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ARTICLE

The Boston Freedom Schools as Places of Possibility for Reciprocal Integrated Education

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Abstract

In 1963 and 1964, organizers in Boston held Freedom Stay-Outs—one-day school boycotts—to protest the neglect of predominantly Black schools from the Boston School Committee, the governing body of the Boston Public Schools. Boycotting students attended Freedom Schools, where they learned about Black history and discussed issues facing Black youth. This article examines the 1964 Stay-Out and Freedom Schools as spaces where Black educators, organizers, parents, and students developed and enacted a vision of integrated education distinct from the dominant models of integration proposed in Boston and across the nation post-*Brown v. Board* (1954). The 1964 Freedom Schools modeled *reciprocal integration*, a vision for integrated education that promotes bidirectional physical and cultural movement, rather than the dominant model of integration that moved Black children into white schools to be taught white history and culture. Reciprocal integration was developed through Black parents' and students' educational testimony, the Stay-Out organizers' own educational analysis, and the practical necessity of interracial organizing.

Keywords: Freedom Schools; educational organizing; civil rights movement; Boston public schools; integrated education

In 1963 and 1964, educational activists in Boston held two, one-day integrated school boycotts in response to the Boston School Committee's refusal to recognize the *de facto* racial segregation of Boston Public Schools and the resulting negative effects on Black students.[1] According to a 1961 report, in thirteen of Boston's public schools, more than 50 percent of the students were Black (majority Black schools), and in seven schools, more than 90 percent of the students were Black (predominantly Black schools).[2] Boston's predominantly Black schools were overcrowded, under-resourced, riddled with health and safety concerns, and seen as discriminatory against Black teachers and administrators.[3] In the June 1963 boycott, which the organizers

[1]I have chosen to capitalize "Black" and not "white" because throughout this paper, "Black" refers not just to a racial category, but to shared culture, history, and community, whereas "white" does not.

[2]Ruth Batson, *The Black Educational Movement in Boston: A Sequence of Historical Events: A Chronology* (Boston: Northeastern University School of Education, 2001).

[3]Jeanne. F. Theoharis, "'We Saved the City': Black Struggles for Educational Equality in Boston, 1960-1976," *Radical History Review* 81, no. 1 (Fall 2001), 61-93.

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named the "Freedom Stay-Out," about three thousand students "stayed-out," and over fifteen hundred students attended Freedom Schools, alternative educational experiences the organizers designed to teach students about Black history and the contemporary civil rights movement.[4] On February 26, 1964, after months of further struggle against the Boston School Committee, coordinated with other boycotts for desegregating schools across the urban North, a second Freedom Stay-Out saw nearly twenty thousand students absent from Boston Public Schools, with over ten thousand reportedly attending one of forty Freedom Schools.[5]

This study focuses on the February 26, 1964, Stay-Out because, in addition to being at a larger scale than the 1963 Stay-Out, the Stay-Out held in 1964 also served as an opportunity for the organizers to use one school day to model their vision of what quality integrated education could look like in Boston. As Freedom Stay-Out co-chair Jim Breeden clarified to those who condemned the second Stay-Out as truancy, "We will permit our children to withdraw from public schools for one day, not in a spirit of defiance and not to devalue education, but to prepare to recapture our freedom. Children will attend Integrated Freedom Schools . . . where the presence of thousands of black and white children learning together will demonstrate the promise of what our public schools could be."[6] The Freedom School's unique "promise" of integrated education was not just that Black and white students would learn together, but also that the curriculum would center Black life, history, and culture, in "classrooms" located in Boston's Black community. During the February Stay-Out, over one thousand students from the suburbs, most of them white, attended Freedom Schools to help model this vision.[7]

This study draws on oral history interviews and archival research to describe the vision for integrated education developed by Boston's Freedom Stay-Out organizers and put into practice for one day during the 1964 Freedom Schools. I call this model *reciprocal integration*, borrowing a term from Freedom Stay-Out co-chair Noel Day. In an essay written a few years after the Freedom Schools in which he advocated for all-Black schooling, Day criticized the models of integration that had been offered to Black students, writing that "programs to integrate schools have been oriented toward movement—both physical and cultural—in one direction only, away from the Negro community. What does this movement say to the children who are involved? . . . A program that moves children out of a black community into a white community without reciprocal action may be little more than a clear object lesson that denies the worth of the black community."[8]

The model of reciprocal integration dramatized by the 1964 Freedom Schools called for bidirectional movement on both the *physical* and *cultural* levels. On a

[4]Robert P. Hey, "Boston Negroes Set New Targets," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 20, 1963, 5.

[5]"Boston Boycott a Huge Success," *Chicago Daily Defender* Feb. 27, 1964, 13; Noel Day, "The Freedom Movement in Boston," 1964 (unpublished manuscript), folder 3, box 1, Samuel Walker Papers, 1964-1966, accessed April 9, 2019, http://server15932.contentdm.oclc.org/u?/p15932coll2,30324.

[6]"School Boycott Plan Holds," *Boston Globe*, Jan. 24, 1964, 3.

[7]Michael Savage, "Beyond Boundaries: Envisioning Metropolitan School Desegregation in Boston, Detroit, and Philadelphia, 1963-1974," *Journal of Urban History* 1, no. 21 (2018), 1-21.

[8]Noel A. Day, "The Case for All-Black Schools," in *Equal Educational Opportunity*, ed. Harvard Educational Review Editorial Board (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 207.

physical level, the Freedom Schools brought white students from across Boston and its suburbs into Black spaces within Boston, places these students likely had never been and had likely never considered places of learning. On a cultural level, the Freedom Schools taught Black and white students that learning about Black culture, life, and history had significant value for their own life. The reciprocal model's attention to bidirectionality and to the cultural level makes it distinct from other models of integration, within and beyond Boston.

Reciprocal integration was developed to respond to Black parents' and students' *educational testimony*, or critiques of their experience with Boston Public Schools and desires for quality education, which Stay-Out organizers encouraged through their mass rallies and its self-published newspaper. In their testimonies, parents and students challenged the Boston School Committee's insistence that the public schools weren't segregated and that the poor conditions of predominantly Black schools were the fault of Black students and families. Unlike other northern cities that held school boycotts and Freedom Schools during this time, Boston had a small Black population, which affected political organizing in distinct ways. To expand political power by recruiting whites, Stay-Out organizers developed a vision of integrated education that emphasized benefits for white students. In other words, reciprocal integration was a vision developed by the needs of political struggle. Education and social movement scholar Kristen Goessling argues that social movements can function as "places of possibility," or "literal and metaphorical spaces where people are afforded the tools and resources necessary to imagine alternative realities, identities, and systems than what currently exist, primarily through creative and activist practices."[9] The organizers of the 1964 Freedom Stay-Out designed the Stay-Out and the Freedom Schools to be places of possibility where Black and white activists, parents, and students could practice interracial political organizing toward a new model of integrated education.

The reciprocal integration model, demonstrated by the one-day 1964 Freedom Stay-Out, did not lead to changes in Boston Public Schools. After the Stay-Outs, Boston Public Schools remained segregated, and educational activists used a variety of other techniques to pursue quality education for Black children, including developing independent community schools and enrolling Black students into predominantly white schools in Boston and the suburbs. However, though the vision for integrated education—which had been developed over a month of organizing—was put into practice by activists only for one day and not implemented by school systems, it does provide insights into the educational desires for some Black Bostonians during the civil rights era. The 1964 Freedom Schools were one-day experiments—not meant to permanently replace students' everyday schooling, but to function as spaces to embody new challenges to the status quo of public schooling. They were a type of mid-1960s "movement school," which historian Russell Rickford describes as grassroots, temporary, and optimistic; they ran parallel to the public school system, not to supplant the system but to highlight the failures of the system and model

[9] Kristen Goessling, "Youth Learning to Be Activists: Constructing 'Places of Possibility' Together," *Critical Questions in Education* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2017), 418.

