



Busing in Boston: a research guide

Introduction

The Moakley Archive and Institute at Suffolk University has many resources that illustrate the controversy surrounding school desegregation in Boston during the 1970s. Boston’s busing crisis was sparked in 1974 with the ruling of Judge Arthur Garrity in the case of *Tallulah Morgan et al. v. James Hennigan et al.* Garrity ruled that the Boston School Committee had “intentionally brought about and maintained racial segregation” in the Boston Public Schools and he implemented a plan that bused students to different schools to create racial balance. At the time of the ruling, Congressman John Joseph Moakley represented South Boston, one of the neighborhoods most directly affected by the busing plan.

Research Guide Sections

1. Background information on busing in Boston	1
2. Primary Sources	5
a. Sources available at the Moakley Archive	5
i. Congressman John Joseph Moakley Papers (MS100)	5
ii. Oral History Interviews	7
iii. Suffolk University Archives Reference Files (SUA/003.004)	7
b. Other Archival Collections (Boston-area)	7
3. Secondary Sources	8
a. Books	8
b. Journal Articles	9
c. Online Resources	10

Background information on busing in Boston

School desegregation became a significant issue in Boston following the United States Supreme Court’s decision in the 1954 case of *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.* ([347 U.S. 483](#)), which asserted that separate educational facilities for black and white students were inherently unequal, and school districts must integrate their public schools. Despite the *Brown* decision and the enactment of the Racial Balance Act of 1965 in the state of Massachusetts, by the 1970s Boston Public Schools remained largely segregated.

In response to the inaction, a group of black parents filed suit against the Boston School Committee, then led by James W. Hennigan, in the case of *Tallulah Morgan et al. v. James Hennigan et al.* ([379 F. Supp. 410](#)) on March 15, 1972. The suit claimed that the Boston Public Schools were deliberately segregated. In a meeting on In a meeting on September 21st 1971, the Boston School Committee had



voted 3 to 2 against using busing to racially balance the new Lee School;¹ a vote in violation of the Racial Imbalance Act of 1965.

On June 21st 1974, Judge Arthur W. Garrity ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, stating:

The court concludes that the defendants have knowingly carried out a systematic program of segregation affecting all of the city's students, teachers and school facilities and have intentionally brought about and maintained a dual school system. Therefore the entire school system of Boston is unconstitutionally segregated. Accordingly, the court will contemporaneously with this opinion file a partial judgment permanently enjoining the city defendants from discriminating upon the basis of race in the operation of the Boston public schools and ordering that they begin forthwith the formulation and implementation of plans to secure for the plaintiffs their constitutional rights.

The court ordered the Boston School Committee to submit a plan to desegregate Boston's public schools, and in the meantime Garrity enforced the State Board of Education's plan for reducing racial imbalance. The plan determined that "the racial balance in all citywide schools shall be reflective of the total student population in the Boston Public School system, with a 5 percent leeway in white or minority enrollments. For example, white students represent 51 percent of the city's student, so white enrollment could number from 56 to 46 percent at any citywide school. Black and other minority students, who are 49 percent of the city's total school enrollment, may range from 54 to 44 percent of enrollment at individual citywide schools."²

Judge Garrity's desegregation plan was to be implemented in three phases. Phase I, which began on the first day of school September 12, 1974, involved redistricting, student transportation and the formation of parent-teacher-community involvement committees. This phase only applied to neighborhoods where whites and blacks lived near each other; the Charlestown, East Boston and North End neighborhoods were excluded.

Phase II, also known as "The Masters' Plan", was ordered to begin in September 1975, and included all areas of the city except East Boston. This phase involved a "a revision of attendance zones and grade structures, construction of new schools and the closing of old schools and a controlled transfer policy" with limited exceptions in order to minimize mandatory transportation.³ Essentially students had two options: 1. to attend a school in their community district schools where the enrollment was determined by the school committee or 2. to attend a citywide school where they could list a preferred school in addition to other options if their desired school was unavailable. Opting to enroll in a community district school meant that the school committee determined where students went based on geocode and racial balance.⁴ Phase II also linked universities, colleges and community groups to schools.

¹ Boston School Committee hearing transcript, 9/21/1971, 0405.002 Row 16 Bay 5 Box 61, School Committee Records, Boston City Archives, West Roxbury, MA. p 2.

