PART OF THE PROBLEM OR PART OF THE SOLUTION?
HARLEM'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 1914–1954

by

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Abstract

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Thomas F. Harbison

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This dissertation examines how school administrators, teachers, parents, and local activists attempted to improve public schools in Central Harlem between World War I and the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. It reveals that animosity and distrust between parents, teachers, and the school administration, which peaked in New York City during the 1960s with mass boycotts and teacher strikes, had been growing for decades.

During the 1920s, as the Great Migration filled Harlem schools with working-class African Americans from the South, New York City school administrators identified a need for an expanded school program to meet the needs of their students. This included the application of a host of Progressive Era initiatives, including health services, vocational training, and character education. At first, parents and concerned community members tacitly supported this approach.

Yet, by the 1930s, parents and local civil rights activists—including some teachers—diverged from administrators in their understanding of the problems facing African American students. They accused the administration of racial discrimination based on stark inequalities in school conditions exposed by a series of incidents and investigative

studies. Organizing in various ad-hoc parent-community groups, these women and men blamed the system's special treatment of black students for exacerbating rather than correcting inequality. Community-school relations further eroded when school administrators dealt with the second wave of the Great Migration beginning during World War II in a manner strikingly similar to the first. By 1954, the administration had established a pattern of adding extra programs to Harlem schools, while doing little to address community concerns about segregation and school inequality.

Acknowledgements

Many people supported this project and made its completion possible. My advisor, Thomas Kessner, has taught me to engage with historical questions in meaningful ways and modeled the skill of constructive criticism in a manner that I seek to emulate in my future teaching. This has been true from my first day of graduate school through completion of this work. Clarence Taylor provided insightful comments on multiple drafts and guided my research in new, productive directions at critical moments, including the very beginning when my topic was just taking shape. Gerald Markowitz pointed me toward a wide range of valuable sources during my research and posed questions that helped me clarify my thinking during the writing phase. Together with my advisor, these readers patiently waded with me through many drafts of my dissertation. Jeanne Theoharis and Steve Brier gave me fresh insights at the late stages of the project, which will continue to guide me as I further develop this work.

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The Interactive Technology and Pedagogy Certificate Program at the Graduate Center, led by Steve Brier, introduced me to a world of instructional technology that I now engage with daily at the Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute at Baruch College. As a Fellow for Instructional Technology at the Communication Institute, I have been supported by both generous financial support and access to a vibrant intellectual community. My director, Mikhail Gershovich, respected and supported my balancing act between work and study. Luke Waltzer, my coworker and good friend, guided me with a combination of modeling, careful listening, and masterfully-timed tough questioning.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my family. Cole and Benjamin were both born during my project. I look forward to the day that they can read and critique it. My wife, Elisabeth, has endlessly supported my work and I cannot thank her enough.

For Elisabeth, Cole, and Benjamin

Contents

Introduction

"An appraisal of education in Central Harlem leads to the conclusion that the schools have lost faith in the ability of their pupils to learn, and the community has lost faith in the ability of the schools to teach … The essential question is why the community and the schools have lost faith in each other.

—Harlem Youth Opportunities, "Youth in the Ghetto"[1]

In 1964, psychologist Kenneth Clark and his team at Harlem Youth Opportunities published extensive evidence in their report titled "Youth in the Ghetto" showing that Harlem students increasingly fell behind their white counterparts in New York City the longer they spent in school. Clark, who had attended Harlem public schools himself, presented the finding as a clear sign of the damaging effects of segregated and unequal schooling opportunities for black students. His conclusion clashed with the belief held by most leaders of the school system that the achievement gap originated due to forces outside of the schoolhouse. He argued that diminished trust between school and community leaders presented a serious threat to students since it undercut possibilities for parents, teachers, and administrators to form a united front to improve students' learning. Without such collaboration, Clark predicted a continued cycle in which black children in Harlem would be denied equal opportunity with their white counterparts in the city.[2]

In the course of their report, Clark's team traced distrust between community and school personnel back to desegregation battles in New York City public schools following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. Indeed, community and

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[1] Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Inc., *Youth in the Ghetto: A Study of the Consequences of Powerlessness and a Blueprint for Change* (New York, 1964), 236 (underline in original).
[2] Harlem Youth Opportunities, *Youth in the Ghetto*, 161–95; Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: A History of the New York City Public Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 251–52.

school leaders grew apart during the decade after *Brown* as administrators resisted growing community demands for desegregation. The sluggish pace of desegregation infuriated parents and civil rights groups. Massive school protests across the city in 1964 drew from this frustration. Few of the leaders of these boycotts discussed the longer historical roots of the problems they were protesting.

However, parents and civil rights leaders' dissatisfaction with inferior schooling, particularly in Central Harlem, had been brewing for decades. The racial segregation that school protestors opposed citywide in 1964 was more than three decades old in Harlem. The types of inequalities that drove their push for integration—inferior school facilities, teacher quality, and academic curricular offerings—were the same as those attacked by an earlier generation of community-based school reformers. As important as the near-term context was for explaining the gulf between community leaders and school professionals, there were longer-term irritants that explained the strong resentments evident in the 1960s.

To understand the roots of this problem, we need to look back nearly a half-century prior to the *Brown* decision. By 1964, when Clark posed his question about why the community had lost faith in the schools, a huge gulf separated the priorities of community-based school reformers and those of school administrators and teachers.[3] Since World War I, administrators had tried to get schools to achieve more social reform for black migrants

[3] The "community" was by no means a monolithic unit in Central Harlem. I use the term as an analytic category because of the large amount of overlap between the strategies, ideologies, and in many cases the leaders of the sub-groups within the Harlem community. Despite the Harlem community's vast diversity of religions, nationalities, and socio-economic positions, most local leaders—ranging from those holding official positions of power in churches and civic organizations to parents—tended to define the role of their schools in strikingly similar terms.

to Harlem with add-on programs, only to raise doubts in the Harlem community about their sincerity and their effectiveness.

This dissertation examines how administrators, teachers, parents, and civil rights activists attempted in various ways to address the issues raised by the large number of African-American students coming into the New York City school system during the migration waves between 1914 and 1954. During this time, administrators unilaterally advanced a particular set of special programs for Harlem schools, while parents grew increasingly dubious of their fairness. This study traces the changing expectations these groups held for the educational system and explores the shifting relationships between community groups and school professionals.

The first chapter focuses on New York City school administrators' response to the major demographic changes in Harlem during the first wave of the Great Migration. Between 1914 and 1930, students increasingly came from rural African-American families who had just arrived in the urban North with few economic resources. During this time, school leaders intensively applied Progressive Era strategies to Harlem schools, adapting the school program for students deemed in special need of vocational training and social services. Black newspaper editors and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leaders, among the strongest public voices in the Harlem black community at the time, tended to support these approaches as they fit them into a larger strategy of racial uplift. They shared with school administrators an understanding that schools should focus on teaching middle-class cultural and social values to working-class African Americans. Black institutions that rose in importance after World War I, such as

YMCAs and fraternal organizations, also favored self-help over protest.[4] Parents of Harlem students, most of whom had little access to political power, generally followed school administrators' lead and maintained confidence that their children would gain upward mobility in a multi-tiered system that offered classes ranging from the lowest-skilled vocational classes to the highest-level academic courses.

However, administrators failed to deliver on their promises. The second chapter examines the ironic outcome when vocational and social services that were originally designed for the purpose of promoting academic mobility did the reverse. This additional programming *impeded* students' academic progress when they were applied crudely across the board, relegating a huge number of newly-arrived African-American students to a low-skilled curricular track. During the early years of the Great Depression, a small group of publishers and journalists in the black press reported on these shortcomings and raised doubts about the fairness of the system. They argued that inequalities in the schools, regardless of intention, represented discrimination, and defined equal opportunity in schools as an essential civil right.

A major riot in Harlem in 1935 drew wider attention to problems in Harlem schools. The third chapter explains how Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia's commission to examine the causes of the riot exposed and documented poor conditions in Harlem schools, underscoring the suspicions of many in the community. This fueled a new wave of protest in which local newspapers joined parents, civic leaders, and a cadre of activist teachers to demand improved schooling for students in Central Harlem. A range of ad-hoc school reform groups built arguments around the evidence revealed by the riot commission.

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[4] Davison Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Segregation, 1865–1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 168–69.

The fourth chapter traces a resurgence in administrators' special programming in Harlem schools in response to a World War II-spurred second wave of the Great Migration combined with a juvenile delinquency scare. During the war, the Board of Education, superintendents, principals, and teachers teamed up to add mental health and expanded social service responsibilities to the school program. They targeted particular sets of schools as pilot cases for this new treatment and pinned the problem of student underachievement to students' psycho-social maladjustment. While focusing narrowly on this goal, they largely ignored the need for systemic improvements such as training and equitable placement of better teachers, and the upgrade of school facilities. During this brief period of experimentation and resource infusion, community protest fell to the low level that it had been at before 1935.

The final chapter shows how far community-based reformers had diverged from the administrators by the post-World War II era. The community raised a new round of doubts about the current system's ability to help their children. They renewed accusations from the 1930s against the school system of systemic racial discrimination and began to target segregated conditions in the school as the root cause of unequal learning outcomes for their students. In a variety of ways they signaled disillusionment with the current system, but they failed to develop a coordinated plan for correcting the system. A case study of parents pulling their children out of a racially segregated high school shows the depth of their dissatisfaction with the status quo, and a study of the political push for African American representation on the Board of Education reveals the community's desire for systemic policy change. While these groups loosely shared general demands, they lacked a

concrete strategy for fixing the system. In this context, their small-scale protests failed to coalesce into a mass movement.

This dissertation contributes to the growing body of literature on the civil rights movement in the North. Historians in this field, such as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Jeanne Theoharis, and Thomas Sugrue, have broadened our understanding of the national civil rights movement by connecting the history of protest in the South to activism in the North. In doing so, they have elevated the historical importance of protests in northern sites during decades as early as the 1930s and as late as the 1970s, retelling the story in terms of a "long civil rights movement."[5] Some of these authors have used New York City civil rights history as their launching point. For example, scholars Clarence Taylor, Martha Biondi, and Craig Wilder have revealed crucial connections between New York civil rights activists and the national movement in the fight against segregation and inequality in education as well as other areas including housing and employment.[6]

A growing body of historical literature particularly details social protest movements that targeted inequality in New York City schools. Clarence Taylor, in *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle for School Integration in New York City*, illuminates the process by which Galamison and other civil rights activists organized

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[5] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1233–63; Jeanne F. Theoharis, "'We Saved the City': Black Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960–1976," *Radical History Review* 81 (fall 2001): 61–93; Jeanne F. Theoharis, introduction to *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940–1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1–14; Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008).
[6] Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle for School Integration in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Craig Steven Wilder, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

during the 1950s and 1960s and exerted major pressure on the Board of Education in favor of school integration.[7] Adina Back's dissertation, "Up South in New York: The 1950s School Desegregation Struggles," examines roots of this 1960s protest in the preceding decade.[8] Jerald Podair's *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* and Daniel Perlstein's *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* focus on the events and politics of the Ocean-Hill Brownsville teacher strike of 1968, and more broadly show how the community steered social protest away from desegregation efforts and toward community control in the face of the school administration's resistance to desegregation.[9]

These important works answer critical historical questions about the civil rights struggles for improved schools in New York City. Yet, they focus almost exclusively on the political complexities of desegregation efforts *after* Brown. They do not fully address the longer roots of community frustrations with the school administration going back to

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[7] Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*. This history also plays prominently in Ravitch, *The Great School Wars* and David Rogers, *110 Livingston Street: Politics and Bureaucracy in the New York City School System* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

[8] Adina Back, "Up South in New York: The 1950s School Desegregation Struggles" (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1997). Adina Back's dissertation probes the pre-*Brown* era to highlight examples of parents and teachers whose work laid the groundwork for subsequent activists. However, the core of her study focuses on the years between 1954 and the mid-1960s. Historian David Ment documents the early rise of segregation in New York schools in his comparative study, "Racial Segregation in the Public Schools of New England and New York, 1840–1940" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1975). His work does not closely examine the opposition to segregation, but rather the formation of the problem of segregation. In this way it differs from the other studies mentioned in this paragraph. Yet it is no less important; Ment's conclusions are foundational for many of the other works discussed. Claude Mangum's dissertation, "Afro-American Thought on the New York City Public School System, 1905–1954: An Analysis of New York City Afro-American Newspaper Editorials" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1976), extensively covers African-American opinion on the school system prior to *Brown*, but the study is narrowly limited to editorials in the black press.

[9] Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Daniel H. Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

reform attempts in the 1930s and 1940s. The *Brown* decision dramatically changed the terms of the debate over race and schools in Harlem and across the nation, steering the politics of school reform in a new direction. However, the ruling was not received in a vacuum. The school administrators, parents, and teachers directly affected by the decision had already established complicated relationships with one another and constructed firm beliefs about the role of schools in providing equal opportunity.

In Harlem, competing definitions of racial equality and the best educational policies for achieving that goal had been evolving for decades. This dissertation examines that development, tracing the diverging goals for public school reform sought by community-based and school-based leaders back to the 1910s. It reveals how the community's unified goal of desegregation emerged in the 1950s only after decades of fragmented reform attempts and increasing disillusionment with the school administration.

This study also highlights precedents set by New York City administrators prior to *Brown* that would have important implications during the school policy battles of the 1960s. It shows that the administrators who resisted desegregation efforts during the 1960s adhered to standards and approaches already deeply established by 1954. For instance, during the 1960s administrators responded defensively to post-*Brown* desegregation demands, defining the nature of the problem as entirely "de facto."[10] While they did not prefer segregated schools, they had not given up confidence that segregated schools could still provide equal educational opportunity under the circumstances. They addressed the problem by infusing special services and remedial curricula in the poorest,

[10] For a thorough analysis of the political and historical uses of the term "de facto segregation" in the context of the civil rights movement, see Matthew D. Lassiter, "De Jure/De Facto Segregation: The Long Shadow of a National Myth," in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–24.

most segregated schools. These approaches are striking in their similarity to those taken by administrators during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.

In order to interpret events over a long stretch of time, this study focuses exclusively on Central Harlem. This location has been chosen in part because of its symbolic importance as a cultural capital for African Americans. More important, however, is the fact that many of the efforts to improve racial equality in schools that occurred in the urban North during the first half of the century were first tried in Harlem. Widespread racial segregation of New York City schools emerged early in Harlem on an unprecedented scale as the Great Migration transformed the demographics of the community. New York City school administrators and teachers first tried out district-wide reforms targeting majority-black schools in Harlem, and regularly used their work there as an example in annual reports and board meetings to their colleagues in other parts of the city. The black press frequently used the school situation in Harlem as an example for larger arguments about public education for black students in New York City and even across the nation. In doing so, it brought national and sometimes international attention to the thicket of inequalities and injustices facing Harlem schoolchildren.

Chapter One
"Equal Opportunities Do Not in Themselves Mean or Call for Identical Educational Offerings": The Great Migration and Harlem Schools, 1914–1930

Between World War I and 1930, thousands of African-American families from the American South and the West Indies arrived in Central Harlem and dramatically changed the student population. From 1920 to 1930, over 115,000 white Harlemites left the area while nearly 90,000 African Americans arrived.[11] School administrators in New York City, fully confident that their schools could meet the specialized needs of the new arrivals, responded quickly to the shift with major curricular adjustments. In their eyes, the public education system that they oversaw was an oasis of equal opportunity where schools could effectively compensate for students' deprived backgrounds. Arguing that the schools had offered a path out of poverty for immigrant children through the nineteenth century, educational leaders remained confident they would do the same for black migrants from the South by countering years of racial discrimination and lack of education with special programs. Harlem's growing number of black families placed great confidence in the potential of education and sent their children to school in high numbers. They stood behind the school system's policy of adjusting the curriculum to meet their children's needs.

The nationwide migration of hundreds of thousands of African Americans from the South to northern urban industrial centers accelerated a demographic shift in Harlem

[11] Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890–1930,* 2nd ed. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 130.

underway by the 1890s when African Americans increasingly settled in the area.[12] The flow of black families from the South to cities such as New York began following the Civil War, but sped up considerably during the 1910s and 1920s. Migrants were drawn to better job opportunities in the expanding industries of the North, and repelled away from agricultural failure, economic decline, and violent racial discrimination in the South.[13] A large proportion of these migrants, particularly those from the coastal southern states, settled in New York City. Combined with a wave of black immigration from the West Indies, the Great Migration changed the racial demography of the city. Historian Ira Katznelson has calculated that in 1890 one person of every 70 in New York was black; in 1930 the number was one of every nine.[14] Between 1910 and 1920 alone, the black population of New York City rose by two thirds, making the black population of over 150,000 the largest in the nation. In the following decade, this pattern continued; the black population doubled by 1930.[15]

This change disproportionately affected Harlem. New York City's growing number of black residents faced a limited set of housing choices due to racial discrimination, and by the 1910s and 1920s they flocked to Central Harlem, with its welcoming apartment houses

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[12] Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900–1930* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 42; Osofsky, *Harlem*, 17–34.
[13] Seth M. Scheiner, *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865–1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1965), 8.
[14] Ira Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities: Race, Politics, and Migration in the United States, 1900–1930, and Britain, 1948–68* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 62.
[15] Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn: The History of Race and Education in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72; David Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation, 1900–1940: A Comparative Study of New York City, New Rochelle, and New Haven," in *Schools in Cities: Consensus and Conflict in American Educational History*, ed. Ronald K. Goodenow and Diane Ravitch (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), 71; Joe W. Trotter, "African Americans in the City: The Industrial Era, 1900–1950," *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 4 (May 1995): 22. Trotter estimates that 522,000 African Americans left the South for Northern cities during World War I, and 872,000 did so during the 1920s.

and well established black community. By 1920, Harlem surpassed other New York City neighborhoods including San Juan Hill (between 59th and 65th Streets) and the multiracial Tenderloin (between 23rd and 42nd Streets) as the area where the majority of black Manhattanites resided. By that time, two thirds of Manhattan's black population lived in Harlem, compared to less than a third only a decade earlier.[16] Between 1920 and 1930, "Black Harlem" expanded from about twenty-five blocks to over fifty, extending south to Central Park at 110th Street and northward to 159th Street.[17] The overall black population of Harlem reached 165,000 by 1930.[18] The number of school age children in Harlem increased from 1,400 in 1910 to 7,000 in 1920, and 20,000 in 1930.[19]

Black migrants came to Harlem with high expectations for economic opportunity but found limited success. Discriminatory hiring practices and union membership restrictions combined with limited educational backgrounds to constrict Harlemites' job options and left many no choice besides low-skilled factory jobs, domestic work, or other low-paying service positions.[20] While much of the national economy boomed during the 1920s, the wartime expansion of New York City's industrial sector faltered after 1923,

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[16] Kevin McGruder, "Race and Real Estate: Interracial Conflict and Coexistence in Harlem, 1890–1920" (PhD dissertation, The City University of New York, 2010), 196; Katznelson, *Black Men*, 63; Gilbert Osofsky, "The Enduring Ghetto," *Journal of American History* 55, no. 2 (September 1968): 244; Ment, "Racial Segregation," 210–11; Osofsky, *Harlem*, 128; Osofsky, "The Enduring Ghetto," 244.

[17] George Edmund Haynes, "Report: Impressions from a Preliminary Study of Negroes of Harlem," 1921, George Edmund Haynes Papers, box 1, folder 1, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library; Shannon King, "Home to Harlem: Community, Gender, and Working Class Politics in Harlem, 1916–1928" (PhD dissertation, Binghamton University, SUNY, 2006), 97; E. Franklin Frazier, "Negro Harlem: An Ecological Study," *The American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 1 (July 1937): 74.

[18] Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010), 249.

[19] Ment, "Racial Segregation," 210–11.

[20] Nancy J. Weiss, *The National Urban League, 1910–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 12; Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode? Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20.

further diminishing the number of opportunities for black migrants.[21] As a result, most families in Harlem struggled financially. Conditions in Harlem's homes, businesses, and public institutions deteriorated, leading urban historian Gilbert Osofsky to conclude during the 1960s, in his classic study *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto,* "The Harlem slum of today was created in the 1920's."[22] As journalist George Schuyler later noted, "The reason why the Depression didn't have the impact on the Negroes that it had on the whites was that the Negroes had been in the Depression all the time."[23]

In the face of such economic hardship, African Americans placed a high value on education in the public schools as an avenue to long-term gain for their children. According to historian Kevin Gaines, African Americans of the era saw education as "the key to liberation" and sought after it with an "almost religious fervor."[24] Access to good schools motivated many of those who left the South for New York. They often mentioned educational opportunity. For example, a father from Augusta, Georgia, wrote to the *Chicago Defender* in 1917, "My children I wished [*sic*] to be educated in a different community than here. Where the school facilities are better and less prejudice shown and in fact where

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[21] Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode*, 39.
[22] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 136; Greene, "Harlem in the Great Depression: 1928–1936" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1979), 5. In Osofsky's telling, the formation of the ghetto and the deterioration of conditions for blacks living in Harlem occurred between 1890 and 1930 because of changes in the housing market due to a combination of racist housing policies, white flight, and exploitative landlords. Others writing on housing conditions in Harlem during the early-twentieth century note the extremely high population density in Harlem resulting from the subdividing of buildings by landlords that caused health conditions and other problems.
[23] George S. Schuyler, "The Reminiscences of George S. Schuyler," 1960, Columbia University Oral History Collection, New York, NY. Historian Cheryl Greenberg explains in her study of Harlem during the Great Depression (*Or Does It Explode*, 14) that during the 1920s Harlem "lived in depression before the Depression."
[24] Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1.

advantages are better for our people in all respect [*sic*]."[25] That same year a farmer from Crescent, Oklahoma, wrote, "I am desirous of leaving here because of the school accommodations for children as I have five and want to educate them the best I can."[26] In letters sent after arriving in the North, it was not uncommon for migrants to Chicago and New York to list access to integrated schools as an improvement in their families' situation.[27]

Compared with the vast inequalities in education spending for black and white students in the de jure segregated systems of the South, the public schools of Harlem offered a clear improvement. This relative improvement boosted confidence in education among the community. During the late 1910s and early 1920s, most local church and civic leaders, as well as parents, remained optimistic about the general potential of education to provide future opportunity. Those who spoke out publicly expressed faith in the city's school administration to meet the specific needs of their children.

Harlem community leaders closely tracked school administrators' decisions and debated them in public forums such as the black press, but rarely directly questioned the motivation behind Board of Education policies. The most outspoken and powerful among this group were black men from middle- and upper-class black families that had been established in the North for generations. Their perception of working-class African Americans who had recently arrived in the North overlapped in important ways with the white school administrators. Organizations like the NAACP and the National Urban League,

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[25] Emmet J. Scott, "More Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916–1918," *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 4 (October 1919): 437.
[26] Ibid., 434–35.
[27] Ibid., 459, 464. The importance of education to migrants such as those quoted in these letters has been detailed by historian James Grossman in his study, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 246-255.

founded in 1909 and 1910 respectively, based their national headquarters in New York City and concentrated their efforts on helping migrants obtain social services and education.[28] They were joined by smaller charities across northern cities that aided newcomers with jobs, housing, and education, often organized through churches and supported by white philanthropists. The National Urban League was founded with the explicit purpose of preparing migrants—many of whom lacked formal schooling, industrial skills, and an understanding of northern customs—for jobs in the North. While these organizations determined their missions largely based on racial solidarity with the migrants, there was also an important class component. In order to arm working-class African Americans to fight against racial discrimination, leaders of organizations such as the National Urban League sought institutions to promote a combination of work discipline and cultural refinement that would lead them toward middle-class status.[29]

New York branches of organizations like the NAACP and National Urban League supported local school policies in large part because of the relative absence of inequality when compared to schools in the South. Migrants faced far lower barriers to public education in New York City then they had experienced previously. Segregated schools were illegal in New York, unlike in the southern states from which the majority of black Harlem residents had come. State legislation, first passed in the 1880s and strengthened in

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[28] Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 193; Weiss, *The National Urban League*, 129; Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 18.

[29] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 9–11; Clarence Taylor, *The Black Churches of Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 3–4. In the first chapter of *The Black Churches of Brooklyn,* historian Clarence Taylor explains how professional-class black church leaders applied the strategy of cultural training in the context of their broader program of racial uplift because of the shared struggle against racial inequality. He describes how black elites' educational programs overlapped with class-based initiatives prevalent in "dominant society," but differed since they favored a cross-class vision of racial uplift.

1900 under Governor Theodore Roosevelt, banned legal segregation of public schools. In addition to phasing out "negro schools," New York City rigorously removed categories of race from all written records.[30] The Board of Education forbid schools to even count the number of students by race, let alone assign them to different schools or classes on that basis.[31] Until *Brown v. Board of Education*, the administration did not survey the ethnic or racial composition of the schools and did not keep track of the academic performance of black students as a group.[32]

However, these rules did little to stop the spread of segregation. By the start of World War I, the highest concentrations of black students in New York City public schools were found in three Harlem schools, ranging from 37 to 69 percent black.[33] In 1920, two elementary schools in Harlem were over 90 percent black.[34] By the early 1930s, thirteen of the fourteen public schools in Central Harlem were almost entirely black. One of these schools was 92 percent black, while the remaining twelve were 97 percent or higher.[35]

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[30] Ment, "Racial Segregation," 211.
[31] Ibid., 20, 171; Carleton Mabee, *Black Education in New York State: From Colonial to Modern Times* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1979), xiii, 275. Historian Carleton Mabee has shown that legally defined black schools continued to exist as late as the 1930s in rural areas of New York State.
[32] Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 251.
[33] Florette Henri, *Black Migration: Movement North, 1900–1920* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), 181.
[34] "More School Accommodations," *New York Age*, March 12, 1921; Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*, 72.
[35] Ment, "Racial Segregation," 80, 247; Sara Asrat, "Harlem Is Not Dixie: The Permanent Committee for Better Schools in Harlem and the Fight for Social Justice in Depression-Era New York," (BA thesis, Princeton University, 2006), 24. David Ment, in "Racial Segregation," determines that Harlem's elementary schools during the 1910s through the 1930s were not segregated by school policies but rather paralleled residential segregation; however, he found that high school students did face discriminatory school placement based on zoning policies and racist principal-level decisions about who to accept from elementary and junior high schools. In his study of segregation patterns in New York City schools between 1840 and 1940, Davison Douglas, in *Jim Crow Moves North*, has shown that the distribution of black students in elementary schools closely matched the level of segregation in residential housing in Harlem (151).

This pattern paralleled the trend in other large northern urban school systems such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Cleveland.[36]

With tacit approval from parents, teachers, the black press, and civic organizations, the central New York City school administration took the lead in adjusting Harlem school programming in response to the migration. The citywide Board of Education and the Board of Superintendents wielded the vast majority of influence over major educational policy decisions. As part of a Progressive Era phenomenon in large urban city school systems across the nation, the New York City school system had consolidated administrative control into a centralized bureaucracy staffed entirely by professionals. When New York State and City legislatures codified this change in the early 1900s, they drastically shifted power away from local ward school boards and toward a centralized board and a superintendent with expanded executive powers. The Board of Education consisted mainly of upper-class white men with backgrounds in business and other areas outside of education. The Superintendent of Schools and his associates differed mainly in their training; most had risen from the ranks of teachers, advanced to principalships and then higher positions after graduate school training in the principles of school management.[37]

During the opening years of the Great Migration, New York City school

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[36] Michael W. Homel, *Down from Equality: Black Chicagoans and the Public Schools, 1920–41* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), x, 27; Mabee, *Black Education,* 248; Vincent P. Franklin, "Educating and Urban Black Community: The Case of Philadelphia, 1900–1950" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1975); Carolyn Jefferson, "An Historical Analysis of the Relationship between the Great Migration and the Administrative Policies and Practices of Racial Isolation in the Cleveland Public Schools: 1920–1940" (PhD dissertation, Cleveland State University, 1991), 49.

[37] Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience 1876–1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 131–58. David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger, 1975).

administrators decided to meet the perceived needs of the new population by expanding and customizing the scope and focus of the school curriculum, thus setting an important precedent for decades to come. Between 1915 and 1930, they instituted specialized programs for students in Harlem designed to sort students by intelligence level, and added supplemental services addressing the physical health, recreational, and moral needs of children. They expanded programs such as free lunches delivered to students in newly built cafeterias. Convinced that these programs would facilitate student learning, the black press, teachers, and parents in Harlem generally supported the initiatives.[38]

The expansion of social services delivered through Harlem schools extended a strategy widely applied to European immigrant children of prior generations. At the end of the nineteenth century, professional school administrators in large cities nationwide responded to the massive working-class immigration increase in school populations by expanding the function of the school. They determined that the classical school curriculum of the nineteenth century, designed to meet the academic needs of a select group of students, would not suffice for the diverse, large group of students pouring through their doors at the turn of the twentieth century. In response, administrators broadened the school program to deliver health and social services and train students in vocational work. By World War I, this approach to education was widespread and continuing to grow in

[38] Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 189–209.

popularity.[39] New York City administrators led the nation with these changes, instituting eye and dental care, social work integration, and recreation programs in large numbers.[40]

Administrators' understanding of race and poverty guided their work to expand services in Harlem schools during the Great Migration. They devised special curricula for Harlem schools in the context of a major national shift in notions of race in educational philosophy. Among school professionals trying to explain the gap in performance between racial groups, the idea that hereditary racial inferiority explained difference was giving way to a nascent theory of cultural deprivation that focused on environmental factors.[41] Although the belief in innate racial differences persisted through the 1920s and beyond, a group of sociologists, social workers, and educational leaders working in public education in Harlem had begun by the 1910s and 1920s to attribute school problems primarily to the shortcomings in students' homes. They built off of the nationally recognized work by social scientists such as Franz Boas, E. Franklin Frazier, and Robert Park.[42]

This new understanding influenced Jacob Ross, the principal of P.S. 89, an elementary school located at the heart of Central Harlem at 135th Street and Lenox Avenue. After a career teaching elementary school, Ross had acquired a PhD degree from New York

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[39] Ibid., 233–35; Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), viii–ix.
[40] "Chronological Review of Some of the Measures Taken to Effect Better Adjustment of School and Child," n.d., series 164, box 1, folder 1, Board of Education Papers, Municipal Archives, New York, NY (hereafter "Board of Education Papers").
[41] Franklin, "Educating an Urban Black Community," 283; Judy Jolley Mohraz, *The Separate Problem: Case Studies of Black Education in the North, 1900–1930* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1979), 42. Throughout the country, social-Darwinian misunderstandings of race and learning spawned during the late-nineteenth century were still predominant among social scientists during the 1910s and 1920s.
[42] Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*, 41; Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 162; Joe W. Trotter, "African Americans in the City," 441; Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900–1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 131.

University in school administration and taken charge at P.S. 89. His school felt the impact of early-twentieth century demographic change in Harlem earlier than any other. Even before the Great Migration accelerated the formation of a black "city within a city" in Central Harlem during and after World War I, the movement uptown of black New Yorkers from Columbus Hill and the Tenderloin district and the flight of white residents to outer boroughs transformed the blocks immediately surrounding P.S. 89. By 1916, 84 percent of the school's students were African-American and 93 percent by 1921. The principal was among the first in Harlem to systematically study the problems facing his students outside of school. In 1916, he issued a formal report that tied problems at school to shortcomings in students' homes. It posited that students' problems in school, such as truancy, delinquency, and slow progress through grade levels, resulted from the absence of proper parenting due to burdensome work demands on those parents, especially in single-parent households.[43]

Professional educators were not the only ones moving toward sociological explanations of problems at home that handicapped Harlem children's performance in school. By the 1910s, civic organizations such as the Public Education Association (PEA), a group mainly consisting of upper-class New Yorkers, attributed black students' struggles in school to their experiences at home. On April 29, 1915, the PEA announced the findings of Frances Blascoer, the association's Special Investigator for the Committee on Hygiene of School Children, in a publication titled *Colored School Children in New York*.[44] Blascoer came from a background as a settlement worker, and had recently served as the first

[43] Haynes, "Report."
[44] Frances Blascoer, *Colored School Children in New York* (New York: Public Education Association of the City of New York, 1915); "Find City Schools Cold to Negroes," *New York Times*, April 30, 1930, 9.

Executive Secretary of the NAACP. Between 1912 and 1913, Blascoer and the rest of her committee studied 68 Manhattan schools with substantial numbers of black students enrolled. They visited homes and social welfare agencies in the neighborhoods of those schools. Despite their original aim to identify school conditions that handicapped black students' performance in school and contributed to juvenile delinquency, they turned most of their attention to the problems students faced outside of schools.[45]

Blascoer's committee labeled many of the children in the study "difficult" and recommended psychological testing of all black students due to a "tendency to mental abnormalities."[46] They explicitly connected the problems of students to race when they referred to the "Negro problem," but avoided references to hereditary difference. Instead, they identified troubled home life as the cause of the problem, characterized by parents' lack of occupational stability, illiteracy, and poor educational background. Many of the principals interviewed by the committee traced these shortcomings to families' lack of educational background in the South.[47]

Pointedly, the committee did not present concerns about students' hardships at home as an excuse for the schools to dodge responsibility. In fact they did the opposite, calling for schools to take on a heightened role in intervening in children's lives. They identified the school as the best institution for coordinating a wide range of welfare services. Churches, settlement houses, and other community centers, they argued, could not as effectively deliver individualized enrichment experiences to children, and served fewer young people. The committee lobbied in favor of increased home visits by teachers

[45] Blascoer, *Colored School Children*, 84; Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 73; Ment, "Racial Segregation," 218.
[46] Blascoer, *Colored School Children*, 131, 138.
[47] Ibid., 1–18, 138.

and social workers, a practice in decline due to the stigma attached to "young ladies" entering "colored homes."[48] They expected that this practice would shed light on students' environments outside of the classroom, thus allowing better customization of school services to meet their needs.

Studies that followed took a similar approach. In 1921, sociologist George Haynes surveyed the Harlem community's social and welfare institutions and concluded that the effects of poverty drastically impeded children's school performance.[49] Six years later, the Joint Committee on Negro Child Study in New York City published a report similar to Blascoer's, in which it elaborated on many of the same problems. The group, representing thirty social welfare organizations active in Harlem at the time, focused primarily on juvenile delinquency.[50] In doing so, it painted a bleak picture of Harlem children's environment, marked by "deplorable conditions" everywhere from the schools to homes.[51] The committee described a pattern of "enforced parental neglect" in which Harlem parents, handicapped by poverty, could not provide properly for their children. The committee's report was summarized in the New York City press as well as the national black press.[52] Letters to the editors of major city papers echoed this sentiment, arguing that the schools were the most efficient point of intervention to deter recalcitrant children from developing

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[48] Blascoer, *Colored School Children*, 1–2, 18, 131, 138. Most principals did not advocate for such visits, and some even banned them to black family homes.
[49] Haynes, "Report."
[50] "Negro Children of Harlem are Found to Be Neglected," *New York Times*, September 25, 1927. The number of black children appearing before the juvenile courts nearly doubled between 1919 and 1925.
[51] "Harlem Conditions Called Deplorable," *New York Times*, September 6, 1927; Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode*, 35. The report determined the delinquency rate among the black children in New York City was four to five times greater than among white children in the city. This is supported by findings by the National Urban League as part of its campaign to show discriminatory practices in the juvenile justice system, including statistics from the 1920s showing that black children appeared before the Children's Courts at three times the rate of white children.
[52] "Harlem Conditions Called Deplorable," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 17, 1927.

into hardened criminals.[53] The *New York Times* dramatized the committee's findings, beginning its coverage of the report, "The glitter of Harlem's principal thoroughfares does not represent the true state of the interior of New York's 'black belt' …"[54]

A 1932 report by Owen Lovejoy, Secretary of the Children's Aid Society, drew similar conclusions. It described how children in Harlem during the previous decade wandered the streets in the absence of adult supervision. Lovejoy backed this argument with statistics showing an alarmingly high rate of student transfers in and out of Harlem schools, which he attributed to families' lack of stability.[55]

Harlem principals and their superintendents used the same type of language found in sociological reports to describe students' lack of support at home. Yet, in the same conversations in which these administrators identified problems in students' home lives, they nearly always ended with the optimistic conclusion that school experiences could outweigh those disadvantages.

New York City school administrators especially raised concerns about the absence of proper moral guidance outside of school and turned to school-based solutions. As a remedy they ramped up "moral education" programs in Harlem schools throughout the 1920s. In crafting these programs, they built on citywide "character education" curricula, which had been initiated as "Americanization" programming between 1890 and 1910 with the aim of assimilating the rapidly growing immigrant school population. Harlem school administrators rarely made explicit comparisons between the African-American migrants who they served and the new immigrants transforming the demographics elsewhere in the

[53] H. S. Rague, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, August 15, 1926.
[54] "Negro Children of Harlem are Found to Be Neglected," *New York Times*, September 25, 1927.
[55] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 147–48.

city. However, the language with which they described the cultural deprivation of the migrant groups overlapped in striking ways.[56]

Such character education programming received popular support citywide. The *New York Times* in 1924 published letters urging the expansion of "practical moral training" in the schools to counter growing juvenile delinquency rates and replace the dwindling "basic character training" offered in the home as working families in large cities found less and less time with their children. One letter writer, a retired navy officer from Brooklyn, proposed a rigorous character education program with a "character diploma" recording students' moral conduct throughout their schooling and a revised curriculum designed to cultivate moral values associated with good citizenship.[57] Other letters in support of increased character education appeared in New York City papers as well as those of other large cities such as Washington, D.C.[58] Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier supported character education and warned in 1924 that the new wave of industrial training programs might lack "moral and religious aspects" and lead to "soulless scholarship."[59]

The black press generally came out in favor of character education in Harlem schools. In the mid-1920s, the *New York Age* (founded in the 1880s) backed administrators' claims that "the building of character is one of the essential aims of education" and reinforced their plea for parent cooperation to buttress in-school moral

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[56] Paula S. Fass, *Outside In: Minorities and the Transformation of American Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 13–35; New York City Board of Education, *Annual Report of the City Superintendent of Schools*, 1925–26, City Hall Library, New York (all New York City Board of Education annual reports are available in City Hall Library; hereafter "NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*" followed by year).
[57] H. O. Rittenhouse, "Practical Moral Training," *New York Times*, June 22, 1924.
[58] S. A., letter to the editor, *Washington Post*, March 17, 1929.
[59] E. Franklin Frazier, "A Note on Negro Education," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (March 1924): 75–77.

training.[60] The *Amsterdam News,* founded in 1909 as a rival to the *Age*, joined the *Age* in regularly urging parents to support the goals of the public schools by sending children to school on time and fully prepared.[61] These two, the most prominent black newspapers in the city, strongly supported the Open-School Week initiative that the central administrators started in the mid-1920s and designed to bring parents into the schools and form better relationships with teachers.[62] The editors at both newspapers were among New York City's black elite, and associated closely in their business dealings with upper-class, white philanthropists who understood the role of schooling through a lens of class.

