

**From the City to the Suburbs:
School Integration and Reactions to Boston's METCO Program**

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For my parents, Anita and Dave Chanoux

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Figures	ii-iv, 82
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One: “A Two-Way Street”	14
Chapter Two: The Value of Integration	45
Chapter Three: “Not At Our Expense”	83
Conclusion	116
Bibliography	123

FIGURES

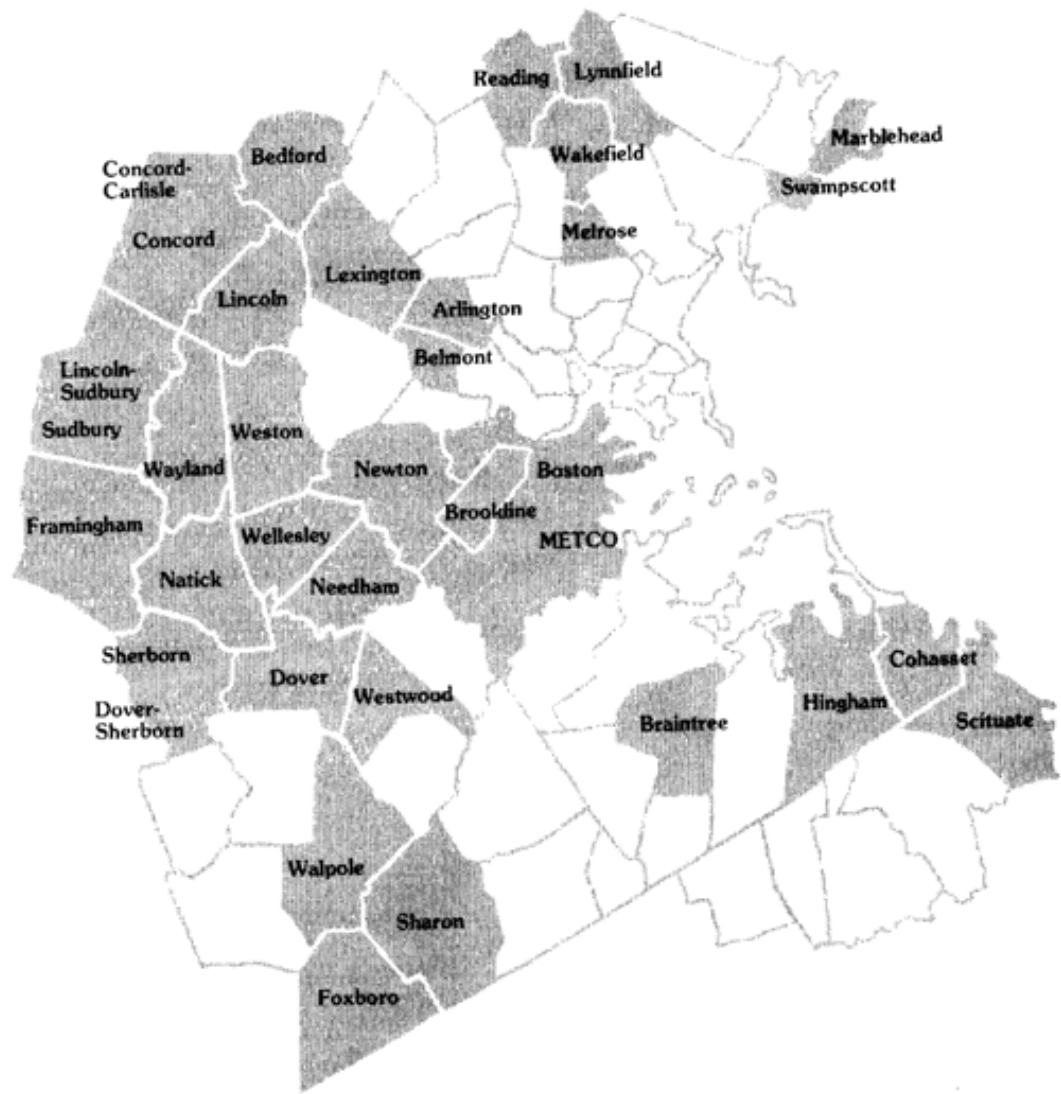


Figure 1 – Map of METCO districts from the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. website, www.metcoinc.org/AboutUs.html, accessed March 28, 2011. In the 2010-2011 school year, METCO bused Boston students to thirty suburban towns. The first suburbs to join METCO in 1966 were Braintree, Brookline, Newton, Wellesley, Lexington, Arlington, and Lincoln. The rest all joined within the program’s first ten years.



Figure 2 – “Boston and Vicinity,” Rand McNally & Co, 1971, courtesy of the University of Michigan Hatcher Graduate Map Library. The highway encircling the city is Route 128, which Boston School Committee Chairman John Kerrigan referenced in his 1975 “Hub at the Bicentennial” speech.



Figure 3 – Map of Boston neighborhoods, 2010, from the Official Website of the City of Boston, cityofboston.gov. In 1963 the city’s primarily black areas, or “black boomerang,” consisted of the South End, Roxbury, and Dorchester neighborhoods. Charlestown and South Boston were two with the most vocal populations who opposed busing for desegregation within the city.

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INTRODUCTION

Even after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which determined that segregated education was inherently unequal and in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, school segregation remained prevalent in both the northern and southern United States. In 1967 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released a pamphlet titled “Schools Can Be Desegregated,” which made several statements regarding segregated schools in the US:

- Racial isolation in the public schools is intense and is growing worse.
- Negro children suffer serious harm when they are educated in racially segregated schools, whatever the origin of that segregation. They do not achieve as well as other children; their aspirations are more restricted than those of other children; and they do not have as much confidence that they can influence their own futures.
- White children in all-white schools are also harmed and frequently are ill-prepared to live in a world of people from diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.¹

The pamphlet demonstrated mainstream liberal views of segregation as a problem for both black and white children across the country. While most liberals accepted that separate schools had a negative effect on black students’ self-esteem and success in school, during the 1960s they began to realize that it additionally harmed isolated white students. The reference to “whatever the origin of that segregation” further noted that segregation was not only the product of Jim Crow laws in the south, but of varied legal and societal processes in the north as well. The rationale behind busing for school integration movements, therefore, became focused not only on correcting inequalities for black students but also for exposing white students to racial diversity.

The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. (METCO) busing program in Boston grew out of these liberal ideologies and worked to give both black urban

¹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, “Schools Can be Desegregated” (Washington, D.C.: Clearinghouse Publication No. 8, June 1967) 1.

students and white suburban students integrated educational experiences. Concerned parents and black activists founded the voluntary program 1966 to provide students from Roxbury and Dorchester with access to superior suburban educational resources while increasing racial diversity in school systems outside the city. In its first year, METCO bused two hundred twenty students who had volunteered for the program to open seats in seven suburban towns.² The organization received substantial support from suburban residents and school committees. Each suburban district guaranteed the urban students a place in their schools through their high school graduation. By the 1970s, it expanded to bus more than one thousand students and had several thousand students on its waiting list.³ In 2010, METCO had increased to include thirty suburban school districts and bused roughly three thousand students from Boston.

While creating integrated school environments was an explicit goal of the METCO Program, few students or parents in the first years considered it an important part of their decision to participate. The small number of METCO students in each town further raised the question of whether the program truly intended to correct the societal problem of suburban school segregation or whether it was more focused on improving the educational experiences of a small number of urban students. METCO gave some students in underfunded and ill-equipped schools in Roxbury the opportunity to have an education that ideally should be available to all American children, but it did not contribute to correcting the problems in the city's schools. Additionally, though the program hoped to increase

² "METCO Is Born," METCO, Inc. website, accessed March 23, 2011, www.metcoinc.org/History.html.

³ *Morgan et al. v. Hennigan et al.*, 379 F. Supp. 410. US Dist. LEXIS 7973; (United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts 1974), [online] LexisNexis Academic Universe.

integration in the metro Boston area, suburban populations remained largely the same within the first decade of the program.

Segregation in the North

Though discussions of segregation in the 1950s and 1960s frequently conjure images of Little Rock, Birmingham, and other southern cities, it was pervasive in the northern United States as well due to both private restrictions and federal policies. Restrictive covenants by homeowners barred the sale of residences in white neighborhoods to minorities. Zoning regulations further mandated minimum lot sizes or barred multifamily dwellings, thus maintaining middle class and racially homogenous suburbs.⁴ In policy, the Federal Housing Authority had a significant impact on the creation of suburbia and its racial makeup. As historian Kenneth T. Jackson argues in *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, “No agency of the United States government has had a more pervasive and powerful impact on the American people” since the 1930s than the FHA.⁵ Created during the Great Depression, it allowed many whites to get home loans to buy houses in the suburbs through insuring their long-term mortgages. However, the FHA explicitly denied mortgages for homes in neighborhoods that were primarily made up of racial minorities.⁶ This fact, coupled with the FHA’s policy of more frequently funding single-family homes than multifamily homes, meant that few builders or potential owners received FHA support for housing within crowded cities.⁷ As Jackson explains, these policies “hastened the decay of

⁴ Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009), 202.

⁵ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 203.

⁶ Sugrue, 203-204.

⁷ Jackson, 207.

inner-city neighborhoods by stripping them of much of their middle-class constituency.”⁸
Cities developed into areas of primarily minorities and working-class whites.

However, few suburbanites recognized these obstacles to homeownership that kept their towns racially segregated. To them, segregated neighborhoods were rather the result of “individual decisions” and the freedom to choose where one wanted to live.⁹ This understanding of segregation ignored the economic and institutional barriers that kept black people from having the ability to move wherever they wanted and contributed to the idea that suburbanites had simply earned enough money to achieve the “American Dream” of private homeownership. Additionally, moving to the suburbs frequently gave white parents an escape from desegregation in their children’s urban schools.¹⁰ They did not see themselves as perpetuating segregation, since they were making individual choices about where they wanted to live – choices that black families could supposedly make as well.

Residential segregation, both within cities and between cities and suburbs, contributed to school segregation in many major metropolitan areas. After *Brown v. Board of Education*, many northern schools that had not been explicitly segregated through *de jure* segregation remained racially homogenous. However, many northerners believed that school segregation was simply a southern problem. Black activists recognized educational inequalities and filed court cases in the north to try to integrate northern schools. The 1961 New York case *Taylor et al. v. Board of Education of New Rochelle* for the first time challenged *de facto* school segregation in the north, or segregation that had not been legally mandated. However, instead of explicitly arguing that *de facto* segregation was unconstitutional, it succeeded based on the same grounds as *Brown v. Board* – that

⁸ Jackson, 206.

⁹ Sugrue, 466.

¹⁰ Sugrue, 467.

segregation was unconstitutional when it was the direct result of intentionally discriminatory policies.¹¹ Students who had attended New Rochelle's segregated school were bused to other, integrated schools and eventually school board closed the school in question. In Gary, Indiana in 1962, an NAACP case against the Gary school officials alleging intent to segregate the schools failed, and the judge ruled that the school board could not be held accountable for residential segregation.¹² Few lawyers attempted to prove that deliberate policies had created residential segregation and thus racially homogenous neighborhood schools were unconstitutional.

Even in successful court cases, however, the question of how schools should be integrated remained controversial, as many northern whites did not want their children affected by desegregation efforts. As Thomas J. Sugrue found in his analysis of civil rights activism in the north, though many northern whites "approved of desegregation in principle, [they] opposed it in practice."¹³ Often integration efforts prompted backlash and accusations of reverse discrimination. Many whites felt that black and Hispanic people were gaining rights at their expense.

Busing was one of the most common approaches to integration, and Charlotte, North Carolina, proved that metropolitan school systems could be effective methods of to desegregate schools both racially and economically. The 1969 case *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg*, reviewed by the Supreme Court in 1971, sought to integrate the city's public schools and launched controversy over busing that continued into the 1970s.¹⁴ However, the metropolitan plan ultimately succeeded, and "a large majority of white families in Charlotte-

¹¹ Sugrue, 197.

¹² Sugrue, 462.

¹³ Sugrue, 465.

¹⁴ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 133.

Mecklenburg decided that they could reconcile their own versions of the American Dream with enrollment in a comprehensively integrated school system.”¹⁵ School integration did not solve residential segregation, but it did show that cities and suburbs could work together to create integrated educational environments.¹⁶

Contrary to the success in Charlotte, the 1972 case in Michigan, *Bradley v. Milliken* closed the door for metropolitan-style solutions to school integration. The judge in *Milliken* ruled that a metropolitan school district would be created to integrate both Detroit and the surrounding suburbs. Suburban whites usually avoided desegregation by virtue of their geographic location, but the *Bradley v. Milliken* ruling denied them such an opportunity. Visceral reactions to the court order avoided racial language but instead focused on the importance of “neighborhood schools” and the idea that parents had moved to towns specifically for the school district.¹⁷ The Supreme Court overturned the metropolitan plan in a 5-4 decision, refuting the argument “that school districts were creatures of the state and that their boundaries could be redrawn in service of larger educational goals.”¹⁸ Because the Supreme Court had allowed suburbs to escape from integration efforts, urban working-class whites and minorities were forced to deal with school segregation on their own and voluntary programs such as METCO became the only way to promote suburban desegregation.

Segregation in Boston

A variety of factors led to segregation in the Boston Public Schools; one of the primary causes was the residential makeup of both the city and suburbs. Federal policies

¹⁵ Lassiter, 217.

¹⁶ Lassiter, 221.

¹⁷ Sugrue, 483.

¹⁸ Sugrue, 487.

created neighborhoods deeply divided by both race and ethnic background in the city as well as in racially isolated suburbs. In 1960, black people made up 2.2 percent of the population of Massachusetts, and roughly 50 percent of black state residents lived in the city of Boston.¹⁹ Between 1950 and 1960, the white population in Boston decreased by 17 percent while white suburban populations increased by 16 percent, illustrating the “white flight” to the suburbs.²⁰ The suburbs of Boston were extremely segregated in the 1960s, though few suburbanites viewed them as such. In Middlesex County, where many of the first METCO towns were located, roughly one percent of the households were nonwhite, and likely a smaller percentage of that one percent was African American.²¹ The previously discussed FHA restrictions and other discriminatory practices maintained the racial homogeneity of metro Boston.

The majority of black people in Boston lived in an area termed the “black boomerang,” made up of neighborhoods in Roxbury, Dorchester and the South End. A 1963 report by the Advisory Committee to the US Commission on Civil Rights exposed the numerous obstacles that kept black people from buying or renting property in certain sections of the city. Using tactics ranging from clear rejection to “ostensibly nondiscriminatory rejection... real estate brokers, developers, landlords, and homeowners” continuously refused to allow black people into certain areas.²² School districting followed neighborhood lines, though in the early 1970s black parents filed a civil lawsuit that proved that the Boston School Committee specifically organized school districts on racial lines.

¹⁹ The Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights “Report on Massachusetts: Housing in Boston,” December 1963, 2.

²⁰ “Report on Massachusetts: Housing in Boston,” 2.

²¹ Of 361,543 households recorded in the 1960 census for Middlesex County, 4,744 were nonwhite. These records did not indicate which races made up the nonwhite statistics, but presumably many minorities in suburban Boston were Asian. 1960 Census Data from Social Explorer Professional, www.socialexplorer.com, accessed March 23, 2011.

²² “Report on Massachusetts: Housing in Boston,” 20.

The suburbs of Boston did not just keep minorities out; white families who were not in the middle and upper classes could not afford to move to the suburbs either. This became a major issue as busing within the city began in the 1970s. Urban whites were frustrated by the “suburban elites” who could judge their refusal to integrate the Boston Public Schools, yet “snob zoning” kept suburban towns and school systems from integrating. Sometimes referred to by urban whites as the “friggin’ liberals in the suburbs,” suburbanites felt the tension between urban and suburban Boston, despite some towns’ efforts to correct segregation through the METCO Program.²³

With school districts determined by neighborhood and thus segregated both within the city and in the suburbs, black students in Boston found themselves in a difficult educational environment. Many studies showed that segregated education had a detrimental effect on young nonwhite children, and Jonathan Kozol, a teacher in the Boston public school system in 1965, reinforced this through his book *Death at an Early Age*, which described his experiences working at an all-black school in Roxbury. The school was rundown and while the majority of the students were black, most of the teachers were white. Students did not have access to the resources they needed due to poor funding, inadequate supplies, and a lack of teachers willing to work with struggling children. After several months he became desensitized to the problems around him, slowly absorbing the attitudes of his coworkers. A common sentiment among other teachers was that a “Negro was acceptable, even lovable, if he came only when invited and at other times stayed back.”²⁴ This idea could be seen in the suburbs of Boston as well, even in towns that had an overall positive reaction to the METCO

²³ John J. Kerrigan, quoted in Robert Reinhold, “More Segregated Than Ever,” *New York Times*, September 30, 1973.

²⁴ Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 22.

Program. Kozol concluded that being educated in such an environment put children at a huge disadvantage from an early age, ultimately causing them to lose their spirits and dreams for a positive future. Concerned parents and activists also saw this and worked to find ways to get their children out of these situations. For some students, METCO became an escape route from Boston and a tool to achieve a better education and a better socioeconomic future.

The arguments for and against the METCO Program demonstrated the limits to suburban liberalism in the historically progressive state as well as class conflicts between urban and suburban whites. The METCO Program caused major debates in its first decade about race-conscious programs, the value of integration, and whether racial integration was as important as economic integration. Busing forced people living in suburbs to confront the potential discrepancies between their political ideologies and the realities of what they wanted for their towns and especially their school systems. Debates about METCO within the city questioned the purpose of the program and its emphasis on racial integration in the suburbs. Many urban working-class whites viewed it as a racially discriminatory program that only focused on helping black children and left white students abandoned in underfunded city schools. METCO resisted efforts by urban legislators and Boston School Committee members to expand the program significantly, raising the question of whether METCO had been created to solve a problem in the city or just help the relatively small number of black students who participated in the program each year.

Though criticism of METCO played a role in arguments about court-ordered busing, most historians focus on the crisis within the city instead of on busing to the suburbs. Ronald P. Formisano, in *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, mentioned METCO briefly in his history of the anti-busing movement within the city. He

concluded that it was a “classic privatist solution to a general social problem – inferior education of black children – that addressed it by setting up a funnel through which only a few could pass to a better education and increased life opportunities.”²⁵ He critiqued the program for pulling the brightest students out of the Boston public schools, distracting from city schools’ issues, and attempting to solve a societal problem on an individual level.

Formisano concluded that the children in METCO came from middle class families, and thus the program left behind poor urban black students and “exaggerated the separation of classes.”²⁶ While Formisano blamed METCO for the continued deterioration of the Boston public schools, he did not analyze the program’s focus on integrated education. Rather, to him METCO seemed to be entirely about giving middle class black children from the city access to well-funded educational resources in the suburbs. Any benefits of integration were simply a gloss by which the program sold itself to suburban communities.

By contrast, Susan Eaton’s *The Other Boston Busing Story* provides an in-depth analysis of METCO through interviews with sixty-five graduates of the program. Unlike Formisano, her evaluation of METCO’s goals is that the program means to “correct disparities” between Boston and the suburbs.²⁷ Her work focused on the experience of METCO students and the ways in which they considered the program a success or a failure. Many commented on the challenges of being a METCO student, which included feeling disconnected from the culture of their hometowns, feeling pressure from their friends in Boston who were not working as hard academically, and dealing with the prejudices and discrimination that came with frequently being the only black student in a classroom.

²⁵ Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 231.

²⁶ Formisano, 231.

²⁷ Susan Eaton, *The Other Boston Busing Story: What’s Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 219.

Several of the students Eaton spoke with referred to their school years as a sort of hell. Many explained that their parents had pushed them into the program, and nearly all had some concept of being in METCO in order to get a better education. When asked if they would repeat the experience or send their own children, most of the people Eaton interviewed said they would.²⁸ Despite the challenges, they recognized the advantages that an integrated suburban education had given them. Eaton's work provides insight into students' perspectives and how their lives were affected by METCO, yet does not discuss suburban reactions aside from racial name-calling and other instances of misunderstanding or discrimination within the schools.

Despite criticism and budget cuts, METCO still functions in Massachusetts and is currently in its forty-fifth year. As Formisano has explained, METCO has a "sacred cow" status in the state as a well-loved institution and each year lobbies the state legislature for additional funds to continue the program.²⁹ The proposed METCO budget for the 2011-2012 school year was \$17.6 million, reflecting a fifteen percent cut since 2008 as well as the substantial size of the financial commitment Massachusetts made to the program.³⁰ Despite METCO's long-lasting presence in the state, its duration contradicts its original intention to be a short-term solution to educational problems in the city and to aid with school desegregation in the suburbs. While the busing program has been an invaluable resource that has undoubtedly improved the educational experiences of many students and helped send many urban students to college, it only helps three thousand of the tens of thousands of Boston students. It has not improved the Boston school system, but rather it has given

²⁸ Eaton, 198.

²⁹ Formisano, 231.

³⁰ "METCO Legislative Alert," METCO, Inc. website, updated February 28, 2011, <http://www.metcoinc.org/Legislative%20Alert.html>.

individual students an opportunity to remove themselves from Boston the city in pursuit of better educational resources. Additionally, while many former students in Susan Eaton's study identified the benefits of attending a majority-white school, integration had not been their ultimate goal when volunteering for the program. Though integration is still an important part of METCO's mission statement, the disconnect between students' goals and the program's goals again raises the question of whether METCO is truly correcting societal problems or simply giving some students access to suburban resources.

An understanding of the reactions to METCO exposes the complex relations between race, class, and geographic location in the Greater Boston area as well as changes in societal opinions towards school integration and affirmative action programs across the country. This thesis will examine METCO's origins and roughly the first decade of the program from 1966 to the mid-seventies through several viewpoints: METCO administrations, white suburban liberals, suburban opponents of METCO, urban activists, and white working-class criticisms of METCO through urban resentment towards the suburbs. METCO was fiercely debated in the suburbs and within Boston, and those debates reveal conflicting understandings of the program and its purpose in the state. Though many suburbanites and parents of black urban students believed that the program was a positive step towards achieving a more equitable society, others focused on the program's cost and potential negative effects on schools, suburban children, and towns themselves. Not all of the suburbs around the city participated in the program, and many who discussed METCO ultimately voted against joining. Many suburbanites held similar views to those of working class white Bostonians, demonstrating the ideological diversity in the suburbs. Boston residents' criticisms of the program revealed

deep resentments towards the suburbs, viewing suburbanites as liberals who only embraced token desegregation while criticizing segregation in the city.

By the 1970s, many people in Boston and surrounding towns began to see METCO not as an effort to correct historic discrimination, but rather a discriminatory program whose focus on race conflicted with the idea that the solution to prejudice was to create a “color-blind” society. The conflict between the desirability of “race-conscious” and “color-blind” programs reflected national shifts in understanding of the purpose of the Civil Rights Movement and the need to integrate schools in the United States. Programs such as METCO that sought to correct years of discrimination towards African Americans received attention for giving one race an unfair advantage over others. Backlash toward METCO and toward affirmative action nationally ignored the history and long-lasting effects of discrimination in the United States and recast the white majority as victims of minority demands.

CHAPTER ONE: “A Two-Way Street”

The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc., Program developed in the latter half of 1965 after several years of civil rights action, parental dissatisfaction with the Boston public schools, and the passage of the Racial Imbalance Law. Though creators proposed the program as a short-term solution to urban school problems, soon the organizers began discussing a more permanent future. Though the first school committees who voted to accept the program welcomed the opportunity to assist students from the city, METCO staff worked to educate suburban staff on the different situation in which METCO students found themselves. Additionally, METCO officials emphasized that suburban integration was beneficial to both urban and suburban students – a “two-way street” that would positively affect racially isolated or segregated students in the Greater Boston area. This chapter will examine the program’s origins, its structure, the METCO suburbs, interactions between the suburbs and the city in the first few years, and METCO student experiences.