² U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. School Desegregation in Boston. Washington, DC. June, 1975. CR1.2:Sch6/18. <http://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr12sch618.pdf>, p 87.

³ Ibid., 77.

⁴ Ibid., 91.



Phase III began in September 1977 and established the Department of Implementation which oversaw desegregation and the compiling of racial statistics of the Boston Public Schools.

Congressional Elections

Prior to the implementation of Judge Garrity's school desegregation plan, the controversy surrounding the issue of school desegregation found its way into the political arena. Many Boston residents were outraged that their children would no longer be able to attend local "neighborhood" schools and instead would be bused to unfamiliar areas of Boston. The issue was of great importance in South Boston, a largely white neighborhood of Boston, where voters would be taking part in the 1970 congressional elections to fill the seat vacated by John McCormack. Joe Moakley, a Democrat, ran for the open seat in 1970 but lost to another South Boston resident, Democrat Louise Day Hicks, in part because Hicks was a more outspoken critic of busing than Moakley. While Moakley expressed his dissatisfaction with the idea of forced busing, his stance was not as firm as South Boston residents would have liked. Moakley was able to win the 1972 congressional election by running as an Independent and therefore bypassing the need to beat Hicks in a Democratic primary. Once elected, Moakley switched back to the Democratic Party and went on to hold the seat for nearly thirty years. Many residents of South Boston never forgave him for his perceived failure to stop school desegregation in their community.

The Impact of the Garrity Decision: 1960s-1980s

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, racial tension and violence escalated in Boston. In anticipation of a ruling on school desegregation, anti-busing rallies and protests were held at city hall and elsewhere around the city.

Elementary and high school students, already subject to long bus rides across the city, experienced rocks thrown at their buses, verbal harassment by people as they entered school buildings, and in some cases harassment by their peers and school administrators once inside the building. The stabbing of Michael Faith, a white South Boston High School student, by a black student inside the walls of the school is just one example of the violence that broke out between students.

Busing proponents and opponents were subject to harassment on a daily basis. Pro-busing activists experienced death threats and harassment by motorcades that hurled insults and rocks at their homes. An iconic image taken by Stanley Forman depicts violence at a rally in April 1976. In the photograph it appears that Ted Landsmark is being attacked with an American flag by anti-busing activist Joseph Rakes. The accounts of what actually happened between Landsmark and Rakes vary widely; ultimately Landsmark sustained injuries at the hands of other protestors that day. This image won Foreman a Pulitzer Prize and catapulted Boston's race problems into the national spotlight.

South Boston was a hot bed of protest and violence. Boston policemen were initially assigned to protect South Boston High School but as the crowds and tension escalated, the National Guard and State Police were called in to maintain order. In his oral history interview Congressman Moakley, a resident of South Boston, recalls his treatment: "I was against busing too, but I just couldn't march in the streets and



scream and holler like some of the people were doing it, and that cost me... On a Monday, I was picketed by six hundred whites. On a Tuesday, I was picketed by six hundred blacks.”⁵ Many Boston families chose to move out of the city to the suburbs; this mass migration, commonly known as “White Flight,” began between 1950 and 1960.⁶ Options for families who did not want their children to be bused and could not afford to move out of the city were slim. Families that could afford it sent their children to parochial school.

As the plan unfolded throughout the 1970s, students and parents gradually accepted forced busing and racial tensions eventually lessened. Judge Garrity continued to oversee most administrative functions of the Boston School Committee and to make decisions regarding schooling and desegregation. Although Garrity’s involvement ended in September 1985, the battle over schools and race continued in the federal courts into the 1990s.

The Impact of the Garrity Decision: 1990s to Today

In the thirty years since the Garrity Decision, scholars, educators, policy makers, and those directly impacted by the court’s decision have continued to question its effectiveness and examine its impact on Boston neighborhoods, race relations, and the city’s educational system.

Because of white flight, busing and immigration the racial makeup of Boston’s neighborhoods has changed drastically when compared to the demographics of the 1960s and 1970s. Neighborhood changes are also reflected in the classroom; the racial composition of Boston Public Schools is now a minority majority system. This trend led to one lawsuit brought by White parents.

