The 1966 Seattle School Boycott and Freedom Schools:

A Message That Persists

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Abstract

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The 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools represent a case of successful activism that did not translate into successful long-term policy. Instead, the value of the boycott lies in the role it played as a catalyst in Seattle's decades-long series of desegregation attempts, which is still ongoing, and the enduring message it sends to modern policymakers. This thesis explores the history that led up to the boycott and freedom schools, taking a long view of the civil rights movement and Seattle's history of racism since its inception as a multiracial city, setting the scene for the city's school desegregation efforts that gained momentum in the 1960s. A thorough look at the organization and implementation of the school boycott and freedom schools reveals a highly successful event that captured the city's attention for weeks on end and relied on participation by over 3,000 students. Special attention is given to the attitudes and actions of secondary students, who left a written record that demonstrates their commitment to desegregation and their desire to be seen as political actors in their own right. After detailing the boycott itself, this thesis examines the events that followed into the 21st century, involving local activists, the school board, and community opposition to desegregation. Developing an understanding of the community forces at play in the 1966 school boycott and freedom schools, including the powerful role that the students themselves held, can inform current proponents of school desegregation as they continue to work towards achieving the demands put forth by those students and activists over five decades ago.

Introduction

What follows is a look at Seattle's unique school desegregation history and, in particular, at one significant event that is rarely examined in local history: the 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools. This study strives to capture the humanity of complex experiences, looking at the attitudes and actions of individuals who were involved in Seattle's school desegregation efforts in 1966 and the unique context in which they found themselves. Studying school desegregation in Seattle provides an opportunity to fill multiple gaps in the current history of desegregation efforts, by presenting the case of an urban district in the Northwest and a case of direct action involving elementary and secondary students. When these stories are missing from our study of desegregation history, we risk assuming that all desegregation efforts paralleled those that took place in the Jim Crow South. A fuller understanding of cases like Seattle help us understand the quieter forms of pervasive racism that enforced segregation elsewhere in the country without the use of the law, often in ways that perpetuated long past the civil rights era and into the current day. Similarly, expanding our understanding of desegregation efforts to include cases like Seattle shines a light on different forms of student activism and different forms of opposition, which allows us to more fully approach new racial justice efforts with a nuanced understanding of history and the wide range of challenges and successes that have taken place.

While a history of the 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools could focus solely on the battle between civil rights activists and the school administration, this study aims to give special focus to the role of the secondary students who boycotted their classes for two days, attended the freedom schools, and left a written record of their attitudes and actions pertaining to school segregation and desegregation. As Yoon Pak wrote in her own examination of student work, "Focusing the study on what students wrote places them at the center, and not at the

margins, in the social history of education."[1] Pak referred to Thomas Bender's essay *Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History* and his concept of "public culture" as a frame for what history aims to tell us. When student voice is left out of Seattle's history of desegregation efforts, a critical element of the public culture that contributed to the successes or failures of these efforts is missing. Student actions, such as the decision thousands of students made to participate in the boycott and freedom schools, and the letters and articles they wrote, are "manifestations of power in society,"[2] which Bender identifies as the heart of public culture. He warns modern historians against writing history that is "missing an essential component of the making of public culture,"[3] which has happened all too often in studies of desegregation in Seattle that neglect to incorporate student voice. A look at the 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools that centers on how students chose to use their limited political power serves as a reminder that for every school board battle, newspaper statement of opposition, and coordinated group of community members for or against desegregation, there were thousands of students whose daily experiences in segregated classrooms put them on the front lines.

This thesis is organized into three main parts. Part 1 examines local and national history leading up to 1966. This includes a look at Seattle as a multiracial city with a long past of racist policies and practices, establishing that the city managed to enforce widespread segregation without the use of Jim Crow laws. There is also a look at the meaning of education within the black freedom struggle, the prominent 1964 freedom schools in Mississippi, and the evolution of the movement from 1964 to 1966. Part 2 is a close-up look at the 1966 Seattle school boycott

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[1] Yoon Pak, *Wherever I Go, I Will Always Be A Loyal American,* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2002), 152.
[2] Thomas Bender, "Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History,* 73, no. 1 (June 1986): 126.
[3] Bender, "Wholes and Parts," 134.

and freedom schools, particularly the organizing effort, the media coverage and community controversy, and the experiences of student participants. Part 3 analyzes the significance of the boycott and freedom schools, in terms of its immediate impact, its decades-long aftermath for Seattle schools, and the symbolic meaning it had at the time it occurred as well as in the present day. The conclusion considers what this story might mean for the ongoing effort to desegregate Seattle's schools.

Whenever possible, individuals involved in the boycott effort and surrounding history are introduced with reference to their race. When individual students are discussed, their school is noted whenever possible. This refers to the school they regularly attend, not the freedom school location they attended. Ages or grade levels are also noted whenever possible - While students from kindergarten through 12th grade were included in the boycott and freedom schools, the written record that has been preserved reflects the experience of secondary students. As Part 1 explains, Seattle developed strictly segregated neighborhoods, and by the 1960s, the north end of the city was home to more affluent, primarily white schools, and the Central District was home to overcrowded, predominantly black schools. References to students or schools in the Central District or the north end should be understood in terms of this segregated geography. Garfield High School and Franklin High School are located in or near the Central District and served primarily black students, while Roosevelt High School and Ballard High School are located in the north end and were predominantly white.[4] Remembering this, along with the race of each student whenever it is noted, gives the reader some basic context for understanding these students and what their environments and experiences may have been like.

[4] See Appendix B for a map of Seattle schools

In the 21st century, Seattle public schools still face a segregation crisis. While the 1966 school boycott and freedom schools represent a case of successful activism in terms of planning, turnout, and community response, they did not result in successful long-lasting policy change. The message from the boycott and freedom schools persists. When current activists and policymakers come to the table without a deep understanding of the historical patterns of desegregation efforts in Seattle's schools, they lose a critical opportunity to reflect and learn from a past that continues to be relevant to how school is experienced by Seattle students. Further, in 1966 and today, those students who are being segregated or desegregated have limited political power, so when they have an avenue to use it (such as by skipping school, holding rallies, participating in freedom school, writing letters to the school board, being quoted in the newspaper – all activities students involved in the boycott engaged in), adults in positions of power ought to listen carefully. The 1966 boycott and freedom schools were one domino in a chain of events that has become a cycle of progress and push-back, ultimately leaving the city's schools still trying to address the unresolved demands made by the boycott. By examining this history, first with a look at the forces that set the stage for Seattle's desegregation effort, we can see stories that echo in today's schools through a new lens.

Part 1: Setting the Stage
History Leading to the 1966 Seattle School Boycott and Freedom Schools

An understanding of Seattle's 1966 desegregation efforts begins with an understanding of the black freedom struggle across America, the meaning of education within the black freedom struggle, and the course Seattle had taken from its inception to become a starkly segregated city by 1966. The connection between education and the fight for black freedom has antebellum origins which tie in to the freedom schools that became a core element of the civil rights movement. By the time the momentum of the southern civil rights movement and the Black

Power movement reached Seattle, the city already had a long history of racial oppression. Through over a century of groundwork, Seattle had achieved a segregated reality that did not need Jim Crow laws to ensure that black residents, like Asian residents and native inhabitants before them, were denied equal access to housing, employment, service, and education. As demonstrated in this section, the story of segregation and activism for civil rights in Seattle in 1966 was markedly different from the context of the most well-known 1964 freedom schools in Mississippi. Both are worth studying, yet Seattle's school boycott and freedom schools are rarely mentioned in local history. Taking a broad view of the history of civil rights, education, and the city of Seattle provide essential context to grasp the connections between the 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools and the history that demanded such action.

Education and the Black Freedom Struggle

The struggle for equal rights for black Americans was not confined to the South or to the brief civil rights era of the late 1950s and early 1960s. As Jacquelyn Dowd Hall recommends, adopting a long view of the civil rights movement "makes visible modern civil rights struggles in the North, Midwest, and West, which entered a new phase with the turn to black nationalism in the mid-1960s but had begun at least a quarter century before."[5] Hall argues that expanding beyond the South allows us to see "the broader and ultimately more durable patterns of privilege and exploitation that were American, not southern, in their origins and consequences."[6] Examining the black freedom struggle in understudied regions such as the Northwest provides powerful examples of those "durable patterns of privilege and exploitation" that are deeply American and are part of a story that extends before and after the traditional timeframe of the

[5] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): 1239.
[6] Hall, "Long Civil Rights Movement," 1243.

civil rights movement.

In his study of the Mississippi freedom schools, Jon Hale draws a line connecting the education wing of the civil rights movement in the 1960s back to earlier ideals of "literacy and education…as a politically volatile tool in antebellum America."[7] Any study of freedom schools should take care to attribute the ideology of education for freedom to the generations of black Americans that had utilized the tools and symbols of literacy and education to resist slavery and combat oppression. Under slavery, when the dangers associated with learning to read were great, many black mothers and fathers nonetheless found ways to connect their children with clandestine schooling.[8] Immediately following emancipation, freed slaves organized and became the greatest force to advocate for universal public education in the South, and revealed themselves to have "a fundamentally different consciousness of literacy, a class that viewed reading and writing as a contradiction of oppression."[9] This determination to gain an education for personal power and liberation is the origin of the black struggle for equal education in the 20th century.

While the Supreme Court ruled in its 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that public schools could no longer practice "separate but equal" segregation, the court enforced no specific timeline or accountability method. Only through activism and additional litigation were black families able to claim their children's legal rights in school. While federal oversight was eventually provided to ensure that *de jure* segregation was resolved (with varying success) in the

[7] Jon N. Hale, *The Freedom Schools : Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 21.
[8] Janet Cornelius, ""We Slipped and Learned to Read:" Slave Accounts of the Literacy Process, 1830-1865." *Phylon* 44, no. 3 (1983): 177.
[9] Anderson, James D. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 17.

South, there was no legal mandate to resolve *de facto* segregation outside of the Jim Crow states. School boycotts and freedom schools were held across the North in 1963 and 1964 as black families and local civil rights organizations rose up to demand equal educational opportunity, with the *Brown v. Board* decision to back up their constitutional rights.

The concept of freedom schools evolved from the Reconstruction-era term "Freedmen's schools" and the advent of "activist-oriented schools directly built on a premise of education for social change."[10] In the early 1960s, brief freedom schools for public school students were offered in various locales across the South as well as the North, providing activist-taught classes on academics as well as citizenship topics to students protesting segregated education.[11] Large-scale school boycotts in northern urban centers such as Chicago, New York, and Boston have been well-documented, where tens of thousands of students participated in skipping school for one-day boycotts to protest, march, or attend freedom schools.[12] It was these northern urban freedom schools that popularized the concept used by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign in Mississippi, where more than 40 freedom schools were set up across the state and operated all summer long. The freedom schools later held in Seattle took their inspiration from Mississippi's well-known 1964 freedom schools, though the term and concept had originated earlier.

Mississippi's 1964 freedom schools served black youth exclusively and operated as "an independent grassroots school system alternative to the state's underfunded and segregated

[10] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 34.
[11] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 35.
[12] "Feb. 3, 1964: New York City School Children Boycott School," *Zinn Education Project*, 2020; "Oct. 22, 1963: Chicago School Boycott," *Zinn Education Project*, 2020; Ellen Lake, "20,000 Pupils Stay Out of Class; Boston Freedom Schools Overflow," *Harvard Crimson*, February 27, 1964.

system of public education."[13] Since teachers were volunteers and not beholden to white school boards, content taught in the classroom was openly radical, challenging segregation and equipping elementary and secondary students to become politically active citizens.[14] Over 2,000 students attended freedom schools across Mississippi, where they sang freedom songs, took traditional academic courses, learned African American history and literature as well as the philosophy of the civil rights movement, expressed themselves creatively, and engaged in activism such as canvassing.[15] The experience that these freedom schools gave their participants demonstrates Hale's thesis that "education for freedom was one of the most salient aspects of the civil rights movement."[16] Youth participants and their families, as well as the volunteer teachers and organizers, emerged from the summer of 1964 ready to engage in the black freedom struggle in new ways, as critical agents in constructing a new social order.

Evolution of the Movement

The black freedom struggle went through a massive shift in the mid-1960s, particularly with the legislative and legal gains of 1964 and 1965 and the ideological shifts that led to the advent of the Black Power movement in 1966. Since the most commonly studied freedom schools were part of Freedom Summer in Mississippi 1964, a study of Seattle's freedom schools needs to properly establish not only the dramatically different geographic context, but also the dramatic difference between 1964 and 1966.

