the process, or an effective organizing program on the ground.

There is much evidence to suggest that the defeat of Mandela was the impetus behind the city's willingness to get rid of this land. Indeed, there were many factors and parallels between the Mandela movement and DSNI because the former's aspirational goal was community control. As historians have often pointed out with regard to the epic struggles waged during the civil rights movement, having both Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X was what made the nonviolent movement successful due to the fact that Malcolm X's program represented such a drastic solution. Ossie Davis recalls in *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s Through the 1980s*, by Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, "[Malcolm] was blunt where King was tactful. They were both smart, both extraordinarily eloquent and articulate. He could say the anger, while King could do the softer encouraging, persuasion, pushing, prodding. Malcolm was a reinforcing person and responded to a different need in us. It was always hard to try to be half as good as Dr. King. Even though we believed in nonviolence, it was also very good to have somebody vent the other side. There always need to be multiple voices with multiple strategies pursuing social change." (Hampton and Fayer, 1990, 250) In this case, Mandela was Malcolm X and DSNI was Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 1987, the city agreed to create the land trust. Prior to the creation of DSNI, the city laid out what it thought would be the comprehensive revitalization of the Dudley Square neighborhood. Flynn's administration had plans for Dudley Square, but they did not include a community-led process. At the same time that Mandela was being proposed, other grassroots initiatives were also asking the city to participate in their process (and not the other way around, which was more traditional), giving credence to the very paternalistic view of city government those community organizers were expressing.

As the authors of *Streets of Hope*, a history of DSNI, point out, "Some people linked the Flynn administration's support of DSNI's eminent domain to city

opposition to the movement to have Greater Roxbury secede from Boston and reincorporate as a separate city named Mandela. ... Some Mandela organizers claimed that DSNI's eminent domain application was nothing more than a way to sabotage the reincorporation process and provide Flynn with a bone to throw Roxbury." (Medoff and Sklar, 1994, 131)

Andrew Jones, interviewed in the *Bay State Banner* shortly before the BRA hearings on granting eminent domain to DSNI, remarked, "This is the twilight zone. It's getting bizarre. It's a purely political move and it's tied to incorporation. It makes no sense at all for any city government to give that power to a private agency....The people in this community have to watch themselves because the city is trying to head off the biggest takeover of all, of 12.5 square miles of Boston, Mandela." (Havis, 1988)

One of the main aspects in which Mandela differed from DSNI was the fact that there was a comprehensive plan in place and collaboration among human service agencies that together enabled DSNI to obtain resources. The financial investment showed community residents they would benefit overall. By the end of 1992, the Riley Foundation had put \$3.2 million of direct funding into DSNI.

Today, when you walk the Dudley Street area, it looks nothing like it did in 1986. At that time, homes were vacant and empty lots reigned. Today, there is evident development. Because of the DSNI, the collaboration, and all of the hard work, a stable community has emerged.

“We Want Our Own Neighborhood Development Authority”

The Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority (GRNA) was created in February 1985. It was a direct outgrowth of King's 1983 mayoral campaign and an effort to make good on some of the promises of that campaign to give the Black community control over the disposition of city-owned land. As Medoff and Sklar make clear, DSNI's general approach and partnership with the city often contrasted starkly with the city's response to the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority (GRNA), which was greeted with much more skepticism. As they write, “GRNA was launched in January 1985 with the leadership of former mayoral candidate Mel King and longtime Roxbury activists in movements for Black empowerment, economic justice, and community development, including Turner, Ken Wade, Willie Jones, and Bob Terrell. The week before the first GRNA meeting was scheduled to take place, the BRA's Dudley Square Plan was leaked to the press. When the GRNA held its first press conference, on February 14—Frederick Douglass Day—it called for a moratorium on the disposition of city-owned land in Roxbury until a ‘neighborhood authority’ was established “to review, monitor and

exercise some degree of control over development in the area.” (Medoff and Sklar, 1994, 92)

As Turner recalls, the GRNA felt “the community should have a body that could play the same role as the BRA in terms of the disciplining, you know, the criteria and process for the decision making around the land. And there, other than that, there were two initiatives that were launched as tools in that process of determination. One was a suit, a Ten Taxpayer suit that the GRNA, which is Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority, launched with the help of a couple of the professors in the Law Department at UMass Boston, where we challenged the city on the fact that there hadn’t been a development plan in about 25 or 30 years, and basically took the position in court that they, you know, couldn’t, they didn’t have the legal right to move forward with the dispossession of the land in the community without a new development plan which caused, we think, a serious amount of concern...in this city and eventually led to them setting up a process to develop a new master plan to offset our suit.” (Turner, 2016)