In 1995, Michael McLaughlin filed a complaint against the Boston School Committee on behalf of his daughter, Julia, who was denied admission to Boston Latin School, the city’s most prestigious public exam school. McLaughlin alleged that the committee’s policy of reserving 35% of the exam school slots for African American and Latino students violated the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. McLaughlin received an injunction against the School Committee, and Julia McLaughlin was admitted to Boston Latin in the 8th grade (*McLaughlin v. Boston School Committee*, 938 F. Supp. 1001). The School Committee subsequently revised its policy; the new policy reserved 50% of the slots for students with the highest test scores, and the remaining 50% of seats were to be filled by a system that took race and test scores into account. McLaughlin filed another complaint in 1997, on behalf of Sarah Wessmann, who was denied admission to Boston Latin under this revised policy. The policy was initially upheld by

⁵ Moakley, John Joseph. Interviewed by Robert Allison and Joseph McEttrick. John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project, OH-001. 2 April 2001. Transcript and video recording available. John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University, Boston, MA. p 19-20.

⁶ “Between 1950 and 1960, a net of 124,668 whites moved out of the city, and a net of 187,521 whites moved into the suburbs of Boston. Between 1960 and 1970, a net of 97,668 whites moved out of the city, and a net of 206,663 whites moved into the suburbs. Hence, ‘white flight’ to the suburbs was considerably less during the decade when school desegregation efforts intensified than during the previous decade.” U.S. Commission on Civil Rights report, 36.



the U.S. District Court of Massachusetts (*Wessmann v. Boston School Committee*, 996 F. Supp. 120), but was eventually deemed unconstitutional by the U.S. Court of Appeals (*Wessmann v. Gittens*, 160 F.3d 790).

2004 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the Garrity Decision, this occasion sparked a renewed awareness of race in Boston and the Decision. One of the many community groups are interested in reexamining the effects of the Garrity Decision is the Union of Minority Neighborhoods. This group, comprised mainly of African-American parents and citizens, is interested in expanding and supporting “communities committed to facilitating Boston’s transition to a more equitable and just public school system.”⁷The UMN, through a grant from the Andrus Family Fund and with preliminary findings of a study conducted by the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Center at Northeastern University, plans to conduct a truth and reconciliation commission to study the impact of the Garrity Decision.

Primary Sources

Primary Sources available at the Moakley Archive & Institute

The list below is a compilation of primary sources available at the Moakley Archive, including links to digitized materials where applicable, and lists of other archival collections available at outside institutions, and secondary sources such as books, journal articles and web resources about busing in Boston and the public’s reaction, including U.S. legislation, some of which Congressman Joe Moakley was instrumental in creating.

Congressman John Joseph Moakley Papers (MS100)

The Moakley papers contain over fifty folders of printed materials that directly relate to the Garrity Decision, including news clippings, constituent and professional correspondence, legislative files, and reports on the issue that were written by various organizations. What follows is a list of the series to consult for further research:

Legislative Assistants Files: General Files (MS100/03.09)

- Folders 1, 2 and 8 contain legislation files background materials, letters from constituents, press releases, a memo describing Moakley’s voting record on busing, Freedom House Institute on Schools and Education booklets, and other items.
- [Digitized documents from this series](#)

District Issues (MS100/04)

- Folders 40-87 contain legislative files, constituent correspondence, files related to an FBI investigation of incidents of racially-motivated violence in Boston, correspondence with representatives from Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR) and a list of their demands, and news clippings.
- [Digitized documents from this series](#)

⁷ Union of Minority Neighborhoods.

http://www.unionofminorityneighborhoods.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21&Itemid=25



Campaign Files (MS100/05)

- Folders 23-37, relate to the 1972 campaign.

Constituent Service Information Requests (MS100/06.06)

- Folder 345 includes a letter to the editor of an unidentified newspaper from a South Boston resident calling for a protest against Moakley's stance on busing.
- [Digitized documents from this series](#)

News clippings (MS100/07.01): stored off-site; advanced notice required

- Folders 3-6, 49, 54-56
- Numerous newsclippings related to busing have been digitized, however, due to copyright restrictions they are not publicly available on our digital collections site. Contact the archives to inquire about access.