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possibilities for how the system could improve.[10] Sharing the history of the Boston Freedom Stay-Out and Freedom Schools carries on work done by historians like Vanessa Siddle Walker, who argues for uncovering the unique visions that Black communities developed for integration before dominant models of integration took over.[11]

In what follows, I first explain how the history of Boston's Freedom Stay-Outs and Freedom Schools contributes to our understanding of the history of civil rights in the North, specifically in Boston. I then give an overview of the problems facing Boston's predominantly Black schools in the early 1960s, the Boston School Committee's inadequate and harmful responses to those problems, and activists' attempts to hold the Boston School Committee accountable, including the first Freedom Stay-Out, held June 18, 1963. I then tell the history of Boston's 1964 Freedom Stay-Out and Freedom Schools, highlighting how they served as "places of possibility" for organizers and the community to develop and model a vision for quality integrated education in Boston Public Schools.

Boston's Freedom Stay-Outs and Freedom Schools in Context

The history of Boston's Stay-Outs and Freedom Schools deepens our understanding of civil rights and desegregation activism in the North. Historian Jeanne Theoharis writes that focusing historical attention on southern civil rights struggle leaves the impression that "the South was the only part of the country that needed a movement, as if blacks in the rest of the country only became energized to fight after their Southern brothers and sisters did, as if Southern racism was more malignant than the strains found in the rest of the country, as if social activism produced substantive change only in the South."[12] Historians of civil rights struggles in the North have countered this narrative by documenting the fights against overcrowded, academically poor segregated schools and school officials who refused to admit to these problems because the segregation was considered a *de facto* issue rather than a *de jure* one. Between 1963 and 1965 cities across the North and Midwest, including Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and New York, held school boycotts and Freedom Schools, during which students learned Black history, sang Freedom songs, and engaged in political discussion.[13] However, Boston's Freedom Stay-Out was unique

[10]Russell John Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 99.

[11]Melissa Holmes, Eileen Wertzberger, and Kay Ann Taylor, "Vanessa Siddle Walker: Honoring Keepers of Knowledge by Using Their Stories to Improve Education," *Educational Considerations* 45, no. 2 (2020), 3, accessed March 26, 2020, https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.2211,

[12]Jeanne Theoharis, introduction to *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, ed. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2-3.

[13]Dionne Danns, *Something Better for Our Children: Black Organizing in Chicago Public Schools, 1963-1971* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); V. P. Franklin, *The Young Crusaders: The Untold Story of the Children and Teenagers Who Galvanized the Civil Rights Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021); and Elizabeth Todd-Breland, *A Political Education: Black Politics and Education Reform in Chicago since the 1960s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

in that its organizers positioned their Freedom Schools as demonstrations of what quality integrated education could be in public schools.

The organizing of both Freedom Stay-Outs and the Freedom Schools in Boston blurred the lines between southern and northern civil rights strategy and struggle. For example, Breeden was inspired to propose a Boston Stay-Out while visiting Birmingham in 1961 and attending a meeting of students who were organizing to stay out of school the next day.[14] Historian Audrea Jones Dunham argued that Stay-Out organizers used southern strategies such as "boycotts, mass meetings, and moderating the opposition of Black elites" when planning the first Stay-Out.[15] One month after the 1964 Stay-Out, Stay-Out co-chair Noel Day and chair of the Boston Freedom Schools curriculum committee Peggy Day (now known as Peggy Trotter Dammond Preacely) joined representatives from the Council of Federated Organizations for a two-day conference to develop the curriculum for the Mississippi Freedom Schools that summer.[16] There, Peggy and Noel helped to adapt what they had learned from the Boston Freedom Schools into the citizenship curriculum for the Mississippi project. Scholars have studied the student and teacher experiences, student work, pedagogy, and politics of the Mississippi Freedom Schools, but less attention has been given to Freedom Schools in the North, such as in Boston.[17] Boston's Freedom Schools differ from Mississippi Freedom Schools not only in their context and duration, but also in their goal. While some of the pedagogy and content aligned—particularly the Days' focus on Black history and student-centered pedagogy—the Mississippi schools were developed for raising critical consciousness in Black students, and the Boston schools were developed as vehicles for interracial collaboration and discussion.

The story of the Freedom Stay-Outs and Freedom Schools also contributes to historians' recent calls to move "beyond busing" when studying the history of Boston's civil rights struggle.[18] Scholarship and public memory overemphasize the violent white response to the busing initiative in 1970s Boston, which obscures the decades-long struggle of Black Bostonians before court-ordered busing. Moving beyond busing also means attending to the variety of visions for integrated education developed

[14]James Breeden, interview by author, July 3, 2020.

[15]Audrea Jones Dunham, "Boston's 1960s Civil Rights Movement: A Look Back," *WGBH Open Vault*, accessed April 7, 2019, at https://openvault.wgbh.org/exhibits/boston_civil_rights/article.

[16]George W. Chilcoat and Jerry A. Ligon, "'Helping to Make Democracy a Living Reality': The Curriculum Conference of the Mississippi Freedom Schools," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1999), 43-68.

[17]George W. Chilcoat and Jerry A. Ligon, "'We Talk Here, This Is a School for Talking': Participatory Democracy from the Classroom out into the Community: How Discussion Was Used in the Mississippi Freedom Schools," *Curriculum Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 165-93; Jon Hale, *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Daniel Perlstein, "Minds Stayed on Freedom: Politics and Pedagogy in the African-American Freedom Struggle," *American Educational Research Journal* 39, no. 2 (June 2002), 249-77.

[18]Tess Bundy, "'Revolutions Happen through Young People!' The Black Student Movement in the Boston Public Schools, 1968-1971," *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2 (March 2017), 273-93; Zebulon Vance Miletsky, "Before Busing: Boston's Long Movement for Civil Rights and the Legacy of Jim Crow in the 'Cradle of Liberty,'" *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2 (March 2017), 204-17; and Theoharis, "We Saved the City."

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by Black activists and educators. Boston's Freedom School model contrasts with both the grassroots and top-down models of integration that would come to dominate Boston in the late 1960s and the '70s. In 1966, Black parent and activist Ellen Jackson started Operation Exodus, which bused students from overcrowded, predominantly Black schools to less crowded, majority white schools within the city of Boston. Exodus took advantage of Boston's "open enrollment" policy that in theory allowed for any student in Boston Public Schools to attend any other school in the district, but in practice often discriminated against Black students transferring into majority white schools.[19] Later that year, Ruth Batson, former co-chair of the Boston NAACP Education Committee and parent of three students in Boston Public Schools, founded the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO). In contrast to Exodus, METCO—which continues as a state-funded program today—coordinated with school districts in the majority white suburbs to bus students from Boston to suburban schools.[20]

The Exodus and METCO models of integration were unidirectional, moving Black students into white schools. These models were also monocultural, as the white schools did not adjust their curriculum, pedagogy, or culture to be relevant to Black students or the unique goals of integrated education. Batson and Jackson saw this model of integration as a pragmatic, and hopefully temporary, strategy to obtain quality education for Black students. Batson hoped that integration could provide Black students access to some of the resources predominantly Black schools lacked, explaining, "Where there were a large number of white students, that's where the care went. That's where the books went. That's where the money went."[21] Though Jackson was a strong advocate for community control, she also knew that parents felt they had few options for their children to escape schools that were killing them and saw integration as a means to immediate quality education as Black Boston did the longer-term work to build its community capacity.[22] For example, in addition to a busing program, Operation Exodus also offered tutorial services, conducted educational research, and provided psychological testing services for Black students in Roxbury, one of Boston's predominantly Black neighborhoods.

The most well-known and infamous model of integrated education in Boston was the state busing and redistricting plan, federally mandated in 1974. The dominant historical narrative about desegregation in Boston centers the violent white resistance to desegregation in the 1970s, cemented into public consciousness by close media coverage at the time and J. Anthony Lukas's Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families*.[23] In response to the state plan, white parent activist groups like Restore Our Alienated Rights

[19]Dan Woods, "A Brief History of Operation Exodus," *Excellence & Equity in Education* 4, no. 5 (1966), 34-39.