After the conclusion of Mississippi's Freedom Summer in 1964 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act that July, many civil rights organizations found themselves evaluating their

[13] Hale, *Freedom Schools*, 19.
[14] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 34-35.
[15] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 113-115, 157.
[16] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 36.

further plans. As Bayard Rustin wrote in February 1965, the forms of direct action being used and their end goals were changing:

> From sit-ins and freedom rides we have gone into rent strikes, boycotts, community organization, and political action. As a consequence of this natural evolution, the Negro today finds himself stymied by obstacles of far greater magnitude than the legal barriers he was attacking before: automation, urban decay, *de facto* school segregation. These are problems which, while conditioned by Jim Crow, do not vanish upon its demise.[17]

While many legal problems were solved on paper with the passages of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, society's deepest racial problems persisted, and the problems that existed outside of the context of Jim Crow, such as *de facto* school segregation and housing discrimination rampant in cities like Seattle, were virtually untouched by these landmark acts.

Also in 1965, as the attention of the black freedom movement was "geared toward the North, toward the cities, toward the problems of political powerlessness"[18] such as *de facto* segregation, the Watts riots took place in California, a state outside of the South and without Jim Crow laws, but nonetheless wracked by systemic racism. The city of Los Angeles used racially restricted covenants to enforce residential segregation, leaving Watts the primary neighborhood available to black residents.[19] The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) was known in the 1960s as the "most cruel in the nation," with a reputation of racist violence.[20] The rising tension and community trauma of living under these circumstances led to an eruption of rioting in response to a traffic stop of a young black man by a white police officer. After six days of

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[17] Bayard Rustin 1965, in *The Eyes on the Prize : Civil Rights Reader : Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle, 1954-1990.* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 202.
[18] Clayborne Carson, *The Eyes on the Prize : Civil Rights Reader : Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle, 1954-1990.* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 234.
[19] Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time : The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 30.
[20] Horne, *Fire This Time*, 134.

rioting, thousands of arrests, and dozens of deaths, the riots ended after intervention from the National Guard.[21] Black activism post-Watts could not be the same as it had been before. It was now evident to the nation that the American West and urban America did not offer respite from the problems of the rural South, where so much civil rights activism had played out. The Watts riots proved that racial tension and perhaps violence was inevitable in these places, too.

By 1966, after the legal and legislative victories of the previous two years and the simultaneous rising tensions of the Watts riots, the Vietnam War, and the assassination of Malcolm X, there rose a "powerful black nationalistic fervor which was emerging with sometimes volcanic force in the black communities everywhere,"[22] which would come to be seen after Stokely Carmichael's June 1966 speech as the Black Power movement. While the movement didn't have its name or organization at the time of the spring 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools, the tide was rising across the country, with attention heading beyond the South and towards issues like *de facto* segregation that had not been solved by the movement's legal victories. In her study of higher education in the South across two decades of the black freedom struggle, Joy Williamson-Lott states:

> The early phase of the black freedom struggle focused on eroding *de jure* segregation, discrimination, and white supremacist practices in southern institutions…With the Black Power movement, however, black activists and their allies focused on their local institutions, no matter where they were located, and insisted on institutional change with boycotts, building takeovers, and lists of demands.[23]

The commonly studied 1964 freedom schools in Mississippi present the former, while the 1966 freedom schools in Seattle tightly align with the latter.

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[21] James Queally, "Watts Riots: Traffic stop was the spark that ignited days of destruction in L.A." *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 2015.
[22] Carson, *The Eyes on the Prize*, 234.
[23] Joy Williamson-Lott, *Jim Crow Campus : Higher Education and the Struggle for a New Southern Social Order.* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018), 119.

Seattle's Discriminatory Multiracial History

From the city's earliest history, Seattle has been marked by racist policies and practices. Understanding this history makes it clear that, by the 20th century, the city was able to maintain and enforce segregation across many facets of public life without the need for Jim Crow laws. By the time that Seattle incorporated in 1869 with a population of 1,000, the region already had a 70-year history of extended visits by European and American explorers, fur traders, and pioneers, who had alternatingly used native societies in the region as a labor force, engaged in violent clashes with them, and spread disease that decimated the native population. Most native inhabitants of the Northwest had been placed on reservations by 1880, land that was continually shrinking as more and more of it was opened up to white settlers. The reservation system was the result of more than just a treaty or legal action to segregate natives, who were denied US citizenship, from whites; it was through "disease, intimidation, corruption, and sheer force of numbers that whites established a clear boundary between themselves and Indians."[24] Seattle's treatment of native residents was just the beginning of a larger social pattern, as Carlos Schwantes explains when he describes "that other boundary, the rigidly confining one that white settlers drew between themselves and others – the Indians, blacks, and Asians…Exclusion on the basis of race was…one of the gaping holes in the social fabric of the early Pacific Northwest."[25]

Chinese immigrants began coming to the region after 1860, and the predominant white response to Chinese workers was one of "intense racial antipathy," part of "a broader movement to consolidate Anglo power in the West"[26] as it carried on the pattern of racism utilized against

[24] Carlos A. Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest : An Interpretive History*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 153.
[25] Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest,* 142.
[26] Shelley Sang-Hee Lee, *Claiming the Oriental Gateway : Prewar Seattle and Japanese America*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 28.

native societies in the Northwest. Unemployed white workers rallied against the Chinese, leading to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, restricting immigration and citizenship. Japanese immigration rose in response, becoming Seattle's largest ethnic minority and establishing the International District.[27] Through the first half of the 20th century, open "hostility to Asians remained a prominent feature of Pacific Northwest life,"[28] including restrictions on property ownership and signs at restaurants to assure white customers that there were no Chinese employees.

The formation of the International District coincided with broader geographic segregation across the city. In the 1890s, "residents of all races began to regroup into income-graded neighborhoods: wealthy and middle class residents (mainly whites) relocated on the hills, while the poorer people of all races remained behind on the less desirable flatlands along the harbor."[29] Through the early 20th century, the Asian community continued to live in the International District and a fledgling black community found a home in the Central District.[30] This initially informal residential segregation became systematic and strictly enforced as neighborhoods developed racially restrictive covenants. These legal documents prohibited property owners from selling or renting homes to specific racial groups, most commonly blacks and Asians, and by the end of the 1920s, the only neighborhoods open to black and Asian residents were the Central District and the International District.[31]

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[27] Lee, *Oriental Gateway,* 32.
[28] Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest,* 159.
[29] Schwantes, *Pacific Northwest,* 155.
[30] "Segregated Seattle." *Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project*, 2004-2018. https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/segregated.htm
[31] Catherine Silva, "Racial Restricted Covenants History," *Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project*, 2009. https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/covenants_report.htm

World War II brought about significant changes to the racial composition of the city. Between 1940 and 1950, the black population rose 413 percent when over 10,000 African Americans moved to Seattle to find work in the city's defense industries.[32] Simultaneously, 7,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans were removed from Seattle and placed in internment camps in the wake of the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor.[33] Quite suddenly, blacks became the largest racial minority in the city.[34] Though many had come for government contract work, which hired across racial lines, unions commonly barred black workers from joining or denied them voting rights, and workplaces frequently discriminated against black workers by segregating bathrooms and lunchrooms, denying promotions, and openly voicing resentment at the "temporary" need to hire black industrial workers.[35]

As the racial makeup of the city became more complex in the 1940s, the prejudice expressed by white business owners became more universal. "Whites Only" signs appeared widely for the first time in business windows, and establishments that did serve all customers often segregated seating.[36] When racially restrictive housing covenants were ruled illegal in 1948, white neighborhoods across the city swiftly replaced them with discriminatory tactics broadly enforced by real estate agents and mortgage lenders. Two events in 1964 demonstrate how strictly residential segregation was maintained: the CORE tests, and the fair housing ordinance vote. To test how discriminatory Seattle's housing industry was, the Congress for

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[32] Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community : Seattle's Central District, from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 159.
[33] Jessie Kindig, "Northwest Antiwar History: Ch 2 Cracks in the Consensus." *Antiwar and Radical History Project – Pacific Northwest,* 2008. https://depts.washington.edu/antiwar/pnwhistory_wwii.shtml
[34] Taylor, *Forging of a Black Community,* 173
[35] Taylor, *Forging of a Black Community*, 164-165.
[36] Taylor, *Forging of a Black Community,* 168.

Racial Equality (CORE) would separately send black and white applicants of the same economic standing to view and apply for the same apartments. Not a single test resulted in the black applicant being given the rental unit, whereas the white applicant was offered the unit nearly 99% of the time.[37] During the same year, on March 10, 1964, the city voted on a fair housing ordinance that would prohibit "discrimination in the sale, lease, or rental of housing based on race."[38] The ordinance was voted down by a strong majority, 115,627 to 54,448. Seattle did not need Jim Crow laws to establish and maintain segregation; racial discrimination had been a part of the city's history from its inception, and by the mid-20th century, this was systematically enforced and evidenced in the arenas of employment, service establishments, housing, and therefore also schools.

Segregated schools were a direct result of segregated housing. With black families restricted to the Central District and public schools serving geographic neighborhoods, *de facto* segregation was inevitable. A 1961 lawsuit by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the voluntary transfer program established in 1963 did little to change the statistics - A 23-page analysis of Seattle school segregation compiled in 1964 demonstrated that 90 percent of black elementary school students attended 10 of Seattle's 86 elementary schools, eight of which were located in the Central District and had student populations that were over 85 percent nonwhite. Outside of the Central District, 75 schools had student populations that were 90-100 percent white.[39] Despite CORE's urging the school board to adopt a compulsory transfer program to integrate the schools, the voluntary transfer program

[37] Silva, "Racial Restrictive Covenants History"
[38] Silva, "Racial Restrictive Covenants History"
[39] Maid Adams, Joan Singler, Jean Durning, Bettylou Valentine. *Seattle in Black and White : The Congress of Racial Equality and the Fight for Equal Opportunity*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 145.

continued to be the only method the board was willing to support, and since the burden of transportation costs was left to parents, few students from the Central District were able to transfer into more affluent, predominantly white schools.

In 1965, while the NAACP began preparing a second lawsuit to bring against the school district, Seattle's Urban League submitted the Triad Plan to the school board, which recommended clustering elementary schools across racial lines and sending students and their neighborhood classmates to attend school alongside other students of the same age from elsewhere in the city. Seattle's civil rights groups banded together in support for the Triad plan, asking the board to adopt "any effective plan for school integration," citing the school district's own literature that stated: "Traditional education has not proved to be an effective answer to prejudice…As the problem grows, the necessity for action grows too."[40] When the school board again refused to take action, overcoming segregation in Seattle schools became Seattle CORE's top priority. In a joint press release from CORE and the NAACP, the city's civil rights leaders expressed their outrage, stating "never again will we allow ourselves to be duped into thinking…the School Board intends to do anything about ending segregation in the schools voluntarily."[41]

Conclusion

As Nancy Beadie, Joy Williamson-Lott, and their co-authors point out in their 2017 essay, "Gateways to the West, Part II: Education and the Making of Race, Place, and Culture in the West," more studies are needed of school segregation and desegregation in the West. Thus far, they claim, "[t]he history of education as a field has struggled to comprehend the

[40] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 147.
[41] "CORE-NAACP News Release, 5/13/65," News Releases, Seattle Collection, Box 5.

significance of such cases as anything other than a loose parallel to racial segregation in the Jim Crow South."[42] In the same essay, Beadie et. al. point out that "histories of urban education focused on western cities remain few and far between."[43] A deeper understanding of this unique history can inform current discussions of activism and policy as modern cities in the Northwest and across the nation strive to desegregate school systems that have barely budged since the civil rights era or that have resegregated in recent decades.

Part 2: Taking Action
The 1966 Seattle School Boycott and Freedom Schools

With the rejection of the Triad Plan and the swelling of a new phase in the black freedom struggle, the stage was set for the 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools. The sections below detail how the boycott and freedom schools were organized, who was involved, how the media and the community understood the boycott and freedom schools, and most importantly, what student participants experienced. This event was unique in its large scale, level of community and student involvement, and rapid timeline. Examining the attitudes and actions of the individuals who lived this experience as participants, leaders, and critics allows modern readers to see this piece of Seattle's history as something with textures and layers rather than just an objective timeline of events and outcomes. As current activists, policy makers, and community members work to overcome ongoing racist policies and practices in Seattle's public schools, there is much to learn from taking a nuanced look at the efforts of local civil rights leaders and impassioned students in 1966, who united in large-scale activism that drew widespread attention to the reality of school segregation.

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[42] Nancy Beadie, et al, "Gateways to the West, Part II: Education and the Making of Race, Place, and Culture in the West." *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2017): 102.
[43] Beadie et al, "Gateways to the West," 105.