However, the editors' concern with moral improvement went beyond class. They maintained a core mission in their newspapers of racial uplift, and they frequently reminded readers of the common bonds between working- and professional-class black New Yorkers. This reflected a larger tendency in the black communities of New York during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries for class divisions to be muted by the shared civil rights struggle.[63] Black elites' support for character education in the schools fit into a larger program of moral uplift among black leaders beyond Harlem. W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington shared a concern for the "moral improvement" of

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[60] "Lessons of School Week," *New York Age*, November 28, 1925; "Aims of Education," *New York Age*, July 3, 1926.
[61] "Getting the Children of Harlem Back to Public and High Schools," *New York Age*, September 5, 1923; "Keep Children in School," *New York Age*, June 14, 1924; "School a Necessity," *New York Age*, December 27, 1924; "Getting an Education," *New York Age*, August 30, 1924; "School Children's Needs," *New York Age*, December 25, 1920; "When Schools Reopen," *New York Age*, September 8, 1928.
[62] "The Public School," *New York Age*, September 24, 1927; "Harlem Observing Open School Week," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 12, 1930.
[63] Taylor, *Black Churches*, 14–15.

black citizens. Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, gave moral training an important place in his ideology of Black Nationalism.[64]

Black press editors' support for character education fit into a broader push for more public schooling of all kinds for Harlem residents. The *New York Age* and *Amsterdam News* both regularly urged parents to enroll their children in school and enforce attendance.[65] In a piece commissioned by the *Amsterdam News* in 1923, a black teacher, Willis Huggins, wrote the following: "We, of all groups, can least afford to neglect so important a thing as public education. Probably nowhere else in the world are educational opportunities so full and free as they are in New York City. This fact should and does mean much to the people of Harlem."[66] "The Go-to-School movement," read a 1924 editorial in the *Age*, *"* should have the force of a moral crusade."[67]

At the same time that they added programs such as character education, New York City school administrators adjusted the academic curriculum. Anticipating limited opportunities for black students in higher education and skilled trades, they replaced higher-level academic classes with remedial and low-skill vocational training. New York City superintendents adopted "practical training" courses, extending a national trend toward a "differentiated curriculum," designed to accommodate the diverse student body

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[64] Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 34, 180.
[65] "School Children's Needs," *New York Age*, December 25, 1920; "Getting an Education," *New York Age*, August 30, 1924; Willis N. Huggins, "Getting the Children of Harlem Back to Public and High Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 5, 1923.
[66] "Getting the Children of Harlem Back to Public and High Schools*," New York Age*, September 5, 1923.
[67] "Keep Children in School," *New York Age*, June 14, 1924; "School a Necessity," *New York Age*, December 27, 1924.

resulting from compulsory education laws enacted during the Progressive Era.[68]

Since the late-nineteenth century, New York's educational professionals had led the way in applying this type of reform in their city's schools. They widely implemented differentiated curricula in city schools that served predominantly working-class students. They saw little purpose in offering traditional education to students who were unlikely to advance to college or obtain white-collar jobs. Instead, they would prepare larger numbers of students for low-skill industrial jobs.[69]

Administrators' differentiated curriculum approach normally revolved around vocational training. With support from an ideologically diverse range of groups, including businessmen, labor leaders, and liberal reformers, administrators created a growing number of vocational schools across the city during the Progressive Era. By World War I, vocational classes were a major part of the curriculum at the high school level, and to a lesser degree the middle and elementary grades.[70] Between 1920 and 1925, the number of public vocational schools rose from eight to eighteen, and by 1931 to twenty-two.[71] In 1929, Superintendent of Schools William O'Shea (who served from 1924 to 1934) spoke proudly of the importance of industrial training for the "thousands of children who are not able to absorb academic treatment and who are manually minded."[72]

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[68] Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*, 66; Harvey Kantor, "Work, Education, and Vocational Reform: The Ideological Origins of Vocational Education, 1890–1920," *American Journal of Education* 94, no. 4 (August 1986): 401. Educational historian Diane Ravitch (*The Great School Wars*, 234) traces the first use of a differentiated curriculum to 1898 when District Superintendent Julia Richman classified students in one school as "bright, medium, and poor" and put the best teachers in the classrooms of the "poor" students.

[69] "Chronological Review of Some of the Measures Taken to Effect Better Adjustment of School and Child," n.d., series 164, box 1, folder 1, Board of Education Papers.

[70] Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*, 67.

[71] Benjamin Fine, "Vocational Study to Get 38 Buildings," *New York Times*, November 7, 1937.

[72] Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 132; "Making Schools Attractive," *New York Age*, June 1, 1929; Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 160. During the 1920s and 1930s, social scientists

New York administrators' broad adoption of vocational training drew upon the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, which favored "industrial" education consisting of manual training designed to prepare black students for jobs open to them at the time. Washington had important followers in New York City during the early-twentieth century who implemented industrial education programs of their own at the middle and high school levels. Prominent among these was William L. Bulkley, an African-American educator who migrated to New York City during the 1890s from South Carolina where he had been born into slavery. Starting in 1899, Bulkley worked as a teacher and principal at a predominantly black school in the Tenderloin district.[73] In 1909, he took charge of a majority-white school, making him the first black principal of a "white" school in the state. He continued as principal of schools serving mostly Jewish and Italian students in Manhattan through 1924 when he left to start a school in Paris.[74]

Throughout his career, Bulkley promoted industrial training programs for black students. He publicly lamented the tragedy of students graduating from school only "to open doors, run bells or hustle hash" for a career. He saw vocational training as a means to expand their opportunities and he adopted such courses for his pupils, and opened up the services for the rest of the community outside of regular school hours. He ran night classes offering industrial training to anyone over the age of sixteen. These were well attended and participants considered them successful.[75]

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such as Horace Mann Bond, Doxey Wilkerson, and Charles Johnson challenged the validity of intelligence testing as a measure of academic potential. *Opportunity*, the journal of the National Urban League, took a lead role in publishing black scholars' objections to such testing.

[73] Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 71; "Rebellion of Teachers," *New York Age*, July 8, 1909; Osofsky, *Harlem*, 20, 64; Weiss, *The National Urban League*, 21–22.

[74] Mabee, *Black Education*, 271.

[75] Weiss, *The National Urban League*, 22.

Like many of the administrators who succeeded him in Harlem schools during the 1920s, Bulkley defined the school program as a panacea for societal ills. He held the firm belief that students from black families living in poor conditions needed extra social services and that his school was in the best position to provide them. In collaboration with local churches and other welfare organizations, Bulkley converted his school into a community center that provided the entire neighborhood with access to classes that ranged from preschool to adult education. He also featured lectures, health services, and recreation programs open to the entire neighborhood. The principal promoted frequent parent meetings and sent teachers to visit the homes of students when problems were detected.[76]

Bulkley wrote prolifically of his strategies for empowering his students through industrial training. In 1906, in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, he published a long article describing the increased opportunities that industrial education offered to black New Yorkers. Repeating a story about the absence of vocational training in New York, he explained, "Someone has remarked that, if a boy in the city of New York wants to learn a trade he must commit a crime" in order to gain access to a manual training program in a reformatory.[77]

Bulkley also worked outside of the education system to advance the job opportunities available to African Americans through vocational education. In 1906, he founded the Committee for Improving the Industrial Condition of the Negro in New York (CIICN), and later served as the vice-chairman of the National Urban League (which grew

[76] Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 71; Mabee, *Black Education*, 116; Scheiner, *Negro Mecca*, 164.
[77] William L. Bulkley, "The Industrial Condition of the Negro in New York City," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 27 (May 1906): 130.

out of the work of the CIICN) and cofounded the NAACP.[78] Influential black newspaper editors such as T. Thomas Fortune, founder of the *New York Age* and a strong supporter of Booker T. Washington, backed Bulkley's push for industrial education.[79] Fortune's efforts paralleled those of Robert Abbott, who promoted industrial education as editor of the *Chicago Defender*.[80]

Many of the administrators who followed Bulkley's model of industrial education worked in Harlem where the Board of Education placed a disproportionate number of vocational schools. This trend began early when the administration targeted the new immigrant population by locating the Vocational School for Boys, one of its first geared toward manual training, at the center of Harlem (138th Street and Fifth Avenue) in 1909.[81] In 1914, the Mayor identified this school as a model for future vocational school development.[82] With the start of the Great Migration and the belief that black students would benefit from vocational training spreading, the board added more of these schools in Central Harlem during the late 1910s and 1920s. They placed the largest of these, a new junior high school, only a few blocks away from the Vocational School for Boys.[83]

In addition to creating new vocational schools, the Board of Education and superintendents intensified the vocational training curriculum in existing schools. These programs tended to focus on preparation for low-skill trades such as domestic (e.g. cooking

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[78] Osofsky, *Harlem*, 62; Weiss, *The National Urban League*, 20.
[79] "Industrial Education in the North," *New York Age*, June 22, 1905; "Industrial Education Movement in New York," *New York Age*, November 8, 1905; "Trade Schools in New York," *New York Age*, November 29, 1906; August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915* (Ann Arbor, MI University of Michigan Press, 1969).
[80] Homel, *Down from Equality*, 119.
[81] Kantor, "Work, Education, and Vocational Reform," 403.
[82] "Mayor Inspects a School," *New York Times*, May 29, 1914.
[83] "The School, the Flag, and the Dollar," *New York Age*, October 25, 1925.

and sewing) and industrial work (e.g. low-skill factory skills).[84] Principals felt that this was the most practical approach and noted that black students who graduated with higher skill training were blocked from better jobs by racist union restrictions in the skilled trades. Some directors of vocational programs proudly admitted that they applied "a higher standard of qualification" for black students since the job prospects were so poor for them. African-American boys were disproportionately enrolled in classes training them in low-skilled machinery operation or service industry etiquette. Girls were routed into specialized classes in dressmaking and domestic work.[85]

Administrators tracked students into non-academic paths in large part based on the new science of intelligence testing. Between 1900 and 1930, educators and psychologists nationwide designed and applied new methods of intelligence testing, with the most rapid rise occurring between 1900 and 1920.[86] This fit a national trend in progressive education that favored the application of scientific techniques developed by psychologists to schools.[87] Starting in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the New York City school system widely implemented IQ testing. Using a few different types of tests derived from the Stanford-Binet (popularized during World War I as a tool for sorting army recruits), the school administration and psychologists from the Education Clinic at the City College of New York and other New York universities developed a series of cutoffs that determined minimum scores necessary for the placement of students in various academic and vocational courses.[88]

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[84] Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*, 72.
[85] Blascoer, *Colored School Children*, 19, 139.
[86] Franklin, "Educating an Urban Black Community," 76, 207.
[87] Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*, viii.
[88] Haynes, "Report"; Homel, *Down from Equality*, 116.

In Harlem, many of the students determined by tests to be less academically inclined were African-American students whose families had recently arrived from the South. These students were frequently two or more years older than their classmates. Some schools that served high concentrations of children who recently lived in the South and West Indies registered hundreds of overage pupils.[89] This resulted mainly from inadequate schooling backgrounds before migration, and it was compounded by poor living conditions for the new arrivals in New York, which made it difficult for students to catch up.[90] According to the district superintendent for Harlem Districts 15 and 16, seven out of eight students who transferred to Harlem schools from the South were overage; three of every eight were more than two years behind; and some of them were four or more years overage.[91] This fits the general pattern observed by Louise Kennedy in her 1930 work, *The Negro Peasant Turns Cityward*, of students "from southern schools [who] had been seriously handicapped by the poor educational facilities there, by the short terms and by the inadequate compulsory school laws."[92] Some principals placed overage children in smaller classes (twenty-five or fewer, compared to the district average over forty), and opened "adjustment classes" for students who were the farthest behind, as well as "continuing schools" for students deemed too old to remain in the K–12 system.[93]

Jacob Ross and Harriet Tupper, the principals of elementary schools in the heart of Harlem that received many students arriving from the U.S. South and the West Indies (P.S.

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[89] Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*, 72; "Why This Colored School?" *New York Age*, December 18, 1920; "Preparing for Business," *New York Age*, July 4, 1925.
[90] Henri, *Black Migration*, 98; Haynes, "Report."
[91] Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*, 72.
[92] Louise Venable Kennedy, *The Negro Peasant Turns Cityward: Effects of Recent Migrations to Northern Centers,* 2nd ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 198.
[93] Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*, 72.

89 and 119), took the lead in applying intelligence testing in Harlem. In 1919, they created new vocational bureaus that administered IQ tests and steered students to either academic or prevocational classes, including new classes in domestic and low-skilled industrial work. The schools also used the tests to classify students as "accelerated," "normal," or "retarded" to sort out the high number of overage children.[94]

Administrators' wide implementation of vocational curricula, even with an emphasis on lower-skilled work, received general support from the black press, parents, and civic organizations active in Harlem. The case of the extension of the Manhattan Trade School for Girls demonstrates this tendency. In 1910, New York City took control of the Manhattan Trade School for Girls (previously a private school) located at 209 E. 23rd Street, six miles south of Harlem.[95] This nearly all-white school, the first in the city to offer skilled vocational training to girls, received attention around the city and beyond for its modern curriculum. In 1914, Woodrow Wilson chose the school's principal, Florence Marshall, as one of two women on a commission to investigate the demand for federal assistance to vocational schools nationwide. Interviewed by the *Washington Post*, Marshall explained how the work of her school allowed girls a new level of independence since graduates could earn as much as fifteen to thirty-five dollars a week in skilled trades like hat making.[96] By 1915, demand for the school had grown to the point that it had to turn away

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[94] Haynes, "Report"; Josephine Chase, *New York at School: a Description of the Activities and Administration of the Public Schools of the City of New York* (New York: Public Education Association of the City of New York, 1927), 14; "Vocational Guidance," *New York Age*, October 23, 1920; Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*, 72.

[95] U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, "Twenty-fifth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1910, Industrial Education" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 267; "Trades for Girls," *New York Tribune*, July 18, 1918; "Mayor Inspects a School," *New York Times*, May 29, 1914.

[96] "Teach Girls a Trade," *Washington Post*, March 3, 1914.

400 girls, and by the early 1920s the school system planned to add additional vocational schools for girls.[97] In 1923, after learning that two such schools had been authorized by the Board of Education—one in northern Manhattan, the other in Brooklyn—the New York City black press and others from among the Harlem community lobbied for placing the uptown school in Central Harlem. The *Amsterdam News* urged civic organizations and churches to lobby for locating the school in Harlem. In the end, the Board of Education acceded to the community's demands and agreed to place the new school in Central Harlem.[98]

Black newspaper editors routinely voiced and influenced the Harlem community's public opinion in favor of industrial education. The *New York Age* promoted vocational curricula in Harlem the most consistently. It maintained this position long after T. Thomas Fortune sold the paper in 1907. During the 1920s, the paper's editorials applauded vocational guidance's effectiveness in matching the "mental capacity and adaptability of the pupil" with "channels that will qualify him for a gainful occupation."[99] "Unless the school children are capable of absorbing and profiting by higher education," the *Age* declared in 1930, "it is a waste of time and money to endeavor to give them academic training. If they can be prepared to pursue some gainful occupation for which they are naturally adapted, they will be better contented and more likely to turn out good citizens."[100] The *Age's* editorial board specifically supported the heightened use of intelligence tests to sort students into varying curricular tracks. "The standards and curriculum adapted to the

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[97] Henrietta Rodman, "City Needs Many More Girls' Trade Schools," *New York Tribune*, February 3, 1915.
[98] "Citizens of Harlem Urged to Awake to Trade School Situation," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 7, 1923.
[99] Editorial, *New York Age*, January 11, 1917.
[100] "Continuation Schools," *New York Age*, March 22, 1930.

normal city children," the newspaper editorialized in 1930, "do not fit these backward children [who recently migrated from the South] and they constitute a disturbing element which tries the patience of many teachers and principals."[101] The *Age* frequently equated vocational education with socioeconomic mobility as it argued against the stereotype that industrial education means "scrubbing floors, cooking and making beds, in the case of girls, or for boys doing some work with a saw and a hammer."[102] It pointed optimistically to the value of an industrial education in an age "when brick masons and plasterers and carpenters are reaping four or five times as much as the white collar workers."[103]

Other black publications joined the *Age* in their support for Harlem students' vocational education. The National Urban League backed industrial education for black middle and high school students in its monthly publication, *Opportunity*. A feature article by journalist Lionel Fraser argued that public schools must take into account the realities of the job market in designing curricula for black students: "equal opportunities do not in themselves mean or call for identical educational offerings."[104] The *Amsterdam News* pointedly dismissed criticism of industrial training by referring to it as "that great bugaboo of Negro intellectuals" and described manual training as "totally in line with modern thought along educational lines for all races."[105]

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[101] "New York's School Head," *New York Age,* April 19, 1930.
[102] "Vocational Training," *New York Age*, May 3, 1930.
[103] Lauri Johnson, "A Generation of Women Activists: African American Female Educators in Harlem, 1930–1950," *Journal of African American History* 89, no. 3 (2004): 230; "Value of Education," *New York Age*, July 12, 1924; "Learning a Trade," *New York Age*, August 2 1924; "Vocational Guidance," *New York Age*, March 26, 1921; "Choosing a Vocation," *New York Age*, March 11, 1922.
[104] Lionel B. Fraser, "Educational and Vocational Guidance of Negro Youth," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (August 1930): 241–43.
[105] "Out of Her Element," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 2, 1926.

In addition to praising vocational training initiatives, the black press expressed general confidence in the school administration's treatment of Harlem's schools. Both the *Amsterdam News* and *New York Age* regularly published editorials complementing the fairness and wisdom of prevailing school policies. Oftentimes, they explicitly noted the leadership's lack of racial discrimination or favoritism.[106] They spoke highly of Superintendent O'Shea and his predecessors, characterizing them as "men of executive ability and courage" who avoided racial or ethnic bias in their work.[107] These newspapers tended to support the reforms enacted by O'Shea, including the use of IQ tests to place and track students in a diversified curriculum. They were especially heartened by his avoidance of assigning teachers to schools by race.[108]

In 1927, radical activist Hubert Harrison heralded the educational opportunities available to black New Yorkers in an article titled "Harlem's Neglected Opportunities": "Whatever hatred we may nourish against the white man of the South for hindering us educationally, none of it will lie against the white man of New York … [who] offers to the Negro child as good an education as that offered the white child—and it is a free gift."[109] His statement echoed the optimistic language of William Bulkley, who had written twenty years earlier of the "liberal mindedness of our excellent city superintendent and his aides"

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[106] "School Administration," *New York Age*, October 9, 1926; "Making Schools Attractive," *New York Age*, June 1, 1929; "Important School Questions," *New York Age*, March 12, 1924; "Popular School Appointment," *New York Age*, November 27, 1926; "A Progressive School Head," *New York Age*, April 18, 1925; "More School Accommodations"; "Two Public Appointees," *The Crisis* (March 1917): 231; Editorial, *New York Age*, January 11, 1917.

[107] "School Supervision," *New York Age*, May 26, 1928; "New York's School Head," April 19, 1930; "Public School System," *New York Age*, May 24, 1930; "Dr. Maxwell's Retirement," *New York Age*, March 15, 1917.

[108] "New York's School Head," *New York Age*, April 19, 1930.

[109] "Harlem's Neglected Opportunities: Twin Sources of Gin and Genius, Poetry and Pajama Parties," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 30, 1927, reprinted in Herb Boyd, *The Harlem Reader* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003), 48.

and the "fairness of our Board of Education and the Board of Examiners" and had concluded, "There is no such a thing as a caste public school in the whole Empire State."[110]

Civic organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League, as well as the black press, were impressed with how much better the school situation was in Harlem than it was in the South, the location from which such a large number of Harlem's students had come. Far more blacks in the North were able to go to school (over 93 percent of children ages seven to thirteen) versus numbers as low as 60 percent in Louisiana and 70 percent in Georgia.[111] And these children encountered a school experience far superior to anything they had known in the South.

By the 1920s, the number of African-American teachers in New York City schools teaching in racially mixed schools was the largest in the nation. Despite the low number of black teachers in New York City, the NAACP identified the situation as a model of integration since the teachers were relatively spread out across schools (to the point that black teachers were more likely to teach white students than black) and by 1930 the percentage of black teachers outnumbered other northern cities by as much as double, making it a success in relative terms.[112] This ran counter to the trend in nearly all other northern cities during the era, where black teachers were routinely assigned to all-black schools.[113] The *New York Age*, a strong proponent of equal opportunities for black teachers and a colorblind selection and assignment process, recognized on its fortieth anniversary in 1926 that hundreds of black teachers now worked in New York City's racially integrated

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[110] Bulkley, "The Industrial Condition of the Negro in New York City," 132.
[111] Henri, *Black Migration*, 95.
[112] Kate Rousmaniere, *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997), 51; Homel, *Down from Equality*, 191.
[113] Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 176.

system. They heralded this as a major advancement since the late-nineteenth century when positions in mixed-race schools were almost entirely closed to African-American teachers.[114]

The NAACP tended to intervene in questions of race and the public schools of Harlem during the 1920s only in cases of gross discrimination. For example, in April 1929, a Harlem parent reported an incident to the NAACP in which her daughter's teacher had slapped her child, breaking her glasses and scratching her face.[115] The NAACP legal office pressured Superintendent O'Shea to thoroughly investigate the situation.[116] O'Shea's level of cooperation did not satisfy the NAACP legal team, which wrote back with an accusation that the central office's response to such situations was too slow and too superficial.

Yet, the NAACP response in the case went no further. And even this level of minor protest was an aberration. Both the national office and the Harlem branch of the NAACP opposed the principle of racial segregation in schools.[117] But despite its ideological stance,

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[114] Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*, 74; Rousmaniere, *City Teachers*, 45, 51; "Looking Back Forty Years," *New York Age*, December 18, 1926; Mabee, *Black Education*, 220; "Equal Opportunities in Schools," *New York Age*, March 22, 1924. This is not to say that employment opportunities for black teachers in New York City were fair in absolute terms during the 1920s. It was not until 1930 that the number of permanent black teachers rose to 1 percent and by the middle of the century to 1.5 percent. These numbers do not include teachers working in a substitute role, which tended to represent an entire additional percentage point. The Teachers Union and other groups fighting on behalf of black teachers' rights were extremely critical of the fact that so many of the black teachers were limited to substitute positions. A handful of teachers complained publicly of discriminatory hiring practices. One teacher during the 1920s, Sadie Delany, the first black teacher of domestic science in New York and the daughter of a pioneering black Episcopal bishop, later recounted how she skipped her interview to hide her skin color for fear of discrimination.

[115] Miss Randolph to Mr. Andrews, memorandum, 23 April 1929, part 3, series A, reel 22, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, microfilmed by University Publications of America, 1986 (hereafter "NAACP Papers"), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

[116] William T. Andrews to William J. O'Shea, 29 April 1929, part 3, series A, reel 22, NAACP Papers.

[117] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 172–73; Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 188, 195–205. After standing firmly in favor of integrated schools during the 1910s, Du Bois wavered on his position in the 1920s, and shifted further in the 1930s as he argued that the insistence on integration was a

the NAACP took little action to fight segregated public school conditions in New York City. Instead, they focused primarily on fighting de jure segregation in school systems where its strategy of legal action would carry the most weight. These included school districts in the South as well as those in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, which all officially enforced separate black and white schools.[118]

Even in the face of a rising tide of racial segregation and increasingly rigid curricular tracking, virtually all Central Harlem community leaders stood behind the overall policies of the administration. Through the 1920s, in the absence of strong evidence of racial discrimination, the middle- and upper-class black elites who wielded the most power in Harlem politics supported the school system in its effort to sort students based on predictions of vocational and academic potential. They also backed programs such as character education to compensate for perceived failings in the home.

This left administrators almost entirely uncontested in their plan to reform the curriculum of Harlem schools. By the turn of the twentieth century, the New York City public school administration had decades of experience defining and serving the educational needs of immigrant communities that suffered disproportionate levels of poverty. Reflecting a Progressive Era faith in statistical measurement and scientific procedure, the administrators working in Harlem turned to intelligence testing and diversified curriculum to guide their work and accommodate individualized needs of the

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misguided strategy. Improvement of separate black schools, he came to argue, was the best short-term uplift strategy. In 1934, he broke very publicly with the NAACP on the matter, explaining that in theory he was against segregated schools, but in practice black students could not receive a fair education in a mixed-race setting. During the 1930s, the NAACP continued to vigorously oppose segregation of all kinds in public education.

[118] Ment, "Racial Segregation," 235; Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 81–82; Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 151, 189.

rapidly growing student body in the same manner as their predecessors. In most ways, administrators stuck to plans developed for European immigrants, with the goal of overcoming economic poverty and cultural deprivation.[119]

The administration's goal of customizing the curriculum for students in Central Harlem yielded some benefits to students and their families. Rather than writing off children who performed poorly as incompatible with the system, school officials adapted the curriculum to meet their needs and expand services. Most school professionals, including teachers, generally supported these reforms. For example, the Teachers Union promoted professional development in "mental hygiene" techniques to train teachers to recognize behavioral problems among children. It stressed the importance of positive relationships between teachers, students, and parents, which it saw as enabling the creation of consistently healthy environments for students' physical, mental, and academic development.[120] Yet, despite shared goals and high confidence levels among administrators, teachers, and the black elite who set much of the political agenda for the Central Harlem community, it remained untested whether revised curricula alone could translate into socioeconomic mobility in the context of pervasive racial discrimination and inequality outside of the schools.

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[119] Diane Ravitch, "New York School Reform: A 'Long Haul' Affair," *New York Times*, January 16, 1974.

[120] John Levy, "The Application of Mental Hygiene Principles to the Class Room," *The Union Teacher* 4, no. 1 (September 1926): 2–3. The Teachers Union changed the name of their publication from *The Union Teacher* to *New York Teacher News* following their split with the Teachers Guild in 1935.

Chapter Two
Counteracting a "Maelstrom of Economic and Social Distress": The Great Depression and Harlem Schools, 1927–1935

The Great Depression hit Harlem extremely hard and relatively early. The New York Urban League noted unusual increases in unemployment as early as the fall of 1927.[121] A steep economic downturn was already underway by 1928.[122] During the Great Depression, the unemployment rate quadrupled during 1930 alone.[123] Most black residents of Harlem at this time worked in low-skilled service jobs and were far less unionized than most groups in New York City.[124] Median income dropped steadily after 1929: from $1,808 to $1,019 in 1932 and $837 in 1936.[125] Between 50 and 60 percent of the families in the area suffered unemployment (between one-and-a-half and three times that of white New Yorkers) and nearly half of them turned to state or federal relief.[126]

As District Superintendent Robert J. Frost reflected in 1934, "Whenever society has been confronted with a problem for which no other agency was equipped, it has turned the task over to the schools. When the present emergency came it was not surprising that the job of ameliorating the rigors of the depression should have been turned over to the

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[121] Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode*, 39.
[122] Greene, "Harlem in the Great Depression," i–viii, 60.
[123] Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode,* 39, 42.
[124] Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 32.
[125] Eve Thurston, "Ethiopia Unshackled: A Brief History of the Education of Negro Children in New York City," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 69, no. 4 (April 1965): 227.
[126] Lauri Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," in *Teacher Education with an Attitude: Preparing Teachers to Educate Working-Class Students in Their Collective Self-Interest*, ed. Patrick J. Finn and Mary E. Finn (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 221; Greene, "Harlem in the Great Depression," iii, 481; Johnson, "A Generation of Women Activists," 224; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 31.

teachers."[127] During the Depression, the Harlem community turned to the public schools as a source of benefits such as free lunches, basic health care, and job training.[128] Educational levels among black students in Harlem rose throughout the 1930s, as did attendance rates, which equaled white children by the end of the decade.[129]

Yet, during this time of increasing dependence on the schools, construction of new buildings slowed across the city. This disproportionately affected Harlem, by then one of the most densely populated areas of the city and an area where expansion of school facilities had already fallen behind the rapid population growth during the 1920s.[130] School administrators, faced with massive budget cuts during the early 1930s, froze all new building, hiring, and limited repairs on existing buildings.[131] Limited by budget constraints, Harlem's district superintendents and principals could do little to fix physical conditions in the schools. They generally refrained from speaking on the record about those conditions, although in some cases complained publicly that their hands were tied by a shortage of resources in their district.[132]

Instead, these administrators focused nearly exclusively on intensifying the vocational and character education programming that they had initiated in Harlem during the previous decade. The superintendents and principals had far greater control over curriculum than resource allocation, and their confidence in the power of a specialized school program to properly "adjust" children remained high. They believed that they could

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[127] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1933–34, 57.
[128] Asrat, "Harlem Is Not Dixie," 72.
[129] Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode*, 190.
[130] Mabee, *Black Education*, 249; Asrat, "Harlem Is Not Dixie," 71.
[131] Thurston, "Ethiopia Unshackled," 227.
[132] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1933–34, 62–63. For example, in his 1933–34 annual report, David Frost emphasized the importance of new school buildings in Harlem to alleviate overcrowding.

enrich the lives of their students to compensate for poverty at home.

Yet, there were dangers inherent to administrators' view that students' home environment and past school experiences dictated their ability to succeed in school. When taken to the extreme, theories of cultural deprivation could be used to blame parents and dismiss school responsibility. In practice, large groups of black students were steered without choice toward limited industrial education opportunities and prepared only for a life of low-skilled labor.

By the second half of the 1920s, some community leaders in Harlem began to complain that this approach could do much harm by denying students access to an equal educational opportunity. They objected to the wholesale replacement of academic courses with manual training curricula.[133] Instead, they wanted their children to have access to both opportunities. Many were suspicious of the disproportionately small number of children who continued academic training through high school (less than a sixth of the city average).[134] They echoed W. E. B. Du Bois's strong public stance against industrial training at all grade levels, associating it with caste formation. "If [black] children are compelled to cook and sew when they ought to be learning to read, write and cipher, they will not be able to enter the high school or go to college as the white children are doing," Du Bois had

[133] "Needs of Colored School Children," *New York Age*, May 6, 1915; Ment, "Racial Segregation," 221. This was not the first time that objections were lodged in the black press to an over-reliance on industrial education, but they became more common during this period. For instance, the *Age* protested in 1915 when the white principal of PS. 89, a school consisting of over 75 percent black students, responded to a proposal to increase the number of math classes by commenting, "More physical exercise, music singing, or manual training would be a good thing, but more arithmetic would be giving the pupils a double dose of something they did not like." The *Age*'s editorial countered that Harlem's children are entitled to the same educational opportunities available to children from any other racial or ethnic group.

[134] "One in 400 in High School," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 9, 1927.

written.[135] Education, he argued, "must not be allowed to sink to sordid utilitarianism" since "it is dealing with Souls and not with Dollars."[136] He was particularly adamant that vocational education had no place at the primary and middle school levels.[137]

During the 1920s, even strong supporters of vocational education like the *New York Age* and the *Amsterdam News* occasionally questioned why principals, teachers, and guidance counselors in Harlem were assigning black students to industrial training classes in such overwhelming numbers without properly consulting parents or students.[138] Instead of opening up options, vocational education had become a cul-de-sac. The *Amsterdam News* criticized an approach that had become "hell-bent on giving the Negro only an industrial education." The paper went further, criticizing the Board of Education for holding "peculiar ideas" about the limited potential for academic training among black students. It referred to recent comments from trustees of Fisk, Hampton, and Tuskegee Colleges predicting increased opportunities for professional training for black students at postsecondary institutions.[139]

With the deepening of economic troubles in the early 1930s, community support for vocational education further eroded as Harlemites came to realize that for all its good intentions and for all the strong arguments behind the more diversified curriculum, its success entirely depended on implementation. However, Harlem's district superintendents

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[135] "Education: The Persistent Onslaught," *The Crisis* (July 1915): 136; Mohraz, *The Separate Problem*, 71. Their objections used much of the same language as that employed by W. E. B. Du Bois in his attacks on "practical education" at the college level, articulated most directly in the 1910s.
[136] W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *The Negro Artisan: A Social Study* (Atlanta, Atlanta University Press, 1902), 81.
[137] "The Common School," *The Crisis* 16 (July 1918): 112.
[138] "Industrial or Academic," *New York Age*, May 22, 1926.
[139] "Educational Eye-Openers," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 9, 1926.

continued to back the expansion of vocational and character education programs in the schools during the early 1930s.

It was the most aggressive of these administrators, Oswald Schlockow, who drew the sharpest criticism. Born in Germany in 1874, Schlockow came to New York City at the age of eight and attended New York City public schools all the way through his undergraduate degree at City College of New York. As a graduate student at New York University, Schlockow had taken a special interest in techniques of school management and discipline, including methods for maintaining order by instilling morality among "incorrigible truants in the schools." He put these notions into practice as a teacher at P.S. 22 in Manhattan, as principal at P.S. 50 and P.S. 109 in Brooklyn, and finally as district superintendent in Harlem beginning in 1928.[140]

Between 1932 and 1934, Schlockow made character education and vocational programming his top goal in his districts (10 and 12), which covered much of Central Harlem. Schlockow concluded that upper Harlem's "special educational, social, ethical, academic and vocational needs" required customized school programming, which he characterized as an antidote to poisonous conditions in the homes and communities of students.[141]

In particular, Schlockow argued that character education and "citizenship training" would achieve this goal, and he pushed his principals to expand this approach.[142] He described his agenda as favoring "character first," a phrase that he argued should "be

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[140] Oswald Schlockow, "Geography," *School Work* 7, no. 1 (April 1908): 255; "Notes and News," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 9, no. 10 (December 1918): 591; Oswald Schlockow, "Discipline; Its Sociological and Pedagogical Implications" (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1904); "Dr. Oswald Schlockow," *New York Times*, July 7, 1954.
[141] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1933–34, 47, 51.
[142] "Harlem Schools Aim At Good Citizenship," *New York Times*, September 9, 1934.

inscribed over the portals of every school in these districts" since he deemed it a "pole star of vision" for Harlem students.[143] One of the schools in his districts, P.S. 89, regularly instructed parents in weekly bulletins to cooperate with the school in building character and academic skills such as "punctuality, regularity of attendance, cleanliness, neatness and prompt obedience."[144] P.S. 89 principal, Julius Gluck, attributed a strong socialization role to education, especially in the case of new arrivals from the South and the West Indies. He spoke proudly of his programs exposing students to libraries, museums, and movies to nurture an "appreciation of a large city" and strengthen their citizenship skills.[145]

Alongside character education, Schlockow increased vocational training programs in his Harlem districts. He sought a "flexible curriculum" featuring a broadened vocational track to meet the perceived needs of pupils who were limited in their ability to succeed in the academic curriculum due to a combination of environmental deprivation and inferior "native ability." Schlockow teamed up with District Superintendent Robert Frost, his counterpart responsible for Districts 13 and 14 (covering the remainder of Central Harlem) to increase the number of vocational courses in their schools. They also adjusted the academic curriculum by dropping some of the advanced classes and adding "visual instruction," which incorporated slides and other visual aides in lieu of complicated texts.[146] Schlockow and Frost justified such changes as steps to accommodate "children with borderline mentalities," more likely in their districts because of "the unique make-up

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[143] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1933–34, 48–49.
[144] Rebecca Marks, "Home Co-operation," *Parent-Teacher Bulletin*: *P.S. 89—Manhattan* 1, no. 5 (April, 1931): 2; Henry C. Sherman, "Emergency Nutrition," *Parent-Teacher Bulletin*: *P.S. 89—Manhattan* 2, no. 5 (February 1932): 3.
[145] "Curriculum," box 131–127, folder 10, E. Franklin Frazier Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC.
[146] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1932–33, 364.

of the population." If parents resisted such modifications, the district superintendents recommended to principals that they be "worn down." In annual reports, they explained their approach in similar terms to their 1920s predecessors, describing their curriculum as a modern improvement over the antiquated one-size-fits-all approach of an earlier age.[147] Yet, Schlockow and Frost failed to maintain even the illusion that the sorting into diverse curricular tracks would take place on an individualized basis. They spoke crudely of assignment of huge numbers of students to lower tracks based on their racial and socioeconomic group. Also problematic was their description of the tracks in static terms. The progressive nature of specialized curriculum, at least as envisioned by its founders, was that it maximized academic mobility for all students. This was increasingly becoming lost on administrators who applied such curricular adjustments to large blocks of students.

Schlockow also expanded social service programs in his districts and argued that students living in poverty needed extra mental and physical health services at school. He identified the root cause of student problems as poverty and insecurity, aggravated by the Depression. He was careful not to directly fault the families. Schlockow complemented the effectiveness of his schools' social service role in 1933 by applauding their success in delivering food, clothing, and medical care to students in desperate need.[148]

The district superintendent pressed particularly hard for the expansion of mental health care in schools. He encouraged close cooperation with outside clinics to promote the proper "mental adjustment" among students. He guided principals toward programs that taught classroom teachers in techniques referred to at the time as "mental hygiene." Such programs trained teachers to recognize early signs of mental instability and refer

[147] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1933–34, 45, 60.
[148] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1932–33, 352.

troubled students to specialists. As a model, Schlockow highlighted the work of a group of Harlem principals, led by Dorothy Bildersee of P.S. 80, who had recently formed an advisory group on the expansion of mental hygiene clinics throughout Harlem and northern Manhattan. Together with his colleague Robert Frost, Schlockow proposed a plan for adding psychologists to their staffs using money from the Civil Works Administration.[149]

Although he was not alone in promoting these causes, Schlockow was candidly outspoken in his call for major curricular adjustments based on the socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic characteristics of students at a given school. In his 1933–34 report, subsequently coined "the Schlockow Report" by the media, he wrote: "It has become common practice to adjust studies so as to promote the intellectual, emotional, and moral growth and development of the individual pupil." Similarly, he called on the schools to formulate individualized plans of "academic studies, manual training, and socialized techniques of work" to best suit the specific ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic makeup of their districts.[150] He reasoned that extra mental health services were in high demand in Harlem due to the high rates of poverty, "improper nourishment," and "unsatisfactory home conditions" that led to both "physical impairment" and "mental maladjustment."[151]

By the time of Schlockow's report, which elicited a great deal of controversy in the Harlem community, there was little disagreement among educators that black students in New York City were as a group scoring significantly lower on IQ tests and progressing through grade levels at a slower rate than their white peers. The question was why this

[149] Ibid., 59, 353.
[150] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1933–34, 46; "Would Change Schools Here," *New York Amsterdam News,* September 15, 1934.
[151] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1932–33, 353.

was the case. Schlockow took the position that the achievement gap between students in different schools in New York City resulted not because of innate intelligence differences, nor because of inequities in the school system, but rather because of environmental factors in the community. In his report, he detailed the poverty and lack of educational background prevalent among black students in his districts, particularly those whose families had migrated to New York City from the South, as well as the correlation between such situations and poor school performance. This "maelstrom of economic and social distress," argued Schlockow, presented a "serious pedagogical situation."[152]

Schlockow supported his argument that environmental factors were the primary cause of his students' poor performance by citing the research findings of Teachers College professor J.D. Maller. In recent years, Maller had conducted sociological experiments measuring the correlation between academic achievement, intelligence quotients, and environmental factors. His research showed that IQ results were significantly less important in determining academic success than "composite environment factors" such as "economic status, economic dependence, delinquency, infant mortality, birth rate, and ethnic character."[153]

Schlockow's successors continued his emphasis on character education and specialized vocational programs. During the 1935–1936 school year, Robert Frost, by this time Assistant Superintendent for Districts 8, 10, and 12, implemented customized character education programs in his schools, primarily in the junior high schools and

[152] Ibid., 47, 51, 351, 354.
[153] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1932–33, 354.

middle grades, which stressed cooperative behavior and "respect for law and order."[154] In the neighboring Districts 11, 13, and 14, which covered the remainder of Harlem, Assistant Superintendent Ellen Phillips used a similar program. She implemented techniques such as "Honor Rolls and Certificates, Praise Cards, Class Commendations" and a "Judge and Jury" program in which students assessed, punished, and rewarded their own peers' behavior. She also promoted vocational and remedial academic training. Under her leadership, the schools gave guidance counselors, particularly at the junior high school level, greater decision-making power to assign students to different curricula based on interviews with students and standardized achievement and intelligence testing.[155]

Schlockow attempted to lay the groundwork for his programs and ford off opposition from Harlem families, who he anticipated would become offended by his program's implicit blame on their communities for school failure. Prior to the report's release, he contacted Harlem church and civic organization leaders and asked for their support.[156] Nevertheless, there was opposition to his reforms, some of it quite hostile.