Press Releases (MS100/07.03)

- Folder 44 includes press releases about South Boston High receivership, a letter from Louise Day Hicks, 1975, and other items.
- [Digitized documents from this series](#)

Congressional Speeches (MS100/08.01)

- Folders 14 and 20 include speeches on busing made by Congressman Moakley to the House

Non- Congressional Speeches (MS100/08.02)

- Folder 9 includes John Joseph Moakley's testimony on busing for one of the "Jaffe Hearings," 23 March 1973 ([view digitized document](#))

Audio Files (MS100/09.01)

- The following audio files related to busing have been digitized; please contact the archives for access:
 - Item # 19: Tom Larson Show: Mrs. Louise Day Hicks, WSBK-TV 38, 22 May 1973. Talk show host Tom Larson interviews Louise Day Hicks, with listener questions; the topics discussed include busing, her 1972 congressional campaign against Moakley, post-congressional plans, and the Watergate scandal.
 - Item # 54: Busing debate, undated. The Boston Busing Debate was an episode of the television show "A Left and a Right" which originally aired on Boston's Channel 5 and was co-hosted two broadcast personalities, the conservative Avi Nelson and the outspoken "Dean of Talk Radio" Jerry Williams. The debate, moderated by Robert Baram, focused on the issue of forced busing in Boston during the 1970s.

Memorabilia (MS100/09.03)

- Item 378: Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR) button
- [Digital image of this item](#)

Congressional Photographs (MS100/10.02)

- Folder 8 contains a photograph of Moakley meeting with the Boston School Committee, including Paul Ellison and Paul Tierney, 1970s



- Folder 19 contains a photograph of an Anti-busing legislation meeting with Moakley and Senator Edith Green (D-Oregon), 13 March 1974
- [Digitized images from this series](#)

Pre-Congressional Political Files (MS100/11.01)

- Folder 49 includes items related to the 1970 campaign

Oral History Interviews

The Moakley Oral History Project and the Boston Voices project (created following the 30th anniversary of the Garrity Decision in 2004) conducted interviews regarding key events and issues in Congressman Moakley's life and career that document valuable information and observations that may not be part of the paper, photographic, and audiovisual portions of the Moakley Papers. Interviews with the following individuals, including family, friends, and Moakley staffers, include observations about the Garrity ruling and busing for school desegregation in Boston. Interviews from the Boston Voices project focus entirely on the Garrity decision.

Digitized interview recordings and transcripts are available on our Digital Collections site:

- [View digitized oral histories related to busing](#)

Suffolk University Archives Reference Files (SUA/003.004)

The Moakley Archive has created and maintained its own reference file on the Garrity Decision and busing for school desegregation in Boston which is publicly available to researchers and visitors in the Archives. The reference file includes news clippings, a copy of the Morgan v. Hennigan court ruling, a timeline of the Garrity decision, a September 21st 1971 Boston School Committee hearing transcript on the Racial Balance Law Boston, and a June 1975 staff report prepared for a hearing of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Boston, among other items.

Other Archival Collections (Boston-area)

Below are a few selected archival collections related to busing available locally.

Boston College

- Citywide Coordinating Council Records, 1975-1978: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2936>
- Louise Bonar and Carol Wolfe Collection of Boston Education Materials 1952-1984: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2954>

City of Boston Archives

- Boston Public Schools Desegregation-era Records Collection 1952-2004: http://www.cityofboston.gov/Images_Documents/Guide%20to%20the%20Desegregation-era%20Records%20collection_tcm3-23340.pdf
- Numerous collections related to the Garrity decision and that time period in Boston: <http://www.cityofboston.gov/archivesandrecords/default.asp>



Massachusetts Archives

- Massachusetts Executive Office of Educational Affairs Administrative Files, 1972-1980:
<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arccol/colidx.htm>

Northeastern University

- James W. Fraser (collector) photograph collection; finding aid available online at
<http://www.library.neu.edu/archives/collect/findaids/m66find.htm>
- Roxbury Multi-Service Center records; finding aid available online at
<http://www.lib.neu.edu/archives/collect/findaids/m109find.htm>
- Citywide Educational Coalition records; finding aid available online at
<http://www.lib.neu.edu/archives/collect/findaids/m130find.htm>

University of Massachusetts, Boston

- Center for Law and Education: Morgan v. Hennigan Case Records, 1964-1994; finding aid available online at <http://www.lib.umb.edu/node/1557>
- Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr.; Papers on the Boston Schools Desegregation Case, 1972-1997; finding aid available online at <http://www.lib.umb.edu/node/1596>
- Mosaic (a writing and photography project at South Boston High School): Records, 1980-1990; finding aid available online at <http://www.lib.umb.edu/node/1626>

Secondary Sources

Many of the books and articles are available at Suffolk's Sawyer Library or Moakley Law Library. Please contact the Archives for more information.