Coordinating the Boycott

In 1965, as the school board rejected the Triad Plan and Seattle's united civil rights organizations expressed their distrust, a new superintendent was settling in. Forbes Bottomly was the first to come in from outside of Seattle to assume the role since 1900. Ed Palmason, often identified as the most "liberal" member of the all-white school board, presumably because he had been a proponent of school desegregation from the earliest efforts, said of Bottomly, "We knew he would come like a bombshell…The reason we hired him was his progressive stance…he was willing to shake the tree."[44] In his previous role in Colorado, Bottomly had successfully created an innovative conservation-focused "out-of-doors" school where 3,000 students each year spent a week in the wilderness learning from ecological experts.[45] He was the son of a Montana supreme court justice and had an academic background in history, political science, and Spanish, with early aspirations to work in educational administration.[46] If his previous work made Bottomly appear "progressive" to Palmason, it did not reflect an eagerness to eliminate *de facto* segregation – Shortly after assuming the role in Seattle, Bottomly made statements discouraging new desegregation efforts, saying, "We do not want to play around with little children's lives because adults are not able to solve their civil rights problems."[47]

Bottomly did not come in with solutions to the district's segregation crisis, but reflected later on the service done for him by Robert Bass, the sole black administrator in the school district. In Bottomly's own words, Bass "took me into the Central Area, introduced me to

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[44] Doris H. Pieroth, "With All Deliberate Caution: School Integration in Seattle, 1954-1968." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1982): 55.
[45] *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs,* Denver Colorado, 1964, 252-253.
[46] Pieroth, "With All Deliberate Caution," 61.
[47] *Seattle Times*, July 1, 1965.

families, made sure that I attended meetings, and made it possible for me to become educated in a short time concerning some of our toughest urban problems."[48] As Bottomly had his eyes opened to the realities of residential segregation in his new city, members of the Central Area Civil Rights Committee (CACRC) met with the new superintendent and told him he would have until February 1966 to get to know the city's schools and that they would expect action to be taken towards integration. When February came and went without news from school administration, CACRC tried to meet with Bottomly again but began to understand that he was not serious about addressing segregation in schools. One CACRC member, Walter Hundley of CORE, met with a small number of CACRC members after coming to terms with Bottomly's inaction, and described this conversation:

> I told them, you know the schools…the CORE committee wasn't able to get anywhere with the School District —there were just a lot of games being played. I said, "We've got to do something…we've really got to move this thing—and its got to be dramatic." And I suggested that we have a school boycott, but that we must do it in the most responsible manner possible… it's going to be a lot of work for everybody. The organizational logistical kind of thing would…be tremendous—but I think we could pull it off."[49]

CACRC expressed their disappointment to Bottomly and took action with CORE and the NAACP to organize a boycott for March 31 and April 1.

Seattle's civil rights organizations collaborated to plan the two-day boycott and freedom schools in just six weeks. Representatives from the NAACP, CORE, and CACRC formed a boycott committee, and met throughout late February and March to discuss the financial, legal, political, and moral ramifications of the boycott, prepare materials for community distribution, and coordinate freedom school locations, volunteers, and curriculum. The committee organized

[48] Bottomly to Homer Boroughs, Jr., June 26, 1970, Seattle Public School Records Collection, Box 2.
[49] Doris H. Pieroth, *Desegregating the Public Schools, Seattle, Washington, 1954-1968*, (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1979), 252.

freedom schools for elementary and secondary students in eight locations, mostly churches in and around the Central District, with robust two-day schedules of civil rights curriculum, small group discussions, and creative work, as well as live musical performances and some practical content such as a seminar on financial aid for college.[50] Each freedom school had two volunteer principals, one black and one white, who oversaw a total teaching corps of 100 volunteers,[51] a mix of professional teachers and community members that included prominent musicians, artists, clergymen, lawyers, and professors.[52] In his look at SNCC's 1964 Freedom Summer, Jon Hale notes that subsequent freedom schools that aimed to "fill the void caused by school boycotts" like these ones in Seattle in 1966 "restored an original vision"[53] of the freedom school concept.

Many organizers from the array of Seattle civil rights organizations contributed their time and skills to the boycott committee.[54] Philip Burton was a black lawyer from Kansas who had worked on the initial filing of *Brown v. Board* before moving to Seattle, where he spent decades fighting cases for the Seattle branch of the NAACP and prepared legal documentation in defense of the boycott. Walter Hundley was a black founding member of CORE and CACRC who had a background in ministry and social work and was the chairman of CORE during the time of the boycott. Reverend John Adams was the minister of the First AME Church, one of the city's most prominent black churches, and was the chairman of CACRC and one of Seattle's loudest voices in the black freedom struggle. Sue Gottfried grew up as a white girl in the segregated South before moving to Seattle in adulthood and was involved in civil rights, anti-war, and feminist

[50] Meeting Minutes and Freedom School Schedules, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-003, Box 1.
[51] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 157.
[52] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 165.
[53] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 176.
[54] See Appendix C for list of key individuals

activism.[55] Carla Chotzen was a Jewish woman who fled Germany at the start of the Holocaust when she was a teenager.[56] The boycott committee was an all-volunteer force, and represented true collaboration between multiple local civil rights organizations that often emphasized different elements of the black freedom struggle.

While much of the written record captures the activism done by black men and white women, many black women undoubtedly carried much of the work, both in terms of organizing behind the scenes and in their roles as mothers of students in the community. Two black women in particular played key roles in the boycott, though their names rarely appear in boycott committee meeting minutes. E. June Smith had been president of the Seattle NAACP since 1963 and was the only female member of CACRC. She lent her name and the weight of her organization to official boycott notices and arranged for volunteers to greet families at school drop-off to encourage registration for the freedom schools.[57] Roberta Byrd, a school librarian who was also a local TV personality, helped prepare freedom school curriculum and served as co-principal of a freedom school, and went on to become the first female principal of a Seattle high school. Bottomly later said of Byrd, "She held my feet to the fire and kept them there… She gave me some of the most valuable advice I ever had. She made me listen and kept me honest."[58] The insights and contributions of these women in particular undoubtedly influenced the success of the boycott and freedom schools, despite the fact that their names do not surface as frequently as others in most records of the event.

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[55] Obituary of Sue Davidson, *The New York Times*, July 1, 2018.
[56] Interviews with Loren, Benjamin, and Yvonne Chotzen, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-002 Box 1.
[57] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 158.
[58] Lily Eng, "Educator Roberta Byrd Barr Dies at 74 – TV Host, Principal Had Key Community Role," *Seattle Times*, June 25, 1993.

In 1964, Gottfried wanted to go teach at Mississippi's freedom schools, but when she asked Hundley for a letter of recommendation, he encouraged her to instead head CORE's effort to integrate Seattle's schools. Gottfried agreed, as long as she could work with a co-chair to head the committee, and Chotzen became her partner.[59] At the February 18th meeting to begin organizing the 1966 boycott and freedom schools, Chotzen volunteered to be the overall coordinator of the boycott, and Gottfried took on the role of documentation, including production and distribution of mailings and signs, while Reverend Adams took charge of finding locations for the freedom schools.[60] At the close of that initial meeting, it was decided that Gottfried would send a letter to Palmason and Bottomly on March 5th to notify them of the boycott and ask that by summer the district deliver a plan, with dates attached, to desegregate Seattle's schools. The boycott committee agreed that no further dialogue would be had with the school board or administration until a "concrete overall plan is presented" (emphasis original).[61] This represents the last direct communication between the boycott organizers and school leaders until after the boycott, but as seen in the following section on media coverage, a dialogue between the committee and the schools continued via newspaper statements.

A constant theme in the planning phase of the boycott was the role of students, whose participation would be essential to ensure the boycott's success. Meeting minutes demonstrate that organizers intended to center the event on the students themselves and their experiences, thoughts, and opportunity to learn in freedom schools. Freedom school teachers were trained to "emphasize creating *dialogue* rather than *talking to* students,"[62] and organizers noted that student

[59] Sue Davidson Gottfried Interview, April 17, 2007, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-002 Box 1.
[60] Gottfried Interview, Collection 1563-002 Box 1.
[61] Meeting Minutes, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-003, Box 1.
[62] Adams et al*, Seattle in Black and White,* 159.

events leading up to the boycott were a time to "let kids put together leaflet announcing rally & describing the problem" with committee members "present only to answer questions."[63] These notes and many others suggest that organizers were intent on the boycott being a case of student activism, though not a case of student leadership or organization.

This falls short of the intentional redistribution of power, from adults to youth, that dramatically shaped the experience of those involved in Mississippi's freedom schools of 1964, where students were taught how to canvas for voting registration and desegregate libraries and lunch counters.[64] Still, in Seattle, the role students played in the boycott was its own important form of activism. In her look at southern student activism on college campuses, Joy Williamson-Lott considers student activism to be more than just the most dramatic forms of protest, citing the many students who "used campus newspapers, formal and informal organizations, classrooms, dormitories, and cafeterias to plan and execute activism both on and off campus." She notes that casting a wider net when looking for examples of student activism "expands the scholarly understanding of what constitutes radical student protest."[65] In the case of the Seattle school boycott, student protest took the form of participating in rallies and forums, skipping classes unexcused, attending freedom schools, writing letters to local leaders, producing creative work, and giving quotes to the newspaper. The political involvement of students was a significant matter to those for and against the boycott, and the students themselves had quite a bit to say, as described in detail in the section "Student Experience" below.

When the first day of the boycott came, freedom schools were overwhelmed. Over 3,000 students showed up at the eight original freedom schools, prompting three more locations to

[63] Meeting Minutes, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-003, Box 1.
[64] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 131.
[65] Williamson-Lott, *Jim Crow Campus*, 4.

open at the last minute.[66] Central District schools experienced the highest rates of absenteeism, with some schools over half empty. Overall about 30% of freedom school students were white.[67] Precise racial attendance data was not taken, and while some sources suggest that the boycott "showed considerable white and Asian support for desegregation,"[68] others remember the freedom school students as "two-thirds of them black and one-third white."[69] Logistically, the event was pulled off with great success, with transportation provided for north end students to be able to reach the freedom schools, which were all located in and around the Central District so black students would have the easiest access. Remarkable agility was displayed by the all-volunteer staff, who managed to open and set up additional classrooms, utilize outdoor space and chapel sanctuaries, and run out to buy 525 McDonald's hamburgers at 15 cents apiece for the students who came without a sack lunch.[70] After six weeks of careful planning and cross-organization collaboration, the event received community support far beyond anticipation, largely thanks to the work of students who spread the word among their peers and media coverage that made the boycott a central community issue for weeks.

Thanks to the hard work of the boycott committee, the positive reception from thousands of students and families, and the media coverage, detailed below, that placed the boycott front and center in the eyes of the community, the two-day boycott and freedom schools delivered a strong message of support for desegregation to Bottomly and the school board. During the planning phase, Bottomly was primarily in communication with the boycott committee via media

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[66] Adams et al*, Seattle in Black and White,* 163.
[67] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 168.
[68] Quintard Taylor, "The Civil Rights Movement in the American West: Black Protest in Seattle, 1960-1970." *The Journal of Negro History* 80, no. 1 (1995): 9.
[69] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 163.
[70] Gottfried Interview, Collection 1563-002 Box 1.

statements, as seen in the following section, and individual school board members were publicly very quiet about the controversy, likely because much of the district's funding at the time came from citywide levies. This system meant that elected school board members "were reluctant to bear political liability associated with mandatory desegregation for fear of antagonizing a major source of revenue,"[71] and would not take a public stance on controversial issues. As planned, the boycott committee refused to engage in further direct dialogue with Bottomly or the school board until officials had a concrete desegregation plan. Within his first year on the job, Bottomly was being publicly held accountable to resolve *de facto* segregation, first in private meetings with civil rights leadership, and subsequently in front of the whole city with the boycott.

Media Coverage and Community Response

In the weeks preceding the boycott, community members across the city followed the developments of the boycott and freedom schools in the local media, particularly the *Seattle Times*. This section highlights basic newspaper coverage of the boycott plans, opposition to the boycott as demonstrated in the newspaper, and media statements from Bottomly as well as boycott organizers that constitute a public dialogue between the school administration and the city's civil rights leaders as the date of the boycott drew closer. Examining the record preserved in these newspaper articles gives a sense of how the community responded to the impending boycott and freedom schools, particularly the main points of opposition that developed.