[20]Elizabeth Keil, "Chronology of the Development of METCO," May 1977, folder 3, box 1, Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc. Records (M101), Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

[21]Ruth Batson, quoted in Theoharis, "We Saved the City," 66.

[22]Ellen Jackson, Ford Hall Forum speech, 1967 (transcript), folder 39, box 3, Phyllis M. Ryan Papers (M94), Snell Library, Northeastern University, Boston, MA (hereafter cited as PMR).

[23]J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

(ROAR), led by former School Committee member Louise Day Hicks, organized boycotts of the desegregating schools. Students and families complying with the desegregation order, especially Black students, were harassed.[24] In contrast with the unidirectionality of METCO and Exodus, the state plan for busing did propose that white students be bused into Black neighborhoods. However, no cultural work was spent to address centuries of prejudice and institutional racism, so resistant white families saw little value in learning in predominantly Black spaces.[25] This research turns historical attention away from the dominant model of integrated education associated with Boston's desegregation history to instead focus on the model developed by Black activists, influenced by Black parents' and students' educational testimony and interracial organizing.

Methods

This research draws on interviews conducted with Freedom Stay-Out co-chair Jim Breeden and Freedom Schools curriculum chair Peggy Trotter Dammond Preacely (formerly Peggy Day and also Noel Day's wife at this time); archival resources, including Massachusetts Freedom Movement press releases and issues of its newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*; and writings from Noel Day. This study relies heavily on Noel Day's writings for two main reasons. First, Day is one of the central figures in organizing the Stay-Outs, developing the curriculum and pedagogy for the Freedom Schools, and theorizing the reciprocal model of integration. Second, Day's recollections through his writings and oral histories collected by others were recorded decades closer to the Freedom Stay-Outs than my own oral histories with Breeden and Preacely, so they are more detailed.

The Start of Boston's Black Educational Freedom Movement and the First Freedom Stay-Out, 1960-1963

In the early 1960s, Black students in Boston faced a number of obstacles to receiving a quality education. The school buildings of Boston's thirteen predominantly Black schools were some of the oldest in the district, with the newest having been built in 1937 and the oldest built in 1868.[26] These schools were also overcrowded and under-resourced, with parents and students complaining about the constant turnover of substitute teachers.[27] Although the exact count of Black teachers was not taken by the district, according to a report by the *Boston Globe*, in 1963, of the 2,800 teachers in Boston Public Schools, only ten were Black, and there were only four Black administrators.[28] Activists were also concerned about racist textbooks and a lack of

[24]Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[25]Formisano, *Boston against Busing.*

[26]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Segregated Schools Are Inferior," in *Freedom's Journal* (New York), 1964, folder 21, box 4, PMR. Note: Only the year of publication is provided, because issues of *Freedom's Journal* did not always include the full date of their publication.

[27]Theoharis, "We Saved the City."

[28]Peter Schrag, *Village School Downtown: Boston Schools, Boston Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

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culturally relevant curriculum.[29] One Roxbury parent described her son's school as being considered "the 'best' in the ghetto," yet "the quality and amount of work expected from the children is not such as to prepare them for anything but near-failure in a good high school."[30] In a list of complaints about their school, a Hyde Elementary School student wrote, "3. Teachers search your pocketbooks for cigarettes. 4. Desks are coming apart. 5. There are rats running around the floor. . . . 13. Need teachers that understand us. 14. Need seats on the toilets."[31] Though Boston's Black population saw a rapid increase after World War II, Black Bostonians composed only 10 percent of the population and therefore had weak electoral power in School Committee elections. Conservative committee members were consistently re-elected and refused to answer more radical calls for change.[32]

The Boston branch of the NAACP was one of the main organizations pressuring the city to improve the poor quality of its predominantly Black schools. Ruth Batson's relationship with the NAACP's Education Committee began when she discovered disparities between her daughter's education and the education her white friend's son was receiving. In 1961, Batson and the NAACP conducted an independent study of Boston's schools, finding "disparities in resources, access, accountability, and hiring."[33] By 1963, the NAACP had petitioned the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, the Attorney General's Advisory Committee on Civil Rights, and the Boston School Committee, but none of these groups would even acknowledge segregation as a problem in Boston Public Schools, let alone take steps to rectify it.[34]

In May 1963, a coalition of labor, civil rights, and religious organizations called Citizens for Human Rights began planning a school boycott to pressure the city to address its educational issues, which they called a Freedom Stay-Out. The group was initially created to organize a rally of support for activists in Birmingham, Alabama, who were facing violent opposition from citizens and the police.[35] The Freedom Stay-Out organizers had strong connections to the southern civil rights movement. Reverend James Breeden had been a Freedom Rider and part of organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.[36] Breeden lent his experience in southern organizing and religious networks to the Freedom Stay-Out. Peggy Day had come to Boston from working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee on political education and voter registration in rural Georgia.

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[29]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Fact Sheet on Negro Schools," in *Freedom's Journal*, 1964, folder 21, box 4, PMR.

[30]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Roxbury Mother Speaks about Schools," in *Freedom's Journal*, 1964, folder 41, box 1, PMR, 2.

[31]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Fact Sheet on Negro Schools," in *Freedom's Journal* 1, no. 4, Feb. 1964, folder 41, box 1, PMR, 6.

[32]Batson, *Black Educational Movement*, and Theoharis, "We Saved the City."

[33]Theoharis, "We Saved the City," 66.

[34]Batson, *Black Educational Movement*.

[35]Lily Geismer, "Good Neighbors for Fair Housing: Suburban Liberalism and Racial Inequality in Metropolitan Boston," *Journal of Urban History* 39, no. 3 (May 2013), 454-77.

[36]James Breeden interview by Larry Crowe, *The History Makers Digital Archive*, History Makers, Sept. 12, 2007, and Phyllis Ryan, "Questions and Points for Channel 5," 1964, folder 17, box 3, PMR.

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Noel Day, a former public school teacher from Harlem, New York, provided both connections to the local community and educational expertise.[37] Day came to Boston to serve as the executive director of St. Mark's Social Center, which would become a hub for Roxbury activism.[38] Day developed his strong critique of mainstream education for Black children from his experience teaching junior high in predominantly Black Harlem schools.[39] Day "felt the school culture brutalized the children and brutalized the teachers and required us to be brutal. . . . We teachers were basically in the business of behavioral control. . . . You were basically serving as a prison guard."[40]

To prepare for the boycott, Day and Breeden organized mass meetings, which featured speeches by activists from across the country, prayer led by local ministers, and singing led by student "Freedom Choirs." The Freedom Choirs sang throughout the meeting, encouraging the "usually fairly reserved" audience to sing, clap, and march in the church aisles.[41] At each meeting, parents and students were called to give testimony about their educational experiences in Boston Public Schools.

Following in a tradition of the civil rights movement, a movement led by church leaders, Day and Breeden used Black church culture as an organizing strategy. Characteristics of Black church culture include collective orientation, call-and-response interactions, prayer, songs, sermons, and testimony from the congregation.[42] In a retrospective analysis of Boston activism, Day named testimony at mass meetings as one of the most effective organizing techniques for the Freedom Stay-Outs.[43] According to Day, the purpose of the testimonies was "to rub wounds that may even have been healed in many cases. The first few nights, people were pretty timorous about it. The things that they complained about were relatively small, and we helped to magnify them from the pulpit. People began to get into real kind of nitty-gritty issues: the way their kids were treated, the lack of materials in the curriculum, the teachers, etc."[44]

What I refer to here as *educational testimony* was an important organizing technique for creating the places of possibility to develop new visions of education. The concept of educational testimony is similar to the *testimonio* as characterized by Dolores Delgado Bernal and her colleagues. An account of one's lived experience, a *testimonio* "challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance."[45]

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[37]James Breeden, interview by author, July 3, 2020.