Not only was there a definite connection between GRNA and Mandela, it would be accurate to say that GRNA and Mandela worked in tandem. As Turner recalls:

They actually took the concepts that we were working with and took them to a higher level, and so there were numbers within GRNA neighborhood council who felt that the presence of the initiative...was very helpful in terms of putting pressure on Flynn to be willing to negotiate with us since, you know, we were less of a threat to his authority and power than Mandela. And you know my perspective is that’s in fact [what] led to his saying, well, I can’t win. When it was clear that he couldn’t put an independent group, a group independent of our neighborhood council, in place, he said, well...I’m establishing neighborhood councils in a number of areas and, in that context, you know, put his stamp of support on the, on the Roxbury Neighborhood Council as a group that they would work with and eventually, you know, that neighborhood council was written into the Article 50 in the Zoning Code and...the council was given to make decision to be the voice of the community in relationship to land development issues, not having the power, decision making power, but having the power to hold hearings and to make recommendations, be the group that had the authority within the Zoning Code to make recommendations to the city and to hold hearings on the issues of zoning appeals and zoning practices. And so when, you know, I think that the Mandela initiative was—the existence of the Mandela initiative was the key leverage in

terms of the mayor being willing to acknowledge the neighborhood council and have the BRA work with us. (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky and Tomás González, 2016)

On the other hand, as Sklar and Medoff suggest, “The Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority (GRNA) only decided to support the referendum as “a tactical matter.” As member Ken Wade explains in an interview with the authors, “We were not sold on the notion that the major strategy for empowerment should be the creation of a separate city for, principally, people of color. We thought, as a tactical matter, it helped to surface the disparity in terms of service delivery. It helped to provide an organizing tool to get people talking, meeting, and in motion around something. If nothing else, our perspective in the GRNA was that you would have to have this study that would reveal how the city is shortchanging that community.” (Medoff and Sklar, 1994, 132).

The other legacy of Mandela and GRNA’s efforts was the creation of the Roxbury Neighborhood Council (RNC). In 1984, the Office of Neighborhood Services proposed five neighborhood councils in Roxbury, West Roxbury, Dorchester, Chinatown, and Jamaica Plain. Flynn appointed eight people as interim council members to the nascent Roxbury Neighborhood Council, all of whom were members of GRNA. They were charged with conducting an election for the purpose of staffing a fifteen-member council whose role was to advise in the future development and the disposal of city-owned land. As the *Banner* article explains, the city approached the GRNA about becoming the council for the neighborhood of Roxbury: “The Flynn administration recognized the Roxbury group as the official council for the neighborhood. Like the other neighborhood councils, the RNC was given advisory authority, not the power that activists had sought to approve or kill projects. In their heyday of the 1980s and early '90s, the neighborhood councils held annual elections in which residents were elected both at-large and from districts within their areas.” (*Banner*, 2015)

As the *Banner* further explained, the main sticking point between the newly founded GRNA and the Flynn administration was the question of veto power to approve or reject projects within Roxbury. “The Roxbury Neighborhood Council was originally established in 1986, an outgrowth of the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority, a community organization that sought community control over development in Roxbury.” (*Banner*, 2015) The article continued, “The push for neighborhood councils in Boston mirrored a national trend toward greater community control. Neighborhood councils in cities like New York were given real veto power over development projects. In the 1983 city election, the organizing group Mass Fair Share placed a nonbinding referendum on the ballot calling for the establishment of neighborhood councils with veto power. The

measure passed by a two-to-one margin.” (*Banner*, 2015) Many members of the Flynn administration, including his Chief of Staff Neil Sullivan, were former organizers with Mass Fair Share and had done much important work organizing on the basis of class.