Local media coverage of the boycott was extensive. From the time the planned boycott hit the press in late February through the week following the boycott, over 50 articles directly about the boycott and freedom schools were written in the *Seattle Times*. This included two

[71] Catherine E. Veninga, *Road Scholars : School Busing and the Politics of Integration in Seattle*, (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2005), 68.

solemn front-page letters from the newspaper leadership to readers boldly declaring "Boycott Threat Ill-Advised"[72] and "Confidence in School Board."[73] Despite the newspaper's opposition to the boycott, much of the press included favorable statements from boycott committee members and local students, including the many examples below. Many *Seattle Times* pieces on the boycott were written by Herb Robinson, assistant editor, who in 1973 would be given an award from the Washington State School Directors Association for "improving public understanding of local education."[74] Robinson often centered his articles on the broader societal impact of current events, with statements such as, "[E]ven if only a handful of children are absent from class on those two days, the boycott sponsors have accomplished their purpose by stirring up the most vigorous public debate in Seattle to date on racial imbalance in the schools." Robinson's articles make it clear that, for weeks, the boycott was not just a plan being organized by a small committee, but in fact "an issue that has assumed the proportions of a major community controversy."[75]

Bottomly responded to the boycott through various media statements, acknowledging the problem of "racial balance" in the schools but opposing the boycott. He asserted that "great progress has been made" and that the issue would need to be addressed not just by schools, but also by "those who deal with housing and employment."[76] With regard to the boycott itself, however, the *Seattle Times* noted that Bottomly "has rightly made clear that no decisions will be changed on the basis of such misguided pressures," and the school board issued one official

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[72] "Boycott Threat Ill-Advised," *Seattle Times*, February 24, 1966.
[73] "Confidence in School Board." *Seattle Times*, March 29, 1966.
[74] Erik Lacitis, "Herb Robinson: Respected Newspaper, TV Journalist," *Seattle Times,* Oct 17 2003.
[75] Herb Robinson, "Reaction to Boycott Surprises Backers," *Seattle Times*, March 20 1966.
[76] Bill Sieverling, "The School Boycott: a Crisis of Conscience," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 1966.

response, saying that the board "recognizes that it has a responsibility to promote racial understanding within its broad obligation to provide a high-quality educational program."[77] Bottomly clearly directed some of his remarks to the boycott organizers, saying he was "sorry to see the civil-rights leaders using this kind of threat…I am sorry to see the children taken out of school and thus used because adults cannot settle their problems. I hope the civil-rights leaders will reconsider this action." This received a direct response from E. June Smith, who told reporters that the boycott would be called off if the school administration would make a policy statement offering a concrete plan for widespread desegregation.[78]

Such a plan did not materialize, but a series of policy statements did come, which together would go on to be regarded as "a bulwark of district policy."[79] At a school board meeting in early March, a new statement on racial discrimination was announced: "We believe that an integrated education provides better racial understanding among all people. We will work to bring this about by whatever just, reasonable and educationally sound means are available to us."[80] This was followed up with communication to a broader audience on March 30, the day before the boycott, when all public school students were sent home with an official district report on racial discrimination. The report featured the following statement from Bottomly: "There is no more urgent cause in our time than that of reaching out to bring our Negro citizens in the mainstream of opportunity. The sting of history is behind this urgency."[81] This statement became

[77] "Boycott Threat Ill-Advised," *Seattle Times*, February 24, 1966.
[78] Herb Robinson, "Central Area Protest: Seattle Civil-Rights Leaders Set School Boycott," *Seattle Times*, 1966.
[79] Pieroth, "With All Deliberate Caution," 56.
[80] Susan Stier, Henry Reed, and Delmar Nordquist, *Middle Schools in Perspective*, (Seattle: Seattle Public Schools, 1973), 9.
[81] "School Report Tells of Try to Reduce Racial Imbalance," *Seattle Times*, March 29, 1966.

seen as a formal announcement of the school administration's commitment to integration.[82] Still, Bottomly continued to share the responsibility of desegregation, saying, "fair-housing and employment practices must be affected. The schools cannot solve it alone, but they do have the moral responsibility to move ahead."[83] This statement sent home with students, and released to the *Seattle Times* the day before, represents his final attempt to publicly answer the call of the boycott without delivering any concrete plan.

Significant strife between Seattle area clergy broke out in response to the boycott, which was backed by the Greater Seattle Council of Churches in a statement on March 16 but vehemently opposed by many individual pastors and churchgoers.[84] This was covered by *Seattle Times* journalist Lane Smith, the religion editor, who wrote at least a dozen articles on the boycott and gave voice to both sides of the debate. His articles chronicled the official stance of the Council of Churches, backlash from a group of 15 downtown ministers who released a statement against the boycott, and the response that Central District ministers gave in return.[85] Smith's coverage served as a method of public conversation between these religious leaders for and against the boycott, featuring long quotations from ministers responding to one another. The downtown ministers who opposed the boycott had their names, churches, and signed statement published in Smith's column, saying, "We publicly disassociate ourselves from the pronouncements of the board of directors of the Council of Churches of Greater Seattle… It fosters disrespect for law, [and] condones insubordination thinly veiled by the problem of civil

[82] Veninga, *Road Scholars,* 77.
[83] "School Report," *Seattle Times*, March 29, 1966.
[84] Lane Smith, "School-Boycott Controversy Among Clergy Cuts Deeper," *Seattle Times*, March 19, 1966.
[85] Lane Smith, "Central-Area Ministers Rap Downtown Pastors on Boycott," *Seattle Times*, March 21, 1966.

rights."[86] Reverend Adams, both a member of the boycott committee and part of the group of Central District ministers to reply to the statement of clergy against the boycott, gave Smith a sharply-worded rebuttal to publish, saying of the opposing clergy, "These ministers of a diluted Gospel say that the boycott is illegal and disruptive. I would remind these custodians of the status quo that these segregated schools against which we boycott have been illegal for 12 years and they never had said a mumbling word."[87] Smith's thorough coverage of the support and opposition of Seattle's religious leaders revealed to community members another powerful layer of society that was getting pulled into the conversation surrounding the boycott.

Many white residents spoke out against the boycott, often using their religious affiliation as a reason to oppose breaking the law. The *Times* received so many letters criticizing the approval from the Council of Churches that they did not have space to publish them all. The representative excerpts that were published include statements such as, "The news that churchmen back the school boycott is indeed heartbreaking and contrary to the will of God…The child's absence from school will make the parent a law-breaker," and "I am surprised that the Council of Churches gives its sanction to the breaking of a law."[88] Michael Rosen, who had been involved in Freedom Summer in Mississippi and was now executive secretary of Washington's branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, pointed out that it was the school board that had in fact been breaking the law for twelve years by allowing segregated schools to continue to operate since the *Brown v. Board* decision.[89] Critiquing the boycott based on its legality proved to be a weak stance for the opposition to take when faced with the *Brown* mandate.

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[86] Smith, L. "School-Boycott Controversy," *Seattle Times*, March 19, 1966.
[87] Smith, L. "School-Boycott Controversy," *Seattle Times*, March 19, 1966.
[88] "Church Council's Boycott O.K. Assailed," *Seattle Times*, 1966.
[89] Adams et al*, Seattle in Black and White,* 161.

Those opposed almost universally stated their support for equal educational opportunity but disapproved of the method, the audience, and the involvement of children. This stance was summarized in one of the two official statements from the *Seattle Times*:

> *The Times* agrees with the objectives of civil-rights militants and members of the clergy in seeking to eradicate racial imbalance in the school system. But we disagree with the tactic of using the boycott as a weapon to coerce the School Board into taking hasty and ill-advised actions.[90]

Repeatedly, letters to the editor reflect the opinion that the boycott was using students as political pawns, with phrasing such as, "The most offensive of all civil-rights demonstrations are those in which children are used…Parents should refuse to let their children become pawns of any group."[91] This worry about the misuse of children was repeated so often that Reverend Adams replied by pointing out that "Negro children are already being misused" by the segregated school system, going on to assert that:

> White parents are using their children and Negro children, too, to avoid facing the most pressing domestic problem in America…[T]he most cynical and degrading use of Negro children is to let them grow up accepting second-class citizenship and inferior education…It is only when we ask them to protest their exploitation and miseducation that concern is expressed for their welfare.[92]

Segregated education gave black children and white children different roles to play in their society, and in pointing this out, Reverend Adams managed to turn a common complaint about the boycott method into a searing statement about the city's segregation crisis.

Of 13 letters to the editor about the boycott published in the *Seattle Times*, only one, written by a high school student, was positive, emphatically inviting the community to participate: "Let all races be unified in action and in freedom schools these two days to bear

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[90] "Confidence in School Board," *Seattle Times*, March 29, 1966.
[91] E. N., "Children Pawns," *Seattle Times*, 1966.
[92] "'Negro Children Are Already Being Misused,' Says Minister," *Seattle Times*, 1966.

witness to our belief in integration."[93] Many other students agreed with this sentiment and had their words published in various other newspaper columns, as detailed in the following section. While many adults objected to the involvement of students, youth repeatedly made it clear that they wanted to take action on behalf of their own education.

The *Seattle Times* coverage of the boycott proved to be a mechanism for a sort of back-and-forth dialogue between boycott organizers and supporters and the community opposition, including Bottomly. This reveals that the community's attention was captured, tensions were high, and the public had a great deal of knowledge about the stance of civil rights organizations, local clergy, fellow city residents, and the schools. The newspaper also gave a voice to students, one key way in which youth were able to exercise their limited political power to address their community and local leadership on a topic that centered on their everyday lives, as seen below.

Student Experience

At the heart of the boycott and freedom schools stood the students themselves and their experience as participants. Rather than being used as pawns, these students were political actors, whose actions were "manifestations of power in society,"[94] at the heart of public culture. Reverend Adams had issued an invitation, claiming it was "time for students themselves to press for the achievement of integration,"[95] and thousands of students in Seattle were prepared to do so. As Catherine Veninga asserts in her study of desegregation in Seattle schools in the 1980s, "it is clear that the actual work of desegregation has been performed by students."[96] Similarly, the actual work of the boycott was performed by the students. All of the tremendous effort put forth

[93] Peter Gilmartin, "Boycott's Aims," *Seattle Times*, 1966.
[94] Bender, "Wholes and Parts," 126.
[95] "'Negro Children Are Already Being Misused,' Says Minister," *Seattle Times*, 1966.
[96] Veninga, *Road Scholars*, 66.

by the boycott committee and community support would have amounted to nothing more than an idea if students had not decided to skip school and participate. Despite having had little to do with originating or organizing the boycott, the decision that thousands of students made to participate was a powerful factor in the boycott's success.

In the weeks leading up to the boycott, many students were vocal about their intention to participate, participating in youth rallies and giving quotes for the newspaper. Multiple youth rallies and forums took place, mostly organized by the boycott committee or sponsored by the NAACP Youth Council. Members of the boycott committee repeatedly stressed to one another that, if they were present at these events, they would be there as "resource people."[97] High school students met and put their own illustrated leaflets together to announce their events and coordinate broad support for the boycott, and served as panel discussion moderators.

At one such public meeting, sponsored by the NAACP Youth Council, students in favor of and against the boycott spoke on a panel together. Annette Shepard, a black student at Garfield High School, shared demographics that made the reality of school segregation undeniable to the audience. She pointed out that, while the city had 11 high schools, three-fourths of all black students in Seattle went to Garfield. Similarly, she noted that two of the city's 16 middle schools were over 80 percent black, while the majority of the other middle schools were over 99 percent white. When other students on the panel suggested that the boycott would impede the school board's efforts to address the situation, Shepard declared, "The nice talk has been talked out; it has been tried. The boycott is our last resort."[98] While the written record primarily reflects the sentiments of students who supported the boycott, including the many

[97] March 18 Meeting minutes, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-003, Box 1.
[98] "Pupils and Adults Hear Debate on Pros and Cons of Boycott," *Seattle Times*, March 20, 1966.

examples given below, this story is incomplete. There were doubtless other students who quietly opposed the aims or method of the boycott, perhaps for reasons echoing the opposition discussed in the previous section. What is clear from the written record left by students like Shepard who vocally supported the boycott is that these youth saw themselves as political actors, ready to take action to address an injustice in their daily lives that adults had failed to solve.

At this same time, the *Seattle Times* published a roundup of opinions from ten white high school students in favor of integration, all of whom had spent ten weeks attending the predominantly-black Garfield High School as "Cultural Exchange" students. The students profiled made a case for integration that focused on their exchange experiences, saying that coming back to an all-white school "didn't seem lifelike" and was an environment where "we all seem to think the same," whereas a desegregated school experience gave them the ability "to judge people better." One student hoping to become a teacher thought that being in a desegregated school would help him since it would "be valuable in knowing more about different teacher-pupil relationships at different types of schools." These students concluded that "there shouldn't be any all-white schools like we have in Seattle" and that "after socializing with different races at our age, we'll be able to understand their problems and live with them more easily later in life."[99] These opinions reflect a view that desegregated schools would benefit white students.

This decision to center the opinions of white students reflects that, for many Seattleites, the question of how to resolve *de facto* segregation revolved around how it would impact white students, not how it could improve educational opportunity for black students. Mobilizing the

[99] Marty Loken, "Teen-Gauge: Cultural-Exchange Pupils Discuss Garfield Experiences," *Seattle Times*, March 19 1966.

white community to move towards desegregation because it would offer better social and professional outcomes for white students is a clear and powerful example of interest convergence. In Critical Race Theory, interest convergence is "the phenomenon that occurs when the interests of those with structural power converge with the interests of people of color." This theory posits that "decisions involving race are only made when the interests of the white majority are benefited."[100] Ultimately, the white community that remained opposed did not see enough of their own best interest represented in demanding desegregation.