[38]"Biographical Material, Noel A. Day Campaign" (1964), folder 12, box 1, Michael Lipsky and David J. Olson Papers, 1935-1981 (M96-024), Wisconsin Historical Society, accessed Oct. 29, 2020, http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/wiarchives.uw-whs-mss00851.

[39]Daniel Perlstein, "Teaching Freedom: SNCC and the Creation of the Mississippi Freedom Schools," *History of Education Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Fall 1990), 297-324.

[40]Perlstein, "Teaching Freedom," 311.

[41]Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston."

[42]Mary Pattillo-McCoy, "Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community," *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 6 (Dec. 1988), 767-84.

[43]Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston."

[44]Noel Day, interview by Daniel Perlstein, Feb. 23, 1988.

[45]Dolores Delgado Bernal, Rebeca Burciaga, and Judith Flores Carmona, "Chicana/Latina *Testimonios*: Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political," *Equity and Excellence in Education* 45, no. 3 (Aug. 2012), 363-72.

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Unlike *testimonios*, educational testimony is a social movement strategy, not a method for research, and was grounded in a particular Black church cultural context. Generating testimony from the mass rallies and the *Freedom's Journal* allowed community members to understand their problems "as a common and shared experience."[46] Students or parents who might otherwise have endured their problems alone could see that others experienced the same indignities, and by testifying, they became part of a movement intending to fight the problems. In this way, educational testimonies were also intended to facilitate "places of possibility," in which people could imagine what quality, humanizing education might look like for Black children in Boston. Day wrote that the most important result of the Stay-Out organizing was that "grass-roots people feel they have a part in conceiving and planning constructive alternatives to anguish and frustration."[47]

Through educational testimony, Black students and parents challenged the dominant narratives about Black families and public education in Boston perpetuated by the Boston School Committee. The School Committee denied the existence of segregation in Boston Public Schools and insisted that Black children were treated equally in schools. In a radio broadcast about the 1963 Stay-Out, then School Committee chairwoman Louise Day Hicks argued, "The Boston schools are not *de facto* segregated or otherwise. They are an integrated school system here in Boston. You must remember that the negro child or any child throughout our system will receive equal treatment. We are now in the process of even giving more education to the child, because we feel he needs it because of sociological conditions that are beyond our control. We do understand the problem of the negro child in Boston."[48] In this quote, Hicks explains the party line of the Boston School Committee: observed educational inequalities were blamed on Black children and their communities, and the solution was to compensate for their academic and cultural deprivation through additional educational programs. Though Hicks claimed to "understand" the problem with Black children's education, Black parent activists wanted more than just compensatory education programs; they wanted structural changes to schooling. The School Committee evaded any demands that accompanied calls for desegregation, often denying groups like the NAACP Education Committee time during public meetings.[49]

On June 15, three days before the Stay-Out, the NAACP Education Committee was finally granted time in front of the Boston School Committee. As the NAACP's representative, Ruth Batson read a summary of the organization's efforts to observe and document the presence and effects of *de facto* segregation in Boston Public Schools. Batson explained that she had spoken with six white principals of predominantly Black schools, three of whom "refused to acknowledge the existence of any problems. They tossed off the complaints parents had made and, in general, inferred that the NAACP was making a 'mountain out of a molehill.'"[50] Batson

[46]Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston," 18.

[47]Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston," 16.

[48]WGBH, "To Secure These Rights: A Documented History of the Negro 'Freedom Movement,'" Feb. 24, 1964 (transcript), folder 1357, box 39, Freedom House, Inc. Records (M16), Snell Library, Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

[49]Batson, *Black Educational Movement*.

[50]Batson, *Black Educational Movement*, 122.

then presented fourteen demands on behalf of the NAACP that went beyond compensatory education programs, including more in-service training for principals and teachers, an increase in permanent teachers, reduced class sizes, multiracial teaching materials, and NAACP input in the search for a new superintendent. After seven hours of negotiation, the School Committee accepted all of these demands except two—they refused to acknowledge the existence of either discriminatory hiring practices for teachers or *de facto* segregation in the Boston Public School system.[51]

Once again, the School Committee dismissed educational testimony from Black parents, activists, and students. Though they accepted many of their demands, they refused the two that might lead to structural change. Historian Frank Levy explains that the rejection of these two demands was politically motivated. "Of all fourteen points, these two criticized the system most explicitly. . . . Acknowledging these points would be accusing the School Department and its personnel of discriminatory practices, a dangerous thing to do in a year when all School Committee members were up for reelection."[52] This pattern of city leadership denying racial discrimination in schools would continue throughout the months leading up to the second Stay-Out and well afterward.

In the days between the School Committee meeting and the Stay-Out, Boston officials continued to work to oppose the boycott. Hicks said that "the pending boycott of the Boston Public Schools will bring irreparable harm to our children."[53] The first Black attorney general of Massachusetts, Edward Brooke, advised the NAACP to continue negotiations with the School Committee. To stop the boycott, Massachusetts governor Endicott Peabody met with the members of the School Committee to develop statements on *de facto* schooling segregation, but the School Committee members continued to blame residential segregation patterns, refusing to place any blame on the school system. Not all Black residents were supportive of the boycott; at a community meeting held by the NAACP, a group of Roxbury mothers "condemned" it.[54]

Despite this opposition, on June 18, 1963, Freedom Stay-Out organizers reported that two thousand to three thousand junior and high school students stayed out of school, and fifteen hundred to two thousand attended Freedom Schools across Roxbury.[55] The idea for the Freedom Schools originated just four days before the Stay-Out, developed by Day and Breeden as a way to keep boycotting students busy.[56] Faculty included professors Thomas Pettigrew, of Harvard; Summer Rosen, of Simmons College; and Adelaide Hill, of Boston University. The curriculum featured lectures and discussion on Black history and the issue of segregation and voter registration.[57] Local radio station WGBH broadcast live from some of the ten Freedom Schools around Roxbury. At one school, Peggy Day explained the goal of the Freedom Schools to the students: "We are staying out of school to tell the

[51]Frank Levy, *Northern Schools and Civil Rights: The Racial Imbalance Act of Massachusetts*. (Chicago: Markham, 1971).

[52]Levy, *Northern Schools and Civil Rights*, 42.

[53]WGBH, "To Secure These Rights."

[54]Batson, *Black Educational Movement*.

[55]Hey, "Boston Negroes Set New Targets," 5.

[56]Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston," 9.

[57]WGBH, "To Secure These Rights."

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School Committee and the community that we don't want inferior schools. We want equal schools. Some parts of the program today will give us a taste of what we feel and believe it is important for us to learn and the things we should learn in the public schools."[58] The leaders of the Stay-Out celebrated what they considered a success. Breeden called the boycott "the beginning of educating the community."[59] Day continued to hold Freedom Schools, with the goal "to create a vehicle for organized action by those who are committed to the Freedom movement initiate [*sic*] and deepen the commitment of the participants."[60]

Despite the optimism demonstrated by organizers following the Stay-Out, in the fall and winter of 1963, Black activists continued to pressure the School Committee to address discrimination in the schools to no avail. For the School Committee elections in November, the NAACP endorsed their own candidates, including activist Melvin King, but the incumbent School Committee members retained their seats, some garnering a greater percentage of the vote by running in opposition to the NAACP's demands.[61] In his inaugural address after being reelected to the School Committee and newly elected chairman, William O'Connor infamously said, "We have no inferior education in our schools. What we have been getting is an inferior type of pupil that we have been asked to cope with."[62] On December 19, 1963, three Black state representatives, Lincoln Pope, Royal L. Bolling, and Alfred Brothers, filed a bill to "bar the payment of state aid to communities which permit 'racial imbalance' to exist in the public schools."[63] In early January 1964, the NAACP met with the Boston Teachers Union to discuss why racially imbalanced schools were harmful.[64] However, the School Committee, emboldened by their strong public support from the election, refused to budge on the issue of segregated schools.