Parent Organization for School Improvement and Desegregation

By the 1960s, the Boston public school system had deteriorated to the point that parents started to take actions to improve the quality of education provided for their children. African American parents in particular realized that despite the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case overturning the ideology of “separate but equal,” their children attended segregated and inferior schools. Though many white urban parents insisted that their own children attended dilapidated schools, the justices in *Brown v. Board* and other researchers had determined that any school segregated by race barred children from getting equal

educations, even if “physical facilities and other ‘tangible’ factors” were the same.¹ Black parents started to organize to get their children access to better resources and better schools. Along with the NAACP, they attempted to confront the Boston School Committee (BSC) to find a solution.

In June 1963, the NAACP with the support of black parents submitted a list of fourteen demands to the BSC, one of which was the recognition of *de facto* segregation in the city’s public schools.² *De facto* segregation meant that segregation existed but not as a result of legal actions or official policies; legally mandated segregation was known as *de jure* segregation. Though previous talks between black leaders and the BSC had been positive, even prompting Chairwoman Louise Day Hicks, an anti-integrationist and anti-busing Charlestown native, to feel “deeply disturbed” about black children’s situation in the schools, the issue of *de facto* segregation led to a breakdown in discussions between the two groups.³ The BSC refused to acknowledge segregation in the public schools. Segregation overshadowed other demands of the NAACP, such as mandating training for white teachers to eradicate prejudices against black children and non-discriminatory hiring practices for faculty, and by mid-June the talks had failed completely.⁴

Black leaders took public approaches to drawing attention to BSC policies, prompting backlash from the BSC. On June 18, more than eight thousand students, mostly black but with some white suburban support, boycotted school to protest segregation and the BSC’s

¹ *Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.*, 347 U.S. 483; 74 S. Ct. 686; 98 L. Ed. 873; 1954 U.S. LEXIS 2094; (United States Supreme Court 1954), [online] LexisNexis Academic Universe.

² “History: Chronology of the Development of Metco,” Box 2, File 3, Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc., Archives, Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

³ Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 28.

⁴ Formisano, 29.

refusal to discuss the racial makeup of the public schools.⁵ Chairwoman Hicks resented NAACP attacks on the BSC in the media that summer, and further “lash[ed] out at the NAACP for its militancy.”⁶ She further insisted that the schools had not contributed to black children’s inferior educations, but rather “black pupils who were poorly equipped by their families and culture to learn” were the problem.⁷ Rather than the black students as victims of the school system, they were the cause of the schools’ deterioration. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Hicks often reframed the idea of victimhood in regards to school integration.

However, the BSC could not continue to avoid discussions with the NAACP and black parents. Before another proposed boycott in February 1964, the BSC voted to reverse their previous decision refusing to acknowledge segregation. According to Committeeman Thomas S. Eisenstadt, “It’s about time we turn the other cheek if we must.”⁸ His phrasing demonstrated the BSC’s reluctance to discuss segregation as well as the committee’s resentment towards black activists. His reference to “turning the other cheek” showed that the BSC felt unfairly attacked, even though conceding that *de facto* segregation existed would not be admitting that the BSC had any role in creating the situation. The NAACP’s actions successfully drew State Commissioner on Education Owen Kiernan’s attention to racial segregation in the public schools. Though the BSC did little to examine the schools’ makeup, Kiernan organized a commission to investigate the school system; their report had a significant impact on policies surrounding segregation in Boston.

⁵ “Boston Conference Called,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1964.

⁶ Formisano, 30.

⁷ Formisano, 30.

⁸ “Boston Acts to Avert Busing,” *New York Times*, February 11, 1964.

The Kiernan Commission Report and the Racial Imbalance Law

Kiernan's Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance and Education consisted of religious leaders; presidents of Boston University, Tufts University, Boston College, and Northeastern University; the head of the Massachusetts League of Women Voters; heads of major local businesses; legal officials; educators; and other major figures from the Boston area. While writer J. Anthony Lukas referred to the commission as "a committee of distinguished Massachusetts citizens," another journalist called them "one of the greatest collections of goo-goos ever assembled in Massachusetts."⁹ Because the committee members were not all Boston residents, many people within the city disputed the legitimacy of their findings.

Despite criticism, the committee's study legitimized NAACP claims of significant problems in the Boston school system. The report, *Because It Is Right – Educationally*, found that "imbalance [did] exist in some of our communities and... its effects are harmful."¹⁰ Further, it insisted that school officials had both "professional and moral" obligations to correct the problem.¹¹ "Racial imbalance" as defined in the report meant that a school was more than fifty percent non-white. In addition to being harmful to both black and white students, the committee wrote that imbalance "represent[ed] a serious conflict with the American creed of equal opportunity."¹² This statement demonstrated an acceptance of civil rights activists' assertion that discrimination, both in education and other areas, went against American ideals. As in earlier discussions of *de facto* segregation with the BSC, the

⁹ J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Random House, 1986), 17; Alan Lupo quoted in Formisano, 34.

¹⁰ Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance and Education, *Because It Is Right – Educationally*, April 1965, VIII.

¹¹ Advisory Committee, *Because It Is Right*, VIII.

¹² Advisory Committee, *Because It Is Right*, 2.

committee did not find that the BSC had created this imbalance, and the word “segregation” did not appear in their report.

The report proposed multiple options to relieve imbalance, including busing children to different schools. The reference to the “exchange of students between other school buildings” prompted severe backlash from white urbanites who soon rallied against busing.¹³ Chairwoman Hicks insisted that busing was “un-democratic” and “un-American.”¹⁴ Despite urban outcries against the report, religious leaders, politicians, and citizens from across the state supported its conclusions. According to historian Ronald P. Formisano, these supporters were from the same social and political demographics that supported national civil rights legislation.¹⁵ Indeed, supporters helped to develop statewide legislation from the report. The committee’s recommendations for state action quickly became the basis of the 1965 Racial Imbalance Law.

The Racial Imbalance Law made schools with more than fifty percent nonwhite enrollments illegal in the state and allowed students in racially imbalanced schools to request transfers to balanced schools. Urban debates over the law continued into the 1970s as the BSC worked to avoid complying with it. Many whites in Boston decried the law as unnecessary and foisted upon the city by suburban liberals who would not feel its effects. While the legislation gave black parents the opportunity to develop busing programs such as Operation Exodus¹⁶ and the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc., it also

¹³ Advisory Committee, *Because It Is Right*, 9.

¹⁴ Lukas, 17.

¹⁵ Formisano, 35.

¹⁶ Operation Exodus, founded by Ellen Jackson and Betty Johnson at the beginning of the 1965 school year, was a program organized by parents in Roxbury to bus their children from overcrowded schools to open spaces in white schools in the Back Bay area of Boston. The program was not funded by the state, but privately financed by black parents and fundraising efforts. By 1969 it bused 1,100 students. See Formisano, 37-38, and *Morgan et al. v. Hennigan et al.*, (United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, Civ. A. No. 72-911-G, June 21, 1974), www.lexisnexis.com (accessed March 15, 2011).

ignored the racial imbalance of Boston's suburbs. By defining imbalance in terms of nonwhite students, the all-white suburban public schools were not technically imbalanced. The opportunities it provided for black parents, however, led to the creation of METCO, a voluntary urban-suburban busing program.

The Beginning of METCO

By the end of 1965 urban black parents of school children, black activists, and some suburban school officials had outlined the basic plan for the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. Designed as a short-term solution until the Boston "straighten[ed] out" its school system, METCO would bus black students from the city to open spaces in white suburban schools.¹⁷ Several of the first founders of METCO had been early civil rights activists in the city with specific focuses on the schools. Ruth Batson, who became the program's Executive Director in 1967, had struggled with the Boston school department regarding her daughters' experiences in the public schools.¹⁸ She had also served as the NAACP's education committee chairman.¹⁹ METCO as a creation of black activists demonstrated the lengths to which the civil rights movement in Boston had extended and the power of black parents to organize for their children's benefit. While busing students out of Boston through METCO did not improve the schools within the city, it did provide METCO students with access to better-funded suburban schools and an integrated classroom environment.

¹⁷ Ruth Batson and Robert C. Hayden, "A History of METCO: A Suburban Education for Boston's Urban Students," 1987, Box 2, File 10, METCO Archives.

¹⁸ Formisano, 27.

¹⁹ Lukas, 125.

METCO founders worked with suburban school committee members to find placements for Boston students. Suburban officials also had an impact on the program. For example, Brookline School Committee member Leon Trilling became an active participant in the METCO administration, and Brookline was one of the first towns to commit to the program. In January 1966, school committees in Lexington, Newton, Brookline and Wellesley voted to participate in the program. By the beginning of the 1966 school year, Arlington, Lincoln, and Braintree also decided to invite METCO to their schools. Each town's school committee guaranteed METCO students a place in the school system through high school graduation.

METCO administration consisted of urban and suburban sections; there was a main office in Roxbury and committees and coordinators stationed in each suburb. The main office dealt with policy, transportation, student placements, and other projects geared towards the overall administration of the program.²⁰ Suburban committees worked with urban students in the schools and administrators from the suburban school district. The suburban wing also organized host families, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Overall, the suburban coordinators worked to ease the transition to suburban schools for Boston students.²¹

When working with potential receiving towns, METCO administrators took into account "community attitude," recognizing that resident students would carry the general atmosphere of the town into the classroom each day.²² METCO did not want to bus students into hostile environments. When Winchester considered participating in 1967, the town

²⁰ Susan Eaton, *The Other Boston Busing Story: What's Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001), 5.

²¹ Eaton, 5.

²² "Guidelines for METCO Participants," May 1966, Box 1, File 34, METCO Archives.

erupted into debate about the program. Though the Winchester Town Meeting eventually accepted the METCO Program by a 99-98 vote, METCO decided against sending students to the town because of the negative effect that such widespread anti-METCO feelings could have on urban students.²³ METCO administrators also asked school districts to make certain changes to their curriculum and school structures; these requests of suburban schools will be addressed later in the chapter.

The first METCO towns shared certain characteristics, including economic affluence and racial homogeneity. Their school districts were predominantly white; for example, in 1960 thirteen black families lived in Lexington out of a population of more than thirty thousand residents.²⁴ The towns also had histories of liberal political leanings and awareness of societal issues. Lexington residents established the Lexington Civil Rights Committee in 1960 and, according to the first Vice President of the Boston NAACP, “practically everyone belong[ed] to the fair housing committee.”²⁵ As a 1970 article in *The Journal of Negro Education* noted, ethnicity played a significant role in how suburbs reacted to the METCO Program. To examine this, the article used the town of Quincy, which considered but never joined the METCO Program, as an example. Quincy had a significant population of former Dorchester and South Boston residents, who had moved away from their Irish-Catholic neighborhoods and who had consistently opposed efforts to relieve segregation within Boston.²⁶ Two of the original METCO towns, Newton and Brookline, also had large Jewish

²³ “Winchester ‘Accepts’ METCO In Close 99-98 Public Vote, METCO Then Rejects Winchester Because Of ‘Attitude,’” *Winchester Star*, June 29, 1967.

²⁴ Lukas, 95.

²⁵ Terry Cogan, Letter to the Editor, *Lexington Minute-Man*, December 16, 1965; Richard Banks, quoted in “Northern Negro Trapped in Vicious Cycle, Says Banks,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 13, 1966.

²⁶ Efreem Sigel and Gary F. Jonas, “Metropolitan Cooperation in Education: The Greater Boston Case,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 39, No. 2 (1970): 154. In JSTOR [database online] accessed March 19, 2011.

populations that supported the busing program; Quincy did not.²⁷ Additionally, as a less affluent town directly next to Boston, Quincy risked housing integration following school integration in a way that towns with high property values and housing costs did not.

Funding

In order to start the program, METCO administrators secured federal funding under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. These grants provided enough money to run the program for about three years and paid for transportation, tuition, and administrative costs.²⁸ Though the limitations of the initial funding helped create METCO as a temporary solution, by the program's third year administrators began viewing it as a longer-term organization. Title III funds were only available for new programs, not "year-in-year-out operational programs," so METCO asked the Carnegie Corporation for another two-year grant, explaining, "[I]t is now necessary to start the conversion to a more permanent format" of funding.²⁹ The program needed private support until it could secure state funds.

That METCO considered itself a "year-in-year-out" program and needed "permanent" funding demonstrated both that the problems in the Boston schools persisted and that METCO had stopped imagining itself as a truly short-term solution. Indeed, in a separate report to the Carnegie Corporation that year, METCO staff noted, "we have never lacked for applicants to the program and in June, 1968, the METCO Parents' Council

²⁷ Sigel and Jonas, "Metropolitan Cooperation...", 154.

²⁸ "An Application for A Two Year Grant from The Carnegie Corporation," ca. 1968, Box 2, File 1, METCO Archives.

²⁹ "An Application for a Two Year Grant...", METCO Archives.

unanimously voted its desire to see the program continue indefinitely.”³⁰ METCO parents witnessed the improved educational experience of their children in the first two years of the program and so did not want to put their children back into the Boston public schools. Securing permanent funding from the state or extended support from the Carnegie Corporation could ensure their students’ academic success through their high school graduations. A three-year program could only give children limited access to suburban resources.

Funding was a consistent issue for METCO when new towns considered participation. Though the program repeatedly emphasized that local tax revenue did not go to paying for METCO, many suburbanites feared that welcoming urban students into their schools would result in higher taxes. When it first voted to join the program in 1966, the Lexington School Committee emphasized that the cost of the program had to be covered by “outside means.”³¹ Even when the Lexington Citizens Committee for Public Schools voted to support the school committee’s decision, an article in the *Lexington Minute-Man* devoted a paragraph to discussing state, federal, and foundation funds that would pay for the program.³² In 1970, when the neighboring town of Belmont was considering participation in METCO, one of the top four questions they had about the program was whether or not the town was paying for it.³³ While suburbs were willing to assist with racial imbalance in the city, they frequently did not want to pay to do so. This became an issue after the first decade of

³⁰ Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity Public Relations Department, “A Report to the Carnegie Corporation,” ca. 1968, Box 22, File 2, METCO Archives.

³¹ “School Committee to Accept 25 Hub Pupils,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 20, 1966.

³² “Supports School Board: Citizens Committee Favors Busing Program,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 27, 1966.

³³ “Advisory Comm. Chairman Answers Questions Often Asked On METCO,” *Belmont Herald*, February 5, 1970, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

METCO, when Massachusetts ran into financial problems and budget cuts threatened METCO's funding.

Student Selection and Parents' Suburban Choices

Students volunteered to participate in METCO, and to be a part of the program they had to go through an application process that included a personal interview. When METCO coordinators interviewed the students, they found that few were concerned with integrated education. The majority of students and their parents focused on getting the best education possible, whether or not they were in an integrated environment. Busing meant gaining access to better quality schools, not correcting a societal problem. In selecting students, METCO administrators tried to find children with varied family and socioeconomic backgrounds. They also attempted to accept "an academic mix."³⁴ Despite their focus on giving students of all educational backgrounds a chance to participate, educators and policy makers criticized the program for pulling the most talented students out of the Boston Public Schools. Ellen Jackson, founder of Operation Exodus, a busing program that send students from Roxbury to other schools within Boston, called METCO a "private school program" that "skimmed the cream off the top."³⁵ However, Jackson's daughter attended junior high school in Lexington through the METCO Program at that time.³⁶ Even critics had to accept that METCO provided opportunities that the schools in Boston could not.

Susan Eaton's book *The Other Boston Busing Story* exposed the reasons why students volunteered for the METCO Program. Eaton conducted interviews with sixty-five former

³⁴ Batson and Hayden, METCO Archives.

³⁵ Ellen Jackson, quoted in Howard Spergel, "Busing Kids to the Suburbs," reprinted from *American Education*, US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, April 1967, Box 44, File 29, METCO Archives.

³⁶ Spergel, "Busing Kids...", METCO Archives.

METCO students, compiling their memories and reflections on the program and its impact on their lives. When discussing their reasons for joining, Eaton discovered a major trend. Busing was not “so much an escape hatch as it was a bet on the future” and a chance “to pursue a share of the American dream.”³⁷ Many students remembered their parents emphasizing that suburban schools “carried prestige” and “might one day open doors previously shut” in ways that diplomas from Boston schools might not.³⁸ Learning to navigate a dominantly white world through a dominantly white school system would inevitably help students in their futures. Parents and students recognized that education was an essential tool in creating a better future and taking part in the American dream of socioeconomic improvement, often represented by home ownership in the suburbs.

Once accepted to the program, students and their parents could request to be placed in certain towns depending on what grade levels were available. In a pamphlet chronicling the history of the program, program founder Ruth Batson and Robert C. Hayden described how program participants viewed the various towns. They wrote that Newton and Brookline were the most popular suburbs due to their excellent academic reputations. Newton was also frequently requested because one percent of the town’s population was African American, a large percentage in comparison to other suburbs in the Greater Boston area.³⁹ Many parents requested Lexington because it was accepting students into the junior high, which were some of the most requested grade levels, and the town was well known for its historical significance. Lincoln and Arlington were the least popular towns to which METCO bused students. Lincoln was a fifty-minute bus ride from the city and had an entirely white

³⁷ Susan Eaton, *The Other Boston Busing Story: What’s Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 27.

³⁸ Eaton, 35.

³⁹ Batson and Hayden, METCO Archives.

population, making it less desirable. Boston parents did not consider Arlington a truly “elite” suburb and it was known for housing discrimination. According to Batson and Hayden, none of the applicants was familiar with Braintree, but as one parent explained, “It’s got to be better than Boston!”⁴⁰

Benefits for the Suburbs

Throughout METCO literature, the founders and proponents of the program emphasized that school integration was beneficial to all students, not just African Americans. It exposed white suburban students to greater diversity than they would otherwise experience in school or their neighborhoods and prepared them for the world beyond their hometowns. By focusing on the good that busing would do for the suburbs, METCO officials attempted to counteract the idea that the program was only about assisting the students from Boston. In his forward to the 1970 METCO guidelines, Executive Director Robert C. Hayden wrote,

METCO is seen as an opportunity for suburban Boston communities to improve the quality of their respective school systems and to provide new learning experiences for their resident students as well as for children from Boston. The METCO students bring fresh insights and new perspectives to the suburban classroom. METCO is a two-way street benefitting all children.⁴¹

By introducing METCO as explicitly for suburban communities to improve their school quality, Hayden reversed the common description of the program. Many suburbanites and school officials rightly believed that METCO had chosen their school systems because of their high quality and good reputations. By explaining the program in terms of “new learning experiences” for suburban children and “fresh insights” from METCO students, Hayden gave the suburbs reasons to see METCO as an essential program for their own children. Busing

⁴⁰ Batson and Hayden, METCO Archives.

⁴¹ “Guidelines for Metropolitan Boston Communities Interested In Participating in METCO,” December 1970, Box 1, File 35, METCO Archives.

was not an auxiliary program with a minimal effect on suburban schools; it would enrich the schools and improve suburban education.

Hayden additionally removed the emphasis from urban students by only referring to them explicitly once: “as well as for children from Boston.” Because the black students were not the focus of his statement, Hayden was again able to redirect his discussion of METCO’s goals to be about the suburban communities. Underlining the word “all” and calling the program a “two-way street” drew even more attention to the mutual benefit of METCO. Hayden’s continued emphasis suggested the difficulty of convincing suburbanites that METCO was “two-way street.” Nonetheless, organizers and school officials frequently used this argument to justify the program, especially to those suburban residents who expressed concerns that METCO students would lower school standards. Such arguments against the program will be discussed in the next chapter.

Some suburban residents adopted this rhetoric and used it to garner support for the program among residents. One of the main reasons that the Lexington Citizens Committee supported the METCO Program in their town was that “it would broaden the experience of the Lexington students who came into contact with the Roxbury students.”⁴² Additionally, in 1968 Superintendent of Lexington Public Schools Rudolph Fobert echoed the sentiment. As an article in the *Lexington Minute-Man* explained, “One of the major benefits received by the Lexington students, Fobert said, is that they are being exposed to colored people. They are seeing that there is no difference between Negroes and Whites.”⁴³ Without benefits for their own children, residents would be less likely to support METCO in their town.

⁴² “Supports School Board,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 27, 1966.

⁴³ “3 Area Towns Prove that METCO Is A Successful Program,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, March 21, 1968, Box 53, File 30, METCO Archives.

Even after the first decade of METCO, suburban benefits from the program remained a key point in METCO literature. The 1976 *METCO Handbook* stated that creating “a new learning experience for suburban children” was one of the program’s main goals.⁴⁴ This emphasis showed that even after a decade, the METCO Program needed to justify itself to suburbanites by proving that their children would benefit from the busing program. Additionally, the contrast in the language used in the statement of METCO’s goals illustrated the different situations for urban and suburban students. While busing provided “a new learning experience” for white students, for urban students it was an “opportunity for an integrated public school education” rather than being in segregated schools.⁴⁵ The writers of the handbook linked segregation to Boston, not the suburbs, portraying it as an urban problem. By describing integration as a learning experience for white students, the writers did not give the same sense of urgency to suburban students’ racial isolation. This could come from an understanding of the more pressing educational problems in the city or the recognition of the significant resources that suburban students already had. Integration for black students meant access to those suburban resources.

Requirements for Suburban Participation

In addition to accepting urban students, METCO organizers asked schools to make changes in their curriculum and personnel. In social studies classes, they requested that teachers include African American history as part of their courses in order to give black students connections to their own history.⁴⁶ Organizers also included in their 1966 guidelines

⁴⁴ Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity, “METCO Handbook,” Massachusetts Department of Education, 1976, Box 1, File 39, METCO Archives.

⁴⁵ Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity, “METCO Handbook,” 1976, METCO Archives.

⁴⁶ “Guidelines for METCO Participants,” May 1966, Box 1, File 34 METCO Archives.

“Active recruitment of Negro teachers, guidance personnel, and administrators.”⁴⁷ However, districts apparently did not take these requests seriously. In guidelines for the 1970 school year, the demands for curriculum and personnel changes were much more explicit and presented with a more insistent tone. The pamphlet stated:

METCO will never achieve its full potential for black or white youngsters unless African and Afro-American culture, history and experience is consciously built into the curriculum at all grade levels and in all disciplines - - social science, history, science, music, and art. Black children and youth must see themselves in the curriculum.⁴⁸

Students might have access to better educational resources in the suburbs, but METCO administrators asserted that integration could not help improve the problems of black children’s self-esteem if they could not “see themselves” in their own learning. The statement again emphasized METCO’s mutual benefit for urban and suburban students by explicitly mentioning “black or white youngsters.” The guidelines again discussed both black and white students when explaining the importance of having “competent black personnel” working in suburban districts.⁴⁹ The program’s administrators wanted to emphasize that diversity was beneficial for suburban students as well. METCO was not simply about giving students access to resources, but about creating a more inclusive environment in the suburbs.

In 1976, authors of the *METCO Handbook* even more specific in requests for curriculum review. The handbook stated, “All school books, instructional and educational materials shall be reviewed for sex-role and minority group stereotyping. Appropriate activities, discussions and/or supplementary materials shall be used to counteract the

⁴⁷ “Guidelines for METCO Participants,” 1966, METCO Archives.

⁴⁸ “Guidelines for Metropolitan Boston Communities...,” 1970, METCO Archives.