While some sources claim that the boycott revealed widespread Asian-American support,[101] there is very little written or photographic evidence of Asian-American student involvement. At the time, approximately 5% of the district's students were Asian-American, while 9% of the district's students were black and 85% were white (the remaining 1% were native or "other").[102] While the Asian-American community was also geographically confined by residential segregation and so experienced segregated schooling, many felt that desegregation efforts that dispersed their children across the city would result in "a greater potential for loss of ethnic identity," both because of their smaller numbers and because some families did not speak English at home. In fact, in Seattle, Asian-Americans were at times "perceived as a group who might possibly oppose a desegregation plan."[103] The multiracial nature of Seattle and the

[100] Muhammad Khalifa, Christopher Dunbar, and Ty-Ron Douglasb, "Derrick Bell, CRT, and Educational Leadership 1995-present," *Race Ethnicity and Education: The Legacy of Derrick Bell* 16, no. 4 (2013): 493.
[101] Taylor, "Black Protest in Seattle," 9.
[102] "Distribution of Public School Enrollment by Ethnic Group," Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5.
[103] Ann LaGrelius Siqueland, *Without a Court Order : The Desegregation of Seattle's Schools*, (Seattle: Madrona, 1981), 56.

differing views and cultural attitudes towards integration complicated the concept of "racial balance" emphasized in any potential plans to desegregate schools.

On March 21, *The Eclectic*, a student newspaper, published a single article on the boycott, written by Grace Katagiri, a Japanese-American student at Roosevelt High School. She stated that the boycott was being held "to illuminate the apathy and unsympathetic nature of the white community in Seattle towards the problem of segregated schools." In response to the many boycott opponents who argued that the school board had no business trying to address segregation caused by discriminatory housing practices, Katagiri explained, "the Supreme Court has ruled that all segregated schooling is unjust and not lawful." Most compellingly, Katagiri made the case for students as moral political actors:

> We have no voting power as students, thus we cannot change the laws or even seriously petition the school board and be heard. Yet we can and must make a commitment and witness that commitment to human justice, and if it means missing two days of school in a protest boycott, then we should do it.[104]

In a *Seattle Times* article featuring students who attended the freedom schools, Katagiri, who had lived in Hawaii for most of her childhood, said, "I never knew what prejudice is until I came to Seattle."[105] As one of few vocal Asian-American students involved in the boycott, Katagiri's stance sheds light on how some students who were neither black nor white may have found their place in addressing segregation in a multiracial city.

While at the freedom schools, students created work that reveals some of their attitudes towards the desegregation effort. Activities at the freedom schools included writing essays, letters, and poems, and the media was also present to gather students' thoughts. Poems like those written by Joyce Victor while attending freedom school show the depth of thought and feeling

[104] Grace Katagiri, "Of Schools and Boycotts," *The Eclectic,* March 21 1966.
[105] "Youths Must Act, Say Freedom Schoolers," *Seattle Times*, April 1 1966.

that students brought to the topics of race, racism, and school segregation. Excerpts from two of Victor's poems appear below:

If I were blind
I could see you
Love the rush, the youth, the
gentle of you.
But my people tell me
You are less than human.
In their darkness
They see only shades
not the light,
oh the light, of you.

Their eyes are not my eyes
yet they tell me what to see.
And I look at it is you
not black, or white.
Who can tell me what to see?

If People
would come
softly
bringing hands
not fists
we could
touch
not trample
on we
a field of flowers
blending into shades
bending, complimenting,
growing from
common soil[106]

The emotions expressed so artistically in these poems serve as a reminder that youth were forming their own understanding of race and racism as they experienced life on the front lines of school segregation, and they had developed mature, deeply held beliefs about the racist structures in which they were raised.

Student essays written at the freedom schools demonstrate the level of intelligent thought that youth gave to the complex societal issues of racism and schooling. Steve Gilbert, a student at Cleveland High School, wrote, "This school boycott is but one facet of an ever-growing situation of unrest in not only the city of Seattle but the nation as well." He went on to address problems like civic apathy and public ignorance, which he saw as concerns in Seattle. Astutely, he identified a key difference between racism in the South and racism in Seattle: "Injustice may not be in the form of outright violence against human rights and dignities; it may take the more

[106] J. Victor Poems, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-003, Box 1.

subtle form of custom or implied social courses."[107] Student work like this helps to upend the notion that desegregation efforts in the West were simply a parallel version of desegregation in the South. There were students in Seattle who recognized that pervasive racism had been quietly embedded in their society, and that many adults in their community refused to acknowledge this.

On the second day of freedom schools, students wrote letters to school board members urging integration. In their letters, students stressed the importance of equal education for all regardless of race, the immediate social benefits they perceived came from integrated education, and the need to develop the life skill of racial cooperation. Students explained their understanding that "you have to grow up with other races to be able to work well with them" and segregated schools meant that "the kids would get all tired and bored with each other and you couldn't make any new friends." Some students pointed out that this specifically meant that black students needed to learn how to navigate a world where white people held power: "If Negroes want to get a good education they should go to an integrated school. We can't learn with a all Negro school because when you get with a cacauisian *(sic)* group they won't know how to act. We must get ready if we want to enjoy life." Other students made moral arguments, asserting that "all men are created equal" and "all Negroes, whites, and orientals can be treated equal in education… Only our color is different. Underneath we are all the same." Like most youth, many students just wanted to find social acceptance, stressing that their friendships existed along racial lines but that they wanted something more, and believed that "if we start being with other children of different races while we are young than we can [be] accepted and learn."[108]

[107] S. Gilbert Essay, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-003, Box 1.
[108] Assorted Letters, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5.

Another theme that emerges from freedom school students' letters to the school board is the need to take matters into their own hands and hold adults accountable, with phrases such as, "Its about time sombody *(sic)* did something about this. Well, we are doing something about it. We are staying away from school to make you sit up and listen. And make you do something!"[109] Expressions like this show that these students saw themselves as political actors, with power to wield. Participation in the boycott was a way for students, who could not vote or make decisions about where to live, to use their political power. Hale points out that freedom schools gave a unique opportunity for secondary students, an "overlooked yet vitally important segment of the population," to engage politically, noting that outside of freedom schools, "students too young for college and too young to vote were not typically viewed as serious participants in the movement."[110] Given that these students were the ones who were experiencing segregation first-hand, we miss a crucial part of the picture if we study desegregation efforts without taking a close look at what students had to say, and yet their accounts are often missed.

Also on the second day of the boycott, the *Seattle Times* published quotes from white, black, and Asian middle and high school students who had come from various parts of the city to join the freedom schools. Echoing the words of Katagiri and other prominent student supporters of the boycott, many of these students spoke of feeling morally compelled to come, whether their parents were supportive, and several spoke of missing exams during the boycott. The most significant theme that emerges from these students' words is their lack of confidence in adults to solve the problem of *de facto* segregation. "It doesn't seem our parents, or any adults, have formulated any plans," said Tom Torrance, a white student at Garfield, who went on to say, "We

[109] E. Hanson letter, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5.
[110] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 95.

see the problems at school with our colored classmates, probably even more and better than our parents do." Another student declared, "The only way for anything to be done is for us kids to take action."[111] Yet again, students were asserting their role as experts and change agents in their own education.

The nature of these artifacts from the freedom schools make this event uniquely suited to analysis that is humanity-focused, looking at the attitudes expressed by the individuals involved, within the context of their time and community. As Veninga identifies, "missing from the literature are the voices of those who arguably have the most to tell us about the impacts and consequences of school desegregation programs – the students."[112] Prior to studying the impacts and consequences of desegregation programs, we must understand the efforts it took to get such programs implemented in the first place, and should be careful not to miss the voices of students in those efforts. While boycott committee organizers did not collaborate with students significantly in planning the boycott, organizers intended to center the event on student experience, including students' original thoughts on segregation and desegregation. They did this by relying on student participation as the key factor in making the boycott a success and creating freedom schools designed to give students avenues for expressing their opinions and ideas regarding the school segregation crisis. Situated in the context of the forces organizing and opposing the 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools, we can center the voices of students in a story of activism that captured the attention of the city for weeks on end and placed demands on the school board that are still unresolved.

[111] "Youths Must Act, Say Freedom Schoolers," *Seattle Times*, April 1, 1966.
[112] Veninga, *Road Scholars*, 21.

Part 3: Aftermath
Significance of 1966 Seattle School Boycott and Freedom Schools, Then and Now

Community response to the boycott came swiftly, first in individual reactions and then in waves of school policy proposals. The dynamic of the conversation shifted as the unity that had uniquely brought the city's civil rights organizations together for the boycott was challenged by the evolution of the Black Power movement. Over the course of decades, broad school district plans to address *de facto* segregation were recommended, sometimes implemented, and ultimately dismantled. As this pattern continued into the 21st century, the significance of the boycott and the actions it provoked have echoed through Seattle's history. These events, and the ultimate meaning of the boycott, are explored below.

Reactions to the Boycott

Immediate reactions to the boycott came from students, organizers, and the media. Freedom school participants had positive stories to tell about their two days together. Boycott committee members shared their enthusiasm about the event's successful turnout and prepared next steps. The newspapers continued publishing articles about the boycott and its impact in the following weeks. Herb Robinson wrote for the *Seattle Times* that "the 'message' in the boycott is one for the whole community, not just the School Board, to ponder."[113] Other reactions came with a more nuanced perspective. Charles Russell of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* wrote, "The boycott, probably only the first of many such demonstrations, served its purpose by spotlighting the problem. It is questionable, however, whether it produced more light than heat."[114] This response would prove prescient, as much of the conversation stirred up by the boycott did not turn into action.

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[113] Herb Robinson, "Central-Area Voices Held Authority," *Seattle Times*, April 1, 1966.
[114] Charles Russell, "Integration Policy Of Schools Hit," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* 1966.

Robinson asserted that the "substantial size of the boycott" proved two things: first, that "there is a significant amount of public interest and concern over the problem of de facto school segregation" demonstrated by the large turnout, and second, that "the status and influence of civil rights spokesmen in the central area is greater than many have suspected."[115] For years, white Seattleites had turned a blind eye to racism in their city. While southern cities and towns under Jim Crow laws were well-aware of the presence of civil rights activists, a city like Seattle, on the other hand, often failed to see the people and organizations fighting for black freedom, until an event like the boycott caught the public eye. As Quintard Taylor notes in his history of black activism in Seattle in the 1960s, "White Seattleites had a particular propensity for isolating themselves from any knowledge or concern about the local black population and its plight."[116] Robinson highlighted that the impact of the boycott elevated the white public's awareness of the black freedom struggle in Seattle and their complicit role in the city's quiet form of white supremacy – Seattle, not just the southern towns featured on the news, was also a home to civil rights leaders working hard to secure basic freedoms for their community.

The boycott committee asked individual freedom school students for verbal feedback after the event. Students commented on the learning experience they had in the freedom schools: Marilyn Daniels of Garfield noted that she was especially impressed with "the discussion groups where the white kids talked freely" (emphasis original), and her younger brother James Daniels reported that he "learned about Negro accomplishments which he did not know." Responses like these represent a key success of the freedom schools – students were able to discuss race in an integrated setting and gain a new, positive understanding of black history not taught in their

[115] Robinson, "Central-Area Voices," *Seattle Times*, April 1, 1966.
[116] Taylor, "Black Protest in Seattle" 2.

schools. Most commonly, students told the boycott committee that they were eager for a second boycott and offered suggestions on the timing. Carole Dickson from Garfield suggested that a second boycott be held "during the busy season of school, perhaps at test time" to demonstrate just how sincere the students were. James Daniels suggested it "be called during the last week of school in preparation for next year" (emphasis original). Maxine Daniels of Garfield, who had first been against the boycott but participated at her parents' urging, was "very much impressed" with the freedom schools and suggested that a boycott be organized for the first days of fall term if there was no integration plan by then.[117] These responses demonstrate that involvement in the boycott did not feel like a one-time effort to these students – They intended to continue to be involved as political actors and to hold the responsible adults accountable going forward.

The day after the boycott, the *Seattle Times* published a full page of interviews with ten freedom school students. These students overwhelmingly thought that the boycott had a positive impact and that the freedom schools had given them valuable learning opportunities. Leasa Farrar, a black student from Garfield, said, "The School Board doesn't have any choice – they have to do something." Another black student from Garfield, Donald Zackery, felt similarly, saying, "When the School Board members see what the Freedom Schools and the boycott are trying to accomplish, they'll have to do something about this segregation problem." These students felt like the boycott had made the problem clear, and now school leaders should be held accountable. Not only did students reflect on their learning and experience at freedom school, they also took pride in knowing that the decision they had each made to boycott had contributed

[117] Student Feedback Notes, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5.

to the huge turnout and ultimate impact of the event, confidently declaring, "The boycott has been a total success."[118]

The volunteer administrators running the boycott expressed immense pride in the turnout and the way students and staff made the oversized freedom schools work. A vice principal at one of the elementary freedom schools emphasized the success of the freedom schools in terms of the surprisingly large turnout, the adaptability of the staff, and the outcomes for students. When the vice principal arrived early on the first day, they report that students were already waiting, and "shortly there was a steady stream of children Negro and white coming into school – it was one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen." Despite planning for 60-80 children, with a willingness to accommodate 100 if necessary, the school ended up with 175 students even after sending "overflow" to a newly opened site. The vice principal wrote:

> Our Freedom School staff rose to the challenge of our overcrowded conditions magnificently. The children were most understanding and cooperative in the midst of this adjustment and the most joyous atmosphere imaginable brought about a great spirit…There was a real glow of happiness and satisfaction that everyone seemed to share that was very unusual – We knew that Freedom School was a stupendous, overwhelming success and that each person there had helped to make it that way.[119]

Notably, in this reflection an unexpectedly large student turnout and atmosphere of happiness and purpose are seen to represent "overwhelming success," regardless of further results.