In a letter to the newly appointed members of the Roxbury Neighborhood Council dated June 12, 1986, Flynn wrote, “I am seeking to establish an unprecedented level of community involvement in development planning and neighborhood service delivery. At the same time, I am seeking to balance the process rights of each individual neighborhood with my responsibility as Mayor of the City as a Whole.” He added, “As in every neighborhood, this administration has two fundamental responsibilities in reference to development in Roxbury: We are responsible for doing all that we can to foster redevelopment that benefits the poor and working families and the businesses in the area; and are responsible for involving the community in a meaningful way in the decision-making process.” At the same time, he wanted to balance the power of the councils with the mayor and city as a whole, and this led to many disagreements between the RNC—which wanted a higher degree of control—and the city. Flynn clarified his position on the matter. “At no time, either as Mayor or as a mayoral candidate, have I favored granting veto power within the development process to any neighborhood council or development advisory committee fulfilling the recent BRA Board vote; it became clear to me that the ‘approval rights’ members of the committee were seeking other development uses for publicly held land that might allow one neighborhood to block a proposal without further recourse for the Mayor as the elected representative of all city residents. I find this an unacceptable level of veto power.” (Flynn, 1986)

The Roxbury Neighborhood Council's role is outlined in the Zoning Code, BRA Article 50, as being “to promote the public safety, health and welfare of the people of Roxbury, within the boundaries as defined by the zoning commission of the City of Boston and to promote and expand neighborhood economic development by working with the city, state, other neighborhood agencies and individuals to identify, promote and create new jobs and business opportunities for the Roxbury neighborhood.” (BRA Zoning Code, BRA Article 50)⁷

Turner further observes: “The legacy of the Mandela movement was that the issue was to have the community having an authoritative voice in that process, and so at the end of the master planning process there was the development of a governing group called the ‘Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee’

⁷ <http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/getattachment/94daf533-0516-454e-8a8f-857c3b19024f>

that...was appointed by the Mayor and had the authority to make recommendations to the BRA in terms...developers of particular parcels of land...to the BRA, the larger parcels, particularly in the Dudley Square area.” (Turner, 2016)

But again, as *Streets of Hope* notes, not all of the leadership of GRNA agreed about Mandela, as GRNA co-chair Bob Terrell explained: "It doesn't make sense to have a separate city that's just as underdeveloped as the neighborhood already is underdeveloped ... The shift in the geopolitical definition wouldn't solve our underlying economic problems." (Medoff and Sklar, 1994, 132). As Kennedy and Tilly write, “Leaders like Mel King and State Representative Byron Rushing, who had supported and in some cases helped to initiate earlier proposals for a separate Roxbury, quickly supported GRIP. Grassroots groups such as the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority hesitated longer, put off by GRIP's single-minded and sometimes sectarian insistence that incorporation was the only way to solve Roxbury's problems. But the GRNA, as well as progressive multiracial groups such as the Rainbow Coalition (a spinoff of Mel King's 1983 mayoral campaign), eventually endorsed the Mandela referendum as one strategy for community control and self-determination.” (Kennedy and Tilly, 1987, 24)

Interestingly, Medoff and Sklar report: “The DSNI board voted not to take a position on the referendum. Board members could be found on both sides. The Mandela issue never came up in DSNI's discussions with city officials. City officials say they never linked Mandela and DSNI in their own deliberations about eminent domain.” (Medoff and Sklar, 1994, 132) Finally, BRA planner Andrea D’Amato, also quoted, says “Mandela was much more of an issue outside the [BRA] than it ever was internally...The BRA or PFD [Public Facilities Department] commitment, to the best of my understanding, was never a response to Mandela. It was never a way of satisfying Mandela in a different way... It was just a weird twist of timing.” (Medoff and Sklar, 1994, 132)

Davis offered a different opinion: “I leaned into the foundations to support the DSNI. The whole white campaign, there was a whole effort on garbage being—there was a whole kind of phenomenon of garbage on vacant lots. And you know, [it] just pushed the community to start claiming those lots and, in return, push[ed] the city to actually put white picket fences around the lot to make visible the issue.” (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky, 2015) Davis continues, “The one thing that we were very—I was personally very pleased with, was DSNI—if I look back historically, and I say, well, what am I happy about, what made it worth it? DSNI made it worth it. Because they’ve been able to influence community organizing all around the country, all around the world, really.” (Interview with Zebulon Miletsky, 2015)