⁴⁹ “Guidelines for Metropolitan Boston Communities...,” 1970, METCO Archives.

stereotypes depicted in such materials.”⁵⁰ Rather than just explaining the importance of representing African American culture and history in the school curriculum, METCO insisted upon reviewing all materials to avoid negative images. The inclusion of sex-role stereotypes also demonstrated changing values in the United States and an increased understanding of women’s issues. This more active role in curriculum changes showed both the lessons METCO organizers had learned in the first decade of the program as well as the increased influence of the program. Without firm backing and an established role in the public school system, METCO would not have been able to enforce its demands for changes.

This environment was also a problem in the first few years of the METCO Program. In the 1970s participant guidelines, the program coordinators wrote more explicitly about teachers’ roles as well, explaining that administrators and teachers “should recognize that they are part of the community’s culture... we cannot ignore the pressing problems of race relations and its impact upon all children.”⁵¹ The writers went on to explain that teachers had the biggest effect on students daily and could not let their own “tension and inner feelings interfere” with their “rapports” with students of any race.⁵² METCO coordinators recommended attending programs designed to improve teaching ability and relationship building related to integration. They stated that integration was not just about the number of students of a certain race in a classroom, it was about the attitudes and environments that could promote high quality learning.

⁵⁰ Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity, “METCO Handbook,” 1976, METCO Archives.

⁵¹ “Guidelines for Metropolitan Boston Communities...,” 1970, METCO Archives.

⁵² “Guidelines for Metropolitan Boston Communities...,” 1970, METCO Archives.

Host Families

One of the ways in which METCO administrators hoped to foster a welcoming atmosphere in the suburbs was through the establishment of “host families.” METCO staff paired each urban student with a suburban family who had a child the same age and ideally in the same class at school. The families provided support for the urban children and could be available during the day in case of emergencies. Suburban families applied to host a METCO student and went through a process that involved multiple interviews with social workers, including one at the family’s home.⁵³ When selecting a family to host, METCO staff considered three main factors: “the physical and emotional well-being of the child,” “the feeling of security and confidence necessary for the parents,” and “the establishment of harmonious relationships between the two communities involved in the project.”⁵⁴ The final point illustrated METCO’s commitment to building relationships between the suburbs and urban children and their families. When expanding on a host parent’s responsibilities, the staff emphasized that parents should not be too busy to take children to birthday parties in the suburbs or Roxbury and that they should be willing to have the urban children stay in their homes overnight.⁵⁵

METCO did not require host families to have an extensive background in race relations, but did ask that they learn about related issues. In Lincoln in 1966, METCO coordinators released an information sheet that explained, “the second-home parent [must] be willing to face race and economic difference honestly and calmly and make some effort to

⁵³ “Guidelines for Metropolitan Boston Communities...,” 1970, METCO Archives.

⁵⁴ “Second Home Selection,” June 28, 1966, Lincoln Coordinating Committee files, Box 2, File 13, METCO Archives.

⁵⁵ “Second Home Selection,” METCO Archives.

inform herself on race relations.”⁵⁶ The information sheet went on to request that host parents familiarize themselves with their METCO students’ home communities. Though separate from school curricula, these requirements demonstrated that METCO hoped to educate entire suburban communities rather than just schoolchildren. School integration through the METCO Program could ideally lead to better understandings between races and members of different socioeconomic classes.

Coordinator Jean H. Stoudt of the Lincoln METCO Coordinating Committee wrote a letter regarding a meeting of host mothers in November 1966 that revealed the practical workings of the host family system. The mothers from Lincoln wanted to interact informally with mothers from Roxbury, but also expressed a desire to each determine her own social interactions individually.⁵⁷ Stoudt’s letter further demonstrated individualized feelings when she wrote about suggesting an overnight visit for METCO students during the winter break. She emphasized that the mothers “prefer[red] to make their own plans.” Though METCO staff suggested certain commitments and events, each host family developed its own approach to the program. Though asked by the METCO coordinators to develop sensitivities to class and race, host families and other members of suburban communities struggled to welcome students without retaining old prejudices, as demonstrated by suburban understandings of the program.

⁵⁶ Host families were originally called “second homes,” but METCO staff changed the terms quickly as they organized the host family system. “Second Home Selection,” METCO Archives.

⁵⁷ Jean H. Stoudt, Coordinator, to Rev. Cornelius Hastie, November 21, 1966, Box 2, File 13, METCO Archives.

Suburban Understandings of the METCO Program and METCO Students

When the Lexington School Committee announced that it had decided to participate in the METCO Program, it outlined its choice as a moral decision. While noting that its “primary responsibility” was to the resident students, it said that the committee “recognizes the responsibility of the suburbs towards the Metropolitan community.”⁵⁸ The committee members did not decide to assist the METCO Program simply as a favor, but because it was the town’s responsibility. To emphasize this point, thirteen clergymen of Lexington wrote into the town paper that day supporting METCO as a solution to a moral issue in Massachusetts. Lexington itself had a history of civil rights activism and awareness, which likely heightened its sense of moral responsibility. In 1960, town residents founded the Lexington Civil Rights Committee “to promote fundamental human rights and freedom in the best tradition of Lexington.”⁵⁹ Lexington residents were aware of the problems in Boston, which made the school committee members’ decisions to participate in METCO easier. They knew that they would have support from the community.

However, at times the idea of a “moral responsibility” created problems. If suburbanites viewed their participation in METCO as a form of charity, they simplified METCO students’ backgrounds to the image of a “ghetto child” and did not appreciate the mutual benefit that METCO coordinators emphasized. When writing to encourage other Lexington residents to support the METCO Program just as it started in January 1966, Elizabeth C. Weaver explained that urban students were similar to residents’ grandparents who had fought for access to education. Her comparison extended into stereotypes about Roxbury residents that, while demonstrating suburban assumptions about the city, did not

⁵⁸ “School Committee to Accept 25 Hub Pupils,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 20, 1966.

⁵⁹ Terry Cogan, letter to the *Lexington Minute-Man*, December 16, 1965.

reflect the average socioeconomic backgrounds of METCO students. She wrote, “Many of [our grandparents’] parents were poor and uneducated. Some were undesirable citizens, with a lack of interest and distrust of education. Many American children of every generation have, with public assistance, outgrown limiting environments and developed into our finest citizens.”⁶⁰ Though Weaver had good intentions, her characterization of Roxbury students as victims of a limiting environment who needed public assistance to rise above their circumstances demonstrated a narrow and incorrect view of urban students. Weaver believed that the METCO students could become “our finest citizens,” but in order to do so, they not only needed to escape their deteriorating public schools but their uneducated parents who raised them with a “distrust” of education. Concerned parents’ creation of METCO contradicted her assumption; they were so involved in their children’s education that they were willing to bus them to other towns to access better resources.

Suburban residents, especially host families, had to confront their own assumptions when interacting with METCO students. The Goods, a host family in Lexington, met and socialized with their METCO student’s family, the Booths. Mrs. Clarence Good, Jr. explained to a *New York Times* reporter in 1969 that the two families had much in common, but that the Booths were not “the usual METCO family.”⁶¹ When, during the interview, her husband asked what a typical METCO family looked like, Mrs. Good hesitated, stating that perhaps they were usual. She clarified, however, that when imagining Roxbury, suburbanites like herself seldom thought of a home “with a mother and father who have regular jobs and who are terribly interested in their children.”⁶² This image of urban dysfunction was common and problematic, demonstrating an assumption that most METCO students came

⁶⁰ Elizabeth C. Weaver, “Show the Way,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 20, 1966.

⁶¹ “Buses That Bring Together Two Separate and Unequal Worlds,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1969.

⁶² Mrs. Clarence Good, Jr., quoted in “Buses That Bring...,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1969.

from broken, lower class homes where they lacked for parental support. The *New York Times* article reiterated this image in describing the program, referring several times to “the Roxbury-Dorchester ghettos.”⁶³

By contrast, many METCO students participated in the program because of their parents’ deep concern for their educational success. Susan Eaton discovered that almost all of the participants with whom she spoke described their homes and neighborhoods as “warm, nurturing places.”⁶⁴ Their communities were also made up of mixed income families, though some were from poorer areas. While they do remember “symbols of neglect and collective lack of opportunity,” they did not remember their neighborhoods as “ghettos” or “slums.”⁶⁵ Additionally, many of the students who Eaton interviewed participated in METCO because their parents insisted. Even when they wanted to drop out and go to school with friends in Boston, their parents would not let them make that choice.⁶⁶

When the program started in 1966, school officials tried to combat assumptions that METCO students were from the “ghetto.” Braintree Superintendent of Schools William F. Young released a statement before the school year began saying that the METCO students would not receive special treatment. He explained, “We accept children with all kinds of backgrounds every year... the only difference is that this group will not live in town.”⁶⁷ He hoped that Braintree teachers, students, and parents would be able to create a welcoming environment without making METCO students feel singled out or different. The same article covering Young’s statement quoted METCO Executive Director Ruth Batson’s advice to

⁶³ “Buses That Bring...,” *New York Times*, April 4, 1969.

⁶⁴ Eaton, 27.

⁶⁵ Eaton, 28.

⁶⁶ Eaton, 40-41.

⁶⁷ Ann Tutino, “Young Bars Special Role For Negroes: Treat Them as Any Others, School Chief Declares,” *Braintree Sunday News*, August 21, 1966, Box 44, File 26, METCO Archives.

host families: “The most important thing is your attitude... if you are doing it out of the sympathy for some ‘poor kid from the slums,’ then drop the idea.”⁶⁸ METCO coordinators and school administrators did not want METCO students to become charity cases for suburban families. Though they encouraged the involvement of suburbanites in the METCO Program, they did not want to create the idea of “slum children” being saved from educational inequality by generous suburban families.

Despite this rhetoric, METCO coordinators pushed suburbanites not to adopt an attitude that viewed urban students in the exact same way as resident students. As Ruth Batson wrote during the program’s third year,

The white community still tries to carry on ‘business as usual.’ ‘We treat these children just as we would our own,’ is a statement that we must challenge over and over again. For if these children were ‘just like our own,’ they would not be climbing on busses sometimes as early as 7 A.M., traveling as long as an hour to get ‘a better education.’ The problem we still face is to continue to attempt to bring about changes which will cause a METCO to be instituted. ‘Business as usual’ as a way of life must be totally discredited.⁶⁹

METCO intended to change the suburbs through school integration. If suburban teachers, administrators and residents refused to acknowledge that METCO students were not exactly the same as resident students, they missed an opportunity to expand their own worldviews and their experiences with diversity. Additionally, urban students needed their differences addressed in order to perform to the best of their abilities in school. METCO officials insisted that teachers needed to recognize that their students had an extra burden of transportation as well as cultural differences to which they needed to adapt both at school and at home. Without instructor sensitivity, METCO students would not be able to achieve the level of comfort necessary to succeed academically.

⁶⁸ Tutino, “Young Bars Special Role For Negroes.”

⁶⁹ METCO Public Relations Department, “A Report to the Carnegie Corporation,” ca. 1968, METCO Archives.

METCO Students' Experience

METCO provided a unique experience for urban students that few outside of the program could understand. Waking up early each morning to be bused into a suburb where students were the racial minority created an unusual educational experience for METCO students. They lived in two communities, one primarily white where they attended school and one primarily black where they returned each evening. METCO staff members tried to impress upon new METCO students that they would have to deal with much more homework than their friends in Roxbury or Dorchester and that they might face racial harassment.⁷⁰

While they gained access to the better-financed resources of the suburbs and learned in an integrated environment, they also encountered racism and prejudice. On the first day of school in 1966 METCO students arrived in the suburbs with little disruption, despite rumors the METCO office had heard. In Wellesley, someone had written a racial slur across one of the school buildings, but school officials were able to paint over it before students arrived.⁷¹

During the winter of 1967 Lexington celebrated "METCO Week," screening education-related films and featuring a speech by METCO Director Joseph Killory. Killory explained that the reactions of students the previous September had been overwhelmingly enthusiastic in regards to the school facilities and the METCO Program's "hope and believe is that [the students will] say to themselves, 'If I work hard enough, and the world will get a little more sense, then I, too, can live like this someday!'"⁷² METCO's goals for its students were closely tied with socioeconomic advancement through educational opportunity.

Despite METCO students' enthusiasm and Lexington's willingness to celebrate its

⁷⁰ "METCO is Born," METCO Inc., accessed December 16, 2010, <http://www.metcoinc.org/History.html>.

⁷¹ "METCO is Born," METCO Inc.

⁷² "Killory Speaks at METCO Week Kickoff Here," *Lexington Minute-Man*, February 9, 1967.

association with METCO, tensions between METCO students and resident students reached a breaking point in 1969.

Lexington experienced unrest three years after the program began. During the late winter and early spring of 1969, several Lexington High School resident students and METCO students got into fist fights, prompting a walkout by 125 resident students to protest the school administration's lack of response.⁷³ In the following months, the school administration worked to give students the opportunity to discuss the conflict and develop positive solutions. Resident students raised the issues of the METCO students' reading room and perceptions of preferential treatment towards METCO students.⁷⁴ After many meetings with both METCO students and resident students, Principal Charles Johnson released a statement to parents explaining the situation and potential actions to ease tensions. He identified a major issue that faced bused students: "The METCO students returned each afternoon to a community which, particularly after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, was expressing greater militancy and separatist feelings. Friends of our METCO students in Roxbury were, in many cases, condemning them as Uncle Toms."⁷⁵ Johnson additionally pointed out that some suburban students had internalized their parents' doubts about the program and negative reactions to the riots of the late 1960s and therefore were not welcoming towards the bused students in their classes. METCO students thus experienced hostility both at school and at home.

⁷³ "Tensions At High School Cause Walkout of 125 Students Last Friday," *Lexington Minute-Man*, February 13, 1969.

⁷⁴ "Students Air Grievances Regarding METCO," *Lexington Minute-Man*, May 8, 1969, Box 53, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁷⁵ Principal Charles Johnson, quoted in "Students Air Grievances Regarding METCO," *Lexington Minute-Man*, May 8, 1969, Box 53, File 31, METCO Archives.

To solve these issues, Johnson emphasized that teachers and parents must focus on students as individuals rather than as METCO students or outsiders. He stated that METCO students were not “guests” but “full members of the student population” and should be treated as such.⁷⁶ He further agreed with the METCO administration that the school needed to incorporate black history into the curriculum, and so created an after school course on the topic. Johnson also suggested that teachers and parents should work to be sure that their students address intolerance and racism openly and work towards creating a more equal society.⁷⁷

That spring, the Lexington High School newspaper, the *Musket*, published an interview between white students and five black METCO students that exposed the problems facing bused students as well as the limits to the program’s integration efforts. When asked what changes they would like to see at LHS, the METCO students responded that student government should become “a more meaningful organization” and they would “like to see more black kids and teachers in the programs – and a black history course.”⁷⁸ The students explained that the current number of METCO students did not truly integrate the school, and inviting more black students could relieve racial tension by fostering more interaction and understanding between races. They further insisted that black people living in suburbia lost “their blackness” and sense of a racial identity. Though they agreed that black students should be getting the same education as suburban students, they did not want to adopt suburban culture.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Johnson, quoted in “Students Air Grievances Regarding METCO,” METCO Archives.

⁷⁷ Johnson, quoted in “Students Air Grievances Regarding METCO,” METCO Archives.

⁷⁸ “Frank Exchange in Lexington: Black-white student dialogue probes value of METCO busing,” *Boston Globe*, May 25, 1969, Box 44, File 29, METCO Archives.

⁷⁹ “Frank Exchange in Lexington,” METCO Archives.

The METCO students additionally discussed prejudice in the suburbs and their perceptions of white people, showing that small-scale integration did not immediately encourage frank and open discussions of race relations. In response to a comment that white students resented METCO students' spending time together and sitting together during lunch periods, one student responded, "That's the way we were brought up. If we divide up, we get conquered."⁸⁰ Other comments revealed further distrust of white students: "No METCO student has a true white friend. We don't stay here long enough to be a friend." "White people who were my friends now claim they are going to 'stab me in the back.'" "Yes, I know [that most LHS students are prejudiced] for a fact."⁸¹ However, one student commented that he trusted his host family, and another mentioned that he trusted the white students in his grade. The students discussed instances of indirect racism and denied that they received any special privileges from teachers because they were black. If they showed up late to class, it was because their bus was late; they insisted that they did not skip school any more frequently than white students.⁸²

The conversation between white and black LHS students illustrated the problems of integration for older students. The METCO students had only attended LHS for three years and thus had not formed the close bonds that children do when they go to the same schools together from kindergarten onward. By not encountering black people until high school, resident students likely had already developed racial prejudices. Without a clear forum to discuss race or difference, confusion and distrust lead to clear frictions and open violence. In the lower grade levels, racialized name-calling prompted a meeting between METCO administrators and suburban parents that winter in which Ruth Batson called the problems in

⁸⁰ "Frank Exchange in Lexington," METCO Archives.

⁸¹ "Frank Exchange in Lexington," METCO Archives.

⁸² "Frank Exchange in Lexington," METCO Archives.

Lexington worse than in other participating communities.⁸³ Rather than viewing these incidents as indictments of subtle suburban racism, the comments by METCO students and white students demonstrated a willingness to meet and discuss tensions. While a handful of METCO students could not eradicate prejudice in a high school nor an entire town, they did prompt a town-wide discussion of race that otherwise might not have taken place.

The tensions in Lexington in 1969 demonstrated the unusual situation in which METCO students found themselves. Each morning, they started the school day in nearly entirely white and affluent communities, and on evenings and weekends they returned to areas where Black Power was gaining supporters. Even as METCO began in 1966, the Congress on Racial Equality in Boston published articles in its newsletter supporting the philosophy of Black Power and the necessity to “grab our bootstraps, consolidate our political power and act within the framework of this democracy to change our lives.”⁸⁴ The increased activism of CORE and other civil rights organizations contrasted with the atmosphere of the suburbs. Suburbanites did not necessarily understand or support the ideology of Black Power, and increased militancy may have alienated suburban liberals who supported civil rights in theory but did not agree with armed self-defense or the more militant rhetoric of the Black Panthers.

Many METCO students described living in “two worlds,” one in the suburbs around white people and one back in Boston, divided culturally as well as racially.⁸⁵ Some noted changes in inflection or vocabulary based on whether they were at school or back in

⁸³ “METCO Supporters Meet,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, March 13, 1969.

⁸⁴ National Director of CORE Floyd B. McKissick quoted in “CORE Director Speaks on ‘Black Power,’” *CORRESPONDENT*, July 21, 1966, Box 23, File 44, METCO Archives.

⁸⁵ Eaton, 44.

Boston.⁸⁶ They switched to “proper English” in school because slang and tonality from the city did not fit into the suburban culture. As Susan Eaton found during her interviews of former METCO students, they altered their speech “merely to avoid creating awkwardness in social situations”; their language changes were only for school, not permanent changes.⁸⁷ When returning to the city, METCO students had to work to fit in and avoid accusations of “acting white” or “talking white.”⁸⁸ Program administrators recognized that students questioned whether or not they were “traitors” for leaving their neighborhoods to attend school.⁸⁹ The stress of balancing two cultures demonstrated some of the challenges METCO students faced, challenges that many suburbanites did not necessarily understand.

However, many students recognized that despite the problems of discrimination or cultural confusion, their experience in METCO was ultimately beneficial. A graduate from the late 1960s who had only spent a few years in the program wrote to Executive Director Ruth Batson to thank her and the METCO staff for giving him the opportunity to go to Wellesley High School. He wrote, “[Without METCO] I honestly do not think that I would have ever contemplated college and now I have been accepted... Thank you again, but we could never thank you enough.”⁹⁰ The student felt that METCO had provided him an opportunity that he would never have explored had he stayed in the Boston public schools. Parents of METCO students felt similarly grateful for the program. As one mother wrote in 1983, METCO had been a “blessing” for her daughter.⁹¹ She said that she hoped METCO would continue to give other black students the same opportunity for years to come. These

⁸⁶ Eaton, 67.

⁸⁷ Eaton, 68.

⁸⁸ Eaton, 69-70.

⁸⁹ METCO Public Relations Department, “A Report to the Carnegie Corporation,” METCO Archives.

⁹⁰ Letter transcribed in “A Report to the Carnegie Corporation,” 15, METCO Archives.

⁹¹ Opal Johnson to Jean McGuire, METCO Executive Director, May 27, 1983, Box 44, File 20, METCO Archives.

letters showed that participants did not view the program as a temporary solution as many METCO administrators originally had.

Black students also faced the problem of how to address race while part of an expressly integration-based program. As Susan Eaton discovered, “neither [black nor white students] talked to the other about race – the very thing that appeared to be separating them. As a result, race frequently felt to the black students like a family secret. To keep life going smoothly, everyone compliantly locked the race subject away. It was too potent to open, too delicate to touch.”⁹² The attitude towards race as a subject to be avoided in some ways reflected the outcry against METCO in the city. To address race would raise the issues of discrimination, reverse discrimination, and the debated necessity of affirmative action programs. As many opponents of METCO seemed to believe, any program that dealt with race directly was inherently racist. This viewpoint ignored the historical institutional discrimination against black people and the continued barriers they faced in efforts to achieve equal access to resources such as jobs, education, or housing. The idea that being “race-conscious” was synonymous with racism meant that for liberal suburbanites and the students in METCO, race was often too potentially divisive to address directly.

After The First Years

While for METCO parents, an integrated education in and of itself was not necessarily as important as access to urban resources, for the organization it was a significant accomplishment and selling point to suburban school districts. METCO’s structure and goals demonstrated the program’s commitment to having a significant effect on suburban communities and schools through integration. Additionally, its origins in parental

⁹² Eaton, 81.

organization illustrated how invested urban parents were in their children's education. Not many suburban residents understood the depth of concern of Roxbury parents, and their initial comments about bused students demonstrated this ignorance. However, the overall success of the first few years demonstrated the workability of the program. By 1970, twenty-eight communities had joined the METCO Program; this was perhaps the best indicator of the program's accomplishments in the original towns.⁹³

Not all suburban residents welcomed METCO into their schools. Even in the first seven towns, residents had concerns and criticisms of the program. Many residents focused more on tax dollars, the program's cost both financially and to suburban students, and the idea that by accepting urban students, the town school committees were not focusing on suburban children sufficiently. However, though METCO explicitly mentioned race in their various publications and handbooks, few suburbanites dealt with race directly. As the program continued past its original three-year plan, it expanded to more suburbs, launching more debates about its merits and its impact in the Greater Boston area.

⁹³ Sigel and Jonas, "Metropolitan Cooperation..." 151.

CHAPTER TWO: The Value of Integration Suburban Arguments For and Against the METCO Program

The Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. Program created controversy in nearly every town to which it bused black urban students. While some suburbanites welcomed the program as a way to expose their children to a more diverse group of classmates while also assisting underprivileged urban students, others did not focus on the ideological mission of METCO. Instead, they considered the financial costs of the program, the potential negative impact on schools, and the needs of their own children to be more important than minimally integrating their school systems. Others accused METCO of reverse racism for primarily busing African American students rather than poor white students. During the 1970s busing crisis within Boston, the program exposed divisions and resentments between suburbs and the city and within the suburbs themselves. Many began to question the value of integration as well as its effectiveness. With the potential costs to each town and to each taxpayer, residents of both the city and suburbs wondered, was the ideological goal of integration a worthwhile endeavor?