Boycott organizers more broadly seemed to agree with this impression. The Seattle CORE newsletter, the *Corelator*, said that the boycott "can only be termed a huge success." After thanking the community groups that supported the boycott, the newsletter went on to say, "The real credit, however, belongs to the citizens of the Central Area. While the civil rights

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[118] Marty Loken, "Teen Gauge: Freedom School Pupils Discuss the Boycott," *Seattle Times*, April 2, 1966.
[119] "Impressions of First A.M.E. Freedom School as seen by the Vice-Principal," Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5.

groups provided the vehicle, it was the Central Area parents who made the boycott such an overwhelming success." These acknowledgements of the broad community effort that went into the boycott and freedom schools are a reminder that families participated in a number of ways, including the many parents who gave their children permission or encouragement to skip school for the boycott, and certainly the thousands of students who opted to miss class knowing they would receive unexcused absences, sometimes participating against their parents' wishes.[120] If it were not for the decisions made by these families to participate and support the boycott, particularly the students who truly made the boycott by skipping school and attending the freedom schools, the event would not have been a success no matter how much planning organizers had done. The piece in the *Corelator* goes on to urge CORE members to attend an upcoming meeting to "discuss the next phases of the campaign."[121] While student participation had made the boycott a visible success, and students left the freedom schools eager for more, it was adult activists who would gather with each other to determine next steps.

Follow Up Action & Inaction

Despite momentum from the successful boycott, activism for desegregation slowed. In part, this was because activists awaited a response from Bottomly and the school board. Another critical factor was the changing dynamic of civil rights work in Seattle as the Black Power movement challenged the working model of integrationists. In April 1967, when Stokely Carmichael came through Seattle and gave a speech at Garfield High School to a crowd of 4,000, he emphasized racial pride and a shift toward Black Power, saying, "Integration is meaningful only to a small chosen class." In response to the speech, Walter Hundley of CORE stated that he

[120] "Youths Must Act, Say Freedom Schoolers," *Seattle Times*, April 1 1966.
[121] "School Boycott Resume," *Corelator*, April 25, 1966.

had "expected precisely what happened – a set-back for integrationists," and the case for integrating Central District students became "a major issue and the focal point in a growing split between integrationists and separatists."[122]

When addressing the action and inaction that came out of the school boycott, this challenge to the unity of Seattle's black community needs to be remembered. Quintard Taylor's study of this era in Seattle's black history concludes that the school boycott represented "the last example of African-American political unity on the *de facto* segregation issue."[123] Like other regions of the country that had experienced a shift in civil rights organizational power as the Black Power movement took hold, Seattle's civil rights groups grappled with the role of white activists in their organizations, particularly in a city with such a small black population. Over the course of 1967 and into 1968, the Seattle branch of CORE slowly decided to become an all-black organization,[124] dramatically changing the makeup of the group and altering the relationships between key boycott organizers. As the structures and sentiments of the black freedom struggle in Seattle evolved, some momentum from the boycott was likely lost as individuals tried to find their place. Even a look at the events immediately following the boycott must keep in mind this context and the changes that were on the verge of taking place.

A number of big ideas were born in the wake of the boycott that did not go on to have a continued impact. In late April, Hundley and Bottomly collaborated to organize a "Race Relations Seminar" for Central District families to meet with school personnel and have their needs heard, including the continued demand to address segregated schools.[125] When this

[122] Pieroth, "With All Deliberate Caution," 59.
[123] Taylor, "Black Protest in Seattle," 9.
[124] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 201-203.
[125] "City-Wide Racial Seminar Scheduled," *Seattle Times*, April 21, 1966.

promising event did not provide any satisfying solutions, CACRC, CORE, and the NAACP organized their own May town hall meeting for supporters to meet in the Central District and determine next steps. In announcing the event, they declared, "We have waited patiently for the Seattle Public Schools to take some positive step toward integration, but so far there has been only silence. We have tried to be 'responsible' and 'reasonable,' but after two months – NOTHING."[126] The stated purpose of the town hall was to begin intensive planning on further direct action, but no follow-up boycott, march, or picket materialized. A number of other community efforts were newsworthy in the weeks immediately after the boycott, such as a committee headed by Rabbi Raphael Levine, who had helped broker peace between clergymen in the controversy leading up to the boycott,[127] but no major action seemed to take flight.

This pattern of making ambitious plans that largely fell short also highlights the unique success of the boycott, which was planned so thoroughly and brought to fruition with a turnout and community impact far beyond expectation. CORE activists Maid Adams, Joan Singler, Jean Durning, and Bettylou Valentine note in their memoir, *Seattle in Black and White*, that a second boycott likely never took place because, by the time it was being planned at the May town hall, Bottomly and the school board had made promises that plans were in place to boost desegregation efforts immediately.[128] Quintard Taylor notes that, due to the timing of these efforts in the context of the Black Power movement and evolution of the black freedom struggle, Seattle's "*de facto* segregation controversy had divided whites and blacks but it also pitted blacks against blacks and whites against whites in the search for an honorable solution."[129] While

[126] Letter Announcing May 31 Town Hall, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5.
[127] "New Committee To Try to Ease Racial Tensions," *Seattle Times*, 1966.
[128] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 170.
[129] Taylor, "Black Protest in Seattle," 10.

activists had broadly agreed on the need for the boycott, there was little consensus on exactly what to do afterwards.

Aftermath for Seattle Schools

Beginning in the months following the boycott, and extending into the 21st century, the school board took various actions to desegregate Seattle's schools. In direct response to the boycott, Bottomly and the school board unveiled multiple plans, and the dialogue with the city's civil rights leaders and community opposition continued. The landscape of the black freedom struggle also continued to evolve, and Seattle's small black community splintered, trying to find an ideology that would allow them to gain ground, before again publicly uniting in the desegregation effort. As detailed in this section, the efforts of the 1966 boycott did eventually contribute to widespread desegregation in Seattle's schools, but steady opposition ensured that it did not last.

As the dust from the boycott settled, Seattle's school leaders responded with a renewed sense of urgency. By June of 1966, Bottomly announced a new plan. His proposal was for students to stay in their neighborhood schools through 3rd grade, at which point they would move into a "continuous progress center," a building of around 5,000 students in 4th through 7th grade, organized into small groups with a "school-within-a-school concept" to integrate students from across the city. After this, students at 8th grade and above would move onto one large campus. In his announcement, Bottomly started out by acknowledging that other bold options to desegregate the schools could not be successfully pursued, saying, "It seems to me that we must formulate a new plan to meet *de facto* segregation." This concept of continuous progress centers was Bottomly's bold new creation attempting to address segregation without putting the burden of the work on the black families in the Central District or the white families unwilling to make

concessions. Bottomly told the people of Seattle, "We have a choice. We can meet this challenge with courage and imagination – the 'stuff' out of which this city was built – or we can sit back and allow our city to be overwhelmed by our future. We in education do not intend to sit back and wait."[130] This response from Bottomly signaled that perhaps he would, at long last, be willing to "shake the tree" and enact widespread change in the district, but the plan did not come across well to the public, who generally disliked the image of large, anonymous centers filled with thousands of students.[131] While this unpopular proposal was not a satisfactory answer to the demands of the boycott, CORE was willing to engage.

CORE issued a critique of the proposal, calling it "a laudable approach" but citing two reservations: the administration's 20-year rollout plan, and their concern that "fourth grade is much too late to introduce a child to integrated situations." CORE invoked the warning example of white flight in other northern cities "which did not act in time – which cannot integrate schools because there is no one to integrate with" (emphasis original). The critique was a strongly-worded call to find an immediate solution, which would likely require significant upheaval. CORE emphasized the urgency of achieving full integration, claiming that a decades-long delay would directly contribute to "an increase of poverty, ignorance, fear, and violence."[132] Bottomly's continuous progress centers proposal would go through many iterations in discussion with the school board, a 100-member citizens' committee, and the community at large, and ultimately never be put into effect.

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[130] Constantine Angelos, "Schools Head Proposes Bold, Long-Range Plan," *Seattle Times*, June 19, 1966.
[131] Pieroth, "With All Deliberate Caution," 58.
[132] "A Critique of the Continuous Progress Center Proposal, by The Seattle Congress of Racial Equality," Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5

Alongside the discussion of the continuous progress centers, the school district revamped its small voluntary transfer program, giving hope to civil rights leaders. After several years without providing transportation, funds were made available to pay for busing. CORE members went door-to-door in the Central District to help families sign up, telling them, "Some of us have worked extremely hard to bring about a paid transportation program for our youth and now it is up to our community to support the program by volunteering to transfer our children."[133] When school started in September 1966, over 500 students boarded busses in the Central District to ride to predominantly white schools on the north end.[134] This represented the most significant attempt at integration in Seattle's public schools, but still resulted in very little change in the overall demographics of a district with roughly 95,000 students (approximately 8,500 of whom were black)[135] and placed the burden of integration entirely on black families. While it was successfully put into effect and grew from year to year, the voluntary transfer program never operated on a scale that could ultimately desegregate the city's schools.

In the wake of Stokely Carmichael's 1967 visit to Seattle, a movement for community control of black schools had emerged alongside the effort to desegregate. While the black community was finding itself at odds, trying to determine the best future for their children in a city that remained segregated, another, smaller school boycott in the Central District took place in 1971 to protest the reassignment of a black administrator. This eventual second boycott was organized by a new coalition of black community members trying to take a middle ground between advocating for integration and demanding local control of black schools, and was not a

[133] Canvassing Materials, Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5
[134] Pieroth, "With All Deliberate Caution," 57.
[135] "Distribution of Public School Enrollment by Ethnic Group," Congress of Racial Equality, Seattle Chapter: Collection 1563-001, Box 5.

move aimed at achieving desegregation policy.[136] The 1966 boycott and freedom schools remained the most significant act in the effort to end school segregation, and by the time that Seattle's small black community again built consensus on the topic, the school board had begun to take action, and the first mandatory desegregation proposal was launching.

Significantly, the school board made plans to desegregate four of the city's middle schools through mandatory busing, the first proposal of mandatory action. This plan was adopted by the district in 1970, but faced substantial pushback from a white parent group called Citizens Against Mandatory Busing (CAMB),[137] who ultimately lost a lawsuit against the district in the state supreme court in 1972. When CAMB lost this case, they tried instead to recall members of the school board who had voted for the desegregation plan, which narrowly failed – the board members retained their seats by a margin of less than one percent.[138] Even without officially recalling school board members or winning against the district in court, CAMB's efforts had destabilized support for desegregation, revealing that voter approval of the school board was slim. Three of the four board members being recalled either resigned or chose not to run for reelection, and in a huge symbolic loss, Forbes Bottomly resigned.[139] With the board and superintendent pushed out, the conclusion was that mandatory desegregation options were not politically realistic, and CAMB's efforts were enough to stall any further plans to desegregate Seattle's schools for the next five years.

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[136] Kirsten Pochop, *Learning Liberalism: Seattle Schools and the Changing Face of American Racial Politics, 1960-1980*, (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2014), 74.
[137] Pochop, *Learning Liberalism,* 99.
[138] Laura Kohn, Seattle. Inst. for Public Policy Management Washington Univ., and Santa Monica, Ca. Inst. for Education Training Rand Corp. *Priority Shift: The Fate of Mandatory Busing for School Desegregation in Seattle and the Nation*, 1996, 25.
[139] Pochop, *Learning Liberalism*, 146.

The story of Seattle's first attempt at mandatory desegregation and the extreme pushback from CAMB demonstrate the crucial role that interest convergence continued to play in the city's segregation crisis. The "interests of those with structural power,"[140] the white parents who wanted to preserve the status quo for their own students, diverged from the interests of the desegregation movement, and those parents used their racial privilege to leverage political capital in their efforts to block desegregation. While the original four middle schools were the first case of successful mandatory desegregation in Seattle, they were intended to be only the first part of a three-part plan. Due to pressure from CAMB, even the school board's first black member, Alfred Cowles, voted to delay further desegregation, saying that expanding efforts as originally planned "would only serve to jeopardize desegregation by inflaming the public."[141]

By 1975, black community leaders had made a "conscious decision to avoid public disagreement" on the tensions between integrationists and the Black Power movement, and "presented a fairly unified position, strongly advocating mandatory desegregation."[142] At this same time, a Seattle bank manager named Constance Herring became the chair of the local NAACP's Education Committee and gained a position on the District-Wide Advisory Committee on Desegregation (DWAC), where she "was instrumental in influencing DWAC decisions and in keeping the NAACP's attention focused on desegregation."[143] This connection helped prompt Philip Burton, still an NAACP lawyer a decade after his work on the boycott, to begin proceedings on a lawsuit accusing the school district of illegally segregating students.