The sharpest criticism came from the *Amsterdam News*, where the editors were generally beginning to have doubts about customized programming for Harlem schools. Immediately after Schlockow's press release, the newspaper aired its concerns about the report. It criticized the District Superintendent (referred to as "the learned doctor") for his conclusion that black students should receive a specialized curriculum based on their race: "When he assumes the task of informing Negroes what type of education is best suited for them as a race he exceeds his responsibility." The newspaper expressed major concerns

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[154] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1935–36. Frost previously oversaw districts 13 and 14. In 1935, he was put in charge of districts 8, 10, and 12.
[155] Ibid., 72–79.
[156] "Would Change Schools Here," *New York Amsterdam News,* September 15, 1934.

that the Schlockow report "augurs an official move to shunt Negro pupils into certain avenues of employment deemed 'best' for them because of racial restrictions and prejudices."[157]

The Schlockow report resonated in black communities beyond Harlem, primarily because of the work of journalist George Schuyler. A nationally recognized social commentator in black communities, Schuyler decided to make a general example of the Schlockow report in his regular newspaper column for the *Pittsburgh Courier.* His message reached a wide audience since by this time the circulation of the *Courier* was approaching 200,000, including more than a dozen editions across the nation.[158] The *Amsterdam News* reprinted Schuyler's columns as well as unique letters that he composed to the editor. A major reason for his focus on Harlem schools was his judgment that "New York City is the spearhead of the Negro's fight for full American citizenship with all of the rights, duties and privileges that go with it."[159]

Schuyler argued that Schlockow's plan represented "a quiet conspiracy … to segregate the Negro educationally."[160] The report, he argued, signaled the "opening gun in the threatening campaign for a lower industrial curriculum for Negro children."[161] Schuyler argued that special curriculum for black children would trap them permanently in

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[157] "The Schlockow Report," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 22, 1934.
[158] George S. Schuyler, "Segregated Schools?" *New York Amsterdam News*, September 29, 1934; "Harlem School Superintendent Charges of Prejudice," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 10, 1934; Aberjhani West and Sandra L. West, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Facts on File, 2003), 265.
[159] George S. Schuyler, "N.Y. School Jim Crow Menace Arouses Parents," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 22, 1934.
[160] George S. Schuyler, "Special School Needs," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 13, 1934; George S. Schuyler, "Segregated Schools?" *New York Amsterdam News*, September 29, 1934.
[161] "Harlem School Superintendent Charges of Prejudice," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 10, 1934.

the "laborer-domestic stratum."[162]

Schuyler used his attacks on Schlockow to open up a broader attack on school segregation in the urban North. He criticized school authorities in Harlem for concentrating black students in a single district with gerrymandered boundaries and then overdosing them with industrial education. In these cases, Schuyler was accusing New York school administration of more than just benign neglect. He argued that Schlockow's approach to reform was deeply racist, noting, "Now [Schlockow] is the man (and one of the exploited Jews!) who presides over the destinies of most of Harlem's school children. The education given the white children of New York is, according to this man, unsuited to colored children." Schuyler referred to Schlockow, along with Jacob Ross, by this time the principal of P.S. 136 and a collaborator with Schlockow on his proposed curricular reforms, as "a menace to the colored people."[163]

Schuyler was by no means the first to argue against racial segregation in New York City schools. Yet his accusation of malicious intent on the part of the administration broke new ground and foreshadowed a more confrontational tone from activists in the near future. For while most of the black press and most civic organization leaders in New York City during the 1920s stood firmly and consistently against the principle of segregated public schools, they rarely opposed the administration's related policies, such as zoning, as

[162] George S. Schuyler, "N.Y. School Jim Crow Menace Arouses Parents," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 22, 1934; George S. Schuyler, "Segregated Schools?" *New York Amsterdam News*, September 29, 1934; George S. Schuyler, "Special School Needs," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 13, 1934.
[163] George S. Schuyler, "Segregated Schools?" *New York Amsterdam News*, September 29, 1934.

did Schuyler.[164]

Schlockow responded to Schuyler's accusations with a letter to the editor of the *Amsterdam News*. He denied racial discrimination, arguing that he offered the same specialized curricula for two districts, one largely white and the other mostly black. He reiterated his support for an increased number of vocational counselors to guide students, and he rejected the claim that parents' and students' wishes for an academic course of study were ignored.[165] Schlockow's rebuttal took place in the context of a national movement cresting during the 1930s for vocational training in high and middle schools.[166]

Schlockow received public support, but mainly from outside of Harlem's black community. For instance, one New York reader wrote to the *Pittsburgh Courier* in support of Schlockow. The reader, L. F. Coles, had covered Harlem schools as a reporter and argued that his findings matched those of Schlockow. He complemented the *Courier* for having the courage to speak openly of poor conditions in Harlem students' homes, something he found lacking in the New York black newspapers.[167] The *New York Times* published a letter from "Schlockow Supporter" Charles Kellar of Brooklyn, in which he defended Schlockow and expressed his opinion about the impracticality of training all students equally, asserting that "the Negro youth throughout America need an altogether different type of education—at least there must be a different emphasis on the philosophy of education pursued."[168]

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[164] "Unwise Segregation," *New York Age*, February 21, 1920; "No Jim-Crow Schools!" *New York Amsterdam News*, February 6, 1929; "Why This Colored School?" *New York Age*, December 18, 1920; "School Funds Wasted," *New York Age*, January 22, 1921.
[165] Oswald Schlockow, "Dr. Schlockow Explains," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 6, 1934.
[166] Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyack, eds., *Work, Youth, and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 203.
[167] L. F. Coles, "Praises Schuyler," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 15, 1934.
[168] Charles L. Kellar, "Schlockow Supporter," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 13, 1934.

Those who spoke out from within the Harlem community sided with Schuyler. Following the press release about the report in September 1934, the NAACP received letters that protested Schlockow's report and reiterated Schuyler's criticisms. Based on these complaints, Executive Secretary Walter White called the Superintendent's Office for a complete copy of the report for his full examination. Told that it was still at the printer, he wrote to Mayor LaGuardia asking that no further action be taken on Schlockow's plan until the matter could be properly investigated by the NAACP. Only in late November did he receive an official copy.[169]

Yet, after receiving the report, White and NAACP inexplicably dropped the subject entirely. This was emblematic of the hands-off position that the organization took on matters of educational discrimination in New York City during the 1930s. Local branches took a course similar to the National Urban League and focused on housing and employment discrimination. The national NAACP fought isolated legal battles against segregated public schools during this period, but only in areas in the South with de jure separation.[170]

With the economic devastation of the Great Depression, many black Americans turned away from the gradualist strategies favored by the NAACP and its "old guard," such as Walter White. During the first half of the 1930s, these organizations lost much of their support gained during their first twenty years of operation; membership contributions

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[169] Roy Wilkins to Mr. White, memorandum, 20 September 1934; Walter White to Harold G. Campbell, 22 September 1934; Walter White to James Allen, 22 September 1934; Howard A. Schiebler to Walter White, 24 September 1934; Walter White to Fiorello LaGuardia, 6 October 1934; Harold G. Campbell to Walter White, 8 October 1934; Harold G. Campbell to Walter White, 27 November 1934, part 3, series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers; George S. Schuyler, "Harlem School Superintendent Denies Charges of Prejudice," *Pittsburgh Courier,* November 10, 1934.
[170] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 4-25.

dropped by more than half. This meant that the association needed to rely more on white philanthropists for support, which steered it away from radical strategies. In 1934, the politically leftward-moving W. E. B. Du Bois broke publicly with White and the rest of the national leadership, drawing a large number of supporters with him when he resigned.[171]

The fact that both the NAACP and the National Urban League, the two largest civil rights organizations in both New York City and the nation, largely overlooked educational inequality in Harlem schools during the early 1930s had important consequences for the course of protest. It created a vacuum into which teacher, parent, and citizen groups moved with their specific grievances about the schools. Without support from major organizations like the NAACP, the ad-hoc organizations in which these women and men mobilized to protest school conditions lacked the resources and political clout to coordinate a sustained reform movement. They shared an interest in improving Harlem schools, but lacked consensus on a common vision of protest strategy or a larger set of policies that they wanted implemented in the schools. Women, especially mothers, played a vital role in many of these groups. Yet, women joined the cause for various reasons and came from a wide range of backgrounds, ranging from working-class mothers in Harlem, to middle-class teachers who worked in Harlem, to upper-class women from elsewhere in the city who targeted Harlem for charity work. At times, these differences impeded solidarity between the women involved.

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[171] Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode*, 63; Beth Tompkins Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933–1941," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (April 1997): 357; Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 18–19. Greenberg shows that citizens in Harlem during the early 1930s shied away from organized protest movements led by large groups of all kinds, ranging from the NAACP to the Communist Party.

By the time of the Schlockow report's release, black press editors, journalists, and isolated parent and teacher groups began to criticize the public school system. As in the case of Schuyler, they expressed frustrations about the lack of improvement in their schools during the past decade, and in some cases charged the schools of overt discrimination. The most vocal protestors placed the highest priority on equality of services and facilities, asking for this to take precedence over special programming.

Breaking with the explanation of school problems espoused by administrators, these critics asserted that a modified curriculum was not the answer and cast blame on the schools for allowing poor facilities and overcrowding to persist. They argued that vocational education could become a trap, especially if it was not used with care and discernment, and provided anecdotal evidence that their children were being shunted into the lowest tracks of the industrial programs. They criticized the narrow range of vocational opportunities and the absence of sufficient classes in skilled and semi-skilled trades.

Protest during the early 1930s against unequal school conditions was stirred in part by the anti-Schlockow sentiments published by the *Amsterdam News* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, but was also fueled by new studies of the conditions in Harlem's schools by parents, teachers, and civic groups in 1929 and 1930. Although school buildings were crumbling across the city, these studies showed that Harlem schools were particularly neglected.

Parent associations became more active in schools during the Depression in order to help deliver relief services such as food and clothing; however, they did not limit their role

to relief.[172] While involved with the schools, some investigated instances of neglect and discrimination. For instance, in 1929, a group of six Harlem mothers formed a Better Schools Club. Based on historical records, the group seems to have been short lived, but before disbanding they conducted their own investigation of P.S. 90 on West 147th Street after learning of poor conditions. In the course of their study they met with the principal and district superintendent and toured the school. In their meeting with Principal Louise Tucker they presented her with a series of concerns, including lack of supplies, dangerous facilities, apathetic administrators, and hostile teachers.[173] They wrote to the NAACP documenting the problems that they encountered, including filth so bad that it made the visitors feel sick, severe shortages of books and other supplies, and verbally abusive treatment of students by teachers.[174] As in the case of the Schuyler report, the NAACP did not follow up on the complaint, presumably because its energy was directed elsewhere.

Beginning in 1930, the New York City Teachers Union, the largest teachers union in the city, began a systematic evaluation of conditions in Harlem schools. The study was initiated by a subset of the union's teachers who worked in Harlem and had noticed particularly troublesome physical conditions in their schools. Volunteers from the union met with principals and toured facilities.[175] At P.S. 119 in Harlem, an elementary school with 2,000 students, investigator M. E. Baer met with principal Anna Lawson for over an hour and sat in a fourth grade classroom for half an hour, where she found the classroom and hallways to be in overall good condition and was impressed by the healthy appearance

[172] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1933–34, 57–58.
[173] "Topics to be Used in an Interview," n.d., part 3, series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers.
[174] "Statement Made by Mrs. Helen Curtis," 3 May 1929, part 3, series A, reel 20. NAACP Papers.
[175] "Survey Questions," n.d., box 15, folder 16, United Federation of Teachers Records, Wagner 022 (hereafter "UFT Papers").

of all students. Through her interview with the principal she learned of a large and active parent-teacher association, which met at least once a month and always had over 200 parents present.[176] However, at P.S. 90, another elementary school in Harlem, she found inferior classroom conditions with dirty and broken furniture, a lack of supplies and equipment, and poor textbooks.[177] She determined that a large number of substitute teachers worked at the school and that the school was overcrowded and needed to run three shifts each day.

Harlem community leaders gained additional ammunition from the Joint Committee on Education, an unofficial umbrella group of organizations active since the early 1920s.[178] Most of the civic organizations represented by the Joint Committee were led by middle- and upper-class white women across the city, such as the Junior League of the City of New York and League of Women Voters. They were all self-identified as non-political civic organizations.[179] In the fall of 1930, the committee conducted a thorough study of all public elementary and junior high schools in Harlem (110th Street to 154th Street, from the Harlem River to Morningside Park). The following spring, the group submitted its report to the Board of Estimate, Board of Apportionment, Board of Education, Board of Superintendents, and the Mayor, as well as organizations such as the NAACP and the press.[180]

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[176] "Report of Visit to Public School 119," 14 February 1930, box 15, folder 16, UFT Papers.
[177] "Report of Visit to Public School 90," 27 January 1930, box 15, folder 16, UFT Papers.
[178] "Harlem Schools," *New York Times*, June 4, 1931.
[179] Mrs. Rogers H. Bacon to James J. Walker, 3 June 1931, part 3, series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers.
[180] Ibid.; Director of Publicity to Mrs. Rogers H. Bacon, 3 June 1931, part 3, series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers; "Defects Reported in Harlem Schools," *New York Times*, June 3, 1931; Thurston, "Ethiopia Unshackled," 226.

This tenth annual survey drew far more attention than the prior years because of the inequalities it revealed. The Joint Committee's examination of schools probed both physical conditions and the application of specialized curricula. The committee most specifically identified significant problems caused by the lack of space.[181] It also called for improvements in medical and dental services, vocational counseling, visiting teacher services, and lunch services, as well as improvements in specialized facilities equipped for vocational and pre-vocational training and recreational spaces.[182]

Between 1932 and 1934, small cohorts of Harlem parents and teachers continued to express concerns about school conditions. The largest and most important collaboration between parents and teachers took the form of the Harlem Parent-Teachers' Committee. In January 1932, under the leadership of St. Philip's Episcopal Church pastor, the Reverend Shelton Hale Bishop, a group of teachers and parents joined representatives from Harlem social welfare agencies and churches to form the Harlem Parent-Teachers' Committee. The teachers who took on leadership roles within the committee were all members of the Teachers Union, most of them from the more radical wing of that organization, which was beginning at this time to ally with Communist and Socialist parties.

In March 1933, the group sponsored a meeting with over fifty civic organizations at the New York Urban League to discuss the school situation in Harlem. They drafted a resolution to the Board of Education calling for improved sanitary conditions, particularly

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[181] Mrs. Rogers H. Bacon to James J. Walker, 3 June 1931, part 3, series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers; "Harlem Schools," *New York Times*, June 4, 1931; "Defects Reported in Harlem Schools," *New York Times*, June 3, 1931; "Survey of Harlem Schools," n.d., part 3, series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers.
[182] "Harlem Schools," *New York Times*, June 4, 1931; "To Improve Harlem Schools," *New York Age*, June 20, 1931; "Harlem Schools Found in Need of Health Facilities," *New York Herald Tribune*, June 3, 1931.

at P.S. 5, 68, and 89;[183] more money to pay better teachers; the ending of multiple school sessions and overcrowding; and new schools with better recreational facilities.[184] After researching these issues, the group wrote a report and submitted it to Superintendent O'Shea and the Board of Education criticizing the poor conditions in Harlem schools. The report documented the group's accusations of overcrowding and unsanitary conditions with evidence from P.S. 10, 89, and 139, three of the schools that the group investigated most carefully.[185]

The *Amsterdam News* stood behind these findings, urging readers concerned about safety in the schools to contact the group as well as the Superintendent's office.[186] In April 1933, Lucien Brown, a teacher in Harlem and leading member of the Parent-Teachers' Committee, argued in the *Amsterdam News* that Harlem schools had become the "proverbial stepchild" of New York City schools and its schools suffered from "deplorable sanitary conditions." "Is there any wonder that from every house top you can hear the cry of the high mortality and morbidity and delinquency rates among the Negro?"[187]

In late April, the Parent-Teachers' Committee sponsored a meeting at St. Philip's Church.[188] More than 200 attendees listened to speakers from various civic, religious, and professional groups speak out against school conditions in Harlem and rallied support for a

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[183] Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 78. All three of these schools were located in Central Harlem and all were at least 98 percent black by the 1930s. P.S. 5 was on 142nd Street, P.S. 89 at 135th Street, and P.S. 68 at 128th Street.
[184] "City Action Urged for Local Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 22, 1933; "Improved Schools Sought by Groups," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 15, 1933.
[185] Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 78, 80; "Conditions in Schools Protested," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 8, 1933. P.S. 139 was located in the heart of Central Harlem, at 140th Street. P.S. 10 was located in the lower portion of Central Harlem, at 117th Street. Both schools were nearly 100 percent black by the 1930s.
[186] "Among the Worst," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 14, 1934; Lucien M. Brown, "Keeping Fit," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 19, 1933.
[187] Lucien M. Brown, "Keeping Fit," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 19, 1933.
[188] "Parents Meet to Improve Schools," *Chicago Defender*, April 15, 1933.

protest delegation to visit the offices of Superintendent O'Shea. They accused the central school administration of corruption, negligence, and discrimination in Harlem schools. Physicians, teachers, parents, social workers and school children spoke unanimously of overcrowded, unsanitary conditions in the schools, and some complained of prejudicial treatment against black teachers. Rev. Shelton Hale Bishop gave a fiery keynote address proclaiming, "I say down to hell with such conditions and down to hell with the Board of Education if they are responsible for such conditions."[189]

Bishop's expression of anger in such blunt terms represented a shift towards a more confrontational style of protest than that previously aired in public forums. At the St. Phillip's meeting, Bishop proposed the formation of a new Citizens Committee to bring together parents, teachers, and other concerned citizens to protest school conditions to Mayor John O'Brien and the Board of Education. Earlier that year, Bishop had communicated a list of serious complaints about Harlem schools in a letter to Walter White of the NAACP. He asked a series of rhetorical questions raising concerns ranging from discriminatory placement in lower-level courses to hiring discrimination against black teachers. He admitted that he used a fictitious address outside of Harlem so that his children could avoid the poor conditions in his local schools and explained that he knew of many other parents who did the same. Although the NAACP sent representatives to the event at St. Philip's and similar meetings that followed, Walter White did not take an active role in supporting the group.[190]

The cross-class collaboration evident in the Parent-Teachers' Committee, encouraged and facilitated by women from the Teachers Union and an activist church

[189] "School Conditions Flayed at Meeting," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 3, 1933.
[190] Shelton Hale Bishop to Walter White, 20 January 1933, Part 12, series B, Reel 5, NAACP Papers.

leader, foreshadowed the type of community alliance that would expand later in the 1930s. Most agencies represented at the meeting were based locally. They were disproportionately led by professional-class Harlemites, such as pastors and lawyers. Yet they incorporated the voices of working-class Harlem mothers in a way unprecedented during the 1920s.

During the months following the meeting, the Board of Education fought back by targeting the Teachers Union members involved in coordinating. They argued that New York City teachers' job responsibilities included defense of the school system against charges such as those launched at the meeting, and certainly prohibited direct criticism at such events. Even if teachers were not responsible for initiating the meeting, which the board suspected to be the case, the board argued that they were guilty simply by acting as bystanders at the event. The board called disciplinary hearings for the teachers who had participated in the meeting.[191] On November 29, they determined that Alice Citron, a teacher in P.S. 184 and an active member in the Teachers Union's projects to promote racial equality in Harlem schools, was guilty of "breach of conduct" because she failed to defend the school system when others at the meeting made derogatory comments.[192] As punishment, they suspended her without pay and denied the pay increase and permanent license that she was due.[193] The board's investigation of Citron's role in the meeting was part of a broader examination of teachers deemed politically dangerous, and the group doled out punishment to other teachers as well.

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[191] Florina Lasker, Chairman of New York City Civil Liberties Committee, to Alice Citron, 29 May 1933, Alice Citron Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.
[192] Howard K. Beale, *Are American Teachers Free? An Analysis of Restraints Upon the Freedom of Teaching in American Schools* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1936), 357.
[193] Interview with Alice Citron, 6 January 1981, Tamiment Oral History of the Left Collection. Tamiment Library, New York University.

The *Amsterdam News* rushed to the defense of these teachers. Leaving no doubt where its allegiance lay, it labeled the board's decision to try teachers for participation in the St. Phillip's meeting "arrogant and stupid." It argued that the board was on a mission to "take out" teachers such as Citron due to their political activism.[194] The *Amsterdam News* also stood behind the other teachers facing dismissal for complaining of poor conditions in Harlem schools.[195] The Communist Party-supported *Harlem Liberator*, a weekly paper published between 1933 and 1935, also defended dismissed teachers. It specifically blamed the Tammany political machine for corrupt handling of the educational system and what it described as a witch-hunt seeking to remove militant teachers involved in civil rights campaigns such as the defense of the Scottsboro Boys and the local labor movement working to protect academic freedom among New York City teachers.[196]

The board eventually reversed its decision on Citron's role at the meeting, but only after Citron initiated legal action and garnered the support of fellow teachers, the New York City Civil Liberties Committee, and Rev. Shelton Hale Bishop.[197] Teachers such as Isadore Begun were not as fortunate. The board permanently fired Begun, who had also worked as an active member in the Teachers Union and as labor organizer (Chairman of the Unemployed Teachers Association), for speaking out against the school administration at

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[194] "Arrogant and Stupid," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 29, 1933; "Afro-American Thought," 199–200.
[195] "The Tiger Strikes Again," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 5, 1933; W. N. Huggins, "The Negro Teacher and Student Go to School," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 22, 1934.
[196] "Stop Firing Militant Teachers," *Harlem Liberator*, June 10, 1933. The *Liberator* most frequently used the example of Williana Burroughs, an African-American teacher and active member in the Communist Party who had supported the Scottsboro boys and worked to defend other women facing expulsion pending a ruling by the Board of Education. She was dismissed in 1933.
[197] Florina Lasker to Alice Citron, 29 May 1933, Alice Citron Papers; Ruth Jacknow Markowitz, *My Daughter, the Teacher: Jewish Teachers in the New York City Schools* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 166.

St. Phillip's.[198]

Among the administrators who publicly opposed teachers' participation in meetings such as the one organized by Bishop was District Superintendent Oswald Schlockow. He wrote to the *New York Times* in February 1934 denouncing teachers who he accused of espousing a radical Marxist agenda and corrupting the school system in the process.[199] He supported recent statements by Superintendent O'Shea against militant opposition among school reformers and claimed such individuals could undermine the effectiveness of the schools by eroding confidence and support in the system. He complained that these teachers' ideology of class struggle was "driving a wedge" between administrators and thus damaging the quality of the schools.

Despite the backlash against teachers who participated in the meeting at St. Phillip's, the Parent-Teachers' Committee continued to pursue their goals in the months that followed. In May, the group received an appointment for a half hour interview with Superintendent O'Shea and twenty representatives travelled to his office.[200] The Superintendent was not pleased by the size of the group, nor its agenda. He took a defensive position from the start, noting, "I don't like this committee idea," and reminded them that he would prefer to deal with a smaller delegation. He rushed the group along quickly as they voiced complaints including outdated school buildings, unsanitary conditions, and overcrowded classrooms. When the wife of Rev. William Lloyd Imes, a

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[198] "The Tiger Strikes Again," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 5, 1933; "Parents Meet to Improve Schools," *Chicago Defender*, April 15, 1933; "Improved Schools Sought by Groups," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 15, 1933. In 1951, the Board of Education terminated Citron as well as other teachers for "conduct unbecoming to teachers," deeming their work to be politically dangerous because it involved activities the administration linked to communism.
[199] Oswald Schlockow, "Radicals in the Schools," *New York Times*, February 6, 1934.
[200] "School Conditions Flayed at Meeting," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 3, 1933.

mother who acted as the primary spokesperson for the committee, listed her group's objection to the outdoor toilets at P.S. 5, O'Shea callously retorted, "Well, suppose they are outdoors? What of it? Outdoor toilets are a good thing."[201]

About one year later, the central committee of the Harlem Parents' Association held a symposium at St. Philip's. Various speakers, including teachers and parents from Harlem, delivered presentations detailing concerns about conditions in Harlem schools.[202] That same month, Mrs. Eddie Aspinall, a black mother of four, and the secretary for the Parents' Association, attended an open meeting of the Board of Education budget committee and passed a slip of paper to the chair requesting that she be allowed to speak. She presented an argument in favor of special annexes for overage students in order to avoid bad influences among younger children, which was well received by the committee.[203]

In August, the Parents' Association sent a letter signed by its president, George W. Lindsay, to the Board of Education Finance Committee protesting the lack of funds allocated to Harlem schools for the 1934–35 school year.[204] In October, 1934, the group scheduled a meeting at P.S 139 to discuss "Mental Starvation for Harlem Children of $15,000,000," protesting conditions in Harlem schools and asking for more money from the Board of Education. Representatives from the Teachers Union, United Parents Association, New York Association of Unappointed Teachers, and the NAACP attended.[205]

Dissatisfaction with the schools was not limited to teachers on the Parent-Teachers' Committee. In 1934, a Harlem teacher outside of the group spoke of widespread parent

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[201] "Civic Leaders Call for Reforms," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 10, 1933.
[202] "To Hold Symposium on Harlem Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 16, 1934.
[203] "Negro Woman Wins Harlem School Aid," *New York Times*, June 26, 1934.
[204] "Parents in Protest Against New Budget," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 25, 1934.
[205] "Parents Ask Board to Increase Budget," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 20, 1934; "Parents Meet," *Chicago Defender*, October 27, 1934.

dissatisfaction with schools in the area in a letter to the *Amsterdam News*. The teacher listed numerous reasons for discontent including overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and low expectations for black students. She argued that a feeling of frustration was especially pronounced in P.S. 90 under the leadership of Principal Tucker, and she proposed the formation of stronger parent associations, perhaps with the help of coordinating efforts by the *Amsterdam News*.[206]

As in the case of the Schlockow report, the *Amsterdam News* played a leading role in publicizing concerns of racial discrimination in school policy and resource allocation. Paralleling its criticism of the unfair application of vocational and character education to Harlem, the paper attacked the school administration for neglecting physical conditions in the schools. In addition to highlighting the negative results from the report from the Joint Committee, the *Amsterdam News* launched its own investigation in 1934 of alleged dangerous conditions in school facilities serving children in Harlem. It highlighted a recently published report by the Fire Commissioner that described four Harlem schools as firetraps. The *Amsterdam News* expressed disappointment in the community's lack of response to its attempts over the past years to "arouse the citizens of Harlem" over dangerous school conditions, and urged readers to contact the Superintendent's Office or the Parent-Teachers' Committee regarding specific fire code violations that it publicized.[207] In 1935, the paper printed a front page editorial reacting to a fire in P.S. 89. Nobody was hurt in the fire (caused by faulty electrical wiring), which occurred after most pupils had left for the afternoon, but it caused $20,000 in damage to the forty-five-year-old building

[206] Jane P. Morgan, letter to the editor, *New York Amsterdam News*, February 28, 1934.
[207] "Among the Worst," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 14, 1934; "5 Harlem Public Schools Firetraps," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 14, 1934.

and the blaze took firefighters two hours to control. The *Amsterdam News* expressed dismay with the outdated facilities (built in 1889) and called for readers to demand the construction of a new school.[208] In 1935, the paper criticized the city for neglecting the needs of Harlem in its $120 million school building program and urged Harlem residents to protest.

George Schuyler played an important role in these journalistic attacks on inadequate physical conditions in the school system. He often combined this line of criticism with his assault on Schlockow and curricular reform. He described the central administration as a suffocating regime that suppressed reform by ignoring parents, buying off community leaders, and transferring teachers.[209] In one article he compared white principals attitudes to African colonial officials.

Schuyler provocatively connected curricular and facilities inequities to larger concerns about segregation, just as he had done in his attacks against Schlockow's plans. He frequently used New York City schools as an example of the virtues of mixed race education, although he warned of the ongoing risk that the system could regress toward the "Siamese Twins of degradation: discrimination and segregation."[210] In his *Pittsburgh Courier* column, Schuyler regularly recounted Harlem parents' protests against "deplorable" conditions and encouraged heightened opposition to Board of Education policies impacting such conditions. He specifically recommended that parents confront the school administration through local parent-teacher associations. He argued that concerned parents who falsely claimed residency outside of Harlem's "Black Belt" or transferred their

[208] "Build a New School," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 9, 1935.
[209] George S. Schuyler, "Charge Conspiracy to Lower Standards in Turbulent Harlem School Feud," *Pittsburgh Courier,* November 3, 1934.
[210] George S. Schuyler, "Views and Reviews," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 4, 1931.

children to private schools were dodging the problem rather than solving it. Instead, he argued that parents could only realize their full strength if they allied with church, press, and social agency leaders to form a "community education congress."[211]

However, the black press did not shift unanimously in this critical direction. At the same time that the *Amsterdam News* dug deeper with its criticisms of school conditions and expressed more pessimism about the fairness of the system, the *New York Age* continued to give the school system the benefit of the doubt. It praised the efficiency of the public schools in Harlem in its editorial pages. It defended the schools against charges leveled by the editorial pages of the *Amsterdam News*, and in one case against an anonymous circular given to parents at a Harlem middle school. The *Age* argued that claims by the *Amsterdam News* that the schools were "filthy and disease breeding" and were "helping to make gangsters and neurotics" of children exaggerated minor, manageable problems. Later, the *Age* criticized the radical position recently taken by Episcopal minister Shelton Hale Bishop for his "loose-talking and vilification" at his mass meeting. Little would be gained by "arraying class against class."[212]

The *Age* continued to support character education initiatives, urging parents to enforce school attendance and teach good study habits. It highlighted the importance of parents' responsibility to educate children and ensure they behave well in school in order

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[211] George S. Schuyler, "N.Y. School Jim Crow Menace Arouses Parents," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 22, 1934.

[212] This period marked a period of transition toward a more confrontational position by the black press. This change took place in the black press beyond New York City. For instance, the change is observed by Carolyn Jefferson in "An Historical Analysis of the Relationship between the Great Migration and the Administrative Policies and Practices of Racial Isolation in the Cleveland Public Schools: 1920–1940." Jefferson explains how the newspapers adopted two distinct strategies of reporting: a period of "passive optimism" prior to 1930; and a period of "aggressive pessimism" after 1930.

to gain positive school experiences.[213] It praised the parents of Harlem's children for achieving such a high rate of school attendance, stating in one case that "the Negro mother making many sacrifices to get a schooling for her children is one of the most heroic roles in American history."[214] The *Age* was not alone in taking this position. The *Harlem Heights Daily Citizen*, a short-lived daily published by an African-American group in Harlem from October 1933 to January 1934, published a long list of instructions for parents. The rules, designed to support children's performance in school, ranged from instilling good character and study habits at home to communicating effectively with teachers in order to coordinate school discipline and teaching decisions.[215]

The *Age* praised Booker T. Washington as the "Father of Vocational Training" and emphasized the practical advantages of higher wages available to black graduates with manual training. It explored the question of what trades should be taught to black students in New York City, recommending careers such as firefighting and police work. It criticized parents, teachers, and counselors who limited their support for black children to enter skilled and semi-skilled trades in the face of hiring discrimination and painted this approach as cowardly.[216]

The *Age* continued to support general cooperation with the school authorities. It applauded Superintendent Harold Campbell's (1934–1942) efforts to meet the individualized needs of students by requiring that teachers identify their academic

[213] "Parental Responsibility," *New York Age*, December 13, 1930.
[214] "The January Graduates," *New York Age*, February 13, 1932.
[215] "Eighteen Don'ts for Parents," *Harlem Heights Daily Citizen*, November 24, 1933.
[216] "Our Harlem Schools," *New York Age*, May 13, 1933.

strengths and weaknesses.[217] It argued that differences in curricula in Harlem schools were not necessarily problems since they met the specialized needs of the students.[218]

Yet, the *New York Age*'s messages in defense of the administration and in favor for gradualism in changing the schools did not echo in the community as they had during the 1920s. New voices of protest arose, including for the first time working-class mothers of Harlem children, as well as radical teachers who spoke in class-based terms on behalf of absolute equality. The meeting at St. Philip's in 1933 demonstrated that at least one cross-section of the Harlem community, including parents, teachers, and church leaders, shared a set of grievances against the school system.

As Harlem schools deteriorated from the neglect and inadequate maintenance, parents and local leaders began to question the fairness of specialized curricula geared disproportionately toward racial minorities. In an undertone at first and then more rigorously as time passed and conditions worsened, they began to speak out against school policies. They started to question whether schools were correcting Harlem students' problems or contributing to them. George Schuyler's explanation of students' failure in school clashed sharply with that implied in the administration's curricular adjustments. Few principals or superintendents even hinted, at least publicly, about the possibility that the schools could be perpetuating inequality. Instead they blamed poverty and cultural deprivation in the community. Schuyler took the opposite approach, casting blame entirely on the schools and accusing administrators of an oppressive conspiracy.

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[217] "The Harlem Schools," *New York Age*, April 8, 1933; "Congratulations, Dr. Campbell," *New York Age*, August 11, 1934.
[218] "5 Harlem Public Schools Firetraps," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 14, 1934; "Public School Efficiency," *New York Age*, June 27, 1931.

Physical conditions in Harlem schools had been slipping through the 1920s, and substantially worsened due to the lack of resources available during the early 1930s. This contributed to the rising level of protest, but only explains it in part. Disillusionment with the school system also occurred because parents' and teachers' patience grew shorter, and their tolerance for inequality declined. Dominant community voices began to favor more immediate equality for working-class families in Harlem and turned the tone of verbal protest in a new direction. Parents and teachers who had little voice in public forums prior to the 1930s found new opportunities in ad-hoc groups that encouraged radical positions to voice pent-up frustrations and heightened expectations for the schools. In the absence of protest by established, middle-class black organizations like the NAACP and National Urban League, groups of teachers, church leaders, and parents joined to confront institutional racism in smaller groups. Many of those who led these groups would later play crucial roles in rallying broader support for absolute equality in the schools of Harlem. This was particularly true of the women from the Teachers Union who helped bring together the Parent-Teachers' Committee.

Yet, despite agreement about deep frustrations with the administration, the ad-hoc committees discussed here had trouble translating the protest energy into real change. For instance, participants at the St. Phillip's meeting got no response from the board except for a crackdown on teachers who protested conditions. They lacked long-term institutionalized strategies within their various organizations for publicizing their cause and lobbying the Board of Education for change. Outside observer George Schuyler took note of this in his column in 1934, criticizing Harlem's ministers, teachers, NAACP branch, and black press for their failure to create a tighter alliance to fight for better schools. He

argued that only greater militancy and better coordination between them could reverse the "Southernization of Manhattan."[219] The school administration, on the other hand, moved forward in lockstep and applied the same formula for curricular adjustment used during the 1920s.

While a cadre of community activists during the early 1930s clearly identified the situation in the schools that they opposed, they struggled to propose a clear alternative to the administration's policies. For instance, they objected to rigid tracking of black students into vocational classes, but they did not think through the implications of jettisoning vocational education altogether. They spoke out against a series of unfair situations in Harlem schools, but did not articulate a uniform strategy for correcting them. They tended to shy away from the complicated question of teacher quality, since this problem was more difficult to quantify and harder to solve. Rather than underlying causes of problems, they mainly protested against symptoms: poor facilities, unequal learning achievement by students, and a shortage of academic curricula. During the following years, as researchers substantiated these problematic symptoms, it was yet to be seen whether the protestors could propose a new reform approach and move the administration toward it.

[219] George S. Schuyler, "N.Y. School Jim Crow Menace Arouses Parents," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 22, 1934.

Chapter Three
"The Unhappy School Conditions in Harlem": The 1935 Riot and Its Aftermath in Harlem Schools

> Curtain raiser to the reformation was the Harlem riot of March 19 and 20, 1935—variously diagnosed as a depression spasm, a ghetto mutiny, a radical plot and dress rehearsal of proletarian revolution. Whichever it was, like a revealing flash of lightning it etched on the public mind another Harlem than the bright surface Harlem of the night clubs, cabaret tours, and arty magazines …
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> —Alain Locke, "Harlem: Dark Weather-Vane," *Survey Graphic*[220]

On a Tuesday afternoon, March 19, 1935, a floorwalker at E. H. Kress and Company five and ten cent store on 125th Street spotted a teenage boy shoplifting a penknife. The guard hailed a manager, and together they apprehended the youth, Lino Rivera, and summoned the police. In an effort to diffuse the situation and disperse the growing crowd of bystanders in front of the store, the manager and the patrolman who arrived on the scene took the Puerto Rican Harlem resident through the basement and released him through a rear exit.[221]

Word spread among shoppers that a young black boy had been badly beaten by the police. An ambulance arrived on the scene to treat minor injuries suffered by the store workers during the initial scuffle while apprehending the suspect, but the crowd assumed that it had come for the boy. When the ambulance left empty and a hearse coincidentally pulled up to a building close to the store, some accused the police of murder and the

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[220] Alain Locke, "Harlem: Dark Weather-Vane," *Survey Graphic* 25, no. 8 (August 1936): 457.
[221] Robert Fogelson and Richard E. Rubenstein, eds., *The Complete Report of Mayor LaGuardia's Commission on the Harlem Riot of March 19, 1935* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 7–8; Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode*; Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 221; "Says Economic Conditions in Harlem are Bad," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 27, 1935; Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in WWII* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 44–45.

gathering sidewalk crowd grew angrier.[222] One woman cried out that this is "just like down South where they lynch us." A heavy object was hurled through the front window of the store and chaos escalated.[223]

When night fell, crowds broke into other stores along 125th Street, most white-owned and many such as Kress having reputations for refusing to hire black employees. Disorder spread outward to Seventh and Lenox Avenues, where rioters smashed over 300 storefront windows and looted merchandise.[224] As participants mainly targeted white-owned store property with their violence, some storeowners posted signs reading "This shop is run by COLORED people" and "This store employs Negro workers."[225] The Harlem Merchants Association wired Governor Herbert Lehman requesting military assistance. This pattern continued through the following day until patrols by over 500 police armed with riot guns brought the situation to a close. Ultimately, five deaths and over $500,000 of property damage were reported.[226]

As author Alain Locke vividly recalled a year later, the Harlem Riot of 1935 suddenly drew public attention across the city to the social and economic problems of the community. When Fiorello LaGuardia appointed an investigative team to document the underlying problems that caused the riot, he set in motion a series of studies that would ensure that this "flash of lightning" in the spring of 1935 would not soon be forgotten. The Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem was the highest profile study in the

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[222] "Says Economic Conditions in Harlem are Bad," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 27, 1935.
[223] Brandt, *Harlem at War*, 44–45; Fogelson, 7–8.
[224] "Harlem Riot Was Very Tough on Window Glass," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 6, 1935.
[225] Greene, 480–81; "Police End Harlem Riot; Mayor Starts Inquiry; Dodge Sees a Red Plot," *New York Times*, March 21, 1935.
[226] Police End Harlem Riot; Mayor Starts Inquiry; Dodge Sees a Red Plot," *New York Times*, March 21, 1935; Fogelson, 9; Greene, 487–500; Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 221; "One Year Ago," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 14, 1936.

aftermath of the 1935 riot, and its focus on education drew lasting attention to Harlem's schools. It energized administrative, teacher, and community school reform groups, all of whom used the commission's findings to support their own distinctive version of change.

Mayor LaGuardia created the commission three days after the riot by appointing a biracial, predominantly liberal group to determine the underlying social and economic problems that made the outbreak possible and recommend government solutions to those problems.[227] He did so in consultation with leaders of church, labor, and racial uplift organizations, most notably Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP.[228] His choices included prominent civil rights leaders such as A. Phillip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; Countee Cullen, poet and school teacher; and William J. Schieffelin, chairman of the Citizens Union and a trustee of Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute. Charles H. Roberts, a Harlem dentist and former city alderman, chaired the group of seven black and six white members. E. Franklin Frazier, an esteemed professor of sociology at Howard University, accepted the position of research director. In that role, he led a team of thirty field workers selected from employees of the Home Relief Bureau.[229]

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[227] "New York Mayor Adopts N.A.A.C.P. Riot Probe Plan," 22 March 1935, box 131–33, folder 16; E. Franklin Frazier Papers; "Police End Harlem Riot; Mayor Starts Inquiry; Dodge Sees a Red Plot," *New York Times*, March 21, 1935; "The Harlem Riots," *Washington Post*, March 23, 1935; Greene, 483.

[228] Anthony M. Platt, *The Politics of Riot Commissions, 1917–1970: A Collection of Official Reports and Critical Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 27.

[229] Greene, 501–3; Ment, "Racial Segregation in the Public Schools," 84–85; Fogelson, 19–21; "New York Mayor Adopts N.A.A.C.P. Riot Probe Plan," 22 March 1935, box 131–33, folder 16, E. Franklin Frazier Papers; "Mayor Has 'Cure' for Harlem-But!" *New York Amsterdam News*, September 11, 1943. The work of the commission quickly eclipsed the parallel investigation by District Attorney William Dodge who, with the backing of the Hearst newspapers, launched a grand jury investigation of groups with Communist ties, such as the Young Liberators, accusing them of causing the disturbance through sidewalk speeches and distribution of literature.

From the start, LaGuardia appointed a Subcommittee on Education alongside seven other committees focusing on areas including employment, relief, housing, law enforcement, and hospitals.[230] He chose Oswald Garrison Villard, former editor of *The Nation,* to chair the education subcommittee. The rest of the group consisted of Countee Cullen; John W. Robinson, a black minister; and William R. McCann, a white priest.[231]

During April and May, Villard's group held weeks of formal hearings questioning administrators, teachers, and parents about the state of the public schools serving Harlem's children.[232] These sessions revealed a significant rift between administrators' understanding of school problems and those of parents and teachers. Parents and teachers generally spoke far more critically of the schools than the administrators, emphasizing the lack of equality in facilities and services in the schools. Dozens of parent and teacher interviewees spoke, often in private for fear of retaliation by the school system, of the dilapidated state of school buildings and crowding of forty or fifty students per class, even after the scheduling of multiple shifts that disguised deeper overcrowding problems.[233] Parents and teachers questioned the state of vocational education, criticizing the limited

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[230] Fogelson, 3; "Harlem Riot Probe May Last over 2 Months," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 13, 1935.
[231] Ment, "Racial Segregation," 244; The Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, "The Negro in Harlem: A Report on Social and Economic Conditions Responsible for the Outbreak of March 19, 1935," 1936, box 131-117, folder 2, E. Franklin Frazier Papers.
[232] Ment, "Racial Segregation in the Public Schools," 244.
[233] Alice Citron ["Teacher #1"], testimony, "1935 Public Hearings: Education"; President of Parents' Association, P.S. 105, testimony, "1935 Public Hearings: Education," box 3770, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers, Municipal Archives, New York; Alice Citron, "An Answer to John F. Hatchett," *Jewish Currents*, September 1968, 12–13; Asrat, "Harlem Is Not Dixie," 9; Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 85. Judging that teachers feared retaliation from the Board of Education for speaking critically against the school administration, most of their sessions were held in private and statements recorded anonymously, in contrast to the highly public hearings held by other subcommittees.

opportunities given to black students within vocational programs.[234] Some witnesses accused individual administrators, such as Louise Tucker (the white principal of P.S. 90), of behaving tyrannically toward black teachers and indifferently toward black parents.[235]

As valuable as they were for revealing contradicting views on the goals and realities of Harlem's schools, the hearings were only a part of the overall investigation into the school situation. Under Oswald Villard's chairmanship, the education subcommittee worked with Frazier's team to pull together more data and draw more sweeping conclusions than any prior study of Harlem's schools. They combed through data on the budget, age of facilities, safety ratings, staff-hiring patterns, racial demographics, and curriculum design. They studied individual schools as well as the broader context of school problems, including unhealthy conditions outside of the schools that saddled the schools with an extra burden. Frazier's team studied every school in Harlem, drawing data from interviews with principals, site visits, and statistics from school records. They also profiled neighborhood conditions for all blocks immediately surrounding area schools.