Those in favor of busing relied almost entirely on the two-way street argument outlined in the previous chapter and the idea that helping METCO students was a morally correct decision. Religious figures in the suburbs supported this viewpoint, making public statements in favor of METCO from its early years well into the 1970s. The busing program as an act of charity, a sentiment criticized by program staff, also proved to be a powerful argument for METCO's suburban supporters. Leon Trilling, a member of the Brookline School Committee and one of the most active suburban officials in the program's foundation, admitted that METCO was a small form of integration that did "good for our own

consciences.”¹ The morality of the program, however, did not persuade suburbanites who had their minds on more tangible effects of the program, such as cost.

Of all the arguments against the program, cost had the most influence on suburban opinions of METCO. Even in Newton, an affluent suburb that quickly dropped tuition charges for METCO students, federal funding had been an important factor in rallying the town members behind initially joining the program.² As the country experienced the economic crisis of the 1970s, even more suburbanites criticized the program as an unnecessary burden on taxpayers. Some Newton homeowners harshly questioned the program’s finances and the cost to the town in the 1970s, demonstrating that even communities that had generally supported the program in its first years had later had residents who strongly opposed it. Frequently, even citizens who wrote to local papers with other critiques addressed cost by identifying themselves as taxpayers in addition to being parents of school children.

The geographic differences in the greater Boston area also affected various towns’ reactions to METCO. With the exception of Newton and Brookline, the first towns in METCO were not directly next to the city. While Newton bordered Boston, it was next to West Roxbury, which was not a primarily black neighborhood.³ Newton residents were also mostly upper and middle class. Several towns that considered joining the program but ultimately voted against it were directly next to the city, specifically Revere, Winthrop, and Quincy. Revere and Winthrop were both northeast of the city, near the Charlestown section.

¹ Efreem Sigel and Gary F. Jonas, “Metropolitan Cooperation in Education: The Greater Boston Case,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 39, No. 2 (1970): 151. In JSTOR [database online] accessed March 19, 2011.

² Sigel and Jonas, “Metropolitan Cooperation in Education: The Greater Boston Case,” 151.

³ West Roxbury was not part of Roxbury, one of the three black neighborhoods of the city. The Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, “Report on Massachusetts: Housing in Boston,” December 1963, 2.

Charlestown had been one of the most vocally anti-busing for integration areas and may have influenced the residents in nearby areas. Quincy had a population made up of many former South Boston residents who did not want support busing.⁴ Though these areas' residents had a history of resistance, however, their arguments did not primarily revolve around racial integration and resented accusations that they were bigoted or focused on race at all. Many anti-METCO advocates in Winthrop, for example, focused on the detrimental effects the program could have on suburban children and existing issues within the school system that needed correcting before accepting nonresident students.

The debates discussed in this chapter revealed the limits of suburban support for the principle of integration. Through their reactions to the METCO Program, residents in the metro Boston area illustrated changing attitudes towards cultural and social issues addressed by the Civil Rights Movement and other social activism in the latter half of the twentieth century. However, their responses also demonstrated the ways in which suburbanites frequently avoided significant issues such as housing discrimination in the suburbs, racial prejudices, and historic institutional discrimination.

Race and Integration

In 1967, the town of Winchester began to discuss joining the METCO Program. Neighboring towns Lexington and Arlington already participated in the busing program. Winchester had been involved in several of the foundational meetings for METCO, but did not take part the first year. However, once the School Board raised the idea of participation, the people of the town quickly responded both for and against the idea. While few addressed the issue of race beyond METCO as a humanitarian project or a form of tokenism, Frances B.

⁴ Sigel and Jonas, "Metropolitan Cooperation..." 154.

Hillman declared her position against busing and specifically addressed integration. She had moved to Winchester for the school system and stated that she disagreed with METCO's purpose. "Let anyone who wants to go to school in Winchester move here, either buy or rent," Hillman wrote, "Make anyone welcome in this town. Integrate the town, not just the schools."⁵ Hillman raised a point that was rarely discussed in the debates surrounding METCO: why were there so few African American families in the towns to begin with?

Rather than discussing larger issues of exclusionary zoning or discrimination in home loans and real estate, suburbanites spent more effort debating the cost of busing children, diminished individual time with teachers, and the social and cultural benefits or detriments. When talking about METCO, town residents rarely discussed housing segregation, which ultimately was the reason that integration was such an important goal of the program. Though METCO referred to suburbs as "racially isolated," they were essentially racially segregated. The busing program saw school integration as a step towards a more equitable society where suburbs had racially diverse populations.

Within the first ten years METCO improved the educational background and economic potential for their students, but had not affected the racial makeup of each suburb. While METCO students were more likely to go on to college and earn enough to live in a suburban community, a move away from the city did not necessarily become a more realistic opportunity. In 1975, the Massachusetts Department of Education conducted a study on the METCO Program and its students. They found that though more than half of METCO seniors believed that they would be able to live in the town where they attended school, less

⁵ Frances B. Hillman, "Integrate Town, Not Just Schools," *Winchester Star*, April 27, 1967.

than fifteen percent would want to.⁶ Additionally, more than half the seniors believed they could get the type of job they would want in their home community, but roughly one quarter thought they could get the same type of job in the suburb where they attended school.⁷ The report did not thoroughly explain what factors may have affected these statistics. The culture of each suburb, the number of minority families in each town, the job opportunities in each town, or their connections to their homes may have influenced how METCO students viewed their future prospects in suburban Boston. However, this report indicated that METCO had not significantly changed the culture of the suburbs in regards to racial integration.

After the first several years of the program, some suburbanites began to question whether or not integration was actually as effective or necessary as METCO and social researchers had stated. The town of Danvers declined to participate in METCO in the 1970s, and comments by school committee members demonstrated that integration itself had played a significant role in their decision. Committeeman Warren Berry claimed, “Integration has been tried in enough schools around the country to show that it does not do the job... It does not accomplish its aim, which is to make the kids do better than they did in their own schools.”⁸ He went on to assert that the sociologist who claimed that integrated education benefitted disadvantaged students was “a liar from start to finish.”⁹ Another committeeman, Robert E. Francis, opposed METCO because he did not think that the schools should take responsibility for social change. He also explained that he did not understand why there were so few African American families in Danvers, but it was not the school’s problem to solve.

⁶ Massachusetts Department of Education, “Assessment of students in Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) Program, 1975-1976,” Box 2, File 40, Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. Records, Archives and Special Collections, Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

⁷ Massachusetts Department of Education, “Assessment of students...”, METCO Archives.

⁸ Kim Rogal, “School Board shuns Metco,” *Danvers Herald*, 1975, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

⁹ Rogal, METCO Archives.

Irene P. Parker of METCO refuted Berry and Francis's statements in an open letter to the *Danvers Herald*. She explained that both the busing program and integration's goal was not to necessarily make Boston students perform better in school, but "to provide access to an EQUAL education" and give students greater confidence and opportunity to attend college if they would like.¹⁰ She further explained that integrated education helped to eradicate racial prejudices, stating, "Omission of minorities from any school system perpetuates bigotry."¹¹ While Berry considered integration's success through grades and scholastic achievement, Parker and other METCO administrators saw the ideal of mutual understanding between races as the true goal to be achieved.

People in other towns also expressed concerns about whether integration was worthwhile. During Winthrop's 1974 debates about the program, resident Arthur J. Fournier argued against METCO by saying that it would contribute to the overcrowding of Winthrop schools. Fournier closed his letter by stating "I feel that the Metco program offers to Winthrop an integration program with no emphasis on quality education or up-grading of educational standards. My children and the children of Winthrop must come first."¹² His statement demonstrated the sentiment that the town should focus on resident children. Contrary to what may supporters argued, Fournier did not believe that integration in and of itself would improve the town schools' quality of education. Being exposed to children of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds might make Winthrop students more culturally aware, but it would not improve their test scores or give them more one-on-one time with their teachers.

¹⁰ Irene P. Parker, Open Letter in response to Committeemen Warren Berry and Robert E. Francis, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

¹¹ Parker, "Open Letter in response to Committeemen Warren...", METCO Archives.

¹² Arthur J. Fournier, "Not For Winthrop," *Winthrop Sun-Transcript*, November 27, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

The issue of racial integration also led many supporters of METCO to accuse opponents of racism. In 1974 Steven J. Rosenthal and Miriam Rosenthal explained their understanding of why Quincy did not participate in METCO: “Several years ago an outpouring of racism kept Metco out of Quincy... And if opponents of ‘forced busing’ really want to prove they are not racists, let them help revive efforts to bring Metco to Quincy.”¹³ They explicitly linked opposition to METCO and court-mandated busing to racism. James Connolly of Foxboro shared the Rosentals’ views. He wrote to the *Foxboro Reporter* in response to another town member’s letter. After explaining the factual mistakes the letter writer had made concerning METCO, he stated, “It all came out in the final sentence that black people must earn their right to integrate with us. What then is at issue is not the need of these rejected people but do we consider them to be worthy.”¹⁴ Without the original letter, it is impossible to know if Connolly distorted the writer’s original meaning. However, his words showed that Connolly and likely other METCO supporters believed that arguments against METCO were essentially about race and whether or not black people deserved to live in Foxboro.

The idea that integration was something to be earned linked it with an economic American dream. Once black people could afford to move to the suburbs, then they could integrate with middle class white people. Such a viewpoint imagined segregation as the product of individual choices rather than institutional discrimination.¹⁵ It also ignored continued prejudice throughout the northern United States in hiring and wages. While many

¹³ Steven J. Rosenthal and Miriam Rosenthal, “Busing Issue,” *Quincy Patriot Ledger*, November 15, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

¹⁴ James Connolly, Letter to the Editor, *Foxboro Reporter*, November 7, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

¹⁵ Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2009), 466.

believed METCO was a way to give black students a better chance at improving their socioeconomic futures, at that moment socioeconomic status still played a role in whether or not suburbs were willing to integrate. Even if former METCO students achieved middle class status and eventually moved to the suburbs, not all suburbs felt the need to assist them on their way.

The Moral Obligation and Humanitarian Mission

Many proponents of METCO suggested that the program deserved support because it accomplished a humanitarian mission. By giving urban students an education of a quality that they would not otherwise receive, METCO was improving their lives and most likely their economic futures. Some residents found any arguments against busing to be selfish or blind to the plight of those in the city. The idea of a moral mission became increasingly important in the mid-1970s, as more communities were considering joining the METCO Program.

When Lexington began to consider being one of the first towns to join the program in 1966, many residents viewed METCO as a compassionate effort. As Arthur E. Bryson, Jr. wrote to the Lexington School Committee, “Certainly there would be problems and we might have to make a few sacrifices. However, this is a rare opportunity to show our concern in a person-to-person program.”¹⁶ For Bryson and other proponents of METCO, the personal connection that METCO would create between the suburb and the city was vital. The busing program would allow suburbanites to “show [their] concern” in a more direct way than by just donating money. Even though the program might not have been perfect, many Lexingtonians believed that at least it was a positive step towards helping Bostonian youth.

¹⁶ Arthur E. Bryson, “An Open Letter,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 13, 1966.

Years later, the moral mission remained an important goal for many suburban citizens. In 1975, Myrtle Y. Dlugokinski of Beverly wrote in to her local paper to express her support of METCO. She could not understand why, if Boston parents were willing to put their children on buses every morning just to attend better schools, Beverly residents would deny them the opportunity. She demanded,

[A]re we so uncaring that we don't care what happens to the other children in this world just as long as our own are being taken care of. I just won't believe this. Now we really have a chance to give help to someone else. This isn't South Africa or India we are talking about nor money from your pocket – this is Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A. You were more than willing to go down South to offer help... so why not now when it will truly benefit our own people.¹⁷

Dlugokinski considered the opportunity to help others the salient point of busing. She did not believe that people in the Boston metro area could be satisfied “as long as [their] own children” had access to good schools. Additionally, she was incensed that residents could consider Boston and its problems as distant as those in other parts of the world. Bostonians were “our own people,” not a separate group from the suburbs. The distinction between South Africa, India and Boston exposed a common idea of charity. As underdeveloped countries, South Africa and India's problems may have seemed more justifiable than Boston's, a big city in one of the most powerful countries in the world. While affluent suburban families might donate money to charities that did aid work in impoverished countries, perhaps they were unlikely or unwilling to imagine Boston as an impoverished area in need of help.

For Dlugokinski, any excuses that opponents might have – cost, impact on suburban children – paled in comparison to the humanitarian goal, and residents of other towns shared her opinion. When Winchester reconsidered joining METCO in 1974, the town erupted in

¹⁷ Myrtle Y. Dlugokinski, “Chance to help others,” *Salem News*, April 7, 1975, Box 44, File 19, METCO Archives.

debates, prompting one resident to write that she could not “understand why the charitable people of Winchester could object to a humanitarian project.”¹⁸ Another Winchester citizen referred to the program as “morally right.”¹⁹ Similarly, when the Wakefield School Committee discussed accepting METCO students that year, a letter to the *Wakefield Item* insisted, “When there is a catastrophe in another town, we respond with mutual aid... In purely humanitarian terms we must not close our eyes to the needs of these children.”²⁰ In these opinions, the insufficient Boston school system was a moral issue that could be addressed with clear right and wrong courses of action. Choosing not to help these students was unthinkable and impossible to justify. However, this choice was not as clear-cut for other suburbanites, whose opinions will be explored later in the chapter.

Adding to the moral implications of METCO, several towns’ religious figures made statements in support of the program. When the Belmont School Board decided to invite METCO to their town in 1970, the town’s Religious Council voted to support the board’s decision. A member of the Social Action Committee of the council explained the group’s position by calling busing “a moral issue... involved in the question of equal opportunity for quality education for children of all races.”²¹ Similarly, the front page of the *Winchester Star* on April 20, 1967 announced, “Clergy Supports METCO Plan, Urges Action In Schools Here.”²² The Winchester Ecumenical Association had presented its pro-busing statement to the School Committee that week. The association took the stance that despite resistance from suburban whites and some black leaders, especially those involved with the Black

¹⁸ Carolyn Roundey, “Put Club Aside; Metco Not Metro,” *Winchester Star*, November 28, 1974, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

¹⁹ Cathy Fallon, “Communication,” *Woburn Times*, December 2, 1974, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

²⁰ Sander Poritzky, “Support for METCO is Urgent,” *Wakefield Item*, November 11, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

²¹ Vartan Hartunian, “Religious Council Unanimously Approves School Bd. METCO Vote,” *Belmont Herald*, February 5, 1970, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

²² “Clergy Supports METCO Plan, Urges Action In Schools Here,” *Winchester Star*, April 20, 1967.

Power movement, METCO would be an important program to “affirm the unity of the human race.”²³ Religious leaders had the authority to cast judgment on moral issues, and used this authority to take a political stand on busing.

Religious figures continued to speak out about busing in the 1970s. In 1974, court ordered busing within Boston became a major issue both within the city and across the state. More communities began to consider participating in the METCO Program. In a letter published in the *South Middlesex News*, seventeen religious leaders from Framingham and the surrounding towns urged their town school committees to increase the number of students they accepted through METCO. However, rather than just calling voluntary busing a moral issue, as clergy had done in the past, the writers focused on the economic inequalities that existed between the city and suburbs. They explained their concern for both the poor white and black families in Boston and cautioned their readers against “smugness.”²⁴ They wrote,

For it is too easy for us to sit by out here while others experience trauma by which we seem not to have to be touched because of our geographical location. This seeming immunity surrounds us also because of our economic location, for we are protected by privilege. We have what we have and live where we live, not only because we’ve worked hard but because we’ve had opportunities and advantages enjoyed by neither the Blacks nor the Whites of communities like Roxbury and South Boston.²⁵

The clergy of the Framingham area recognized the historic economic and racial discrimination that had contributed to the educational problems within Boston. They urged suburbanites to understand their own privileges, and argued that these privileges were a reason to justify increased participation in the METCO Program. Suburbanites should not be

²³ “Clergy Supports METCO Plan...,” April 20, 1967, 2.

²⁴ “Letters – Clergy protest Boston violence,” *South Middlesex News*, November 11, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

²⁵ “Letters – Clergy protest Boston violence,” METCO Archives.

content that they had earned their privileged position, but they should use that privilege to help those who had not had access to the same advantages.

In addition to their position on METCO, the clergy suggested creating more housing expressly for the elderly, lower income people, and minorities in their towns. They recognized that housing discrimination was still a problem that needed actions to be corrected. The children being bused came from families who may have wanted to live in the suburbs but were barred through exclusionary zoning laws or prohibitive costs. The clergy also hoped that residents would support Judge Garrity and non-violent methods to integrate the Boston Public Schools. The clergy wrote, “It is our conviction that segregationist forces must not prevail, neither in Boston nor where we live and our respective religious institutions reside.”²⁶ While METCO literature had frequently used the less charged and less offensive term “racially isolated,” these leaders’ reference to “segregationist forces” expressly stated that racial segregation was a problem in the suburbs and compared suburbanites to the openly hostile anti-busing residents of Charlestown and South Boston. The clergy’s comments demonstrated recognition of the implication of the suburbs in urban problems, an implication that many suburbanites either did not or chose not to understand.

The Cost of METCO

For many suburban residents, the cost of METCO was more important than integrating their school systems or achieving a humanitarian goal in helping urban students get a better education. Supporters insisted that METCO was state funded, so local taxes would not increase to pay for participation and thus suburbanites would not pay for the program. Opponents rejected this idea, stating that they paid state taxes and thus were

²⁶ “Letters – Clergy protest Boston violence,” METCO Archives.

paying for METCO. Because the local school committees or school boards usually made the decision to invite the program to each town, many residents felt that the school committees were spending their tax dollars without their consent. The national economic crisis in the 1970s and Massachusetts's budget deficit focused additional attention on METCO as a potentially unnecessary use of taxpayer money. Though program administrators continued to reassure suburbanites that their property taxes would not go up if their town participated in the program, they could not deny that METCO was state-funded and thus paid for by tax revenue. However, administrators believed that integration was a valuable goal for Massachusetts's schools and therefore the busing program was a justifiable usage of state funds. Others, however, believed that the debate should not be about who was paying as much as whether limited suburban integration through METCO was worth paying for at all.

One of the most consistent arguments against METCO was that taxpayers, who fund the schools, should be deciding how their money is being spent. This was especially apparent in Newton in 1974 when the town's school population started to decline and town members began to discuss how to best deal with the empty seats in classrooms. The League of Women Voters of Newton suggested that the town increase its participation in METCO rather than close under-enrolled schools.²⁷ Additionally, ten residents wrote to the editor of the *Newton Times* to ask the town to increase the number of METCO students it accepted to 800 students, or 4.9 percent of the total school enrollment.²⁸ They compared Newton to surrounding towns, including Weston, Brookline and Lincoln, which each had a higher percentage of METCO students enrolled in their school systems.

²⁷ Miriam Erlich, "A Letter to the Community," *Newton Villager*, November 21, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

²⁸ Betty Latner et al, "METCO operation," *Newton Times*, November 13, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

However, many Newton residents did not think that inviting more METCO students into the schools was as valuable as potentially saving money. One resident wrote into the *Newton Graphic* to insist that closing minimally enrolled schools would save tax money and avoid the risk of overcrowded classrooms: “[It] sure as heck is one way to save tax dollars, i.e. heat, electricity, salaries... Surely if room can be found for METCO students without overcrowding, room can be found for Newton students transferring from schools which could be closed.”²⁹ Rather than maintaining the current school budget by keeping schools open and inviting a greater number of METCO students to Newton, he believed that a wiser course for Newton would be to save taxpayer money by closing schools. The morality or benefit of the METCO Program was not his concern, but tax rates were.

Several town residents wrote into their local papers to argue against increased METCO participation. When writing an open letter to the School Committeeman from his district, Michael R. LeConti identified himself as “a father of five children, homeowner, taxpayer and citizen of Newton and the State of Massachusetts.”³⁰ His prioritization of homeowner and taxpayer after fatherhood indicated the importance of cost. LeConti further stated that “parents and taxpayers” were “the most important people in Newton,” in fact he was “more important” than teachers’ unions because he “share[d] in paying the bills.”³¹ In his opinion, the desires of those who paid for the school system should be given priority over the needs of non-residents. By “paying the bills,” he felt he had earned a right to have significant control over the Newton schools, or at least control over how his money was spent.

²⁹ A. Landsman, “Questions for C.E.E.N.,” *Newton Graphic*, November 14, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

³⁰ Michael R. LeConti, “Open letter to School Committeeman ward 3 Gerald Byrne,” *Newton Villager*, November 28, 1974, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

³¹ LeConti, METCO Archives.

LeConti went on to say that with the state deficit projected to be \$316 million for the next year, either taxpayers would have to pay more or state funded programs such as METCO would have to be reduced or cut entirely. Increasing the number of METCO students in Newton seemed counterproductive and he believed it would end up costing him more in property taxes and state taxes. He expressed his frustration that the potential METCO increase was not on the recent ballot and thus he felt Newton residents did not get to voice their opinions. LeConti insisted, “[I]f costs keep rising at the rate they are going now, my next step into the future is at the front door of the welfare office.”³²

Through this rather extreme claim, LeConti expressed a fear that Newton was at risk of deteriorating into a lower class town due to METCO and other state-funded programs. Considering LeConti was a resident of one of the most affluent suburbs of Boston, his assertion that he would end up on welfare was unusual. While not all of the residents of Newton lived above the poverty line, the town’s median household income six years later in 1980 was \$26,663, roughly \$5,000 higher than the national median family income.³³ Newton residents in general could afford higher taxes to fund their excellent school system. The lack of tax revenue in Roxbury and Dorchester contributed to the problem of underfunded schools and thus the need to bus children to Newton. These children were more likely to have experience with the welfare office than LeConti. His letter was reprinted in the November 23, 1974 issue of the *Waltham News-Tribune*, which indicated that Waltham residents shared similar concerns regarding tax rates and METCO participation.

³² LeConti, METCO Archives.

³³ According to the 1980 census data, 589 families in Newton were living below the poverty line. This made up less than one percent of the population. Income statistics for Newton come from “Comparison of Selected Demographics,” City of Newton, www.ci.newton.ma.us/planning/Demogr/demograf.pdf (2001). The national data statistic comes from U.S. Department of Commerce, “Money Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States: 1980,” Bureau of the Census, 6, from <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/p60.html>.

Not all Newton residents took the same logic-based approach to criticizing the school board's spending. An anonymous person from Newton expressed his or her opinion through the following letter:

Dear Editor,

A salute to you for your excellent editorial on METCO. It is about time the press advocated a stop to this reckless spending and raping of Newton into another Roxbury. You should run more details about our reckless School Committee's actions.

Sincerely, A Reader.³⁴

The writer's extreme language exposed several issues regarding METCO in Newton. By using the phrase "raping of Newton into another Roxbury," the author created both an image of violence and a threat of deterioration. Newton was an affluent town while Roxbury was a place most suburbanites viewed as lower class and dangerous. By suggesting that increased spending towards the METCO Program could lead Newton to become an impoverished, violent city, the author demonstrated racialized fears and an association between class and race. Perhaps he or she used Roxbury in opposition to Newton solely due to the socioeconomic status of the residents, but the racial makeup of each area was difficult to ignore. Not all people of Newton held such extreme views, but the difficulty inherent in separating race and economics demonstrated the complexity of the cost of METCO.

Wesley G. Matthei, a Bedford resident, also criticized METCO from the standpoint of a taxpayer. He wrote in to the *Bedford Minute Man* to outline what he considered the assumptions of the program and his statistics to discount those assumptions. The fifth point on his outline was that METCO would not cost Bedford extra money. Matthei asserted that this was false, saying, "Clearly, most Bedford wage earners pay state taxes which are becoming excessive because of the proliferation of state funded programs, e.g., METCO. In

³⁴ Anonymous Letter to the Editor, *Newton Villager*, December 5, 1974, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

addition, the Bedford taxpayers will be expected to pay for all the extra ‘perquisites’ required by this program.”³⁵ As extra costs, he cited the addition of a METCO coordinator as well as efforts to add African American studies to the curriculum. Like LeConti, he did not consider the potential benefit of METCO to Bedford’s students, just the cost the program might have for the town. The idea that Bedford needed to change to accommodate METCO students also seemed ridiculous and unnecessary.