Rushing, a state representative from the nearby South End, also sees some correlation. Speaking of DSNI specifically, he said, “We’re influenced with that

geographic look, and looking at ways then to do that kind of organizing approaching a neighborhood that way, without risking losing the support from the power structure because you insist on independence. So, rather than insisting on having your own mayor, you say, ‘Oh no, we want to just have control over...all the land the city owns at my neighborhood.’ We—you can’t do anything to that land without coming to the neighbors, right? ...That kind of approach, I think, was definitely influenced with this idea.” (Interview with Jeremy Bingham, 2014)

As Kennedy and Tilly write, “In fact, the GRNA has been active in pulling together a citywide Coalition for Community Control, which links together neighborhoods across the city in demanding greater community authority over development. Boston’s powers-that-be tried to use the Mandela referendum to discredit the GRNA and other black groups and leaders that seek to pursue a community control strategy. We believe that instead, the debate over incorporation is likely to give new visibility and a political boost to that strategy.” (Kennedy and Tilly, 1994, 25)

Gloria Fox, the longtime Roxbury state representative, sums up the quandary well: “So, there were a lot of things that would have turned out differently in the 30 years that has gone on since we brought this innovative idea of self-governance, self-determination, *kujichagulia*, and the ability to determine your life... That was brought to the people and no matter how they looked upon it, hindsight is 20/20, the same things that people are complaining about now they could have been, maybe not completely washed away, but they could have been dealt with by the organizers and the community and themselves now.” (Interview with Jeremy Bingham, 2014)

Conclusion

Tilly and Kennedy make an important point in their article on Mandela that Roxbury was both a neighborhood and a commodity, which is a helpful framework for understanding the discrepancy between the differing visions of the city and mayor and the community. They write, “Roxbury can be analyzed in two ways, both of which are important to an understanding of its unique role in the current transformation of Boston. It is a neighborhood, meaning that it has a particular location, is made up of buildings and other supporting structures, and occupies a piece of land. It is also a community, specifically a Black and Latino community, which means that it has a social and political as well as a physical reality. As a neighborhood, Roxbury is a commodity, or rather a collection of commodities. Its land and buildings are bought and sold on the market for profit. As a commodity, a neighborhood goes through cycles in which it is developed, decays, and is rebuilt, cycles that occur in the context of cycles of accumulation for the city and the

economy as a whole.” (Gastón, Kennedy, and Tilly, 1990, 99) This framework of “community” versus “commodity” tells us something about how much there was at stake for the city and neighborhood stakeholders. While residents fought to control their physical space and improve their quality of life in the form of Mandela, the city was more concerned with revenue and quieting the more radical political elements calling for a separate municipality. As “communities,” these areas were significant to those who lived there; however, in this moment as “commodities,” they were of little value and ripe for redevelopment.

A short stroll around the areas of Roxbury today tells that story. Properties estimated to be worth well over a million dollars exist in what was once dismissively labeled “the ghetto.” Prior to this moment, however, Black residents and activists attempted to fight to protect their neighborhood from gentrification.

Groups such as Freeze Frame in Roxbury continue to carry the torch for community control over the land for the people of Roxbury. Although there has been talk of reinvigorating the Roxbury Neighborhood Council, it remains a defunct organization. As part of his Imagine 2030 initiative, current Boston mayor Marty Walsh has expressed interest in possibly rebuilding the council. Groups such as “Reclaim Roxbury” have been holding meetings about possibly reinstating the GRNA. While Mandela, as an autonomous Black-majority city, did not come to fruition, the ideas behind it sparked a shift in discussions about community control. In the wake of national changes, including deindustrialization and a rising population of urban unemployed people, local politicians and their constituents were propelled to come up with solutions to new problems. If it had succeeded, Mandela would have served as a model for self-determination as understood by those influenced by the movements of the 1960s. Instead, in the failure of the referenda, Flynn, DSNI, and to a certain degree the residents of Roxbury were able to construct a new vision for the future of this community. While one can debate whether or not this vision benefited the residents of Roxbury, it is clear that “Mandela” pushed the debate about community control forward on a more progressive path.

In the final analysis, Mandela suffered most from a lack of organizing experience on the part of its founders, Andrew Jones and Curtis Davis. King, in an unpublished paper written after the first vote on Mandela, argued, “Transformation starts with the belief that we can fashion a community that is free of the oppressive, elitist dominance that currently characterizes the relationships in this country.... Our first step is to define the community and the direction in which it would proceed. Everything being suggested here are things we have already done ... I am convinced that failure to organize at this level will mean that we are moved off this turf.” (Neill, 1990)

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