In late August, the Subcommittee on Education submitted a highly detailed report to the full commission.[236] The group disagreed with the administrators' testimonials defending the quality of their schools. Instead, they concluded that Harlem schools were a significant part of the problems plaguing the community. The subcommittee held the school system, which it characterized as a "sheltering institution," to an especially high standard in Harlem, explaining, "The school system is at all times a vital part of the life of

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[234] Betty Hawley, "Public Hearing, New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Urban Colored Population," typescript, 13 December 1937, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, 1118–25.
[235] "Link Old Schools to Harlem Unrest," *New York Times*, April 11, 1935; Wm. J. Burroughs, testimony, "1935 Public Hearings: Education," box 3770, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers; Fogelson, 78.
[236] "New York School Conditions Attacked," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 28, 1935.

any community. In this one, it has become peculiarly important, and almost decisive in its influence upon the lives of the children, because the depression and the consequent alarming unemployment have robbed multitudes of them of the attributes and conditions of a normal life."[237]

LaGuardia's Commission on Conditions in Harlem prominently featured public education in their report. They concluded that poor conditions in the schools played a major role in fueling the anger and frustration driving the riot. Their study optimistically argued that reversal of inequality in the schools would remedy broader social and economic injustice in the community, staving off future conflict. A full chapter of the final report from the commission was devoted to education and recreation. The lofty language used by Villard's team argued for the disproportionately large influence of school quality on the fate of the Harlem community. The group, in a letter to the Mayor, elaborated at length on the conclusion it had reached by May, 1935: "the unhappy school conditions in Harlem have been one of the most potent factors in creating the unrest and unhappiness which set the scene for the disorders of March 19."[238]

In doing so, they were validating the concerns of groups in the early 1930s, such as the Parent-Teachers' Committee. Signs of such poor conditions existed during the early 1920s, but received relatively little publicity. The commission's extensive documentation of the problem exposed the problem to a much larger audience. A small cadre of activists and newspaper editors during the last few years had publicized problems in Harlem's schools ranging from poor facilities to the lack of academic classes for black students.

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[237] Charles H. Roberts, Oswald Garrison Villard, and Eunice Carter, to Fiorello LaGuardia, 22 May 1935, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers.
[238] Ibid.

However, the commission confirmed that a clear gap existed between the academic performance of black and white students, and detailed a wide range of shortcomings in Harlem schools and the surrounding communities.

The meticulous research from Frazier's staff clearly demonstrated a wide range of discrimination and put the school administration on the defensive. The chapter drawn from the education subcommittee's report identified a host of dangerous and unsanitary physical conditions, staff shortages and unacceptable levels of turnover. The commission explicitly accused the Board of Education of discrimination in appropriating funds to Harlem schools, assigning teachers to Harlem schools, and disproportionately enrolling black students in vocational programs geared toward unskilled trades.[239] To address these problems, it recommended, among other things, an emergency school and playground-building program, increased hiring of full-time and visiting teachers, and the appointment of an African American to the Board of Education.[240]

The report did not explicitly address racial segregation or the fact that by the time of the riot Central Harlem had thirteen nearly all-black schools.[241] However, it documented segregation of students into unskilled vocational classes, and accused the school system of inequitable resource allocation, teacher hiring, and racially biased treatment of black

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[239] Citron, "Harlem Wants Schools," 126; Fogelson, 77–91; Johnson, "'Making Democracy Real': Teacher Union and Community Activism to Promote Diversity in the New York City Public Schools, 1935–1950," *Urban Education* 37, no. 5 (November 1, 2002): 574–75; "Harlem Teachers Reveal More Accomplishment Here," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 4, 1941; The Teachers Union of the City of New York, "Petition to the Board of Education of the City of New York," 9 January 1936, part 3, series A, reel 22, NAACP Papers.,

[240] "New York School Conditions Attacked," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 28, 1935; Charles H. Roberts, Oswald Garrison Villard, and Eunice Carter, to Fiorello LaGuardia, 22 May 1935, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers. Philadelphia's Board of Education, which gained a black member in June 1935 after a long struggle by the city's black community, served as a motivating factor for this final recommendation.

[241] Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 151.

teachers, students, and parents by administrators. It also revealed evidence of discriminatory zoning practices at the high school level through its examination of policies and the testimony of teachers and parents who complained of unfair high school districting.[242]

The Subcommittee on Education concluded that Harlem students lacked proper access to academic courses and high-skill vocational courses, confirming the argument voiced by the *Amsterdam News* for almost a decade by that point. It highlighted this with evidence from Wadleigh High School, the only academic high school located in Harlem, a girls' school that enrolled the majority of black, female students from Harlem.[243] Seventy-five percent of Wadleigh's students enrolled in a curriculum centered on low-skill domestic courses such as dressmaking in a separate building from the commercial courses (located in an annex elsewhere in Harlem). The Subcommittee on Education traced this outcome to a combination of poorly equipped, understaffed junior high schools and guidance counselors who held "traditional beliefs" about black girls' ability to pursue academic paths of study. The Subcommittee also profiled the Harlem annex of Straubenmuller Textile High School to show that the school had become a dumping ground for "dull or problem" children and lacked proper equipment in the departments most heavily attended by black

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[242] Ment, "Racial Segregation," 246, 255; George Lindsey, testimony, "1935 Public Hearings: Education," box 3770, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers. David Ment has shown that segregation at the elementary and junior high schools during this period resulted almost entirely from residential segregation, while the high schools involved a more active part by principals and the Board of Education. His work explores the creation and movement of districting lines that caused the newer, high-achieving schools like George Washington, Julia Richman, and Benjamin Franklin high schools to maintain low numbers of black students despite the fact that they were much closer to Harlem than Haaren and Textile high schools, where substantial numbers of black students attended. The report by LaGuardia's commission serves as importance evidence supporting his conclusion.

[243] Asrat, 43. However, the curriculum shifted toward vocationalism as the black attendance rose through the 1930s.

students. In contrast, the subcommittee determined that the day school program at Manhattan Trade School for Boys, which provided higher quality vocational training in more commercial fields, drew 75 percent of its student body from white families in the Bronx, despite its location in the middle of Harlem.[244]

The report did not limit its criticism to the K–12 schools. It pointed out that Harlem was the only section of the city without a single nursery school, and of the fifty-four complaints that one of Frazier's investigators summarized during his analysis of the hearings, about a third of them dealt with inadequate social services in the schools and the community.[245] Among the eight formal recommendations from the commission's Subcommittee on Education was that a conference of representatives from all agencies be held to coordinate social work with all children showing a predisposition to delinquency.[246]

Upon receipt of the final version of the commission's highly critical report, controversial enough that it was left unsigned by three of the five white commission members, Mayor LaGuardia withheld his official endorsement and decided to hold it for internal use only.[247] The overall conclusion that the incident at Kress department store was a "spark that set aflame the smoldering resentments of the people of Harlem against racial discrimination and poverty in the midst of plenty" was in line with the Mayor's statements during the creation of the commission, and included in its chapter titled "Education and Recreation" the optimistic declaration, "Probably the greatest boon which a

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[244] Fogelson, 85–87, 89.
[245] Carson De Witt Baker to Sub-Committee on Education, memorandum, 19 April 1935, box 131–127, folder 10, E. Franklin Frazier Papers.
[246] "New York School Conditions Attacked," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 28, 1935; Carson De Witt Baker to Sub-Committee on Education, memorandum.
[247] Platt, 1, 161. Morris Ernst, William McCann, and John Grimley were the three commissioners who refused to sign the final report.

city like New York offers the Negro at present is an opportunity for his children to receive an education comparable to that given the white child."[248] Yet, the specific accusations of discrimination by various city departments, including the school system, contradicted his position and represented a potential political liability. In the winter and spring of 1936, NAACP officials, the black press, and other leaders in the Harlem community urged the Mayor to release the report, but he declined. Only if certain "objectionable" passages were omitted or rewritten would LaGuardia consider sharing the report more widely. However, a copy of the report was leaked to the *Amsterdam News*. On July 18, 1936, the paper published the entire 35,000-word report and newspapers across the city immediately picked up the story.[249]

Release of the report fueled several Harlem-based school reform movements. A group of teachers from the Teachers Union took the lead in building a protest movement based on the report findings. They expanded the alliances forged in the Parent-Teachers' Committee during the previous two years to launch a larger campaign of publicity against the school administration calling for equal resources for working-class Harlemites. Since its founding in 1916 as the first teachers union in New York City (as Local 5 of the American Federation of Teachers), a significant group of teachers within the Teachers Union had pushed an agenda reaching far beyond bread and butter issues.[250] The majority Rank and File caucus within the union, with their close ties to the Communist Party, desire to pursue an industrial unionism model that included all school workers, and focus on

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[248] Fogelson, 77.
[249] Charles Houston to Fiorello LaGuardia, 6 April 1936, microfilm reel 86, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers; "Report on Harlem Survey Censored," *Chicago Defender*, August 3, 1935; Fogelson, 7; "Complete Riot Report Bared," *New York Amsterdam News,* July 18, 1936.
[250] Clarence Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights, and the New York City Teachers Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.

academic freedom and civil rights, alienated more moderate members. These tensions culminated in late 1935 when this group, the largest teachers union in the city, split apart after President Henry Linville and fellow officers accused a wing of the union with "communist domination."[251] The more radical faction retained the name "Teachers Union" while the defecting group resigned from Local 5 and formed a new "Teachers Guild." After the split, the Teachers Union campaigned more aggressively for economic and social reform, including racial equality and the protection of academic freedom rights of teachers. The union's leadership, which included many members of the Communist Party of the United States of America and the Socialist Party, sought to transform school facilities, curriculum, and teacher selection processes, especially in schools serving students from poor families. Despite a drop of 700 members during the 1935 schism, the union regained and surpassed those numbers during the Popular Front years of the late 1930s. By the end of the 1930s, the Union listed 6,500 members, meaning that it continued as the largest teachers union in the city.[252]

In the closing months of 1935, a cadre of teachers from the Teachers Union established a Harlem Committee to coordinate a community-wide effort to confront the problems identified by the report of LaGuardia's riot commission.[253] Alice Citron and Lucile Spence, a biology teacher at Wadleigh High School, led the Committee.[254] As one of

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[251] For the most comprehensive study of the 1930s schism in the Teachers Union, see chapter one, "The War Within," of Clarence Taylor's *Reds at the Blackboard* (11–33). Karen Lea Riley, *Social Reconstruction: People, Politics, Perspectives* (Greenwich, CT: Information Age, 2006), 226; Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 221.
[252] Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard,* 33–34, 60; Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 219; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 215–17.
[253] Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 219–21.
[254] Citron, discussed in chapter two of this dissertation, taught sixth-grade students at P.S. 184 and played a number of important leadership roles in the Teachers Union.

its first actions this group drafted a petition to the Board of Education directing their attention to a list of problems overlapping closely with those discussed in the LaGuardia report.[255] The Teachers Union members, they explained, "are in a position to realize that the findings of the Mayor's committee were in no way exaggerated. They have found that the conditions described in the report make proper teaching and proper receptivity to the teaching process impossible."[256] The petition drew heavily on the work of the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, and called for reduced class sizes, new school buildings, improved recreational facilities, free lunch and winter clothing for children of the unemployed, special classes for overage students, and an increase in the number of visiting teachers. To bolster their cause, the Harlem Committee circulated reprinted copies of the commission report.[257]

The goals outlined in the petition were quickly and emphatically endorsed by the union's leadership as well as religious and political leaders such as the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. of Abyssinian Baptist Church and community leaders who had served on LaGuardia's commission, such as poet Countee Cullen.[258] In November 1935, in the first issue of its monthly publication, the *New York Teacher*, the Teachers Union quoted large sections of the report and drew attention to the lack of response by the school administration and LaGuardia's office.[259] Charles J. Hendley, President of the Teachers Union, contacted the NAACP in early 1936, "calling upon all religious, civic, political, fraternal, educational and labor leaders and organizations to endorse its program to bring

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[255] "Probe Harlem School Discrimination Charge," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 25, 1935; Asrat, 68.
[256] "Petition to the Board of Education," part 3, series A, reel 22, NAACP Papers.
[257] Citron, "Harlem Wants Schools," 126.
[258] Asrat, 68.
[259] Celia Lewis Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union, 1916–1964: A Story of Educational and Social Commitment* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 87–88.

to life the report of the Mayor's committee."[260]

The teachers on the Harlem Committee reached out to other local organizations to create a broad coalition for addressing school problems. In the spring of 1936, they pulled together a wide range of parent, religious, and civic organizations to form the Provisional Committee for Better Schools in Harlem.[261] For instance, they received backing from members of the upper-class Paul Laurence Dunbar Apartments in Central Harlem who sought school reform out of an expressed concern that residents with school-aged children were leaving to seek better educational opportunities outside of Harlem.[262] Prominent citizens of the complex, led by manager Roscoe Conkling Bruce, signed a petition demanding that the Board of Education improve conditions in the area's schools based on the recommendations presented by the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem.[263] The provisional committee also gained support from the Harlem Youth Council of the NAACP, which had organized a meeting at Harlem's Salem M.E. Church to protest educational inequality in Harlem. They joined forces with this group when Executive Secretary Walter White and Roy Wilkins, now editor of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, realized that the Teachers Union was paralleling the efforts of their Youth Council.[264] The Provisional Committee also gained support from social service agencies operating in

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[260] Charles J. Hendley to National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 31 January 1936, part 3, series A, reel 22, NAACP Papers.
[261] Charles H. Houston to Friends of the NAACP, "Organization Call for Equal School Conditions in Harlem," n.d., part 3, series A, reel 22, NAACP Papers.
[262] Letter from Roscoe Conkling Bruce to Walter White, 25 January 1936, part 3, series A, reel 21, NAACP Papers.
[263] "Petition Against Schools' Condition," *Chicago Defender*, February 29, 1936; Back, "Up South in New York," 50.
[264] Walter F. White to Mr. Wilkins, Mr. Houston, and Miss Jackson, memorandum, 2 March 1936; "Resolution Proposed to Audience at Mass Meeting, Sunday, 8 March 1936, at Salem M.E. Church," 8 March 1936, part 3, series A, reel 22, NAACP Papers.

Harlem. The North Harlem Community Council sent representatives to their meetings in addition to independently making an argument to the Board of Education to push for new school buildings and equipment to compensate for poverty in families' homes.[265]

On the one-year anniversary of the riot, March 19, 1936, the Harlem Committee of the Teachers Union and the rest of the Provisional Committee, which now included members of the NAACP and various parent and church groups, organized a meeting at St. Martin's Episcopal Chapel on Lenox Avenue in Harlem.[266] Over 350 delegates from sixty-eight political, fraternal, and religious organizations gathered. At this meeting, the group renamed itself the Permanent Committee for Better Schools in Harlem (PCBSH) and elected the Reverend John W. Robinson of Christ Community Church chairman and Lucile Spence of the Teachers Union executive secretary.[267]

The PCBSH succeeded in pulling together members from across the ideological spectrum toward a common cause. This broke a recent pattern of failed grassroots reform campaigns in Harlem, such as the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign earlier in the decade, in which internal political and cultural divisions derailed progress.[268] The PCBSH drew heavily on support from Communists like Emmett May and Theodore Bassett, as well as a cohort of Harlem ministers such as Robinson who were active in Popular Front activities, and it combined parent, church, fraternal, teacher, racial uplift, and labor groups.[269] During the founding meeting and subsequent weeks, the committee hammered

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[265] "Harlem Group Cites Local School Needs," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 7, 1936.
[266] "Program of the Conference for Better Schools in Harlem," 19 March 1936, part 3, series A, reel 22; *New York Amsterdam News*, February 22, 1936.
[267] Johnson, "'Making Democracy Real,'" 575–576.
[268] Asrat, 13.
[269] Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 197; "Organizations Participating in the Delegation to Mayor LaGuardia to Request Better Schools in Harlem," n.d., microfilm reel 86, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers;

out lists of specific recommendations for school construction, parent-teacher association formation, playground building, and staff hiring.[270] The *New York Teacher*, ran an editorial by teacher Alice Citron titled "Harlem Wants Schools," which stressed the importance of the Better Schools Committee and lamented the ongoing existence of downtrodden conditions by asking, "When will this misery cease?"[271]

The Teachers Union Harlem Committee arrived at the conclusion that school conditions for black students should equal those for white students based on their larger vision for socioeconomic equality in their city. Most of its members favored in radical revision of the system for distributing resources to Harlem families; this included the schools but also welfare services outside of school to promote a healthy environment for students outside of school. They shared this general vision with some of their allies, especially members of the Communist Party who participated in the PCBSH. Yet, they also teamed up with parent groups and professionals from the Harlem community that fit school quality into a much more moderate ideal for change. Their ability to work together was based on a common denominator: they agreed that the physical conditions of Harlem schools must be improved.

The PCBSH continued to meet frequently, and on at least a few occasions members

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"Call Conference on Schools Here," *New York Age*, March 14, 1936; "Demand New Schools for Harlem Children," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 28, 1936. This group of ministers included Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. of Abyssinian Baptist Church, Rev. Shelton Bishop Hale of St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Rev. William Lloyd Imes of St. James Presbyterian Church, and Rev. David Licorish of St. Matthew's Baptist Church. The number of black Communist Party members in Harlem grew from 300 to 700 between January and August of 1935. They were joined in a united front by many black leaders during and following the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem, such as those of the North Harlem Community Council and the YMCA.

[270] "Harlem Teachers Reveal More Accomplishment Here," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 4, 1941; Provisional Committee for Better Schools in Harlem to the Parents of Harlem School Children, n.d., part 3, series A, reel 22, NAACP Papers.

[271] Citron, "Harlem Wants Schools," 126.

visited the offices of the Mayor and the Board of Education to lobby for better schools. On April 14, 1936, over fifty representatives led by Rev. John W. Robinson went to City Hall to request four new schools, recreational facilities, and a black member on the Board of Education. The Mayor had taken off the afternoon to watch a baseball game, so they had to give their presentation to his secretary, who referred them to the Building Committee of the Board of Education.[272] The following summer, representatives of the PCBSH attended an open school budget hearing and presented an argument for a new elementary school to serve children from the Harlem River Houses, a Public Works Administration project recently completed after the Harlem Riot.[273]

By the end of 1936, the Board of Education approved a building program that included two new elementary schools for Harlem to be located in an area relieving P.S. 68 and 89, two of the most overcrowded schools.[274] Two of these schools were opened by 1938, along with a new annex for Frederick Douglass Junior High School. The board announced in 1938 plans for two more schools, which were completed in 1941.[275] The PCBSH and many of its constituent organizations maintained that this was a step in the right direction, but not enough to solve Harlem's school problems.[276]

During the following school year the PCBSH drew wider public attention by holding a mock hearing at Abyssinian Church where it tried the Board of Education for neglect and discrimination in the case of Harlem's schools. Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., playing the

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[272] "Harlem Launches Campaign for School Board Member," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 18, 1936; Citron, "Harlem Wants Schools," 126; "Education Board to Hear of Evils," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 6, 1937; Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 22.
[273] "Local Group Demands Schools Be Improved," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 4, 1936.
[274] "School Board Puts Harlem Plan First," *New York Times*, May 14, 1936.
[275] Asrat, 13; "School Doors Open Monday for New Year," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 11, 1937; "Finish Work on 2 Schools for Harlem," *Chicago Defender*, August 20, 1938.
[276] "Conference is Called on Harlem Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 29, 1936.

role of prosecutor, accused the board of ignoring overcrowded and shabby building conditions, illegally gerrymandering zone lines, and assigning black students to outdated vocational programs. Witnesses included principals, teachers, parents, and students from the local community. Before a packed house, the jury of prominent Harlem citizens found the board guilty on all counts.[277]

At the trial, PCBSH members publicized a few specific incidents of discrimination by principals during the past year. The most blatant infraction involved principal Gustave Schoenchen. In October 1936, witnesses accused Schoenchen of striking a disobedient fourteen-year-old with a ruler on the head, shoulders, and arms, and kicking him in the stomach. The op-ed columns of New York City's black newspapers exploded with resentful commentary about racism in Harlem's schools.[278] The boy, Robert Shelton, who had gone to Schoenchen's school to pick up his younger cousin, later recounted his story of the attack by the 250-pound white principal to the PCBSH group assembled at Abyssinian Church. Only a few days before that meeting Schoenchen had been cleared on criminal charges but the Board of Education subsequently transferred him out of the system in the face of PCBSH- and NAACP-led protest.[279]

During the same month of the Schoenchen incident, the PCBSH launched a campaign to remove Mabel Thresher, Louise Tucker's replacement as principal of P.S. 90, due to public racist statements. At her induction ceremony, Thresher had commented, "If I had

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[277] Alice Citron, letter to the editor, *New York Amsterdam News*, July 20, 1972, Alice Citron Papers.
[278] Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 238.
[279] "Cleared in Child Beating," *New York Times*, January 21, 1937; "Schoenchen Has Gone," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 30, 1937; "Principal is Freed," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 23, 1937; "Asks New York Board to Remove Brutal Principal," *Chicago Defender*, December 5, 1936; "Harlem Stirred Over Principal's Savage Attack on Schoolboy," *Chicago Defender*, November 7, 1936; "Civic Bodies Still Active on Principal," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 21, 1936; "Step-Children of New York," *New York Teacher* 2 (February 1937): 9–10.

known that I was coming to an Amos and Andy community, I would have gotten a Fresh Air Taxi to come up, and perhaps stopped by Madam Queen's." This was interpreted as jest by her defenders (mainly fellow administrators), but many in the black community thought otherwise and voiced disgust through the PCBSH at the principal's reference to the crude stereotypes featured in the radio situation comedy.[280] Roy Wilkins wrote in his opinion column "Watchtower" for the *New York Amsterdam News*: "It is pretty senseless to live in New York and permit our boys and girls to be given an Alabama education."[281] This type of racism was not new during the 1930s, but the research of the Mayor's commission and the publicity spread by the PCBSH highlighted such problems more vividly than before.

The PCBSH petitioned the Board of Education for a new building for Wadleigh High School and worked closely with the Wadleigh Parent Teachers Association to achieve this goal.[282] Simultaneously, John Robinson, and the rest of the leadership of the PCBSH and its member organizations, protested what they deemed an attempt to make Wadleigh a "Jim Crow institution" in response to rumors that it would officially become an all-black school.[283] In late June of 1936, Assistant Superintendent John Tildsley gave an interview to the PCBSH in which he supported the idea of a new Harlem school, although he refused to entertain the idea of going as far as adjusting zoning lines to avoid racial segregation. He admitted the unfairness of routing of black students disproportionately to Wadleigh, Haaren, and Morris High Schools, all with academic programs inferior to those at schools

[280] John W. Robinson, testimony, Public Hearing, New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Urban Colored Population, 13 December 1937, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, 1052–57.
[281] Roy Wilkins, "Watchtower," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 3, 1936.
[282] "Both Races Need New Wadleigh High School, Audience is Told," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 15, 1939; "Place Wadleigh Building Drive Before Harlem," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 23, 1938; "Ask New School for Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 26, 1938.
[283] "Wadleigh Hi May Lose By Zoning Laws," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 26, 1937.

like George Washington and Julia Richman, but he did not propose any solutions.[284]

The PCBSH also lodged complaints about vocational tracking with the Board of Education. Prior to the mock trial at Abyssinian Church, Assistant Superintendent John Tildsley gave an interview to the PCBSH. Questioned about the segregation of black students into low-skilled vocational courses, Tildsley argued that vocational programming simply and naturally paralleled discriminatory employment practices, rhetorically asking, "Surely, you don't expect a Negro doctor to practice among whites?"[285] According to an article published in *The Crisis* in 1937, Tildsley argued, "Isn't a girl better off as a seamstress making a living than as a stenographer not making one?"[286] Dozens of parents wrote letters to the NAACP and the PCBSH throughout the 1930s complaining that they were denied access to better high schools and tracked into lower-skill trade programs across the board.[287] James Marshall, President of the Board of Education, defended the overrepresentation of black students in vocational classes as a result of the pupils' own choice, but few in the PCBSH or NAACP accepted this argument.[288]

The NAACP did not take a lead role in protesting conditions in Harlem schools during this period. It continued to direct its attention to the legal fight against officially segregated schools in the South. Yet, the organization consistently supported the PCBSH by sending representatives to its meetings and publicizing its mass meetings. This type of collaboration signaled an important shift in the NAACP during the 1930s, moving away from an elite, professional-class position favoring gradual change to one favoring wide-

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[284] "Jim Crow Move Laid to School Official," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 20, 1936.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Edith M Stern, "Jim Crow Goes to School in New York," *The Crisis* (July 1937): 201–202.
[287] Back, "Up South in New York," 57.
[288] "In Reply to Chapter Six, The Problem of Education and Recreation," series 354, box 3, folder 17, Board of Education Papers.

scale political engagement on behalf of immediate gains for working-class African Americans.

The Permanent Committee also benefited from support from new state agencies established to combat racial discrimination, in large part in response to pressure from the NAACP. Governor Herbert Lehman appointed a Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Urban Colored Population in 1937 and the state legislature granted it a $30,000 operating budget (later extended by an additional $15,000), to survey housing, employment, and other "living conditions" among the urban black populations in cities across the state. Following the 1935 riot and the municipal investigation, the commission focused most of its attention on New York City. The study grew in size and the work of the commission extended through 1939. The group subpoenaed school records and held hundreds of hours of hearings, many of them closely examining Harlem's schools.[289]

The PCBSH submitted a written report to the commission regarding various discriminatory practices. John Robinson and Emmett May, key witnesses during the Temporary Commission hearings, followed up with verbal statements representing the PCBSH position and referred back to the work of the PCBSH and the Mayor's Commission on Conditions in Harlem on zoning restrictions.[290] The commission took these recommendations seriously and focused their investigation heavily on related subjects. The commission made the question of equal access to academic and vocational curricula of

[289] Allon Schoener, *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, 1900–1968* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1968), 182; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 239.
[290] John W. Robinson, testimony, Public Hearing, New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Urban Colored Population, 13 December 1937, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, 1052–57.

all types a central issue for their investigation.[291] It ultimately agreed with the PCBSH's accusation of racial discrimination in assignment of black students to Wadleigh, Textile, and Haaren High Schools.[292] On the topic of skilled vocational training, it synthesized the testimony from teachers and principals working in vocational schools to tell a story of a "vicious circle" where black students could not get jobs without high-skill training and were denied the training because of the lack of job possibilities. Without access to education in higher-skill vocations, industrial education had become a "hit or miss affair."[293]

Arguments against discriminatory school policy such as that made by the Temporary Commission built on the work of scholars during the 1930s that critiqued institutional discrimination. For instance, in the spring of 1938, the education professor and Communist Party activist Doxey Wilkerson authored a multipart essay on "Caste in Education" in *New York Teacher News* (formerly *New York Teacher*), comparing the more subtle forms of discrimination present in the North (versus those typical in the South). He stressed the structural nature of the problem by focusing on zoning, curriculum design, and budget trends. He concluded that unequal school conditions and racially biased placement in vocational programs, phenomena widespread in Harlem, represented intentional

[291] Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 92; Asrat, 121.
[292] New York State, *Second Report of the New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Colored Urban Population*, Legislative Document No. 69 (Albany, NY: J. B. Lyon, 1939), 100–106. The group published two reports, the first in 1938 and a second in 1939.
[293] New York State, *Report of the New York State Temporary Commission on the Condition of the Colored Urban Population*, Legislative Document No. 63 (Albany, NY: J. B. Lyon, 1938), 57–58. *Second Report of the New York State Temporary Commission*, 108.

discrimination that led to a "mental crucifixion" of the Negro child.[294] Wilkerson based many of his conclusions on data compiled by E. Franklin Frazier.[295]

As in the early 1930s, the increase in accusations of racial prejudice during this period resulted in part from increased racism. Yet, the racism and poor conditions discussed in the riot commission report had not suddenly appeared out of thin air. The bigger reason for the perception of a drastic rise in discrimination was the spike in data after 1935 to support such claims. As early as 1912, Frances Blascoer and her PEA team (discussed in the first chapter) had documented racism on the part of teachers and principals working with Harlem students, but the findings were not nearly as comprehensive as those in the riot report and received far less attention in the media. This trend continued through the 1920s, as examinations of neglect and discrimination in Harlem schools were carried out sporadically and incompletely. The work of LaGuardia's riot commission and its research team put into the public record hard evidence that confirmed suspicions already harbored by the minority of dissenters who spoke against the administration during the previous decade. Journalists and civil rights organizations had not been oblivious to the inequalities, but they did not have the same level of proof as they did regarding housing and jobs. The riot report, combined with follow-up studies conducted by teachers, social scientists, Harlem-based civic groups, and state agencies, provided a large body of data to support arguments about discriminatory practices in the schools that had previously just been suspicions. This created a self-perpetuating cycle, in which the more evidence of inequities in Harlem schools became available, the more

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[294] "Caste in Education: II," *New York Teacher* 3 (April, 1938): 14–15; Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 251. Right after the release of the last part of the essay, the *New York Age* criticized the piece for exaggerating the depth of the problem in Harlem.
[295] "Caste in Education: II," 14–15.

researchers put the schools under a microscope.

In the face of growing protest from groups such as the PCBSH, New York City's central office school administrators explicitly denied discriminatory practices. Yet, they were willing to discuss the existence of inadequate conditions. Most agreed with protestors that a growing achievement gap existed between black and white students. If they weren't already aware of this prior to the report from Villard's team, they realized it with abundant clarity afterward. James Marshall, president of the Board of Education, readily admitted the inadequacy of Harlem's school facilities while adamantly denying discriminatory practices. When faced with arguments such as one reported in the *New York Times* in late 1934, and reiterated during the LaGuardia commission hearings, that a three-year building plan by the Board of Estimate allocated a meager $400,000 to Harlem out of a total of $120 million for the city, he argued that other poor sections of the city, many of them serving white immigrant children, suffered the same levels of overcrowded, unsanitary, understaffed conditions. This led him to the awkward position for a board member of rebutting accusations of discrimination by emphasizing the uniformity of substandard conditions across the system.[296] He communicated these views extensively in a lengthy written rebuttal to the riot report, which he shared with Mayor LaGuardia.[297] Although he agreed with some of the recommendations for improvement, he denied that they represented neglect for any other reason than lack of overall funding.[298] As did his predecessors in the 1920s, he pinned the underperformance of black students on

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[296] James Marshall to Fiorello LaGuardia, 5 May 1935, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers; "Harlem Conditions Worst in N.Y.," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 3, 1935.
[297] "In Reply to Chapter Six, The Problem of Education and Recreation," Board of Education Papers; James Marshall to Fiorello LaGuardia, 5 May 1935.
[298] "Harlem Public Schools," *New York Age*, March 21, 1936.

"deficiencies in training which result from broken homes, poverty, a vicious environment, retardation, and ill health."[299]

At the same time that community-based protestors increasingly took an adversarial role lumping together a wide range of problems under the umbrella of racial discrimination, administrators responded to the riot by retreating even more to their orthodoxy of changing the curriculum to manage community-based problems. Unlike the teachers and parents who assessed the situation strictly based on the quality of basic services offered by the schools, administrators continued to turn to sociological explanations of school problems and favored specialized services to overcome such problems. This approach was not new to Harlem in the mid-1930s, but it intensified following the 1935 riot as administrators scrambled to defend against attacks on their schools' performance.

Four months after the riot, the Board of Education and Board of Superintendents appointed a Joint Committee on Maladjustment and Delinquency. The committee, chaired by James Marshall and Associate Superintendent Margaret J. McCooey, focused on the "psychological and sociological implications of maladjustment and delinquency" citywide and paid special attention to poorer districts such as Harlem.[300] Over the next few years, the group collected and analyzed a vast amount of statistics on incidents of delinquency (including incidents of violence or vandalism in schools and arrests outside of school),

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[299] "In Reply to Chapter Six," Board of Education Papers; James Marshall to Fiorello LaGuardia, 5 May 1935, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers.

[300] "The Psychological and Sociological Implications of Maladjustment and Delinquency," 1938; "Report and Recommendations of the Joint Committee on Maladjustment and Delinquency," 1937, series 164, box 1, folder 4, Board of Education Papers; Justine Wise Polier et al.,"Report on the Harlem Project," September 1943–June 1945," mimeograph, 10–11, December, 1947, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

attendance rates, ages of students at different grade levels, and levels of overcrowding in schools.[301]

Repeating much of the same language as school administrators from the 1920s and late 1930s, the committee concluded that the most effective solution for the problems at hand was differentiation of the curriculum. They urged the continuation of the transition from a "mass treatment" approach to one favoring "flexibility, diversification and individualization," as well as the broadening of the curriculum to address the physical health, character, and behavioral needs of children. They argued that schools could effectively promote healthy development of the "whole child" only if they collaborated with agencies outside of school to minimize negative environmental conditions.[302] More specifically, they explained how curricula that matched the ability and interests of students would decrease the dropout rate and accelerate students' progress through the grades, reducing the number of overage students that they identified as a high delinquency threat. The group made forty-five recommendations in their final report, but placed the greatest emphasis on the delivery of "differentiated educational treatment" for "varying pupils."[303]

During LaGuardia's riot commission investigation, administrators consistently focused their testimony before the Subcommittee on Education on environmental factors. Superintendents and principals explained school failure in terms of the uphill battle due to socioeconomic inequities originating outside of the schoolhouse. They uniformly located the roots of students' behavior and academic shortcomings in their experiences at home and in their local communities. Eugenie Chinnock, principal of P.S. 136, a girls' junior high

[301] "Statistical Reference Data," 1936, series 164, box 1, folder 1, Board of Education Papers.
[302] "Report and Recommendations of the Joint Committee on Maladjustment and Delinquency," 1937, series 164, box 1, folder 2, Board of Education Papers.
[303] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 10–11.

school (one of five located in Harlem), included sociological data about her 2400 students in her testimony. She identified correlations between broken homes, unemployment, and school attendance and explained her calculation that more than half of her students came from homes with "loose guardianship," with one or more parents remaining in a Southern state from which they migrated.[304] Based on such data, the Subcommittee on Education concluded that 25 percent of Harlem's families were "broken," defined specifically as having only a woman as head of household.[305] Elementary school principal Jacob Ross blamed single-parent homes for "deterioration in morals" among his 2200 students.[306] In one extreme case, Principal Gustave Schoenchen (discussed earlier in the chapter) blamed Harlem schools' troubles on the children, their families, and community conditions, without assigning any responsibility to the schools. When cross-examined by the education subcommittee's investigator, Schoenchen recommended that the parents and teachers who had complained against the school in the hearings be arrested for perjury and blackmail. In his view, the students were uncontrollable "problem children," and he explained that the transfer of twenty-one teachers out of his school resulted from fear of their commute through the neighborhood and fear of the students rather than any unfair policies. To emphasize the danger present among his students, he showed the investigator pocketknives, a meat cleaver, and various other confiscated weapons.[307]

Some principals recommended to Villard's investigative team that institutions other than the schools should help manage problems of students. Principal David Goldwasser of

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[304] Eugenie Chinnock, testimony, "1935 Public Hearings: Education," box 3770, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers.
[305] Fogelson, 82.
[306] "Education Hearing," April 4, 1935, box 131-124, folder 4, E. Franklin Frazier Papers.
[307] James H. Tarter, Jr. to Charles H. Roberts, memorandum, n.d., box 131-119, folder 1, E. Franklin Frazier Papers.

P.S. 83, who referred in his testimony to instances of single-parent homes fostering "moral problems" that led to unemployment and crime, called for special agencies in the Harlem area for the "delinquent negro boy," modeled after institutions like the Hawthorne Protectory that served Jewish boys, as well as additional visiting teachers to coordinate work between the school and such agencies.[308] Gertrude Ayer, elementary school principal at P.S. 24, argued that Harlem students' problems originated outside of the school and should thus be addressed there.[309] This included a proposal for the creation of more psychiatric facilities for black children and more relief activity to provide proper clothes, housing, and food for families.[310]

Despite their common understanding that Harlem students' troubles in school stemmed from insufficient support at home, most principals maintained confidence that the schools could overcome problems on their own with the proper curricular innovation. Harlem schools must do more, not less, they argued. As they had since the World War, these principals explicitly and vehemently denied racial discrimination in their system. They claimed their schools were in fact fighting against bigotry by maximizing opportunity for all students, and they framed their proposed solutions—specialized curriculum in school, and community programs outside of school designed to remedy students' economic and cultural poverty—as responses to differing educational, social, and psychological needs.[311] In this way, they could help students overcome race- and class-based disadvantages due to discrimination in the larger society. Unfortunately, the riot report

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[308] "Education Hearing," April 4, 1935, box 131-124, folder 4, E. Franklin Frazier Papers.
[309] Ayer was the first African-American female principal in New York City schools, and the first African-American principal since William L. Bulkley, who is discussed in chapter one of this study.
[310] "Education Hearing," April 4, 1935, E. Franklin Frazier Papers.
[311] "Discrimination in Harlem School Denied," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 18, 1935.

pointed to the fact that despite good intentions, the administrators' position on remedial academic curricula and vocational education often resulted in rigid tracking of students for the long term and reinforced their disadvantaged position, rather than providing them the tools to overcome it.

Some Harlem superintendents and principals argued explicitly in favor of simplified academic curricula across the board to meet the special needs of their students. Assistant Superintendent in charge of Harlem's District 10, Robert J. Frost, argued that this was the only way to reach more students, since many could not "relate to the traditional curriculum."[312] Julius Gluck, principal of P.S. 89, devised a "Re-Organization of the Curriculum" project to meet the "mental level of the group intelligence of the student body" after determining that his students were unprepared to follow the city's standard elementary curriculum. He had followed the lead of other principals in his district, who in 1932 had revised the arithmetic and composition syllabi to a more basic level. But Gluck went one step further, simplifying the reading, history, geography, and spelling programs. Other principals' approaches to academic curricula for black children were especially laden with negative assumptions about the educational potential of their students. An investigator assigned by the Subcommittee on Education to Junior High School 136 noted that the principal and staff believed that children in Central Harlem were generally unprepared for the normal academic curriculum. The pervasive attitude, he wrote in his report, was that "Negro children are not, as a group, mentally equipped to master the

[312] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1935–36. His report heavily applied sociological theories; it called for the addition of non-teaching services including recreation centers, hospitals, and after-school clubs.

standard program of study as prescribed for the average student in this city."[313]

During the riot commission hearings, principals spent a great deal of time justifying the value of vocational training. Julius Gluck highlighted, as did many other principals questioned by Frazier's staff, the demand for proper equipment and teaching staff to give students failing the academic curriculum greater opportunity. "Manual training work must be extended to a great degree," he argued, "if we are to fit the children of this neighborhood for a good, profitable life after their education is completed." In his argument in favor of a broadened vocational curriculum, Gluck blamed a historical overemphasis on intellectual training for students' inability to advance through the grades at a proper pace, resulting in overage students that caused social problems in classrooms.[314] Principals of vocational high schools, such as Charles J. Pickett, head of the New York Industrial High School, advocated for the special importance of manual training during a depression era when a higher number of students than normal were in school against their wishes and had no desire for an academic curriculum.[315]

In 1939, a committee of Harlem principals conducted their own survey of schools and completed a report for the Committee of Associate Superintendents. The committee requested that the report of this unofficial rebuttal to the riot report remain private to avoid offending local families. Casting as much blame as they did on rampant cultural deprivation in the Harlem community, it is no wonder they desired a limited local

[313] "Curriculum," box 131-127, folder 10, E. Franklin Frazier Papers.
[314] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1935–36.
[315] Charles J. Pickett, testimony, "1935 Public Hearings: Education," box 3770, Fiorello LaGuardia Papers.

audience.[316]

The report emphasized the severe handicaps facing administrators and teachers, mostly traceable to the family and community life. "Desertion, divorce, illegitimacy of birth, death, prostitution, and weak parental control," the group argued, each led to a "full quote of adverse home situations that creates unwholesomeness and concomitant problems." The committee described deficiencies in students' ability "to follow the right and to acquire desirable habits of conduct," something that could only be countered with the slow process of character education at the school. They blamed students' below-grade-level status and overage situation on families migrating from the South without the proper background, arguing, "Children are continually being sent up from the South, ostensibly to receive a good education, actually in many instances, to increase the relief appropriation to the family." Their report documented several stories of out-of-control students in Harlem schools and painted a picture of a dangerous student body including students who "often carry knives" and if "excitedly enraged, make use of any handy article as a weapon, e.g., the heel of a shoe, a pen, or a rock." In the absence of proper training at home, the committee posited that teachers were overburdened with the responsibility of taking over the roles of "parent, nurse, big sister or big brother, social service worker, recreational director, vocational counselor, and spiritual adviser."[317]

Many of these principals were the same men and women who had expanded the school program during the 1920s and early 1930s and persisted with that approach. Those who were new to the system adopted a strikingly similar strategy. Between 1935 and

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[316] Committee of Principals, "A Report on Conditions in the Schools of Harlem," series 354, box 3, folder 17, Board of Education Papers.
[317] Committee of Principals, "A Report on Conditions in the Schools of Harlem," Board of Education Papers.