The 1964 Freedom Stay-Out

On Sunday, January 12, 1964, thirty representatives from civil and educational rights groups across the urban North and Midwest met in a Manhattan hotel to coordinate a multi-city public school boycott, scheduled for February. Reverend Milton A. Galamison, president of the Parents Committee Workshop for Equality in New York City Schools, explained, "It's become evident . . . that the educational problems among Negroes in various urban areas are as similar as they are grotesque."[65] In many of the cities represented, such as New York, Chicago, and Boston, these boycotts would serve as a culminating event to years of frustrated struggle against obstinate school officials. Chicago had already held a previous "Freedom Day" boycott in October 1963 in

[58] WGBH, "To Secure These Rights," 14.

[59] WGBH, "To Secure These Rights," 18.

[60] Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Press Release, Freedom Schools Opening Event," July 1963, folder 15, box 3, PMR.

[61] Levy, *Northern Schools and Civil Rights*.

[62] Levy, *Northern Schools and Civil Rights*, 46.

[63] Batson, *Black Educational Movement*.

[64] Batson, *Black Educational Movement*.

[65] Simon Anekwe, "School Boycott Could Spread to Eleven Cities: Meeting Here Sunday Formed New Committee," *New York Amsterdam News*, Jan. 18, 1964, 21.

response to the actions of Superintendent Ben Willis, who responded to the issues of overcrowding in Black schools by creating portable classrooms—which parents derisively called "Willis Wagons"—despite vacant seats in majority white schools.[66]

After the meeting, Noel Day returned to Boston, and planning for the second Freedom Stay-Out began in earnest. The organizing body for the Stay-Out was the Massachusetts Freedom Movement (MFM), self-described as "a non-sectarian interracial organization committed to non-violent direct action to bring about social change in order to create an open society by the elimination of barriers based on economic, political and social separation, prejudice and discrimination."[67] Co-chaired by Breeden and Day, the second Freedom Stay-Out was envisioned to be the first action of a larger campaign that would also tackle labor and housing issues. The MFM consisted of a Steering Committee of about thirty people, including student leaders, and thirteen subcommittees including those by the names "Church Liaison," "Legal Advice," "Suburban Liaison," "Press and Publicity," "Liaison with Civil Rights Committee of Teacher's Union," Freedom Choirs, and the *Freedom's Journal* newspaper.[68]

Described by Day as "an emergency newspaper-propaganda sheet to carry its message to the community,"[69] each issue of *Freedom's Journal* featured civil rights movement news from around the country, updates on the Stay-Out and Freedom Schools, and letters of testimony from parents and students about their educational experiences. The publication was named after the first Black-owned and -operated newspaper in the United States, founded by John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish in 1827. The goal of the nineteenth-century *Freedom's Journal* was to "plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us."[70] At the end of each *Freedom's Journal* issue, the "School Stayout Committee" called for articles, those with "personal experiences of life in Boston schools especially desired, as well as community discussion on any problems faced by our people. . . . Published in the interests of furthering justice, dignity, and an equal chance."[71] Along with the mass rallies—some of which reached crowds of up to nine hundred people—*Freedom's Journal* offered another space for Black parents' and students' educational testimony.[72]

Jamaica Plain High School student Romana Baker directly addressed O'Connor's racist declaration, writing, "And to the Chairman of the School Committee, I say that the only reason there are inferior children is because we have to go to inferior schools, and there we get an inferior education." Baker also wrote that she valued integrated education because "if the schools are not integrated when we are small . . . then by the time we receive our diplomas and go out into the world, we aren't able to get along with the whites or they with us, because we don't understand their ways and they ours."[73]

[66]Todd-Breland, *A Political Education*; Danns, *Something Better for Our Children*.

[67]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Statement of Purpose," undated, folder 16, box 3, PMR.

[68]Batson, *Black Educational Movement*.

[69]Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston," 13

[70]"To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal* (New York), March 16, 1827, 1.

[71]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Call for Submissions," in *Freedom's Journal*, 1964, folder 21, box 4, PMR, 8.

[72]Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston."

[73]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Letter from a Student," in *Freedom's Journal*, 1964, folder 21, box 4, PMR, 6.

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In another issue of the paper, a mother from Roxbury likened segregated education to the conditions of slavery, writing, "Slave holders never really believed slaves were inferior. That is why it was so wrong, even punishable by law, to teach a slave to read and write. Masters knew that educated slaves might start a rebellion in search of justice. After abolition, the system of segregation operated the same way. Segregated education allowed inferior education and helped 'keep the Negro in his place.'"[74] By using Black history to analyze the current political conditions of Black education in Boston, this testimony challenged the School Committee's assertion that Black families in Boston were inferior and lacked a culture and history.

The Freedom Stay-Out organizers combined the educational testimonies of Black parents and students with their own analyses of Black education to build a vision of what quality integrated education could look like in Boston. Characterized by bidirectional physical and cultural movement, the model of reciprocal integration directly contradicted Boston school officials' belief that Black communities lacked value. In this model, both Black and white children could learn from each other's cultures, in each other's spaces.

Interracial Organizing and White Suburban Support

Practicing reciprocal integration required white participation and therefore interracial political organizing. Because the model depended on white parents and students investing in Black educational contributions, Stay-Out organizers continuously emphasized that integration benefited both Black *and* white children. The MFM logo—which was on each Freedom School diploma—symbolized the importance of interracial collaboration: a white and Black hand together holding a blazing torch.[75] Though these organizers did not yet have access to this term, their organizing strategy could be seen as a pragmatic use of what critical race scholar Derrick Bell calls *interest convergence*. In his analysis of school desegregation legal cases, including *Brown v. Board*, Bell argued that "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites."[76] MFM organizers felt that recruiting white allies was necessary for political change because of the small Black electoral population in Boston. The curriculum document for the Freedom Schools explained, "Negro voters alone cannot improve the lot of the Boston schools unless they convince whites that the changes will help them too. . . . In order to get better schools in Boston and put an end to the *de facto* segregation, we must try to convince the white community as well as the Negro that segregation hurts every child and that to improve the level of education in Boston, Negroes and whites must work together."[77]

To appeal to white allies, the Stay-Out organizers often argued that integrated schooling would help Black and white children succeed in a world that was becoming

[74]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Roxbury Mother Speaks about Schools," in *Freedom's Journal*, 1964, folder 41, box 1, PMR, 2.

[75]Batson, *Black Educational Movement*.

[76]Derrick A. Bell Jr., "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma," *Harvard Law Review* 93, no. 3 (Jan. 1980), 523.

[77]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Freedom School: The Boston Schools," undated, folder 19, box 3, PMR, 1.

increasingly globalized. In a statement by the MFM arguing for integrated education, Day explained,

> This new world will be one of technology and automation, a world of great industrial complexity. It will also be a world of great social complexity—a multiracial world. And our children must be prepared to live in a world of many different peoples, with different languages and, perhaps most import n [*sic*], of different colors. . . . I believe that we must look to our schools to prepare our children for interracial living.[78]

Though white students were technically "bused" into the February 26 Freedom Schools, the Stay-Out organizers' vision for integration of the public schools did not call specifically for busing. In one of their fact sheets distributed to the Brookline Committee for Civil Rights, a suburban group that supported the Stay-Out, the MFM explained, "A simple change in the school district lines would help insure integration. It would relieve congestion in some schools and utilize unused classroom space in other schools. Bussing is not necessary."[79] The MFM likely wanted to avoid having potential white allies turned off by the thought of "forced busing," something the Boston School Committee accused Black activists of proposing to discredit them.[80]

Securing suburban support was important to the success of the Stay-out. The chairman of the Suburban Liaison Committee was Hubert "Hubie" Jones, one of the few African American members of the Newton Fair Housing Practices Committee. On January 31, Jones held a meeting at Stone Church in Lincoln, Massachusetts, where representatives from twenty-one towns promised to support the boycott and send students to participate.[81] Jones was surprised and touched at the response from suburbia, saying that "it has shaken my pessimism about the negative role that most suburbanites play and have played in the whole struggle. . . . And it's been very overwhelming to me to see the response that we have gotten."[82]

Not all support from the suburbs was white; for example, the *Boston Globe* reported that of the sixty students that came from Lynn, a suburb north of Boston, most of them were Black.[83] However, many of the students that came to the Stay-Out from the suburbs were white. What compelled white suburbanites to support the Stay-Out and to attend or host Freedom Schools? For some, attending Freedom Schools meant engaging with unfamiliar problems. A white high school student from Wilmington explained, "We didn't understand the problems of segregation

[78]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Statement of Support for School Integration," 1964, folder 17, box 3, PMR, 1.