Other communities demonstrated a variation on the idea that taxpayers should control how their money was being spent. Some thought residents should be the only people to benefit from the resources paid for with their tax dollars. In the fall of 1974, the town of Revere built a new high school and held an opening ceremony that November. The town mayor, superintendent and school headmaster each gave a speech. Mayor William G. Reinstein used his time at the podium to promise to keep Revere from participating in the METCO Program. He was quoted in the local paper, saying, “I do not intend to allow other communities to benefit from money spent for the taxpayers of this city only to have outside children bused into these new buildings.”³⁶ The paper further wrote that he “added emphatically that he shall take whatever legal means possible to keep the city out of the METCO busing program and remain dis-involved with the busing issue.”³⁷ Reinstein did not demonstrate any sense of obligation to the problems in Boston and insisted that Revere’s resources should only be available to the taxpayers of the town. Additionally, his reference to “the busing issue” linked METCO and court-ordered busing in Boston, an association that METCO tried to avoid. Revere never joined the METCO Program.

³⁵ Wesley G. Matthei, “METCO Comments,” *Bedford Minute Man*, July 11, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

³⁶ “Citizens Cited For New RHS,” *Revere Journal*, November 13, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

³⁷ “Citizens Cited For New RHS,” METCO Archives.

The article on the high school opening ceremony juxtaposed Reinstein's comments with those of Superintendent William J. Hill. In his speech, Hill declared, "[T]here can never be a permanent underprivileged class in America as long as the free public school is available for the education of all students and to point the way to a richer and brighter tomorrow."³⁸ The article's author did not comment on the discrepancy between Hill's comments and Reinstein's insistence on keeping non-residents out of the Revere Public Schools. Hill did not voice an opinion on the problem of ill-equipped public schools and their potential effect on perpetuating an underprivileged class in the United States. Their comments demonstrated that the Revere school administration focused on METCO's impact on Revere rather than the Revere schools' impact on METCO students, a common viewpoint among opponents of the program.

Many believed that a town should serve its own students rather than investing funds in helping non-residents. In 1976, Lexington resident Anita M. Bonasera expressed her frustration in a letter titled "Cut Co." "If [the] Metco program is not 100 percent self sustaining," she argued, "it should be done away with... Many taxpayers of this town have problems trying to support themselves, without having to support outsiders as well."³⁹ Bonasera posed "outsiders" as a threat, taking advantage of taxpayers' hard-earned money by demanding "support" and access to resources. Additionally, the use of the term "outsiders" exposed a harsh view of the Boston students and drew a sharp divide between the suburbs and the city. To her, a town only had an obligation to its residents. She did not believe there was any link between the city and suburbs, nor did she express any sense of a metro Boston

³⁸ "Citizens Cited For New RHS," METCO Archives.

³⁹ Anita M. Bonasera, "Cut Co," *Lexington Minute-Man*, ca. March 1976, Box 44, File 20, METCO Archives.

community or even a sense of unity among suburbs. Anyone who did not live in Lexington was “an outsider” to her.

An even harsher criticism of METCO as an unnecessary expense and a harbinger of mandatory busing came from Marie Lee of Quincy in 1974. When the Quincy School Board began discussing the METCO Program that year, Lee was “aghast and disgusted to hear” that the subject was under consideration.⁴⁰ She further criticized one of the members of the board for suggesting that busing was a “matter of principle” and benefitted all students.⁴¹ Within the context of court-ordered busing in the city and the national economic crisis, Lee criticized the program as an unhelpful burden:

Perhaps [the school board member] is not abreast of the tragedies occurring in So. Boston, Roxbury, and Hyde Park and the total lack of education the children have received from this so-called “better education for all”. Metco is a step away from forced busing. Federal funding is not available for busing. Taxpayers pick up the tab. Just another expense to the already overburdened taxpayer and a further escalation of inflation along with the unemployment rate rising every day.⁴²

Lee linked court-ordered busing and METCO in a way that many other suburbanites did, which demonstrated fears that the violence and unrest that greeted busing in the city could spread to the suburbs. Additionally, she resented paying for a program that she believed would not provide an education for the Boston students or students in Quincy. She already felt “overburdened” and refused to pay for what she considered ineffective programs.

As Massachusetts faced budget deficits and an economic downturn in the 1970s, METCO faced criticism from within the city as well. Eugene L. Notkin of Boston wrote to the editor of the *Boston Herald American* to say that the state should not be paying for the busing program. He explained, “The METCO Program is a luxury that we never needed and

⁴⁰ Marie Lee, “Metco Proposal,” *Quincy Patriot Ledger*, December 2, 1974, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

⁴¹ Lee, METCO Archives.

⁴² Lee, METCO Archives.

cannot afford, one that was foisted upon the taxpayers before it became obvious that Massachusetts was in financial trouble. Its elimination rather than its increase should be a top priority.”⁴³ Additionally, Notkin asserted that Governor Michael Dukakis supported the program in order to win the votes of METCO families and employees, essentially bribing those citizens. Even though many urban families took advantage of the program, those Bostonians who did not have children in METCO did not view it as essential or worth the state’s money.

Regarding the program’s finances, the METCO administrators rejected the assertion that participation in the program cost the suburbs money. Throughout its literature the program insisted that it was fully funded by the state and thus would not affect local taxes. For the 1975-1976 school year, METCO released a document of common questions and answers about the program. One of the questions addressed was whether or not the suburban towns in the program paid for METCO through their local taxes. METCO responded no, the communities did not pay to bus the urban students. They added that they bus less than one percent of the suburban districts’ enrollment. Additionally, they stated that “most communities use the ‘empty seat’ theory – requesting the number of students which would fill empty seats in the suburban classroom – thus major costs of operation are not increased, the objectives of the program are realized and METCO is not a financial drain on local real estate tax bases.”⁴⁴ By adding a few children per classroom, the METCO program did not require suburban towns to pay extra teachers or buy a significantly larger amount of supplies. METCO insisted that they met their goals without costing the suburbs extra money.

However, state funds did come from state taxes, which suburban residents paid. While their

⁴³ Eugene L. Notkin, “METCO is a luxury,” *Boston Herald American*, June 5, 1977, Box 44, File 20, METCO Archives.

⁴⁴ METCO Question/Answer Memo, 1975, Box 2, File 35, METCO Archives.

real estate tax base may not have been raised due to METCO, the suburbanites did indirectly pay for the program.

In the same document, METCO addressed the question of its future prospects and the budget cuts it faced. METCO had a budget of \$5.98 million for the 1975-1976 school year and the Board of Education had requested \$7.1 million “to insure continuity, growth and stability of the program.”⁴⁵ However, the state government had asked for \$500,000 less than the program’s 1974-1975 budget. Regarding these cuts, the METCO administrators wrote, “We want to emphasize to the administration and to members of the state legislature, that if one is to maintain or expand a successful program, cutting the budget is not the way to do it.”⁴⁶ The following question asked if this budget decrease indicated that the Massachusetts government was weakening in its commitment to METCO and to school integration. The writers answered that they hoped not and declared that Massachusetts could not “afford to lose its leadership position in voluntary integrated education. The eyes of many people, in Massachusetts and out-of-state will be watching closely this decision.”⁴⁷ For METCO, unlike for suburbanites, their ideological goal was more important than the financial cost for the state. Proponents of school integration saw METCO as an innovative program and, to them, cutting it would mean that integration was no longer a priority.

The METCO question and answer document illustrated the essential debate over METCO’s cost: ideology vs. financial burden. While suburban districts did not directly fund the busing program and their tax rates did not increase due to their participation, they did pay through state taxes. They worked to pay their tax dollars and felt that they deserved to reap the benefits. However, many ignored the federal funding their own schools received from

⁴⁵ METCO Question/Answer Memo, 1975, METCO Archives.

⁴⁶ METCO Question/Answer Memo, 1975, METCO Archives.

⁴⁷ METCO Question/Answer Memo, 1975, METCO Archives.

the government as well as the higher percentage of taxes that corporations and businesses in the suburbs paid to the state. Other critics considered METCO to be an unnecessary program that took advantage of suburban resources. METCO and its supporters, however, continued to refute the idea that the program cost the towns anything. For them, getting students from Roxbury and Dorchester access to better educational resources and an integrated education was an essential issue that deserved to be funded by the state.

Impact on the Suburban School District

Both those in favor and against voluntary busing discussed the effect that urban students would have on the suburban districts. Supporters insisted the program would improve the educational experience and worldview of racially isolated suburban children. Their children would grow and learn from exposure to racial minorities and children of different socioeconomic classes. Opponents argued that inviting non-resident students would be detrimental to their own children. Teachers would spend less time with each individual student and more time with METCO students if they needed to catch up to their grade level, more time would be devoted to curricula that the program required, and the overall school standards would necessarily be lowered for students who had not been properly educated in Boston. They insisted that resident students should be a priority and that the school districts should accomplish all that they could for suburban students before inviting METCO students into town schools.

When the Lexington School Committee began discussing involvement in the METCO Program in 1966, it was also considering creating a public kindergarten program. Because the Superintendent of Schools Rudolph Fobert made statements on each during the same time

period, many town residents became confused and did not realize that they could have a kindergarten and participate in METCO. Rather, they mistakenly believed that they could only have one or the other. This prompted several letters in the *Lexington Minute-Man*'s "Brickbats and Bouquets" section, one of which was written by a mother complaining about the cost of private kindergarten programs. She demanded the creation of public kindergarten and insisted that the public schools were already overcrowded without inviting twenty-five urban students into the middle school.⁴⁸ Due to many such reactions, the Lexington School Committee issued statements clarifying its position on METCO and public kindergarten. It emphasized that its "first responsibility" was to provide a kindergarten for Lexington children and it would only invite METCO students to the schools if the town did not have to pay.⁴⁹ The school committee recognized that it could not gain enough support to help urban students without first assuring Lexington students the best educational experience possible.

Though residents used the same argument, unlike Lexington the town of Winthrop voted against participating in METCO in the 1970s. Former PTA member Phyllis Fluet wrote numerous letters to the editor of the *Winthrop Sun-Transcript* explaining why she was opposed to the program. She resented the implication that she was racially-motivated in not wanting black students bused to Winthrop and stated, "If we are bigots, we are bigoted in one issue, that we are striving very hard and long for a quality education for our Winthrop students. We must utilize our resources to give our children the best and most informative education possible."⁵⁰ Again, resident children's quality of education was more important than inviting black urban students into the Winthrop school system. Residents like Fluet saw

⁴⁸ Mrs. Robert Sanford, "Tight Squeeze," *Lexington Minute-Man*, 20 Jan. 1966.

⁴⁹ "School Committee Discusses Busing," *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 6, 1966.

⁵⁰ Phyllis Fluet, "Wrong Approach," *Winthrop Sun-Transcript*, November 27, 1974, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

ways that the public schools could improve, but did not think it was possible to provide the best education to both suburban and bused students. She further explained her position, stating,

We, in Winthrop, should not sit back and be so proud as to say that Metco is interested in our schools because of the educational values we can bring to any minority child for there is much work to be done to bring the standards upward... this is where we biased, bigoted people pick up our arms and fight. We have a very bad condition here in Winthrop, namely overcrowding. Let us put our forces into bettering our system within the next few years... then we may look outward and share our wealth with the less fortunate.⁵¹

The issue of bigotry as mentioned in Fluet's letter was a complex one for suburbanites. Few town residents explicitly discussed race in regards to the METCO Program. However, it was clear that METCO was intended to integrate otherwise racially homogenous towns.

Therefore, any resident who argued against the program made an effort to clarify the reasons they did not want their town to participate in order to avoid being accused of being racist. Fluet did not completely reject the idea of helping non-resident students, but not before the school board could ensure the best quality education for their own children.

At the end of that year, when Winthrop declined to participate in METCO, Phyllis Fluet again wrote to the *Winthrop Sun-Transcript*, stating, "I asked... that we work to bring about a better school system together... But, of course, that would be too American, too important to bring about the unity that is needed in all corners of America today."⁵² Though discussing schools in a national sense, Fluet excluded students who do not live in her suburb. Unity, to her, meant bringing the town together, not bridging gaps between communities. Fluet's discussion of unity and American ideals exposed the tension between the advocates and opponents of the METCO Program. Fluet's goal was the entire town working to create

⁵¹ Fluet, METCO Archives.

⁵² Fluet, METCO Archives.

the best school system possible; for others, a national goal was using a wider geographic approach to achieve integrated education and equality of educational opportunities.

Belmont Residents also raised the issue of lowering school standards for METCO students when it debated joining METCO in 1970. In February of that year, the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Urban-Suburban Exchange in Education wrote an article in the *Belmont Herald* providing answers to common questions asked about the program. The questions he mentioned demonstrated the common anxieties felt by suburbanites regarding the METCO Program, one of which was, “Will the standards of the Belmont schools be lowered with an influx of a number of youngsters from the Boston school system?”⁵³ Urban students typically fell behind students in their grades during their first few years in the suburbs due to their improper preparation in the Boston schools. Because of this, suburban parents frequently expressed concern that their children would be held back as the urban students caught up. This fear conflicted with METCO’s assertion that integration was beneficial for everyone involved. Belmont parents’ anxiety over school standards showed that, while they may have believed their children would benefit from interactions with black students, their children’s educational success was their priority.

Even eight years after the program’s inception, residents used this argument against METCO. In 1974, Wellesley resident Ed Bleiler wrote a letter to the School Committee Chairman through the *Wellesley Townsman* Letters to the Editor section. He discussed school reorganization, which would leave extra seats in the high school. He stated that the buildings would fit all the students “as long as the [School Committee] does not replace this declining [population] with METCO students... The town of Wellesley is on either a double

⁵³ “Advisory Comm. Chairman Answers Questions Often Asked On METCO,” *Belmont Herald*, February 5, 1970, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

standard or the Wellesley level is being lowered to accommodate them.”⁵⁴ Bleiler’s statements illustrated a sense of protectionism for Wellesley students both materially through class size and ideologically through the “Wellesley standard.” He did not believe that METCO could improve the overall standard for Wellesley students through cultural diversity.

The idea of a “Wellesley standard” or a “Belmont standard” showed a sense of distance between the suburbs and lower-class Boston neighborhoods that was made up of more than a bus ride. While statistics showed that a higher percentage of Boston students graduated from high school and went on to college through the METCO Program, this positive change was not enough for some suburban residents.⁵⁵ Rather than seeing suburban schools and educational resources as positive forces allowing urban students a better education, they saw the urban students as a negative force dragging down their own children. The language of “standards” also demonstrated an assumption that black students from Boston would not be able to achieve the same levels of success as white resident students.

Other suburbanites resisted METCO due to the changes that the program asked of the community. In 1974, B. Matthews wrote to the *Newton Graphic* to express concerns about METCO’s effect on the Newton schools. He felt there was a discrepancy between the program’s intention and the way it was carried out:

The object of this exercise was... to avail Metco students of existing educational facilities here which are supposedly superior to their own – not to downgrade or change these facilities to be more in keeping with the backgrounds from which these students are trying to escape. But now I see that apart from social workers, psychologists and allied paraphernalia to ease the way, we are to provide course work in Spanish [sic], rather than teaching immigrants to speak English, and are also being

⁵⁴ Ed Bleiler, “Ed Bleiler Pens an Open Letter to Steve Porter,” *Wellesley Townsman*, November 28, 1974, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

⁵⁵ “Advisory Comm. Chairman...,” METCO Archives.

urged to add Afro-American studies to the curriculum. All this, in a program supposedly designed to produce “integration”!⁵⁶

For Matthews, integration should be one-way in the same way that METCO was one-way and Newton did not need to change in order to integrate. He did not believe that educating the students from Boston could lead to increased educational opportunities for suburban children; he did consider Spanish and other new courses positive additions to the curriculum. Matthews pointed out that frequently when universities offered African American studies courses, few white students if any enrolled in them, thus producing classes of only black students. He suggested that offering similar courses in Newton would produce the same effect of “qualitative segregation.”⁵⁷ After these assertions, Matthews closed his letter by stating that if METCO “lower[s] the educational standards for which we pay so dearly, our school superintendent [should close under-enrolled schools] instead of saddling Newton taxpayers for years to come with the expense of keeping [the schools] open for the benefit of non-residents.”⁵⁸ He would only accept the METCO Program, which had been operating in Newton for eight years, if it did not affect the quality of the schools nor cost the town any money.

In Lexington in 1976, Anita M. Bonasera further criticized the program, demanding to know why METCO students needed special counselors. She asked, “Are not the counselors we have for our town children good enough? Or are our children working with inferior counselors?”⁵⁹ With these questions, she exposed several issues regarding suburban cooperation with METCO. Many suburbanites believed that METCO students should be

⁵⁶ B. Matthews, “Increasing Metco,” *Newton Graphic*, November 21, 1974, METCO Archives.

⁵⁷ B. Matthews, METCO Archives.

⁵⁸ B. Matthews, METCO Archives.

⁵⁹ Bonasera, METCO Archives.

treated like any resident student and thus did not need special counselors or access to African American history courses. However, being bused from the city to a new, unfamiliar suburb where the students were racial minorities affected the students, and therefore METCO insisted upon having specially trained counselors in each school district to assist urban students. Additionally, Bonasera's concern that her own children were not working with adequate counselors showed a continued fear across towns that resident students were not the top priority of the school committees. Rather than investing time and, according to some residents, funds in METCO, the school committees should be insuring the best education possible to suburban students.

Busing within Boston and Its Impact on METCO

When Judge W. Arthur Garrity ordered the Boston Public Schools to begin desegregation in 1974, people across the country witnessed the violent reactions of Boston families whose children would be bused across the city to attend school. The crisis within Boston in many ways focused attention on METCO, which had already been promoting school integration for eight years. Many suburbanites felt they should increase their participation in the program in order to assist the families in the city, while others saw METCO as a step towards urban-suburban court-mandated busing programs that would send their children into Boston's schools. Fears of forced busing spread across the state, leading to complex arguments over the goals of busing in general, METCO, and the suburbs' role in urban problems.

Fred Frazee, who lived in Marshfield, exemplified a suburban concern regarding busing in Boston. He appeared with his family in a pro-METCO political advertisement in

the *Marshfield Mariner* in the fall of 1974. The advertisement sparked much debate in the local paper's Letters to the Editor section, prompting Frazee to respond. He explained that he and his family believed that "[t]he media is not emphasizing the desire on the part of youngsters for equal, quality education and social experiences. This isn't a problem anyway, it's a right morally and legally."⁶⁰ Beyond the legitimacy of the issue, Frazee stated, "Many of us make our living in Boston. We should all feel a sense of obligation to our city. Its problems are ours as well."⁶¹ Frazee's "sense of obligation" demonstrated a different argument in favor of busing than that of the humanitarian mission. Residents of other towns also agreed that increasing their participation in METCO could help ease the situation in Boston. Twenty-seven citizens signed a letter to the Concord-Carlisle School Committee asking for an increase in the number of METCO students in their school districts, saying "We do not believe that our towns should ignore this problem as one that concerns only the city of Boston."⁶² They too felt an obligation to help with educational issues in the city.

For years Bostonians addressed the issue of housing segregation in the suburbs more directly than their suburban counterparts did. In 1965 Chairman of the Boston Finance Commission said that "snob zoning and [suburbanites'] refusal to put up public housing are the chief practitioners [sic] of segregation in the metropolitan area."⁶³ While some suburbs had fair housing committees and began considering low income housing options in their towns, few towns achieved the types of fair housing initiatives that the Finance Commission recommended and thus housing remained a target of Bostonian resentment. As the first Vice President of the Boston NAACP Richard Banks explained to the Lexington League of

⁶⁰ Fred Frazee, "Explanation," *Marshfield Mariner*, October 31, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

⁶¹ Frazee, METCO Archives.

⁶² "Citizens Urge extending METCO," *Concord Journal*, January 16, 1975, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives.

⁶³ "Fin. Com. Head Gives Advice: Suburbs Told: Act on Rights," *Boston Traveler*, April 26, 1965, Box 44, File 26, METCO Archives.

Women Voters in 1966, “much of the housing problem for Negroes is due to the unwillingness of suburbs to take in Negroes or poor people.”⁶⁴ He explained that though Lexington or similar towns might support fair housing, many black families could not afford to move in due to high property costs or strict zoning codes. The towns closer to Roxbury were within their economic reach, but these suburbs were the most resistant to housing integration.

Others regarded busing within the city and METCO as frightening harbingers of their own school districts’ futures. In 1974, the town of Saugus began to consider joining METCO. Resident Sandra Sarno voiced her opposition to the program, stating, “in four more years METCO could be the stepping stone to say that my children are to be bused somewhere else. Well I will never let this happen because if I pay taxes all these years to make Saugus schools a good system that is where they are going to be educated.”⁶⁵ Though the METCO Program did not involve busing suburban students, that it bused students for the purpose of integration appeared too similar to the situation within the city of Boston. Sarno and other suburbanites felt that they had earned their homes outside the city and paid taxes to have quality schools. They resisted any perceived threat to their children’s place in those schools.

The town of Winchester considered the METCO Program in 1967 and again in 1974. Both times, residents expressed fears of a metropolitan school system, which would take the control of each school out of the hands of the individual school boards and create a system for the entire greater Boston area. Opponents of METCO established a “Voice of

⁶⁴ Richard Banks, quoted in “Northern Negro Trapped in Vicious Cycle, Says Banks,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, January 13, 1966.

⁶⁵ Sandra Sarno, “Opposes Saugus METO program,” *Lynn Item*, April 20, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

Winchester” campaign in 1968 to convince the School Board not to participate in the program, and in 1974, Arthur J. Hewis, Jr. wrote as the “Voice of Winchester” to further resist the town’s participation. He tried to incite fears in residents by addressing Judge Garrity’s ruling on the Boston public schools, saying, “If [Garrity’s] order is valid, how long will it be before the courts will determine a) your place of residence, b) your employment, c) your very right to live?”⁶⁶ While his examples demonstrated an extreme jump from metropolitan busing to a totalitarian state, he further asserted that the school board’s vote to join the program was “the second attempt to take your control of your schools away from you, the parents and taxpayers.”⁶⁷ While Winchester citizens may not have agreed with Hewish that accepting the METCO Program would lead to government control of every part of their lives, the idea that it would lead to cross-district busing was much easier to believe.

METCO consistently worked to correct this misconception. In many towns considering the program, school board members or METCO associates wrote articles answering common questions about it. In Winchester, two of the main questions were, “What about metropolitanism?” and “Will Metco encourage metropolitanism?”⁶⁸ The article reassured readers that there was no plan to connect Winchester in a metropolitan school district and declared that METCO actually reduced the risk of a forced metropolitan system.⁶⁹ The article further stated that the program would not cause Winchester children to be bused elsewhere. That these questions needed answers demonstrated the real concerns that suburbanites had regarding busing. Their fears were not assuaged by the actions of the Boston School Committee.

⁶⁶ Arthur J. Hewis, Jr., “Communication,” *Woburn Times*, November 25, 1974, Box 44, File 16, METCO Archives.

⁶⁷ Hewis, METCO Archives.

⁶⁸ Stephen R. Parkhurst, “What’s Metco All About,” *Winchester Star*, November 21, 1974.

⁶⁹ Parkhurst, *Winchester Star*, November 21, 1974.

