



Oral History Interview of Richard Lane (OH-071)

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Oral History Interview of Richard M. Lane

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Interview Summary

In this interview, Richard M. Lane, an attorney and lifelong resident of South Boston, discusses the impact in his neighborhood of the 1974 Garrity decision, which required some students to be bused between Boston neighborhoods with the intention of creating racial balance in the public schools. He reflects on the reactions to the busing plan among South Boston residents; the impact of media coverage on perceptions of South Boston; the effect that busing had on the demographics of South Boston and the Boston Public schools; and the overall ineffectiveness of the busing plan. Mr. Lane concludes with a brief reflection on the career of Congressman John Joseph Moakley of South Boston.

Subject Headings

Busing for school integration

Lane, Richard M.

Moakley, John Joseph, 1927-2001

Morgan v. Hennigan (379 F. Supp. 410)

South Boston (Boston, Mass.)

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This interview took place on April 24, 2007, at
546 East Broadway, South Boston, MA.

Interview Transcript

STEPHEN FOLEY: Would you please give your name?

RICHARD M. LANE: My name is Richard Lane.

FOLEY: Where are you originally from, specifically?

LANE: I'm a lifelong resident of South Boston.

FOLEY: What street were you born on? Where in the neighborhood?

LANE: I was born at 807 East Broadway, between M and N Streets, across from M Street Park in South Boston. I've always lived in the City Point area,¹ from G Street down this way. Now live at 6 Bantry Way in South Boston.

FOLEY: What is your occupation?

LANE: I'm an attorney. I've been an attorney for thirty-three years.

FOLEY: What were you doing in 1974?

LANE: Refreshing my memory, knowing that you were coming here today, I was an attorney. I had just passed the bar in January of 1973. So I was an attorney for about a year and a half before September of 1974.

¹ The City Point area of South Boston is located on the neighborhood's eastern side.

FOLEY: Do you remember anything about when the Garrity decision² first came out? How people reacted to it?

LANE: Yes, I do. I had worked for a law firm back then called Bulger Infinity, and there was a political person, Bill Bulger,³ who was very much involved with the issue, and how it affected the community, because the fundamental issue at the time was with the rights of the natural parents to educate the children. So it became a very much tumultuous time in South Boston. So I did play a small role in doing some research on busing at the time.

FOLEY: Can you describe some of the research that you did? And how that went for you?

LANE: Back then, prior to the decision of Judge Garrity, there was a national movement in order to attempt to desegregate the schools throughout the country. And as a result of that, various states legislated what they called racial imbalance laws, back then. What they needed to do was to try to implement some kind of a movement as to—to try to implement the Racial Imbalance Law⁴ and desegregate the schools.

As a result of that, the matter was brought to the federal courts, and it came before Judge W. Arthur Garrity. At that time, there was a tremendous amount of opposition, because people who had children in the Boston Public Schools wanted neighborhood schools, and wanted to be able to walk their children to school. South Boston is a very closely-knit community. It is a very active neighborhood with various families. There was a lot research done as to why there was the necessity to bus kids out of their neighborhoods, which may be safe, into a not-so-safe community.

² The Garrity decision refers to the June 21, 1974, opinion filed by Judge W. Arthur Garrity in the case of *Tallulah Morgan et al. v. James Hennigan et al.* (379 F. Supp. 410). Judge Garrity ruled that the Boston School Committee had “intentionally brought about and maintained racial segregation” in the Boston Public Schools. When the school committee did not submit a workable desegregation plan as the opinion had required, the court established a plan that called for some students to be bused from their own neighborhoods to attend schools in other neighborhoods, with the goal of creating racial balance in the Boston Public Schools. (See <http://www.lib.umb.edu/archives/garrity2.html> for more information)

³ William M. Bulger (1934-), a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1962 to 1970, in the Massachusetts State Senate from 1970 to 1978 and as State Senate President from 1978 to 1996.

⁴ Passed in 1965, the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Law prohibited “racial imbalance” in public schools and discouraged schools from having more than 50 percent minority students.