[79]Massachusetts Freedom Movement and the Brookline Committee for Civil Rights, "Fact Sheet: Freedom Stay-out Day in the Boston Public Schools," 1964, folder 15, box 3, PMR, 1.

[80]Batson, *Black Educational Movement*, and Matthew F. Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

[81]Phyllis Ryan, "Press Release, Statement on Suburban Support of Freedom Stay-Out," Feb. 1, 1964, folder 19, box 3, PMR.

[82]WGBH, "To Secure These Rights," 51.

[83]Anne Wyman, "Arlington: Talk in Every Pew," *Boston Globe*, Feb. 27, 1964, 18.

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and the racial problems that existed. We wished to get a better understanding of what the students had to cope with in their daily studies."[84] Other students saw going to Freedom Schools as taking a step toward change. A high school student from Wellesley said, "It seems to me that you can only philosophize and compare notes about the situation for so long, and then you have to take a step, no matter how small."[85] Robert Ireland, superintendent of the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District, did not directly support the Stay-Out, but acknowledged that for the students and teachers from his district attending Freedom Schools, "the purpose of attendance is to supplement classroom instruction with firsthand knowledge of history in the making, and to attempt to resolve the question in the minds of many students of the use of civil disobedience as a tool for social change in a democratic government."[86] By request from some suburban parents, Freedom Schools for elementary grades were established in a few suburban cities to encourage a two-way integration of the stay-out.[87] From one report, the Freedom Schools in Newton looked much like those in Roxbury, with students learning Black history and singing freedom songs.[88]

Although the support of white suburban civil rights groups is well documented in the archives, the extent of support from white Bostonians for the Freedom Stay-Out is unclear. The *Boston Globe* reported that "few white students from Boston joined the boycott or Freedom Schools, so the white suburban high schoolers helped fill a void that would have been achingly obvious if Negroes had had to meet alone with only white newspapermen to look at them."[89] Aligning with suburban whites may have even hurt Stay-Out organizers' efforts to organize white Bostonians, as the Boston School Committee used this coalition as evidence that the Stay-Out organizers did not have the interests of white Bostonians at heart.[90] One of the activists whom Tahi Lani Mottl interviewed for her dissertation admitted, "The coalition blacks needed to build in the beginning didn't really happen. This would have been a coalition of people across the city whose kids were going to the schools, so that they would understand that their kids were getting short-changed too, that it wasn't just blacks trying to rip them off. . . . The school committee used the coalition with suburban groups as publicity to show an alignment against city whites."[91] Historian Lily Geismer argued that the Stay-Out, with its recruitment of elite, college-educated Freedom Schools faculty, "upheld and even reified both a distinctively middle-class and gendered image and ideology."[92] According to Geismer, the press treatment of the Stay-Out disproportionately

[84]Anthony Galints, "Wilmington Teen Agers Impressed by Day at Boston Freedom Schools," *Lowell Sun* (Lowell, MA), Feb. 27, 1964, 1.

[85]Timothy Leland, "From Suburbs They Came to Back the Fight: Wellesley: A Negro's Thank-You," *Boston Globe*, Feb. 27, 1964, 18.

[86]Robert Ireland, "Want to See History in the Making," *Boston Globe*, Feb. 19, 1964, 8.

[87]Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston."

[88]Gary Kayakachoian, "Action in Newton," *Boston Globe*, Feb. 27, 1964, 18.

[89]Ian Forman, "Who Staged the Boycott," *Boston Globe*, Feb. 27, 1964, 15.

[90]Tahi Lani Mottl, "Social Conflict and Social Movements: An Exploratory Study of the Black Community of Boston Attempting to Change the Boston Public Schools" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976).

[91]Mottl, "Social Conflict and Social Movements," 268.

[92]Lily D. Geismer, "Don't Blame Us: Grassroots Liberalism in Massachusetts, 1960-1990" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010), 182.

focused on the middle-class white children from the suburbs, despite the fact that they represented only one-tenth of the participants in Freedom Schools.[93]

Despite what seemed like a lack of strong support from white parents and students in Boston, the Freedom Stay-Out did garner support from higher education faculty across Boston, such as the faculty of Boston College, Simmons College, and Boston University. Support from prominent allies was important because, just as with the 1963 Freedom Stay-Out, Boston officials resisted the boycott, primarily by questioning its legality and threatening parents and students with arrests. On February 10, Attorney General Brooke ruled that truant officers could enforce attendance laws by taking absent students to schools.[94] On February 12, School Committee Chairman O'Connor instructed thirty-three attendance officers to patrol the boycott, and Louise Day Hicks threatened to call for the arrest of boycott leaders. However, Stay-Out organizers were adamant that the Stay-Out was not illegal, and their allies across the state agreed. The Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts issued a press release in response, stating, "We disagree with the Attorney General's opinion, both as a matter of law and as prudent policy. We trust that city and school officials will be wise enough not to seek the arrest of children, parents, or leaders involved in the stayout. Should they do so, however, the Civil Liberties Union is prepared to request its cooperating attorneys to defend anyone so accused of violating the school attendance laws."[95] The NAACP also offered free legal aid in case anyone was arrested.[96]

The 1964 Freedom Schools: Modeling Reciprocal Integration

On February 26, 1964, around 20,000 students were absent from Boston Public Schools, which was about 21 percent of students and more than double the 8,121 students absent on February 4, the figure that the superintendent of Boston Public Schools William Ohrenberger used as comparison.[97] Because the school department reportedly did not keep racial demographic data, the racial breakdown of the absent students is unclear.[98] It is also unclear how many of the twenty thousand students who were absent were intentionally boycotting. Over ten thousand students attended one of forty Freedom Schools in community centers and churches.[99] Over one thousand students and adults from the suburbs came to support the Stay-Out and attend or volunteer at Freedom Schools.[100] Young children in first through third grades and others who couldn't attend in person tuned into a radio program.[101] Despite the threats, no students, parents, or organizers were arrested.

[93] Geismer, "Don't Blame Us."

[94] James Doyle, "Brooke Rules School Boycott Illegal, Says Truant Officers Can Pick Up Absent Pupils," *Boston Globe*, Feb. 11, 1964, 1.

[95] Albert R. Beisel Jr., "Press Release," Jan. 24, 1964, folder 19, box 3, PMR.

[96] Doyle, "Brooke Rules School Boycott Illegal."

[97] Richard Connolly, "Sue Leaders, Says Mrs. Hicks: Boycott Chiefs Hail Stay-Out as Success," *Boston Globe*, Feb. 27, 1964, 1-2.

[98] "Boston Boycott a Huge Success," *Chicago Daily Defender*, Feb. 27, 1964, 13.

[99] "Boston Boycott a Huge Success," and Day, "Freedom Movement in Boston."

[100] Savage, "Beyond Boundaries."

[101] Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Freedom School Locations," in *Freedom's Journal* 1, no. 4, Feb. 1964, folder 41, box 1, PMR.