METCO as a Racist and Discriminatory Program

While the founders of the program created METCO with the intention of aiding with the problems of discrimination and prejudice in the greater Boston area, many opponents of the busing program claimed that it actually discriminated against both black students and students of other races. These arguments took several forms, ranging from claims of discrimination against white students to the assertion that METCO only took the best students from Boston and thus contributed to the deterioration of the city's schools. In the arguments surrounding the program as a whole, race seldom entered directly into the discourse. Calling METCO racist, however, was one of the ways it did.

Some argued that busing young children early each morning to another town upwards of a half hour away placed an undue burden on the urban students, ignoring the fact that students volunteered to go. A *Boston Herald* editorial asked why the program would ask students to take so much time and effort just to go to school. The editorial further suggested that Boston should solve its own problems.⁷⁰ A Winchester resident expressed a variation on this idea in 1967, calling METCO a form of hypocrisy that only served to assuage the consciences of suburban whites. He stated, "They condescend to let a few 'disadvantaged' children enjoy a few hours of association with their children in school. Then back on the bus and back to the ghetto! Back to the tenements and the rats! Do you honestly believe this will benefit these children?"⁷¹ He went on to say that the problem was in Roxbury and thus should be solved in Roxbury. To him, METCO was not helping urban children at all, but rather making their lives worse by providing them daily with the contrast between suburban

⁷⁰ "'Scatteration' won't help," *Boston Herald*, January 1966, Box 44, File 26, METCO Archives.

⁷¹ D. L. Wisley, "METCO Idea Termed Hypocrisy," *Winchester Star*, April 27, 1967.

affluence and “tenements and rats.” The writer used common imagery of Roxbury as a poverty-stricken ghetto, which contributed to the idea that METCO was simply a form of charity work. To many critics of the program, METCO students did not need this form of charity, which added hours of busing to their daily lives to send them to unfamiliar environments.

Others argued that if METCO existed, it should not focus solely on black children. Before METCO students arrived in Lexington in 1966, John W. Cole wrote to the editor of the *Lexington Minute-Man* to explain how the program violated basic rights. He declared that beyond the town’s disrespect towards his right to voice an opinion by spending his tax dollars without a town referendum, METCO also denied the right of equal opportunity to Boston’s white children. Cole asked, “Are not the poor whites of the South End as needy of a ‘meaningful educational experience’ as the poor Negroes of Roxbury? Does this not constitute discrimination?”⁷² While he did agree that METCO’s goals were worthwhile, he appeared to advocate socioeconomic equality over racial equality. However, Cole closed his letter by insisting that a “democratic society must also extend equal educational opportunities to all people regardless of race, creed, or color” and did not mention economic discrimination as an issue to be addressed in a democracy.⁷³ He did not consider racial integration to be a key component of the METCO Program, though he focused on the program’s implementation as racially discriminatory.

In 1974, Bedford resident Wesley G. Matthei protested the program for similar reasons. In his letter outlining assumptions about METCO that he believed incorrect, he stated, “Assumption No. 1: The ends sometimes justify the means; e.g., racist programs are

⁷² John W. Cole, “About Our Schools,” *Lexington Minute-Man*, August 18, 1966, Box 53, File 30, METCO Archives.

⁷³ Cole, METCO Archives.

sometimes justifiable.”⁷⁴ His response to this statement was, “Reverse discrimination because of race, etc. is untenable because it logically permits immoral, and, thus, unacceptable discrimination because of race, etc.”⁷⁵ That he did not discuss the reasons he believed the busing program was racist demonstrated that perhaps he based his assumptions solely on the fact that METCO explicitly dealt with race and racial integration. Aside from stating that METCO’s operation constituted reverse discrimination, Matthei did not explain how it could lead to immoral behavior. He further failed to clarify whom METCO discriminated against, urban or suburban whites. Simply assuming that the program was racist showed a criticism of METCO that did not take into account the program’s ideological goals or explore in depth the program’s practical implementation.

That same year, Mrs. Peter McDermott of Rockland attended a meeting regarding her town’s potential participation in METCO. After listening to Executive Director Jean McGuire speak about the program, McDermott decided, “METCO, as it is now operated, is the lowest form of racism.”⁷⁶ She based her opinion on the idea that the program excluded white students and black children from low-income families. Instead of spending money on METCO, she argued, the state should be putting money into educational programs within the city. At the town meeting, Jean McGuire had explained, “We have some high standards in Metco. We don’t send people here to cut classes.”⁷⁷ While she may have intended this statement to assuage fears about the types of students who would be going to school in Rockland, McDermott took her statements to mean that METCO only accepted the brightest Boston students. She believed that the program bused students who could be leaders or role

⁷⁴ Matthei, METCO Archives.

⁷⁵ Matthei, METCO Archives.

⁷⁶ Mrs. Peter McDermott, “Reevaluate Objectives,” *Whitman Times*, October 3, 1974, Box 44, File 20, METCO Archives.

⁷⁷ Jean McGuire, quoted in McDermott, METCO Archives.

models for other children in Boston, thus weakening an already struggling district. “The kids we should be helping,” she explained, “are those who might get through high school and even on to college with the help of our school system. Not kids who have a good chance of making it anyway.”⁷⁸ McDermott also resented the idea that her tax money was going to pay tuition for black students who came from middle class families in the city. She accepted the program’s general educational goals but rejected their methods to achieve them.

Similarly to Phyllis Fluet of Winthrop, McDermott felt further insulted by accusations from other town members that opponents of METCO were bigots. “Not once during the evening did I hear one racial slur. In fact most of those in disagreement made legitimate comments,” she insisted.⁷⁹ She further explained that she had always supported METCO-style programs and thought a metropolitan school system was a good idea. To her, bigotry and discrimination only meant racialized name-calling. For someone to insinuate that her opposition to a program that represented “the lowest form of racism” constituted bigotry was horrifying to her.

Irene P. Parker of METCO responded to Mrs. McDermott in a letter to the *Whitman Times*. In addressing the accusation that the program discriminated based on race, she explained, “There are Blacks, Chinese, Puerto Rican, and other Spanish speaking children involved in the program. When METCO first began over eight years ago, whites were involved in being bussed too.”⁸⁰ While black leaders and parents originally founded METCO in order to bus black children to the suburbs, it formally accepted students of all races from within the city. However, in 1996, the State Department of Education ordered the

⁷⁸ McDermott, METCO Archives.

⁷⁹ McDermott, METCO Archives.

⁸⁰ Irene P. Parker, “Re: Letter from Mrs. McDermott,” *Whitman Times*, n.d., Box 44, File 20, METCO Archives.

METCO Program to accept Asian and Hispanic students proportionally based on the percentage of each race present in the Boston public schools.⁸¹ While this mandate did not by any means prove that METCO discriminated based on race, it did suggest that METCO had been geared primarily towards black students.

In her letter responding to McDermott, Parker further addressed the issue of bigotry. While she did not directly call McDermott a bigot, she stated, “Racism in American education not only reflects racism in society, but also reinforces and perpetuates it... By closing your doors to METCO students, you are breeding ignorance, superstitions, irrational fears and hatred.”⁸² Writing for the METCO Program, she stated that METCO was not racist, but those who opposed it were contributing to racism. The fine distinction between being racist and promoting racism demonstrated that while program administrators promoted METCO as a two-way street that focused on equality of educational opportunity, racial issues were difficult to separate from the program’s implementation. To those who supported the busing program, opposition constantly appeared tinged with racism and prejudice. While supporters and opponents could both argue that it was about the wise spending of tax dollars or the quality of educational resources, the fact that the program primarily bused black children to white suburbs created tensions that few could ignore completely.

With a program that included racial integration as a specific part of its mission, supporters and opponents found it difficult to separate race from other arguments. Accusations of bigotry and racism both from METCO supporters and the METCO administration infuriated those against the program, who in turn claimed the program was

⁸¹ “What Does METCO, Incorporated Do as Part of the METCO Program?,” n.d., Box 2, File 35, METCO Archives.

⁸² Parker, “Re: Letter from Mrs. McDermott,” METCO Archives.

racially discriminatory or ignored race and focused on the financial burden to taxpayers. The debates over race and integration further exposed the tension between METCO's mission and its implementation in the suburbs. While arguments against the program frequently focused on cost and other factors rooted in money or measurable values, supporters of METCO argued in more vague terms about the value of helping the city of Boston, helping disadvantaged urban children, and benefitting their own white children who had rarely been in the same class in school with children of a racial minority.

Serious debates about segregation in the Boston public schools occurred within the city throughout this time period. From the Racial Imbalance Law in 1965 through the Boston School Committee's efforts to avoid its implementation, black activists and parents fought for equal access to quality education within the city. White urban parents who did not want their children bused across the city fought vehemently against integration, arguing that suburban legislators were imposing their liberal values on Boston while minimally integrating through METCO. Members of the Boston School Committee decried busing while also suggesting that an expanded METCO Program could help solve the educational disparities between the suburbs and the city. The following chapter will examine METCO's place in debates within the city and the ways in which urban residents discussed the value of economic integration, racial integration, and "color blind" programs.



Figure 4 – “We’re not prejudiced, you know – but why would you want to come way out here just to get a decent education?” *Woburn Times*, December 6, 1974, Box 44, File 15, METCO Archives. Reproduced with permission from *Woburn Times*. This cartoon illustrates suburban resistance to METCO. The cartoonist mocks suburbanites’ insistence that they did not oppose the program for racist reasons, but rather because of the idea that a good education was not worth the hassle of being bused to the suburbs. Many suburban residents opposed METCO by arguing that the program’s long bus rides to unfamiliar neighborhoods placed unnecessary burden on urban students, yet this ignored the fact that students volunteered for the program.

CHAPTER THREE: “Not At Our Expense” Urban Reactions to METCO

Bostonian reactions to METCO and racial integration focused on several specific pieces of legislation and on resentments toward affluent suburbs and their residents. The Racial Imbalance Law of 1965, Boston School Committee member John Kerrigan’s proposed busing plan in 1974, and 1975’s Daly-Sullivan Bill all dealt with the necessity of suburban participation in Boston’s school issues. Additionally, the 1974 and 1975 proposals suggested that an expanded METCO Program could aid white and black Boston students by granting them access to affluent suburban school systems. White urban parents, urban representatives, and Boston School Committee (BSC) members supported these plans, demonstrating recurring grievances against suburban liberals whose children were not bused and who lived in racially segregated communities. METCO, they believed, was a form of tokenism that assuaged suburban consciences by allowing them to believe they were helping with the city’s school issues and integrating their own schools, while actually minimally effecting suburban school districts.

Busing in Boston became a major issue in June 1974 when Judge W. Arthur Garrity ruled in *Morgan v. Hennigan* that the Boston School Committee and the Massachusetts Board of Education had deliberately segregated the Boston public schools. He ordered that the BSC develop a plan to integrate the schools by the upcoming September; the cross-city busing that urban whites had feared since the 1960s had become a reality. BSC members, white parents, urban students, and urban politicians soon began protesting cross-city busing, which they referred to as “forced busing.” In addition to criticizing Garrity as a suburbanite

who could order busing without feeling the consequences, many residents also focused on METCO as an example of reverse discrimination.

White anti-busing advocates insisted that METCO discriminated against white students by rarely busing them to the suburbs and thus did not comply with the color-blind philosophy that they had understood as the message of the Civil Rights Movement. Because METCO was “race conscious” by dealing with race openly, white Bostonians, especially mothers from South Boston who attempted to register their children for the program, believed that METCO was a racist organization. Additionally, because white parents, BSC members, and other politicians viewed primarily white schools in Boston as equally run-down as all-black schools, METCO became a program that assisted black students by giving them access to suburban resources at the expense of disadvantaged white urban students. METCO insisted that its critics were politically motivated and had distorted the program’s integrationist goals.

However, as lawmakers began to consider large-scale solutions to urban educational problems, METCO’s insistence that it was a short-term solution for Boston’s problems conflicted with program administrators’ criticisms of proposed metropolitan solutions. The debates surrounding busing and METCO in the 1970s questioned the actual goals of METCO. Was the program about achieving a better education for all urban students or providing opportunities for individual students? Should the program concern itself with racial integration or economic integration? Did Boston need to racially balance its schools to achieve equality of education or was socioeconomic integration with the suburbs a more equitable and desirable end goal?

Racial Imbalance Law Debates

The Racial Imbalance Law, passed in 1965, defined a school as racially imbalanced if more than 50% of the student body was nonwhite. While this had a significant effect on Boston's schools, by defining imbalance in terms of nonwhite students legislators did not question the racial makeup of all-white suburban schools. Though these schools were entirely made up of one race, they were not considered "imbalanced." After 1965, many people within the city began to work to weaken or do away with the legislation. At the beginning of 1967, many representatives proposed laws or adjustments to the law on behalf of Boston School Committee members. Some suggestions included amending the Racial Imbalance Law to define being balanced if 50% or less of a school was made up of black students, an imbalanced school as having more than seventy-five percent black students, or being imbalanced if the number of nonwhite students was "an excess of 50%" rather than a strict 51%.¹ Such adjustments to the law would make it much easier for the BSC to comply, since a vague percentage such as "excess of 50%" could be subject to a wider range of interpretation than the strict percentages of the Racial Imbalance Law.

METCO administrators reacted quickly to proposed changes to the law, insisting that it was a necessary piece of legislation that needed more time to be properly evaluated. By March 1967 Executive Director Ruth Batson and administrator Paul Parks had created a committee to support the bill in its current form. In their letter to Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Chairman of the Democratic Advisory Committee Lester Hyman, Batson and Parks listed two reasons that changes or the repeal of the law could damage Massachusetts. One focused on the state's image nationally: "the chief consultant for the [U.S. Civil Rights

¹ "2/17/67 FACT SHEET ON RACIAL IMBALANCE BILLS," Commission on Law and Social Action, N.E. Regional, American Jewish Congress, Box 8, File 81, METCO Archives.

Commission] recommended the imbalance law as a model for other states to follow. A rollback will be noted all over the country.”² Further, they pointed out that the law was still too new to be sure of its effect, writing, “when [the Racial Imbalance Law] is just starting to function and its pressure beginning to be felt, it should not be changed or suspended. We might as well stop a cure just when the patient begins to get better.”³ They believed that the law could “cure” the Boston public schools; balanced racial populations would lead to balanced resources.

The Greater Boston chapter of the Congress on Racial Equality also opposed changes to the law, suggesting that those who were attempting to rewrite it were focused more on their upcoming political campaigns than on the best course of action for Boston’s students. In a form letter to legislators regarding the proposed bill to replace the Racial Imbalance Law, Chairman of Greater Boston CORE Frank J. Meranda, Jr. explained, “We wish to keep our attention focused on the improvement of public education for all children in Massachusetts. We hope that you will do the same and not allow yourself to be sidetracked by [replacement bill creator Edward Logue’s] effort to gain support for his mayoralty or other political ambitions” through his criticism of the law.⁴ While Meranda’s suggestion may have been based in fact if Mr. Logue was attempting to appeal to a white urban voting base, his suggestion that the law would improve education for “all children in Massachusetts” was misleading. Due to the law’s wording, racial imbalance only existed in cities with a significant percentage of minorities. Suburban children were unaffected by the law.

² Letter from Ruth Batson and Paul Parks to Edward M. Kennedy, Senator, and Lester Hyman, Chairman of the Democratic Advisory Committee, March 21, 1967, Box 8, File 81, METCO Archives.

³ Batson and Parks to Kennedy and Hyman, METCO Archives.

⁴ Form letter from Frank J. Meranda, Jr., Chairman of Greater Boston CORE, copy to Paul Parks of METCO, April 17, 1967, Box 8, File 81, METCO Archives.

In his 1991 book *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, Ronald P. Formisano questioned the necessity and effectiveness of the Racial Imbalance Law. Though METCO administrators insisted that the rest of the country would judge Massachusetts for changing a unique and progressive law, Formisano pointed out that in 1965, the Civil Rights Movement had accomplished the passage of the Voting Rights Act while Massachusetts passed the Racial Imbalance Law. He further commented, “No other state passed such a law,” implying that the law was unnecessary or unwanted in other parts of the country.⁵ With the benefit of nearly twenty years of hindsight, he critiqued the law, explaining, “Perhaps it is sufficient comment on the law’s effectiveness to note that the Boston School Committee managed to delay its implementation for nine years. But many non-Bostonians whose local school districts in no way faced desegregation now possessed satisfied consciences.”⁶ Formisano pointed out that only one legislator from Boston voted for the bill in 1965, demonstrating urban resistance to such a racially focused law that could have had a significant effect on the public school system had it been properly implemented. He quoted political scientist Frank Levy’s study of Civil Rights law, which proposed that the fewer areas affected by civil rights legislation, the more like it was to become law.⁷ Suburban support for the Racial Imbalance Law suggested that Levy’s theory was correct.

Despite METCO, CORE, and other groups’ support for the Racial Imbalance Law, even former proponents of the law began to change their minds. Boston Mayor Kevin White, a liberal politician who had been popular among black voters, stated in 1973 that though he had supported the law in 1965 he immediately began to doubt its effectiveness and believed

⁵ Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 35.

⁶ Formisano, 36.

⁷ Frank Levy, “Simple Theory of a Civil Rights Law,” quoted in Formisano, 36.

it needed to be reworked.⁸ He explained that he would not back the law “without taking a mature look at it – to see if there is anything that would make a difference either in its implementation or in breaking out of this stockade and moving out into the suburbs.”⁹ Additionally, he criticized “forced busing” within the city. His suggestion of “moving out into the suburbs,” however, demonstrated that even liberal urban politicians had started to believe that a metropolitan solution was necessary to deal with the problems in the Boston public schools. Mayor White pointed out that all the Boston schools needed improvement, not just the majority black schools.¹⁰ Integrating dilapidated schools would not provide the same benefit to urban students that a metropolitan system could.

METCO’s support of the Racial Imbalance Law may have been motivated by the program’s short time span and commitment to being a temporary solution to Boston’s school issues. If the Boston public schools improved significantly through racial balance, METCO students and parents might more reasonably see themselves staying in urban schools. However, the fact that METCO did not criticize the bill’s lack of focus on the imbalance of all-white schools, such as those in the suburbs, demonstrated the program’s reliance on suburban support. Program administrators did not vilify suburbanites, as many white anti-busing advocates did, as affluent escapees from urban problems. Rather, they focused on the perpetrators of segregation within the city as the cause of deteriorating facilities, inadequate faculty, and other issues in primarily black schools. The BSC, however, felt otherwise, and reacted strongly against the Racial Imbalance Bill and other efforts to demonstrate their commitment to segregated schools.

⁸ Robert Reinhold, “More segregated than ever,” *New York Times*, September 30, 1973.

⁹ Reinhold, “More segregated than ever.”

¹⁰ Reinhold, “More segregated than ever.”

The Boston School Committee and Racial Imbalance

When faced with the problem of racial imbalance – not called segregation – in the Boston public schools, the Boston School Committee came up with various solutions to adhere to the 1965 Racial Imbalance Law, which stated that a school was imbalanced if more than half of the students enrolled were non-white. Aside from reclassifying Chinese students as white in an effort to create more favorable statistics and retain the status quo, the BSC proposed solutions that focused on expanding METCO.¹¹ In 1969, committee member Joseph Lee wrote to Dr. Leon Trilling of METCO to insist that the BSC would not meet with anyone associated with the program unless they were willing to speak about a 1965 BSC plan to end imbalance. This plan, Lee wrote, would “transport the 14,000 excess Negro pupils in Boston” to the surrounding suburbs, putting potentially one black student in each classroom.¹² He reasoned that transporting black students to the suburbs would make it easier to balance the school populations in the city, since there would be fewer black students in Boston and thus less of a chance that a school would have more than fifty percent minority students. He claimed that busing these students to white schools in the city would do nothing to relieve imbalance because it would leave a number of schools with one hundred percent black enrollment. The BSC apparently did not consider busing white students to black schools a viable option.

Lee pointed out that the BSC had suggested this plan to the Kiernan Commission when they researched the racial makeup of Boston schools and produced *Because It Is Right – Educationally*, which led to the Racial Imbalance Act. According to Lee, Kiernan had ignored this idea because he “was afraid that it might land a Negro pupil betwixt the wind

¹¹ “Information Sheet On - - The Issues Facing the Boston School Committee Election,” n.d. (with documents from 1966 and 1967), Box 8, File 41, METCO Archives.

¹² Letter from Joseph Lee to Dr. Leon Trilling, January 27, 1969, Box 8, File 42, METCO Archives.

and his nobility in Milton. He therefore backed the safely miniature Metco proposal.”¹³ His statement demonstrated a common sentiment among white Bostonians who were against busing and school integration within the city: suburbanites could condemn Boston for having segregated schools, yet they escaped from integration by living in affluent towns where few minority families could buy homes. By calling METCO a “safely miniature” program, he cast the program as a form of tokenism that did not truly integrate the suburbs in any meaningful way. This urban resentment towards the suburbs became more pronounced as Boston faced court-ordered busing within the city in 1974.

Morgan v. Hennigan and Cross-City Busing

In 1974, Tallulah Morgan and several other African American parents of children in the Boston public schools filed a civil action suit against the individual members of the Boston School Committee, including Chairman James W. Hennigan, the Superintendent of the Boston public schools, the Boston Board of Education, and the Commissioner of Education. The parents alleged that the Boston School Committee and other defendants had deliberately segregated the public schools by race for years through districting, open enrollment policies, construction projects to alter school capacity, and refusing to actively work to enforce the Racial Imbalance Law, among other actions. Because of the segregated school system, the plaintiffs argued, the BSC had denied black children their constitutional right to an equal education.¹⁴ The members of the BSC and the school superintendent, referred to in *Morgan v. Hennigan* as the “city defendants,” denied taking any actions to

¹³ Lee to Trilling, January 27, 1969, METCO Archives.

¹⁴ *Morgan et al. v. Hennigan et al.*, 379 F. Supp. 410. US Dist. LEXIS 7973; (United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts 1974), [online] LexisNexis Academic Universe.

segregate the school system and instead blamed housing segregation within the city for the racial imbalance. They further insisted that they had complied with the Racial Imbalance Law and could not be doing any more than they already were to promote integration within the city.¹⁵ The Board of Education and Commissioner of Education, referred to in *Morgan* as the “state defendants,” also denied any constitutional violations. However, the state defendants sided with the plaintiffs and blamed the BSC entirely for racial segregation, claiming that they lacked control over BSC policies.

The BSC attempted to make geographic segregation an issue in the case. According to Judge W. Arthur Garrity’s opinion, “The court denied a motion of the city defendants to join numerous cities and towns around Boston as defendants, partly on the ground that the proposed defendant cities and towns had not been charged by the plaintiffs with contributing to the violation of their constitutional rights.”¹⁶ The BSC tried to pull the suburbs into the case by arguing that the towns around Boston were just as responsible for segregation within the city as the BSC. In his dismissal of the BSC’s claim against the suburbs, Garrity did not consider whether or not the towns should be sued, basing his decision on who had been named by the plaintiffs. The BSC wanted to blame white flight from the city and suburban housing discrimination for issues within Boston. A decision in a case against both the city and suburbs could have resulted in some sort of metropolitan solution, possibly similar to what Lee proposed in 1965.