Books

* indicates title is available at the Suffolk University Libraries

Begley, Thomas M., *The Organization of Anti-busing Protest in Boston, 1973-1976*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1981.

*Buell, Emmett H., *School Desegregation and Defended Neighborhoods: The Boston Controversy*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1982.

*Bullard, Pamela, and Judith Stoia, *The Hardest Lesson: Personal Accounts of a School Desegregation Crisis*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980.

*Dentler, Robert A., *Schools on Trial: An Inside Account of the Boston Desegregation Case*. Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1981.

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



- *Formisano, Ronald P., *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

- *Jones, Leon, *From Brown to Boston: Desegregation in Education, 1954-1974*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1979.

- *Kozol, Jonathan, *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro children in the Boston Public Schools*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

- *Lukas, J. Anthony, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families*. New York: Knopf, 1985.

- *Lupo, Alan. *Liberty's Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977.

- *Metcalf, George R., *From Little Rock to Boston: The History of School Desegregation*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983.

- *Malloy, Ione, *Southie Won't Go: A Teacher's Diary of the Desegregation of South Boston High School*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

- Reid, Willie Mae, *The Racist Offensive Against Busing: The Lessons Against Busing: How to Fight Back*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974.

- *Ross, J. Michael, *"I Respectfully Disagree with the Judge's Order:" The Boston School Desegregation Order*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981.

- Sheehan, J. Brian, *The Boston School Integration Dispute: Social Change and Legal Maneuvers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

- *Taylor, D. Garth, *Public Opinion and Collective Action: The Boston School Desegregation Conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

- Teele, James E., *Evaluating School Busing: Case Study of Boston's Operation Exodus*. New York: Praeger, 1973.

Journal articles

- Anrig, Gregory R., "Boston and the South: Differences and Similarities in School Desegregation," *Consortium Currents* 2, no. 1 (Fall 1975): 11-13.

- Casey, George W., "Busing in Boston: Weighing the Values," *America* 133, no. 6 (Sept. 13, 1975): 111-112.



Chancy, Joette and Brenda Franklin, "Report from Boston: The Struggle for Desegregation," *Black School* 7, no. 4 (Dec. 1975): 19-27.

Kozol, Jonathan, "The Rebirth of Education in Boston," *American Education* 16, no. 5 (June 1980): 6-14.

Marshall, Kim, "The Rebirth of Education in Boston," *Learning* 4, no. 1 (Aug./Sept. 1975): 32-40.

Richer, M., "Busing's Boston Massacre: A federal judge's experiment in social engineering has unraveled neighborhoods and frustrated black achievement," *Policy Review*, no. 92 (1998): 42-47.

Stack, John F., Jr., "Ethnicity, Racism, and Busing in Boston: The Boston Irish and School Desegregation," *Ethnicity* 6, no. 1 (March 1979): 21-28.

Worsham, James, "Busing in Boston: Desegregating the Nation's Oldest Public School System," *Civil Rights Digest* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 2-5.

Wren, C., "Indelible Images: Stanley Forman's photograph of a brutal skirmish in downtown Boston 30 years ago encapsulated the city's tensions over court-ordered busing," *Smithsonian* 37, no. 1 (2006): 21-25.

Online Resources

Long Road to Justice: The African American Experience in the Massachusetts Courts; "Education: *Morgan v. Hennigan*;" produced by the Massachusetts Historical Society.
<http://www.masshist.org/longroad/02education/morgan.htm>

Eyes on the Prize: American's Civil Rights Movement 1954-1985; "The Story of the Movement – School Desegregation in Boston;" produced by PBS as part of its American Experiences series.
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/story/21_boston.html

The Boston Busing/Desegregation Project, a project of the Union of Minority Neighborhoods:
<http://bbdproject.org/>

Boston School Desegregation / Boston Busing Crisis: a bibliography by the Boston Public Library:
<http://www.bpl.org/govinfo/guides-resources/boston-school-desegregation-boston-busing-crisis/>

Digitized primary sources on busing from various Massachusetts repositories are available through [Digital Commonwealth](http://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/) under the subject "Busing for school integration." View items here:
https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search_field=subject&q=Busing+for+school+integration

Archival and Library Resources on the Garrity Decision and the Boston Busing Crisis, a LibGuide by the Mildred F. Sawyer Library, Suffolk University: http://suffolk.libguides.com/garrity_decision