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According to an agenda published in an issue of *Freedom's Journal*, each Freedom School session began at 9 a.m. and lasted until 2 p.m. Each student received a diploma and written attendance excuse note to send with the child when they returned to public school next day. Discussion groups were also held for parents who wished to attend Freedom School with their children. The five hundred-person Freedom Schools faculty boasted a diversity of professions including "social workers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, clergymen, college professors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and civil rights leaders" from all over Greater Boston.[102]

The Freedom School at St. Mark's Social Center served as the showcase experience for the press, and local public radio station WGBH broadcast the day live from there. The day began with the singing of Freedom songs, some of which had lyrics adjusted toward the goal of the day—interracial solidarity. For example, a trio of students led the six hundred people crowding the center's pews to sing, "We are fighting for our freedom, we shall not be moved. . . . We are black and white together, we shall not be moved."[103] During the last song, one of the song leaders noticed that the pew nearest to the stage was all Black students, while the second row was all white students. He cried out, "We gonna show the School Committee how to get rid of *de facto* segregation!" and motioned for the students to integrate the pews. The crowd cheered as the students changed seats.[104] Describing the opening ceremonies at her Freedom School, Edith Franklin, a Black tenth grader who had come to the Freedom Schools from Arlington, later told a reporter, "There was unity there."[105]

After the songs, guest speakers lectured on Black history and the state of civil rights organizing in Boston and across the United States. Boston University professor Adelaide Hill filled in the "missing pages in our history text books" by describing how the fight for quality schooling for Black students in Boston began decades before, with abolitionist William Nell and escaped slave Lewis Hayden petitioning the Boston School Committee for integrated schools in Boston in 1846; she encouraged students to "carry on with the basis of sound knowledge that a lot went on before you."[106] In describing what she had hoped students took from the Freedom Schools, Preacely said,

> Students have a right to the truth about history. . . . Neither Black nor white students knew all that much about Black history in 1964 because it was not in the history books. So it was important to impart information about Black history to both Black and white students and give white students information that might counter some of their earlier impressions of Black kids. Cause many of them

[102]Phyllis Ryan, "Press Release, 500 Faculty Volunteers Set to Teach in Freedom Schools," Feb. 19, 1964, folder 19, box 3, PMR, 1.

[103]Massachusetts Freedom Movement, "Freedom Songs," 1964, folder 16, box 3, PMR.

[104]"Stay Out for Freedom; Live Broadcast [1 of 4]," by Ted Mascott, Feb. 26, 1964, Vault Special Collections, WGBH Media Library & Archives (hereafter cited as WGBH), accessed Nov. 9, 2019, http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/A_AACA46D644644422B53828303ACEBB89.

[105]Wyman, "Arlington: Talk in Every Pew," 18.

[106]"Stay Out for Freedom; Live Broadcast [4 of 4]," by Ted Mascott, Feb. 26, 1964, WGBH, accessed Nov. 9, 2019, http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/A_6F6142AD96754D7580D45EBC6F07473E.

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were bused into the Freedom Schools and never had encountered Black students like themselves who were scholars or activists.[107]

In his speech, James Bevel of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference described the need for the work to continue beyond just the one day of the Stay-Out. Students should be actively involved in the movement, registering voters, teaching political education, filling in jail cells.[108] Bevel's presence was significant as he had been a leading figure in the coordination of the Birmingham Children's Crusade, a march in 1963 during which children and teenagers had been attacked by police and arrested.[109] Including Bevel drew the Freedom Schools—and, therefore, their Black and white attendees—into the national civil rights movement, linking the northern and southern struggles.

After the speeches, the students dispersed into their assigned discussion groups, where the work of integrated education, which was more difficult than the simple shuffling of pews, began. In these discussion groups, Black and white students, some of whom had never been educated in a racially integrated group, struggled with controversial and urgent political and social topics. According to a guide for discussion leaders, the goal for these discussions was "not to change everything overnight. However, it is hoped that this day will begin to open doors which may have seemed forever closed. It is the job of the discussion leader to help the students to begin to see themselves in a new and different way, and to encourage them to realize that there are indeed many things which they can do."[110] In other words, Freedom School teachers were meant to cultivate places of possibility wherein Black and white students could develop new relationships to each other and new ideas for the future.

The "educational and culturally enriching program" for integrated Freedom School classes was designed to focus on six topics: "1. What are the psychological effects of segregated education? 2. The issue of teenage unemployment. 3. Why the school 'drop-out'? What happens to the 'drop-out'? 4. The Negro's contribution to American history. 5. Community resources available to students in vocational planning. 6. College scholarship opportunities and financial assistance programs."[111] Except for the fourth topic, these topics did not focus explicitly on Black students, but the Freedom Stay-Out organizers likely chose these topics because of their relevance to Black youth.

In St. Mark's, Alan Gartner, director of the Boston chapter of the Congress on Racial Equality, or CORE, asked his interracial high school discussion group for their ideas about how to integrate schools. One student asked, "Do you mean busing?" Gartner replied, "Maybe let's think about the possibilities. Think of things that haven't been thought of before."[112] The students then began to unpack the

[107]Peggy Trotter Dammond Preacely, interview by author, March 19, 2020.

[108]"Stay Out for Freedom; Live Broadcast [3 of 4]," by Ted Mascott (Feb. 26, 1964), WGBH, accessed Nov. 9, 2019, http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/A_AACA46D644644422B53828303ACEBB89.

[109]V. P. Franklin, *The Young Crusaders*.

[110]Roderick Nordell, "I Sure Do Thank the Freedom Schools," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 7, 1964, 20.

[111]Phyllis M. Ryan, "Press Release, Freedom School Curriculum," 1964, folder 16, box 3, PMR.

[112]"Stay Out for Freedom; Live Broadcast [3 of 4]," WGBH.

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advantages and disadvantages of various strategies for integration that they had heard, including busing, integrated housing, private schools, regional high schools, and continuing Freedom Schools in Newton and Roxbury. Gartner and his co-facilitator Peggy Day encouraged students to develop their own ideas, beyond the stock answers that adults had already come up with, like busing or redistricting. For example, one student hesitantly called integration "sort of an inconvenience, to have to go from one town to the other every morning." The student worried particularly about the effect on younger children. Peggy Day responded, "Segregation is always inconvenient," challenging the student's use of a common anti-integration talking point. The student continued to think out loud, saying, "Yeah, I know, and so the parents . . . they're both gonna have the same problem . . . and it's gonna bring them together. For once, they'll have the same basic problem." Peggy added, "A common problem to attack together," reminding the students that the goal of recognizing a shared, interracial problem was interracial action.[113]

All students came to Freedom Schools with different social and political understandings and beliefs, including variation within the same racial group. For Noel Day, these differences and the discomfort that they generated were an intentional part of the learning process. Noel and Peggy Day helped to write the curriculum for the Mississippi Freedom Schools later that year, and some of the curriculum and pedagogy that they developed for Mississippi had first been tested in Boston. To Mississippi teachers, Day wrote that "no expression of feelings (hostility, aggression, submission, etc.) should ever be passed over, no matter how uncomfortable the subject or the situation is. Both the students and the teacher can learn something about themselves and each other if it is dealt with honestly and with compassion."[114] In other words, part of the ways that the Freedom Schools could function as a place of possibility was through the placing of oneself in unfamiliar and uncomfortable circumstances to see what new ideas might be generated from the friction.

Discomfort seemed common among students across Freedom Schools. Peggy Preacely described students as a mixture of "curious and standoffish" at first.[115] She recalled that students' comfort levels with one another depended on factors like class and educational experiences as much as they did race, and that some students tended to stick with who they knew. As an example, Bob, a white high school student who attended the Freedom School at St. Mark's Social Center, admitted, "The town where I come from there's maybe two Negroes in the school of about fifteen-hundred, and it's disgusting. . . . I don't know anything about how the other side lives. Negroes are just completely nothing to me."[116] Even as Bob sat across from Black students ostensibly to work together against the problem of segregation that he called "disgusting," he still labeled his Black classmates as being on the "other side" and described them as "nothing." The discomfort of students like Bob

[113]"Stay Out for Freedom; Live Broadcast [3 of 4], WGBH."

[114]Noel Day, "Notes on Teaching in Mississippi," in *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972* (Sanford, NC: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1982), 1178.