1940, the Board of Education and Board of Superintendents continued a variety of special programs started in the 1920s and early 1930s, many of them calling for expanded services to meet the particular needs of underprivileged black youth. Because they located the root of students' learning problems in the community, they saw no reason to question their system. They saw no reason that systemic policies affecting resource distribution, teacher training and placement, or student zoning needed adjustment. In their view, the system was working. With continued imaginative curricular improvement and expansion of school services, there was no reason that the current system could not provide equal educational opportunities for the most recent migrants to Harlem.

At the close of the 1935–1936 school year, Assistant Superintendent David J. Frost reported on District 10 (covering the lower half of the Central Harlem) on the special needs of its students. Frost favored the expansion of manual training, ungraded classrooms, and other modified curricula for "the duller children" (identified through a combination of intelligence testing and academic performance). He also recommended an increase in social services to support the academic role of the school. After reviewing existing institutions, including settlement houses, libraries, churches, and health centers, Frost lobbied for the creation of new community-wide programs in adult education (including vocational and citizenship training), after-school care, supervised recreation, and health clinics. He also called for stricter adult monitoring of poolrooms, movie houses, and other places of vice. Frost envisioned that schools following such a wide scope of recommendations would turn out students better socially adjusted with stronger basic life skills, attitudes, habits, and "social virtues." Frost held up Leonard Covello, principal of Benjamin Franklin High School in East Harlem, as a model for his pioneering work in

coordinating social and educational community agencies. The Associate Superintendent's 1935–36 annual report from Districts 11, 13, and 14, covering most of the rest of Harlem, included a review of the existing character training program, designed to "inculcate respect for law and order, and to lay the foundation for social cooperation and good citizenship." As in District 10, the report called for smaller class sizes, more visiting teachers, and more guidance counselors so that individualization of instruction could meet the needs of all students.[318] Frost's methods and general approach closely paralleled those of William Bulkley a generation earlier.

Yet, the community's level of confidence in such programming had diminished. Unlike the general support Bulkley received in the black press, the *New York Age* and *Amsterdam News* dismissed programming such as Frost's and instead protested the unequal access that black students had to academic curricula. Since the beginning of the Great Migration, school administrators in charge of Harlem schools had built their strategy on the assumption that special programming for underprivileged students would erase differences with other children. In this way, the schools would actively fight discrimination and inequity. However, what if the special programs reinforced rather than overcame preexisting inequities? Groups such as the Teachers Union's Harlem Committee and the PCBSH used evidence gathered by the Commission on Conditions in Harlem to argue that this was the case: special curricula could easily translate into dangerous discrimination over the long term. They pointed to the absence of black Harlem students in upper-level academic and high-skilled vocational programs as evidence of impermeable tracks that permanently sorted students, an understanding that contrasted sharply with

[318] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1935–36.

administrators' goal of increasing socioeconomic mobility through individualized programming. Instead of specialized curricula, they identified the most important need of Harlem's children as being access to facilities, staff, and curriculum equal to those experienced by their wealthier, white counterparts in other sections of the city. They disregarded the criticism that this could create a mismatch between the education of black students and the opportunities available in the workplace, since they saw educational reform as part of a larger civil rights struggle that aimed to eliminate job discrimination as well.

The Teachers Union's protests during the 1930s did not rule out the provision of extra help for students from underprivileged backgrounds. Of all the groups involved in school reform in Harlem, they held the most expansive vision of change, arguing that the entire system of resource distribution to Harlem schools should be overhauled in addition to a more careful application of Progressive Era programs favored by administrators to alleviate cultural deprivation.

Yet the radical core of the Teachers Union remaining after the 1935 split lacked the political power to enact sweeping change. The Teachers Union had to reach beyond radical allies in the Communist Party who shared their broader vision. After joining with a range of parent groups, ministers, and the large number of professional-class Harlemites in the PCBSH, they needed to find a common denominator to protest, and that was inadequate school conditions. The larger group agreed that poor school conditions were unacceptable and centered their verbal protest against the administration on this fact. Yet, as in the case of the Parent-Teachers' Committee, they failed to agree on a clearly defined vision of an alternative set of policies for the schools that would not only build cleaner, less

overcrowded schools in Harlem, but also fill those classrooms with better teachers and special services needed to teach their students and prepare them for success beyond the K–12 years.

The riot commission shone a spotlight on school conditions in Harlem as never before and mobilized significant action within the local community. In the wake of the riot and the report that followed, expanding groups of parents, civil rights leaders, and teachers in civic groups, unions, and non-governmental agencies all clamored to document school problems and draft action plans for fixing them. They expressed faith in the importance of public education, continuing to identify it as a powerful corrective for deep-seated social and economic troubles. Yet, they painted administrators' approach with a broad brush as being unfairly motivated by racial discrimination.

Administrators denied these accusations and maintained faith that a specialized curriculum was the best way to teach Harlem students. As they had done for at least the past two decades, they favored customization of the school program. In the late 1930s, they presented a detailed plan for collaboration between social service agencies and the school, including the Children's Court and the Juvenile Aid Bureau. As they continued to broaden school services, they increasingly called for the addition of mental health and social work professionals to their staffs with the goal of achieving proper psychological "adjustment" of their students. This represented a turn that would sharpen during the upcoming war years, when principals and superintendents would be joined by teachers in an effort to infuse the curriculum with mental health services.

The findings reported by LaGuardia's commission spurred both sides to dig in their heels and explain school problems in extreme terms. Community-based reformers began

to uniformly label the schools as a fundamental cause of inequality, rather than merely a symptom of discrimination and poverty originating outside of the school. They saw segregation of poor, black students into schools with inferior facilities, teachers, and curricular opportunities as an active form of discrimination on the part of the schools. Unlike many of their predecessors, these activists refused to accept compensatory specialized education as a sufficient measure to serve their children. This put them at odds with principals and superintendents who reasserted their position that the schools were not part of the problem, but rather a solution to their students' educational and cultural deficiencies. Administrators, on the other hand, refused to admit any responsibility on the part of their schools for allowing unequal, segregated school conditions to persist. They continued to speak with full confidence of their schools as remedies to social, economic, and cultural disadvantages facing their students.

These two competing approaches were not inherently mutually exclusive, and both had their merits. Community-based education reformers were correct on many counts that the ideal of specialized curriculum had become corrupted during implementation. Yet administrators' insistence that Harlem's black students needed additional help in order to counteract inequities outside of the school was admirable for its ambition and pragmatism. With each side moving towards unified theories of the problem, the majority of stakeholders in reforming Harlem schools ignored the multiplicity of the problems impeding student learning. The practice of both sides talking past each other would further worsen during the 1940s when a new, larger wave of migration further transformed Harlem and exacerbated the challenges facing the area's schools.

Chapter Four
Correcting the "Maladjusted Student": World War II, the Second Great Migration, and Harlem Schools, 1941–1945

The New York City school administration faced a wave of demographic change beginning in 1941 that surpassed the one experienced during the 1920s. Between 1940 and 1948 the city's black population rose by 64 percent, compared with white population growth of only 3 percent.[319] By 1945, New York City had the largest black population of any city in the world.

This change took place in the context of a second wave of Great Migration, even larger and more transformative than the first.[320] Rapid industrial growth and government employment opportunities in Northern cities during World War II triggered the second wave of migration from the South, where African Americans were still experiencing severe civil rights constraints and economic hardship.[321] During the 1940s, 1.6 million Southern blacks migrated to the West and North, the majority of them to urban centers.[322]

The increase in black students took place at the same time as the number of Puerto Ricans in New York City tripled between 1940 and 1950, rising to a total of 250,000 (compared to about 750,000 African-American New Yorkers). The majority of these migrants settled in Harlem in areas zoned to attend predominantly black schools.[323]

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[319] Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 227–228; Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 3.
[320] Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 1, 3.
[321] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 76.
[322] Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 227. This number was three times greater than the number of migrants from the first wave.
[323] Lucas S. Waltzer, "An Uneasy Idealism: The Reconstruction of American Adolescence from World War II to the War on Poverty" (PhD dissertation, The City University of New York, 2009), 115; Lorrin Reed Thomas, "Citizens on the Margins: Puerto Rican Migrants to New York City, 1917–

New York City school administrators responded to this change by launching a new round of curricular initiatives in Harlem schools, more ambitious than those of the 1920s or 1930s. They continued their strategy of expanding the school curriculum to compensate for perceived cultural deprivation with remedial academic courses and social services. During the war years the Board of Superintendents and Board of Education began to target Harlem for special programming more aggressively than they had in the past and launched experimental programs designed to infuse "difficult schools" with social services and remedial academic programming. They argued that the persistent, increasingly widespread poverty among Harlem students' families had raised the challenge for the schools, implying that the cycle of poverty could not be broken with the scope of the 1920s and 1930s school programming. In order to correct students' problems, they argued, special services must be delivered with greater intensity by a better-trained staff than before.

At the same time that administrators expanded social services on an unprecedented scale, they added yet another layer to their schools' programming, this time focusing on the delivery of mental health services to underprivileged children by employing greater numbers of psychologists and social workers charged with the role of "re-adjusting" troubled students. They communicated, both internally and with the public, an overwhelming confidence that the school was in the best position to correct for social pathologies and psychological maladjustment. With increasing support from teachers and mental health professionals, administrators responsible for policy in Harlem's schools expanded non-academic programming in the schools, kept schools open for longer periods

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1960" (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2002), 299; Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 242.

of time, and experimented with new institutional partners. Because of limited resources available during wartime, this often meant trying to do more with less, something that many administrators and teachers believed possible through better integration of services and more scientific targeting of the problem.

Some leaders in the black press raised concerns over schools' ability to "re-adjust" students. One *New York Age* editorial supported the idea of closer cooperation between parents and schools to "teach them good manners, the difference between right and wrong, and good behavior," but severely criticized the school system's ability to fairly deliver its end of the deal. If the teaching of morality and citizenship skills were to be left to the school, teachers and administrators must rise above the "poor standard" that had been set for the teaching of academic skills to their children.[324]

However, such dissent was rare during the war years. The most outspoken voices in the debate over the future of the schools during the war shifted their emphasis away from improving the physical conditions of Harlem's schools and equalizing the academic curriculum with predominantly white schools. Instead, they turned to staffing and curriculum reform designed to meet Harlem students' unmet psycho-social needs. As they redefined the role of Harlem's schools to include social and emotional development of children, the administrators and teachers leading this crusade called for increased responsibility for the schools to compensate for perceived deprivation and adjust for social pathologies.

This shift away from protest occurred in large part because more moderate groups crowded out radical voices that had risen during the 1930s. The largest reform in Harlem

[324] "Wants Manners Taught," *New York Age*, August 19, 1944.

schools during the 1940s was funded by a charitable foundation with a goal of gradual improvement of poor communities. The Teachers Guild, a politically centrist organization, became more active than the radical Teachers Union in lobbying for reform of Harlem schools. Working-class parent groups from the 1930s and leftist allies from teachers and the Communist Party were surpassed by professional-class activists (despite the fact that only 4 percent of Central Harlem residents held professional-class jobs in 1940) who moved away from the fight for equal school conditions in Harlem.[325] The NAACP roared back to life during the war years and added school desegregation in the North as a top priority, but it directed most of its attention to legal desegregation campaigns outside of New York City.

The decline in protest also occurred because the New York City school administration directed a greater amount of resources and attention toward improving Harlem schools. The administration increased its aid to Harlem schools in the context of growing concerns about juvenile delinquency. Combined with the wartime demographic shift, the fear of delinquency led administrators to further broaden the mission for Harlem schools. Juvenile delinquency rates rose dramatically in cities nationwide during the war despite a drop in overall crime.[326] The problem was particularly concentrated in New York City, where court officials reported increases ranging between 11 and 17 percent annually between 1941 and 1944. A disproportionate amount of the rise in delinquency arrests in the city involved black children. They made up nearly half of the cases appearing before

[325] Asrat, "Harlem Is Not Dixie," 17.
[326] Brandt, *Harlem at War*, 168; "Program for Dealing with Juvenile Delinquency," September 1943, box 6, folder 17, UFT Papers.

the Domestic Relations Court during the period.[327] In 1941 alone, juvenile delinquency rates jumped 34 percent for children in Harlem, compared to 7 percent for children across the city.[328] Beginning in the winter of 1941, fact mixed with rumor by word of mouth and in the media and exaggerated the magnitude of the juvenile delinquency problem.[329] Newspapers across New York City sensationalized the "crime wave," much to the dismay of some of Harlem's political leaders, such as Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who protested against racial stereotyping in the reports.[330] "The Negro, like the Jew in Europe," he argued, "has been named the scapegoat" for the problem of juvenile delinquency.[331]

A major riot in Harlem on August 1, 1943, further stoked fears of delinquency. On that night, a white police officer shot and superficially wounded a black soldier in the course of an arrest at a hotel on 126th Street. Rumor spread that the soldier had been killed. Beginning around 10:30 p.m., crowds broke 4,587 windows in more than 1,400 white-owned stores across Harlem. In a span of twelve hours, a police force of over 6,000 arrested 606 people. Six black participants were killed, four of them by the police; 185 people were injured. Property damage was estimated as high as five million dollars.[332]

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[327] City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem, "Report of the Sub-Committee on Crime and Delinquency," 1942, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library; Esther S. Cahan, "New York Teachers Guild Attacks the Delinquency Problem," 1943, box 3, folder 16, UFT Papers.
[328] Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power*, 8.
[329] "Harlem Asks School Aid," *New York Times*, November 28, 1941.
[330] "Soapbox by Adam Clayton Powell Jr.," *People's Voice,* July 24, 1943; "Soapbox by Adam Clayton Powell Jr.," *People's Voice*, December 19, 1942; "Harlem Negroes Win Praise," *New York Times*, December 18, 1941; "Delinquency-Home Front Problem," *People's Voice*, December 26, 1942; Michael Carter, "Crime in Harlem," *The Crisis* (December 8, 1939): 366; Harlem Evening High School Faculty, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, December 18, 1941.
[331] Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., "Soapbox," *People's Voice*, December 19, 1942.
[332] Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode*, 211, 306; Capeci, *The Harlem Riot of 1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), xi, 101–103; "6 Dead in Harlem Riot," *Chicago Defender*, August 7, 1943; "Harlem Unrest Traded to Long-Standing Ills," *New York Times*, August 8, 1943; "Mayor in

Unlike the case in 1935, LaGuardia did not appoint an official commission to investigate inequities that may have contributed to the riot. The Mayor refused this approach even when pressured to do so by national black leaders such as A. Philip Randolph and Roy Wilkins, who had described the riot after witnessing it firsthand as "the boiling over of pent-up resentment in the breasts of millions of American Negroes all over this country."[333] Instead, the Mayor emphasized law and order and promised to punish those responsible for violence and destruction during the riot.[334] He commended the citizens of Harlem who refrained from joining the disorder and scolded the "thoughtless hoodlums" and their destructive actions.[335] By radio broadcast, LaGuardia told listeners, "Shame has come to our city and sorrow to the large number of our fellow citizens, decent, law-abiding citizens, who live in the Harlem section."[336]

Newspaper columnists and other commentators referred to LaGuardia's interpretation of the riot as the "hoodlum thesis" since it blamed individuals' misbehavior rather than systemic problems. The Mayor was not alone in this understanding. Many politicians and civic leaders in the Harlem community shared his disdain for miscreants' role, and some specifically blamed young, uneducated southern migrants. In his reflections on the causes of the event, Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, regretted the high amount of "lawlessness" by black teenagers.[337]

Command of Harlem Forces," *New York Times*, August 3, 1943; "Harlem Riots Take 5 Lives, Lasts 16 Hours," *Washington Post*, August 3, 1943.

[333] "Commission on Race to Study Riot is Urged," *Atlanta World*, August 5, 1943.

[334] "Mayor in Command of Harlem Forces," *New York Times*, August 3, 1943.

[335] Capeci, 120; "Harlem Riots Take 5 Lives, Lasts 16 Hours," *Washington Post*, August 3, 1943.

[336] "Mayor in Command of Harlem Forces," *New York Times*, August 3, 1943.

[337] Capeci, *The Harlem Riot of 1943*, 123–124.

Despite the fact that political leaders publicly cast no blame on public institutions such as the schools, education professionals took it upon themselves to make changes in light of the perceived crisis. Administrators, teachers, and mental health experts all recommended that schools play a leading role in the reduction of delinquency. They identified the public school as the institution best positioned to reduce juvenile delinquency and promote socialization that would prevent future rioting. They received support from nonprofit and government reports that identified schools as the institutions most equipped to combat social ills.[338]

This focus on juvenile delinquency and the larger goal of adjusting students' psycho-social health was at the heart of the most ambitious New York City school reform project of the decade, the so-called "Harlem Project." The program was started at the beginning of the 1943–44 school year, with fanfare in the media. On September 29, the *New York Times* announced the program's launch with the headline, "Delinquency War Begins in Harlem."[339] Project leaders left no doubt that their goal was to deliver compensatory services for students with special needs resulting from poverty. Continuing the Progressive Era impulse toward diversification of the school curriculum, they emphasized the importance of a differentiated course of study designed to meet "the challenge offered by the varying needs of pupil" and spoke of the goal in terms of modernization and a "promise of the future."[340]

The project was jointly funded by the New York Foundation and the Board of Education, with supplemental support from the Hofheimer Fund, the Harlem Foundation,

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[338] Nettie Pauline McGill and Ellen Nathalie Matthews, *The Youth of New York City* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1940), 75.
[339] "Delinquency War Begins in Harlem," *New York Times*, September 29, 1943.
[340] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 11.

and the Public Education Association. These groups created a new corporation to administer project funding, New York Educational Projects, Inc., and budgeted $250,000.[341] Project leaders defined its mission explicitly as combating juvenile delinquency and set out to expand the program at three of Harlem's schools to include delivery of mental health services.[342]

The project set out to expand the curriculum and staffing at these three schools, serving a total of 5,000 students, along with intensive delivery of mental health and social services. Ultimately, it intended to "study how to diminish maladjustment and delinquency through school services."[343] Project founders determined that "the school is in a unique position to recognize symptoms of maladjustment in the day-to-day appearance and conduct of children" since it has the power to "enlist the interest of parents in the problems of their children and also in activities aimed to correct community evils."[344] With the help of the Children's Court, project leaders identified the schools with the highest delinquency rate among students for the pilot project.[345]

Project leaders such as Family Court Justice Justine Wise Polier and Max Winsor, a psychiatrist from the Harlem's Bureau of Child Guidance Children's Court, identified three schools in Harlem with unusually high rates of juvenile delinquency as measured by

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[341] "Harlem Schools Produce Answers to Juvenile Ills," *People's Voice*, April 17, 1948; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," vi, ix.
[342] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1942–43; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," iv.
[343] "Delinquency War Begins in Harlem," *New York Times*, September 29, 1943; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 1; "A Good School Program," *New York Times*, October 3, 1943; Andrea Jennifer de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier and her Struggle for Juvenile Justice in New York City" (EdD dissertation, Harvard University, 2005), 134.
[344] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 138–39.
[345] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1942–43; "Delinquency War Begins in Harlem," *New York Times*, September 29, 1943.

referrals to the juvenile justice system.[346] They applied an approach favored by Polier in which the school serves as the central site for child services.[347] Project leaders chose to deliver program services to three schools: P.S. 101, a junior high for girls; P.S. 120, a junior high school for boys; and P.S. 10, an elementary school that fed into P.S. 120. All three fell within school Districts 10 and 11, covering the central and southern portion of Harlem.[348]

Prior to 1943, Max Winsor had run a program in Harlem that trained teachers to recognize early signs of maladjustment and delinquency, and collected data on delinquency rates in the schools. His work served as an important model for the Harlem Project. His program, sponsored by the Foundation to Further Child Guidance in the Public Schools, staffed "child guidance units" in two middle schools, P.S. 139 and P.S. 184, using resources from the Foundation, the Board of Education, and the Bureau of Child Guidance. These units included psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, part-time pediatricians, and statisticians. It was during this work that he documented the high concentration of delinquency in a small group of schools. He and his team concluded that an increase in social service and psychiatric services delivered through the schools had the potential to diminish delinquency, but only if carried out more intensively and in conjunction with training of classroom teachers and provision of recreational opportunities.[349]

Upon the founding of the Harlem project, the Superintendent and Mayor's offices deferred to Polier and her colleague Marion Kenworthy, a philanthropist and worker at the

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[346] "Delinquency War Begins in Harlem," *New York Times*, September 29, 1943; de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 130; "School Discipline Assailed in Survey," *New York Times*, March 23, 1948; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 1; "A Good School Program," *New York Times*, October 3, 1943.
[347] de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 97.
[348] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 17–18, 21. P.S. 120 had the highest number of students in the city with records in the Children's Court, and the worst attendance rate in the city. This school was opened in 1943, relieving overcrowding in P.S. 184.
[349] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 1–2, 5, 12.

New York School of Social Work, to select an interracial Joint Advisory Committee to oversee the project. The committee mainly consisted of health, legal, social work, and education professionals. Associate Superintendent Frank O'Brien co-chaired the Joint Advisory Committee with Kenworthy.[350] The project also enlisted twenty-six volunteers from the staffs of New York area education schools to observe teaching practices in the project schools.[351] Prominent citizens with records of civil rights activism on the committee included Channing Tobias, director of the Phelps-Stokes Foundation, and Viola Bernard, a child psychiatrist and child welfare advocate.[352]

The project leaders placed a heavy emphasis on documentation of the demonstration project. They created a large Research Committee, chaired by Justine Wise Polier. She worked closely with research director Sophia Robinson and the rest of the committee to complete a final evaluation in December 1947.[353] This group consulted at times with E. Franklin Frazier, who had played a key role in the research for LaGuardia's report on the 1935 riot.[354]

From the beginning, the Research Committee defined the problem of Harlem children's poor school performance as rooted in impoverished conditions in their community but expressed confidence that the schools had the power to overcome such shortcomings. They described social pathologies suffered by students in the targeted

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[350] Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power*, 15; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 1949, vi, ix.
[351] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 6.
[352] James L. Hicks, "Harlem Project Study Findings Released," *New York Amsterdam News,* April 3, 1948; de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 134.
[353] James L. Hicks, "Harlem Project Study Findings Released," *New York Amsterdam News,* April 3, 1948; "Delinquency War Begins in Harlem," *New York Times*, September 29, 1943; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 5.
[354] Sophia M. Robinson to E. Franklin Frazier, 14 March 1944; E. Franklin Frazier to Sophia Robinson, 8 May 1944, box 131-42, folder 1, E. Franklin Frazier Papers.

schools and concluded that difficult conditions in the community—such as poor housing, job and salary inequities, and inadequate health care—impeded academic progress. They referred to "chaotic, poverty-burdened, overcrowded homes" and students' "encirclement by gang warfare in the streets" and "search for substitute parental interest and affection."[355]

In order for schools to solve children's problems in these other areas, the Harlem Project leaders insisted that the schools must make major modifications to meet students' needs, particularly those resulting from the abrupt changes associated with migration from the rural South to urban Harlem. They expressed confidence that schools, with the proper infusion of staff and other resources for students, could adjust to "the changing population and its problems." The group emphasized the large challenge involved by explaining that black migrants from the South need to "fit into a social pattern set by earlier migrations and into a city school system established originally for a population with different antecedents of race, of nativity, of cultural patterns and of educational opportunities."[356] They held the school responsible for a complicated socialization process that could only be achieved after major institutional adjustments enabled more individualized attention to migrants.

Harlem Project researchers measured a two to three year gap between Harlem students' learning and the average for the city. They explained this phenomenon as a pattern that started with inappropriate behavior that caused them to fall behind in elementary school, continued with higher rates of truancy and delinquency, and ultimately drew attention away from academics when these problems used up a large amount of

[355] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 21, 135.
[356] Ibid., 7.

teachers' and principals' time and created poor working conditions that discouraged staff from remaining in Harlem schools. Their position, shared by the Harlem Project leadership, was that a massive infusion of additional staff and a fundamental overhaul of the curriculum was required to break this cycle.[357]

For this reason, the Harlem Project gave top priority to the assignment of dozens of "special teachers," as well as psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and "recreational leaders" to the schools. It kept schools open during evenings and Saturdays, providing extra staff to coordinate recreational and academic services. In all three schools, the project staff sought to measure the impact of enriched curriculum, additional recreational opportunities, and expanded support from educational staff trained in the basics of mental health, as well as additional clinical professionals in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and social work. Program administrators frequently discussed mental health in terms of the ways in which it led to acting out in the classroom and down a slippery slope to delinquency. In P.S. 101, they also asked whether the separation of "unmanageable" girls into an isolated, probationary school could be avoided with proper individualized attention, since a proposal to start a new school exclusively serving these girls had been debated in the school system and the local community during recent years.[358]

Continuing the model developed earlier by Max Winsor, the Harlem project assigned a "complete child guidance unit" to the experimental schools. These consisted of a psychiatrist, a psychiatric social worker, a psychologist, a secretary, and an assistant for after-school programming. The additional staff provided by the project delivered individualized academic counseling and remedial lessons in reading and arithmetic in

[357] Ibid., vi.
[358] Ibid., ix, 4, 64.

addition to consultation on health and behavioral problems.[359]

P.S. 120, the school attended by more students in New York City's juvenile justice system than any other, was officially categorized as a "community school," and opened to serve the community during the entire day through the full year. Four additional "after-school group leaders" joined the full-time staff to provide educational and recreational programs through the evenings and summer. An activities director coordinated the extended-day work with the regular school day curriculum. Over 1,000 children registered for the program during the project's two-year period.

Parents also played an important role in coordinating the community school functions of P.S. 120. They voiced their opinions through a Parents' Advisory Council. They researched students' problems in a "Boy Study Group," in which they discussed their sons' problems with truancy, delinquency, or general adjustment with invited guests that included social workers, a probation officer, ministers, and an assistant superintendent. Parents involved in the Boy Study Group started a "Parents *Do*" program, through which they identified three blocks on which several parents lived and arranged neighborhood recreational events to draw children away from gang activities. However, most of these parents were the same ones already active in the school's Parent-Teacher Association. The Harlem Project offered no systematic approach for encouraging the rest of parents to join the program.[360]

In P.S. 101, extra teaching positions opened by the Board of Education supported remedial reading and arithmetic classes, as well as work in health, attendance, guidance,

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[359] Ibid., 18.
[360] David Alison, *Searchlight: An Expose of New York City Schools* (New York: Teachers Center Press, 1951), 177; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 42–45, 48.

and arts programs. They also supported English language courses for non-native speakers, an important addition since many of students came from families who had recently migrated from Puerto Rico. Extra personnel provided by the Board of Education also made possible an expanded school program at P.S. 101, encompassing after-school, weekend, and summer programming.[361]

The Harlem Project established a mental hygiene clinic at P.S 101, staffed by a full-time psychologist and social worker, and part-time psychiatrist. The clinic aimed to advance a "mental hygiene approach" throughout the school, designed to prepare all school personnel to screen students for habits indicative of mental or psychological maladjustment by giving them at least a basic understanding of children's mental development.[362] The clinic simultaneously implemented a program to work in greater depth with a selected group of students identified as having the greatest need for counseling. The clinic staff defined their approach in terms of adjusting the curriculum and staff procedures to fit children's individual emotional, mental, and physical needs. They advised against corporal punishment and insisted that the root causes of misbehavior be identified before staff intervened.[363] The final report of the project presented quantitative data showing improvement in the behavior of girls who worked with the clinic versus a control group, and highlighted improvements of individual girls in case studies.[364]

In the elementary school, P.S. 10, the project experimented with interventions that could treat the causes of juvenile delinquency before children got to the junior high level. It

[361] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 63–70.
[362] Mental hygiene was a popular approach among child psychiatrists and psychologists during the war years.
[363] de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 124.
[364] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 66–67, 74, 80–81, 118–119.

jointly attempted to give targeted attention to students flagged as "maladjusted" while simultaneously providing a more supportive environment for all students. For the former, the clinic focused on children showing symptoms of maladjustment such as fighting, truancy, stealing, lying, "restlessness," and "hyper-emotionality." Teachers referred these students to the clinic and avoided harsh disciplinary techniques involving ridicule and sarcasm, reportedly common at the beginning of the project. As the first step in helping an individual student, the clinic held a conference with the principal, teacher, clinic team, and parents, in order to fully explain the problem. During the course of the project, the clinic dealt with 180 such cases.

Toward the goal of improving the mental health environment for all students, project leaders at P.S. 10 established a child guidance clinic designed to meet with individual students and also encouraged the entire staff to pay close attention to students' mental health. The clinic staff ran mental hygiene seminars for teachers, training them how to encourage healthy mental development in all children. An all-day school program was also instituted, staffed by six additional teachers provided by the Board of Education. These six were previously regular teachers at the school, but their roles were changed to "quota teachers" and their responsibilities shifted to specialties outside of the classroom: behavior counselor, remedial instruction, health counselor, audio-visual instruction, dramatics and music, and arts and crafts.[365] The program served between 300 and 500 students daily, offering athletic and artistic activities as well as field trips. It also ran activities for adults that drew fifteen to twenty adults per evening.

During the 1944–45 school year, the foundations supporting the Harlem Project

[365] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 106, 108–112.

failed to renew the program and it was forced to an end in June 1945. During the short time that it was underway, the project met some limited goals. The experiment demonstrated the potential impact of improved staff and curriculum. Assistant Superintendent Jacob Theobald, in his forward to the final report, praised lasting achievements of the project, such as continued improvements in staffing at the pilot schools and smoother relations between schools and local health and social welfare agencies. The Research Committee's report touched on improvements such as instances of decreased gang fighting in the vicinities of the schools.[366] Evaluators considered the project at P.S. 101 to be at least a partial success since the sponsors agreed that it demonstrated separate probationary schools for "unmanageable" girls were not necessary. They rated more than three quarters of the girls as having "improved in their adjustment."[367] Anonymous teacher surveys distributed at the end of the program showed that most teachers at this school gained professionally from the project, rated the clinic's work highly, and began to place a greater importance on social adjustment relative to academic achievement. The school's principal agreed with these conclusions.[368] Staff at P.S. 120 reported closer cooperation with the Bureau of Child Guidance and improved parent-school relations.[369] In its final report, the Research Committee explained that the project clearly demonstrated the essential importance of excellent teachers, administrators, and counselors, operating with a curriculum that allowed them to meet

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366 Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 49.
367 Daniel P. Clarke and Dorothy Gray, "School Surveys and Delinquency Prediction," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 24, no. 1 (September 1950): 21; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 91, 96–98.
368 Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 91, 96–98.
369 Norman London, "The Harlem Project Report," *New York Times*, November 8, 1948; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 53.

students' individualized needs.

However, despite demonstrating important potential improvements, the project fell far short of achieving its overall mission. It did not reverse the pattern of increasing delinquency and it did not systematically improve the academic performance or significantly reduce behavioral problems among the students in the pilot schools. The clinics established in the schools saw only a fraction of the students who needed help.

The program particularly failed to meet one of its primary goals: improvement of teacher turnover rates, attitudes, and performance. Many teachers anticipated relief from the addition of school personnel early in the program, but ended up saddled with an increased burden as expectations rose. A significant number of teachers reported that they resented their assignment to a Harlem school, and this attitude did not markedly change in the two years of the program. Tensions emerged between clinical, teaching, and administrative staff when they diverged in their approaches to solving students' problems and jockeyed for authority. Follow-up observations of teachers after completion of the project showed a regression to methods of intimidation or apathy. No reduction in teacher turnover rates was achieved. The principal of P.S 120 felt that the project had underestimated the challenges that schools faced and run for far too short a period to tackle them.[370]

The failure of the project showed that comprehensive school reform is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in a time span as short as two years, partly because the new relationships between administrators, teachers, and parents that are fundamental to such change require a long gestation period during which commitment to change is shared by all

[370] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 19, 22–29, 52, 107, 116–117, 256–57.

parties. It also reveals the limits of such reform in the absence of training, placement, and compensation plans for teachers. Teachers participating in the project were forced to take on a range of added responsibilities to their normal academic teaching duties but offered no extra compensation in return.

Media coverage of the project brought a level of attention to Harlem schools unmatched since the riot report of 1936. Yet contrary to the project leaders' initial intentions that the program prove the efficacy of schools to reverse a wide range of student troubles, most outside observers used the results to demonstrate the severity of Harlem schools' internal problems and inequities. *New York Times* coverage of the project and the subsequent report stressed the problems that the study revealed as much as the solutions it tried.[371] Most news reports emphasized negative teacher attitudes, high personnel turnover, low scores of students on standardized tests, and substandard facilities, all of which were revealed by the project's research team.[372] The Research Committee's negative portrayals of the overall situation in these schools in their report caused Superintendent William Jansen (1947–1958) and the Board of Education to suppress official release of the report for months for fear of embarrassment about the poor conditions. Jansen and his staff were particularly concerned about the interviews with staff members that exposed resentment toward the administration and racist attitudes toward students and their families. But against Jansen's wishes, the committee unofficially released the report on March 22, 1948, at a press conference held at the home of Marion Kenworthy. It led to so

[371] "School Discipline Assailed in Survey," *New York Times*, March 23, 1948.
[372] Rev. Charles Young Trigg, Rev. Ben Richardson, and Ada B. Jackson to Friend, 29 March 1948, part 3, series B, reel 3, NAACP Papers; "Harlem Project Report Shows Alarming School Conditions," *New York Teacher News*, December 15, 1948; "School Discipline Assailed in Survey," *New York Times*, March 23, 1948.

many requests of the Superintendent's Office that Jansen ordered the report officially copied and distributed.[373]

The Harlem Project was not the only experiment of its kind sponsored by the school administration during the war years. During the 1942–1943 school year, when the Harlem Project was still in its planning stages, the New York City School Superintendent's Office joined the school system's Division of Instructional Research and Division of Tests and Measurements to commit to a pilot curricular reform program in three Harlem elementary schools. By this time, Assistant Superintendent Rufus Hartill was running a "reading readiness" program in Harlem, implemented at three schools after he and his staff noticed the high demand for reading remediation in Districts 10 and 11 documented by the Bureau of Reference, Research and Statistics.

The leaders of the new "Exploring a First Grade Curriculum" project, as it came to be called, determined that the students in these same schools needed more than just improved reading education. All three schools were in poor communities experiencing racial segregation in housing. The program assessors explained the depth of problem facing the schools in terms of cultural and educational deprivation rooted in the local community: "The first five years of life had dealt harshly with many of these children. In more than a physical sense—in the deprivation of essential childhood experiences—they were undernourished youngsters."[374]

The program focused in part on reading improvement. It applied frequent testing to identify students in need of extra help, and conducted studies on the effects of postponed

[373] de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 136, 156, 164.
[374] "Exploring a First Grade Curriculum," 1, uncatalogued, Board of Education Papers.

reading instruction.[375] Yet, most of the resources dedicated to the program went to the overhaul of schools' entire curriculum, creating long blocks of time in which administrators integrated subjects such as hygiene and ethics into thematic units along with traditional academic disciplines. Through group and individual conferences with teachers and school administrators, the program staff devised thematic units to encourage interdisciplinary teaching and learning, and carved out time for students to work with one another in groups and at times freely choose activities. They lengthened the amount of time spent on the arts and home economics. They combined play with academic subjects, focusing on skills such as cooking, block building, and finger painting in overlapping lessons on math, science, and reading. In one school, the teachers converted a staff bathroom into a cooking station. Program leaders created learning centers in the classroom for science, construction, art, and music, each designed to offer hands-on learning. They added field trips to community locations like public markets, the firehouse, and the zoo. They also enriched aspects of the curriculum that taught English language skills to the large number of Spanish-speaking children.

Teachers at participating schools were expected to coordinate with parents and support staff in bringing attention to students' individual needs. They were given literature on various topics in child development and attended conferences on related topics. They were encouraged to consult with families, social workers, doctors, and former teachers to learn more about their pupils' situations. In an effort to improve students' physical

[375] Ibid., 71.

hygiene, teachers regularly met with school nurses and parents to ensure that all students maintained good health.[376]

As in the case of the Harlem Project, the Exploring a First Grade Curriculum project called for major changes in the role of teachers by demanding that they take on a therapeutic role in addition to their other responsibilities. Most of the teacher unions supported the idea of such an expanded role in the schools in theory, but objected to specific plans such as this one in practice since they resulted in decreased independence for teachers in choosing their school and extra work without added compensation.

The lack of systemic change, such as adjustments in the selection, training, and compensation for teachers, undermined much of the Exploring a First Grade Curriculum program's effectiveness. Without proper buy in from teachers, the project was decimated by teacher turnover. All teachers in the first grade classes participated in the program, as did most of the second grade teachers; yet fewer than half continued through the full two years. One of the principals and at least one assistant principal left during the program.

The central school administration did not entirely ignore the approach of changing procedures for teacher placement in Harlem. They attempted occasional programs devised to regularly rotate teachers into Harlem and other "difficult" districts. Yet they achieved little but a series of false starts in the face of union opposition. The Superintendent's Committee on Maladjustment and Delinquency proposed a rotation in plan in 1942 in response to wartime teacher shortages, which exacerbated the preexisting problem of short staffing in Harlem's schools. Teachers reacted to the plan with fierce resistance since it required them to spend a given amount of time in under-resourced areas like Harlem.

[376] Ibid., 51, 57.

The Teachers Guild—by this time the predominant teachers union in the city—stood against this plan, as well as subsequent ones, after internal discussions failed to achieve consensus on how personnel for "difficult schools" should be selected and compensated. It based official objections to the rotation plan on the argument that it ignored the underlying causes of school problems. The Association of Assistant Superintendents proposed a rotation plan in 1944, but withdrew it under pressure from the Teachers Guild and Joint Committee of Teachers Organizations. Adversaries of the plan justified their position by explaining that rotation would raise more problems than it solved by alienating teachers and did not necessarily solve the problem since young, enthusiastic teachers would perform better than veteran teachers who did not prefer to teach in Harlem.[377]

Despite teachers' resistance to alterations in teacher placement, the majority stood behind the administration's increase in school programming, including the addition of mental health and social services to the curriculum. Teachers generally supported widening the scope of the school program as a means for combating juvenile delinquency and perceived psychological and social maladjustment of students in Central Harlem. They lobbied for additional resources to be directed to schools in Harlem and increasingly joined the administration in backing curricular changes.