So there was a lot of research done in terms of people's natural inalienable rights as to their right as parents, as mothers and fathers, to put kids in schools of their choice. At that time, there was some research done on whether or not what they call an open enrollment program would be implemented. I recall at the time—I'm not sure if it was before or during Judge Garrity's overseeing of the case, whether or not—there was a Superintendent Griffin,⁵ I believe, that proposed an open enrollment program, which we did a lot of research on. What that meant was kids and parents would choose their own schools. That was really the whole purpose of it. Not to send kids out of schools but to bring kids into schools. We had no opposition in South Boston to do that.

FOLEY: When did people first find out that the buses were going to be used?

LANE: Well, I think months in advance, particularly in South Boston. The various political meetings between different families and politicians, and the NAACP. I think there was a fellow named Atkins⁶—I forget his first name—that headed up the NAACP, and eventually was put on an advisory board of Judge Garrity that had a lot to do with trying to implement busing in the city.

At the time, there were groups put together—I think Louise Day Hicks⁷ was a big thing here. Jimmy Kelly,⁸ who has since passed away, was an active political person, even back then, before he became a Boston city councilor. And you had Representative Bill Bulger involved, you had

⁵ Boston Public Schools superintendent Frederick Gillis proposed an open enrollment plan prior to Garrity's 1974 decision.

⁶Thomas I. Atkins (1939-2008) was a prominent civil rights activist and staunch supporter of busing for school integration in Boston. A graduate of Harvard Law School, Atkins was the first black at-large member of the Boston City Council, elected in 1971. He was associate trial counsel in the *Morgan v. Hennigan* case and served as executive secretary and later president of the Boston chapter of the NAACP.

⁷Louise Day Hicks (1916-2003), a Democrat, served on the Boston School Committee from 1962 to 1967 (serving as chair from 1963 to 1965), ran unsuccessfully for the mayoralty of Boston in 1967 and in 1971, and served on the Boston City Council before being elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1970. She represented Massachusetts' Ninth Congressional District for one term.

⁸James M. Kelly (1940-2007), a lifelong South Boston resident, represented South Boston in the Boston City Council from 1983 until his death in January of 2007. He served as city council president from 1994 to 2001.

had Ray Flynn⁹ involved. And everybody tried to approach it in a rational way, but the media picked up on it and unfortunately tried to pigeonhole people in South Boston in a different category.

FOLEY: So how do you feel, actually, about the media coverage of what happened? Do you think it helped or hurt or—?

LANE: The *Boston Globe* was notorious for giving slanted and one-sided opinions. Most of the people at the *Boston Globe*, particularly, lived outside the city and were unaffected by busing, because busing dealt with the inner-city kids. And most of those people—on the side, Judge Garrity was appointed—got an appointment through Ted Kennedy,¹⁰ who was a senator at the time, I believe. And all the people who were involved with the media were unaffected. They had their kids going to private schools or whatever.

But what happened was any time there was an incident involving either black or white people, you would always see that there was a one-sided version of what took place. There's one particular case, I remember, prior to busing imposition, that a fellow almost got hit by a car, a white fellow on Broadway. And as a result of it, there were four blacks in the car, and they came out of the car, and they stabbed the white fellow. And the fellow who did it was named Cooper. As a result of that, a bunch of guys came out of a bar and chased Mr. Cooper up the street, and as a result of that, Mr. Cooper was stabbed with his own knife and died. And the fellow who was the original victim was taken to court and he was found not guilty, but there was a one-sided story by the media saying that it was white on black, when in fact, it was initially a black on white type of confrontation. So I think the media wanted headlines back then.

And you have to keep in mind that, once the busing started, we had about fourteen hundred Boston Police officers in a community that had approximately twenty-eight thousand residents. They had fifty FBI agents, they had fifty other federal government employees, they had

⁹ Raymond L. Flynn (1939-), a Democrat, represented South Boston in the Massachusetts State House of Representatives from 1971 to 1979. He later served on the Boston City Council from 1978 to 1974, then as mayor of Boston from 1984 to 1993.

¹⁰ Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy (1932-), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts in the United States Senate since 1962.

helicopters going overhead. It was almost, in a way, like marshal law. So any time there was a demonstration, the media covered the part where people might have gotten in scuffles or fights, whatever. They never emphasized whether or not busing was working. And history tells us that it didn't work.

FOLEY: So you think that that media attention—do you think that had any effect on the legacy of Boston, particularly South Boston, how it was regarded nationally?