[115]Peggy Trotter Dammond Preacely, interview by author, March 5, 2020.

[116]"Stay Out for Freedom; Live Broadcast [2 of 4]," by Ted Mascott (Feb. 26, 1964), WGBH, accessed Nov. 9, 2019, http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/A_C068358A1BE9498D9B90FCF40E1386BE.

demonstrated that true integration required more than just placing bodies next to each other. Conducting the experiment of the Freedom Schools taught organizers, educators, and students that quality integrated education required more than physical movement.

A reporter from the *Boston Globe* observed an exchange at Union Methodist Church between a Black student and white student in which one asked the other, "Are you afraid of me?"[117] The reporter added, "It was the white suburban kids who did most of the talking at first. The Negro students appeared justifiably reticent—and skeptical. This situation did not last. By lunchtime a two-way conversation was going in every pew."[118] A *Christian Science Monitor* journalist wrote about a heated discussion between a Black student and white student regarding discriminatory hiring practices at a local bank. The white student asked, "The bank says they don't keep Negroes out of jobs because of their race but because the Negroes aren't qualified. How can you prove they're wrong?" His Black classmate challenged back, "Do you think any qualified Negroes applied?"[119]

After the discussion groups, students reported out what they discussed to the whole Freedom School. At St. Mark's, some students were hesitant to speak in front of the large crowd, while others were confident and clearly energized by their discussions. The range of topics was impressive, including the politics of gendered labor, the possibility of a tax boycott, and a proposal for a "Negro exchange program," where Black students would come to white suburbs on the weekends.[120] After their Freedom School sessions ended, some students then marched toward City Hall, where Stay-Out leaders, including Breeden and Day, met with Mayor John Collins.[121]

From Reciprocal Integration to Direct Relief and Community Control

Stay-Out organizers felt the day was a success. In his analysis of community development in Boston, activist and Freedom School faculty member Mel King wrote, "I saw kids everywhere, excited, aware that they were directly involved in changing the schools. . . . A great amount of political and cultural education took place for students and parents alike."[122] However, city-level leadership condemned the Stay-Out. Louise Day Hicks threatened to sue Day and Breeden, and superintendent of Boston Public Schools William Ohrenberger said that as a result of the boycott, "a color line is being drawn now that never before existed."[123] Despite the massive display of support from the Stay-Out, the School Committee still refused to admit that Boston Public Schools were segregated, which had been one of the Stay-Out's primary goals. On a community level, while Stay-Out organizers found it difficult to sustain long-term

[117] Wyman, "Arlington: Talk in Every Pew," 18. Note that the reporter did not specify which student asked the question.

[118] Wyman, "Arlington: Talk in Every Pew," 18.

[119] Nordell, "I Sure Do Thank the Freedom Schools," 20.

[120] "Stay Out for Freedom; Live Broadcast [4 of 4]."

[121] Connolly, "Sue Leaders, Says Mrs. Hicks."

[122] Mel King, *Chain of Change: Struggles for Black Community Development* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 39.

[123] Connolly, "Sue Leaders, Says Mrs. Hicks," 1-2.

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commitments from teachers to set up permanent Freedom Schools, a parent-run Roxbury-Newton Freedom School did meet monthly at least through February 1966.[124]

The Freedom Stay-Outs did motivate action at the state level that had long-lasting impact on education in Massachusetts. In March 1964 Massachusetts commissioner of education Owen Kiernan put together the Advisory Committee on Racial Imbalance, which released a report which would become the basis for the 1965 Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act. This act outlawed "racially imbalanced" schools, which had populations with more than 50 percent non-white students.[125] Districts found to be racially imbalanced were mandated to put forth a plan to desegregate schools. The state department of education and community organizations would continue to pressure the School Committee to adhere to the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act for the next decade.

As activists grew increasingly frustrated with the intransigence of the School Committee, they turned to other strategies of seeking quality education for Black children in Boston: direct relief programs like Operation Exodus and METCO and community-controlled education.[126] After all, reciprocal integration was just one model of how quality education for Black children in Boston might be achieved, and not one that seemed politically feasible at the time. Writing in 1968, Toye Lewis, education director for the New Urban League of Boston, explained that "the change from integration to control shows a change in tactics rather than a change in goals. The goal of our community has always been one of quality education. But three to five years ago, it seemed that the strategy which would achieve the goal had to be integration."[127] In an interview study with Black parents in Boston who participated in Operation Exodus, researchers found that the parents' priority was quality education, with integration being of secondary or minimal concern.[128]

As mentioned earlier, Exodus took advantage of the Boston Public Schools' open-enrollment policy to bus Black students from overcrowded schools to less crowded schools in the city. METCO founders benefited from the suburban-city partnerships developed during Stay-Out organizing to bus Black students from Boston to suburban towns.[129] Parents and educators also built independent community schools, including the Highland Park Free School, where Jim Breeden sent his children, and the Roxbury Community School, which described itself as created by "a group of parents who were tired of the fruitless protests against the Boston School Committee."[130] In 1966, Noel Day opened the New School for Children, an elementary school that Day described,

[124]James Breeden, interview by author, July 3, 2020, and "Roxbury-Newton Freedom School Still Growing," *Bay State Banner* (Boston), Feb. 19, 1966, 3.

[125]Levy, *Northern Schools and Civil Rights*.

[126]King, *Chain of Change*.

[127]Merelice Kundratis, "Roxbury Unit Seeks School Control," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 25, 1968, 13.

[128]Clara Mayo, "Quality Education and Integrated Education: A Conflict of Values," paper presented at the Eastern Research Institute for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Philadelphia, PA, April 1970.

[129]Keil, "Chronology of the Development of METCO."

[130]James Breeden, interview by author, July 3, 2020, and Roxbury Community School, "Roxbury Community School," undated, folder 16, box 1, Frank J. Miranda Papers (M112), Snell Library, Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

in much the spirit of Boston's Freedom Schools, as "an experimental alternative to the failure of the public schools" that was "both truly integrated and truly 'public'—that is, responsive to the public that it serves."[131] Although the New School was envisioned to be diverse, its student body was primarily Black and drew mainly from the Roxbury-North Dorchester neighborhoods.[132] In the late 1960s, Day's educational views on integration had also shifted. In the same paper in which he criticizes dominant integration plans for being unidirectional, Day argued that the dominant programs of integrated and compensatory education had so far failed Black students, but that all-Black laboratory schools, staffed by Black teachers, could help Black youth develop "self-acceptance and group consciousness."[133]

The primary goal for these strategies, even the integrated New School for Children, was relief from overcrowding and poor-quality teaching, facilities, and school materials—not necessarily integrated education—and support for reciprocal integration faded after the single-day demonstration during the February 26, 1964, Stay-Out.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated how the organizers of Boston's one-day Freedom Stay-Outs envisioned a model of integration built on reciprocal physical and cultural movement, which I call *reciprocal integration*. Put into practice on one day during the Stay-Out held on February 26, 1964, this model of integration was distinct from other unidirectional and monocultural models of integration that came to dominate Boston schools in that it placed value on the educational contribution of Black students and their history and culture. Reciprocal integration was a model developed to respond to Black parents' and students' educational testimony, Freedom Stay-Out organizers' own educational thought, and a political desire to develop interracial solidarity that could strengthen the Black freedom struggle in Boston. The model of reciprocal integration is an example of the creativity of Black activists, parents, and students in imagining possibilities for quality education of Black children in Boston. In Boston's 1964 Freedom Schools, Black and white children were challenged to have new conversations, generate new ideas, and model what an integrated world that respects Black culture and thought could look like.

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[131]Noel Day, "New School for Children," 1966, folder 1314, box 38, Freedom House, Inc. Records (M16), Snell Library, Northeastern University, Boston, MA.

[132]William M. Willis Jr., "Problems in Conflict: Administration of a Parent Run Community School, the New School for Children, Inc., Dorchester, Massachusetts" (EdD diss., Harvard University, 1972).

[133]Day, "The Case for All-Black Schools," 211.

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