The Teachers Union, a group that adamantly opposed the administration's treatment of Harlem Schools during the 1930s, scaled back accusations of discrimination and inequality and supported the administration's mission to expand services in Harlem

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[377] "A Progress Report on Districts 10 and 11 for the Period 1946–1949," 1949, series 354, box 3, folder 17, Board of Education Papers; Abraham Lederman, "Union Head Takes Issue with Superintendent Jansen," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 3, 1954; "Policy Consultation Committee, Report of Subcommittee on 'Staffing Difficult Schools,'" 1944, box 9, folder 45, UFT Papers; Back, "Up South in New York," 175–176.

districts during the war. Arguing against the calls by some teachers and administrators for increased police enforcement in and around the schools, Teachers Union member Alice Citron wrote to the *New York Times* and objected to the detailing of hundreds of policemen to Harlem since this would most certainly fail to solve "the deep-rooted causes of juvenile delinquency."[378] In a letter to the *Amsterdam News* the following winter, with another wave of juvenile delinquency making headlines in New York, Citron explained that extra police in Harlem schools had failed to solve the problem in the past so they were unlikely to solve the problem going forward. Her view was shared by her union's president, Charles Hendley, who referred to corporal punishment as a "short cut" method that would only increase delinquency in the long run.[379] Instead, teachers such as Citron recommended solutions along the lines of the experiments with extended-day schools being tried in Harlem and elsewhere in the city.[380]

In November 1941, the Harlem Committee of the Teachers Union, of which Alice Citron was an important leader, partnered with the Permanent Committee for Better Schools in Harlem (PCBSH) to sponsor a conference of teachers, parents, and community leaders at Abyssinian Baptist Church to discuss juvenile delinquency in Harlem. Two hundred teachers, parents, and civic leaders attended the meeting, including representatives from the State Assembly, the State Unemployment Insurance Board, the National Welfare Council, and various labor unions. During this assembly and others that followed, the groups broadened their focus from that of the 1930s and began to look beyond equality of physical conditions in the schools. They drafted a series of

[378] Alice Citron, "Some Harlem Needs Outlined," *New York Times*, November 12, 1941.
[379] "Teacher Group Heads Say: About the Current School Child Conduct Problem," *People's Voice*, December 19, 1942.
[380] "The People Speak," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 26, 1942.

recommendations for the Board of Education, all of which they predicted would reduce juvenile delinquency and moderate hysteria about the current "crime wave." As an immediate solution, they asked for extended school hours through 10:00 p.m., allowing for extracurricular activities for all students, and remedial measures for pupils deemed at risk of delinquency.

The Teachers Union's calls for extended school hours pointed to programs already being run by the Board of Education as examples. School administrators had experimented with extended school days in New York since the 1930s, and they began implementing such programs in Harlem during the early 1940s. Beginning in 1942, the Board of Education, with joint sponsorship from the Public Education Association, funded a lengthened school day at Harlem's P.S. 194, an elementary school serving over 900 boys in Central Harlem.[381] This extended an All-Day Neighborhood Schools (ADNS) program in the city that started in 1936 at P.S. 33 in the Chelsea section of Manhattan at a school that largely served children of poor, foreign-born parents.[382] At P.S. 194 the board provided six additional teachers as well as a "community worker" to coordinate school activities with social agencies, provide students with psychological and social work support, and maintain regular contact with parents to mediate problems at school and to encourage participation in school and community life. The community worker collaborated with a Community Relations Committee, a group of over fifty social workers and civic leaders dedicated to helping the schools. In addition to remaining open from at least 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., P.S. 194 and other schools in the all-day program extended the curriculum to include recreation and

[381] "All-Day School Gets Aid," *New York Times,* April 17, 1948; Agnes E. Benedict, "Violence in the Classroom," *The Nation,* January 9, 1943, 51–53.
[382] "All-Day Neighborhood Schools," n.d., UFT Papers, box 13, folder 47.

health education. Students took on responsibility for helping to run parts of the school such as the library, a penny milk business, and school supplies store.[383] The schools also encouraged cooperation between parents and teachers with special events and the hiring of a full-time social worker for each school. In some cases, the Board of Education used the all-day schools as sites for experimental general curricula focused on citizenship and "life skills," as well as "adjustment" classes geared toward preventing delinquency.[384] The schools particularly targeted children of working parents with clubs and activities during the extended day. The ADNS program, particularly at P.S. 194, received support from the black press, which praised the delivery of additional resources to students in these schools.[385]

However, extended school hours did not spread beyond experimental sites, mainly because of the shortage of funds needed for such an endeavor. Board president James Marshall regretted this fact, telling the *New York Times* that children would tend to "horde together in unwholesome gangs of their own making" if schools did not provide them with supervised activities all day long.[386] By 1948, the Board of Education supported four all-day schools, with continued support from the Public Education Association and private philanthropies.[387] These schools were joined by less comprehensive, less formal all-day programs at several Harlem schools put in place by 1944.[388] In the fall of 1945, the Board of Education took over complete control of the ADNS program and expanded into two

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[383] "2 All-Day Schools Open Experiment," *New York Times*, September 27, 1942.
[384] NYC Board of Education, *Annual Report*, 1942–43; "Harlem High School to Lead in Experiment to Use Community Worker in School Set Up," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 7, 1944; "All-Day Schools: Experiment with Added Services Shows Good Results," *New York Times*, December 5, 1943.
[385] "All-Day School Program," *New York Age*, May 30, 1942.
[386] "Schools to Center on 'Problem Areas,'" *New York Times*, November 26, 1941.
[387] "All-Day School Gets Aid," *New York Times,* April 17, 1948.
[388] "Delinquency Decreased in Lower Harlem," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 26, 1944.

additional schools located in the Bronx.[389]

Despite the Teachers Union's shared support for programs such as ADNS, there were still important ideological divisions between those teachers and the administration. Although they shared a desire for the extra resources and services provided by experimental programs like ADNS, the Harlem Project, and Exploring a First Grade Curriculum, the Teachers Union located the roots of problems in Harlem schools elsewhere and held a different long-term vision for school change. Increased delinquency in Harlem, argued the Teachers Union, resulted in large part from inferior schooling opportunities just as much as factors external to the school system. For this reason, the longer-term solutions that they proposed included elimination of discrimination against black teachers and students in the city's vocational schools, better school facilities, and the assignment of better teachers to Harlem schools. They reiterated points that the PCBSH and Teachers Union had asserted following the 1935 riot about the need to root out systemic racism in the curriculum, personnel, and school building policies, explicitly arguing that contemporary crime outbreaks were only a symptom of longstanding problems resulting from decades of neglect.[390] Implicit in these arguments was a lack of faith in the efficacy of the schools, at least in their present condition, to overcome external socioeconomic inequities.

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[389] "Harlem High School to Lead in Experiment to Use Community Worker in School Set Up," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 7, 1944; Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 11–12; "All-Day Neighborhood Schools," n.d., box 13, UFT Papers. By the 1960s, the ADNS Program expanded into fourteen public elementary schools in New York City.

[390] "Harlem Asks School Aid," *New York Times*, November 28, 1941; "The Other Side of Harlem," *New York Times*, November 12, 1941; Lucile Spence, letter to editor, *New York Times*, November 28, 1941; "Summary of the Teachers Union Report to the Maladjustment and Delinquency Committee of the Board of Education," June 11, 1936, box 13, folder 47, UFT Papers.

Yet, the Teachers Union was in a period of decline, overshadowed at the bargaining table by the Teachers Guild and marginalized by the state and municipal government as punishment for its communist connections. During the 1930s and early 1940s, the state government increasingly discouraged communist affiliation by state employees. This strengthened enemies of the Teachers Union among the administration and competing unions. Beginning in 1934, the state implemented loyalty oaths for teachers. In 1939, a group of Harlem principals expressed disdain with teachers' collaboration with organizations such as the PCBSH since it led to "subversive activities" that "interfere with the normal functioning of the school."[391] This pressure intensified significantly in 1941 when the Rapp-Coudert Committee of the New York State legislature heard cases against public employees suspected of communist involvement, including teachers in the New York City Public School System. Superintendent Harold Campbell supported the removal of teachers who questioned "existing structures and institutions."[392] The *Amsterdam News* granted its "heartiest approval" to the committee's effort to "ferret out Communists" from the schools, although it warned that restraint was necessary to avoid a witch-hunt that would violate the personal liberties of teachers. The paper regretted that some of the leading teachers in Harlem schools were likely to be "snared in this [anti-communist] net."[393] The paper printed letters from leaders of citizen groups such as John Robinson, chair of the PCBSH, in which they denounced the hysteria caused by the work of the Rapp-Coudert Committee.[394] The Rapp-Coudert hearings led directly to the dismissal of at least

[391] Committee of Principals, "A Report on Conditions in the Schools of Harlem."
[392] Dominic W. Moreo, *Schools in the Great Depression* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 50–51.
[393] "Red Teachers In Harlem," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 14, 1940.
[394] "Views on Many Questions," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 21, 1940.

four Harlem teachers from the Teachers Union for association with the Communist Party.[395]

By World War II, the more politically moderate Teachers Guild stood in a much stronger position than the Teachers Union, and played a greater role in supporting the administration's expansion of mental health and social services in Harlem schools. In 1941, the Teachers Guild formed a Committee on Problem Areas, and submitted a report to Mayor LaGuardia and Board of Education President James Marshall recommending a seven-point program to combine with increased police presence to reduce juvenile delinquency in Harlem. In their correspondence with school leaders, they explained that their recommendations sought to "check crime at its source" and were designed with the specific needs of Harlem in mind, but should be applied generally to public schools in other "problem areas of the city." Their recommendations included decreased class size, enlarged vocational training, and expanded remedial education.

Yet, above all, the Teachers Guild pushed for extended child guidance and social services as part of a "modernized curriculum" geared toward promotion of strong character and good citizenship.[396] They described poor student performance in Harlem in language very similar to that of administrators, blaming cultural deprivation in the community. In describing the roots of school difficulties, they described a path directly from unprepared children to misbehaved children to "problem schools." As in the case of the proposals from superintendents and principals, their plans focused on adjusting students psychologically and emotionally. During the first half of 1942, the Committee on

[395] Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 309.
[396] Rebecca C. Simonson to Fiorello LaGuardia, 13 November 1941, box 3, folder 16; Rebecca C. Simonson to James Marshall, 13 November 1941, box 3, folder 16, UFT Papers; "Aid Asked to Curb Crime at Source," *New York Times*, November 9, 1941.

Problem Areas met frequently and campaigned for a series of elaborate policy recommendations. The committee began with an exclusive focus on the condition of education in Central Harlem, and primarily consisted of teachers from that community. However, they moved promptly to recruit teachers from schools in other "problem areas," including East Harlem, Lower Bronx, and the Red Hook section of Brooklyn.[397]

In 1943 the Teachers Guild's Committee on Delinquency (formed in 1942) broke into subgroups, focusing on personnel policy, special services (health, psychiatric, and welfare), recreation, and curriculum. According to the general committee's chairwoman, Esther S. Cahen, the Curriculum Subcommittee sought to guide students "toward better personality adjustment" through subject matter adapted to the individual needs of the student. In the cases of "confirmed delinquents," this translated into a special program with particular emphasis on social and psychological counseling.[398] The Committee on Delinquency identified experimental All-Day Neighborhood Schools located in Harlem and other districts disproportionately serving poor students as models for their own proposed school program.[399] On at least one occasion, they invited a leader from a pilot All-Day Neighborhood School to lecture on the effectiveness of the approach for reducing delinquency.[400] The Teachers Guild Committee on Delinquency also approached agencies responsible for teacher training, including the New York City teacher colleges and the

[397] Minutes of Meeting of Committee on Problem Areas, January 5, 1942, box 3, folder 16, UFT Papers.
[398] Esther Cahen, "New York Teachers Guild Attacks the Delinquency Problem," n.d., box 3, folder 16, UFT Papers.
[399] Agnes E. Benedict, "Violence in the Classroom," *The Nation,* January 9, 1943, 51–53.
[400] Esther Cahen to Adele Franklin, 19 April 1943, box 6, folder 13, UFT Papers.

Board of Examiners, to help train teachers in mental hygiene techniques. They remained active through the end of the decade working towards this goal.[401]

Teachers Guild members communicated their disappointment to Mayor LaGuardia in March 1943, after learning that he created a committee to study juvenile delinquency without selecting a single teacher for membership. Because schools would likely play an important role in implementing solutions proposed by the committee, the Guild argued that teachers should help craft such programs. They also emphasized the unique position of teachers in understanding the problems related to delinquency due to their long experience with such matters.[402] Following this slight, the Teachers Guild cooperated with other civic organizations to create their own committee to advise on delinquency. They filled out their committee with representatives from a range of religious, government, and civic welfare organizations, including the City-Wide Citizens Committee on Harlem, the Children's Court, and the Bureau of Child Guidance.[403]

Working alongside these other groups, the Committee on Delinquency completed an official report on a "Program for Dealing with Juvenile Delinquency" in September 1943. This publication reiterated recommendations already communicated to the Board of Education, Superintendent, Mayor, and public via the press since 1941. It explained delinquency as a result of insecurities in youth caused by poverty, unstable families, inadequate school facilities, and the lack of recreational opportunities. It explained that decades of social change in the family had raised juvenile delinquency rates, but that the

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[401] "Recommendations of the Committee on Juvenile Delinquency for a New Teacher Training Program," June, 1947, box 3, folder 16; Esther Cahen to Sir or Madam, Director, School of Education, 1946, box 6, folder 14, UFT Papers.
[402] Uranie Penn Davis to Fiorello H. LaGuardia, 1 March 1943, box 6, folder 13, UFT Papers.
[403] William H. Kilpatrick and Austin MacCormick to Katherine Blake, 9 March 1943, box 6, folder 13, UFT Papers.

war had exacerbated the problem by stimulating emotions of "fear, hatred, and violence" among young people and encouraged resistance to authority during a time when fathers were leaving for war and "hasty marriages" were weakening the family structure.[404]

The report proposed that schools in areas serving children exposed to these types of neglect, such as Harlem, be provided with greater numbers of teachers, social workers, counselors, and psychiatrists, all trained in the basics of mental health, and offer special curriculum in small classes to students deemed "maladjusted." It used the language popular in progressive education circles of the "whole child" as it called for increased attention to the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of students. It advocated for all-day schools in neighborhoods with "latch-key children," providing supervised recreation opportunities until at least 9:00 p.m.[405] It also strongly recommended the expansion of the Bureau of Children's Guidance and more efficient cooperation with schools in greatest need of its services. Finally, it recommended increased vocational training opportunities for minority students, even in fields with job hiring discrimination, framing this as the first step to breaking down prejudices among employers. The committee specified that it recommended specialized vocational training for particular minorities, such as "Negro beauty culture," where the demand existed. The Teachers Guild's work in advising school solutions to juvenile delinquency drew attention from the national office of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) when the editor of the

[404] "Program for Dealing with Juvenile Delinquency," September 1943, box 6, folder 17, UFT Papers.
[405] The term "latch-key children" is from the original.

American Teacher, the official publication of the AFT, solicited an article on the topic of New York City schools and juvenile delinquency.[406]

During the war years, other institutions contacted the Teachers Guild to request cooperation on the integration of child services. The Coordinating Committee of Guidance Associations of the New York Public Schools, an umbrella group representing psychologists, guidance counselors, social workers, and visiting teachers, wrote to the Guild on January 13, 1943 to request a mutual alliance in speaking out for an increased budget for social welfare programs in the schools at the annual Board of Education public hearing.[407] Eight days later, the director of the Bureau of Child Guidance contacted union president Rebecca Simonson and suggested a series of organizations that would serve as valuable allies in the fight for increased funding for social services for children. The list included social worker associations, the League of Women Voters, and teacher training colleges, as well as others.[408]

As indicated by such alliances among civic groups, professional educators were not the only ones in Harlem who sought school-based solutions to the wartime crime wave. At the request of New York City magistrate Anna Kross, 250 New York citizens, most politically active in black politics or children's welfare, met at her court in November 1941 to consider the causes of crime and poverty in their districts. Participants at the meeting chartered a City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem. Under the leadership of Justice Justine Wise Polier, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, and Algernon Black of the Society for Ethical Culture, the group expanded in the following

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[406] George T. Guernsey to Rebecca C. Simonson, 18 January 1943; George T. Guernsey to Mabel Travis Wood, 8 February 1943, box 6, folder 13, UFT Papers.
[407] Helen Kepler to Sirs, 13 January 1943, box 6, folder 13, UFT Papers.
[408] Caroline B. Zachry to Rebecca Simonson, 21 January 1943, box 6, folder 13, UFT Papers.

months to a total of 300 prominent New York citizens, most of them leaders of political, religious, social, and judicial agencies. Vice-chairmen included Walter White of the NAACP and Lester Granger of the National Urban League.[409]

The representatives serving the City-Wide Citizens' Committee came from more powerful organizations and broader bases than those from the ad-hoc school improvement groups in Harlem during the 1930s. They also tended to represent professional-class black New Yorkers, as opposed to the working-class parents who gained a voice during the 1930s. The NAACP was undergoing a transformation toward a working-class membership as its membership multiplied nearly tenfold between 1940 and 1946.[410] Yet, in their dealings with the rest of the committee, Executive Secretary Walter White and *Crisis* editor Roy Wilkins steered away from the topic of desegregation that was taking top priority on the NAACP agenda outside of New York City, and advocated for moderate steps such as an increase in social services.[411]

The Citizens' Committee decided from its founding to address the problem of juvenile delinquency broadly, setting out to "fulfill the promise of equality of opportunity for true democracy for the Negro people."[412] They established subcommittees to address education, housing, health, employment, and crime and delinquency. The thirty members of the Board of Directors, which included labor leader A. Philip Randoph and Channing Tobias, proposed a series of programs to fight poor conditions in Harlem, as well as the

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[409] Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 18; de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 130; City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem, "The Story of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," typescript, 23 May 1943, 1, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.
[410] Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard," 376.
[411] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 163–199. During World War II, the NAACP began to support parent-led boycotts of segregated K–12 schools across the country. This included a number of New York City suburbs, but only those with de facto school segregation.
[412] "The Story of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," 3–4, 4–6, 8–9.

other "Harlems" of New York. To solve the "Negro problem," referred interchangeably as the "Harlem problem," they recommended collaboration between school officials and non-governmental social agencies, particularly those associated with education, recreation, health, housing, crime and delinquency, and employment. They put pressure on leaders ranging from city department heads to private social agencies and employers. They rallied public support for their efforts with radio broadcasts, many by Algernon Black, and newspaper coverage of special projects and events such as an annual City-Wide Harlem Week.

Despite its identification of a wide range of causes of delinquency, this group maintained a central focus on the schools, and consistently identified school improvement as a key goal. Its Subcommittee on Education and Recreation, chaired by Paul Blanshard, Executive Director of the Society for the Prevention of Crime, determined that children in Harlem and other "problem areas" had greater educational needs due to their experience of poverty and overcrowding in their homes and neighborhoods.

The group briefly touched on many of the same problems in schools as did the Mayor's commission that investigated the 1935 riot: deteriorated and unsanitary facilities, oversized classes, and an overreliance on substitute teachers due to high staff turnover. Yet, they primarily targeted the absence of psychiatric and social services in the schools as the most urgent problem to be addressed. "It was no wonder," they determined based on the poor facilities and shortage of good teachers they found in a 1943 survey, that a full quarter of students in some Harlem schools were delinquents. The group felt strongly that individual attention was critical to provide students with the proper sense of security; without it, there would be dire consequences since "a tremendous number of children are

antisocial in attitude and behavior, carriers of intolerance and violence, future delinquents and criminals, unfitted to carry their responsibilities as citizens of a free society." The committee framed their efforts in terms of the struggle for black civil rights as they observed in Harlem schools the "tremendous waste of great undeveloped gifts of the Negro children who could contribute so effectively, not only to their own personal fulfillment and happiness, but who could contribute to the emancipation of the Negro people as a whole."[413]

As part of their campaign for improving self-confidence among black students, the Subcommittee on Education and Recreation investigated the treatment of black history and culture in textbooks. Beginning in 1943, the organization formed a Committee on Textbooks to study the books' coverage of black culture. The group was led by L. D. Reddick, a prominent historian who served as co-chair of the Subcommittee on Education and Recreation and Frank Karelsen, a lawyer formerly the president of the Public Education Association. Their effort built upon pioneering work by the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History during the 1910s and 1920s, the Teachers Union in the 1930s, and parents in the early 1940s such as William Pickens, a Harlem parent, author, and NAACP field secretary.[414]

Pickens conducted a study of bias in the textbooks used in Harlem schools in response to complaints raised by black parents in the area. He examined books used by P.S. 89 and 119 and identified numerous racist passages. He found the most egregious prejudice in the history textbooks, calling one book an "effective apology for slavery and for

[413] "The Story of the City-Wide Citizens' Committee on Harlem," 10–11.
[414] Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2:973.

the subsequent treatment of the Negro."[415] Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. supported this work and expressed dismay with the irony of using racist textbooks in New York City schools during a world war being fought against Nazism.[416]

The work of the Citizens' Committee, combined with that of the Board of Education, school superintendents, principals, and the teachers unions, represented an important shift toward special mental health programs and continued curricular adjustment as a remedy for children's problems. The resurgence of special curricula motivated by this approach meant further differentiation of the program that Harlem students encountered during the 1940s relative to that in predominantly-white schools.

After the pivot toward school-based mental health intervention took place in response to wartime delinquency, administrators and teachers continued to head in this direction after the war. During the 1945–46 school year, New York City's Board of Superintendents completed plans for opening youth centers around the city to help outside of school hours in directing children away from criminal behavior and treating students' psycho-social maladjustment. In December, Julius Gluck, principal of P.S. 89 in Harlem held a special assembly with his students, teachers, and administrators from several different Harlem schools, and representatives from the Police Department's Juvenile Aid Bureau. At the event Gluck and his colleagues launched a new after-school sports program, designed as a deterrent to delinquency.[417] During the summers of 1947 and 1948, the Police Department teamed up with the Board of Education to sponsor summer camps for Harlem students and recreational events hosted at schools in Harlem during the off season,

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[415] Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn*, 73; Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 44.
[416] Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., "Soapbox," *People's Voice*, February 27, 1943.
[417] "Down to Fundamentals," *New York Age*, December 28, 1946.

including psychological counseling for students.[418] Parents, teachers, church leaders, and others from throughout the city formed Community Councils, which coordinated the use of schools and teachers as childcare and social centers outside of business hours with support from local police precincts.[419] The Teachers Guild continued to stress the importance of staff trained in the principles of "mental hygiene," and favored extended teacher-training programs with expanded curricula to make room to incorporate mental health screening.[420]

The school administration's goals for programs to fight delinquency aimed higher than any previously tried in Harlem. With the infusion of extra resources, they expanded not only the mission of the schools, but also the staff and facilities necessary to provide special services customized to meet the needs of every individual student. They sought better-trained, highly experienced teachers to work in the schools serving the poorest students and aimed to keep them in place for long tenures. At least in theory, this meant that the addition of services would not amount to skimping on traditional academic training and the maintenance of a college-preparatory track open to upwardly-mobile Harlem students.

However, as in the case of vocational education during the 1920s and 1930s, implementation of the plan in such a way that provided individualized attention and maximized academic opportunity for all students was extremely difficult. Programs such as the Harlem Project, Exploring a First Grade Curriculum, and All-Day Neighborhood Schools attempted to

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[418] "Vacation and Delinquency," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 5, 1948.
[419] Leonard Buder, "Citizens' Drive on Delinquency," *New York Times*, May 30, 1948.
[420] "Recommendations of the Committee on Juvenile Delinquency for a New Teacher Training Program," 18 June 1947, box 3, folder 16; Esther Cahen to Sir or Madam, Director, School of Education, 1946, box 6, folder 14, UFT Papers.

entirely reformulate the role of school, but in practice provided only limited add-on staff and programs. They sought deep, sustained change, but only had the resources for short bursts of change and with the same staff, paid the same salaries but asked to do more.[421] The programs improved particular situations and helped small numbers of schools at pilot schools, but lacked the resources to widely transform children's school experiences or the administrative mandate to create a new system for guaranteeing high quality teachers and facilities.

Perhaps the most faulty assumption made by school professionals in their wartime efforts to infuse the schools with remedial services was that they could adequately adjust students without close cooperation from parents and other local institutions serving their students. Despite their stated goals of connecting parents with educators and counselors, administrators provided few concrete incentives to teachers or parents to work together. The wartime anti-delinquency projects placed little confidence in parents or other community leaders to improve conditions outside of schools. This was not surprising considering that the program leaders blamed school problems so completely on cultural poverty in the community. The administration's overconfidence in their schools' ability to psychologically readjust students without outside help or major institutional reform undercut the possibility for systemic change.

Working-class parents from Harlem remained strikingly silent about special programs such as the Harlem Project and Exploring a First Grade Curriculum. With a new infusion of resources into the schools, parents got a glimmer of hope that their primary concerns would be addressed. Yet, when these programs were cut short and failed to deliver the transformative change promised, the community was left with few, if any,

[421] Polier et al., "Report on the Harlem Project," 138–139.

tangible gains. As discussed in the following chapter, many parents were not buying in to the idea that the problem in schools lay in the curriculum and range of services.

Chapter Five
"Harlem is Tired of Being Treated like a Step-Child": Community Challenges to the School System, 1945–1954

"Whenever the public school system embarks on a program or uses procedures which provide different levels of education for different social, economic or racial groups, it then becomes a force in solidifying undemocratic class cleavages, obstructs mobility, and blocks the use of human intellectual resources."

—Kenneth Clark, speech delivered to "Children Apart" conference, April 1954[422]

On Thursday, September 27, at the beginning of the 1945–46 school year, two students from East Harlem's Benjamin Franklin High School, one black and one white, had a fistfight in the school gymnasium. This led small groups of black and white youths to threaten gang violence in the schoolyard for the rest of the day and through Friday. The newspapers reported many incidents of racial violence, although their claims were unverified by eyewitnesses. Principal Leonard Covello turned away a group of African-American boys who were not students at the school but were attempting to approach the building, some of them with broomsticks. Despite a rumor among students and parents that three teachers had been killed and the principal stabbed, there was no evidence of actual violence.[423]

Partly because of the overblown reports, a major response was implemented by the

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[422] This quote is taken from a reprinted version of the speech in Kenneth B. Clark, "Segregated Schools in New York City," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 36: 6 (February, 1963): 250. Clark delivered the speech to conference attendees at the "Children Apart" conference, hosted at the Northside Center in April, 1954.

[423] "400 Police Watch Harlem Students," *New York Times*, October 2, 1945; Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 323; Leonard Covello, *The Heart is the Teacher* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), 237–241.

school system. On the Monday following the incident, 400 police officers escorted students between public transportation and Benjamin Franklin High School and its sister school, James Otis Junior High. One third of students stayed home. Principal Covello, after spending the morning meeting with teachers, parents, Walter White of the NAACP, and representatives from the police department and Board of Education, put on a series of assemblies for the students who attended, all of which emphasized the importance of interracial tolerance and cooperation. Salvatore Pergolo, Dean of Boys at the school, told students, "we don't want Bilboism here," referring to the white supremacist governor of Mississippi, and explained to them that the disturbance represented a temporary slip for a school with a good track record on race relations. A faculty investigation concluded that the events had been caused by "outside influence," not racial animosity among the staff or students of the school. The *New York Herald Tribune* called for increased policing of schools throughout the city to prevent racial violence.[424]

Benjamin Franklin High School had been opened in 1934 in East Harlem at 116th Street and East River Drive. From its beginning, the school served a highly diverse group of students; by the 1940s the students were represented by forty-one "nationalities and races" according to Principal Covello.[425] African-American students represented 30 percent of the total. This level of diversity was nowhere to be found in Central Harlem by this time, where most schools were serving 99 percent black students.[426]

During the 1940s, parents, civil rights activists, teachers, and administrators in Central Harlem began to discuss more openly the increasing racial segregation that plagued

[424] "400 Police Watch Harlem Students," *New York Times*, October 2, 1945.
[425] "Melting Pot Boils in This High School," *New York Times*, December 14, 1952; Thomas, "Citizens on the Margins," 171.
[426] Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 78, 80.

their districts. They often combined this with discussions of racial inequities or race relations. Yet while they agreed that there were high-priority problems in these areas, they were far from agreeing on their cause and the proper role of schools in solving them. As in the 1930s, a divide widened after World War II between administrators who identified the schools as solutions to racial prejudice and inequity in their city versus parents and community leaders who labeled the schools as an extension of the problem.

The incident at Benjamin Franklin served as an early indicator during the postwar era of how firmly the administrators, even when operating within a racially segregated system, would stay wed to their faith in the school program as a corrective to racial inequality. During the months following the Benjamin Franklin incident, a number of voices in Harlem and beyond spoke up in favor of intensified "intercultural education."[427] This general term was employed toward many different ends and at times used to describe everything from lessons in diversity tolerance for students, professional development trainings for teachers that informed them about African-American culture, the addition of "black history" to curricula, and the removal of racist contents from textbooks. The practice of intercultural education took hold during the 1930s under the leadership of Rachel Davis DuBois, a teacher in New Jersey, and the New York City Teachers Union, and took off in popularity after the start of World War II.[428]

The black press demanded broad implementation of intercultural education in New York City schools following the events at Benjamin Franklin. The *New York Age* expressed dismay with the situation and called on the Board of Education, with special support from

[427] "Better Program to End Bias Urged," *New York Times*, March 22, 1947.
[428] Historian Clarence Taylor explains in *Reds at the Blackboard (*88–94) how DuBois and the Teachers Union shaped intercultural education in New York City from 1934 through World War II.

the Mayor's Committee on Unity—formed by Mayor LaGuardia in March, 1944 to address the racial tensions in the city—to improve courses about "intercultural and interracial contributions."[429] Superintendent John Wade (1942–1947) wrote confidently to the *Herald Tribune* about the promise of the city's plans for intercultural curriculum, leaving it unclear what exactly such courses would teach. In an editorial titled "Bigotry, Intolerance," the *New York Age* reminded readers of the overall inequality that plagued schools serving most African Americans, arguing that the problems facing black students in New York were no different from those of sixty years prior. It described the "racial strife" evident in incidents at Benjamin Franklin High School, as well as a handful of others in northern cities in 1945, as symptoms of ignorance and called on intercultural education as a solution. It demanded that the Board of Education take immediate steps to build intercultural training into the curriculum for all schools thereby fulfilling "the right of citizens to live together in a community in perfect understanding and harmony."[430]

Teachers took the lead in two particular curricular changes carried out under the banner of intercultural education: the purging of racist passages from textbooks and the infusion of African-American history and cultural studies into the curriculum. These teachers worked through their unions to pressure the administration to eliminate racial prejudice and build race pride through curricular adjustment.

The Teachers Union led the initiatives for the removal of racist passages from textbooks and the addition of "black history," continuing efforts underway since 1935 to identify textbooks with prejudiced content, and promote supplementary materials that highlighted positive contributions of African Americans throughout world history and

[429] "Strife in Schools," *New York Age*, October 13, 1945.
[430] "Bigotry, Intolerance," *New York Age*, October 20, 1945.

culture. Following World War II, the Teachers Union's Harlem Committee continued its efforts begun during the 1930s to lobby the Board of Education to remove biased textbooks from circulation.[431] They identified several offensive quotes in a geography book written by the Superintendent of Schools, William Jansen, including, "Because the native people of Africa, most of whom belong to the Negro race, are very backward, the greater part of the continent has come under the control of European nations since its opening up began."[432] The group documented hundreds of cases of bias against African Americans, Jews, Puerto Ricans, Italians, and others, and sent the findings to the board and published them in *New York Teacher News*. They also announced their campaign against prejudiced textbooks in fliers, pamphlets, and press releases with titles such as "Our Children's Minds are Poisoned by Race Hate in School Books," calling attention to passages mentioning "fat black mammies," patriotic KKK leaders, and in one text a "drunken nigger."[433] The Teachers Union's Harlem Committee received support from other civic organizations, including ad-hoc parent groups based in Harlem, such as the Committee for the Improvement of Textbooks and the Committee for Democracy in Textbooks. Like the Harlem Committee, the Committee for Democracy reviewed textbooks to locate insulting and inaccurate information.[434]

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[431] Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 223.
[432] Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 245.
[433] "Our Children's Minds are Poisoned by Race Hate in School Books," 15 May 1951; "A Biased Textbook," 8 May 1951; "Copy of a Letter to the President of the Board of Education on the Question of the Use of *Oliver Twist* and *The Merchant of Venice* in the Public Schools," 17 January 1951, box 44, folder 3, Teachers' Union of the City of New York, 1916–1964, Collection #5015, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library (hereafter "TU Papers").
[434] "The Harlem Committee, September 1951–June 1952," box 44, folder 11, TU Papers; "Quiet Work, Good Work," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 9, 1953; "Pulse of the Public," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 28, 1953; "Textbooks Purging," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 14, 1953.

In 1950, Harlem Committee chair Norman London directed the preparation of a twenty-six-page pamphlet titled "Bias and Prejudice in New York City Schoolbooks."[435] In the introduction, the group explained that while it opposed censorship, the "elimination of material containing racist stereotypes, distortion of historical and scientific fact, and bias" was a legitimate and necessary undertaking.[436] It called for eliminating such books and backed the idea of focusing on black history not just one week a year but instead "as a basic phase of the development of American culture and traditions."[437] The Committee urged Jansen to discontinue the use of books containing racist or anti-Semitic passages, pressured the publishers to amend the books, and designed replacement materials with special attention to intercultural understanding.[438]

The Board of Education did not directly respond to the pamphlet, but in 1952 began to slowly remove titles from its list of approved texts that matched those reported by the Teachers Union.[439] The Committee regularly sent recommendations of books and films to the Superintendent's Office and the Board of Education to substitute for the books it rejected.[440] These materials included texts drafted by the Harlem Committee, such as "The

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[435] Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union,* 102; Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard,* 241.
[436] Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 245.
[437] Teachers Union, *Bias and Prejudice in Textbooks in Use in New York City Schools, An Indictment*, pamphlet, 1950, TU Papers.
[438] "A Biased Textbook," 8 May 1951; "Teachers Union Submits to Board of Education Evidence of Bias and Prejudice in Text-books," 3 April 1951; Abraham Lederman to Dr. William Jansen, 19 April 1950; "Guide for Research in Bias in Books," n.d., box 44, folder 3, TU Papers; "School Board Probing Anti-Democratic Tests," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 14, 1951; Alice Citron, letter to the editor, *New York Amsterdam News*, August 22, 1979.
[439] "The Harlem Committee, September 1951–June 1952," TU Papers; "Discusses Racial Bias In NY Schools Texts," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 22, 1952.
[440] "Recommended List of Books for Human Relations," April 1957, TU Papers; "Books about Negro Life for Children," 30 January 1951, box 46, folder 1; "The Negro in New York, 1626–1865," 1955, box 44, folder 3, TU Papers.

Negro in the American Revolution" and "Negro Slavery in the U.S., 1800–1865."[441] The committee distributed "Bias and Prejudice in New York City Schoolbooks" to anyone who sent a letter expressing interest and fifteen cents. Teachers, parents, libraries, and education colleges wrote in for copies.[442] The union also distributed teacher-training materials to individual schools and coordinated lecture series targeted at teachers featuring scholars such as Herbert Aptheker, a Marxist historian of African-American history.[443]

Beginning in 1951 the Harlem Committee annually published a four to eight-page Negro History supplement in the union newspaper discussing topics related to the Negro History Week, started by Carter G. Woodson in 1926.[444] The supplement was aimed at an audience of all ages, and included features and games such as "What's Your Negro History Quotient," "Negroes of the Year," "Recommended Books about Negro Life for Children," and "Africa in Our Schools."[445] These pages ran extensive bibliographies of readings in African American culture alongside articles by teacher and union leader Lucile Spence favoring school integration.[446] Each year, thousands of extra copies were mailed to teachers across the country, especially in the South. Black newspapers ranging from Atlanta to Boston

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[441] Teachers Union of the City of New York, "The Negro in the American Revolution," May 1951; "Negro Slavery in the U.S., 1800–1865," 1952; "The Negro in New York, 1626–1865," 1955, Box 44, Folder 7, TU Papers.
[442] Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union*, 101–102; "Our Children's Minds are Poisoned by Race Hate in School Books," May 19, 1951, box 44, folder 3, TU Papers.
[443] "Negro Slavery in the United States"; "The Harlem Committee, September 1951–June 1952," TU Papers.
[444] Zimmerman, *Whose America,* 44; Teachers Union, press release, 16 January 1961, box 44, folder 9, TU Papers.
[445] "Negro History Week," *New York Teacher News*, January 31, 1953; Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union*, 98–99.
[446] Johnson, "A Generation of Women Activists," 224; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 227.

reprinted sections.[447] In 1952, in addition to its 10,000 weekly readers, the section reached another 5,000 others who ordered separate copies.[448] In 1954, Spence explained that the Teachers Union sought full integration of black history into "every level of social studies, literature, and science wherever it naturally comes." She argued the primary reason for the change was so all children would "engender pride for the Negro child and appreciation for the white child."[449] The Teachers Union pressured the Board of Education to publish its own such supplement but failed in this effort. The union supplement continued until 1963 when the union was dissolved.[450]

The Teachers Guild also weighed in on intercultural education following the war, raising concerns that limited intercultural education programs focusing exclusively on curriculum reform were too little to solve a problem as deeply ingrained as racial tension and racial inequality. In a mid-October press-release, the Guild described the unacceptably slow pace of implementing intercultural programs in the face of high "racial and religious tensions" that demanded programs to "promote understanding and harmony." It continued to argue that an intercultural education project amounted to nothing more than a "paper program"[451] unless the Board of Education pressed harder to force schools to implement programs quickly and thoroughly in all schools. The union proposed a broader definition of intercultural education, which would feature smaller classes, remedial academics, health services, and community activities. They lobbied on behalf of additional

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[447] Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union*, 99; "Negro History Week" program, 1952, box 44, folder 18, TU Papers.
[448] "The Harlem Committee, September 1951–June 1952," TU Papers.
[449] Lucile Spence, "The Struggle for Integration," *New York Teacher News*, January 16, 1954.
[450] Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union*, 99.
[451] Here, the Teachers Guild was building on an earlier public complaint by Frank Karelsen that his committee's recommendations were "met with nothing but statements of generalities and paper plans."

teachers and social service personnel with better training, including cultural sensitivity.[452]

The teachers unions received strong support from black newspapers in their efforts to lobby the Board of Education to replace textbooks containing racially and ethnically prejudiced materials. John Hewitt, writing for the *People's Voice* in its multipart survey of public education in Harlem 1945, concluded that the absence of intercultural education and the use of textbooks that "pervert the history of the United States" had caused a situation in which black children in New York were unable to develop proper "race pride" and white students failed to learn respect for African-American culture."[453] His article criticized the Board of Education for failing to take action even in the face of repeated protests from the Teachers Union, and asked readers to swamp the Mayor, Superintendent, and board offices with complaints. The *New York Age* complemented the Board of Education's James Marshall when he testified before a U.S. Senate Committee in favor of revising textbooks worldwide that spoke derisively of other nations, races, or ethnicities, but asked why more had not been done in New York toward such ends.[454] The *Amsterdam News* urged the Board of Education to replace biased books as part of a broader campaign to rid the schools of "viciously distorted information."[455] In 1947, it asserted the importance of replacing such misinformation with African-American history across the curriculum from

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[452] Kay Kerby, "White Students in 3 N.Y. Schools Favor Mixing the Races in the Classrooms," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 13, 1945; "Exclusive Release to the Tribune," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 14, 1945; Esther Cahen to Sir or Madam, Director, School of Education, 1946; "Recommendations of the Committee on Juvenile Delinquency for a New Teacher Training Program," box 6, folder 14, UFT Papers; Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union,* 96. In October, the *New York Amsterdam News* surveyed students at three Manhattan high schools, including Benjamin Franklin, asking participants whether they were in favor of racially mixed high schools. 70 percent of respondents from Franklin supported integration.
[453] John Hewitt, "Textbooks Brand Negroes Inferior," *People's Voice*, February 10, 1945.
[454] "Let's Start It Here," *New York Age*, June 22, 1946.
[455] "Ban of Biased Books," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 8, 1952.

kindergarten through graduate school.[456]

Through the remainder of the decade and 1950s, the *Amsterdam News* supported Negro History Week celebrations in Harlem, implemented most comprehensively during the early 1950s when Associate Superintendent Truda Weill (in charge of Districts 10, 11, and 12, including Harlem and Washington Heights) organized a program with participation of all schools and several community organizations.[457] Much of the programming for Negro History Week built on special events and materials shared from the Schomburg Collection, archived in the Countee Cullen Branch of the New York Public Library at 136th Street between Lenox and Seventh Avenues.[458]

The Board of Education voluntarily supported a more general program for intercultural education in schools across the city. This consisted of a series of classes and professional development emphasizing the importance of racial tolerance and understanding and spread to most schools in some form between 1943 and 1946. These programs were disconnected from plans to revise biased textbooks and infuse the curriculum with accurate and complete portrayals of African-American history. This more moderate plan pushed by the administration took the lead during the years after World War II.