Judge W. Arthur Garrity presided over the case, and issued an extensive opinion that dealt with housing segregation, school placement, and other significant issues that contributed to segregation in the public schools. He noted the statistics related to school

¹⁵ *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

¹⁶ *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

segregation in Boston, noting that while 61% of the public school population was white and 32% black, 84% of those white students attended predominantly white schools and 80% of the public schools did not have populations that represented the racial makeup of the school population.¹⁷ Plaintiffs cited patterns of overcrowding as evidence of deliberate segregation. All-white South Boston High School enrolled more than six hundred students over capacity in 1971 while the majority black school Girls High had more than five hundred extra spaces.¹⁸ Garrity noted, “The adverse educational effects of overcrowding within a school facility are so obvious” that they were not worth discussing beyond realizing that the BSC and other defendants had been aware of them.¹⁹ The BSC had avoided transferring students of one race to schools that mainly populated by another race, thereby ignoring opportunities to balance the schools while failing to effectively decrease overcrowding.

When Garrity introduced busing into his opinion, he did so by addressing a plan that the BSC had proposed in 1971. He explained, “While it would not always have been necessary, busing was a viable alternative to overcrowding. Boston buses several thousand school pupils. In June 1971 defendants proposed busing 4,000 inner city black students as much as fifteen to twenty miles to suburban schools in exchange for an equal number of white students from the suburbs.”²⁰ He further noted that the BSC had understood the Racial Imbalance Act’s restrictions on busing to apply only to state officials, which Garrity affirmed. However, beyond mentioning the urban-suburban busing proposal, he did not comment on its feasibility or desirability. He quickly moved on to the defendants’ refusal to consider busing students within the city to relieve imbalance and declared that they had

¹⁷ *Morgan v. Hennigan.*

¹⁸ *Morgan v. Hennigan.*

¹⁹ *Morgan v. Hennigan.*

²⁰ *Morgan v. Hennigan.*

“acted inconsistently on the basis of the race of the students being harmed.”²¹ The idea of busing black students to the suburbs was acceptable to the BSC, but busing white students from one overcrowded high school to another still crowded white high school was more desirable than busing white students to black schools. Garrity cited other evidence from the case attesting to the BSC’s deliberate segregation, including building a new school with the goal of creating racial balance, but giving white students in the district the option to remain at their old schools, thus guaranteeing that the new building would have an entirely black population.

The judge additionally addressed the city defendants’ claim that school segregation resulted from housing segregation, something that the BSC could not control. He wrote,

In Boston the term “Roxbury” probably carries many of the connotations which “Harlem” does in New York City. Unfortunately, streets in disrepair, burned out houses left standing and rubbish left on side streets in parts of Roxbury cannot help but intensify the identification of parts of this section of the city. The defendants were not ignorant of these segregated housing patterns and projects, which were a frequent topic of discussion at school committee meetings... This correlation between residential segregation and school segregation is the direct result of school construction projects between 1953 and 1972. Specifically, the small size of these schools was such that their enrollments could not but reflect the racial composition of the immediate neighborhood. Their locations were such that it is readily inferable that their racial compositions were intended.²²

While Garrity acknowledged the Boston Housing Authority’s contributions to neighborhood segregation through referring residents to housing projects based on race, he concluded that the defendants were familiar with racial housing patterns and thus should have anticipated that newly built schools in neighborhoods which were shifting from white to black would inevitably become racially imbalanced. Garrity’s description of Roxbury further

²¹ *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

²² *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

demonstrated the problems of housing segregation and the associations that white urban parents had with Roxbury schools.

Garrity ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, finding that the defendants had deliberately segregated the schools and must immediately begin correcting the problem. He declared that defendants had an “affirmative obligation” to act and that “[n]eutral conduct [was] no longer sufficient.”²³ The state board had already submitted several plans to redistrict the school system and bus students to relieve imbalance, and Garrity stated that the plan would go into effect on the first day of the coming school year. Though the state originally estimated that the plan would call for six thousand students to be bused, the judge explained that busing would more likely affect twenty thousand students.²⁴

Reactions to Garrity’s Decision

Bostonians had been aware of the threat of busing before 1974. The previous year, a *New York Times* reporter published an article examining the city eight years after the Racial Imbalance Law had gone into effect. He interviewed BSC member John Kerrigan about his views on the school system and the law. Kerrigan had become a major figure in Boston politics and the urban community, especially regarding school desegregation and busing. During the 1967 BSC elections, Kerrigan was in the process of supporting an amendment to the Racial Imbalance Law that would exclude grades one through six from having to comply with the law, one that made clear his opposition to involuntary busing.²⁵ Within a year of being elected Chairman of the BSC he insisted, “A conservative... is a liberal whose child

²³ *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

²⁴ *Morgan v. Hennigan*.

²⁵ “Information Sheet On - - The Issues Facing the Boston School Committee Election,” ca. 1967, Box 8, File 41, METCO Archives.

just got on a bus.”²⁶ In addition to being openly critical of the suburban elite who he believed unjustly tried to control Bostonians, he “delighted in shocking liberals with uninhibited racial derogation of blacks.”²⁷ Staunchly against busing, Kerrigan became a popular figure amongst the virulent anti-busing advocates.

With his position on busing for school integration already well known, his comments to the *Times* reporter in 1973 were unsurprising. Kerrigan blamed suburban liberals for the Racial Imbalance Law and efforts to integrate the city’s schools through busing. He explained, “Those who want to bus kids are out to bus yours, not theirs... When they put their kids on the altar of social justice, then I’ll put mine there, too.”²⁸ The writer noted that by “they” Kerrigan meant the “friggin’ liberals in the suburbs” who lived in all-white communities.²⁹ His characterization of liberals reflected the common resentment of suburban escape and frustration at the way that suburbanites could avoid large-scale integration simply by their geographic location.

Boston school officials agreed that the divide between city and suburbs was damaging to Boston and its residents. Boston School Superintendent Dr. William J. Leary explained in 1973,

This is a class problem... We have a suburban ring around the city that likes to think of itself as liberal, and disassociates itself from the problems of the working class. They like to shift the problems of integration onto the city. So the people in the city feel everything is against them. They feel if they could just raise an extra \$5,000 to cross the river and move, it would solve all their problems. So they flee. But those who are left are stuck with all the problems – they feel trapped.³⁰

²⁶ John Kerrigan, quoted in Formisano, 55.

²⁷ Kerrigan, quoted in Formisano, 57.

²⁸ Reinhold, “More segregated than ever.”

²⁹ Reinhold, “More segregated than ever.”

³⁰ Dr. William J. Leary, quoted in Reinhold, “More segregated than ever.”

Leary succinctly expressed widely held sentiments towards suburbanites among Bostonians, especially those who would be affected by court-ordered busing. By viewing imbalance as a class problem rather than a problem of racial segregation, Leary and other Bostonians blamed affluent white families rather than examining any other causes for segregation within the city. Leary's statement and similar opinions from other officials redefined the idea of victimhood in the Boston school system. Rather than viewing the black students as victims of deliberate segregation and unequal education, Leary, Kerrigan, and others who were against busing saw urban whites as victims of suburban affluence, political power and indifference to urban viewpoints.

In 1974, John Kerrigan was Boston School Committee Chairman. He gave a speech during a school committee meeting in January 1975 entitled "The Hub at the Bicentennial." He began by reviewing the year, explaining that in January of 1974, the Racial Imbalance Law had still been in effect, Judge Garrity had not ordered the desegregation of the BPS, and "Boston was still a proud City looking forward to participating in a national bicentennial celebration of which it was the cornerstone, indeed, the hub."³¹ One year later, Kerrigan believed, Boston was no longer a proud center but rather a city that the surrounding area ignored. He went on, saying,

We were, and still are the hub, the part of the wheel which bears the ultimate weight and on which all of the peripheral forces ultimately impinge. However, I was naive enough to think that the wheel had spokes which would transmit pressures equally to points on the rim, just as Paul Revere had done in 1775 when he rode through the suburbs to Lexington and Concord. But I was sadly mistaken. Paul Revere, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and yes, Crispus Attucks, had a vision of liberty which thrust far beyond Lexington... Two hundred years later Boston has been left to fight her battles alone... A hub that

³¹ John J. Kerrigan, "The Hub at the Bicentennial," January 2, 1975, *Proceedings of the School Committee 1975*, Box 1, File 58, METCO Archives.

once was encompassed by firm spokes is now surrounded by rotten wood, almost a vacuum extending to Route 128 and beyond.³²

Kerrigan used imagery of the American Revolution in his criticism of the suburbs, linking his speech both to the upcoming bicentennial and to the sense of pride that many Massachusetts residents felt for the area's role in the Revolution. His references to Lexington in particular were apt: the town prided itself on being the location for the first battle of the revolution and adopted as its slogan "The Birthplace of American Liberty."³³ Further, his emphasis on Crispus Attucks revealed Kerrigan's attempt to refute the image of the BSC as a racially discriminatory organization; Attucks was an African American soldier killed during the Boston Massacre in 1770 and was frequently considered one of the first martyrs of the American Revolution.

Kerrigan's wheel metaphor further demonstrated a common urban frustration with the surrounding suburbs. Many Boston residents felt abandoned by those outside of the city who could avoid Boston's problems. However, though Kerrigan felt that the "spokes" around the hub were rotting, they still led into the center. He stated, "The highways, car tracks, and railroads which tie Boston to its suburbs convey economic, social, and cultural benefits outward, but little if any assistance inward to insure the health, indeed the survival, of the City of Boston."³⁴ Though Bostonians felt isolated from the suburbs, commuters were able to take advantage of the city's resources while escaping urban issues. The idea of suburban escape influenced the discussion of the metropolitan area's obligation toward the city. While many suburbanites accused Boston residents of bigotry for trying to stop cross-city busing,

³² Kerrigan, "The Hub at the Bicentennial," METCO Archives.

³³ J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Random House, 1986), 92.

³⁴ Kerrigan, "The Hub at the Bicentennial," METCO Archives.

Kerrigan pointed out that the suburbs would remain “lily white” while the “people in the city... [do] the integrating for them.”³⁵

In 1974, Kerrigan had proposed a plan to render court ordered busing within the city unnecessary by vastly expanding the METCO Program. He suggested busing 19,000 black students to eighty-five towns in the Boston metro area.³⁶ In his opinion, this would “reduce the racial isolation of all-white suburbia” and be mutually beneficial: white students could experience integration and urban students could get a well-funded education.³⁷ He also pointed out that each school would receive an average of forty-five black students, which Kerrigan referred to as “hardly a takeover.”³⁸ This phrase implied that suburbanites resisted his plan because they did not want their school systems to deteriorate to the same level as the Boston public schools by accepting urban students. He turned the accusations of urban racism back at the suburban liberals, demanding that they consider to what degree race and class played into their opposition to his proposal.

That Kerrigan, one of the BSC members most openly critical of busing and opposed to creating racial balance within the city, would suggest an extensive plan to integrate the suburbs showed that racial integration was not his ultimate goal. He wanted the suburbanites, whose representatives voted for the Racial Imbalance Bill, to recognize that they lived in segregated communities instead of insisting that segregation was a strictly urban problem. His explicit reference to black students getting a well-funded education showed that he believed suburban affluence had created unequal school systems, not racism within the city. Many white urban parents felt that all the Boston public schools were in need of

³⁵ Kerrigan, “The Hub at the Bicentennial,” METCO Archives.

³⁶ Kerrigan, “The Hub at the Bicentennial,” METCO Archives.

³⁷ Kerrigan, “The Hub at the Bicentennial,” METCO Archives.

³⁸ Kerrigan, “The Hub at the Bicentennial,” METCO Archives.

repair and better funding, not just black schools. To them, the real enemies of equal education were the suburbanites who worked in the city, used city resources, paid for their own well-equipped suburban school systems, but did not contribute tax revenue to the city's schools.

Kerrigan noted that METCO had openly criticized his busing plan, saying that he was distorting the program's purpose. He did not elaborate on the reasons they cited. Though METCO literature extolled the virtues of suburban desegregation, when it came to metropolitan solutions such as Kerrigan's plan, the program's directors often focused on BSC efforts to avoid desegregating the city. Given their reaction to the similarly structured Daly-Sullivan Bill in the following year, busing black students out of the city in droves to create numerical balance would not likely have been METCO administrators' ideal solution to imbalance in Boston. Kerrigan dismissed the METCO Board of Directors as primarily a group of suburbanites who opposed his ideas in order to keep METCO a safe form of tokenism that would not truly affect suburban diversity. He decried the "subtle" discrimination in the suburbs that "[took] place in realty offices, banks and zoning board meetings," keeping black families out while remaining ostensibly centers of liberal idealism.³⁹ Suburbanites such as those on the METCO Board might care about integrating the city's schools, but according to Kerrigan they did not care about integrating their own communities or at least turned a blind eye to their own racial segregation.

After citing articles about white flight and housing segregation's effect on school segregation, Kerrigan again returned to the rhetoric of the American Revolution. He declared, "The Spirit of 1775 may yet be renewed. A twentieth century Paul Revere may still emerge, not shouting 'the blacks are coming,' but proclaiming the mutual dependence of the

³⁹ Kerrigan, "The Hub at the Bicentennial," METCO Archives.

city and suburb.”⁴⁰ The image of Revere warning suburbanites of the encroachment of black students and black families further critiqued suburban discrimination and racial segregation. Kerrigan ignored the overtly racist protests within the city, insisting that the only way to correct Boston’s problems was to involve the suburbs. His plan, while numerically balancing the racial makeup of Boston’s schools, would leave white students at their “neighborhood schools” while sending thousands of black students into the suburbs. Unlike METCO, which was a voluntary program, Kerrigan’s plan would ask that black students take on challenges that might be unwelcome, such as long early morning and late afternoon bus rides, unwelcoming school communities, and an extended day away from home. Rather than truly integrating Boston’s schools, it would create a metropolitan school system solely for black students and allow white students to avoid the problems that bused students faced both in the suburbs and at home. Though blanketed in the language of the Revolution, Kerrigan’s plan dealt less with creating a freer society and more with halting busing within the city.

The Daly-Sullivan Bill

Other leaders shared John Kerrigan’s view that suburban involvement was essential to solving the urban school crisis. Legislatures proposed House Bill 2439, commonly referred to as the Daly-Sullivan Bill, in 1975 as a way to ease the pressures on the Boston public schools. Sponsored by Education Committee Chairman Michael J. Daly and Boston School Committee member Kathleen Sullivan, the bill would require any town within twenty miles of Boston with an income higher than the general average of the greater Boston area to

⁴⁰ Kerrigan, “The Hub at the Bicentennial,” METCO Archives.

open ten percent of the seats in its public schools to urban children, black and white.⁴¹

Supporters believed that the bill would successfully blend urban and suburban schooling to create an overall improved educational experience for Massachusetts' children. In a statement supporting the bill the Suburban Coalition, a pro-metropolitan school system group, declared that suburban involvement was "morally right" because it allowed urban students access to "generally superior" and better funded schools.⁴² Similarly to METCO officials, the group used the "two-way street" argument, saying that both urban and suburban students would benefit from their interactions.

METCO officials reacted strongly to oppose the Daly-Sullivan Bill. According to METCO literature, the bill would mandate the busing of as many as 28,000 low-income Boston students to the suburbs and "would require 'wealthy' suburbs to make available 10% of their seats to Boston students."⁴³ METCO opposed the bill and asked citizens to protest to their representatives and school board members. METCO rejected the bill and previous similar plans by the BSC based on the grounds that the city was avoiding its duty to desegregate by busing students to the suburbs. They further criticized metropolitan school systems as proposed by the bill, saying that they "[e]xploit desegregation and the aspirations of Black parents in Boston."⁴⁴ METCO emphasized that it was a voluntary busing program that assisted with desegregation. The program administrators insisted that METCO was not "A two way program," "An escape valve for Boston's responsibility under the court order," or "A metropolitan school district," and did not only bus poor students or require

⁴¹ Paul Parks, Secretary of Educational Affairs, to Hon. Walter J. Boverini, senator, and Hon. Michael J. Daly, representative, Joint Committee on Education, March 10, 1975, Box 39, File 55, METCO Archives.

⁴² Suburban Coalition, "STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF INCREASED SUBURBAN INVOLVEMENT IN DESEGREGATION," April 2, 1975, Box 39, File 55, METCO Archives.

⁴³ METCO Memo regarding the Daly-Sullivan Bill, March 4, 1975, Box 2, File 35, METCO Archives.

⁴⁴ METCO Memo, March 4, 1975, METCO Archives.

participating towns to be affluent.⁴⁵ METCO did not want to be associated with metropolitan programs or large-scale city-to-suburb busing despite its rhetoric of creating urban-suburban unity. METCO portrayed itself as a temporary solution to the city's educational problems, but if it wished to remain a small, voluntary program, its commitment to a long-term solution was unclear.

While the program openly addressed the issue of white suburban students growing up in "racially isolated" communities and needing integrated educations in order to better participate in a diverse society, it did not have an impact on white urban students growing up in all-white schools. Additionally, though many suburban advocates of METCO felt they were participating in an act of charity by pulling "slum children" out of their "ghetto schools" METCO only bused a few thousand students. It did not do anything to improve the dilapidated schools for black or white children in the city, and arguably used funds that could have gone to supplying city schools. However, for the students in METCO, the program provided an invaluable educational boost that they would not have received in the city. While in some ways METCO was a positive program for individual urban students and provided a way for suburbs to begin the process of integrating schools, it did not address widespread urban educational issues in the same way that Daly-Sullivan proposed. METCO did not work to correct economic segregation, though its students benefitted from better-funded education and often provided socioeconomic diversity to suburban schools.

METCO received support from the League of Women Voters of Boston, though through arguments similar to those made by METCO opponents. LWV chapters had been an important force in various towns to bring METCO to their suburbs. Regarding the Daly-Sullivan Bill, the LWV testified in front of the Joint Committee on Education that the

⁴⁵ METCO Memo, March 4, 1975, METCO Archives.

organization felt that the bill ignored the positive programs that existed in the Boston public schools, demonstrating a “lack of respect” on the part of the legislators.⁴⁶ They further suggested that the money and effort that would be put into implementing the bill could be better spent on improving the city’s schools. Opponents of METCO had made similar arguments against the smaller busing program, stating that the money spent to bus children to the suburbs could be spent within the city more effectively.

That some opponents and supporters of METCO both thought that financial resources in different degrees could be better invested in Boston’s schools than in busing students away from the city demonstrated a contradiction to which many urbanites attempted to draw attention. Supporters of METCO frequently opposed the Daly-Sullivan Bill, which many viewed as a larger version of the program. They thus seemingly accepted small-scale racial integration instead of a large-scale integration that would have a significant effect on the towns’ school populations both racially and socioeconomically. Again, urbanites used this to raise the issue of suburban escape, which permeated discussion of busing within the city and METCO’s role as an option for Boston’s minority students.

The METCO Program sent letters to students’ parents, host families, and the school district leaders to encourage them to oppose the Daly-Sullivan Bill. To these letters, they attached lists of representatives to which parents could write. Representative Ann Gannett of Wayland wrote an open letter to METCO parents in April 1975 to express recognition for the amount of mail she had received. She explained that she understood that parents did not feel their children received a proper education in Boston and she knew “how much [the parents]

⁴⁶ League of Women Voters of Boston, “Education Committee: Testimony on House Bill 2439, the ‘Daly-Sullivan Bill,’ presented to the Joint committee on Education...,” April 2, 1975, Box 39, File 55, METCO Archives.

have sacrificed to enroll [their] children in schools out of Boston.”⁴⁷ Gannett said she supported METCO and believed it could not function alongside the Daly-Sullivan plan without one overtaking the other. Further, she pointed out that Daly-Sullivan’s mandatory participation would not take into account the atmosphere of each town. While METCO had carefully considered the importance of sending students to a school system that welcomed them, Daly-Sullivan obligated affluent towns to open seats for urban students, thus forcing a busing program into communities that may have rejected the METCO Program. While Gannett believed that the suburbs and city should work together to solve urban problems, she did not think that the current bill was an effective solution. She finished her letter by saying that she wished she had a solution, “but for the time-being, let us continue and increase METCO!”⁴⁸ Her statement appeared to contradict her previous statements against the bill; increasing METCO could create a program similar in size and scope to Daly-Sullivan. While METCO’s voluntary basis distinguished it from the bill in at least one significant respect, if the program’s goal was to continue to expand it could risk approaching the same problems of Daly-Sullivan by busing black students out of the city and spending money on their transportation that could be better used to fund Boston’s schools.

The Massachusetts House of Representatives considered other METCO-related legislation at the same time as the Daly-Sullivan Bill. One bill would open METCO spaces to white, Asian, and Hispanic students.⁴⁹ According to their literature, METCO had not explicitly excluded these students, but the program was primarily geared towards the African American community in Boston. Chairman of the Massachusetts Advisory Committee on

⁴⁷ Letter from Representative Ann Gannett to METCO parents, April 8, 1975, Box 20, File 9, METCO Archives.

⁴⁸ Gannett, METCO Archives.

⁴⁹ “House kills two bills on Metco program,” *Boston Globe*, May 1, 1975, Box 39, File 55, METCO Archives.

the United States Commission on Civil Rights Julius Bernstein objected to the bill and Daly-Sullivan, saying in a statement that attempts to include white students in METCO “indicate[d] a lack of understanding of the purpose of the program; a conscious effort to destroy the program; or both.”⁵⁰ He pointed out that the previous year the Massachusetts Assistant Attorney General declared that white students could join METCO as long as their participation would contribute to alleviating racial imbalance in the city.⁵¹ However, busing white students to white suburban schools would do nothing to promote racial integration in the suburbs and would worsen the situation in Boston by pulling white students out of the school system. From an economic integration standpoint, however, busing white students would give them access to well-financed educations while expanding suburban students’ worldviews regarding socioeconomic status. METCO, however, focused on racial integration instead of socioeconomic integration and thus perceived bills to mandate white students’ acceptance into the program as a misunderstanding of its goals.

Bernstein went on to describe several reasons that the Daly-Sullivan Bill and other changes to the METCO Program would be impractical. For one, the cost to bus tens of thousands of students out of the city could exceed sixty million dollars per year.⁵² The six million dollar cost to run the METCO Program seemed small in comparison. Additionally, Bernstein reiterated that it would bus white children to predominantly white school systems and increase racial segregation within the city, and also pointed out that the type of program proposed by Daly-Sullivan would create a massive bureaucracy to operate it. Expressing an

⁵⁰ Julius Bernstein, “Statement of Julius Bernstein, Chairman, The Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights on Current Legislation Before the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on the METCO Program,” 1, 1975, Box 20, File 9, METCO Archives.

⁵¹ Bernstein, METCO Archives.

⁵² In a footnote on the second page of his statement, Bernstein explained that the Daly-Sullivan Bill’s proposal would cost the city of Boston \$27.69 million and the state \$32.5 million. Bernstein, METCO Archives.

opinion shared by many opponents of Daly-Sullivan and the other METCO-related bill, Bernstein stated, “Once again the METCO program is threatened by those whose real target is integrated education.”⁵³ Though supporters of the bill explained that they were trying to solve urban educational issues and push for greater equality, METCO proponents consistently declared the METCO-related legislation politically motivated and a distortion of the program’s purpose.

Others within the city disagreed. Dick Sinnott, a syndicated editorialist, published a column entitled *City Hall Scene*, in which he supported the Daly-Sullivan Bill and all opponents of court mandated busing within the city. In an article published in February 1975, he described various suburban representatives’ positions on the bill. Charlie McGowan of Dedham, for example, opposed the bill, explaining, “Why extend the disease of forced busing into the suburbs. It should be controlled at the source.”⁵⁴ This opinion hardly endeared him to the people in South Boston and Charlestown, who vehemently opposed busing within the city and did not want any part of the “disease” either. Sinnott went on to criticize suburban legislators who voted for the “cruel and senseless” Racial Imbalance Act in 1965 and mocked those who believed that their towns’ participation in METCO was “the beginning and the end of out-of-town involvement in the busing plague.”⁵⁵ He then echoed the common resentment towards liberal suburbanites who called white Bostonians racist while resisting large-scale integration in their own communities, closing his article with the line, “Now the bus is on the other foot.”⁵⁶ He insisted that no one in the state wanted forced busing, so the city should not be the only place subjected to it.