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[140] Muhammad Khalifa, Christopher Dunbar, and Ty-Ron Douglasb, "Derrick Bell, CRT, and Educational Leadership 1995-present," *Race Ethnicity and Education: The Legacy of Derrick Bell* 16, no. 4 (2013): 493.
[141] Siqueland, *Without A Court Order*, 14.
[142] Siqueland, *Without A Court Order,* 15.
[143] Siqueland, *Without A Court Order,* 15.

In 1977, after threats of a lawsuit from the NAACP, ACLU, and Church Council of Greater Seattle, the school district announced the "Seattle Plan," which went into effect in the fall of 1978. This plan used district-wide mandatory busing to achieve widespread desegregation across the district by busing nearly a quarter of all students. Such an accomplishment did not happen overnight – Veninga notes that the plan "represents the culmination of two decades of incremental steps,"[144] including the boycott that pushed the issue into the forefront of the city's mind, and the Triad Plan that the Urban League had proposed in 1965, which is heavily borrowed from in the Seattle Plan.[145] Success was now possible largely "because of the imminent threat of court order and the desire within major establishment actors to avoid violent situations they saw in Boston and other cities."[146] Faced with a lawsuit that could result in a court order, the school board opted to instead desegregate on their own terms, and for the first time, they had the political savvy to do so successfully.[147] This made Seattle the country's largest city to achieve widespread desegregation without a court order, and was touted as a huge victory for integrationists.

At long last, the type of widespread school desegregation imagined by the organizers of the 1966 school boycott was being delivered, and vocal opponents looked for a foothold. Within two months, an opposition group had gotten an anti-busing initiative on the statewide ballot, I-350, which was approved that November by 61% of Seattle voters and 66% of voters statewide. The initiative was challenged and went to the U.S. Supreme Court, where it was ruled

[144] Veninga, *Road Scholars,* 68.
[145] Pochop, *Learning Liberalism,* 161.
[146] Jennifer Marie Hehnke, *The Politics of Racial Integration in the Seattle Public Schools : Discourse, Policy, and Political Change, 1954-1991*, (University of Oregon, 2009), 180.
[147] Pochop, *Learning Liberalism,* 154.

unconstitutional in a split-decision in 1982.[148] Seattle would, for the time being, be allowed to continue its program of mandatory busing, and the city's schools were broadly desegregated for the first time, with the transportation burden spread across both Central District and north end students. The Seattle Plan was celebrated as a uniquely successful city-wide solution to *de facto* segregation, 12 years after the 1966 school boycott, but it would not prove to be the long-lasting success that the city needed, and the pattern of progress and push-back that defined this era of Seattle's school desegregation efforts would continue.

After a decade of being heralded as the prime example of victory over *de facto* segregation, mandatory desegregation in Seattle began to be dismantled. In 1988, substantial changes were made in response to ongoing criticism of mandatory busing, effectively ending the era of the Seattle Plan and implementing a new formula to maintain desegregation in the schools of a still heavily residentially segregated city. This shift came about in response to criticism from almost every corner: various community factions were concerned that too many students were bused, that students of color were bused disproportionately, that enrollment was not fairly spread across schools, that white students were leaving for private schools or suburbs, and that the overall plan was too costly and complex.[149] After a decade of mandatory busing, the district adopted a plan that allowed parents to rank their school choices, and assignment was given based on achieving racial balance. Over the course of the 1990s, the district's remaining desegregation policies were slowly chipped away at, with more power given to student choice in 1992, an end to busing for desegregation at the elementary school level in 1996, and an end to race-based busing at the secondary school level in 1998. The district's new plan would include race only as

[148] Douglas Judge, "Housing, Race and Schooling in Seattle: Context for the Supreme Court Decision," *Journal of Educational Controversy*, 2, no. 1 (2007): 6.
[149] Kohn, *Priority Shift,* 26.

a "tiebreaker" in a complex new high school enrollment system.[150] The fruits of the boycott, which had taken so many years to fully appear, were falling away, sometimes under the guise of prioritizing educational equity in new ways, and sometimes clearly because the white community was not willing to bear the cost.

In 2000, even this occasional use of race in school assignment was opposed by a white mother from the north end, who filed a lawsuit against the school district when her daughter was assigned to Franklin High School, on the south end of the city with a predominantly black student population. The suit was settled in 2007 in the split-decision U.S. Supreme Court case *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, known as the PICS decision, declaring Seattle's policy of using race even as an occasional tiebreaker unconstitutional. While the *Brown v. Board* decision had motivated Seattle's civil rights leaders to make the case for school desegregation with the 1966 boycott, the PICS decision undid the most significant remnants of the boycott's success.

The justices on the Supreme Court in 2007 were "ultimately divided between two very different notions of the meaning of racial discrimination under the Constitution." While those in favor of the ruling saw race as "an impermissible factor in governmental decision-making," the dissenting justices held the view that "there is no moral equivalence between public policies that seek to bring persons of different races together and those that aim to keep them apart."[151] Decades worth of work and sacrifice on the part of civil rights organizers, educators, clergy leaders, community members, and students and parents had rested on the implicit agreement that policies that seek to bring people together are morally superior to policies that aim to keep

[150] Judge, "Housing, Race and Schooling in Seattle," 7.
[151] Jonathan L. Entin, "Parents Involved and the Meaning of Brown: An Old Debate Renewed." *Seattle University Law Review* 31, no. 4 (2008): 936.

people apart. In the wake of the PICS decision, the city's black superintendent, Maria Goodloe-Johnson, and Asian-American chairwoman of the school board, Cheryl Chow, were forced to abandon efforts to broadly desegregate Seattle's schools, with Chow stating, "It's not my job to desegregate the city."[152] In the following decade, Seattle's schools fell into a pattern of resegregation.[153] The message that the 1966 boycott and freedom schools had sent the school board to urgently desegregate schools – a demand coming directly from thousands of students, the ones whose daily lives were impacted by segregation in the classroom – was now being completely ignored.

As various plans were tried and failed across the decades, the city saw short-lived success at achieving school integration across neighborhoods that continued to be racially segregated. Seattle's long history of legally restricting housing based on race will take generations to fade from the map.[154] The short-term successes of the district's best plans were never enough to override the deep history of white supremacy in the region and the long-term effects of racially restricted housing covenants. The policies that have had the best chance of overcoming the city's racist reality have continually been deemed too inconvenient for powerful white families to accept, ultimately leading to the PICS decision. Understanding this history reveals a pattern that emerged in response to the boycott. When the boycott called the attention of the whole community to the school segregation crisis, it was met with progress and push-back, progress and push-back, and never resulted in the long-lasting policy it pursued.

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[152] Linda Shaw, "Integration Is No Longer Seattle School District's Top Priority," *Seattle Times*, June 3, 2008.
[153] Justin Mayo and Brian M. Rosenthal, "6 Seattle Schools Have Become Whiter as New Assignment Plan Changes Racial Balance," *Seattle Times*, August 20, 2012.
[154] See Appendix A for a map of Seattle racial demographics in 1960 and 2000

How to Measure Success

While the boycott and its subsequent chain of events did not resolve segregation in Seattle's schools, its success and significance are noteworthy. Approximately 1,000 more students attended Seattle's two days of freedom schools than students who participated in Mississippi's 1964 Freedom Summer freedom schools state-wide.[155] Seattle students who participated also had their voices broadcast by mainstream media, the *Seattle Times*, despite the newspaper's stance against the boycott. In response to the boycott, policymakers expressed a willingness to move towards desegregation and kicked off a series of policy proposals themselves. Walter Hundley told students at a panel discussion before the boycott that the goal of the boycott was "to promote a discussion among bigger groups of people, bigger than school and civil rights groups, about the need for integrated education."[156] By this measure, the boycott was a tremendous immediate success. Quintard Taylor notes that the biggest obstacle to overcoming *de facto* segregation in the city's schools was white Seattleites' claim that there was nothing to fix: "The 'enemy' in Seattle was indifference in the white population born of its perception that 'there was no problem' in the city."[157] Thanks to the scale of the boycott and freedom schools and their dominance in the media for weeks, this perception was challenged and the city could no longer claim there were no problems.

Ultimately, the boycott and freedom schools were successful activism, with tremendous turnout and community attention, but they did not translate into long-term successful policy. The school board and administration were willing to take some action, but never enough, until the

[155] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 147.
[156] "Negro Teen-Agers Segregated More Than Ever, Pupils Told," *Seattle Times*, March 26, 1966.
[157] Taylor, "Black Protest in Seattle," 2.

threat of a federal court order in 1977. Key powerful white families were ready to push back against any changes that inconvenienced them, as seen in the examples of CAMB, Initiative 350, and the PICS case. The black community was not a monolith, at times uniting powerfully for desegregation while, at other times, splitting between separatist forces and integrationists. The boycott effort represented a unique cross-organizational collaboration, at a time when tensions within and across racial groups were rising. In retrospect, several boycott organizers who had celebrated the success of the event initially found themselves wondering how to categorize it. Adams, Singler, Durning, and Valentine wondered decades later what might have occurred in Seattle's segregated schools without the boycott and continued efforts of Seattle's civil rights organizations. While they noted many changes in the district that have carried on through today, such as expanded curriculum to better include black history and the legacy of Central District families as involved advocates for equal education, they also acknowledge that "as of 2010, the situation does not seem to have changed substantially."[158]

Beyond the notion of success is the notion of significance. The significance of the boycott and freedom schools, then and now, can be understood in a number of ways. At the time, as mentioned, the boycott was significant in its coordination and the freedom schools in their turnout and the impact they had on the students involved. Thanks to the boycott and freedom schools, thousands of students finally had an opportunity to exercise their powers as political actors, be in a classroom with students of different races for perhaps the first time, and learn the language of political activism from community leaders. This type of educational experience for black youth also represents a meaningful connection to the history of black education in America. As James Anderson notes in his extensive history of black education in America, "the

[158] Adams et al, *Seattle in Black and White,* 174.

long-range purpose [of early black schooling] was the intellectual and moral development of a responsible leadership class that would organize the masses and lead them to freedom and equality."[159] Both the freedom schools of Mississippi in 1964 and Seattle's two days of freedom school in 1966 were creative ways of answering this call, offering black students tools to use as they continued to advocate for their own education and freedom. Hale notes that civil rights educational programs such as freedom schools were "where many activists learned and practiced the art of resistance,"[160] working to equip future local civil rights leaders but also to enable students to engage actively and meaningfully in the struggle for civil rights while they were still children and teenagers, in their local communities.

Seattle's 1966 desegregation events also have significance as a look at school activism in the West, in an urban setting, and with young students. As noted in Part 1, Nancy Beadie et. al. put out a call in their 2017 essay for more studies of segregation and desegregation in the West, and in particular more cases of urban education in the West. They go on to note that "scholarship on student activism needs to encompass high school as well as collegiate contexts."[161] While the high school student participants in Seattle's freedom schools did not take part in the same organizational leadership that many older, independent college students were prone to do in the civil rights era, their determination and willingness to skip school unexcused, write letters to the school board, speak at rallies and forums, and give quotes for the newspaper must be viewed as powerful political activism by a student population with few other political means to act. There is significance in the prominence of student voice that persists in the story of the boycott and

[159] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 31.
[160] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 7.
[161] Beadie et al, "Gateway, to the West," 124.

freedom schools, as Catherine Veninga, Yoon Pak and others remind us.[162] Jon Hale demonstrates that "elementary, middle, and high school students have been overlooked, though they are very important historical actors,"[163] and most current studies of 1960s desegregation efforts in Seattle overlook the contributions and attitudes of Seattle's freedom school students.

Not only do these student contributions fill a gap in our understanding of public culture, they also represent a form of counter-storytelling. The Critical Race Theory concept of counter-storytelling refers to any "methodology and practice that allows marginalized people to articulate their own realities in dignified, wholesome, and culturally nuanced ways."[164] The dominant narrative of the school desegregation effort tends to focus on the words and decisions of the white school board members and superintendent and a handful of prominent black and white civil rights organizers. The words and actions of black students, in particular, who attended the freedom schools, wrote letters and essays, and spoke out to the media offer a view of this history that tells a different story, centered on students who felt a sense of urgency in addressing their daily reality of segregated schools and expressed anger and disappointment in the lack of action that they saw from adults in power. Employing counter-storytelling can "act as a persuasive and potentially transformative tool"[165] to examine racism and elevate voices that have been silenced, providing another compelling lens for understanding student involvement in the boycott.

Conclusion

Seattle represents a unique case in the history of school desegregation efforts. As a city with a long history of quiet racism and a peaceful liberal image, civil rights efforts often went

[162] Pak, *Wherever I Go, I Will Always Be a Loyal American,* 152; Veninga, *Road Scholars,* 21.
[163] Hale, *Freedom Schools,* 12.
[164] Khalifa et al, "Derrick Bell, CRT, and Educational Leadership," 494.
[165] Khalifa et al, "Derrick Bell, CRT, and Educational Leadership," 495.

unseen or ignored by the white majority. The status quo had for centuries denied equal rights of employment, housing, and education to native, Asian, and black populations, and until the 1966 school boycott, few civil rights efforts had captured the public eye and garnered significant media attention. Seattle in the 1960s was a multiracial city with dense urban neighborhoods of black and Asian-American families that could do little to move elsewhere in the city or access equitable educational opportunities, and yet unlike in the South, no Jim Crow laws were formally holding them back. As the current of the black freedom struggle in the South swept across the country, it met a grassroots effort in Seattle that had already been fighting to overcome segregation in every facet of life. The 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools were a key event in Seattle's racial history that is seldom remembered. While the complicated timeline of busing in Seattle that began in earnest a decade after the boycott is often retold and studied, it was the boycott that ignited the conversation and forced the school administration to put together concrete plans to truly address *de facto* segregation for the first time.