The more radical plan promoted by the Teachers Union and black press struggled in the context of two citywide controversies. The first such incident regarded the Advisory Committee on Human Relations to the Superintendent of Schools, created in September, 1944, with the intention of coordinating intercultural and interracial education that would

[456] "Schools to Teach Democratic Principles," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 24, 1947.
[457] "The Salvation Army," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 21, 1953.
[458] Frank Pereira, "Negro History Week," *New York Times*, February 13, 1952.

counter racial and religious animosities that contributed to the war. On October 17, 1945, Frank E. Karelsen, Jr., chairman of the Committee (and former chairman of the City-Wide Citizens Committee of Harlem's Subcommittee on Education), resigned from his position along with more than half of the other members.[459] During Karelsen's tenure, the group had some success implementing in-service courses for teachers with the backing of the Board of Education, the Teachers Union, and the Teachers Guild.[460] However, these accomplishments, and the level of support received from the central school administration, fell far short of the committee's goal. Karelsen and the majority of the other members had increasingly grown frustrated with budget cuts and failures of the school system to integrate intercultural programs into the preexisting curriculum as tightly as they recommended.[461]

With his resignation, announced in a six-page letter to the Superintendent of Schools, Karelsen lodged a general protest of the inequality and poor conditions in the school system, explaining that he was stepping down "in order that public attention may be focused on the chaotic and inexcusable conditions now and long prevailing in the public school system of New York." He elaborated on some particular problematic conditions such as low morale, racial and religious tensions, overcrowded classes, and understaffed schools, and he referred to the "outbreak" at Benjamin Franklin High School as a symptom

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[459] Frank E. Karelsen, Jr. to John E. Wade, 17 October 1945, box 4, folder 17, UFT Papers; "Our School System," *New York Age*, October 27, 1945; "Race Segregation in Schools Scored," *New York Times*, May 31, 1944.

[460] "Educational Approach to Intercultural Conflicts," 15 January 1945, series 634, box 1, folder 1A; Jacob Greenberg to John E. Wade, 9 May 1945, series 634, box 1, folder 1B, Board of Education Papers; "Teachers' Union Demands Action on Race Hate," *The People's Voice*, December 16, 1944. The Advisory Committee included the Teachers Union's longtime legislative representative, Rose Russell.

[461] Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 328–329; Frank E. Karelsen, Jr. to John E. Wade, 17 October 1945, box 4, folder 17, UFT Papers.

of these problems. "The school system of the greatest city in the world," wrote Karelsen, "deserves the most broadminded and effective kind of action in the area of human relations."[462] Based on his recommendations for expanding services in New York City schools, he defined the scope of intercultural education much more broadly than the Board of Education, involving extensive staffing changes. Soon after his resignation, Karelsen formed an "emergency committee" to work independently toward the former goals of the Advisory Committee.[463]

The *New York Age* and the *People's Voice* supported the decision by Karelsen and the others to resign, as did the Teachers Union.[464] The resignations, as apparently intended, drew attention to the subject of education in the 1946 mayoral campaign.[465] Yet, Karelsen's protest movement died down quickly and left the Teachers Union and the black press without an ally in the Advisory Committee on Human Relations.

Few in the Harlem community were content with Karelsen's replacement, William P. Russell of Teachers College. The *People's Voice* responded with dissatisfaction when Russell was quoted in 1946 stating that he "doubted the relationship of school teaching to fostering good human relations," and was said to have complained at a conference about the excessive "hoop-la about what textbooks say about some races and about what some teachers say about a race or religion." "This is a dangerous doctrine," the paper editorialized, "especially when voiced by the chairman of the Advisory Committee on

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[462] Frank E. Karelsen, Jr. to John E. Wade, 17 October 1945, box 4, folder 17, UFT Papers.
[463] Philip Locker and Mina Weisenberg to Members, 3 November 1945, box 4, folder 17, UFT Papers.
[464] "Our School System," *New York Age*, October 27, 1945; "Race Segregation in Schools Scored," *New York Times*, May 31, 1944; "Our Schools and the Elections," *People's Voice*, October 27, 1945; American Federation of Teachers, press release, 17 October 1945; Abraham Lefkowitz, "The Crisis in the Public Schools," 16 November 1945, box 4, folder 17, UFT Papers.
[465] "Our School System," *New York Age*, October 27, 1945.

Human Relations of the New York Board of Education."[466]

During this same time, the anti-communist movement in city government undercut the Teachers Union's more radical vision of intercultural education. Beginning in February 1946, the House Committee on Un-American Activities probed the Advisory Committee on Human Relations for information on suspicious collaborators.[467] The advisory committee defensively maneuvered to redefine their work in anti-communist (as opposed to wartime anti-Fascist) terms, describing the importance of preserving "all-American schools." They reduced attention to curriculum reform that stressed harmonious race relations and pride in African-American culture and instead began to focus on teaching the superiority of American values over Soviet ones. The group kept tabs on similar intercultural education government sponsored programs in Russia during the period of 1945 through 1950 and often documented differences from these.[468]

In 1947, questions were raised in the press about the politics of all in-service intercultural courses offered by the Board of Education and teachers unions. Articles in October in the New York *World-Telegram*—by this time a staunchly anti-communist paper, moving to the political right under the ownership of media conglomerate Scripps Howard—claimed to expose the courses as subversive, communist propaganda. Superintendent William Jansen dropped one of the lectures in the program and began a review of intercultural education across the board. Teachers in the courses, led by Teachers Union members, protested Jansen's action, accusing the central administration of

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[466] "Educational Hoop-La," *People's Voice*, December 7, 1946.
[467] Irene E. Lavin to House Committee on Un-American Activities, 2 February 1946, series 634, box 1, folder 1C, Board of Education Papers.
[468] "Working Files on In-Service Course," 1948, series 634, box 1, folder 2, Board of Education Papers.

"intellectual blackmail" and "thought control," but they received no direct response from the central administration.[469] The Board of Education phased out its intercultural courses for teachers by the spring of 1948. By the early 1950s, intercultural education declined in the face of accusations that these programs were intellectually "soft" and politically biased in favor of communist sympathies.[470]

The anti-communist attacks on teachers, already intensified during the early 1940s with the Rapp-Coudert hearings, picked up renewed pace following the war. By this time, they reached well beyond intercultural education and undercut much of the school reform work of teachers in Harlem. In 1949, the New York State legislature passed the Feinberg Law, banning all public school teachers from membership in "subversive" organizations and requiring teachers to take loyalty oaths that were more invasive than those instated in the mid-1930s.[471] On June 1, 1950, after a citywide political showdown, the Board of Education passed the Timone Resolution, which banned the Teachers Union from representing teachers in New York City schools.[472] Just a month earlier, Superintendent Jansen had abruptly suspended without pay eight teachers from the Teachers Union. This included teachers such as Alice Citron, who had played important roles leading the Harlem Committee of the Teachers Union and the Permanent Committee for Better Schools in Harlem (PCBSH).[473] In early 1951, after a series of hearings and a major campaign by the Teachers Union to rally support for the accused, the board dismissed all eight for "conduct

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[469] Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union,* 97.
[470] Johnson, "A Generation of Women Activists," 231.
[471] Ibid., 228; Back, "Up South in New York," 226. The law was challenged by New York City teachers up to the U.S. Supreme Court, which upheld it in 1952.
[472] Board member George A. Timone had been pushing for the resolution since soon after he joined the Board in 1946. For an extended discussion of the political conflicts around the resolution, see Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard*, 6, 154–177.
[473] Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard*, 6, 135–137

unbecoming to teachers."[474] Over the next four years, more than 200 teachers were dismissed or forced to resign.[475] Organizations such as the PCBSH and the Harlem Committee of the Teachers Union withered under these stresses.[476]

At the same time that teachers and administrators were focusing on changing the curriculum of Harlem schools in an effort to erase racism among students and teachers, Harlem parents and civil rights activists began to launch new accusations of institutional racism against the administration. Their protests, some of which began to build during World War II, quickened after the war's conclusion. As the second wave of the Great Migration continued to expand the black population of Harlem and increase the number of all-black schools, civil rights leaders and social critics from the Harlem community expressed a disbelief in the administration's commitment to equal education for their children. They began to link all forms of inequity more explicitly to segregation and increasingly drew the conclusion that segregated schools were inherently unequal.

As in the 1920s and 1930s, the black press played a lead role in setting the course for school reform protest. Toward the end of 1943, at the same time that the Harlem Project was getting underway, the *Amsterdam News* published a series of eight articles

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[474] "8 Ousted Teachers Sue for Jobs; Ask Back Pay and Pension Rights," *New York Times*, April 12, 1951; Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900–1980* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992): 187; Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard*, 135–152.
[475] Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard,* 153; Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 224; Johnson, "A Generation of Women Activists," 228.
[476] Alice Citron, "Two Decades of Punishment," *Newsday*, December 39, 1971; "Supreme Court of the State of New York County of Kings, In the Matter of the Application of … Petitioners against the Board of Education of the City of New York," Alice Citron Papers; Leonard Buder, "City Acts to Rehire 31 Teachers Ousted in McCarthy Era," *New York Times*, September 21, 1972; Leonard Buder, "Board Weighs Reinstatement of Teachers Ousted in '50s" *New York Times*, December 1, 1971; Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union*, 93; Johnson, "We Cannot Avoid Taking Sides," 224. In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the constitutionality of the Feinberg Law and in 1972, the Board of Education restored the pensions of many of the teachers dismissed in the 1950s, including Alice Citron.

detailing the situation in Harlem schools relative to that revealed by the riot report in 1936. A. M. Wendell Malliet, a civil rights activist and journalist, concluded the series with a scathing attack on the sluggish school building in Harlem during the time period since the riot and questioned the intentions of the administration: "Democracy is not yet at work in New York's Harlem, and Mayor F. H. LaGuardia knows it."[477]

Two years later, the *People's Voice*, a newspaper founded by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. in 1942, commissioned a weeklong study of Harlem schools and assigned journalist John Hewitt the task of reporting the findings. Hewitt announced the group's finding that the schools "have reached a new low in public education." He provided statistics that convincingly demonstrated substantial gaps in student academic achievement between Harlem schools and the New York City average at the junior high school level. In addition to blaming unequal physical conditions in the schools for this gap, he blamed the presence of a "caste attitude" among teachers and administrators and profiled teachers who considered African-American students "low grade" and "unable to learn." He argued that Harlem had become a "dumping-ground for maladjusted teachers."[478] The findings reported by Hewitt were echoed in a 1951 book, *Searchlight*: *An Expose of New York City Schools*, in which the author explained that conditions had gotten worse in Harlem's schools since 1945. He included statistics from a study by the Harlem Council on Education of Harlem junior high schools, showing that 90 percent of students were one year behind in reading and writing courses, and 60 percent were behind three years or more (versus a city

[477] A. M. Wendell Malliet, "Harlem's School Situation Compared with 1935 Study," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 23, 1943.
[478] John Hewitt, "Crowding, Teacher Bias Harm our School Kids," *People's Voice*, January 13, 1945; "Education of Harlem's Children," *People's Voice*, January 13, 1945.

average of 23 percent).[479]

During this same period, parents and Harlem citizens increasingly sought change in the schools with the ballot, seeking black representation on the Board of Education. Since as early as 1912, the Harlem community had lobbied to add a black board member, arguing that an African American could most effectively represent the true needs of the schools in the city serving mostly black students.[480] They targeted the central city board in particular since centralization of power in the citywide Board of Education and Superintendents office at the beginning of the century had stripped local boards of most of their power.

Since World War I, the central board had sole power to make decisions about the allocation of resources to Harlem districts as well as major curriculum changes. In 1918, the state legislature decreased the size of the board from forty-six to seven members, wiping out gains made by the black community in 1917 when Mayor John Mitchel appointed a black physician to the board.[481] The new board consisted of seven members who served seven-year terms, with two residents from Manhattan and Brooklyn and one from each of the three other boroughs. In addition to the citywide board (with jurisdiction over all schools in the city), there were local five-member boards appointed by the Borough presidents who decided on matters specific to the schools in their borough's local districts. Yet the central board maintained the important powers to allocate expenditures and hire and fire personnel.[482] This board was appointed by the Mayor.

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[479] Alison, *Searchlight*, 175.
[480] "We Want a Member of the School Board," *New York Age*, November 21, 1912.
[481] Editorial, *New York Age*, January 11, 1917; "Mayor Puts Negro in Education Post," *New York Times*, July 22, 1948; Mabee, *Black Education*, 144; Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 104; "We Want a Member of the School Board," *New York Age*, November 21, 1912.
[482] "Public School System," *New York Age*, May 24, 1930.

Since the riot report's recommendation in 1936 that the Mayor appoint a black member to the Board of Education, the Harlem community had sporadically lobbied for this change, with the intensity of their efforts rising whenever spots on the board opened up. But their protests escalated during the three years following World War II, in the context of rising political power due to the increased number of black voters in New York City. Relative to the 1920s and early 1930s, when political influence over the Board of Education and school administration was minimal, postwar Harlemites had increased sway. The number of registered Harlem voters rose significantly during the 1930s from 43,000 to 70,000 as they joined the New Deal Democratic Coalition. The political power of black voters in New York surged during the 1940s, part of a trend evident across the urban North in the context of the migration. Both political parties competed for the black vote, giving African Americans increased leverage. By 1945 Harlem had elected three black New York City Assemblymen. Representatives like Hulan Jack and Benjamin Davis won legislative victories in the New York State Legislature against employment discrimination, which provided some protection in an area previously almost entirely unregulated. In 1944, Harlem gained representation by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. in the U.S. Congress.[483]

Although the fight for a black board member extended citywide, many of those seeking this goal lived or worked in Harlem, and had the interest of Harlem's schools in mind. In the closing months of the war, with a mayoral election underway, civic leaders in Harlem joined others in the black community across the city to demand that the next Mayor appoint a black board member. Complaining about years of failings by the board to allocate fair resources to Harlem schools, the *Age* concluded in May 1945, that representation by an

[483] Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 3–4, 39, 17–37; Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 228–231.

African American was the best solution. "Harlem is tired of being treated like a step-child," the paper editorialized, "and it's time that the rest of the city and our City Fathers know that."[484] In his article comparing conditions in 1943 Harlem to those at the time of the 1935 riot, A. M. Wendell faulted LaGuardia for failing to take seriously the riot commission's recommendation to appoint a black Board of Education member.[485]

In January 1946, a vacancy opened on the board. The city's black newspapers urged Mayor William O'Dwyer to fill the spot with an African American.[486] In its editorial pages, the *People's Voice* argued for a more transparent selection process, in which citizens could see candidates' credentials and express opinions on the candidates in public hearings.[487] The *Age* emphasized the value to all New Yorkers of the appointment of a black member, arguing that it would foster "interracial understanding" and provide the best educational leadership for previously neglected areas. Doxey Wilkerson, chief manager of the *People's Voice*, wrote an editorial in his paper titled "Democratize Our School Board," which referred to the Board of Education's "disgusting performance" in its passive handling of the case of May Quinn, a Brooklyn teacher accused of anti-Semitic behavior in 1942 as one example of the necessity for a change in representation.[488] He criticized "'upper-class' stodginess" on the board, which failed to represent the city's half million African Americans and working-class citizens of all races and ethnicities.[489] When the Mayor hinted that he was

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[484] "New School Buildings," *New York Age*, May 12, 1945.
[485] Malliet, "Harlem's School Situation Compared with 1935 Study."
[486] "O'Dwyer's Chance," *People's Voice*, January 5, 1946; "Opportunity for the Mayor," *New York Age*, January 12, 1946; "Watchful Waiting," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 12, 1946; "Poison for Children," *People's Voice*, January 12, 1946.
[487] "Choosing a Superintendent," *People's Voice*, November 23, 1946.
[488] Doxey A. Wilkerson, "Democratize Our School Board!" *People's Voice*, March 9, 1946; For details on the May Quinn controversy, see Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard*, 75–76.
[489] "Name Franco Booster to N.Y. School Board, *Chicago Defender*, March 16, 1946;

considering maintaining the status quo by filling the opening with another Catholic member, the *Age* protested.[490]

William O'Dwyer did not appoint an African American to the Board of Education post, but did appoint Rev. John Coleman, rector of St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, in March 1946, to the New York City Board of Higher Education. This appointment, the first of an African American to the board overseeing the city's public colleges, fell far short of the desires of the Harlem community. Some sources in the Harlem community and the black press acknowledged it as a step in the right direction, but most lamented the failure to gain the desired Board of Education position.[491] The *Chicago Defender*, surveying the series of frustrations faced by those struggling to gain an African-American board member from afar, wrote, "Negro New Yorkers fear the Coleman appointment is a move to keep the city board which supervises primary and secondary schools lily-white."[492]

For the Board of Education position, O'Dwyer chose a white candidate, George Timone.[493] Timone would go on to become highly controversial due to his extreme anti-communist stance, and from the beginning he drew fire from the black press for alleged association with fascist groups.[494] In June, the Mayor was reported to have promised an African American for the next appointment.[495] Around this time, the *Amsterdam News* jumped to the conclusion that Timone was likely to resign, calling for the Mayor to line up

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Doxey A. Wilkerson, "Democratize Our School Board!" *People's Voice*, March 9, 1946.
[490] "A Negro Member on the Board of Education," *New York Age*, February 2, 1946; "Name Franco Booster to N.Y. School Board, *Chicago Defender*, March 16, 1946; Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 243–244.
[491] "New York Advancing," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 9, 1946; "Another First," *New York Age*, March 16, 1946.
[492] "Name Franco Booster to N.Y. School Board, *Chicago Defender*, March 16, 1946.
[493] "Another First," *New York Age*, March 16, 1946.
[494] "Name Franco Booster to N.Y. School Board, *Chicago Defender*, March 16, 1946.
[495] "Do You Mean It, Mr. Mayor?" *New York Amsterdam News*, June 29, 1946.

an African-American replacement.[496] When an opening came up in the fall after the death of board member George Chatfield, the black press stepped up pressure on the Mayor. The *Amsterdam News* published an editorial written in the form of a memo to the Mayor, with a header listing "Subject: Board of Education"; "Date: Too Late"; and "From: Negro Residents of N.Y.C." "We don't like racial percentages, appointments only because people are Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Lithuanians, or anything else," read the body of the article; "But in this instance, the blatant boxing off of Negroes from the board has been an open scandal."[497]

Following the appointment of Timone, Hulan Jack, a black state assemblyman (and later Manhattan Borough President) from Harlem, introduced a bill into the state legislature to create an elected, rather than appointed, Board of Education in New York City, but it failed to pass.[498] At the close of 1946, the *Amsterdam News* identified the absence of an African-American board member as the "biggest hole in the calendar of things to be done," and sharply criticized the Mayor's failure on three occasions to fulfill his campaign promise to do so.[499]

In April 1948, the Harlem community joined another citywide movement by black New Yorkers to lobby the Mayor for the appointment of an African-American board member to one of the vacancies opened by a pending state law raising board membership from seven to nine, or the anticipated slot due to an upcoming retirement.[500] Harlem's

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[496] "Hopeful Advice," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 1, 1946.
[497] "Please Attend," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 2, 1946.
[498] "Name Franco Booster to N.Y. School Board, *Chicago Defender*, March 16, 1946.
[499] "Farewell 1946," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 28, 1946.
[500] "Mayor Puts Negro in Education Post," *New York Times*, July 22, 1948; "The Time is Now Ripe," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 17, 1948. The law added a second representative from Queens and the Bronx and taken effect July 1.

recently formed, ad-hoc Citizens Committee for the Appointment of a Negro to the Board of Education teamed with the Harlem Council on Education to host a public forum on the topic.[501] Teachers, parents, and leaders of civic organizations met at the Salem Methodist Church in Harlem and passed a resolution pressing for the appointment of an African American to one of the three upcoming positions. They blamed the current board for discriminatory zoning and allowing "mass educational retardation" among black students.[502] In addition to documenting their concerns about the lack of a black representative on the board, members such as Rose Russell from the Teachers Union argued for the importance of adding a woman, parent, and labor representative.[503]

These groups received strong support from the black press. The newspapers pointed to examples in Chicago, Washington, DC, Philadelphia, and Cleveland, all of which had black school board members.[504] The *Amsterdam News* called the Board of Education "one of the most unrepresentative departments of the city and state."[505] The *Age* joined the *Amsterdam News* in closely following news of the Mayor's decision-making process over the following months, analyzing biographical profiles of reported candidates.[506] In May, the *Age* expressed its satisfaction that the Mayor was seriously considering African-American candidates for the positions in Brooklyn and the Bronx.[507] The *New York Times* also came out in favor of appointing an African American to the board, concluding that a

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[501] Rev. Charles Trigg, Rev. Ben Richardson and Ada Jackson of the Citizens Committee for the Appointment of a Negro to the Board of Education, 29 March 1948, part 3, series C, reel 23, NAACP Papers.
[502] "Meeting Calls For Negro On School Board," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 17, 1948; "Negroes Ask Place on Education Board," *New York Times*, April 12, 1948.
[503] "Negroes Ask Place on Education Board," *New York Times*, April 12, 1948.
[504] Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 263.
[505] "The Time is Now Ripe," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 17, 1948.
[506] "The Vacant Education Post," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 26, 1948.
[507] "The Mayor and the Board," *New York Age*, May 22, 1948.

black citizen would be "invaluable" to the board by "keeping it informed of the needs and feelings of the Negro community."[508]

On July 21, 1948, Mayor O'Dwyer appointed John M. Coleman of Brooklyn to the Board of Education, fulfilling his campaign promise from three years prior to appoint an African American to the citywide board.[509] The black press celebrated the victory, although quickly turned its attention to underrepresentation of black professionals in teaching and administrative positions, and continued to raise concerns over unequal conditions in the schools. Throughout the 1940s, the *Amsterdam News* had specifically keyed its argument for a black board member to the needs of Harlem and the unequal conditions in Harlem schools. It urged the Mayor to appoint a replacement keeping in mind that "the Board of Education needs very badly a representative who is close to the Harlem community and who feels real concern and responsibility to the children in this crowded, expanding and oft-neglected area. Such a member should, of course, also be selected because he can make a contribution to all the city but, nevertheless, he should be especially aware of, and dedicated to, Harlem's needs."[510] The paper rationalized its position by explaining the extent to which Harlem had suffered from neglect and lack of representation on the board.

Much of the anxiety and anger about conditions in Harlem schools that lay behind arguments for a black board member during the 1940s were exemplified in the situation at Wadleigh High School for girls. During the same period that the Harlem community mobilized to support the push for a black member on the Board of Education, parents of children at Wadleigh protested in another way.

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[508] "For the Board of Education," *New York Times*, May 28, 1948.
[509] "Congratulations," *New York Age*, July 31, 1948.
[510] "Our Board of Education," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 10, 1952.

Wadleigh's main building was located on 114th Street west of Seventh Avenue, with annexes on 102nd and 135th Streets in an old elementary school and an old teacher training college.[511] Girls living in the Harlem area were required to attend Wadleigh, Haaren (10th Avenue and 58th Street), or the Harlem annex of the Straubenmuller Textile High School.[512] Wadleigh was the only academic school among these.[513] Due to gerrymandered zoning lines, most white students in northern Manhattan had the choice between Wadleigh and three newer, academic high schools: Julia Richman, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin.[514] Only a small number of girls were granted permission by the Board of Education to cross district lines and attend these other schools. The intent of the school board in setting zone lines was difficult for protestors to pin down. As Roy Wilkins of the NAACP replied to a parent complaining of discriminatory placement of her child, "It is very difficult to catch the Board of Education in a bona fide case of race or color discrimination. There are so many plausible explanations of what it does that nearly always it is possible to dodge the charge of discrimination."[515]

During the 1930s, the racial composition of Wadleigh's student population changed dramatically. The school, founded in 1897, originally served mainly students from middle-class, white families.[516] By 1935, the school had become highly diverse: 30 percent of the school's students at the time were African-American (and 25 percent Jewish, 15 percent Italian, 5 percent "Spanish," and 25 percent other "white American"). However, racial

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511 Fogelson, 85; "May Build New Wadleigh High," *Chicago Defender*, March 25, 1939; Harold G. Campbell to Roy Wilkins, 19 June 1934, part 3, series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers.
512 "Place Wadleigh Building Drive Before Harlem," *New York Amsterdam News,* April 23, 1938.
513 Fogelson, 85; "Wadleigh to Mark 40th Anniversary," *New York Times*, December 5, 1937.
514 Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 91.
515 Roy Wilkins to J. Foster Gillead, 21 June 1934, part 3, series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers.
516 "The $64 Question: Is It Jimcro or Close Down for Wadleigh High?" *People's Voice*, June 24, 1944.

diversity did not translate into shared or equal opportunities in the classroom. African-American girls made up only 10 to 15 percent of the student population at the annexes where specialized commercial and college-preparatory curricula were offered. Three quarters of the black students took vocational courses in the main building where they focused on dressmaking and other domestic work. In 1937, the Teachers Union noted in its monthly publication that Wadleigh was turning into a vocational school and asked rhetorically, "Does the Board of Education now intend to remove even the possibility of academic education for Negroes?"[517]

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the number of black students attending Wadleigh climbed rapidly. By 1945, the proportion had risen above 90 percent.[518] By this time, percentages in the high-nineties were typical for Harlem elementary and middle schools, but Wadleigh was exceptional at the high school level. The effect of the increasing residential racial segregation on the school population, in the absence of proactive measures by the school system to integrate, was clear. In the years following World War II, with another wave of black migration to Central Harlem and the expansion of the predominantly black area around Wadleigh, the percentage of black students at the high school continued to rise. As racial segregation climbed, white parents in Harlem increasingly applied successfully to the Board of Education to transfer their children to

[517] "Editorial Paragraphs," *New York Teacher*, May 1937.
[518] Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 315; "The Situation At Wadleigh High," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 10, 1945; Viola Horpel, "Wadleigh Students Include Young Girls Of Various Nationalities, Many Creeds," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 29, 1941; "Race Segregation in Schools Scored," *New York Times*, May 31, 1944. It is important to note that there was a large amount of diversity among the non-white population, including African Americans as well as immigrants from various countries in the West Indies, Africa, and from the territory of Puerto Rico.

other high schools.[519] The proportion of black students reached 98 percent in 1947.[520] Regardless of intent, the Board of Education's zoning policies had exaggerated and entrenched, rather than countered racial segregation at Wadleigh.[521]

Community leaders were intensely aware of the rising racial segregation at the school. They increasingly protested against the phenomenon, arguing on pragmatic grounds that the disappearance of white students would amount to fewer resources allocated by the Board of Education. In 1944, the City-Wide Citizens Committee of Harlem's Subcommittee on Education spoke against the severe segregation at Wadleigh, which it placed at 95 percent. The group connected the problem to that of residential segregation, the primary focus of its lobbying efforts at the time, and made the important distinction between segregation at the high school level and the elementary and middle school. As with most other reformers in Harlem, they still favored neighborhood elementary and middle schools, but since high schools drew across large areas, they vigorously protested segregation at that level, arguing that the Board of Education was complicit in the problem.[522]

The PCBSH met at Wadleigh in January, 1945, and passed a resolution stating it deplored "the drive to make Wadleigh an all-Negro high school by feeding Negro junior high school students into Wadleigh on the advice of vocational guidance counselors while other children are permitted to register at the high schools of their choice."[523] The committee determined that the school must be closed if the school administration did not

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[519] "Monument to Jimcro," *People's Voice*, October 12, 1946.
[520] Florence Murray, "What Can Be Done to Check N.Y.'s Trend Toward Segregated Schools?" *People's Voice*, June 7, 1947.
[521] Ment, "Patterns of Public School Segregation," 92.
[522] "Race Segregation in Schools Scored," *New York Times*, May 31, 1944.
[523] John Hewitt, "Pupils Denied Choice of City High Schools," *People's Voice*, January 20, 1945.

rezone and move the school to a new location to encourage racial integration and petitioned the Mayor for such changes. They saw great damage in the possibility of Wadleigh becoming a "Negro high school." In the meanwhile, the group called for renovation of the current main building to keep up with the condition of the city's other high schools.[524]

Many parents of Wadleigh students became tired of waiting for change. They began to do everything possible to transfer their children out of the school. In the early 1940s, nearly half of Wadleigh's freshman class left the school every year.[525] Some of those who left were white girls whose parents feared their attendance at a "negro school," but the majority were black students whose families were voting with their feet against Wadleigh's inadequacy. Overall enrollment at the school, designed to serve 2729 students, plummeted from nearly 3,000 in 1935 to less than 700 in 1946.[526] In 1946, *People's Voice* editorialized, "Wadleigh High School, in the heart of Harlem, stands as a monument to the spirit of jimcrowism in the public schools of New York City."[527] After 1946, Wadleigh's numbers dwindled so low that the Adam Clayton Powell's *People's Voice* referred to it as a "ghost school."[528] The students remaining after the war were disproportionately from families who had most recently migrated from the South or from the West Indies.[529]

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[524] "The Situation At Wadleigh High," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 10, 1945.
[525] Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 310.
[526] John Hewitt, "Pupils Denied Choice of City High Schools," *People's Voice*, January 20, 1945; "Segregation and Waste," *People's Voice*, October 19, 1946; "Education Board Studies Problem of Unfilled Seats in High Schools," *New York Times*, May 17, 1944; "Wadleigh High Principal Airs Problems of School New York," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 31, 1948.
[527] "Monument to Jimcro," *People's Voice*, October 12, 1946.
[528] "People's Town Hall," *People's Voice*, June 24, 1944.
[529] Mangum, "Afro-American Thought," 370–71.

Part of parents' motivation for going to great lengths to find ways to transfer their children out of Wadleigh was the poor condition of the school facilities. Some accused the Board of Education of "having allowed the high standard of faculty members and school discipline to deteriorate" as the school was attended by an increasing number of black students.[530] Despite promises in 1945 from Assistant Superintendent Frederic Ernst (the head of the city's fifty-five high schools) that more teachers and resources would be allocated to Wadleigh, the community's confidence in the school continued to decline.[531]

However, the most highly publicized reason for the exodus from Wadleigh was concern over Jim Crowism. The black newspapers, the NAACP, and the Teachers Union supported parents in their decision to pull their students out of the school, and agreed that the school should be closed and converted into a vocational center for adults, a nursery school, or some other type of community center unless an immediate plan to integrate the school was put in place.[532] They felt that an all-black high school set a dangerous precedent in the city and deprived students of important exposure to interracial experience. The *Amsterdam News* complained, "the price of segregation that we pay by being cooped off into a 'special' area such as Harlem is already too great without adding the humiliation of an 'all-Negro' school." It explained how segregated public schools had become despite New York City's "cosmopolitan character," and argued, "The narrowing down of public facilities of education to racial areas is a dangerous practice and must be halted at all costs at

[530] "Let's Help Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 13, 1947.
[531] "The Situation At Wadleigh High," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 10, 1945.
[532] "To Close Wadleigh?" *New York Amsterdam News*, October 26, 1946; "People's Town Hall," *People's Voice*, June 24, 1944.

once."[533] Others defined the problem in terms of democracy, arguing that segregated schools in New York conflicted with American political ideals. They decried the substandard, racially segregated experience offered students, which they frequently labeled as "undemocratic." All agreed that the school was declining in reputation and physical condition and something needed to be done about it.[534]

The black press played an important role in publicizing concerns over segregation at Wadleigh. Since the late 1930s, the *Amsterdam News* editorial staff warned about the dangers of racial segregation at the school. But after the war, the paper sharpened its attacks. In 1946 it declared, "Wadleigh is now a 'Negro School' in as full a sense as in deepest Mississippi, with all the inadequate programs, poor facilities, and general neglect and scholastic failure that goes with being a ghetto school."[535] One month later, it described Wadleigh and New York Vocational High Schools as "mental dumping grounds for the problem children of our communities."[536] The paper blamed the Board of Education for actively reinforcing segregation in the high schools and labeled their zoning policies an "open scandal." Even in the face of residential segregation, it explained, the board could and should encourage racial diversity in the high schools through whatever means possible.[537]

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[533] "The Situation At Wadleigh High," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 10, 1945; "Let's Help Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 13, 1947.
[534] "The $64 Question: Is It Jimcro or Close Down for Wadleigh High?" *People's Voice*, June 24, 1944; "People's Town Hall," *People's Voice*, June 24, 1944; "New Principal and Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 20, 1947; "Let's Help Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 13, 1947; "Wadleigh High Future Viewed as a Problem," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 20, 1945.
[535] "To Close Wadleigh?" *New York Amsterdam News*, October 26, 1946.
[536] "Harlem's Schools," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 23, 1946.
[537] "To Close Wadleigh?" *New York Amsterdam News*, October 26, 1946.

The *Amsterdam News* was joined by the *People's Voice*, which editorialized about the situation at Wadleigh on many occasions. In 1946, it stated, "This deliberate school segregation is repugnant to the democratic principles of most New Yorkers; it is also terribly expensive, as the half-used Wadleigh High School building so eloquently testifies," and challenged the Board of Education, Superintendent of Schools, and the newly created Advisory Committee on Human Relations to reverse the pattern of segregation across the city's high schools. In October, the paper continued with this line of criticism in an editorial titled "Monument to Jimcro."[538] The president of the Board of Education, Andrew Clauson, reacted with a letter to the *People's Voice* lead editor, Doxey Wilkerson, denying these claims. Clauson countered that no girls were forced to attend Wadleigh and the decline of white students resulted from their families moving long distances from the school. "Just as we do not compel Negro girls to go to Wadleigh," he wrote, "we do not, cannot, and would not compel other girls to go there."[539] One month later, the *People's Voice* used the situation at Wadleigh as a warning of what should be avoided in sections of Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens where the level of racial segregation in high schools was on the rise. "The people of Harlem," read the editorial, "are unwilling to tolerate any longer a Jimcro high school in the city of New York."[540]

On January 9, 1945, 250 parents and representatives from religious and civic organizations attended a meeting at Wadleigh to discuss the future of the school. Principal Margaret Byrne facilitated discussion on parents' opinions about sending their children to the school. Conversation focused on declining conditions in both the schools and the

[538] "Monument to Jimcro," *People's Voice*, October 12, 1946.
[539] "School Head Denies PV's Jimcro Charge," *People's Voice*, October 26, 1946.
[540] Why Wadleigh Must Close," *People's Voice*, November 30, 1946.

surrounding neighborhood. Assistant Superintendent Ernst, in attendance at the event, did not speak publicly but told the press afterward that he and the Board of Education would stand behind the community's wishes for Wadleigh.[541]

In November 1946, the Mayor's Committee on Unity organized a small conference at the Wadleigh High School library to discuss the future of the school and the general development of racial segregation in the city's school system.[542] Members of the Board of Education, parent groups, the Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Human Relations, the Central Harlem Council for Community Planning, and the press all attended. Doxey Wilkerson opened the event with a speech sharply criticizing school administrators for failing to prevent the segregated, inferior conditions at Wadleigh. Associate Superintendent Ernst admitted that the problem of declining enrollment at Wadleigh was foreseen nearly twenty years earlier, and worked with other attendees to propose solutions to the problem. The majority agreed that the general education program at the school should be closed, possibly to be replaced with specialized, interracial vocational training.[543] Executive secretary of Mayor O'Dwyer's Committee on Unity, Dan Dodson, commented, "Wadleigh is the end result of the lack of integration of Negro students in the High Schools of New York City."[544] In November, a group of African-American representatives from Harlem community parent organizations expressed their opinion that the high school should be closed and replaced with some kind of interracial educational

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[541] "Wadleigh High Future Viewed as a Problem," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 20, 1945; "To Discuss the Future of Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 6, 1945.
[542] Dan W. Dodson, "Intergroup Work Praised," *New York Times*, March 31, 1954.
[543] "Community Leaders Agree to Closing of Wadleigh," *People's Voice*, November 23, 1946; "Why Wadleigh Must Close," *People's Voice*, November 30, 1946.
[544] "To Close Wadleigh?" *New York Amsterdam News*, October 26, 1946.

programming. It was fully against a "Jim-crow, 1/5th used, 'special' school for Harlem."[545]

Despite pressure from the Mayor's Committee on Unity, the black press, and the diminishing enrollment of Wadleigh due to parent action, Associate Superintendent Ernst made the decision in 1946 to keep Wadleigh open. He did so following a meeting with the acting principal of Wadleigh as well as the principals of Harlem Evening High School at Wadleigh, Morris High School, and Girl's High School in Brooklyn.[546] It is unclear why Ernst and the superintendent's office refused to close the school at this point. The huge inefficiencies of running the school for so few students were surely on their mind. It is unlikely that they believed the situation at the school would improve, since no plan for desegregation or additional funding opportunities for Wadleigh were under serious consideration. The *Amsterdam News* accepted the decision but clearly communicated that it expected major changes at the school. The school administrators, it reflected, "have accepted responsibility for seeing that Wadleigh becomes what it is not: a school which represents a fair cross-section of the school population of the City."[547]

In 1947, the Superintendent's Advisory Committee on Human Relations, at the request of the Mayor's Committee on Unity and in response to complaints from petitions from Harlem community leaders, authorized an independent study of the high concentration of black students at Wadleigh.[548] They found no evidence of neglect by school authorities since no student was forced to attend Wadleigh. However, they called

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[545] "Why Wadleigh Must Close," *People's Voice*, November 30, 1946.
[546] "Wishing Wadleigh Well," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 21, 1946. These other two schools also experienced heightened racial segregation and declining enrollment similar to that at Wadleigh.
[547] "Wishing Wadleigh Well," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 21, 1946.
[548] "Schools Aid Easing of Racial Tensions," *New York Times*, June 12, 1947; "New Principal and Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 20, 1947; "N. Y. Scores School Trend," *Chicago Defender*, November 9, 1946.

upon the school administration to correct the situation going forward by changing the pattern of feeder schools to increase racial diversity.[549]

The Board of Education ignored these recommendations, which would have required major changes in the zoning of middle schools and junior high schools—a change they had refused to even consider for decades. The enrollment at the virtually all-black high school continued to drop into the early 1950s. In the 1953–54 academic year, the last year of the school's operation, only 626 girls attended, leading the *Amsterdam News* to refer to the school as an "island of spaciousness" compared to the overcrowded elementary and middle schools in the area.[550] During the final years of the school's operation, school leaders modified the school's curriculum, adding courses in nursing, nursery education, and dressmaking in a last-ditch effort to entice more students of all races.[551] The nursing program included a hospital cooperative that allowed students to get experience and a stipend while working in area hospitals.[552] Yet, this revised curriculum failed to draw back students, white or black. By this time the school had acquired a reputation as a neglected Jim Crow school with inferior facilities that it couldn't shake.[553]

In June 1954, one month after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Wadleigh closed down as a public school. The Board of Education did not make a statement

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[549] "N. Y. Scores School Trend," *Chicago Defender*, November 9, 1946; "New Principal and Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 20, 1947; "Schools Aid Easing of Racial Tensions," *New York Times*, June 12, 1947.
[550] "Crowded Harlem Classrooms," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 26, 1953.
[551] "Wadleigh High School Provides Parents Opportunity to See Activities at School," *New York Amsterdam News,* April 29, 1950; Mary C. Graham, "Wadleigh Girls Earn At Nursing While Learning," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 14, 1953.
[552] "Wadleigh High School Students Study Nursing Course," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 14, 1953; Mary C. Graham, "Wadleigh Girls Earn At Nursing While Learning," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 14, 1953.
[553] "New Principal and Wadleigh," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 20, 1947; "Wishing Wadleigh Well," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 21, 1946.

explaining the reason for the school closing, but they seem to have been primarily motivated by the inefficiency of running such an empty school. The remaining students were transferred to Julia Richman High School in downtown Manhattan, and the administrators and teachers were transferred throughout the city.[554]

The parents and community supporters who had favored the closing of Wadleigh won a moral victory in this case, but it was one that yielded few tangible gains. Julia Richman was the high school that many Harlem parents had wanted to transfer their children to, given its superior facilities, teachers, and curricular opportunities relative to Wadleigh. Yet the closing of Wadleigh left no academic high school in Harlem; a new, improved high school in Harlem was never even seriously considered. This meant that students had to travel long distances to other high schools, where in most cases they were tracked into racially segregated classes.

The protests against conditions at Wadleigh clearly demonstrated community dissatisfaction with the quality of schools and an increased urgency for change. By the 1940s, Harlem parents were no longer willing to accept relative improvements over all-black schools in the segregated South. Parents' expectations had risen to the point where they demanded nothing short of absolute equality with their white counterparts. The black press and civil rights organizations that backed their efforts to close the school framed the problem in terms of the larger problem of Jim Crowism, echoing arguments introduced by George Schuyler during the 1930s. They used language that painted the inequalities at Wadleigh as unfitting to the democratic principles recently defended during the war. Their accusations of discrimination went far beyond those that they made during the 1920s.

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[554] "85 Girls Graduate, Other Students are Transferred," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 26, 1954.