⁵³ Bernstein, METCO Archives.

⁵⁴ Dick Sinnott, “City Hall Scene,” *Charlestown Patriot*, February 7, 1975, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁵⁵ Sinnott, February 7, 1975, METCO Archives.

⁵⁶ Sinnott, February 7, 1975, METCO Archives.

At the end of April 1975, the House of Representatives voted against both the Daly-Sullivan Bill and the bill to open seats in METCO to non-black students after hours of debate. Before the vote, legislators' arguments devolved into extreme speeches. One man compared integration specialist and Harvard professor James T. Coleman to Adolf Hitler, while another insisted that black families wanted to keep white students from receiving an equal education.⁵⁷ He insisted, "They made it up the ladder... and now they don't want to let anyone else up."⁵⁸ His statement revealed a common sentiment among whites in the working class neighborhoods of Boston; programs such as METCO that worked to improve the educational experiences of black students appeared to do so at the expense of white students. Rather than correcting an existing problem, many urban whites viewed the program as promoting inequality between the races and giving black students an unfair advantage. These feelings became even clearer as white families from South Boston began openly criticizing the METCO Program for discriminating against white children.

White Bostonians, the Suburbs, and METCO

Parents in South Boston and Charlestown did not want their children bused away from their neighborhoods to attend school in predominantly black areas; neither did they want black students from Roxbury and Dorchester bused to their schools. As they protested busing within the city, they also turned their attention to the METCO Program to express their resentment towards suburban liberals who supported busing and African Americans who benefitted from it. As Louise Day Hicks explained, "Many people are taking a long, hard look at METCO. Many parents are asking why some people in the city should receive

⁵⁷ "House kills two bills on Metco program," *Boston Globe*, May 1, 1975, METCO Archives.

⁵⁸ *Boston Globe*, May 1, 1975, METCO Archives.

preferential treatment. If the Boston schools are segregated for one, they are segregated for all... METCO allows black parents to send their children wherever they wish and that... is discrimination.”⁵⁹ While Hicks admitted that segregation affected all students in the city, she rejected busing as the proper way to deal with the issue. By describing METCO as a form of “preferential treatment,” Hicks cast white Bostonians as the victims of special interest groups who wanted to deny white people’s rights to quality education. Instead of the black students as the victims of segregation, Hicks portrayed the white students as the victims of reverse discrimination.

White urban anger directed itself at three main issues: reverse discrimination, economic inequality, and perceived infringements on white freedoms. On June 17, 1975, Dick Sinnott’s column read, “It was just a year ago this month that Judge Wendell Arthur Garrity decided he would deprive the parents of Boston of their God-given right to freedom of choice in the upbringing of their children.”⁶⁰ The language of freedom distracted from the issue of segregation. To Sinnott and many white parents in Boston, the social issue was not worth correcting if it impinged upon the liberty of white families. Later in the same article, Sinnott insisted, “the liberals have deserted the people. The liberals have deserted Boston with their high ideals and big money to go on inhibiting METCO expansion in town meeting after town meeting in the suburbs.”⁶¹ Describing the liberals as an elite, wealthy group separate from “the people” Sinnott cited their idealism as a detriment to the people of Boston. His support of METCO expansion, however, was likely within the context of the recently failed Daly-Sullivan Bill and the legal addition of white children to the program. His

⁵⁹ Louise Day Hicks, quoted by Dick Sinnott, “City Hall Scene,” *South Boston Tribune*, July 3, 1974, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁶⁰ Dick Sinnott, “City Hall Scene,” June 17, 1975, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁶¹ Sinnott, June 17, 1975, METCO Archives.

discussion of “big money” again raised the issue of economic segregation. An expanded METCO Program could give poor white children access to the superior facilities and resources in the suburbs while promoting socioeconomic integration. For white families in the city, this type of integration was more important than racial integration.

The idea of affirmative action programs, including METCO, infuriated some urban residents. As one South Boston man explained, “If black people want equal rights they should have them. But not at our expense.”⁶² He went on to say that he had never owned slaves and thus had no obligation to repay black people for the years of suffering they had experienced due to slavery. Further, he addressed racial pride, decrying liberal usage of “their big weapon, the word racist.”⁶³ If black people and other minorities were proud of their race, he explained, it was called racial pride, but if whites felt the same way they were called racists. “If being racist is... being happy to live among your own people then I guess I qualify and I refuse to apologize for it,” the writer declared. White urban opponents of busing frequently shared the sense of white solidarity and separatism that he expressed. Why should black people get special treatment, they asked, if it comes at the cost of the white students? These costs included being bused away from their neighborhood schools as well as being denied admittance to the METCO Program.

Throughout 1975 Sinnott used his column to assert that METCO was a discriminatory organization that infringed upon white people’s rights. In July, he wrote that Bostonians should try again to force METCO to give white students “the same opportunity to attend suburban schools as their black brothers. And that’s what we keep hearing isn’t it, that we’re

⁶² John Ciccone, “South Boston Information Center News,” *South Boston Tribune*, October 14, 1976, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁶³ Ciccone, October 14, 1976, METCO Archives.

all brothers?”⁶⁴ Sinnott demonstrated an interpretation of the Civil Rights Movement and METCO’s goals that focused more on the idea of equality than correcting years of institutional discrimination. If all races were equal, he reasoned, there should be no reason for programs like METCO that focused on racial integration. All people should have access to the same resources, regardless of race. However, METCO’s goal of suburban integration focused on racial rather than economic integration.

The program’s focus on race created problems once parents from South Boston attempted to enroll children in METCO. In the summer of 1976, several white mothers who opposed cross-city busing drove to Roxbury to enroll their children in METCO and “challenge it.”⁶⁵ Their children were placed on the waiting list behind six thousand other students. An editorialist for the *South Boston Tribune* writing about the incident took this to mean that METCO discriminated against white students, ignoring the fact that six thousand other students had registered first. The writer insisted that METCO should be challenged in court, saying, “[T]he Supreme Court recently stated that the Civil Rights laws cut both ways protecting whites as well as blacks and I say METCO is rejecting white pupils because of their race[.] So let’s sue them!!!! [Why] should they be allowed to have a segregated program. [sic] We should put a stop to METCO... It’s Un-American.”⁶⁶ Again, South Boston residents interpreted civil rights legislation to mean that affirmative action-style programs were illegal. The reference to METCO as “Un-American” further demonstrated anti-busing rhetoric that focused on “liberty and justice for all” as another way of saying that programs that gave one race an advantage, even to correct a societal issue, were contrary to

⁶⁴ Dick Sinnott, “City Hall Scene,” *Boston Post-Gazette*, July 18, 1975, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁶⁵ Dan Yotts, “South Boston Information Center News,” *South Boston Tribune*, July 15, 1976, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁶⁶ Yotts, July 15, 1976, METCO Archives.

basic American ideals. METCO did not officially discriminate against white students, and the situation described in the article showed that the program was already extremely popular among African American parents. With an ultimate goal of creating racially integrated environments, the program might have been less likely to select white students to send to the suburbs. While white parents viewed this as discrimination, METCO viewed it as a commitment to the ideology of racial integration.

Representative Raymond Flynn, Democrat from South Boston, decided to weigh in on the issue that summer. He insisted that METCO was failing due to its inadequate administrative organization and claimed that it was becoming a separate, independent school system.⁶⁷ Regarding discrimination, he stated that the program “refuse[d] to enroll [sic] non-black children... despite the fact that the program is funded entirely by the taxpayers of Massachusetts.”⁶⁸ By bringing up tax dollars, Flynn made METCO an issue for everyone in the state. Few would want their money to pay for a discriminatory program, or at least one that discriminated against white students. He repeated the story of the South Boston mothers registering their children for METCO only to be told “that there was no guarantee that any white children would be accepted.”⁶⁹ Flynn explained that METCO was not achieving its intended goal of alleviating racial imbalance and with the court order to desegregate in the city METCO no longer had a purpose.

One month later, Flynn became the spokesman for a group of white Boston parents who filed a class action suit against METCO, Governor Michael Dukakis, Secretary of Education Paul Parks, and Commissioner of Education Gregory Anrig. The suit alleged that

⁶⁷ “Representative Flynn Charges METCO Is Failing Because of Organization,” *South Boston Tribune*, August 12, 1976, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁶⁸ “Representative Flynn...,” August 12, 1976, METCO Archives.

⁶⁹ “Representative Flynn...,” August 12, 1976, METCO Archives.

the state was using tax dollars to fund a program that discriminated based on race.⁷⁰ When speaking on behalf of the plaintiffs, Flynn stated, “The suit has absolutely nothing to do with busing, METCO is a blatantly outrageous program which flies in the face of not only fairness, but equal protection of the law.”⁷¹ Arguing that the suit, filed by parents who were among the most affected by busing, had nothing to do with the crisis in the city was disingenuous and only drew attention back to Garrity’s order and the families who disagreed with it. His inflammatory language further demonstrated Flynn’s reinterpretation of METCO’s purpose and the goals of civil rights action. Because people of all races should be protected equally, he reasoned, METCO’s focus on creating racially integrated school systems was illegal and discriminatory. The parents sued METCO not because it was “blatantly outrageous” but because they wanted to participate and get their children out of the schools in Boston, and if they could not then they felt that black parents should not either.⁷² His argument was similar to that of Louise Day Hicks when she asserted that if Boston’s schools were “segregated for one, they [were] segregated for all.”⁷³

Flynn and South Boston parents’ argument against METCO further demonstrated a common sentiment among urban whites that race-conscious programs were inherently racist. However, METCO students could not ignore the differences between themselves and white suburban children. Bused students were not residents and experienced school in a distinctly different way than their white suburban counterparts. Suburban school administrators struggled with how to deal with the urban students. Treating them exactly the same as white students seemed like the most equitable option, yet METCO administrators argued that

⁷⁰ “METCO Court Suit,” *Boston Post-Gazette*, September 10, 1976, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁷¹ “METCO Court Suit,” METCO Archives.

⁷² After a detailed search of LexisNexis and communications with the Suffolk County Clerk’s office, I have yet to locate records of this case. This suggests that it was either never filed or it was dismissed.

⁷³ Hicks, quoted by Sinnott, “City Hall Scene,” *South Boston Tribune*, July 3, 1974, METCO Archives.

because the students were different, teachers and administrators needed to recognize that METCO students required different considerations than other children. METCO staff worked to support their students, providing METCO coordinators in each school system as well as METCO counselors for students. However, suburban school systems often did not do enough in the opinion of METCO staff.

Executive Director Jean McGuire criticized suburban school systems in 1978 for failing to acknowledge that their schools needed to adjust to teach METCO students. McGuire stated that the suburbs had not made a significant effort to hire minority teachers and staff and “black children who are bused to suburban schools... are still being taught as though they were white because white teaching professionals have not learned from black teachers how to deal with an integrated school.”⁷⁴ Her insistence that black students needed to be taught by people who understood their experience in order to have a successful integrated environment prompted backlash from the city. McGuire received an unsigned letter several days after her statement appeared in the *Boston Globe*, which included a copy of the article with several phrases underlined. Postmarked from Boston, the letter read:

Its [sic] no wonder black kids have so much trouble in school with the mentality its black leaders have. Do black kids need black teachers to do well in school or does the black leadership want jobs from desegregation and the main motive is not education? All kids should be treated alike and the sooner you black people realize this the better your whole race will be. If you really want to help your own kind push for discipline in the school and don't fall back on the bullshit of the past 200 years!⁷⁵

The writer's emphasis on children of all races receiving equal treatment and equal education illustrated reflected Louise Day Hicks and Representative Raymond Flynn's interpretations of civil rights and the value of integration. The idea that there was a different

⁷⁴ “Metco head raps suburbs,” *Boston Globe*, September 11, 1978, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

⁷⁵ Letter from anonymous to Jean McGuire, METCO Executive Director, September 13, 1978, Box 40, File 31, METCO Archives.

way to teach white and black children contradicted many people's understanding of equal rights as a form of color blindness. However, the racially charged language in the letter demonstrated the politicization of "color blind" equality. The writer felt justified in criticizing METCO for not treating all students alike and thus violating white children's civil rights, yet also saw no problem in using derogatory phrases such as "you black people" to criticize an entire race of people. By viewing black leaders' push for an educational system that recognized the different experience of METCO students as a type of special interest group, the writer took what he perceived to be a moral high ground that allowed him to reconcile arguing for equality while adhering to racial stereotypes.

Accusations of reverse racism by white working class Bostonians demonstrated changing attitudes in the United States toward civil rights and the need for specialized programs to correct historical discrimination against African Americans. Many Americans adopted idea that equal rights meant contemporary rights, neglecting the importance of legacies of past racism. These changes in political and cultural language cast white people as the victims of minority demands rather than beneficiaries of discriminatory policies and institutions. The lawsuit between Allan Bakke and the Regents of the University of California demonstrated this ideology in regards to educational affirmative action; Allan Bakke sued the University for denying his admission to medical school on the basis that its admissions policy for minorities had violated the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause.⁷⁶ In 1978, the Supreme Court eventually found in favor of the defendant, ruling that the University could not use "an explicit racial classification" because it infringed upon

⁷⁶ *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265; 98 S. Ct. 2733; 57 L. Ed. 2d 750; 1978 U.S. LEXIS 5; (United States Supreme Court 1978), [online] LexisNexis Academic Universe.

individual rights.⁷⁷ Though race could be considered, the University could not use race to keep from comparing all candidates competitively. Though affirmative action programs intended to correct the problems of years of discrimination and inequalities in education, the Supreme Court's decision reflected a color-blind approach to the Constitution. More court cases used this approach to challenge affirmative action and race-conscious educational decisions, threatening METCO and similar programs' futures and further questioning the value of integrated education.

⁷⁷ *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*.

CONCLUSION

Reactions to METCO in Boston and the surrounding area demonstrated the effects of race, class, and location on opinions of school integration and disagreements about the limits of civil rights action. The busing program developed from black activism and black parental concern and illustrated a trend in the Civil Rights Movement that recognized that *de facto* segregation's impact on children was as destructive as *de jure* segregation. Additionally, METCO's focus on helping white students who grew up in racially segregated areas reflected an increase in understanding by both black and white activists of the negative results of segregation for all children. Many white liberals who supported the program adopted the argument that METCO would help their own children while giving black urban students access to an education they could not have in the city. However, the arguments against METCO in the suburbs show that integration in and of itself was not as valued by suburbanites as it was by black parents or METCO administrators. Suburban liberals might support school desegregation in theory, but ultimately argued that the costs both in taxes and in school quality outweighed the benefits that their children might gain from the program.

The urban view of METCO further exposed the changing national attitudes towards affirmative action and racial integration. White working class parents who opposed busing within the city argued that METCO discriminated against their children and gave black children an unfair advantage. They promoted the idea that if all races were equal then all children should be treated the same, and thus voluntary programs such as METCO should not exclude white children in the name of racially integrating the suburbs. Black parents believed that their children had suffered from inadequate educational facilities and METCO was a way to correct the problems of segregation and underfunded schools. While many

black activists originally supported METCO, some later changed their positions and argued that the program took funds away from the Boston public schools, contributing to their deterioration. For them, school integration became less important than simply improving the school quality within the city. The national transition to a color-blind ideology further challenged affirmative action programs such as METCO.

After the 1970s

Through the 1970s and to the present day, METCO has continued to voluntarily bus students to suburbs around Boston to achieve educational equality. Though the program's rhetoric has largely remained the same since its 1966 inception, its language has moved away from directly focusing on racial integration. On its website, METCO outlines both the program's mission and purpose: their mission is "to provide students with educational opportunities designed to enrich their academic, personal and interpersonal experiences. It is our belief that the METCO experience should provide a strong academic foundation, as well as an environment rich in cultural, educational, ethnic and racial diversity."¹ The program's continued emphasis on cultural exchange in addition to improved academics demonstrates its goal of improving educational experiences for both white suburbanites and minority students from the city. Though the program's section on purposes explicitly mentions urban-suburban cooperation, it no longer mentions specific races, illustrating the changes to METCO in recent decades. The purposes highlights METCO's goal to "increase the diversity and reduce racial isolation" in suburbs, but does not reference integration or integrated educational

¹ "About METCO, Inc." METCO, Inc. website, accessed March 25, 2011, <http://www.metcoinc.org/About%20Us.html>.

environments.² The idea of a two-way street is still important to METCO, and the program now adopts more subtle references to the importance of racial desegregation.

The program faced continued challenges to its stated goals after the 1970s, especially from other minorities in Boston. A 1996 report by the Lesley College Intercultural Relations Program revealed that few people in Boston's Asian community were aware of METCO or knew that it was not exclusively for African American students.³ Others in the Chinese community suggested that METCO used funds that should be directed at the Boston public schools, demonstrating a continuation of arguments from the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ In 1996, the Massachusetts Department of Education ordered METCO to accept Asian and Hispanic students proportionately to their populations in the city.⁵ While this demonstrated an understanding that all minorities in Boston deserved to have access to quality education, it also removed METCO from its origins as a program created by black activists in order to integrate black students into white neighborhoods.

Integration through busing has been threatened in recent years through legal challenges in other states, notably in the 2007 Supreme Court case *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District 1, et al.* The Supreme Court overturned the school districts' plans, which assigned students to specific schools in order to achieve racial balance, ruling that they violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.⁶ The court further explained, "[R]acial imbalance in the schools was not unconstitutional by

² "About METCO, Inc."

³ Thorold F. Field, Lesley College Intercultural Relations Program Intern, "METCO, Inc. Asian Outreach Effort, February to May of 1996, Final Report," May 1, 1996, 1, Box 27, File 47, METCO Archives.

⁴ Field, "METCO, Inc. Asian Outreach Effort," 2, METCO Archives.

⁵ "What Does METCO, Incorporated Do as Part of the METCO Program?," n.d., Box 2, File 35, METCO Archives.

⁶ *Parents Involved In Community Schools v. Seattle School District 1, et al.*, 551 U.S. 701; 127 S. Ct. 2738; 168 L. Ed. 2d 508; 2007 U.S. LEXIS 8670; (United States Supreme Court 2007), [online] LexisNexis Academic Universe.

itself.”⁷ Justice Clarence Thomas’s opinion revealed the importance of color-blind ideology in the court’s decision. He explained,

[T]hese race-based student-assignment programs do not serve any compelling state interest... Disfavoring a color-blind interpretation of the Constitution, the dissent would give school boards a free hand to make decisions on the basis of race--an approach reminiscent of that advocated by the segregationists in *Brown v. Board*.⁸

His comparison between the Seattle school boards and the segregationists in *Brown v. Board* demonstrated changed understandings of the importance of active desegregation of schools. Though the Seattle school boards hoped to maintain racial balance in their schools, because the court found that they were not correcting existing segregation, the boards’ race-based assignments appeared to invite the possibility of official re-segregation of schools. The link between “decisions on the basis of race” and *de jure* segregation further exemplified the idea that any program explicitly dealing with race was inherently racist.

This decision could threaten METCO and similar programs that use race as a factor in school assignments and further raises questions about the busing program’s purpose. Following the decision, METCO’s Executive Director Jean McGuire stated, “If the issue gets down to ‘You can’t assign students by race,’ Metco could end... The superintendents are worried that somebody’s going to tell them they have to put white kids in Metco and their towns won’t buy it.”⁹ Though METCO’s language has backed off of explicitly discussing integration, racial diversity remains more important than economic diversity in suburban decisions to participate. In 2007, METCO students reflected the population ratios of minorities in Boston, accepting sixty percent black students, thirty percent Latinos, and ten percent Asians. According to McGuire, some white students joined METCO by claiming to

⁷ *Parents v. Seattle*.

⁸ *Parents v. Seattle*.

⁹ Jean McGuire, quoted in Tracy Jan, “Metco fears for its future,” *Boston Globe*, July 26, 2007.

be Latino.¹⁰ The METCO director in Lincoln, a town with the highest percentage of METCO students, commented, “We don't need more white children... Not that they're not deserving of a quality education, but it's not desegregation.”¹¹

The Supreme Court decision has prompted several parents in the Boston area to begin searching for ways to challenge METCO, arguing that income rather than race should determine how the program chooses students, echoing the arguments of white working-class Bostonians in the 1970s.¹² METCO has avoided using income as a determining factor due to preexisting stereotypes of urban black students as entirely from lower class backgrounds. In 2007, METCO administrators acknowledged that they did not originally intend the program to last for more than four decades, yet because of persistent residential segregation both in Boston and between the city and suburbs they felt the program remained necessary.¹³

Despite continued residential segregation in the Boston area, METCO's continued funding by the state is problematic due to inequalities that still exist in the city. In 2010, Northeastern University released a study of major metropolitan area schools, which found that the Boston public schools were among the most segregated nationally.¹⁴ The study demonstrated that school segregation remains an important issue in Boston and across the United States, yet it does not receive the same widespread attention due to the idea that segregation is no longer a problem in a color-blind society. The transition to color-blindness instead of affirmative action has further contributed to the decline in school integration's importance nationally. While METCO provides many Boston students with superior educations and gives them opportunities they might not find in the city, it does not solve the

¹⁰ Jan, “Metco fears...,” *Boston Globe*, July 26, 2007.

¹¹ Christina Horner, quoted in Jan, “Metco fears...,” *Boston Globe*, July 26, 2007.

¹² Jan, “Metco fears...,” *Boston Globe*, July 26, 2007.

¹³ Jan, “Metco fears...,” *Boston Globe*, July 26, 2007.

¹⁴ “Study: Segregation in Mass. schools among worst,” *Boston Herald*, September 20, 2010.

underlying problems that cause such inequalities between segregated facilities or between urban and suburban districts. By pulling students out of the city, the program does not relieve racial imbalance in Boston nor does it improve the overall quality of the public schools. It has yet to significantly alter the racial makeup of suburban Boston, and in some ways has negatively contributed to perceptions of African Americans in suburbia.

In 2009, Lexington Education Foundation board member Jeri Zeder wrote an editorial for the *Boston Globe* discussing race in the town through a conversation she had with a black Lexington parent. When Zeder called to ask if she could use a group photo that included the woman's child in LEF publicity materials, the mother refused for two reasons. For one, the woman explained that organizations frequently use images of black children to gain sympathy, not to illustrate black leadership or elicit other positive connotations. More personally, she did not want her child's image used because of Lexington's participation in the METCO Program. Zeder wrote, "She told me that, though she and her daughter are Lexington residents, they are often assumed to be with METCO - as if you couldn't possibly live in Lexington if you're black."¹⁵ While METCO has been a positive experience for many urban students, it has contributed to new suburban stereotypes of African Americans. Many white students and parents assume that any black child in suburban public schools belongs to METCO and returns home to Roxbury each evening.

Though suburbs may accept METCO students for the benefit of urban and suburban children, until residential integration renders METCO and similar programs unnecessary, educational inequalities and cultural barriers will persist or even become more deeply ingrained across the United States. The national shift towards color-blind ideologies poses continued challenges to correcting such inequalities, even making significant changes more

¹⁵ Jeri Zeder, "Actually, let's have that beer," *Boston Globe*, August 20, 2009.

difficult than in the mid-twentieth century. Though METCO's future remains uncertain and its commitment to individual improvement seems to supersede its commitment to societal change, it is one of the few remaining programs that consider racial integration an important goal in education.

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