The success of the boycott rested on the shoulders of students, who could have rendered the boycott a failure if they had opted not to skip school. When over 3,000 students packed the overflowing freedom schools, the community could not deny that families and students felt impacted by segregation and were ready to take a stand against it. This level of young student involvement is unique in Seattle's timeline of civil rights activism. The perspectives of students, the ones experiencing school segregation and desegregation first-hand, are so often missing from our understanding of public culture and must be understood if we want to know the impact of civil rights efforts on schooling. Furthermore, since Seattle is continuing to come up with new efforts to desegregate schools, a full understanding of the local history of desegregation efforts and failures is essential to modern activists and policymakers.

Since the PICS decision, the district has developed the largest racial achievement gap in the state, and fifth in the nation in large school districts.[166] District plans to address this education debt have cycled through over the past two decades, offering promises but no lasting results. As recent as 2017, when the deadline of the district's latest five-year plan to address racial inequity was approaching and the promised results were not evident, critics in the Central District voiced their frustration at seeing the district stuck in this decades-long pattern. Muriel Gibson, one of several black grandmothers at a Central District meeting to review the school district's state of affairs on racial equity in 2017, is one of many community members who have seen multiple family generations move through Seattle's public schools. In response to the district's presentation, Gibson commented, "We've done a lot of this before. I'm saddened that not much has changed for them… They've been dealing with these same issues for decades. And they keep coming up with these lovely documents and plans that float for a while and then disappear."[167] Stephan Blanford, who had been the school board's only black member before stepping down in November 2017, said, "Everything they were fighting for back in 1963, we are still fighting for right now."[168] The compelling messages of the activists, students, and families involved in the 1966 school boycott and freedom schools are just as relevant today as they were five decades ago, and we should be careful not to let them lose their potency by slipping out of our memory.

The students who participated in the 1966 freedom schools left loud and clear messages for the adults who had the political power to make progress towards desegregation. Since little

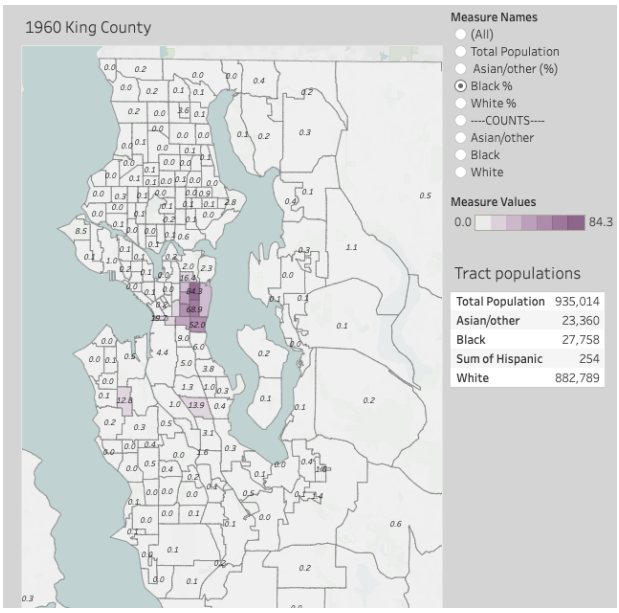
[166] Gene Balk, "Seattle Schools Have Biggest White-Black Achievement Gap in State," *Seattle Times*, May 9, 2016.
[167] Neal Morton, "Racial Equity in Seattle Schools has a Long, Frustrating History – And It's Getting Worse," *Seattle Times*, January 12, 2018.
[168] Neal Morton, "Racial Equity in Seattle Schools," *Seattle Times*, January 12, 2018.

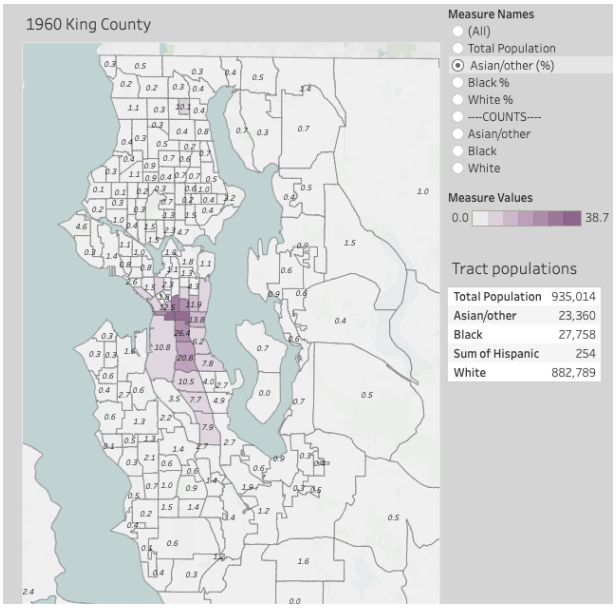
has changed in Seattle's school demographics in the 21st century,[169] the messages these students left are still relevant, waiting to be acted on, and we've largely forgotten them from our history. Revisiting this history, with an emphasis on the words of students and their attitudes and experience, is an invitation to keep the successes and challenges of the 1966 Seattle school boycott and freedom schools in our shared historical consciousness so we can bring the city's full history to the table when trying to address decades-old problems in our schools. Historians, activists, teachers, researchers, policymakers, and students and families all ought to have a voice in this collective effort to implement a long-term solution to Seattle's ongoing *de facto* segregation.

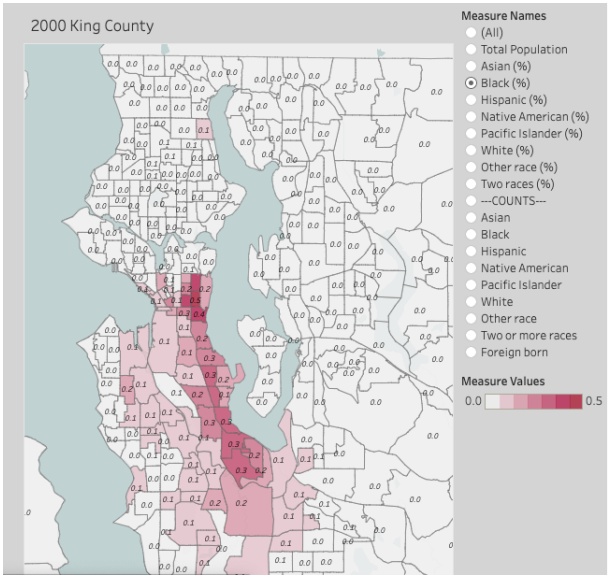
[169] See Appendix A for a map of Seattle racial demographics in 1960 and 2000

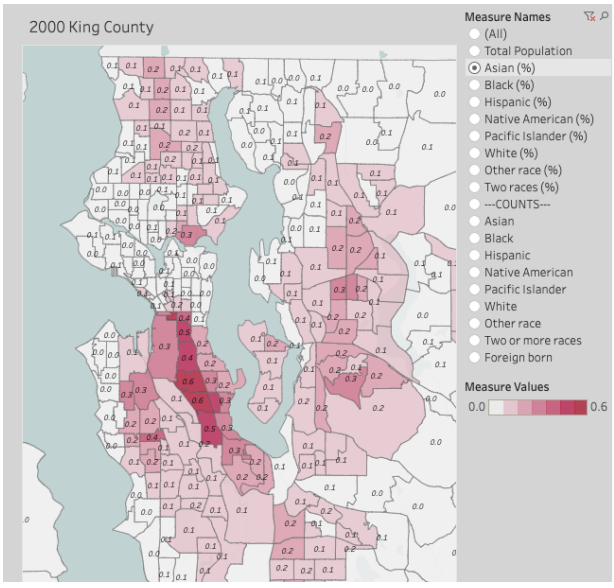
Appendix A:

Seattle Racial Demographics in 1960 and 2000





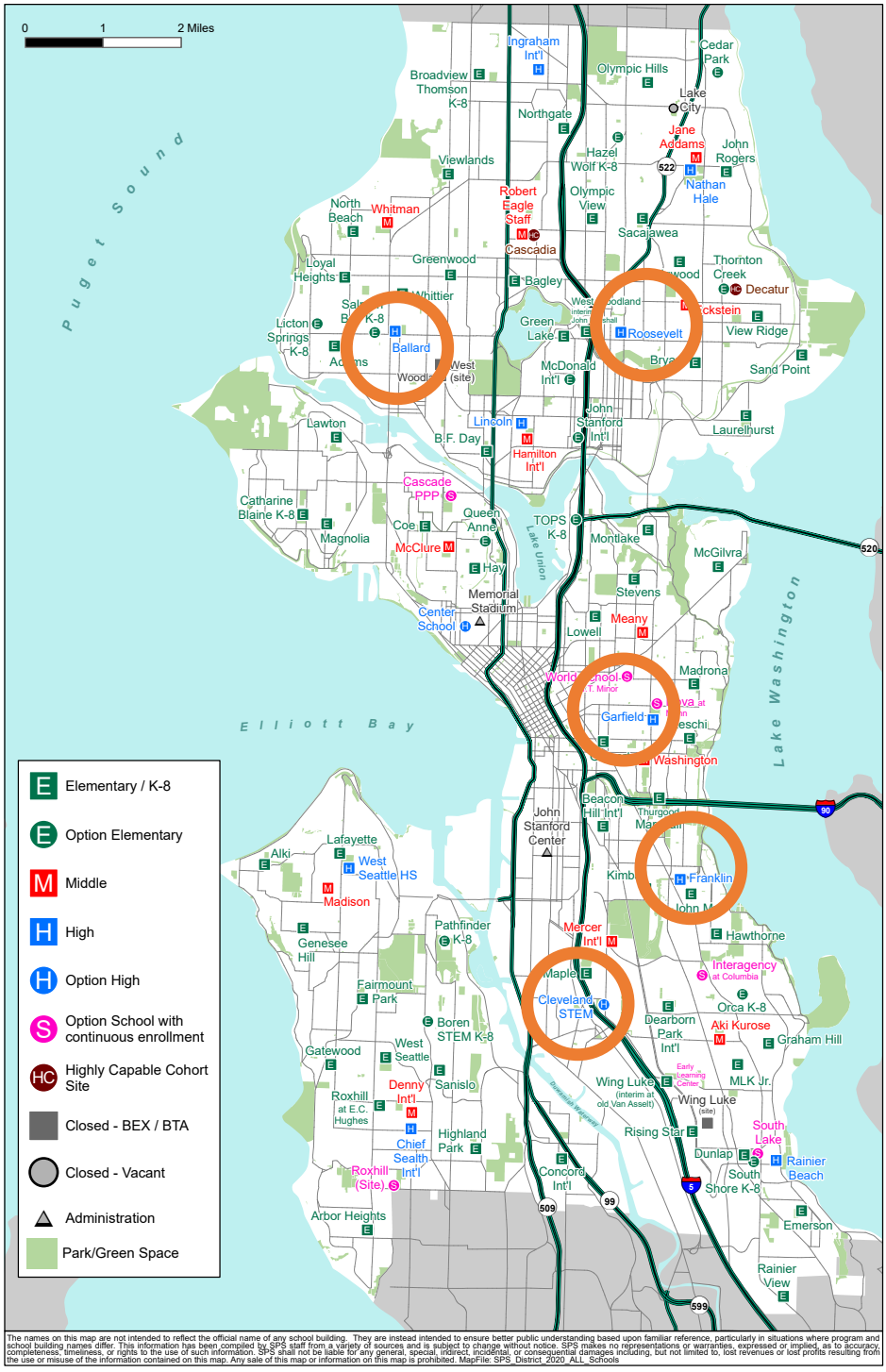




Maps by the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, using data from the National Historical Geographic Information System

Appendix B:

Map of Schools in Seattle



Schools mentioned in this text have been circled. Map by Seattle Public Schools

Appendix C:

Key Individuals

Forbes Bottomly	Seattle Public Schools Superintendent
Ed Palmason	Seattle School Board Member
Walter Hundley	Seattle CORE Chairman, CACRC Member
Philip Burton	Seattle NAACP Lawyer
Reverend John Adams	CACRC Chairman
Sue Gottfried	Seattle CORE Member
Carla Chotzen	Seattle CORE Member
E. June Smith	Seattle NAACP President
Roberta Byrd	School Librarian and Television Host
Herb Robinson	*Seattle Times* Assistant Editor
Lane Smith	*Seattle Times* Religion Editor

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