LANE: Well I think, again, we appeared to be bigoted and racist and all of that. And in fact, when it happened here, we were the first community or neighborhood to say that, look, we should uphold our rights as parents and be able to bring our kids to whatever schools we wanted to do. Blacks were always welcome in South Boston. Prior to that, actually kids were going to school here, they were working in the neighborhood. There were never any major incidents of any type.

After busing started, I think, any time there was an incident, whether it was black or white, it was on the front page of every paper locally, and in turn, went national. I think unwarranted attention was spent on incidents. And I can just tell you, having lived here all my life, that it was a very good community, strong-minded people, who just wanted their kids to go to neighborhood schools. Blacks were always welcome here prior to that. And I think the point that the media was—they never showed why the kid from one community should be sent into a dangerous community for purposes of getting a good education.

FOLEY: So what do you think the main reason why people were so opposed to busing? What was the major (inaudible—simultaneous conversation) behind it?

LANE: Well, and again, I think looking at it even as an attorney and a parent, I think that people felt that their rights as citizens, and people had the Declaration of Rights particularly, and they lost all that, and they had no say. They were forced to take their kids from their safe community, put into a dangerous situation where there was no neighborhood—there were no

community ties. No education was going on. So in essence, took away the rights of parents to bring up their children.

Judge Garrity, in turn, took it upon himself, I think—and there has been books written about judicial tyranny and all that. As a lawyer only for about a year or so, I was pretty much in favor of the justice of the courts— were great to people. But after looking at everything that Judge Garrity did, it was mostly unnecessary. He made over, as I understand, four hundred separate orders during the time that he had the case under his supervision. During that time, there were many arrests, made as a result of orders of the police that people couldn't gather in groups of two or more around the school, particularly South Boston High School. There were mothers who had baby carriages, and in somewhat of a protest, would take the carriages up Broadway. And the police, in their full battle array (phone rings), even attempted to arrest parents with baby carriages.

So what had happened, our community turned into kind of a police state. We were limited in exercising our first amendment rights. We were limited in helping bring up our kids the way we wanted to. Certain things were imposed upon us that were not imposed upon anybody, probably, in the country, at that point in time.

FOLEY: So do you think that the Garrity decision had any impact, at least immediately, on race relations in Boston outside of the schools?

LANE: I think the Garrity decision was probably the worst judicial decision made. It had a negative impact in the city of Boston, probably in our history, because in fact, I think Mayor White¹¹ at some point, who was the mayor during a large portion of the time that busing was forced upon us—it suggested, I think, the Revolutionary War was one of the major impacts on the city of Boston, which was a positive one—and the results of that—and I think the busing decision was probably the worst, and had the most negative impact on the city of Boston.

¹¹ Kevin White (1929-), a Democrat, served as mayor of Boston from 1968 to 1984.

What happened was there was a major exodus of families that left the city of Boston, because they couldn't afford to send their kids to private school, and because of the nature of what was happening, didn't feel safe in their own community. And I think it did make a major divide between blacks and whites. Fortunately, I think blacks and whites, at that time, they both had a very common interest. They both wanted their kids educated and to have the best education possible. So the solution wasn't busing kids all across the city; the solution was to have better schools, so that anybody could go to their neighborhood school and get a great education.

But I think history now tells us that, thirty-three years later, we have less families in the city of Boston. We did have an exodus of white families leave the city. Millions of dollars were wasted on transportation costs and busing that could've gone towards education and building new schools, and paying teachers better money. As a result of that, kids could've gone to their own neighborhood schools. But history tells us that Garrity's decision was the biggest failure, probably in the history of the city of Boston.

FOLEY: When would you say, basically, open opposition to forced busing ended? Or did it ever end?

LANE: I think it still rings true today that any time busing is talked about—we still have busing, and we can't see anything better going on in the school system. It's never created the racial balance that it was originally set up to do. In a way, it's a reverse desegregation. I don't know the statistics, but I think, probably, in the city of Boston, the minorities far outweigh the percentages of white families who go to school in the city, other than the three high academic schools. So I think that you have a situation that we still have the same problems, if not worse, that they had thirty-three years ago, in terms of kids getting a good education in the city of Boston.

FOLEY: Do you think Garrity's decision, having an impact on basically the entire city as a whole—you did mention that there were a few families where the people had to move out. Do you think that decision really played a role in that?