During that earlier period, parents and their community-activist allies had most commonly pinned school problems on individual racist actions by administrators and teachers. By the postwar period, they routinely alleged institutional discrimination in the city's educational system and blamed poor student performance on administrative policy and common practices.

The Harlem community's contributions to the citywide campaign for a black board member represented a new level of protest, made possible by growing power among black New Yorkers in electoral politics. Yet, as in the case of Wadleigh, the community was not mobilized on a sufficient scale to pressure the administration into serious reconsideration of systemic policies such as desegregation or other forms of major resource redistribution. As administrators dodged accusations of discrimination, the community was not yet ready to force a conversation through organized boycotts and other means of direct protest. Harlem parents agreed on their overall end goal—high quality schools for their children—but did not yet have a clear-cut alternative policy to lead there. They explicitly linked desegregation and equal opportunity in schools, but stopped short of proposing specific plans for desegregation. In the absence of mass support from within the black community and white allies, the Harlem community did not have the clout to pressure the administration to undertake a project as major as integration. This would change in 1954, with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision rallying school reformers behind a more focused, sweeping short-term strategy for improving the equality of school resources.

Conclusion

Between 1914 and 1954, the Harlem community consistently shared with professional educators a sense that the public schools were the institution best positioned to eliminate racial, economic, and social disparities. Even in the face of a rising tide of poverty and racial discrimination, few people living or working in Harlem objected to the notion that the public schools could and should play a leading role in ensuring socioeconomic mobility.

Yet during the very same range of time, parents and their allies in the community grew increasingly disillusioned with the administration's approach and sought their own, distinctive priorities for their children's schools. They moved further and further away from administrators in their interpretation of the schools' problems. Long before the evolution of the community control movement in the 1960s, they expressed deep reservations about the efficacy of the current system to solve their problems. Parents, journalists, and other civil rights leaders from Harlem's black community increasingly doubted Harlem schools' power to alleviate social and economic inequity, and some argued that the schools were perpetuating the very problems they were supposed to fix. They began to charge that administrators' new plans for specializing school curricula to address the particular needs of their community's students reinforced, rather than eliminated, differences in academic opportunities between black and white students.

Harlem parents, joined by civil rights activists from the local community and within the ranks of teachers, mobilized to identify and fight against unequal conditions and discriminatory policies in the school system between 1914 and 1954. While on average

this mobilization increased in size, its growth was not steady. It occurred in fits and starts. Unlike the administration, which maintained a single course driven by bureaucratic momentum, the small, ad-hoc civil rights groups that protested against the school administration jumped quickly between short-term objectives.

These groups repeatedly lost steam because they failed to unanimously identify a clear alternative for the administration to adopt. Ad-hoc parent groups failed to coalesce into sustained social protest movements, largely because they lacked a unified strategy or a consistent counterargument to the curricular-based solutions pushed by the administration. They wanted equal conditions for black and white students but did not have a shared sense of what to fix in order to get to that point. This was in part because of ideological divisions about the preferred pace of social change and strategies of protest. These sometimes fell along class lines, with upper-class black civil rights activists favoring moral uplift and vocational training while working-class parents sought academic curricula. It was not until the pioneering work of Kenneth and Mamie Clark, and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to which they contributed, that the majority of the Harlem community got behind a single protest for systemic change.

One example of an interruption in community-based protest against unequal school conditions occurred during World War II. During the war, there was a large decline in protest against the school administration. This resulted in part because radical activists were elbowed aside by more moderate groups. This change occurred among teacher, parent, and civil rights groups working in Harlem, but also outside of Harlem as black civil rights groups discouraged mass protest in an effort to win over white support.[555] Another

[555] Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 224.

reason for diminished protest during the war was that special projects such as the Harlem Project overlapped with community goals since they shared a goal of infusing Harlem schools with resources. These programs fended off protest because they delivered money, high-quality teachers, and individualized attention to students at a level that promised real mobility. The problem with these benefits is that they came in short bursts, most of which had been exhausted by the end of the war.

But community-based school reform attempts prior to 1954 should not be dismissed simply because they splintered and hit dead ends. The types of protest that Harlem parents and their allies formulated reveal a great deal about their attitudes toward public education, the socioeconomic problems facing their community, and the predominantly white and upper-class power structure that controlled school policy. The failure of these efforts helps explain the deep frustrations that contributed to the rise of mass desegregation and community control movements across New York City during the decade following the landmark Supreme Court decision in 1954. The widening gap between the community's priorities for school reform and those maintained by the administration during the forty years prior to *Brown* fed 1960s-era hostility between parents and administrators.

Civil rights activists in New York City were by no means alone in their crusade for better schools in the urban North. In Philadelphia, civil rights organizations fought a unified battle against segregation in the schools earlier than New York City, combining legal suits with boycotts against segregated schools during the 1930s and 1940s. Yet, the

strategies employed in Philadelphia differed from those in New York since protestors faced a different, more clear-cut challenge: officially separate, all-black schools.[556]

The Harlem community's declining faith in the school administration had closer parallels in Chicago during the same years. As in Harlem, the social protest movement for better schools in Chicago was fragmented and punctuated in nature. Between the 1920s and 1940s, voluntary associations had low rates of membership overall and extremely low rates among working-class citizens. The professional-class African Americans who led organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League often differed in goals from the majority of the community they represented. As in Harlem, Chicago parent-teacher associations were disproportionately made up of middle- and upper-class parents and overall membership was very low. Churches brought together the largest networks of black Chicagoans, but as in Harlem they generally did not take part in school reform debate or activities.

By the 1930s, the black press and citizen groups in Chicago increasingly complained of inadequate school conditions and overcrowding in their public schools. They spoke of the schools in terms of perpetuating, or even causing inequality, rather than a means toward upward mobility. As shown by historian Michael Homel, the black community that had given tacit approval to school quality during the 1920s was "brimming with anger and disillusionment" by World War II.[557]

When the most influential civil rights organizations in Chicago targeted schools, they engaged in general verbal protest for integration but did not go further. As in Harlem, the Chicago NAACP struggled with its implementation of the national organization's

[556] Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 128–150.
[557] Homel, *Down from Equality*, x–xi, 27, 58–59, 83, 125; Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 187–188.

strategy of litigation since the Illinois law was not clear about racial segregation in neighborhood schools that mirrored housing segregation and said nothing about equal resource allocation across districts. The most successful protests were those that involved ad-hoc parent groups fighting local conditions of school facilities in particular schools. These groups conducted verbal protests at mass meetings held in Chicago churches and direct actions such as pickets and small boycotts during the 1930s.

Beyond the poor physical condition and overcrowding of schools, civic organizations in Chicago failed to maintain a concerted protest in favor of better teachers, equal distribution of resources, or fairer access to academic curricula. Their push for desegregation was mild relative to the size of the growing problem. They devoted far less energy to the problem than to school conditions or representation on the board. They succeeded in winning small battles, but overall fell behind in the war against unequal, segregated schools.[558]

The Harlem community protests against unequal school conditions prior to *Brown* also paralleled to those of Detroit. Historian Karen Miller's study of racial clashes at an integrated Detroit high school during the 1940–1941 school year shows how racial violence at the school spurred mass mobilization in the black community against discrimination. As in New York City, a small group of civil rights activists had fought since the 1930s in favor of better school conditions, the inclusion of black history, and the hiring of greater number of African-American teachers. In the case of the Detroit movement, the riots at the high school kick-started community support for all of these goals. Parents and

[558] Homel, *Down from Equality*, 134–135, 151–157, 165–177.

other residents began to join in mass meetings and pressured the Board of Education with petitions, letter writing, and a large group presence at board meetings.[559]

Other northern cities such as Boston also witnessed efforts such as those by Harlem parents. Historian Jeanne Theoharis has shown how Boston mothers such as Ruth Batson and fellow community activists formed a public school NAACP subcommittee during the 1950s. The group investigated racial inequities in areas including school spending, student assignment to schools and curricular tracks, and teacher hiring. In all of these areas, committee members found evidence prior to *Brown* of active segregation and rampant discrimination at the policy level. They discovered that Boston school principals generally did not defend segregation, but instead problematically blamed school problems on parents who failed to properly prepare and motivate their children for academic success.[560]

Theoharis has also revealed activists' efforts to fight segregation prior to *Brown* in Los Angeles, where the school district claimed to adhere to a colorblind policy in terms similar to those used by the New York City Board of Education. Women such as civil rights activist Marnesba Tackett organized an effort through the NAACP Education Committee to fight student segregation, a shortage of black teachers, and racist curricula beginning in the

[559] Karen R. Miller, "'We Cannot Wait for Understanding to Come to Us': Community Activists Respond to Violence at Detroit's Northwestern High School, 1940–1941," in *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America*, ed. Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 242–52.
[560] Jeanne F. Theoharis, "'They Told Us Our Kids Were Stupid': Ruth Batson and the Educational Movement in Boston," in *Groundwork*, 21–23; Jeanne F. Theoharis, "Hidden in Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement Outside the South," in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30–32; Theoharis, "'We Saved the City,'" 65–67. Leaders such as Batson continued to lead desegregation struggles in Boston schools into the 1970s.

early 1950s. Tackett and her comrades remained central to community desegregation struggles in Los Angeles into the 1960s.[561]

In all of these cities, the course of public education for African-American children was primarily dictated by the powerful centralized school boards and superintendent offices. More than any other northern city with large numbers of black students, the school authorities in New York City made a good faith effort to provide equal educational opportunities regardless of race. Compared to schools across the lower North—such as those in New Jersey, Ohio, and Indiana—the New York City schools had a relatively low level of active, intentional discrimination since assignment of students was rarely made explicitly along racial lines. Unlike cities such as Philadelphia, official separation of black students was disallowed.[562]

Prior to the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the type of head-on clash between the New York City school administration and parents that became common during the 1960s notably did *not* occur. Harlem civil rights groups of the early- to mid-twentieth century were unable to pin down a culprit for inequality as could their southern counterparts who faced a uniformly and explicitly separate and unequal system of education. Civil rights groups in Harlem faced a more elusive, complicated form of segregation than their southern counterparts.

Relative to Chicago, the other city with a comparable number of black students in schools without de jure segregation, the New York City Board of Education implemented far more special programs with ambitious goals of solving social problems. The rise in racial segregation and poor conditions in Chicago's "Black Belt" closely paralleled those in

[561] Theoharis, "Hidden in Plain Sight," 36–39.
[562] Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*, 128–150.

Harlem between 1910 and 1960. As in New York City, the administration took a supposed colorblind approach and eliminated race from all official records. But the Chicago Board of Education did not deliver intensive specialized programs for black students on the scale tried in New York.[563]

Yet, the availability of extra programs and services in the schools did not necessarily lead to positive results. Too often Harlem parents found that such programs failed to deliver tangible opportunities to their children. This created an awkward situation in which they faced an ally of sorts, one who shared an interest in improving learning outcomes for students regardless of race. But the alliance severely faltered as the two sides defined the underlying causes in drastically different terms.

Administrators' confidence that they could solve Harlem students' problems within the existing system increasingly exceeded those of parents as the magnitude and complexity of those problems grew along with increasing segregation and community-wide poverty. The administration's exclusive strategy of changing the curriculum to meet the special needs of struggling students in Harlem was no match for the social and economic change underway in Harlem during the twentieth century, and it too easily gave way to a racial tracking of students. Even during the 1930s, when migration from the South slowed, the number of nearly-all-black schools climbed in Central Harlem as residential segregation rose when white families left for outer boroughs or suburbs. Students increasingly came from homes struggling with poverty during the Great Depression. During the war years and postwar citywide economic boom, families in Harlem yielded few economic gains. Job prospects remained severely limited due to discriminatory practices in hiring and union

[563] Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North*, 123–140; Homel, *Down from Equality*, 1–26.

membership. The second wave of the Great Migration, combined with the migration of Puerto Rican families to Harlem, further transformed the student population.

In the face of these massive demographic shifts, the school administration maintained full confidence that curricular adjustment could solve the problems faced by Harlem students. They were blind to the overwhelming effects of segregation. In stark contrast to the community, the administration moved in near lockstep in their approach to the deepening problems facing their students, remaining incredibly consistent from decade to decade in their approach to the problem. To some degree, it seems that they were kept in line by bureaucratic momentum. While it was a small group who wielded the bulk of power over schools in Harlem (at the superintendent and board of education level), they were operating within a massive system that constrained systemic change.

For generations, administrators had nurtured faith in the idea that modernized curricula could overcome any social problem. As early as the late 1910s, school administrators in charge of Harlem schools who confronted black students' lagging academic performance saw the need to revise academic curricula and add social services to better meet their students' needs. When racial segregation intensified over the next three decades as the Great Migration accelerated, administrators further added to schools' responsibilities, including layers of curricula geared towards promoting everything from psycho-social adjustment to intercultural harmony. These school professionals exuded a confidence in their schools' ability to overcome student deficits in the Harlem community simply through a change in the content of programming. Yet despite their good intentions, these curriculum-based changes were undermined by skimpy resources, bureaucratic

barriers, and a lack of well-thought-out incentives for teachers to undertake additional duties in schools.

Between 1941 and 1954, the administration was increasingly joined by teachers in favoring moderate, gradualist solutions, while the community headed in the other direction and demanded immediate change. Based on the understanding that their system had single-handedly enabled socioeconomic mobility to millions of immigrants during previous generations, New York City school administrators saw no reason to alter the fundamentals of their system. Subsequently, the administration's willingness to enact deep systemic changes in pursuit of equal opportunity increasingly fell short of the community's expectations. The curricular adjustments that they proposed in round after round of reform proved to be no match for the size of the challenges that they faced.

A notable change in administrators' implementation of specialized curricula for Harlem students was the scale on which they applied special programs and the regularity with which they steered students into lower academic tracks. This approach, devised in principle to help underprivileged students catch up to their more privileged counterparts in a diverse system, became a one-size-fits-all solution for huge groups of students.

An even deeper problem was the administrators' continued tendency to see students' family and community culture as the exclusive source of their academic unpreparedness. By the 1930s, they began to speak of "problem students" and "problem schools." This language spread grew widespread during the 1940s. Although administrators in charge of Harlem schools drew such conclusions about students' problems being embedded in their culture, they did not believe the problems were immutable. They saw their school system as powerful enough to correct any cultural

deficit, given the proper innovation in curriculum. But as the Harlem community saw their children's progress in school stagnate, or even decline, they cast blame in a different direction.

By 1954, the administrators had become so deeply entrenched in approaches designed to correct the students of Central Harlem, that they hardly registered accusations by parents that schools were the source of unequal learning. By that time, the two groups were virtually talking about two different problems. They rarely acknowledged that the problems were in fact interconnected, and even more rarely discussed possibilities for addressing the common underlying causes. In the 1930s, the Teachers Union took the important step of stepping back to look at the problem more systemically. They called for the delivery of specialized services to Harlem students based on deficits in their past learning, but only when delivered *in addition* to schools of equal quality to the wealthiest children of the city. Yet by the second half of the 1950s, the reform approach of the Teachers Union was carried on by very few as administrators protected their turf and parents and civil rights organizations narrowly targeted the most quantifiable forms of systemic discrimination.

By the time word of *Brown v. Board of Education* reached Harlem school reformers, community-based and school-based reformers had grown so firmly entrenched in their different positions that little room remained for compromise or collaboration. Superintendents, principals, and teachers focused on curricular adjustments while parents and their community allies rejected any reform except those granting immediate equality. The majority of the Harlem community now held the school administration accountable for reversing the problems of racial segregation and unequal facilities, even if these reflected

larger problems that extended beyond the schoolhouse. The administrators, on the other hand, had changed strikingly little in their approach to school reform in Harlem. Seeing little opportunity to influence any plans as major as desegregation or equalization of resources for majority-black schools, they instead returned to the familiar tactic of curricular adjustment, designed to customize schooling for African-American students.

A decade after *Brown*, Kenneth Clark and his research team at Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited observed (as quoted in the epigraph) that "schools have lost faith in the ability of their pupils to learn, and the community has lost faith in the ability of the schools to teach." This dissertation shows that the erosion of confidence and trust between the schools and the community began as early as the 1920s and had progressed a long way by the eve of *Brown v. Board of Education.*

Epilogue

In May 1954, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down the doctrine of "separate but equal" and ruled laws establishing racially segregated public schools unconstitutional. Thurgood Marshall and the rest of the NAACP legal team, who argued the case in favor of *Brown*, combined five cases in which parents had filed NAACP-backed lawsuits against their children's de jure segregated school districts. Although prominent New Yorkers made vital legal and scientific contributions to this case, the decision did not stem directly from local desegregation protests. It grew out of NAACP legal campaigns staged outside of the urban North.

The implications of the court case for northern schools were surprisingly not publicly discussed in earnest until soon before the final decision. Even after the decision, it took some time for educational and civil rights leaders to come to terms with its meaning for New York City since their type of segregation, keyed so closely to residential segregation, differed in character from that of the southern districts explicitly addressed by *Brown*.[564] *Brown* had no positive impact on the level of racial segregation in New York City schools during the decade after the decision. Between 1954 and 1964 the number of segregated schools with over 95 percent black and Puerto Rican students increased 400 percent.[565] Residential segregation continued to accelerate in districts such as Harlem with the in-migration of black and Latino residents and the exodus of white residents. More than one million white New Yorkers left the city during the 1950s, and more than 700,000

[564] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 181–182.
[565] Back, "Up South in New York," 456.

Puerto Ricans and African Americans arrived.[566] As the Harlem Tenants Council pointed out following the *Brown* decision, "Segregation in education, now outlawed by the Supreme Court, cannot really be eliminated until segregation in housing, too, is outlawed."[567] In 1955, the Public Education Association submitted a report titled "The Quality of Education Offered to Majority and Minority Students" at the request of Board of Education president, Arthur Levitt. The report documented widespread racial segregation in the schools and showed major gaps in the quality of facilities, teaching staff, and curricular opportunities offered in predominantly white schools and those that were mostly black and Puerto Rican.[568]

Yet, the passage of *Brown* dramatically changed the debate about schools in New York City, and Harlem in particular. Historian Martha Biondi has shown that New York City was of the first places in the country where the decision "sparked a push for integration."[569] The Supreme Court had struck down segregation of all kinds, regardless of cause or motivation, arguing that it "has a tendency to retard the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system."[570] Virtually all civil rights organizations active in New York City that hadn't already placed education as their number one area for demanding equal rights turned in this direction.

The school administration refused to implement strategies such as busing or rezoning to foster desegregation and counter trends in residential segregation. Under

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[566] Henry J. Perkinson, *The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education, 1865–1990* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 95; Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 261.
[567] Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 240.
[568] Rogers, *110 Livingston Street*, 19–20; Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 54.
[569] Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 246.
[570] Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

intensifying pressure from parents, they did make concessions, but these did not tend to satisfy parents and civil rights leaders. Following precedent back to the 1920s, these administrators attempted to equalize the playing field for students in areas like Harlem by infusing the schools with additional social services and remedial education.

But community activists, many of them the same women and men who led protest for absolute equality in Harlem schools during the 1930s and 1940s, rejected such plans outright. They emphasized that special programming meant special treatment, which in the spirit of the *Brown* decision they declared inherently unequal. The ruling solidified the link between segregation and school inequality, inspiring greater numbers of New York parents to protest against anything short of desegregation in their schools.

The most explicit connection between the issues taken up by *Brown* and the situation in Harlem was made by psychologist Kenneth Clark. Since World War II, Clark and his wife Mamie had been involved in studying the educational, social, and psychological needs of troubled children in Harlem and delivering them services in all of those areas through the Northside Center for Child Development in Harlem, which they founded in 1946.[571] Since 1952, both of the Clarks had contributed to desegregation court cases in which they testified based on their research findings about the psychological damage caused by segregated school conditions. Beginning in February 1954, three months before the *Brown* decision, Clark began a push to promote desegregation in New York City with a speech to the Urban League of Greater New York on the topic of segregation in the city's schools. For his audience, which included Mayor Robert Wagner, he surveyed the history of segregation in New York City schools and highlighted the persistent detrimental results

[571] Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power*, 18–19.

of segregation. He spoke very critically of the declining conditions for African-American students, denouncing the school system's lack of action by the school system to counter the trend.[572]

In April 1954, Kenneth Clark organized, through his newly formed temporary "Intergroup Committee on New York Schools," a gathering of about 200 representatives of sixty organizations at a conference titled "Children Apart," and hosted it at the Northside Center. He spoke to the group, making many of the same arguments that he did at the Urban League dinner in February, and presented evidence similar to that he used before the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Brown* case to argue the extent of the psychological damage of all children in segregated learning environments. His findings demonstrated that students in majority-black Harlem schools were falling behind academically relative to both white students in New York City and black students immigrating from the South and the West Indies. The longer they remained in segregated schools, the more they were falling behind. He presented shocking statistics on the number of Harlem children tracked into special education classes (103 total classes measured in his study) versus gifted education classes (six total classes in Harlem), and qualitative data on the low expectations shared by many of the teachers and administrators that fed the rush to provide specialized curricula. By the time of graduation from New York City schools, only two-tenths of 1 percent of black students met college entry requirements despite the fact that they represented nearly one third of the city's students.

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[572] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 189; Back, "Up South in New York," 95; Adina Back, "Exposing the 'Whole Segregation Myth': The Harlem Nine and New York City's School Desegregation Battles," in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940–1980*, ed. Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 69; Damon W. Freeman, "Not So Simple Justice: Kenneth B. Clark, Civil Rights, and the Dilemma of Power, 1940–1980" (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2004), 97.

To emphasize the magnitude of the inequities in Harlem schools, Clark referred back to LaGuardia's riot report, explaining that conditions had only worsened since the time of its publication in 1936. He criticized the board's use of gerrymandering to isolate Harlem students from academic and high-skill vocational schools. He highlighted the system's lack of mobility, which tracked students for their entire school careers based on elementary school experience. This closed opportunities for most Harlem students to access college-track academic courses and caused great damage to their self-esteem, since "the child can blame no one but himself and his alleged and created inferiority."[573]

Conference attendees, inspired by Clark's arguments, supported the establishment of a permanent Intergroup Committee on New York Schools, designed to gather evidence of the evils of segregation and pressure Superintendent Jansen and the Board of Education to promote integration throughout New York City schools. The new group consisted of a coalition of twenty-eight community organizations, including the NAACP, United Parents Association, and the American Jewish Congress. The organization accepted the Teachers Guild, but denied the Teachers Union membership due to its communist sympathies. The group named Clark chairman of the new organization and planned to meet again the following month at the Northside Center.[574] Civil rights and educational leaders from across the city joined the committee, including Ella Baker and Milton Galamison.[575]

Superintendent William Jansen responded with dismay to Clark's accusations, defending what he construed as the school system's successful adherence to a policy of

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[573] Clark, "Segregated Schools in New York City," 246–248, 249.
[574] Back, "Up South in New York," 99, 239; Freeman, "Not So Simple Justice," 98, 105.
[575] Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 153; Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 189. By 1957, Baker had left the organization and created Parents in Action, a group focused more on direct action to reform education.

colorblindness.[576] He believed strongly that the city's tradition of neighborhood schools should be maintained, even in the face of residential racial segregation. However, in response to pressure from the Intergroup Committee on Schools, the board created a Commission on Integration by unanimous decision in December 1954.[577] That commission soon reported, "it is a desirable policy to promote ethnic integration in our schools as a positive educational experience of which no child in the city should be deprived."[578]

However, the board and Superintendent William Jansen, under pressure from major anti-integration protests in Queens and Brooklyn and objections from teachers to teacher rotation plans, refused to enforce the desegregation strategies proposed by the commission.[579] They blamed segregated school conditions on residential patterns beyond their control and refused to alter the longstanding tradition of neighborhood schools with busing, rezoning, or other desegregation strategies.

Instead, the administration moved in 1959 toward another kind of concession: special school services, to be delivered primarily in areas serving poor, black students. Under pressure from parent organizations such as those mobilized by Milton Galamison, New York City administrators launched new enrichment programs for schools in Central Harlem and other predominantly black districts. Higher Horizons, the largest of these programs, grew out of the Demonstration Guidance Project started in West Harlem in 1956 at Junior High School 43 by Mamie and Kenneth Clark's Northside Center, and Clark served on the Advisory Committee to the program. In the Clarks' pilot program, dropout rates,

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[576] Freeman, "Not So Simple Justice," 97.
[577] Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 54.
[578] Rogers, *110 Livingston Street*, 19–20.
[579] Rogers, *110 Livingston Street*, 166–167; Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power*, 99–100.

continuation to college rates, and intelligence scores had all improved dramatically after the application of a range of intensive services, including psychological counseling, remedial math and reading training, half-sized classes, and parent workshops, supported by spending of more than $250 per student. According to self-assessment that included surveys for students, parents, and teachers, the pilot program achieved gains in reading scores, student behavior, and improved attendance rates relative to paired control schools. Morale among parents, students, and teachers improved. Parent participation in these schools rose dramatically. Students in the program schools went on far more field trips to the theater, ballet, concerts, and college campus tours.[580]

In 1959, Higher Horizons applied a similar program to thirty-one elementary schools and thirteen junior high schools. Nearly half of these were located in Harlem.[581] Program coordinator Daniel Schreiber maintained a similar approach as the Clarks' demonstration project, calling for infusion of intensive academic and social services into the schools in pursuit of equal cultural and educational opportunities for students from "less privileged groups." He aimed to reverse the "stifling of educational motivation" among students from poor families. On average, students in the selected schools were two years behind grade level in reading and over one and a half years behind in other academic subjects.[582] Like the Demonstration Guidance Project, Higher Horizons introduced remedial academic classes, teacher and parent workshops, and psychological and career

[580] Daniel Schreiber, "First Annual Progress Report, 1959–1960," n.d., manuscript, part 3, series D, reel 7, NAACP Papers; Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 260.
[581] Rogers, *110 Livingston Street*, 214; Schreiber, "First Annual Progress Report." Fifteen of the elementary schools and five of the junior high schools were located in Harlem.
[582] Schreiber, "First Annual Progress Report."

counseling to the selected schools.[583]

Yet, in the process of expansion the program was spread thin. Enacted in sixty-five schools serving almost 50,000 students, Higher Horizons reduced the extra per-pupil spending to forty dollars. This diluted the services and undercut much of the program's effectiveness. It reported few of the gains achieved by the demonstration project. The Board of Education phased out the program in 1966 after their internal assessment showed a failure to reach its goals.[584] This did not stop the school administration from claiming success. Superintendent John Theobald (1958–1962) called the project "the most significant breakthrough in any city toward equality in education."[585]

But unlike the Harlem Project of the 1940s and the All-Day Neighborhood Schools program of the 1930s, community leaders overwhelmingly sided against Higher Horizons. Many argued that it sidestepped the central problem of segregation. The Intergroup Committee on Schools, a coalition of civic agencies chaired by Clark, criticized Higher Horizons for ignoring the goal of integration and its failure to reach all children. The Brooklyn-based Parents Workshop for Equality, a group led by Rev. Milton Galamison in opposition to school segregation, took a similar stance, attacking the program for blaming parents and children for poor performance in school rather than underlying inequities that it argued only integration could eradicate.[586] The *Amsterdam News*, in an editorial titled "Lower Horizons" called the program an "educational country club" for administrators who

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[583] Schreiber, "First Annual Progress Report."
[584] Back, "Up South in New York," 384; Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power*, 113; Zitron, *The New York City Teachers Union, 1916–1964*, 115; Schreiber, "First Annual Progress Report"; Rogers, *110 Livingston Street*, 215–216.
[585] Ravitch, *The Great School Wars*, 260.
[586] Back, "Up South in New York," 386.

get paid extra money to "experiment on the intelligence of Negro students."[587]

During this same period, Harlem parents began to protest with direct action what they saw as the administration's sluggish and misguided response to segregation. Local civil rights leaders such as Ella Baker began to run parent workshops that mobilized toward a new strategy: boycotts of inadequate schools. When nine Harlem mothers, coined the "Little Rock Nine of Harlem" by the press, decided in September 1958, to keep their children out of Harlem Junior High Schools 120, 136 and 139 due to segregated, poor conditions, the school administration fought back.[588] The Board of Education accused the parents of breaking compulsory school attendance law and subpoenaed them to appear before the New York City Domestic Relations Court.[589] In defense, the mothers justified their action with evidence gathered by the Harlem parent-led Junior High School Coordinating Committee that documented the limited access to academic curriculum and the teacher shortages at those schools. They received support in engineering the boycott and defending their position from Paul Zuber, a black attorney for the City Board of Health.

Two of the cases, against the parents of Charlene Skipwith and Sheldon Rector, were sent to Judge Justine Wise Polier, who had played a critical role shaping the Harlem Project during the 1940s. She interpreted the situation broadly, treating the case as about segregation and racial equality rather than simply about truancy, and allowed the trial to question the equality of education in the schools in question. On December 15, 1958, she decided in favor of the parents. Polier determined that the Skipwiths and Rectors could not be legally forced to send their children to schools such as these that were systematically far

[587] "Lower Horizons," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 25, 1961.
[588] Back, "Up South in New York," 306, 336; Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty,* 189–190.
[589] Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power*, 1; Back, "Up South in New York," 326.

inferior to others in the city. She agreed with the parents' logic, asserting that the schools offered "inferior educational opportunities by reason of racial discrimination."[590] In her testimony, Bernice Skipwith very clearly linked her actions to the struggle against segregation and low standards in majority-black schools: "I have refused to send my daughter, Charlene, to P.S. 136, because it is a segregated school ... a segregated school with a very low curriculum."[591] Testimony from other witnesses, ranging from the schools' principals to social scientists, revealed that more than 55 percent of teachers at J.H.S. 136 were substitutes and a large number of the full-time teachers were not properly licensed. It also showed that while academic achievement (as measured by reading and math scores) was on the decline in recent years, a high proportion of the school day was filled with non-academic subjects, and there were substandard facilities.[592] In January, the board appealed the decision, leading the Harlem Parents Committee (founded by Harlem parents in 1963, and led by Isaiah Robinson and Thelma Johnson) to threaten a march on city hall.[593] In the face of this ultimatum, backed by Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Thurgood Marshall, Superintendent Theobald withdrew the board's appeal and allowed the children of the Harlem Nine to attend schools out of their district.[594]

The 1959 boycott and Polier's decision energized other education reform activists in northern cities and inspired them to turn to boycotts as a protest strategy, including another wave of parent-led boycotts in Harlem and across the city during 1959, as well as

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[590] Back, "Up South in New York," 307, 326.
[591] de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 206–207.
[592] Ibid., 212, 214.
[593] Carolyn Woods Eisenberg, "The Parents Movement at I.S. 201: From Integration to Black Power, 1958–1966: A Case Study of Developing Ideology" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1971), 72; de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 221.
[594] de Forest, "Justine Wise Polier," 223.

other protests in city suburbs such as New Rochelle.[595] The small boycott staged by the Harlem mothers represented an important backlash against the notion that special compensatory curriculum could solve problems in the schools. The segregated, unequal conditions that led to the Harlem Nine's boycott continued to worsen in the following years, and parents responded by boycotting the schools in much larger numbers. By this point the administration and the community had moved so far apart in their understanding of the problems facing the schools, and lost faith in one another as part of the solution, that the opportunities for cooperation were almost impossible.

During the early 1960s, instances of boycotts continued to climb and won small victories such as Open Enrollment, which allowed voluntary transfers of students out of schools. But Open Enrollment had major shortcomings. In that program, the onus for desegregation fell on families from black neighborhoods and remained voluntary in nature. In the face of weak, partial nature of the board's integration policies, racial segregation continued to climb.[596]

In response, civil rights leaders such as Milton Galamison, Annie Stein, and Ella Baker mobilized the parents of hundreds of thousands of children to boycott their schools.[597] Beginning in 1960, parents organized in groups such as the Parents' Workshop for Equality and Harlem Parents Committee, which grew out of local NAACP branches.[598] On February 3, 1964, nearly 500,000 students—almost half of the public school student population of New York City—stayed out of school, and parents picketed at nearly half of

[595] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 190–193.
[596] Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 123.
[597] Back, "Up South in New York," 380.
[598] Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 91–115; Rogers, *110 Livingston Street*, 104–105; Back, "Up South in New York," 401.

the city's schools.[599] Ninety-two percent of students in Harlem stayed home during the boycott, the highest proportion in the city's history.[600]

Administrators continued to see the problem through a lens of cultural deprivation, emphasizing the need for changes in the community, while community activists blamed the schools for causing the problem. The direction taken in the Higher Horizons program, which assumed a cultural deficit in communities such as Harlem, was not significantly changed after its completion in 1962. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT), by this time the dominant teachers union in the city, implemented its own compensatory curriculum beginning in 1964, called More Effective Schools. The Board of Education directed millions of dollars to the program, at times pressured into doing so by the UFT at the bargaining table.[601] Operating in more than twenty schools, it reduced class sizes and added staff to the classrooms to offer remedial classes. As historian Jerald Podair recounts, the UFT was caught off guard when the African-American Teachers Association objected vehemently to the More Effective Schools plan as part of their campaign to move the explanation of student failure away from the family and onto the teachers and administrators.[602]

By the mid-1960s, a combination of black nationalist ideology and frustration with the failure of the integration process led the Harlem community to give up on aspirations for integration in favor of demands for local community control: "Black control of Black

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[599] Taylor, *Knocking at Our Own Door*, 6, 141–142; Back, "Up South in New York," 381.
[600] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 463.
[601] Ibid., 468–69.
[602] Jerald E. Podair, "'White' Values, 'Black' Values: The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Controversy and New York City Culture, 1965–1975," *Radical History Review* 59 (spring 1994): 44–45.

schools."[603] Many leaders in the Harlem community had determined that the problems in the schools resulted not only from racial prejudice among the system's powerbrokers, but resulted from structural, systemic inequities. Seeing endless barriers to desegregation in their city and driven by what historian Daniel Perlstein calls a "politics of frustration" tied to the Black Power movement, they pragmatically turned to local control.[604]

The shift to community control occurred first in Harlem. In the fall of 1966, building was completed on Intermediate School 201 and it was scheduled to open to students in April. The Board of Education located the massive, windowless structure in East Harlem in an effort to address the problem of severe overcrowding in the area's junior high schools.[605] Under pressure from parent groups in the local community, the Board made an attempt to encourage integration at the school by trying to convince white parents from across the river in Queens to send their children to the school via the Triborough Bridge. Yet they got few takers, leaving the school with virtually all black and Puerto Rican students. The Harlem Parents Committee immediately mobilized to protest against the insufficient action toward desegregation at I.S. 201. When the Superintendent of Schools explained that a white principal would lead the school, the parents' frustration deepened, and they demanded budget control. Realizing that integration was not a realistic goal, they shifted their demands toward local control of school policy.[606] Parents placed a good teaching staff—well qualified and free of prejudice—at the top of their list.[607] If the school

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[603] Eisenberg, "The Parents Movement at I.S. 201," 1, 112.
[604] Daniel Perlstein, "The Dead End of Despair: Bayard Rustin, the 1968 New York School Crisis, and the Struggle for Racial Justice," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 31, no. 2 (July 2007): 93.
[605] Eisenberg, "The Parents Movement at I.S. 201," 42, 81.
[606] Back, "Up South in New York," 442–443.
[607] Eisenberg, "The Parents Movement at I.S. 201," 104.

would not be desegregated, then at least the local community should have control over staffing and curricular decisions. The school board and the parents agreed on a compromise plan proposed by Kenneth Clark to put academics from New York universities in charge of mediating policy decisions at the school, but the president of the United Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker, stood against the plan in fear of unfair treatment of white teachers, and derailed the plan. In 1966, the Harlem Parents Committee arranged for boycotts of the school, while starting talks with state and city officials to communicate their goals. They held pickets at the schools and marches and sit-ins at Board of Education headquarters and City Hall.[608] Local branches of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) supported the group.[609]

In 1967, the Mayor created a Panel on Decentralization of New York City Schools and with funding from the Ford Foundation launched a program of experimental, locally controlled schools, including one in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district of Brooklyn.[610] Located in one of the poorest areas in the city, the district's schools were almost entirely black and Puerto Rican. While the central administration used the language of "decentralization," local parents and political leaders called the experiment "community control."[611] In 1968, experiments with community control in Ocean Hill-Brownsville over administrative decisions led to clashes with teacher unions and the central administration exposed the limits of compromise on the issue. In the spring of 1968, when the newly elected school board "reassigned" nineteen white teachers out of the district, it was

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[608] Back, "Up South in New York," 444; Eisenberg, "The Parents Movement at I.S. 201," 315; Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power*, 117–118.
[609] Robert G. Newby and David B. Tyack, "Victims Without 'Crimes': Some Historical Perspectives on Black Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 40, no. 3 (Summer 1971): 204.
[610] Markowitz and Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power*, 118.
[611] Back, "Up South in New York," 448.

immediately confronted by the UFT.[612] When no compromise solution could be reached, the UFT called for a citywide strike, and three major strikes between August and November took the majority of teachers (over 55,000) out of school for eight weeks.[613]

Many of the frustrations communicated by parents, teachers, and civil rights organizations active in Harlem continued well beyond the 1960s, persisting to the present day. Community control politically empowered Harlem parents and civil rights organizations with whom they allied. However, it did little to alleviate problems that had plagued the schools since the 1920s. By most measures, Harlem schools failed to improve student outcomes following the switch to local control in the late 1960s. Since some moderate gains in reducing the black-white achievement gap during the 1970s and 1980s, the gap has widened further. In 2011, black and Latino students score lower and attend college at much lower rates than their white counterparts in the city. The schools in Harlem, and throughout New York City, are among the most racially segregated in the country.[614]

In 2002, the state granted Mayor Michael Bloomberg nine years of direct control over the city's schools; in 2009, it renewed his control through 2015. Under this arrangement, the mayor appoints all board members and a chancellor in charge of the New York City Department of Education. This newly-created department wields all control that

[612] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 476.
[613] Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York*, 71–123; Back, "Up South in New York," 451.
[614] Sharon Otterman and Robert Gebeloff, "Triumph Fades on Racial Gap in City Schools," *New York Times*, August 16, 2010; Thomas Sugrue, "School Daze," *The Atlantic*, August 16, 2010, http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2010/08/school-daze/61526/.

lay previously in the hands of the Board of Education.[615] Bloomberg justifies this power by explaining that only strong executive control over the schools can enact the sweeping reforms necessary to close "the shameful achievement gap between ethnicities." He no longer wants to "tinker at the margins."[616]

During the last decade, Bloomberg has left much of the major experimentation to independent charter schools. The most famous and best funded of these in New York are run by the Harlem Children's Zone. Geoffrey Canada founded this program in the 1990s as an intensive anti-poverty program that infuses educational and social services for residents of all ages on a block-by-block basis. Since beginning on a single block on West 119th Street, the project has expanded to an area stretching over ninety-seven blocks between 116th to 143rd Streets and serves about 10,000 children. Three charter schools in the zone provide small classrooms and a large supply of educational professionals, including two licensed teachers in each classroom, guidance counselors, and college counselors. The school year has been extended to eleven months and all students are eligible to attend an after-school program that runs until 6:00 p.m. and offers one-on-one tutoring and recreational activities.[617]

As discussed in this study, the infusion of social services into school curriculum has a long, unsuccessful history in Harlem. However, the Harlem Children's Zone breaks new ground for a few reasons. One is that the infusion of services is larger and continues over a longer period of time due a steadier stream of private funds. Another is the emphasis on

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[615] Javier C. Hernandez, "Paterson Signs Mayoral School-Control Bill," *New York Times*, City Room, August 8, 2011, http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/11/paterson-signs-mayoral-control-bill.
[616] Michael Bloomberg, 2008 State of the City Address, January 17, 2008.
[617] Javier C. Hernandez, "Educator is Said to Have Rejected Chancellor Job," *New York Times*, December 10, 2010.

academic curriculum geared toward college preparation and changes in the classroom such as class size and well-qualified teachers. The Children's Zone also employs approaches pioneered in programs such as James Comer's School Development Program, which since the 1980s have fostered cooperation between school professionals and parents across large public school systems to promote children's academic, social, and psychological development.

Reform programs such as the Children's Zone have been proven to boost student achievement.[618] Yet, it remains unseen how such a program can be scaled up to impact the large number of children in need of improved schooling. The century-long struggle for improved schools in Harlem warns us how difficult it is for schools to achieve change without proper support from all institutions that affect the lives of children and without the administrators, teachers, and parents approaching the problem in unison. It also reminds us that the notion that schools have the power to compensate for outside inequities in children's lives can be a dangerous one if taken to such an extreme that it excuses attention to the root causes of the problems.

[618] Paul Tough, "The Harlem Project," *New York Times Magazine,* June 20, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/20/magazine/the-harlem-project.html. However, success in the schools have been qualified and questioned, as in Sharon Otterman, "Lauded Harlem Schools Have Their Own Problems," *New York Times*, October 12, 2010.

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