LANE: I think everybody points to the Garrity decision as something that he posed his own political and social solutions to the education problems at the time. He was going to do it regardless of what anybody else suggested for him to do. He had many, many other options back in that time. He could've approved an open enrollment policy. He could've done it on a staggered situation, where he could have either kids in, say, kindergarten or first grade, be bused in a way that was a safe way to do it, do it on a small scale at first, so people could adjust to the thought, and to see if it worked. Or you could've had kids in high school, juniors, seniors in high school, that would be more mature to handle the busing situation. But what it did was put a community like South Boston in upheaval, and there was no stability for any kids here—where they were going to go to school, whether they'd be safe where they were going to school.

So I think the Garrity decision, today, still holds true. But I think what it's shown through all of this—for years and years, the South Boston community was depicted as racist and bigoted. Now I think history tells us that they were right in what they did, and right in what they fought for. And that still hasn't really been put, in a way—in the media—in a way that's cleared up the reputations that were lost throughout the years because of busing.

FOLEY: Do you think that busing and its aftermath had any effect on the way people voted or the political atmosphere here in Boston?

LANE: I think a lot of people lost interest in the school system itself. Boston was always known as the education center of the world. I think if you look at what has happened here, you can't look at least to the high school level, other than two or three schools—Boston Latin [School], Boston Latin Academy, the John O'Bryant School¹²—other than that, you can't look to any of the schools of the city of Boston that's really carrying that torch that we've had over the years, as far as education.

¹² Boston Latin School is a public exam school located in Boston's Fenway neighborhood. Founded in 1635, it is the oldest public school in the United States. Boston Latin Academy is also a public exam school, located in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood. It was founded in 1877 as Girls' Latin School and became co-educational in the mid-1970s. The John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science is located in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood and was founded in 1893. Its namesake was a teacher and guidance counselor in the Boston Public Schools in the 1950s and 1960s before becoming the first African American member of the Boston School Committee. The school was named after him in 1992.

So politically, I think, Louise Day Hicks was labeled—she became a congresswoman. I think she lost a lot of her reputation, because, again, the *Boston Globe*, particularly, in the media, depicted people like Louise Day Hicks, Jimmy Kelly, Bill Bulger, and even Ray Flynn, to some extent, to be racist and bigoted. Although they had great statistics and numbers and explanations and interpretation of the Constitution and Declaration of Rights that were very favorable as to why busing should not have been implemented. I think to this day, people outside the city of Boston still look upon us—as those days of being dark and dreary. And I think there is still a taint or shadow or cloud over our heads that carry on today.

FOLEY: You mentioned those four people earlier. Who are some of the other leaders in opposition to busing or for busing?

LANE: Well, again, I think Chet Atkins [sic – Thomas Atkins] was a very—a proponent of busing at the time. He was the president at some point in time of the NAACP. The National [Association for the] Advancement of Colored People. I can't remember exactly what it meant. And he had Judge Garrity's ear, as I recall. His position, I think, was that minorities have suffered over the years, for many, many years, and it's time for us to be balanced in that sense. And I always thought he was somewhat prejudiced himself, in terms of his views on why kids should be bused, whether they be black or white, miles across city lines. You're not getting any better education than they got in the schools they were [attending]—and why he wasn't more of a proponent of, let's fix the education problem itself and make better schools and teach kids things. Everybody seemed to miss the point on that.

But even back then, you had women—there was a couple women who come to mind that were the head of a ROAR organization. It's R-O-A-R. My recollection of that was that it meant Restore Our Alienated Rights. [See attachment A] At that point in time, no one was listening to any of the politicians in Boston, as to the entire busing movement. There was a woman, Virginia Sheehy and—I forget—a Rita Graul,¹³ that led up this mothers movement that actually took their babies in baby carriages and protested; walked up from City Point up Broadway, up past the school. They were confronted with hundreds of Boston Police, headed up by the then Boston

¹³ Virginia Sheehy and Rita Graul were active members of ROAR.

police commissioner, Robert DiGrazia. They were threatened with arrest and everything else. But they stood up to the court and they stood up to the police at that time. I always found that they were right in their protest, and all they were doing was being mothers and looking out for the safety of their children.

So in addition to Louise Day Hicks, Jimmy Kelly, Bill Bulger, there were other groups. They started up a South Boston Information Center. I think they had a group called the South Boston Marshals. There were various groups that would try to keep the community together. It was a situation that people are just trying to keep our neighborhood safe.

FOLEY: I guess that's the end of my questions. Are there any personal stories, or anything in particular that you'd like to add about busing, or just the Garrity decision in general?

LANE: Can I turn this off?

(audio cuts out)

(audio returns)

LANE: I wasn't directly affected by the busing itself, because I didn't have any children at that time, although many of my friends were faced with that situation, and they had to make decisions as to whether or not to put their kids out into other parts of the city at young ages, or whether or not they would have to try to find other places to live outside the city of Boston. So the decision, to me, was a very regrettable one. And W. Arthur Garrity went way overboard in terms of the imposition of his own policies and rules and orders that weren't necessary at the time.

But I don't have any personal experiences from it. I do remember the incidents up at South Boston High School that made news throughout the country. That was basically—people had no way to vent. No way to speak out on their behalf. And I think a lot of it was out of frustration. But all in all, I think, over the years, it's proven that the South Boston community was right in

the end, and busing has done nothing in terms of desegregating the schools and furthering the education of the kids.

(audio cuts out)

(audio returns)

FOLEY: I understand that you're a lifelong resident of South Boston. Did you ever have any dealings with Mr. Joe Moakley?

LANE: Joe Moakley was a neighbor. He lived two blocks away on Columbia Road. And he visited—he was a regular guy. He visited the neighborhood stores on Saturdays and Sundays. He'd go out and read the newspaper out Castle Island on a Sunday with his cup of tea. He visited a place called the Island Store, just months before his death, actually, which was in the City Point area, which was a couple blocks away. So I would see him from time to time. He would always ask about how you were doing, not how he was doing, even though he had several things happening in his life. He had I think a liver transplant, he had hip surgery. He had other ailments. He never complained about any of those.

He was probably one of the most underestimated politicians that ever spent any time in Washington. He followed Speaker McCormack,¹⁴ who was one of the most powerful politicians in the country for many, many years. And Joe Moakley, at some point, became the chairman of the House Ways and Means,¹⁵ and he probably had delivered more monies and services to the state of Massachusetts than any one group of politicians or representatives.

He told a story about even when he was fourteen or fifteen years old, he falsified his papers and joined the navy, even at a young age. So he was an (inaudible) too. Served our country, served it well. He was a true patriot. America needed more men like him, and I don't think we'll ever see

¹⁴ John W. McCormack (1891-1990), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Twelfth and, after redistricting, Ninth Congressional Districts in the United States House of Representatives from 1928 to 1971. He served as Speaker of the House from 1962 to 1971.

¹⁵ Congressman Moakley actually served as chairman of the House Rules Committee, not the Ways and Means Committee, from 1989 to 1995.

someone like him again. At one point, I had been at a function, and he couldn't appear, and I was given the honor or privilege to present a flag to a woman who was a gold star mother,¹⁶ who had lost a son in one of the world wars. And he was great to recognize people who served our country. And it was a great privilege for me just to say I was presenting this flag that had been raised at the White House in honor of this particular gold mother.

I think he was one of the most respected politicians ever to come out of South Boston. We've had many. But he did more for Massachusetts, I think, than Senator Kennedy, Senator Kerry¹⁷ combined. He never bragged about it, he never talked about it. He just did it. He was great to his constituents. And he was very well educated. He was an attorney. He worked in various legislative capacities before he became a representative, then senator, out of South Boston. So he was a great political leader. And he's dearly missed.

FOLEY: Alright. Thank you for doing the interview, and I appreciate your time.

LANE: Alright, thanks very much, Steve.

END OF INTERVIEW

¹⁶ A gold star mother is a woman who has a child who has died during military service. The term refers to the practice of hanging service flags in the windows of a family's home, with blue stars to represent family members in the military and gold stars covering the blue stars of family members who died during their military service. (See <http://www.goldstarmoms.com/> for more information)

¹⁷ John Kerry (1943-), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate since 1985.

OH-071 Attachments

Attachment A

Photograph of “Stop Forced Busing” ROAR pin (DI-0304); pin was donated by Mr. Lane at the time of this interview and is now part of the John Joseph Moakley Papers Collection (MS100/09.03-378)

